

World

Luxury Travel

Magazine

Vol. 1 ■ Issue 6 ■ January, 2013

Laos – *Jewel of the Mekong*

Glamping – *The Luxe Camping*

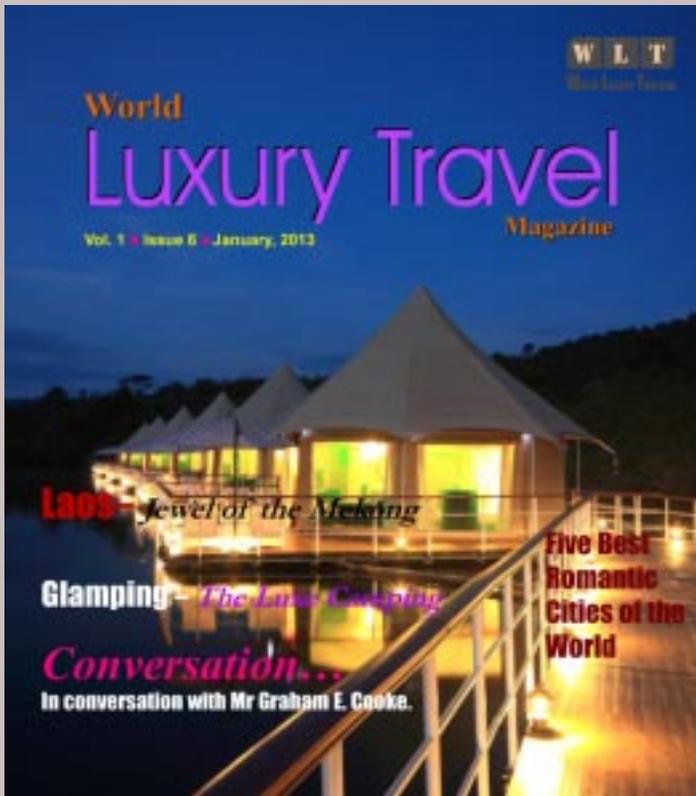
Conversation...

In conversation with Mr Graham E. Cooke.

**Five Best
Romantic
Cities of the
World**



- Vol. 1
- Issue 6
- January, 2013



W L T
World Luxury Tourism

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World
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Magazine



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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

A New Year is here! This is the perfect time to start or do something new. The previous year was a year of milestones for us at World Luxury Tourism. It was the year of our birth, of making new friends, of getting recognition in the world tourism market and of course getting to know you!

The year 2013 undoubtedly holds a sea of opportunity for all of us and we wish only the best for you! New travel markets and destinations are opening up at a never before speed. May this New Year bring you more opportunities to travel, to widen your horizon and leading you to more prosperity. As it is said that travel is the only thing you buy that makes your richer.

To prepare yourself better for your next trip, this issue of the World Luxury Travel Magazine brings you a variety of topics on destinations, adventure activities, events and more. Since the weather is pleasant everywhere now, this makes it the ideal time to go glamping. Read our cover story on the best places to go Glamping in Asia. How about a visit to this unexplored land of beauty, Laos? Learn more about this country in our Country Getaway section. It's carnival time all around the globe and the biggest carnival in the world has to be the one in Rio de Janeiro. Read more about this amazing upcoming event in our Event Watch section.

While attending the World Travel Awards, I met Mr. Graham E. Cooke, President and Founder of the World Travel Awards. A charismatic man with a beautiful sense of humour. Read what he had to say about the Grand Finale of the World Travel Awards and more in our Conversations section.

Every month we put our best to bring you the most useful information on travel. Your words of appreciation and the thumbs up on our facebook page motivate us to do even better. Thank you for your appreciation and continued support! We look forward to a happy and more fruitful union in this New Year.

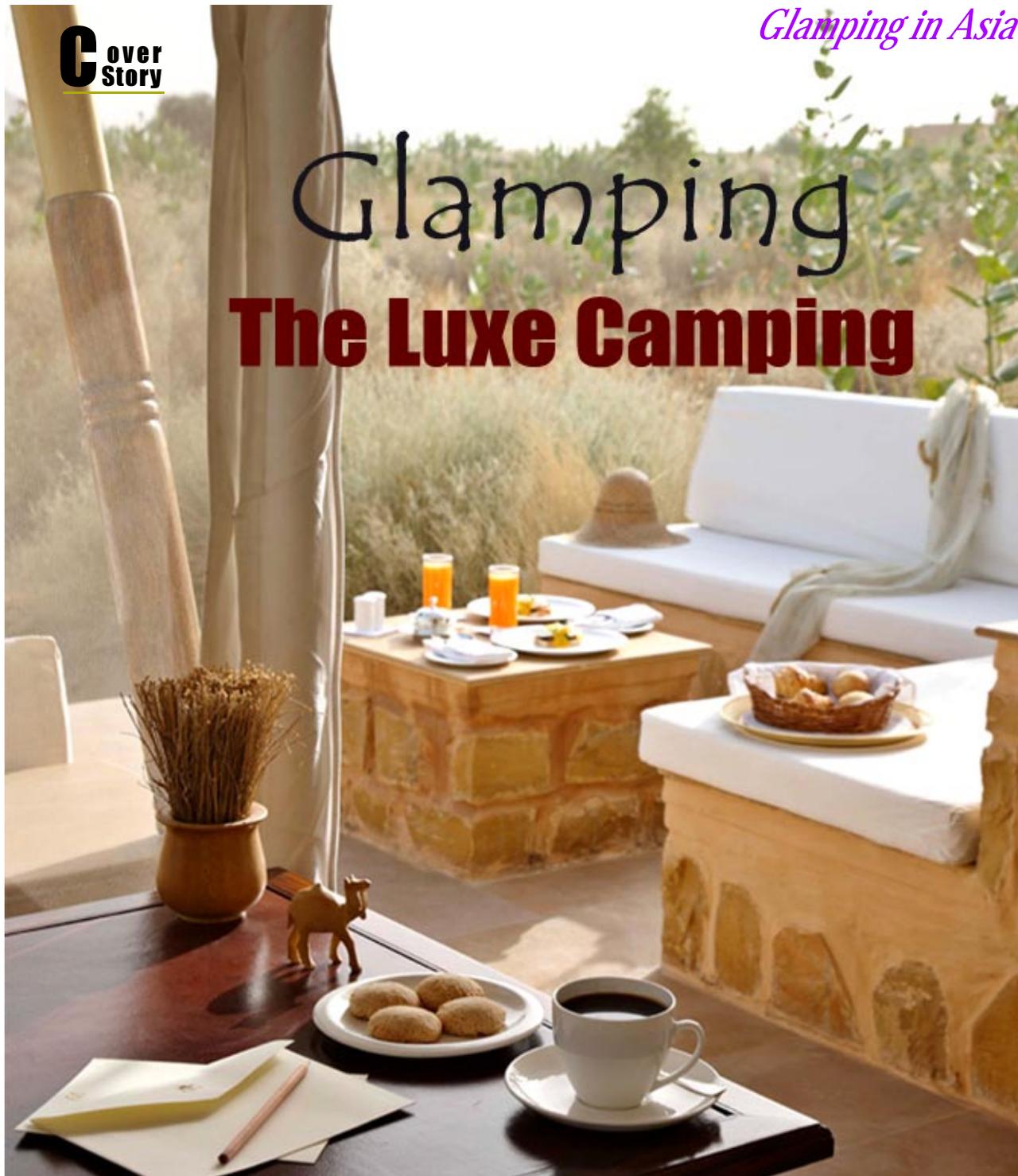
Season's Greetings to you all!

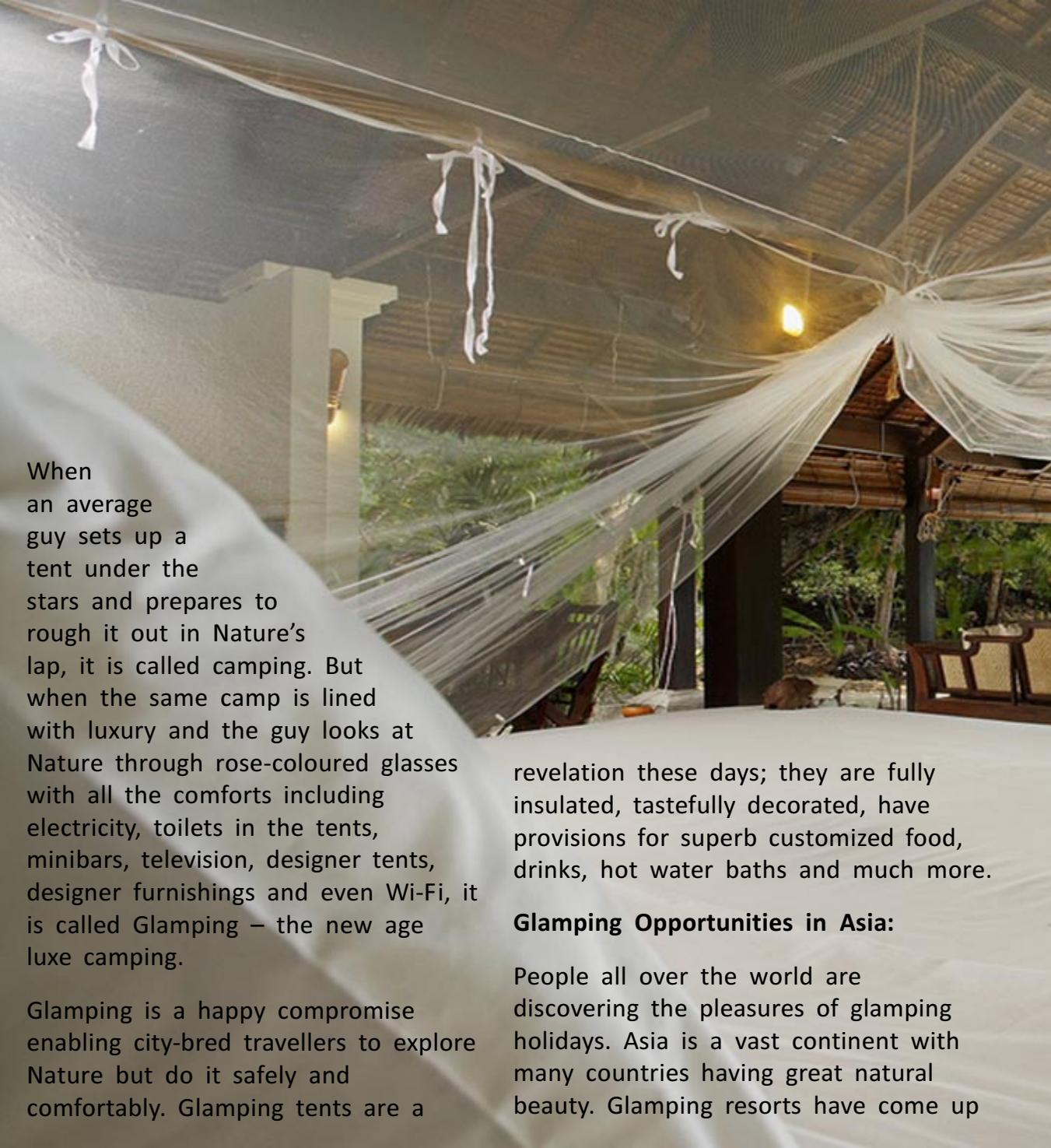
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Manashree". The signature is stylized with a long vertical stroke on the left and a horizontal line underneath.

Manashree Prakash
Editor-in-Chief

Glamping

The Luxe Camping





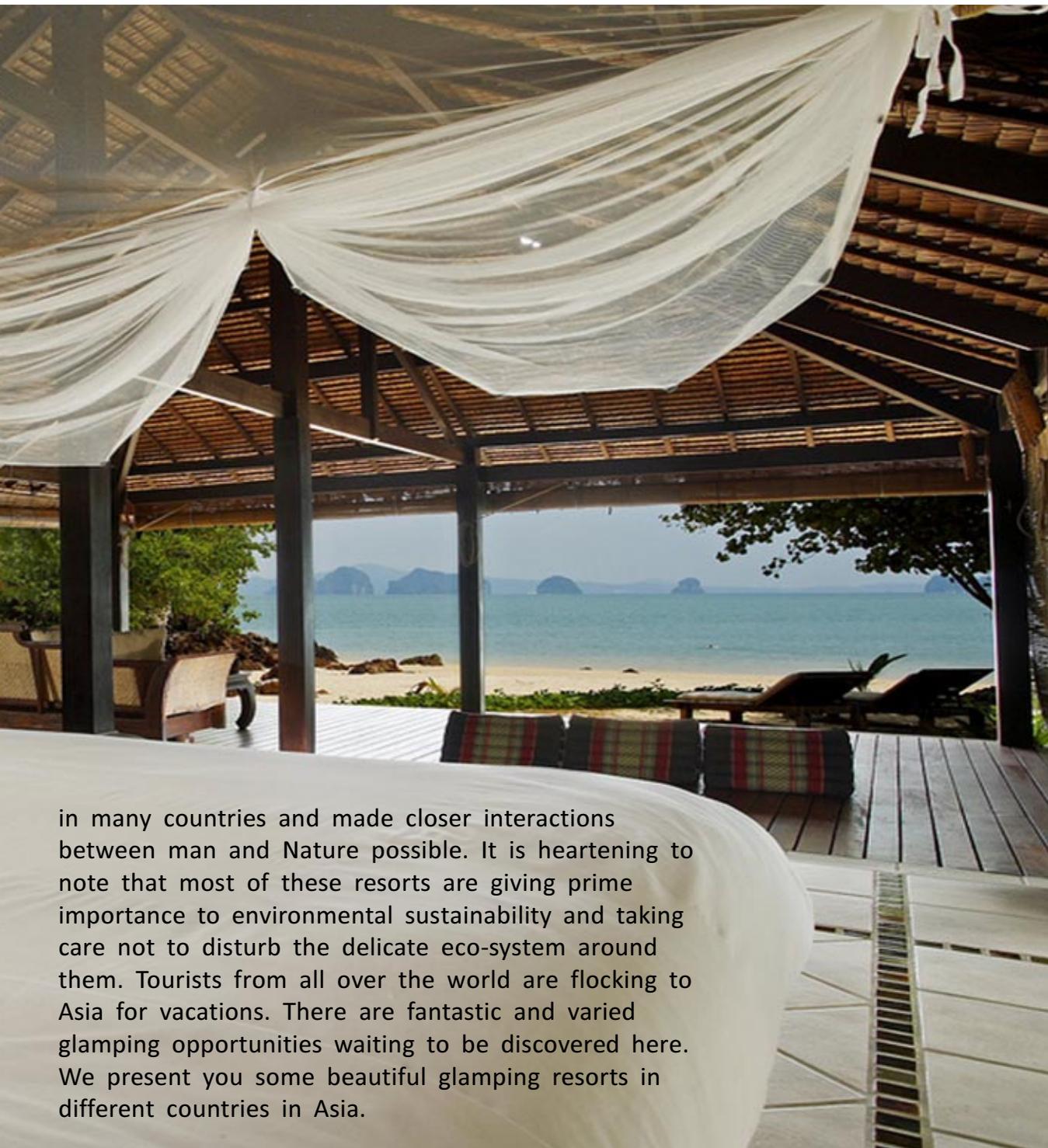
When an average guy sets up a tent under the stars and prepares to rough it out in Nature's lap, it is called camping. But when the same camp is lined with luxury and the guy looks at Nature through rose-coloured glasses with all the comforts including electricity, toilets in the tents, minibars, television, designer tents, designer furnishings and even Wi-Fi, it is called Glamping – the new age luxe camping.

Glamping is a happy compromise enabling city-bred travellers to explore Nature but do it safely and comfortably. Glamping tents are a

revelation these days; they are fully insulated, tastefully decorated, have provisions for superb customized food, drinks, hot water baths and much more.

Glamping Opportunities in Asia:

People all over the world are discovering the pleasures of glamping holidays. Asia is a vast continent with many countries having great natural beauty. Glamping resorts have come up



in many countries and made closer interactions between man and Nature possible. It is heartening to note that most of these resorts are giving prime importance to environmental sustainability and taking care not to disturb the delicate eco-system around them. Tourists from all over the world are flocking to Asia for vacations. There are fantastic and varied glamping opportunities waiting to be discovered here. We present you some beautiful glamping resorts in different countries in Asia.

Thailand

Hintok River Camp at Hellfire Pass, Kanchanaburi, Thailand

Accommodation: 38 luxury tents

Atop the Hintok Mountain and overlooking the River Kwai, this glamping resort was listed among the top ten adventure resorts in Asia Pacific in 2009. The wooden-platform mounted tents have the typical safari feel. Relax close to nature, indulge in adventure sports, soak in the natural spring pool and enjoy superb food at the restaurant with lovely views of river and greenery.

Amenities: Wi-Fi internet connection at the Clubhouse, campfire arrangement, traditional Thai massage, mountain bikes, secured parking space, security guard, superior water filtration system, doctor on call, tour and sightseeing arrangements, laundry service, transfer service, 24 hour camp security, electrical supply, air conditioning, balcony, in-room bathroom with shower, barbeque-campfire dinners; comfortable bedding, refrigerator.

Activities: Trekking at the historic Hellfire Pass, Hellfire Pass Memorial

Museum, mountain biking, canoeing, bamboo rafting, excursion to Mon tribal village, massages, elephant riding, opportunity to see the world's smallest bat in the Lawa Cave, sun bathing, bird watching, boat trips, traditional Mon dance, bamboo rafting etc.

Best Time to Visit:
November to March

Travel Tip: Bangkok to Hellfire Pass-Highway 323-two and a half hour drive



Four Seasons Tented Camp Golden Triangle, Chiang Rai, Thailand

Accommodation: 15 luxury tents

Located in lovely forest surroundings in the Chiang Rai province of northern Thailand, this camping resort offers unforgettable elephant treks through jungles, stunning forest and mountain views, Mekong river excursions and rejuvenating natural whirlpool baths. All this in beautifully furnished luxury tents with everything needed for a comfortable stay.

Amenities: Wired or wireless Internet, refrigerated private bar, multi-line





phone(s) with voicemail, flashlight, emergency overnight kits, in-tent safe, tea/coffee maker, down pillows, hypoallergenic pillows, thick terry bathrobes, twice-daily housekeeping service.

Activities: Mahout training, elephant trekking, longtail boat cruise on the Mekong River, jungle trekking, Nature walks, bird-watching, massages, hiking, sightseeing trips, wine tasting and learning traditional crafts.

Best time to visit: November to March.

Travel Tip: Chiang Rai International Airport around 70 km from the campsite.





Laos

Kamu Lodge-Luangprabang, Laos

Accommodation: 20 luxury tents

Set amidst lush jungle and rice fields, this beautiful resort will open up a new world of rustic villages, jungle trails and the mighty River Mekong on whose banks the lodge is situated. Delicious local food is



served on banana leaves at low tables. Interaction with Kamu villagers is a delightful and enriching experience. Participation in their daily activities like rice farming, fishing, weaving and even gold panning guarantees to transmit you into another world of charm altogether. The weather-proof, thatched tents provide the perfect place for relaxation after a wonderful day.

Amenities: Solar powered hot water and electricity, private bathrooms, room service,

shower, toilet, dining room, restaurant, spa.

Activities: Excursions to nearby villages, observing and participating in the traditional Kamu lifestyle activities; body treatments, fishing, hiking, bird-watching etc.

Best time to visit: November to February

Travel Tip: Three hour lodge-boat cruise away from Luang Prabang.



Cambodia

4 Rivers Floating Lodge, Koh Kong, Tatai River, Cambodia

Accommodation: 12 luxury tents

Glamping has acquired a whole new meaning at the unique, floating, luxury tent resort on Tatai River at Koh Kong. Set amidst the lush forest lands, the floating tents are inter-connected by a floating wooden pathway; together they are

linked to a central pontoon. With the river at your doorstep, jungles around you, four-star luxurious accommodations and gourmet fare by a top chef, the scene is set for an unforgettable holiday.

Amenities: Kayaking (mangroves), hydro massage (Tatai Waterfalls), queen size beds/twin beds, restaurant, library, Wi-Fi in room, minibar, room service, running water, toilet, telephone, TV, DVD and games rental,



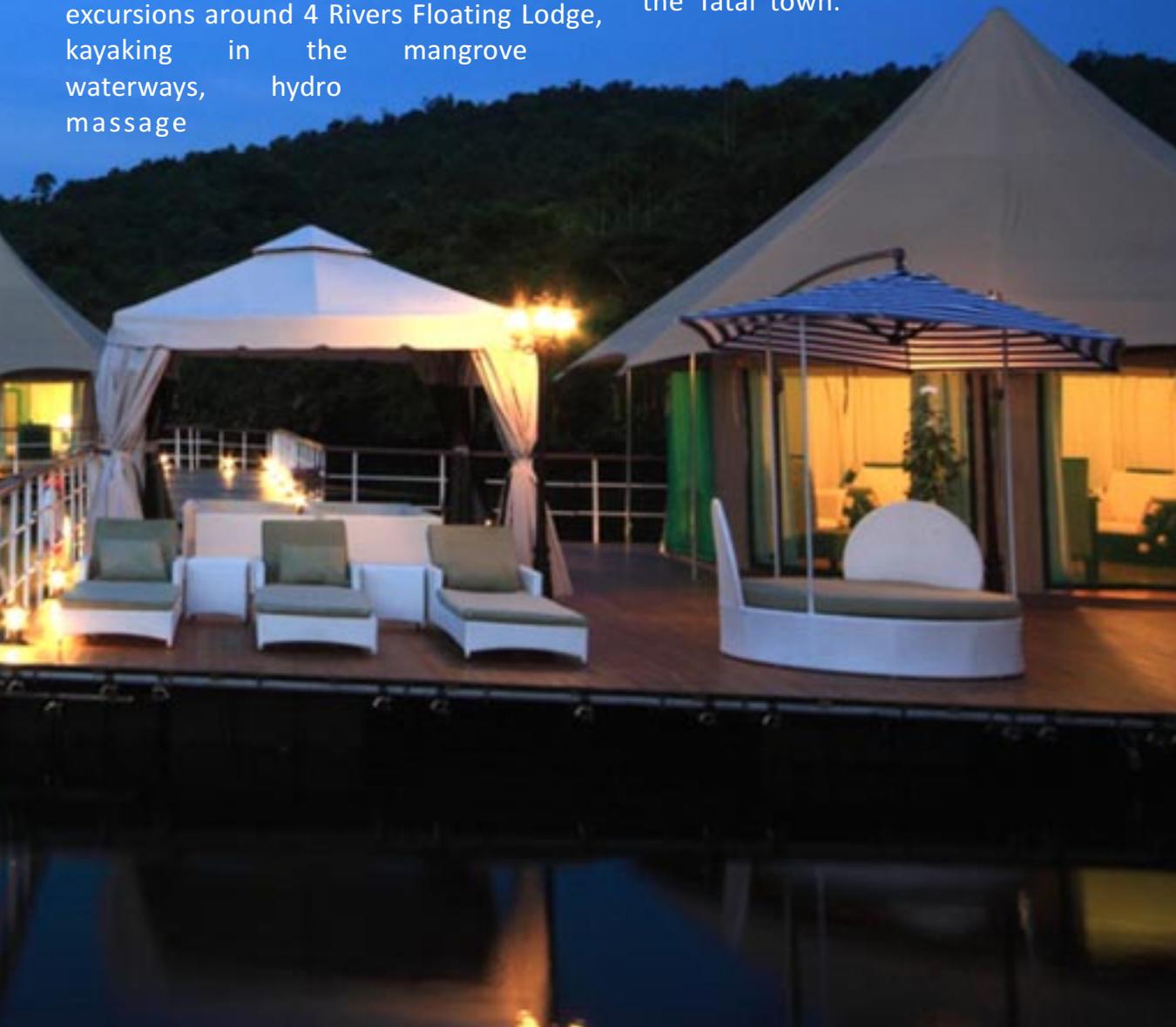
shower, pool, solarium.

Activities: Trekking in the jungle, experiencing local customs, beliefs, natural cures, visit Cardamom Mountains and Southeast Asia's largest coastal mangrove, excursions around 4 Rivers Floating Lodge, kayaking in the mangrove waterways, hydro massage

(of the majestic Tatai Waterfalls), fishing, sunset cruise, photography etc.

Best time to visit: November to February

Travel Tip: 10-25 minutes boat trip from the Tatai town.



Philippines

Bluewater Sumilon Island Resort - Cebu Islands, Philippines

Accommodation: 6 luxury tents

Located in the beautiful, isolated island of Sumilon, this is a fish sanctuary with a variety of marine life. The tents are set up near the beautiful picnic grove in the lagoon. Visitors can marvel at the crystal clear waters, colourful fish species and the ancient watchtower. By nights there are bonfires and special Saturday dinners enlivened by





native dance performances. There are various packages - for couples, families and divers.

Amenities: Twin beds, in-tent minibar, toiletries, cabinets, lamps, fans, cell service, camp assistant, Pavilion theme dinners, spa services infinity pool and airport transfers.

Activities: Bird-watching, kayaking, hiking, sailing, scuba diving, snorkelling, massages, library, lounging, cave tours, picnics, sunset, fishing in the lagoon etc.

Best Time to Visit:
December to May

Travel Tip: 125 km
from Cebu city



India

The Serai- Luxury desert camp and Spa-Jaisalmer, Rajasthan

Accommodation: 21 luxury tents; 14 tented suites, 6 luxury tented suites, Royal Suite

This luxury desert camp and spa is located in the Great Thar Desert of India. An oasis of beauty and luxury, the resort has won several awards including 'World's Top 100-Readers' Travel Awards', Condè Nast and ranked among the '101 Best Spas in the World', Tatler Spa Guide. The tented suites have an outer relaxing area, a sitting room, a bedroom, en suite bathroom; luxury tents have private gardens with a sunken pool;





the Royal Suite has a private spa, outdoor pool, dining and lounge tents. Choicest gourmet food and drinks complete the perfect resort experience.

Amenities: Dining Tent, library, bar, spa, boutique, linens, running water, pool, shower, toilet, towels, laundry service.

Activities: Historical tours to Jaisalmer forts and temples, camel safaris, sun downers on the sand dunes.

Best Time to Visit: October to March

Travel Tip: 290 km from airport in Jodhpur; 60 km from airport in Jaisalmer for private chartered planes.



Tsermang Luxury Eco Camp, Ladakh

Website: [http://](http://www.nomadslandcamps.com/)

www.nomadslandcamps.com/

Accommodation: 8 luxury tents

Ideally located 10 minutes-drive from Leh, the Tsermang Eco Camp promises you an enchanting view of the Indus River. Set with an aim of understanding nature, it offers a serene and rejuvenating environment. Spread over more than 300 meters along the river, surrounded by thick seabuckthorn bushes, mountains and sunshine, it sure is a dream-like place. But step in, and adventure begins almost instantly, especially at night. Amidst a starlit sky, moonlit mountains, a silver-shimmering river and a something more you will always wait for.

Amenities: 12x12 ft. living area, weather-proof tents with attached bathrooms; twin beds high quality mattresses; wash basin, hand shower, western-style toilets, mirror, hot water buckets, running water, laundry service, antique cupboards, traditional indoor games, library, solar



plugs for mobile and laptops, boutique with local and eco-friendly artists' products and airport transfer.

Activities: Raft down the Indus River, Ladakhi cooking class, Royal Enfield motorbike exploration (at a cost), climbing the 6000 m peak Stok Kangri, a ride down the Khardung La Pass in mountain bike etc.

Best time to visit: June to mid-September

Travel Tip: Within 10 minutes' drive from Leh

Glamping is the new buzzword in adventure travel. You can still have your cosy mattress and explore the

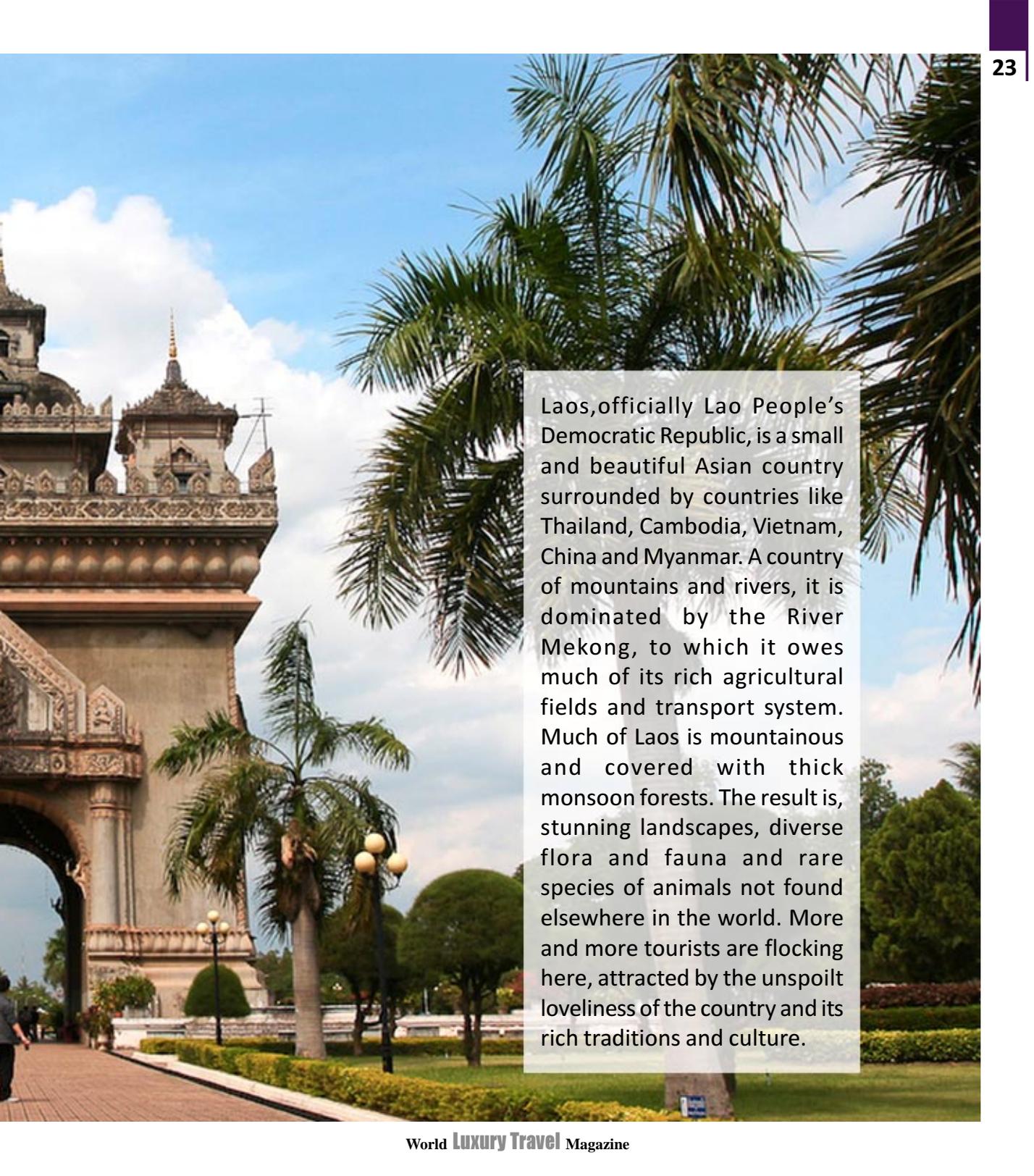


desert or mountain at the same time. It is also possible now to include elderly people or younger children who could not have roughed it out in a regular camp otherwise. Now you have to arm yourself with far less gear than the regular camp would require; a couple of good books, games, the spirit of adventure and you are good to go!



Laos

Jewel of the Mekong



Laos, officially Lao People's Democratic Republic, is a small and beautiful Asian country surrounded by countries like Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, China and Myanmar. A country of mountains and rivers, it is dominated by the River Mekong, to which it owes much of its rich agricultural fields and transport system. Much of Laos is mountainous and covered with thick monsoon forests. The result is, stunning landscapes, diverse flora and fauna and rare species of animals not found elsewhere in the world. More and more tourists are flocking here, attracted by the unspoilt loveliness of the country and its rich traditions and culture.

Culture

Laotian culture is greatly influenced by the culture of the countries surrounding it, by Theravada Buddhism and Hinduism. Folk dances are often based on Hindu epics, music and arts are greatly influenced by religion. Khaen, a kind of bamboo pipe is the national instrument and the lam is the primary folk music. Sticky rice, the staple food, has cultural and religious connotations and is associated with several rituals. The people are mainly monogamous. Laotian handicrafts, especially metalwork, jewellery and Laotian embroidery are famous for their beauty all over the world. Muay Lao, a form of kickboxing is the national sport. Laotians are immensely fond of football too.

The Laotians are often distinguished as lowland, midland or highland people depending on the altitude in which they live. The lowland people or Lao make up 60 per cent of the population and dominate



the political and cultural scene. The midland tribes or Lao-Theung form 30 per cent of the population and the Lao Soung or highland people form the minority with tribes like the Lua being endangered.

Culture- Dos and Don'ts

- Dress and behave modestly at all times.
- Public display of affection (PDA) and shouting are considered offensive.
- Never touch anyone on the head (Laotians consider the head as 'private').
- Show respect to all, especially to elders and old people.
- Remove shoes before entering any shrine and never turn your back on any image of the Buddha.

Climate: Laos has a tropical climate characterized by heat and humidity. There are two main seasons-dry and wet. The wet season or monsoons (May to November) is a time of heavy rainfall. The rest of the year is dry and pleasant. Temperatures depend on altitude, ranging from 15-38°



C in the Mekong River Valley area while it can fall to 0° C in the mountain regions.

Best time to visit: November to February

Currency: Kip (LAK)

Language: Lao

Capital: Vientiane

Must-carry: ID card, passport, visa,

travel insurance certificates and money medicines, first aid kit, insect repellent, torch, camera, comfortable walking shoes, warm clothes for winter.

Tourist attractions:

The largest city of Laos and its capital is Vientiane. The most charming city from the tourist point of view is Luang Prabang. Savannakhet and Pakse are other major cities in Laos.

Laos has incredibly natural beauty and many



places which delight tourists. It also has many lovely wats or temples. Some of the top tourist sites in Laos are:

Luang Prabang – This calm and scenic city standing at the confluence of the Mekong and Khan rivers is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Golden spired temples, French colonial villas and traditional Lao



buildings are all found here. Laos has 32 temples including the famous Wat Xieng Thong, Wat Wisunlat and the Pak Ou Caves (containing Buddhist shrines). The beautiful Kuang Si waterfalls and the Royal Palace Museum are also must-see sites of Luang Prabang. The daily morning procession of monks collecting alms is quite a sight! There are also more worldly pleasures available. Superb Lao coffee, cold beer or wine; colourful markets selling spices, handicrafts, silks, restaurants serving the finest international and local cuisines are all

major tourist attractions.

Mekong River – The largest river of Southeast Asia (4350 km) dominates the Lao scenery and acts as the main waterway and transportation in the country. The Upper Mekong River view is breath-taking and a boat tour is a fantastic way of enjoying the scenery. The Si Phan Don is a lovely archipelago in Southern Laos which is also worth a visit.



Plain of Jars – This intriguing area near Phonsavan town has huge jars standing singly or in clusters of hundreds all around. The jars are of varying heights with diameters ranging from 1 to 3 m and are carved from rocks. It is conjectured that they were part of ancient burial rituals.

Pha That Luang – This lovely golden stupa in Vientiane is the most important monument in Laos and is considered the symbol of Buddhist religion and Lao sovereignty. It was built in the 16th century on the ruins of a previously standing Khmer temple. The stupa has various terraces, each symbolic of different stages of enlightenment.



Wat Xieng Thong – This is the grandest temple of Luang Prabang. Built by King Setthathirath in 1560, and under royal patronage, it had a library and a drum tower attached to it later. The temple has beautiful glass mosaics and there are lovely carvings on the wooden panel above the main door. Scenes from the life of the Buddha are also carved on the gilded wooden doors. A unique statue of reclining Buddha, as old as the temple itself, is housed here.

Vieng Xai – It is a huge network of caves, which served as a hiding place for the Communist Army during the Vietnam War.

The Communists were waging a war against royalist forces in Vientiane. It was literally an underground city, housing up to 23,000 people and containing barracks, shops, a hospital and even a theatre.

Some of the other major attractions in Laos include Patuxai, Kuang Si Falls, That Dam, Lao National Museum, Wat Ho Phra Bang, the Buddha Park, Wat Phu Champasak, Khon Phapheng waterfall and the Public Park.

Activities:

In a country where nature is still largely undisturbed, there are many exciting activities for the adventurous.

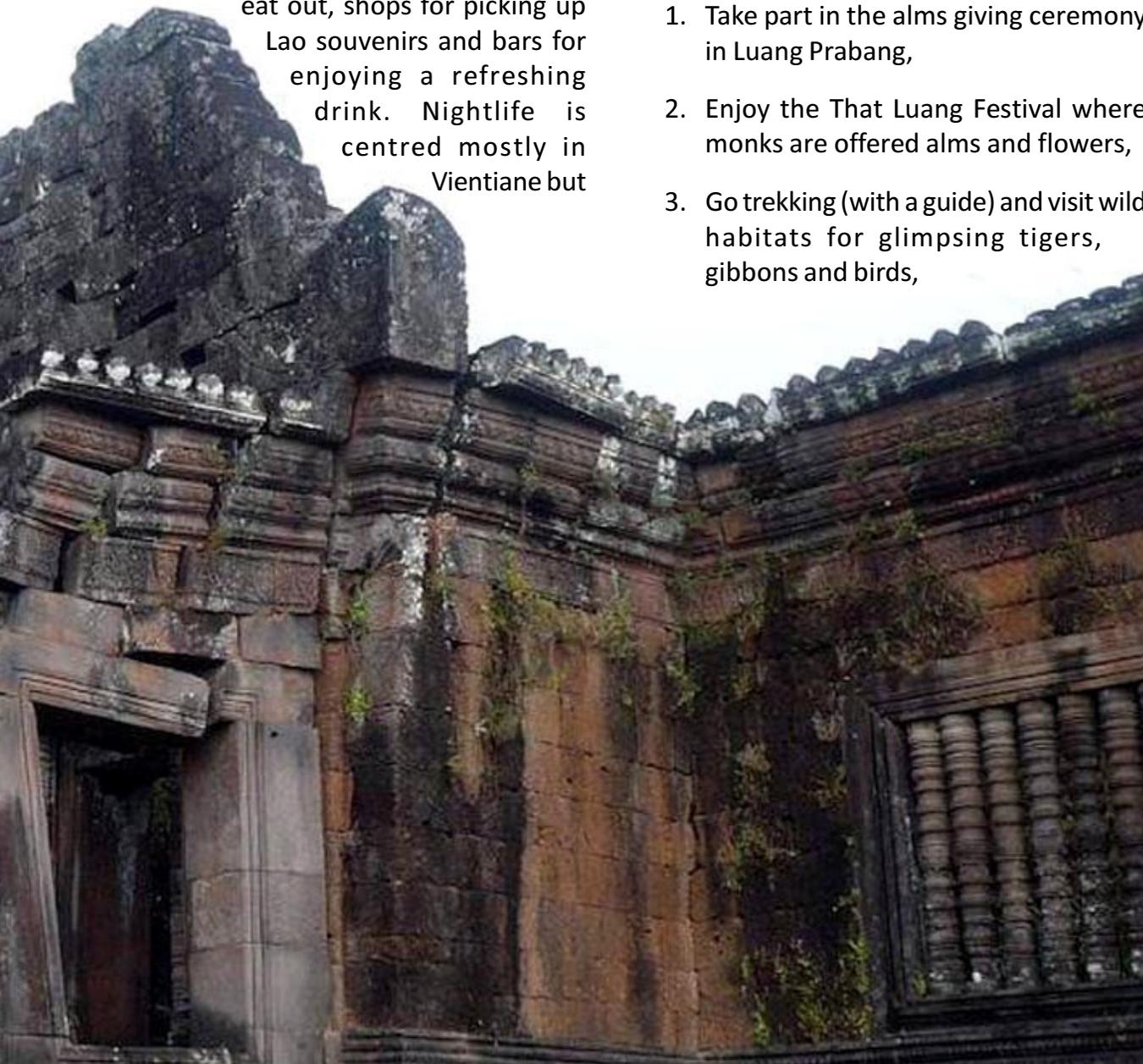


The popular ones include river tubing, exploring caves, trekking, following tiger trails, kayaking, rock climbing and biking. There are also many restaurants where one can eat out, shops for picking up Lao souvenirs and bars for enjoying a refreshing drink. Nightlife is centred mostly in Vientiane but

by and large it is not rocking.

Our list of top 5 things to do in Laos would be:

1. Take part in the alms giving ceremony in Luang Prabang,
2. Enjoy the That Luang Festival where monks are offered alms and flowers,
3. Go trekking (with a guide) and visit wild habitats for glimpsing tigers, gibbons and birds,



4. Go shopping for the world renowned Lao silks, handicrafts and jewellery,
5. Choose from sandwiches, soups, salads or cakes at JoMa Bakery Café, the best bakery in Luang Prabang.

Cuisine:

Sticky rice (khao niaw) is the staple food and it is part of almost every meal. It is eaten by itself or with a fish or meat dish. The main feature of the cuisine is that the food is simple and eaten fresh. Fresh water fish, raw greens, vegetables and herbs mostly eaten raw are all part of the Laotian meal. Soups, salads, a grilled item and a sauce dish are integral parts of a meal. Commonly used herbs include lemongrass, dill, galangal, mint, tamarind, ginger and kaffir lime leaves. Chicken, pork, beef, ducks and buffalo meats are commonly used. Use of raw meat in dishes is a unique feature of Lao cuisine. Beer Lao, sugar cane juice, fresh fruit juices and Lao coffee are popular drinks (freshly ground Lao coffee is delicious). Meals are communal affairs and traditionally eaten with fingers or fork and spoon.

Some famous Lao dishes are:

Larb or laap –A spicy mixture of meat or fish or both, often raw, and various herbs and spices,

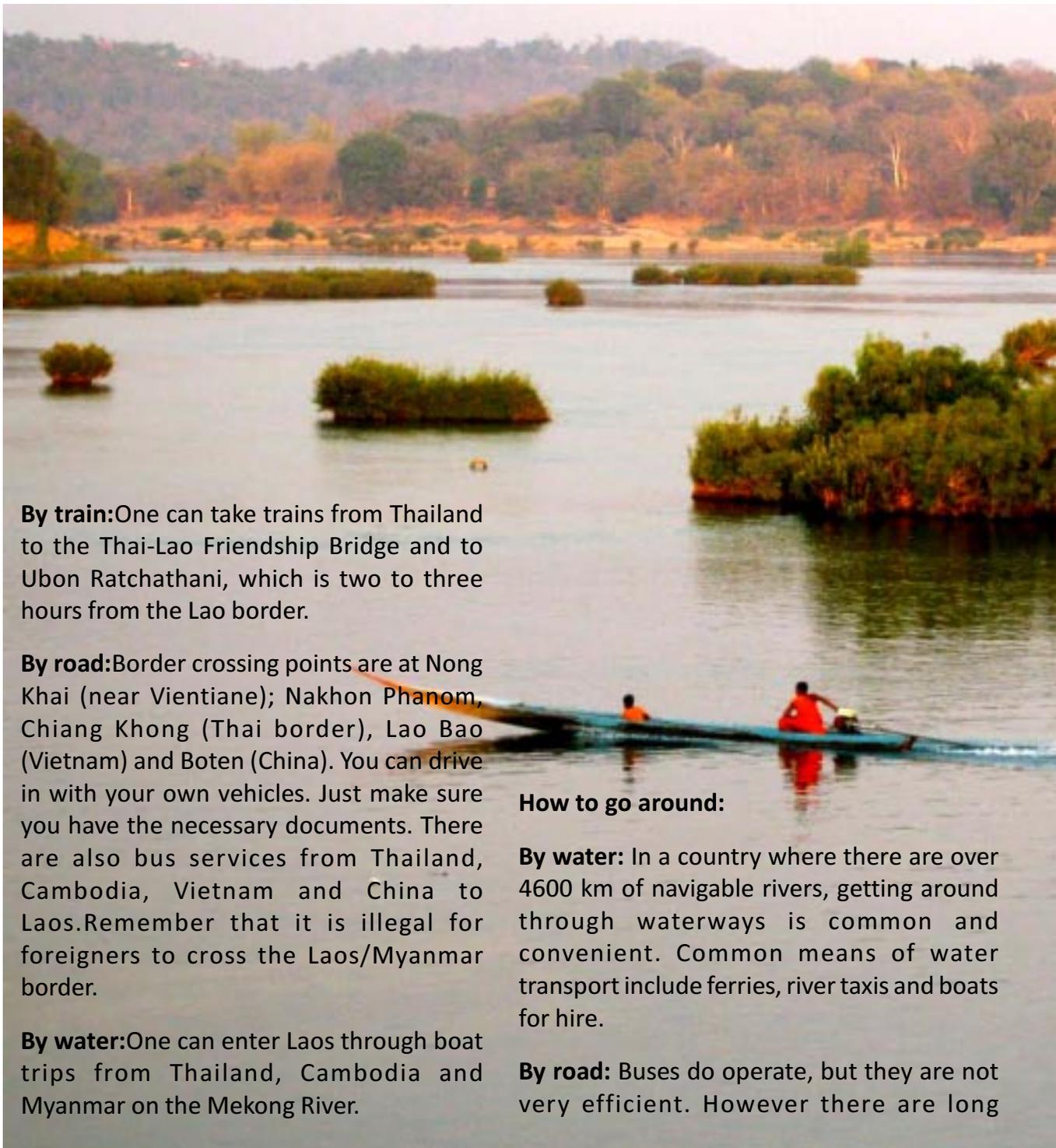
Tam maak hung –Spicy salad of green papaya,



Pa daek –Anextremely pungent fermented fish sauce,
Feu –A filling soup with meat, vegetables and noodles.

How to reach there:

By air:Through the four main airports- Wattay International Airport (Vientiane), Luang Prabang International Airport and Pakse International Airport. Lao Airlines is the national and primary carrier. There are direct flights to Wattay International Airport from major cities of all the neighbouring countries.



By train:One can take trains from Thailand to the Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge and to Ubon Ratchathani, which is two to three hours from the Lao border.

By road:Border crossing points are at Nong Khai (near Vientiane); Nakhon Phanom, Chiang Khong (Thai border), Lao Bao (Vietnam) and Boten (China). You can drive in with your own vehicles. Just make sure you have the necessary documents. There are also bus services from Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and China to Laos. Remember that it is illegal for foreigners to cross the Laos/Myanmar border.

By water:One can enter Laos through boat trips from Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar on the Mekong River.

How to go around:

By water: In a country where there are over 4600 km of navigable rivers, getting around through waterways is common and convenient. Common means of water transport include ferries, river taxis and boats for hire.

By road: Buses do operate, but they are not very efficient. However there are long



distance buses which are fairly good. Cars, Motorbikes and cycles are also available for hire in larger cities. Since the cities are small and the roads are very good, local transport is not much of an issue. One can walk around or simply take a bicycle.

Laos has a tantalising range of experiences waiting to be discovered. You can head to Laos for the New Year celebrations or witness the Magha Puja in February or the harvest festival

of Boun Khoun Khao in March. There are many more events lined up for the entire year, all giving glimpses into the rich cultural traditions of this country. However if all you want to do is get away from it all, then this is the perfect place for it. This is still one place which has not caught on to the frenzied pace of modern living. Life is unhurried and nature is at her best here. Laos truly lives up to the promise of its official tourism slogan- 'Simply Beautiful'!

Feature

Upcoming
Valentine's Day Special

Five Best Romantic Cities of the World

A romantic couple is shown from the waist up, embracing each other on a beach. The man, with dark curly hair, is wearing a white tank top and has his arms around the woman. The woman, with long dark hair, is wearing a long, light blue dress with a dark hem and has her arms crossed. They are standing in shallow water, looking out at the ocean. The background shows waves breaking on the shore under a soft, golden sunset sky. The overall mood is romantic and serene.

Name a place where you would love to go to with that special someone for a special occasion. It is difficult to just name one place, isn't it? It becomes even more difficult when you need to decide on a place where you can pop the question or share special moments together to renew the bonds of love. To help you solve your problem of plenty, we present you five such places, which have rightfully earned the title of being the most romantic cities in the world. We have handpicked these places by including both classics as well as contemporary cities. These places have that indefinable quality of romance, which makes spontaneous expressions of love and closeness more possible than anywhere else in the world.

Venice

What can be more romantic than a city standing on waterways, edged with

colourful palazzos benignly overlooking the gondolas moving silently through the water? The fairy-tale atmosphere is enhanced by ancient buildings in Gothic, Byzantine or Baroque styles of architecture. Charming Piazzas, quaint bridges, lovely canal views, restaurants, bars and art galleries all contribute to the magic of Venice. The waters seem to resound with sweet nothings murmured by lovers through the ages. Venice is truly a city made for love with many beautiful places to see and interesting things to do.

St Mark's Square (considered one of the world's most beautiful squares), located on the banks

of the Grand Canal is a must-see with its lovely, historical monuments. The legendary Rialto Bridge with a 400-year old



history has a quaint market, where you can buy trinkets, souvenirs and Murano glass.

The Bridge of Sighs, the lovely onion-domed St Mark's Basilica and the Doge's Palace are other top attractions of the city.

truth of it as you lose yourself in soulful performances at the famous theatres of Venice (Teatro La Fenice, Teatro Goldoni).



Discover the Grand Canal in the best way possible by taking a tour on a vaporetto (the public boats). The beauty of artistic Venice can be seen in the Gallery dell'Accademia. Finally, remember that happiness is found in the little things. So just roam around the city and discover its charm (just make sure you have a gelato in hand!) Sample Venetian cuisine, seafood and wines, catch an unexpected sunset and let the magic of this romantic city envelop you.

Top romantic thing to do: A gondola ride in sunset or

We have it from the great bard himself that music is the 'food of love'; discover the

moonlight. Choose the smaller canals for lesser crowds.

Paris

Paris is a beautiful city with its lovely Gothic buildings, delightful cafes and beautiful avenues. The city is steeped in art, architecture and history and has some of the world's most famous museums including the Louvre. The Seine River heightens the romance of the city with its scenic bridges and stunning views from the banks. There are many fascinating places to visit in Paris.

Any Parisian visit would be incomplete without a visit to the famed Louvre. The museum houses some of the most famous and precious art treasures of the world including the Mona Lisa and the Venus de Milo. Equally a must-see is the

iconic landmark of Paris- the Eiffel Tower. It soars over the skyline standing 300 m tall. Have a candle-lit dinner at the Jules Verne restaurant here, while watching the breath-taking view. Visit the Arc de Triomphe and walk down the Champs Elysees, dubbed the world's most beautiful avenue. Marvel at the lovely stained glass and spires of the Notre Dame Cathedral. See the 'city of lights'





twinkling beneath you from the Sacre-Coeur at the highest point in Paris. Spend time together in the beautiful Luxembourg Gardens, admire the lovely view from the Pont Neuf Bridge or seal your love by putting a lock on the Lovers' Bridge.

The list of things to do in Paris is endless. There are endless restaurants serving the best of French food and wines. You can head to the Michelin starred Le Grand

Vefour if you are well heeled or simply enjoy a lovely meal at any sidewalk café in the Latin Quarter, on the Montmartre Hill or near the Louvre Museum. For an unforgettable luxury stay, book in George V or a luxury French chateau. Parisian chic is world-renowned and you can shop in any of the top class boutiques or pick up a deal in the flea markets. Perfumes, antiques, handicrafts, Paris has enough to satiate the most avid shopper. You can also head with your partner to any of the jazz clubs, nightclubs or bars and party the night away. Whatever you choose to do, the romantic setting of Paris will make it an incredible experience.

Top romantic thing to do: Enjoy a romantic dinner cruise on the lovely River Seine!

Prague, Czechoslovakia

This is a fairy-tale capital city with golden-spired towers, winding cobblestone streets, charming bridges, quaint street lamps and horse drawn carriages creating a magical look and feel that is simply irresistible. It has many famous attractions as well as unexpectedly lovely romantic nooks, which invite lovers and couples from all over the world to come here.

The famous Charles Bridge tops the must-see list of Prague. From here, you can watch the River Vltava flowing below, the bridges across the river and city landmarks like the Prague Castle and St Nicolas Cathedral. The bridge has towers at either end and is lined with statues of saints (touching the statue and making a wish is a popular ritual).

Street vendors, artists and musicians enliven the whole scene. The best time to visit the bridge is at night when all is quiet and the illuminated Prague Castle and sparkling lights across the river create

sheer magic. Prague Castle, one of the oldest and largest castle complexes in the world, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Worth visiting are its palaces, towers, gardens and churches, especially the magnificent St Vitus Cathedral. Do not miss a visit to





the charming Old Town Square with its cafes, souvenir shops and galleries. The marvellous 600 year old Astronomical Clock still ticks away here.

Other places to see are the National Museum, Old Jewish Cemetery, Rudolfinium, Dancing House and Petrin Hill (take the funicular railway). Remember to take the Prague Card, which gets you free entry to more than 50 top tourist attractions.



Sightseeing is not the only thing to do here. Enjoy coffee in the cafes, drink Czech beer (among the bests in the world), go shopping or enjoy the nightlife (head to Zizkov which has over 300 bars).

Top romantic thing to do: Go for a dinner Cruise at River Vltava and take the Prague Night Tour.

Cape Town, South Africa

One of the most beautiful cities of South Africa, Cape Town has myriad things for tourists to do and see. It has stunning mountains and ocean scenery and numerous attractions including great restaurants, shopping and nightlife.

The spectacular Table Mountain dominates the city landscape, standing tall at 1085 m height. A revolving cable car takes you to the summit where you can grasp at the view of the city, sea and forests below. A restaurant on top provides a refreshing break for a quick meal and/or drinks. On the eastern slopes, the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Gardens

stretches over 528 hectares and has beautiful views. For sheer diversity and beauty of South African flora, it is unbeatable (the perfect spot for a couple to wander in or share a picnic lunch). The popular Wine Route is a tour through beautiful Cape Wine lands. Feast your taste buds on top class wines and your eyes on the simply gorgeous views of grand mountains and rolling vineyards. Stop at a farmhouse, sample delicious local food, see cheese making (and taste it too) or pick strawberries. Head to the V&A Waterfront for stunning harbour views, pubs, shopping and movies. To



experience the thrill of swimming with penguins, take a trip to Boulders Beach.

The open bus tour is a fantastic way of exploring the city. Visit Robben Island, and discover its evolution from a harsh prison island to a symbol of victory over apartheid. Other popular spots include Cape Point, the beautiful beaches of Cape Town, Kalk Bay, Chapman's Peak and Noordhoek. You can make your own sushi at Florentines, go for a romantic hike up Lion's Head or delight your partner with flowers at the Adderley Street Flower Market.

For the adventurous couples there is kayaking,

hiking, hot air ballooning, paragliding and lots more to do. For food lovers, there are numerous restaurants serving great seafood, game dishes and traditional local fare. Do not forget to order the wines for which the city is famous. Shop till you drop for jewellery, craft work, souvenirs or clothes at Hout Bay Harbour, V & A Waterfront or Long Beach Mall.

Top romantic thing to do: Go for a 'one couple only' romantic sunset cruise dinner at the V & A Waterfront.



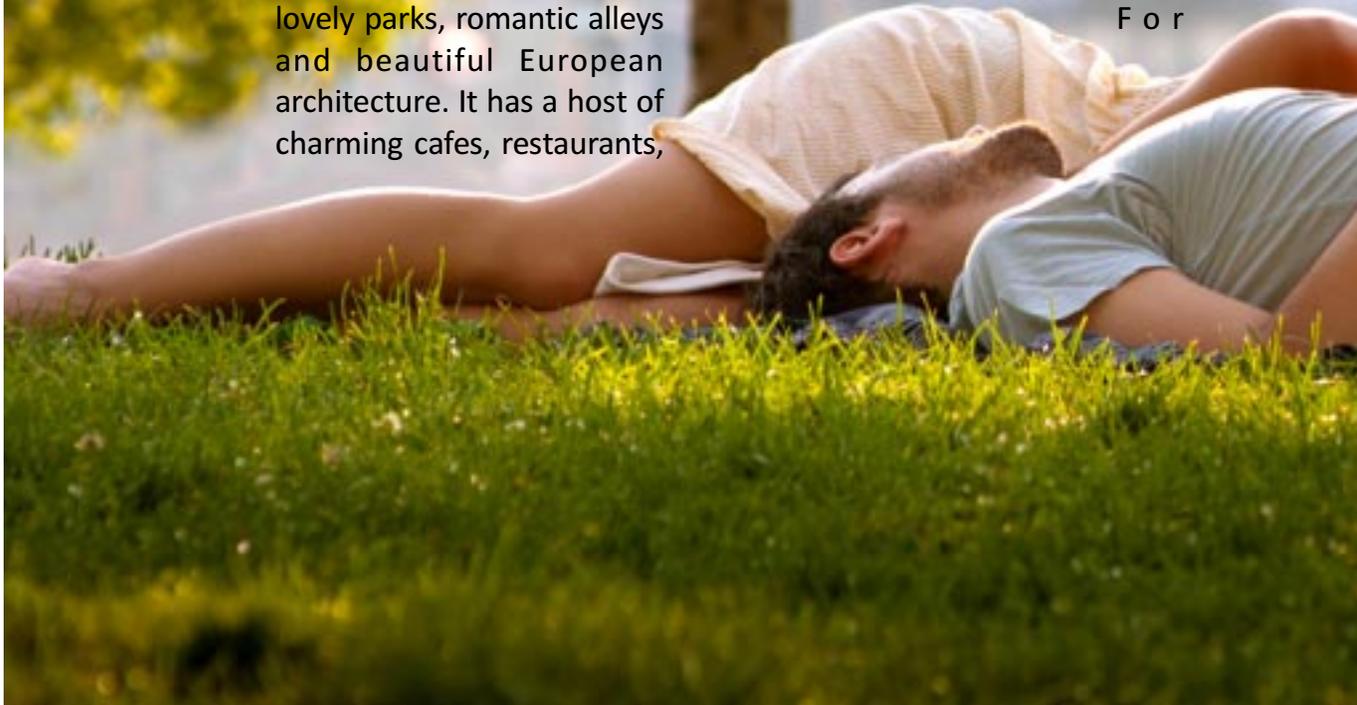
Melbourne, Australia

One of the most liveable cities of Australia, Melbourne is a melting pot of cultures. It is ideal for a romantic getaway with its old world charm, lovely parks, romantic alleys and beautiful European architecture. It has a host of charming cafes, restaurants,

shopping areas, a lively nightlife scene, music, theatre and sporting events.

Melbourne Cricket Ground is the ultimate destination for sports lovers. It is associated not only with cricket and Boxing Day but also with the Australian football grand finals. Nothing can beat the thrill of catching a match live at these grounds. The Hall of Fame contains fascinating memorabilia and will delight sports lovers. Federation Square, the art and civic centre, is the place to catch art exhibitions, snacks at restaurants and cafes and enjoy free Wi-Fi (the biggest free Wi-Fi site in Australia).

F o r



nature lovers, the Royal Botanic Gardens is the place to visit; it has over 12,000 species of flora and fauna. The Melbourne Zoo is another fascinating place. Sovereign Hill, Ballarat evokes the past with its recreation of the historic gold rush. St Kilda is for the beach lovers. It has amazing shops, cafes (don't miss the European cakes), the iconic Luna Park and a lively art scene, playing host to different cultural events. The scenic Yarra Valley is famous for its wineries, fruit farms, nature reserves (Healesville Sanctuary) and restaurants. The Dandenong Ranges are also famous for their spectacular views and beautiful gardens. Other attractions include the

Shrine of Remembrance, the National Gallery of Victoria and Flinders Street Station. The free City Circle Tram is a great way to explore the main attractions of the city.

Top romantic thing to do: Watch an open air screening of a classic film in the lovely Royal Botanic Gardens with your partner, some snacks and a bottle of wine.

Discover the beauty of a vacation in any of these romantic cities. In case you completed exploring all of them, remember there are many more cities. Florence, Rome, Vienna, Salzburg, Victoria (Seychelles), London, New Orleans, Buenos Aires, Barcelona are all awaiting their turn. Begin travelling and add your own favourite names to the list. Happy Valentine's Day!



Rio de Janeiro

The Marvellous City



For sheer exuberance and joie de vivre, Rio de Janeiro of Brazil can give other cities of the world a run for their money. The city bustles with life and activity under the benevolent care of none the less than the Redeemer himself, who looms watchful over the skyline with outstretched arms. It was the Portuguese who, arriving in January 1502, mistakenly supposing the Guanabara Bay to be a river, gave the city its name. Rio, as it is popularly known, stands on the Guanabara Bay of the Atlantic Ocean on the southeast coast of Brazil. Rio is one of the most relaxed places on earth. The 'Cariocas' or locals live life with zest and joy. Add to it some gorgeous beaches, spectacular mountains, thick forests, dazzling nightlife and a fantastic carnival and you have the heady concoction that is Rio.



Climate

Rio lies on the Tropic of Capricorn and seasons here are reverse to those of the northern hemisphere.

Summer- November to February (hot and humid; upto 104°F)

Autumn- March to May (hot though lesser than summer; March wettest month; latter part of fall is also a good time to visit)

Winter- June to August (mild winters)

Spring- September to October (warm, low humidity; another best time to visit)

Best time to visit — December to March being the best time to visit, is also peak tourist season so everything is expensive and crowds are more. If you want to catch the Carnaval, go in February. Off season is

between May to October another good time to go.

Places to see

Rio has a long list of attractions. There are beaches, mountains, museums and parks. If your stay is short and you need to prune your list down to the not-to-be missed sights, they would be:

Statue of Christ the Redeemer (Cristo Redentor): This iconic landmark towers over the whole of Rio and attracts millions of visitors annually. The 38 m high statue of Christ with outstretched arms weighs 1.145 tonnes and is made of soapstone by the French sculptor Paul Landowski. This amazing statue is ranked

among the seven new wonders of the world. It stands on the summit of the 710 m Corcovado Mountain. A cog train takes one to the top of the mountain and the statue can be reached by an escalator and elevator. The view from top is simply spectacular.



Sugar Loaf Mountain (Pao de Acucar): This

tops the list of tourists' must-see list. Standing tall at around 395 m, Sugar Loaf Mountain is one of the best places to get stunning harbour and city views. Go right till the top in the cable car enjoying spectacular views from

the glass windows of the bondi. Stop for a bite at the charming village of Morro de Urca. A ticket is around \$33 USD (the ride back is free after 7pm). To avoid rush, go early morning (tickets are sold after 8 am) or if you want a phenomenal experience, see the view at sunset.

Corcovado (Hunchback Peak): This 710 m peak is located in the Tijuca Forest National Park and is famed for the statue of Christ the Redeemer atop. One can take the cog-train from the



Corcovado station at Cosme Velho right till the top. The queues are long but your patience will be more than rewarded by the magnificent views from the top. There is a viewing platform to which one can take escalators. The train tickets cost around R\$45.

Botanical Gardens (Jardim Botânico): This lovely parkland in South Rio was laid in 1808 by Prince Regent Dom Joao. Modelled after European gardens, it was opened to public in 1822. Originally founded to acclimatize West Indian spices, it still contains tea,

cloves and cinnamon; it is also a research centre. Spread over an area of 137 hectares, it has more than 5000 species of plants. The lake with lovely water lilies, orchids, a Japanese garden and the Avenue of Royal Palms (134 palms) are all major attractions here.

Beaches: Rio has some of the most beautiful beaches in the world. Clean, white sands, wide spaces, vendors selling everything from snacks to souvenirs, no wonder the city has a beach culture synonymous with the carefree Rio way of life. Check with the beach reports or your



hotel about beach closings before you set off. Not all beaches are unpolluted enough for swimming. Do not leave your valuables on the sand and avoid night strolls on the beach. The one most important tip we can give you is to first head straight to the Brazilian bikini market and purchase a two-piece. Grab a sunscreen and a towel and you are set for the gorgeous Rio beaches.

Copacabana Beach is a great favourite. Stretching along 4.5 km it offers generous space for people to sunbathe, play and

generally laze around. Swimming and surfing are very popular here and so is strolling along the Avenida Atlantica. There are kiosks with beach chairs and bathrooms too. Try the fantastic seafood while you are here.

Ipanema Beach is another lovely 3 km stretch of sand and water. Apart from swimming, surfing, volleyball, soccer and wakeboarding are also popular beach pursuits. Yes, there are scores of vendors too, selling towels, peanuts, coconuts and even suntan lotions.

Tijuca National Park : This massive spread of rainforest area covering 8300 acres is the largest urban forest in the world. This mountainous, hand-planted rainforest is the brainchild of Emperor Dom Pedro II. He wanted to prevent deforestation and ensure fresh water supply for the people of Rio. The park is home to hundreds of animal and plant species including many endangered ones. It contains the Corcovado Mountain with the Redeemer's statue atop. It is a beautiful area for hiking or picnicking. Attractions in the park include the Cascatina Waterfall, the Mayrink Chapel and the Mesa do Imperador (a massive granite picnic table).

If your stay in Rio is long, then other spots to check out would include the Sambadrome (Carnaval venue), Petropolis, Grumari Beach, the Theatro Municipal and the Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil (CCBB).

Nightlife: Rio has justly earned a reputation for its racy nightlife. Bars, samba clubs, nightclubs, gay clubs, strip clubs, Rio has it all. The night scene is simply rocking with lively music, samba, drinks and partying. Some of the top nightclubs include Zero Zero, Casa da Matriz and Nuth. A friendly tip- Carry your passport for identification and remember drugs are illegal.

Important tourist info:

Emergency Number: 190

Accommodation: Rio is expensive, but cheap, comfortable hotels are there in Flamengo and Catete or in central Santa Teresa. Hostels, B&Bs and private condominium apartments are all good options.

Security: Rio is sadly notorious for crime and violence. The favelas (slums) and drug trafficking are serious problems here. Gringos (tourists) are easy targets for pickpockets, muggers and cheats. Avoid the downtown area; do not stroll on the beaches or streets after dark



when police is not there. Be wary of having your shoe shined in the Copacabana beach, you will be conned into cleaning them and paying a huge price for it. Do not flaunt any sign of wealth and never ever go to a favela by yourself.

Health: Rio is susceptible to dengue fever,

particularly in February and March. For 24x7 assistance call The Tourist Doctor (tel: 3596-1222) or Galdino Campos Clinic (2548-9966).

Money: Currency exchange can be done at banks but you can get better rates at shops with 'Cambios' sign on them. ATMs are closed from 10 pm to 6 am. Not all ATMs give money, so check for Visa/MasterCard logos or head to international banks.



Things to do:

- Experience the Carnaval for which Rio is famous,
- Dance away at a samba club,
- Indulge in retail therapy at BarraShopping,
- Enjoy the sights and sounds of the feira livre (fruit and vegetable markets),
- Go for paragliding, kite surfing or beach volleyball,
- Drink the renowned Brazilian Caipri and Brazilian beer,
- Visit the Lapas and Santa Teresa neighbourhoods,
- Meat lovers head to any local churrascarias; food lovers head to Zuka; try local seafood and other delicacies at any street side restaurants.

Getting there:

Air: Rio is well connected with the rest of the world through the Galeao International Airport and Santos Dumont Airport.

Bus: Rodoviária Novo Rio in Santo Cristo is the centre for to and fro buses (note there is



no train service into Rio from outside).

Car: Rio is well connected by road to nearby cities. Take the Via Dutra if you are coming from Sao Paulo.

Ferry: Ferries come from neighbouring Niteroi to Rio and arrive close to the city centre.

Getting around:

Taxis: Taxis are the best way to get around

in Rio. Yellow taxis are common but do check that the meter is started before you set off.

Train: You can get around using the two lines of the subway, it is clean and safe (there is a separate pink 'ladies only' coach).

Bus: Bus network is good but ask around to know exact destinations and where to get on or off.

Car: Cars can be hired but they are expensive and not very safe.





Interesting facts/trivia:

- Rio is Brazil's second largest city (San Paulo being the first)
- For nearly 200 years Rio was the capital of Brazil
- Rio will host the 2016 Olympics
- Football is the most popular sport in Rio
- Portuguese is the language mainly spoken in Rio

Add Rio to Your Bucket List

Rio de Janeiro has not been nicknamed 'Cidade Maravilhosa' (The Marvelous City) for nothing. The best beaches, scorching nightlife, the iconic samba, parks, shops, museums, restaurants-you name it, Rio has got it. The world famous Carnival itself is reason enough to visit Rio once in your lifetime. So put on those travel shoes and come and experience the magic of Rio.

The Best Ski Destinations *in* Europe



Come winter and ski lovers from all over the world flock to Europe to enjoy the thrill of winter sports and generally frolic in the snow. Europe is a first grade skiing destination. It has some of the highest mountain ranges in the world with spectacular scenery and a reliable snow cover. Top quality resorts with immaculately groomed pistes, top class lift systems, fantastic trails and a whole range of non-skiing fun activities make it the most sought after winter playground of the world.

If you are planning to pack your bags and hit the snowy trail, we have a pick of some of Europe's best ski destinations. Discover the best each place has to offer.



Courchevel, France

Courchevel is in the world-renowned Three Valleys in Savoie, France, the largest interlinked ski area in the world. Courchevel is a top class ski resorts area with 600 km ski slopes and 200 ski lifts, 800 instructors, a terrific lift system and immaculately maintained pistes. It is spread over four altitudes and villages including Courchevel 1850, the haunt of the rich and the famous. Apart from skiing, snowboarding and snowmobiling, it has a wide range of non-skiing activities and great après ski (including two Michelin starred restaurants). Snow is guaranteed throughout the season from December to April.

Difficulty level: Suitable areas for all expertise levels.

Getting there: Two hours from the Geneva Cointrin and Lyon St Exupery International Airports.

Accommodation: Grandes Alpes Private Hotel (luxury); Hotel Courchevel Olympic (good value).

Snippet: Courchevel is based on four levels, named after their altitudes: Courchevel 1350, 1550, 1650 and 1850.

Chamonix, France

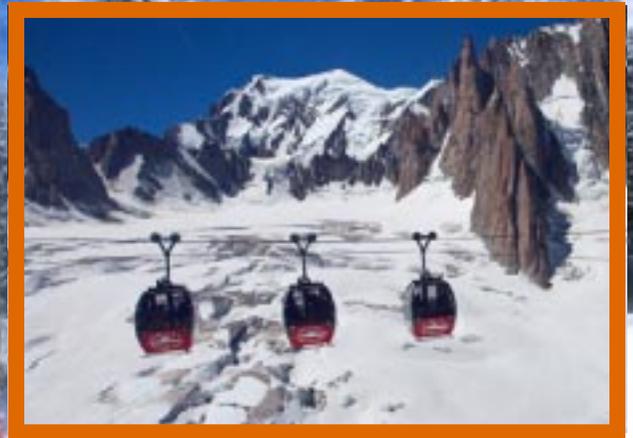
The charming little town of Chamonix is situated at the foot of Mont Blanc, France.

There are five main skiing areas spread over 10 miles along the valley and linked by ski bus service. The resort offers access to 394 pistes and has around 49 lifts. Long slopes, lift access to steep cliffs, skiing opportunities through tree areas, off-piste and a host of après-ski (post skiing) activities make this a hot favourite of ski lovers. Last but not the least; you can sample the best of French wines here. Lifts are open from December to May and June to September.

Difficulty Level: Ski areas for all expertise levels;

Getting there: 80 km from Geneva and 220 km from Lyon airports.

Accommodation: Hameau de Albert



Premier (luxury); Le Vert Hotel (perfect for skiing vacationers).

Tip: If snow conditions are poor, you can head to Courmayeur in Italy which is just half an hour away.



St. Moritz, Switzerland

Glamour, glitz, sunshine and world class skiing come to mind at the mention of this famous ski destination located in the lovely Engadine valley. With 350 km piste area and an altitude of 1800 to 3303 km above sea level, snow and great skiing trails are assured. The efficient 22 lifts, freeride slopes, wide nursery slopes, a glacier slope trail, ski huts,



snowbars, a frozen lake and a variety of après-ski activities are the main attractions of this top class resort. Most of the lifts are open from November to April.

Difficulty level: Various slopes suitable

for all experience levels.

Getting there: 210 km from Zurich; 300 km from Munich airports.

Accommodation: Badrutt's Palace and Kempinski Grand Hotel (luxury); hostels, apartments and cheaper hotels are available in plenty.



Trivia: St. Moritz hosted the 1928 and 1948 Winter Olympics.

Zermatt, Switzerland

This ski destination against the stunning Matterhorn backdrop is a no-cars, electric transport run, picture-perfect town. One can ski all year round on the 350 km marked trails or on the 20 km Zermatt Theodul Glacier. Amazing 57 lifts, 40 gondolas and

trains provide efficient connectivity. You can grab a bite at any of the numerous restaurants on the mountain slopes or drop in at the renowned Chez Vrony. Free-ride slopes, hell-skiing, Gravity Park and après-ski activities as well as great snow conditions keep the tourists pouring in here. Snow conditions are excellent with the season generally extending from November to May.

Difficulty level: Mainly for intermediate and advanced skiers, though there are some broad slopes for beginners too.

Getting there: 250 km from Zurich; 230 km from Geneva

Accommodation: Mont Cervin (luxury); Ski Total chalets (value); Hotel Alfa (backpackers).

Trivia: The longest run is from Klein Matterhorn into town and the Klein Matterhorn lift is the highest cable car in the world at 3820 m.

Kitzbuhel, Austria

This charming Alpine ski destination hosts the famous Men's Downhill Race. The skiing area has 170 km of fantastic pistes, 60 marked trails and 52 lifts. The downhill trail on the Streifis

is considered as one of the most difficult ones in the world and is a challenge even for the most advanced skiers. The popular Ski Safari covers most of the famous trails. Tourists flock here not only for the great skiing but also to the bustling après spots, shopping

and nightlife. The skiing season is open from December to March.

Getting there: 160 km from Munich; 80 km from Salzburg

Accommodation: Kempinski Hotel Das Tirol (luxury); Hotel Schweizerhof- Sport & Beauty (value); Alpenrider Hostel (backpacker).

Tip: Get the Kitzbuhel Guest Card. It gives great discounts on a lot of activities.

St. Anton, Austria

This beautiful ski hot spot in the Arlberg area is as famous for its celebrity visitors and rocking nightlife as it is for its world class skiing. There is 260 km of piste area and 85 lifts. For daring skiers there is a breath-taking downhill slope from the Valluga summit (2800 m) right to the valley below. Beginners can head to St Christoph or Rendl and advance skiers can ski in Lech or Zurs which also have some fantastic off-piste skiing. Snowboarding is also very popular here. The fun-park, terrific restaurants and après skiing activities make this a hotspot skiing destination. The season normally extends from December to April.

Getting there: 250 km from Munich; 200 km from Zurich; Innsbruck is 100 km.

Accommodation: Chalet Mooserwirt (luxury); Bergheil Apartment (value); Haus Schoepf (backpackers).

Tip: Visit the Skiing and Local Museum and discover the story of skiing in Arlberg.

Cortina, Italy

Cradled in the lap of the spectacular

Dolomite Mountains, this area has gorgeous scenery and sunny weather. Guaranteed snow from November to April, 140 km of skiing slopes and a modern lift system (37 lifts) make it a skiing haven. It is connected with the Dolomiti Superski pass which gives access to 1225 km of interconnected trails. That is not all; there are Free Dolomites for the adventurous, off-piste skiing, snow-kiting, heli-skiing, excursions to Ampezzo Dolomites Nature Park and Slow-Ski. Après-ski fun begins early in the afternoon and restaurants serve delicious food at reasonable prices. The

Alpine Ski World Cup and Cortina World Polo are some of the international events held here.

Getting there: 162 km from Venice; 140 km from Bolzano (Italy).

Accommodation: Cristallo Hotel Spa & Golf (luxury); Hotel Montana (value); Hotel Olimpia (B&B).





Tip: Cortina is famous for its superb Italian restaurants.

It is hard to beat the rush of adrenaline you get while whizzing down a snowy slope. Breathless after descent while you wait for a few seconds, you can drink in the sunshine and the glorious spectacle of mountain and snow all around you. Then cheerily head back to the hotel for a drink, great food and nightlife fun; or simply curl up in bed after the day's exertions to wake up to another

fantastic day of fun in the snow.

We have handpicked a few of the best names; there are also others you can explore. Pas De La Casa and Soldeu in Andorra, Bansko in Bulgaria and Narvik in Scandinavia also have great skiing hot spots. So sharpen your skills, skiing season is here.



Ski Parlance

For those who may have wondered what these terms mean:

Après-ski: After ski activities,

Black diamond: Expert trails marked on maps with black diamonds,

Free-riding: A form of snowboarding with no fixed rules or set course,



Gondola: A gondola is an enclosed carriage (like a cable car) to transport skiers up the mountain,

Grooming: Maintaining snow trails by smoothing them,

Off-piste: Areas not marked on a trail map,

Piste: Trail (French),

Snowboard: A small surfboard-like contraption used for going down ice slopes.

Conversation...



In conversation
with the President
and Founder of
World Travel Awards,
Mr Graham E. Cooke.



Rightfully nicknamed by The Wall Street Journal as the Oscars of the travel industry, the World Travel Awards (WTA) is one of the most important travel awards in the world of tourism today.

The Grand Tour of WTA gala ceremonies are regarded as milestone events in the tourism industry calendar. These ceremonies are attended by the industry's key decision makers, organisation heads and the leading trade and consumer media.

In 2012, the WTA Grand Tour staged ceremonies in the Middle East, Africa and the Indian Ocean, the Americas, Asia and Australasia, and Europe.

According to the format of the World Travel Awards, all regional winners compete head to head in a final round of voting to decide who will win in WTA's world awards. The winners are announced on the night of the WTA Grand Final in December.

The Grand Final is attended by the leading decision-makers from the global travel industry. The Grand Final of 2012 was held in New Delhi, India on December 12, 2012.

Conversation...

The www.worldluxurytourism.com (WLT) was a proud media participant in the Grand Final of the World Travel Awards held in New Delhi, India. In the event, WLT had the opportunity to meet and interact with the **President and Founder of World Travel Awards, Mr Graham E. Cooke**. Here's an excerpt of the conversation we had with Mr Cooke.

WLT: What was the inspiration behind finding a successful institution like the World Travel Awards?

Mr. Cooke: I set up World Travel Awards in 1993 with the aim of creating the definitive awards programme for the travel and tourism sector, to identify and reward those brands pushing the boundaries of excellence and implementing ground-breaking ideas.

WLT: What are the defining achievements and/or milestones that led the World Travel Awards to the present day status of being the "Oscars of the Travel Industry"?

Mr. Cooke: There have been many rewarding memories over the past twenty years. Highlights include our first ever ceremony, which took place at Universal Studios Hollywood in 1994. Seeing 1,400 of the cream of the travel industry gathered in one place to celebrate was not only a huge buzz but also demonstrated the potential of growing WTA.

Other highlights include expanding our

programme in 2007 from one annual ceremony to a Grand Tour, featuring regional heats.

WLT: How was your experience in the World Travel Awards Grand Final held in New Delhi, India?

Mr. Cooke: It was a phenomenal evening for the World Travel Awards team and our partners at The Oberoi Gurgaon and Incredible India. We have been inundated with positive feedback from everyone that attended to say how much they enjoyed the ceremony.

WLT: What is your view on the future of Indian Tourism scenario?

Mr. Cooke: We are witnessing a golden era in the evolution of India's travel and tourism industry, with New Delhi is proving the epicentre for this growth. The improvements in infrastructure and the city's growing portfolio of luxury hotels, such as The Oberoi, Gurgaon, reflect how travel and tourism is linked inextricably with the economic evolution of this new economic superpower.

WLT: Have you decided on the venue for the year 2013 award ceremonies? What would be the venue of the Grand Final of the World Travel Awards' 20th anniversary?

Mr. Cooke: The selection of our hosts is fundamental to the success of our awards programme. Like our winners, we select destinations that are driving the industry to new heights through innovation and evolution.

Our 2013 Grand Final will be hosted in Macao in December 2013. Our regional events include Indian Ocean Ceremony in the Maldives in April; Middle East Ceremony in Dubai in May; North America in Las Vegas in June; Europe Ceremony in Antalya, Turkey in August; South and Central America in Peru in September; Africa Ceremony in Nairobi, Kenya in September; Asia and Australasia in Singapore in October.

QU: What are the special plans for World Travel Awards' 20th anniversary?

Mr. Cooke: It's going to be our biggest and busiest year so far with eight regional ceremonies. We are also launching World Ski Awards in November 2013 to acknowledge and reward the world's best organisations within the ski sector.



"The awards have been making a steady and significant, long term impact." – The Financial Times

"The biggest travel event of the year." – Gulf Times

"These awards are internationally recognised and are a big morale boost," - Philip Chen, CEO, Cathay Pacific

Happenings

World Festivals
February

Groundhog Day

Where: Pennsylvania, USA

When: February 2, 2013

This amusing festival is based on a rodent's prediction of season change. Legend has it that on Groundhog's Day if a groundhog emerges from its hole; it signifies the end of winter. However, if it sees its shadow and goes back to the hole, then winter continues for six more weeks. Every year the groundhog of Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, Phil Sowerby makes his appearance on Gobbler's Knob in the Pennsylvania Wilds. Thousands of people gather here to find out what the animal has in store for them on the season change. The whole idea was started by a local editor in 1887 who proclaimed on Candlemas that a local groundhog (named Phil after King Phillip) was capable of predicting the weather. The groundhog became famous and the rest is history.

Trivia: Legend has spawned a movie named the 'Ground Hog Day' portraying Phil!



Venice Carnevale

Where: Venice, Italy

When: February 2 – 12, 2013

The world's most famous masked ball is

celebrated to herald the arrival of spring. The gorgeously colourful masks and costumes are unrivalled in the whole world for their stunning loveliness and sheer creativity. The



centre of action is the Piazza San Marco and a fantastic masked procession starts off the festivities. Apart from the Grand Masked Ball, there are jousting events, musical and



theatrical shows. Street performers add to the festive air. Another highlight is the colourful procession of masked revellers in boats and gondolas gliding down the Grand Canal. The best costumes are awarded prizes.

Trivia: The Pantalone, Bauta, Gnaga and Moreta are all different kinds of masks used in the carnival!





Battle of the Oranges

Where: Ivrea, Italy

When: 3 days concluding on Fat Tuesday (February)

What La Tomatina is to Spain, the Battle of the Oranges is to Italy. This 3-day festival

involves nine teams hurling orange missiles at one another at the main square of Ivrea, a small Italian town. Legend goes that the festival has its roots in a protest against a city's tyrant, belonging to either the Ranieri family or a conflation of the 12th-century Ranieri di Biandrate and the 13th-century Marquis William VII of Montferrat. Every



year the citizens remember their liberation with the Battle of the Oranges where teams of “Aranceri” (orange handlers) on foot, throw oranges against Aranceri riding in carts representing the tyrant. The townspeople threw stones at the tyrant and in later years riots were staged annually on this day by rival gangs. Later it became a

friendly affair with oranges replacing stones. To join in the fun, you can become part of any of the participating teams. However if you wish to be left in peace, don a red hat.

Trivia: Around 3500 people hurl 400,000 kg of oranges during the festival!

Oruro Carnival

Where: Oruro, Bolivia

When: February 8 – 12, 2013

Originally believed to be a native festival the Oruro festival transformed into a Christian celebration. Oruro, a small mining town situated 3700 m above sea-level comes alive with a carnival in honour of the Virgen del Socavon during the days before Ash Wednesday. The highlight parade, the 'Dance of the Devils' is a fantastic display of people in demons' costumes led by San Miguel. The long procession consists of 20,000 dancers and 10,000 musicians and lasts for almost 20 hours. The destination of the parade is a soccer stadium where dance enactments show the triumph of good over evil. The celebrations culminate in a massive water-bomb fight on the Monday after Ash Wednesday.

Trivia: This festival is listed among UNESCO's Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity!



Chinese New Year/Spring Festival

Where: China

When: February 10, 2013

The Chinese New Year is celebrated on the second new



moon time after the winter solstice. It is a time for family get-togethers, traditional rituals and for honouring dead ancestors. Colourful decorations run riot everywhere. Pictures of gods, small poems on spring and glittering red and gold decorations add to the air of gaiety everywhere. Money envelopes are exchanged for wishing wealth to one

another. People flock to the temples at midnight for special prayers for good luck for the coming year. The celebrations culminate in a grand procession of people carrying colourful lanterns. Spectacular fireworks add the finishing touch to the festivities

Trivia: Hotels are overflowing at this time and accommodation is both difficult to find and expensive. Advance booking is advised.

Thaipusam

Where: Malaysia

When: Mid-January to Mid-February

This Hindu festival is celebrated by Tamilians on the full moon day in the Thai month of the Tamil calendar. Pusam is the star that is at the highest point in this month. Celebrated in honour of the god Murugan, devotees carry the 'Vel Kavadi' (a construction decorated with

peacock feathers, pictures of gods and flowers), which is hooked to the devotees' bodies with 108 vels (spears). Devotees pierce their bodies, cheeks or even tongues; carry milk pots hooked to their bodies and even walk on fire. It is said that the devotees do not feel any pain as they are in a state of trance.

Trivia: Devotees follow a 48 day preparatory, spiritually cleansing regimen before they can carry the kavadis!





parties march through the streets led by drummers and singers and trailed by enthusiastic crowds who join the fun.

There are gorgeous, raunchy parties (blocos) and parades. The revelry concludes with

the grandest parade-

the samba parade where samba schools compete with one another to put on the

best show. The winner is covered with glory, needless to say. The pulsating music, the rhythmic dances and the highly effervescent spirits of the participants and onlookers combines to create sheer magic. This is one time when restraint is thrown to the winds and people throw themselves into having the greatest time of their life.

Trivia: The Sambodromo - a massive parade area was specifically built for the samba parade and can hold up to 90,000 people!

Rio Carnaval

Where: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

When: February 9 – 12, 2013

An explosion of colours, music, dance and the most dazzling display of costumes make the Rio Carnival one of the greatest shows of its kind on earth. Beginning a week before and culminating on Fat Tuesday, it is a week of unrestrained gaiety, free-flowing alcohol, feasting and revelry. The bandas or street



Mardi Gras

Where: New Orleans, U.S.A

When: February 12, 2013

The 'greatest free party on earth' is celebrated in New Orleans in the weeks

preceding the Lent season. The twelfth night after Christmas marks the start of the Carnival season. 'Krewes' (parade organizations) are fully engaged in preparations for the upcoming festivities. Two weeks before Mardi Gras or Fat Tuesday, celebrations begin in full swing and there is an avalanche of parades, balls and



parties. There are parades with spectacular floats and costumed revellers who toss coloured beads, trinkets or toys at

the cheering spectators. The costumes are outrageously creative and flamboyant. The New Orleans Mardi Gras, notorious for its raunchy parties and parades (particularly in the French Quarter), attracts around three million visitors annually.

Trivia: The souvenirs ranging from beads, cups, doubloons and toys tossed to the onlookers are greatly prized and

people collect them avidly!

St Valentine's Day

Where: Terni, Italy

When: February 14

Essentially a celebration of love, this festival is associated with St Valentine who is said to have united many lovers. In his hometown Terni, there is a grand celebratory feast around the Basilica di San Valentino, which contains the saint's remains. People gather

around to enjoy various religious and cultural events. The 'Valentine Marathon' is a popular event as is the 'Cioccolentino', a 4-day chocolate market. There are games and workshops for couples, lovers and others as well.

Trivia: Valentine's Day has spawned a huge market for lovers' gifts with over 50 million of roses alone sold all over the world each year!



Pingxi Lantern Festival

Where: Taiwan

When: February 24, 2013

On the fifteenth day of the first Chinese Lunar Month, the Lantern Festival is celebrated in Pingxi, a small town in Taiwan. According to a legend, a Taoist deity the 'Great Emperor Heaven Official' visits the earth plane and blesses his devotees. On this day, once it is dusk, people paint their wishes on beautiful

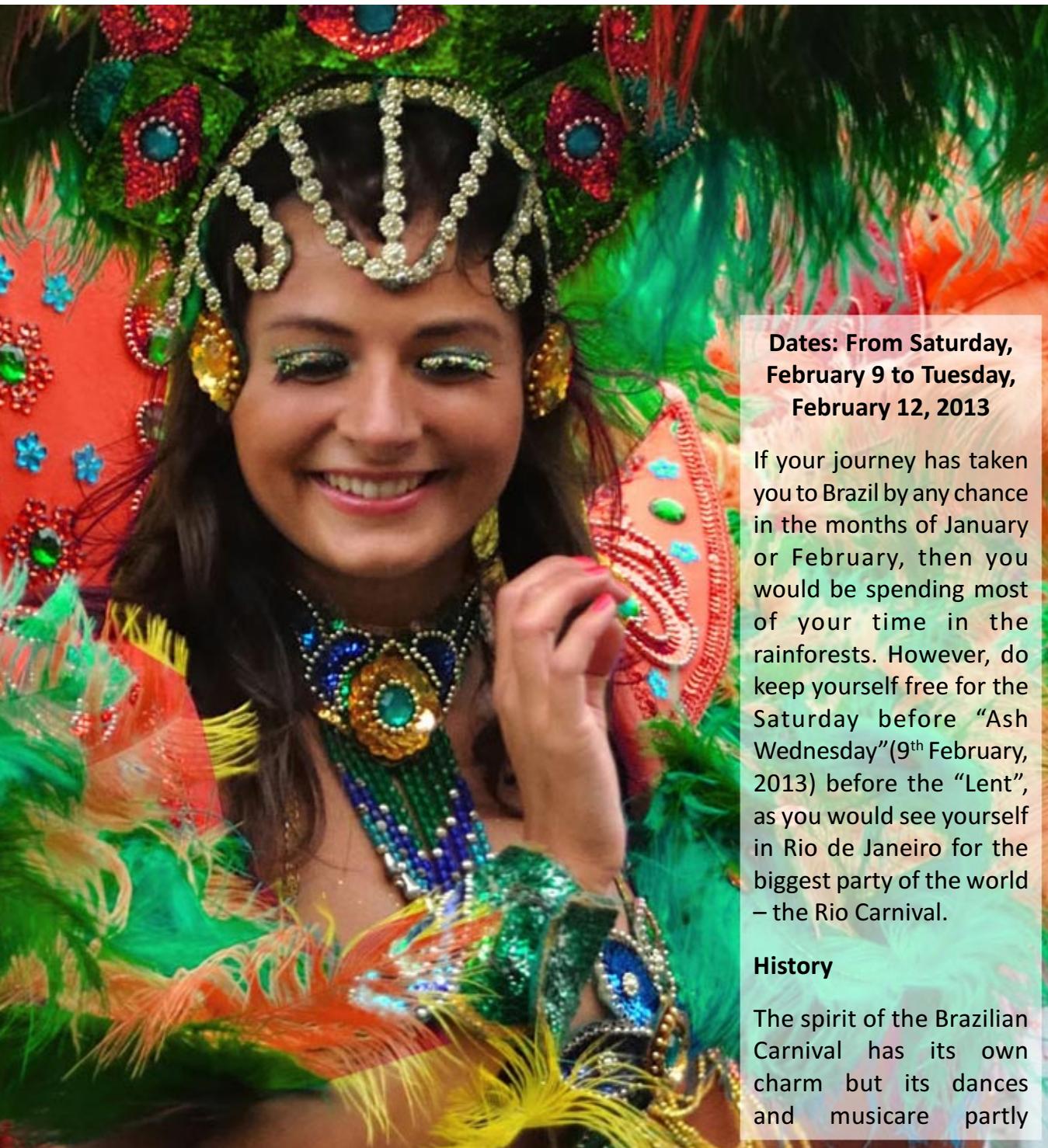
paper lanterns and launch it in the sky. People choose specific colours for specific wishes. The fuel-propelled lanterns float up gently and glow like golden umbrellas against the dark night sky creating a magical effect. Folk arts and performances, stalls selling lanterns, snacks and fireworks enliven the whole proceedings.

Trivia: Yuanxiao - sweet or savoury rice dumplings are traditionally eaten at this time!



**Event
Watch**

Rio Carnival



Dates: From Saturday, February 9 to Tuesday, February 12, 2013

If your journey has taken you to Brazil by any chance in the months of January or February, then you would be spending most of your time in the rainforests. However, do keep yourself free for the Saturday before “Ash Wednesday” (9th February, 2013) before the “Lent”, as you would see yourself in Rio de Janeiro for the biggest party of the world – the Rio Carnival.

History

The spirit of the Brazilian Carnival has its own charm but its dances and music are partly



inspired from the Native African and American cultures. The Rio Carnaval, on the other hand, lends the credit of its creation purely to the Europeans' way of celebrating the Christian Liturgical New Year. The history of Rio's earliest festivals date back to 1723, but it was not until in the late 19th century, "Cordoes" (cords, or particularly laces in Portuguese) was introduced into the culture of Rio de Janeiro. "Cordoes" were dancing and singing pageant performers who paraded the entire city in groups. European traditions merged into the original Brazilian Carnival, which was celebrated as a national festival at the time, to give Rio Carnival its today's national recognition and international exposure. The groups became to be known as "Blocos".

Now, as the carnival expands for magnanimous attention around the world, the larger "Blocos" are also known as the 'Samba Schools'. It is the 'Samba Schools' that fetch the biggest amount of crowd in the entire celebration.

Festivities

The six-week (or controversially 40 days or 38 days, excluding the Sundays) "Lent" is the commemoration to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without any accurate dates in the calendar, the ceremony starts from the Ash Wednesday and ends at the Holy Thursday or the Easter Eve. In Brazil, it is the Sunday and Monday evenings preceding the Ash Wednesday that the Rio Carnival takes place. While vibrancy is the flavour of the

occasion, bold and expensive costumes are a must companion to the exclusive colour palette of the carnival. The thumping beat combined with electrifying tunes set the mood and the rhythmic dances take the parade of joy forward. The parading style of course is seeded from the European culture. Yet, the tradition surely has seen a few feathers being added to it in its new South American avatar.

Blocos de Rua—

Come January and be sure to see uniform colours when you enter the bars or cafeteria of your choice in Rio as every locality, even party joints, pubs and hanging out places, have their own themes for the Blocos Parade. The street carnival bands called “Blocos de Rua” (which were 440 in number in 2012) take the party to the streets as they parade from one street to the next while playing the most happening party tunes, and sometimes, even adding their own jingle to it. Do save your energy though because there is an after party at the end too when the parade reaches its finishing line at the beaches. Not in Rio? No problem! Copacabana, Ipanema, Lagoa – all major cities in the Brazilian territory burn red

hot in the Blocos party fever all month long.

Samba Schools – The big players of the big night in Rio are the world renowned ‘Samba Schools’. Previously a part of the street carnival, but with the ever increasing frenzy of crowd and sponsors around them, authorities have arranged a bigger and better venue for their performances – the



Sambadrome. It is an entire four-night endless enjoyment package with over 100 performers in each of the floats participating in the Samba School contest. Vibrant colours, pulsating music, and the cheers of a 90,000 strong crowd joining in the 700 meter parading stretch makes its show of extravagant beauty.

Tourism

Amazon, Soccer and Carnival – these are the three main attractions in Brazil. One cannot be enjoyed while the other is in progress. So thinking about touring other places in the times of Rio Carnival is a big no. Besides, Rio Carnival is more in the streets than in the palace, or the beaches. Over 300 Bandas and Blocos make sure that the streets are flooded with enough people to last night and day. Even drivers are participating in the street parades! P u b l i c transportations across the country become feudal as the carnival is a n a t i o n a l phenomenon and the main cities, from





where you generally get your transport, are the main venues. The best ways to go anywhere - just melt into the flavour of the occasion and enjoy the June tide as it sways you in the waves of merriment. The Carnival itself is said to be drawing around 500,000 foreign visitors every year!

Fast facts

- Answering to the rhythmic necessities of parading, the percussion-based Batacuda Samba is mostly followed in Rio Carnival.
- There is an order in which the Samba Schools have to



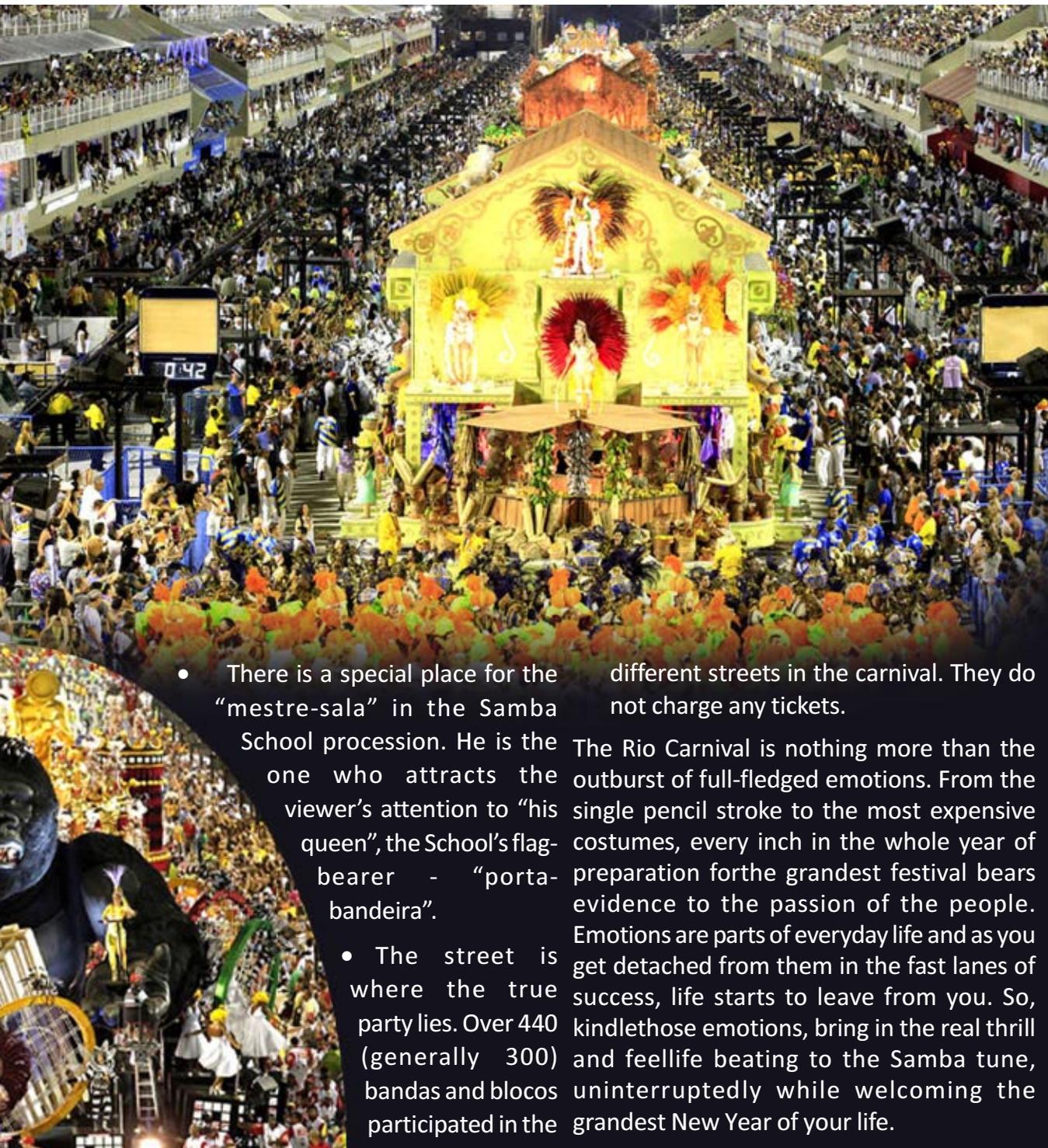
give their performance. First, “comissao de frente” introduce the school, then the opening first wing, called the “abre-alas”, proceed followed closely by the entire cast.

- The Sambadrome charges for tickets in the Grand Stand. Tickets range from \$10 in the back to \$500 (even \$2,500) in the best locations, including VIP Cabins.
- There are 13 Sambadromes in total in the whole country among which seven are only in the major capitals.
- The Rio Carnival is one of the safest public occasions of the world. In 2012 only, over

2 million revellers performed while 5 million spectators beheld this event, but without a single reported incident in crime.

- Fellow rival Samba Schools participating in the Samba School contest are called ‘co-sisters’.





- There is a special place for the “mestre-sala” in the Samba School procession. He is the one who attracts the viewer’s attention to “his queen”, the School’s flag-bearer - “porta-bandeira”.
 - The street is where the true party lies. Over 440 (generally 300) bandas and blocos participated in the different streets in the carnival. They do not charge any tickets.
- The Rio Carnival is nothing more than the outburst of full-fledged emotions. From the single pencil stroke to the most expensive costumes, every inch in the whole year of preparation for the grandest festival bears evidence to the passion of the people. Emotions are parts of everyday life and as you get detached from them in the fast lanes of success, life starts to leave from you. So, kindle those emotions, bring in the real thrill and feel life beating to the Samba tune, uninterrupted while welcoming the grandest New Year of your life.

W L T

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