

W L T
World Luxury Tourism

World

Luxury Travel

Magazine

Vol. 1 ■ Issue 11 ■ June, 2013

Rain Lover's Paradise

Five best monsoon destinations in Asia

Ultimate Luxury

**The five best luxury concierge service
providers of Europe**

Monasteries

**A blissful escape
from the modern life**

**Best Vegetarian
Destinations of the World**

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Monsoon is right around the corner. But does this mean the rain will stop you from travelling? No! A true traveller thinks every season is an opportunity to gain a different perspective on a place. We think so too! For those who are planning a monsoon getaway, we are presenting to you the 'Five best monsoon destinations in Asia' in this month's cover story. We are positive that once you read it, you would start packing your bags to one of these amazing destinations.

Concierge services, do these words ring a bell? Concierge is not confined to hotels anymore. It has evolved far and beyond with some of them giving exemplary services around the world. In this issue of the e-zine, we have covered the top five concierge services in Europe. Watch this space for more area specific toppers!

Do you, at times, want to get away from it all? If yes, that is the time to go to one of these tranquil monasteries that we have covered in our feature section this time. Read on to know more.

The World Luxury Travel Magazine completes a year next month. On this happy occasion, we are offering our industry colleagues, a full page complementary advertisement space in our July and August issue of the e-zine. Request you to grab this opportunity to reach your target audience effectively for free!

The WLTM is having a new format from this issue and the mantra is to bring you the most amazing and interesting information, features and more related to the world of travel. If you want to know about something specific on travel, let us know. We will do our very best to bring it to you.

With that promise,

Happy reading everyone!

Thank you!

Manashree Prakash
Editor-in-Chief

Rain Lover's Paradise

*Five best monsoon
destinations in Asia*

Monsoon, often synonymous with rainy season, fundamentally means a change in wind direction due to uneven heating of land and water; winds begin to blow from ocean to land causing the air over the land to become moist and causing heavy rainfall. South-East Asia is the most famous example of a monsoon area compared to any other part of the world.

Heavy rainfall and storms characterise the Asian monsoon. However, if you think that this is a nuisance, think again. Monsoons are very important for they bring the much-needed relief from the gruelling heat of the Asian summer. After the scorching heat of the summer months, people await the cooling showers eagerly and the first monsoon rain is greeted joyously. The monsoon rains are



also very important for the crops. Absence of monsoon in this region would mean destruction of crops the worst nightmare of every farmer.

To experience the magic of the monsoons, take a trip to one of the Asian countries during

the months of June to August. You can see the dry earth reviving and bursting with life under the life-giving showers. From eating hot snacks and drinking steaming tea in the rain, to splashing around in the puddles or sheltering under an awning and watching the rain, there are many new experiences that only monsoons can offer. Read on and discover the five best places you can head during the monsoons.



India

Monsoon Months: June to September

There is no better place than India if you want to catch the monsoon magic. Here you can see the monsoon in all its black-clouded,

lush vegetation and gorgeous wet-earth smell glory and experience every shade and mood of the monsoon rains.

Kerala: The lush vegetation bursts afresh with greenery under the magic touch of the monsoons. Rainfall is heavy here, but there are fantastic off-season discounts on hotels, tours and houseboat cruises at this time. Depending on the date of your visit, you can



catch the renowned Onam festival and the Snake Boat Race. Monsoons are traditionally the best time to have the famed Ayurvedic spa treatments and massages of Kerala. If you love the rains, this is the best place to hear the beat of the raindrops and slip into the delightful heaven of doing nothing.

Goa: Fresh and verdant under the rain, Goa is a lovely place to enjoy the rain. Though beach and water fun can be threatened by

rain, it is not ruled out totally. There are other interesting things to do, like visiting wildlife sanctuaries, having your breath taken away by the rain-engorged Dudhsagar Falls or the view alongside the Mandovi River from a cruise boat, enjoying the Sao-Joao festival and visiting the lush spice plantations of Savoi.

Rajasthan: This desert state is a great place to tour during the monsoons as it does not rain much here. You can visit the ancient and colourful cities of Jaipur, Jaisalmer or Jodhpur and marvel at the lovely forts and



monuments there; watch the countryside come alive under the rains from the Monsoon Palace at Udaipur. Catch the colourful festival of Teej; go on a camel safari and of course get drenched in the quick showers of Rajasthan's monsoon. All this at a fantastic off-season price!

Valley of Flowers: Tucked away in a Himalayan valley in Uttarakhand is a glacial expanse, which bursts into masses of alpine blooms during the monsoons. This beautiful valley is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The flowers are at their best in July-August. Good walking shoes and raingear are essential.

Indonesia

Monsoon Months: November to March

Indonesia is one of the best destinations to visit during monsoon as it has dry season at this time. Rainfall, if any, is light and intermittent. The weather is warm and lovely with temperatures ranging between 25° to 30°C.

Bali: Soak in the sun and water on the beautiful Kuta or Seminyak or Legian beaches of Bali; rest your eyes with the lush green beauty of paddy fields in Ubud; find peace at the Besakih temple, explore the natural reserves, volcanic mountains or explore the



culture - the dance, music, food and lifestyle of the Balinese.

Jakarta: A visit to this bustling capital city must include the iconic national monument, national museum and a bit of shopping for electronics at the Mangga Dua Mall. For recreation hit the Ancol Dreamland.

Sumatra and Java:

You simply cannot miss the

huge, volcanic Lake Toba or Lengkuas Island in Sumatra and the world-famous Buddhist temple of Borobudur or Mt Bromo in Java.

Others: Bunaken Marine Park in Sulawesi (famous for diving and snorkelling), Gili Islands, Komodo National Park, Toraja and Raja Ampat (Papua).

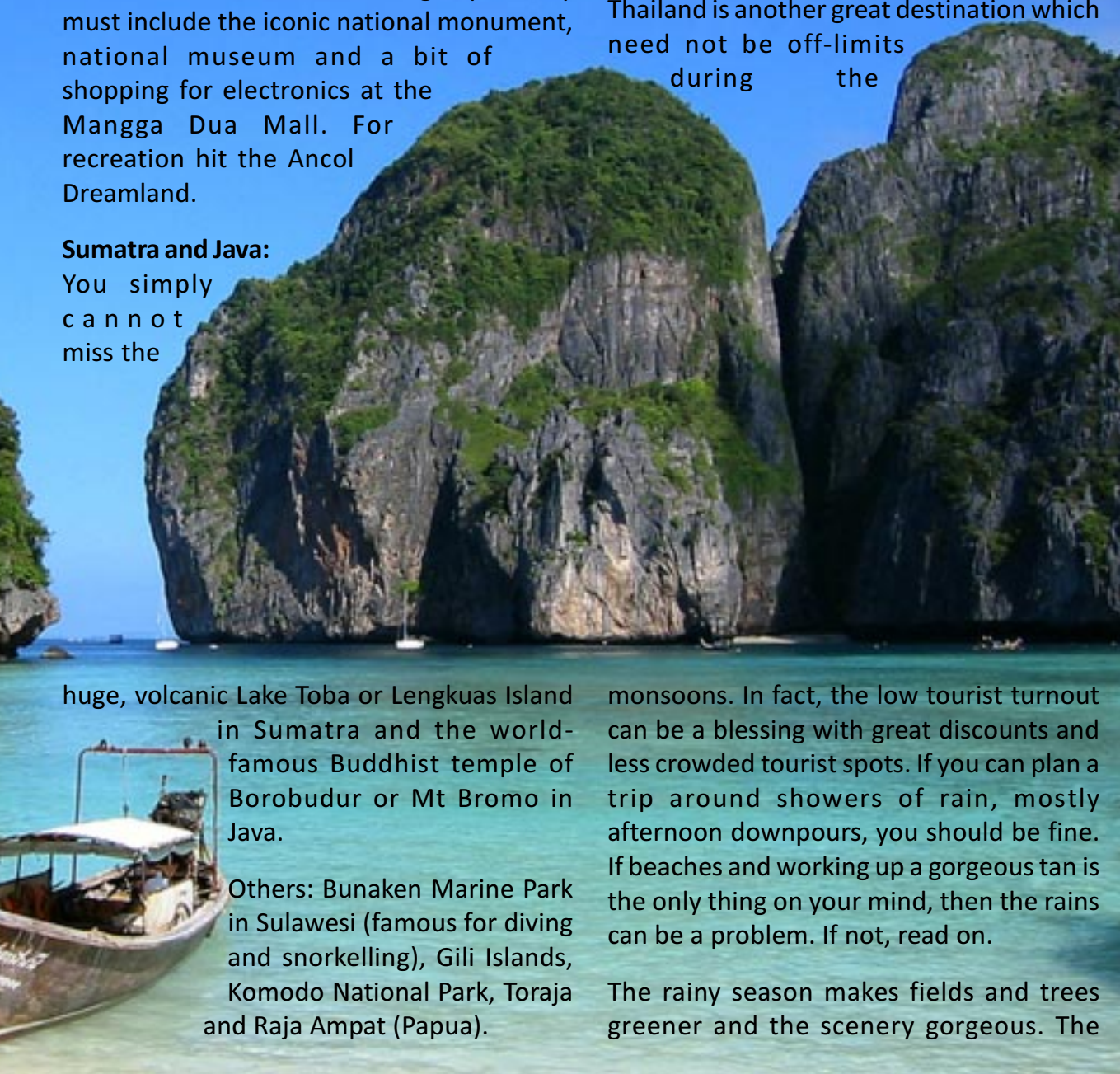
Thailand

Monsoon Months: May to October

Thailand is another great destination which need not be off-limits during the

monsoons. In fact, the low tourist turnout can be a blessing with great discounts and less crowded tourist spots. If you can plan a trip around showers of rain, mostly afternoon downpours, you should be fine. If beaches and working up a gorgeous tan is the only thing on your mind, then the rains can be a problem. If not, read on.

The rainy season makes fields and trees greener and the scenery gorgeous. The



'safer' areas to visit during the rainy season are generally Koh Samui, Koh Phangan and Koh Tao. In the mainland of Thailand, though the rain can be heavy, it is not generally long. Take a trip to the lovely Ang Thong National Marine Park. You can head to Phuket's Patong Beach when it is sunny; when it is not, lose yourself in shopping, games or cinema at the huge Jungceylon shopping mall. Pamper yourself in the amazing spas or take a museum or temple tour.

If you are visiting Bangkok, remember it rains heavily but after the shower, the sun comes out again drying everything quickly. On rainy days too, there are no dearth of interesting things to do. Shop till you drop at the enormous Terminal 21 shopping mall, MBK shopping mall, Central



World, Paragon Siam and so on. Visit the fascinating Siam Ocean World or go for one of the popular cooking lessons. As long as you have an umbrella, rain shoes and do not hate the rains, you are good to go.

Do Carry: Stout umbrella, flip flops/good rain shoes, quick drying clothes, waterproof backpack or pouch for carrying mobiles, watches etc. mosquito repellent and first aid kit.

Malaysia

Monsoon Months: May to October (west coast); November to February (east coast)

Malaysia is a great tourist destination even during the monsoon. During

the traditional monsoon months in Asia, the east coast has dry weather, so the lovely beaches there are still open. Swim, dive or go snorkelling at the heavenly Redang or Perhentian Islands. Sipadan is one of the best diving havens in the world and you can also catch turtles laying eggs in the beaches there (May-August).

Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre in East Sabah is one of the few places on earth where the endangered animal can still be seen. Go trekking, camping and explore the beauties of nature at Sarawak's national parks. The world's largest and smelliest and rare-to-glimpse Rafflesia flowers (up to

39 inches diameter and up to 22 pounds heavy) bloom in Gunung Gading National Park (Sarawak). See the lovely coral reefs in Tioman islands (selected once by the Time magazine as one of the world's most beautiful islands). Do not miss the incredible Mulu caves (Borneo). May to July is a good time to visit Kuala Lumpur. Not to be missed attractions are the renowned Petronas Towers, Menara KL



Tower, the Chinatown and Batu Caves. Penang and Cameron Highlands should definitely be on your itinerary too.

Singapore

Monsoon Months: June-September (south-west monsoon)

Singapore is one of the most popular

tourist destinations in Asia. It has two monsoon seasons, south west and a north-east monsoon (December-March). Between June to September, there can be showers and thunderstorms but they are of short duration and therefore not a hindrance to tourist activities. The monsoon months are a good time to catch two fantastic tourist events of the country. Indulge in a celebration of shopping during the Great Singapore Sale when there are discounts for as much as 70 per cent on various products. June and July is also the best time to treat your taste buds to a breath-taking variety of delicacies at the Singapore Food Festival.

Tourists love to go to the newly constructed Gardens by the Bay





near the Singapore Flyer. The Supertree Grove at Gardens by the Bay has been attracting visitors ever since its installation. Sentosa Island is also a popular destination for tourists and locals alike. A whole lot of interesting experiences await them in Sentosa. The fascinating



Underwater


World and Dolphin Lagoon, the lovely Butterfly Park and Insect Kingdom, the thrilling Megazip Adventure Park, Merlion Statue, Universal Studios (with rides based on blockbuster movies) are great hits with tourists. Explore the natural world with visits to the fabulous Singapore Zoo and the Singapore Botanical Gardens. For restaurants and pubs, head to Boat Quay and Clarke Quay. Marina Bay Sands, the National Museum, the Science Centre, the Singapore Flyer are other popular must-see attractions.

You can choose any of the above destinations for experiencing what the rains in Asia are all about. With a few alterations in your choices you can witness either an awe-inspiring thunderstorm and heavy showers or just an afternoon-shower-with the sun coming out soon. Either way, it will be an experience to remember. Experience the rains, experience monsoon in Asia.

Special **Feature**

Ultimate Luxury

**The five best luxury concierge
service providers of Europe**

A large, dark silhouette of a person's head and neck is positioned in the upper left and center of the page. The person is facing right, looking out over a body of water towards a sunset. The sky is a warm, orange-yellow color, and the water reflects the light. The silhouette is sharp and detailed, showing the ear, jawline, and the back of the head.

The word concierge is inextricably tied up with hotels, calling forth images of a front-desk employee attending to reservations, travel plans and numerous general duties. Did you know the word 'concierge' has French origins meaning 'keeper of the keys' or a 'house guardian'? The concierge was responsible for streamlining the various facets of a royal household to ensure smooth service and a pleasant stay for the guests. The hotel concierge took over with pretty much the same function, only operating in hotels instead of the castles.

In modern times, the term has further evolved to spawn an interesting industry of lifestyle concierge services. Lifestyle concierge experts step in to the lives of people who need things

done but do not have the time to spare for doing those. For a monthly or an annual fee, they attend to all those tasks, which the clients are too busy to do, thereby freeing the client's time so that they can use it to do what they enjoy or like doing. Concierge companies today cover a broad spectrum of services, making their members' life as hassle-free as possible, and helping them to 'buy back' their most precious possession-time.

Let us take a look at some of the best names in this field today. It is almost impossible to choose only five names from a host of fantastic concierge services, so we shall limit ourselves to some of the best providers with headquarters in Europe.

Quintessentially

When a company has its slogan as 'Impossible is made available', you know you have come to the right place to get that impossible reservation made or get a Black Hermes Birkin handbag delivered to you within 48 hours. Yes, Quintessentially has done all of the above, and more. Requests range from the mundane such as tickets for events, reservations in restaurants, hotel bookings and real estate assistance to whacky ones such as hiring a pyramid for a private party, finding a pink crocodile for a birthday gift or rescuing a member who was snowed-in in a mountain chalet. The main idea here is to help members to save the most precious commodity in their busy lives – time! The club takes care of the nitty-gritty, freeing their client's time for enjoying the

things they want to.

This private members' only luxury concierge club was founded in 2000 by Aaron Simpson, Paul Drummond and Ben Elliot (a member of the royal family). This award-winning concierge service, available 24/7 and 365 days a year, functions with a network of 1500 employees including 800 personal assistants, across 60 cities worldwide. Membership ranges from general to elite. The popular elite membership comes at an annual cost of \$45,000 and offers complete personalised service taking care of





every aspect of your life you need help on. Members include celebrities, entrepreneurs and fashion designers. Apart from the concierge services, there are 32 luxury sister businesses, which

cover every aspect of luxury living including travel, fine wines, property and event planning. Members also enjoy exclusive benefits such as access to the best hotels, clubs or restaurants and discounts and special offers from stores all over the world. Luxury brand partners of the club include British Airways, Audi, Jaguar and HSBC Private Bank.

Unusual Requests: *Getting the Sydney Harbour Bridge closed for a marriage proposal; producing a life-size, edible cake party-costume!*

USP: *Focus on luxury.*





TeN

Ten Lifestyle Concierge

Ten Lifestyle, a pioneer in the concept of concierge services, was founded in 1998 by Alex Cheatle and Andrew Long. One of the leading concierge services in the world, it provides services to over 300,000 clients in 145 countries. Available round the clock and all year round, they satisfy a vast array of request with the help of experts who speak

20 languages. Ten Lifestyle has a fantastic network of contacts and insider know-how to get you that coveted access to top hotels, restaurants or VIP events. It has employees representing over 30 nationalities giving a good understanding of various cultures and contacts

all over the world. Ten has catered to well over a million requests till date. The main areas of expertise include travel, restaurants, tickets and retail. Ten can offer its members great deals with airlines, tour operators and luxury hotels; access to sold out events and the best

tickets; priority access to over 900 of the best restaurants in the world; get you the best retail deals and help to choose and deliver gifts at best prices. You can choose from monthly or annual memberships. If you are a VIP member, a personal lifestyle manager

is dedicated to you, who will offer bespoke services creating perfect tailor-made solutions. Services are offered to private individuals and through corporate customer loyalty schemes. Ten's clients include Coutts, Barclays and Citi.

Unusual Requests: *Sourcing a blue diamond, sourcing an elephant for a wedding, organising a match with a chess grandmaster, delivering 999 red roses to Hong Kong for a proposal!*

USP: *'Intelligent Support' delivering faster and cheaper solutions.*



Bon Vivant

For things ‘that you don’t have the time, inclination or expertise to do yourself’ there is Bon Vivant, a leading luxury lifestyle service founded by Emyr Thomas in 2009. Based in London but working globally, Bon Vivant offers a range of services related to travel, leisure and lifestyle, leaving you free to enjoy your time. A personal account manager is assigned to each client to take care of any task including finding a hotel, tickets to exclusive events and advice on any lifestyle service. Members also have access to VIP treatment, complimentary benefits





and discounts at top hotels, clubs and also access to exclusive and sold out events. Everyday tasks such as finding a gym, cleaner, arranging a party are handled with ease. Personal and corporate memberships are available on a monthly or ad hoc basis. This makes it customised to your specific needs and you also avoid paying for a host of services you probably will not use. Bon Vivant even offers ad hoc, customised bespoke concierge and lifestyle management to temporary visitors to London. Celebrities, senior professionals and entrepreneurs include the clientele. Corporate clients include Sotheby's, top city law firms, banking and media professionals.

USP: Personalised service and affordable luxury.



John Paul

John Paul was established in 2008 by David Amsellem. The company offers both personal and corporate concierge services and is available 24/7 and 365 days a year. It works seamlessly to fulfil any requests, which members do not have the time, resources or contacts to arrange themselves. Members have access to special privileges,

which include the best rates and benefits at top hotels, sold out tickets to top events, access to VIP events, luxury retail services and VIP airport transfers. On the corporate side, John Paul provides concierge, loyalty and customer engagement solutions through a white label, personalised customer relation approach. The CRM software used by the company is the

JOHN PAUL
INTERNATIONAL





‘data bank’ of customers’ profiles based on their behaviour and preferences. It is the key platform to providing personalised service and offering insightful solutions.

Unusual Requests: Arranging a 50th birthday party of 60,000 euros and delivering 30 live penguins for it!

USP: CRM, Big Data and Brand advocate features to engage customer loyalty.



Alberta La Grup

Founded in 2006 by Lourdes Carbo, this luxury boutique concierge service is based in Barcelona, Spain. The personalised services limited to just 100 clients, includes Paris, London, Dubai, Miami, Milan, New York, Kiev, Moscow and others based on request. From mundane tasks like dry-cleaning and buying grocery to arranging luxury dinners, this concierge service handles it all. The custom-made experiences include



gastronomy, fashion, culture, sports, leisure and entertainment. A host of multi-lingual, energetic employees offer services to clients who include CEO's of Forbes listed companies, high net worth people and boutique travellers. They offer personal assistants who understand your preferences and tailor make solutions with every attention to detail. Their bespoke lifestyle services 'for those who do not carry their own luggage' help to make vacations perfect. You can also avail of the 'ten gorgeous

experiences' consisting of wonderful experiences around the world.

Unusual Requests: *Traveling 50 miles to a private European mountain villa through snowy roads to restore a client's daughters teddy bear which was left behind; organizing a 'Last Dinner' experience for Chef Ferran Adrià at the renowned elBulli restaurant (now closed) at a short notice for 150 privileged clients from all over the world!*

USP: *Providing special lifestyle experiences with personalised attention.*

Time to do nothing

"I'm a man of simple tastes. I'm always satisfied with the best," commented Oscar Wilde. For those who want the best out of life and can afford to exchange money for time, the concierge services are a boon

indeed. Seamlessly absorbing the hassles of daily living, they ensure that their clients' enjoy a better quality of life. Bill Watterson, the renowned creator of Calvin and Hobbes once said, "There's never enough time to do all the nothing you want." It is exactly this regret that concierge services aspire to do away with.



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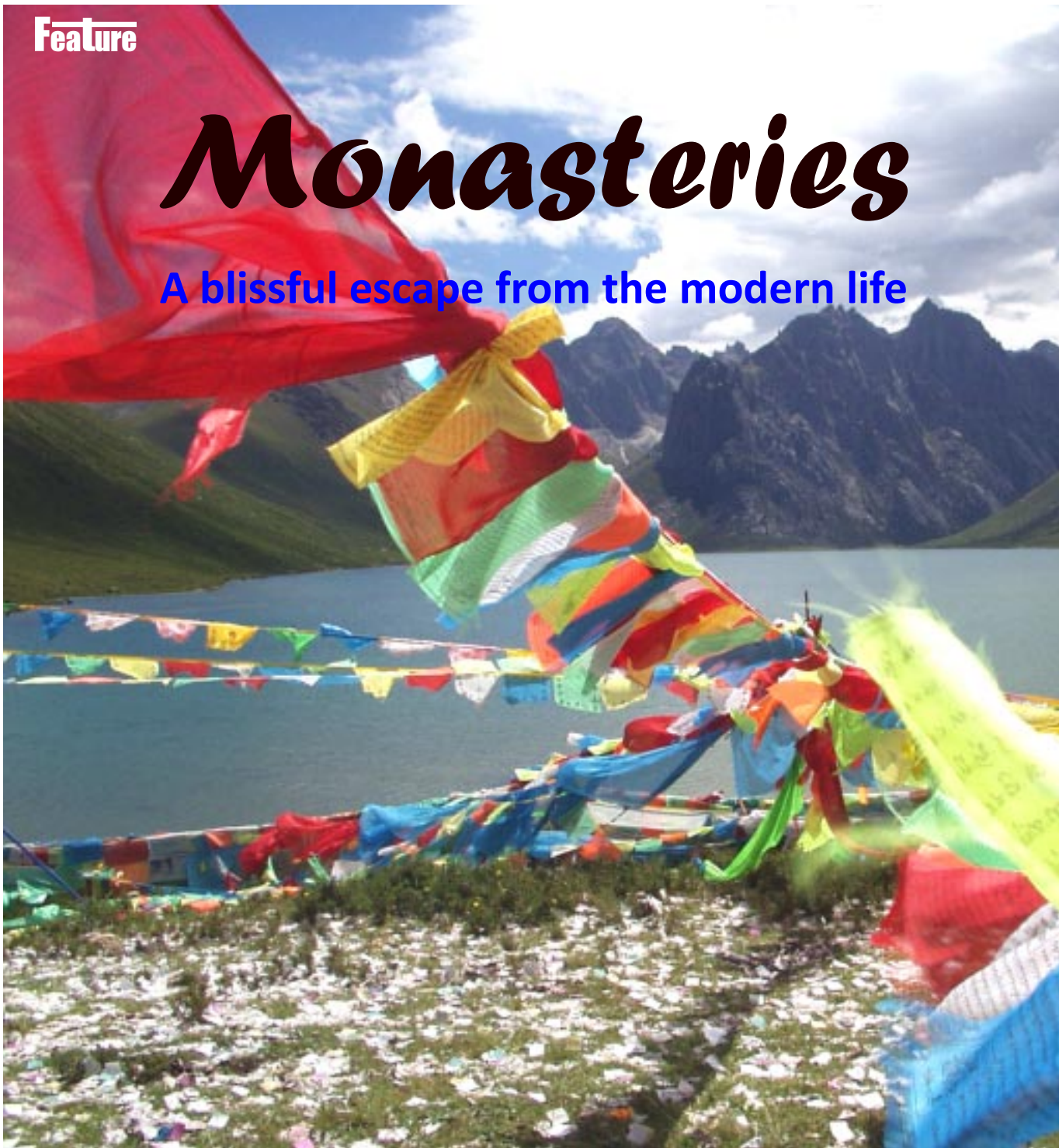
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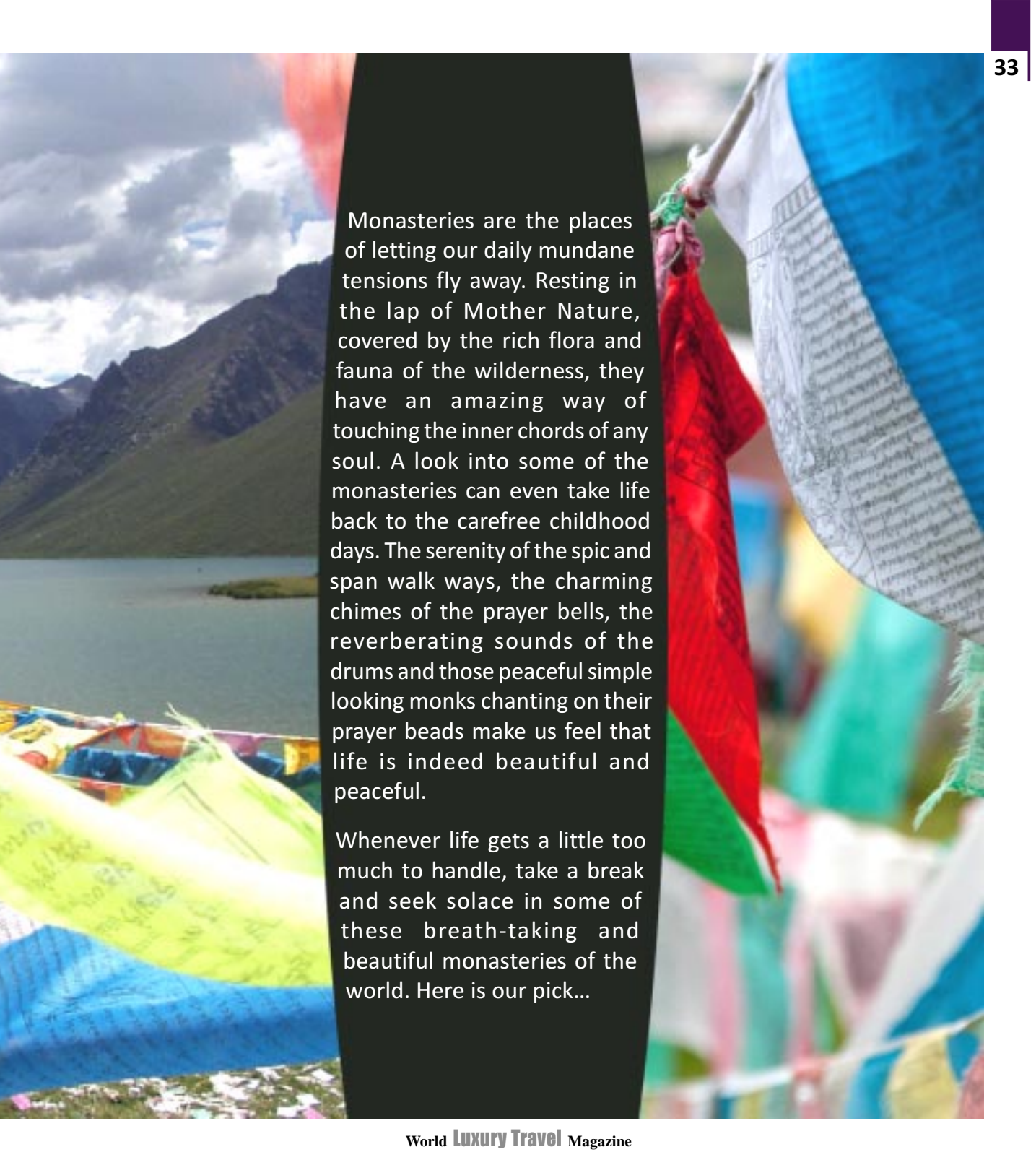
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Monasteries

A blissful escape from the modern life





Monasteries are the places of letting our daily mundane tensions fly away. Resting in the lap of Mother Nature, covered by the rich flora and fauna of the wilderness, they have an amazing way of touching the inner chords of any soul. A look into some of the monasteries can even take life back to the carefree childhood days. The serenity of the spic and span walk ways, the charming chimes of the prayer bells, the reverberating sounds of the drums and those peaceful simple looking monks chanting on their prayer beads make us feel that life is indeed beautiful and peaceful.

Whenever life gets a little too much to handle, take a break and seek solace in some of these breath-taking and beautiful monasteries of the world. Here is our pick...

Yumbulagang Monastery, Tibet

Travelling through the vast mountains and meandering roads, you can reach the Yumbulagang Monastery in Tibet. The very thought of Tibet brings in the thought of resting all worries and tensions in the lap of the overpowering and all engulfing Himalayas. A land full of mysteries and spirit, Tibet is every traveller's dream destination.

Yumbulagang, meaning the 'land of mother and son' in Tibetan dialect, proudly holds the

earliest of Tibetan buildings. This is a palace with a history of over 2000 years. Tibet and many Buddhist countries still run the old tradition of spiritual monarchy where the king is a person encompassing the path of religion and spirituality. The monastic system of ruling still pre-dominates the area.

Yumbulagang Monastery suffered major destructions during the Cultural Revolution and was repaired in the early 1980s. Journey to Yumbulagang is extremely enriching as the hill is covered all around by lush greenery of





corn fields. The 'Bon Po' believers built it in the 2nd century for the first King of Tibet Nyatri Tsanpo, which later became the mystical summer stay of King Songtsen Gampo and Princess Wenchen. Later, Songtsen Gampo had transferred his seat to Lhasa and Yumbulagang became a monastery of the Gelugpa School under the reign of the 5th Dalai Lama.

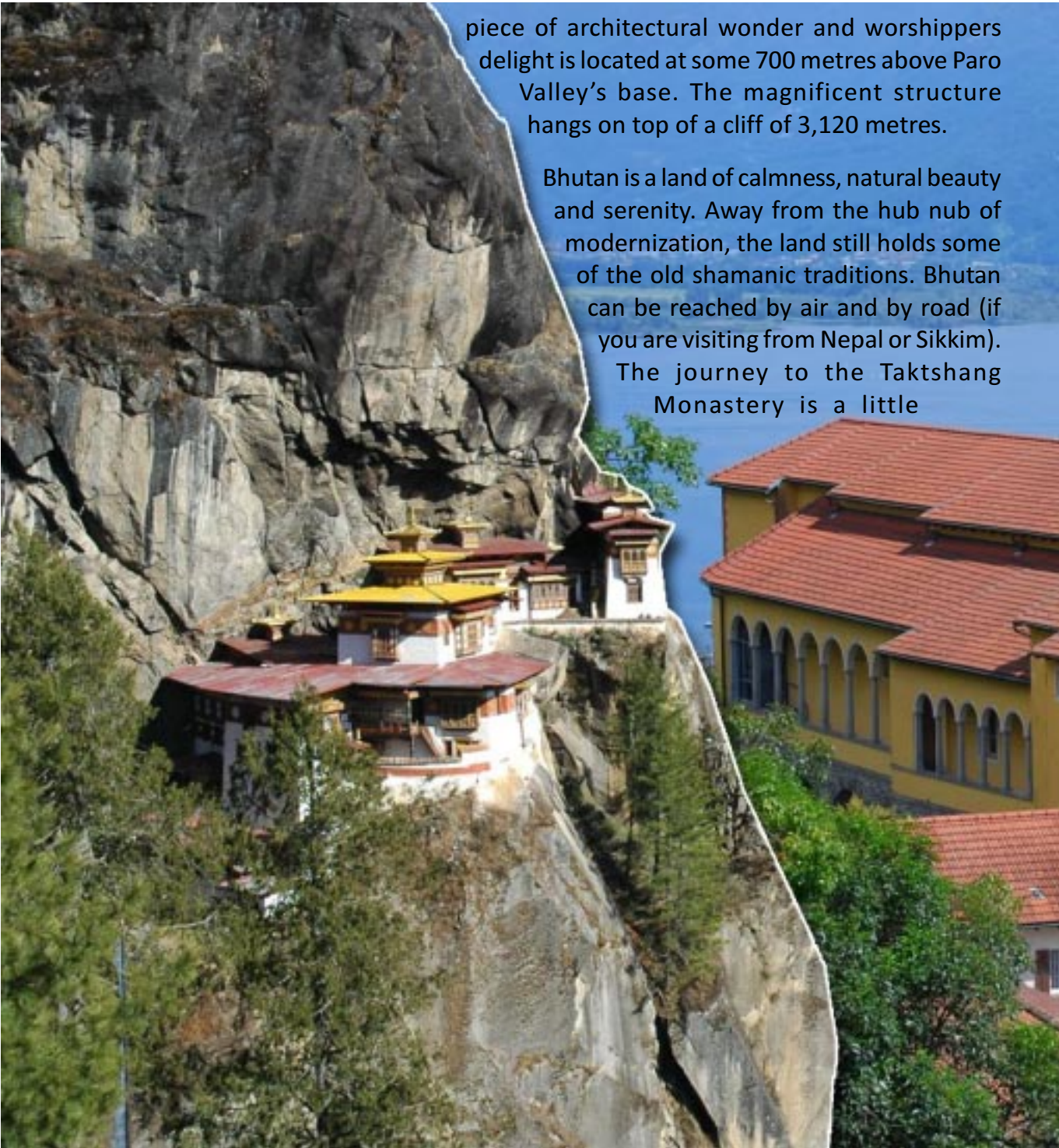
Taktsang Palphug Monastery (The Tiger's Nest), Bhutan

If you are a keen traveller or peace seeker and love to get lost in the peaceful enamour of natural beauty, travel to these places of worship to relive your worked up body and mind. The combination of the scenic beauty with strict disciplines of a monastic order, teachings of a "Sheda", where texts are taught and the "Dup di" where monks and nuns learn meditations, the Taktsang Monastery in Bhutan is an age old virgin pride of the creators.

Mythology has it that Lord Padmasambhava or Guru Rimpoche flew to the Taktsang Monastery sitting on a tiger. This beautiful

piece of architectural wonder and worshippers delight is located at some 700 metres above Paro Valley's base. The magnificent structure hangs on top of a cliff of 3,120 metres.

Bhutan is a land of calmness, natural beauty and serenity. Away from the hub nub of modernization, the land still holds some of the old shamanic traditions. Bhutan can be reached by air and by road (if you are visiting from Nepal or Sikkim). The journey to the Taktshang Monastery is a little



strenuous, nevertheless, adventurous.

Pilgrims can reach the Tiger's Nest either on foot or atop a mule. The journey to the monastery is a breath-taking experience. Seven temples in the monastery with majestic prayer centres can be visited offering obeisance at the altars. Colossal images of Lord Sakyamani Buddha,

Lord Padmasambhava with his consorts leave a feeling of being one with a mission of searching 'The Truth'.

The strain of the climb easily runs down with the local brew, hot and delicious cuisines in the traditional hotels that serve by the temple. A visit to the Taktshang Monastery is like reliving the moments of history—a dream all the reverberating hearts wish to experience.

Most of the Buddhist monasteries are located by the hills with innumerable prayer flags and stone tombs holding the rare relics of the great masters of each lineage. The churches abound has the silent representation of the teachings of Bible.

Madonna Del Sasso, Switzerland

Madonna Del Sasso is a pilgrimage located at the heights of Locarno, Switzerland. This beautiful sacred aura rests as a church with

another legend – Virgin Mary is believed to have appeared in a vision around 1480. The church with its Capuchin Monastery construction began after the vision and was accomplished by the 17th century. The monastery is an old brick and stone structure standing beside an unfurled curve of the bays of a lake.

The old structure and its stunning peaceful existence are made aesthetically. The presence of the monastery's museum gives

insight of the place. There are several sacred arts carefully preserved in the museum. It is not necessary that you would have to be aesthetically bent to enjoy the beauty of the place. Anyone who finds romanticism in the lap of Mother Nature can enjoy a vast expanse of the mountains, lakes and lush greenery in the same place.

Gregoriou Monastery, Greece

Greece has numerous mythical figures that



adorn the Greek religion and philosophy. Christ had found a unique place in the heart of every land owing to the unfathomable endurance to pain and torture for the cause of good.

Greece is a place where history, archaeology and mythology mingle. The Greek heroes abound

literature and have been studied as serious academics in various reputed universities around the world. Among the oldest of earth's civilization, there are innumerable legendary figures in Greek mythology and philosophy. Spirituality and Greece have been synonymous for ages now. One of the





most stunning structures ever created in the spiritual history of Greece is the Gregoriou Monastery. Located in the south-west of Mount Athos, the Gregoriou monastery was built in the 14th century. Out of the twenty Athonite monasteries in hierarchical discipline, Gregoriou monastery occupies the reputation of being seventeenth in position.

The murals painted on the walls that speak

of the various teachings of the church, are by some monks from Kastoria. The church has a Katholikon, many chapels and a library. It was worked on in the latter half of the 17th century. Its library got destroyed during the fire and raids in the revolution of 1821. There is a fragment of the real cross, one which bore the manifestation of the Lord and His immense endurance. There are



about 297 manuscripts and 4,500 books along with other relics of the saints.

A place which can wash off all the material thoughts and liberate a soul can be a fabulous place of research for theologians. The 13th century Holy Bible is one of the liturgical manuscripts adorning the monastery. The monastery provides with food and shelter for those who seek to find the path of Christ. There are 71 living in monks who serve the monastery by living exactly the way Christ had led his life in simplicity and hardship.

When the lord seems to be the only peaceful symbol existing in the mind, and the body wishes to rescue itself from the stress of daily life, a trip to the far-away, stand-alone monasteries (representation of the teachings of the Lord) seems to be the only road to find solace. Visit one of these monasteries to find what you seek and get in touch with your inner self.



Best Vegetarian Destinations of the World



Have you ever gone on a holiday, ordered potato wedges thinking of it to be a safe bet for vegetarian food, only to find it served with bacon? Have you ever ordered a vegetarian meal and found eggs and fish as garnish on the plate? If you are a vegetarian traveller you might have often found yourself in these piquant or downright frustrating situations.

Good food is an important ingredient of a good holiday. For the vegetarian travellers who want to go beyond just 'getting along' to have a really great time, we bring you a few places, which have gained the reputation of being 'vegetarian friendly'. If you travel to any of these places, you will not be given the short shrift just because you are a vegetarian.



India

A vegetarian's haven, not surprisingly, as India has the highest percentage of vegetarians in the world. According to a survey in the year 2006, around 31 per cent of Indians are vegetarians or lacto-vegetarians who consume milk and dairy products. Vegetarian food products are labelled with a green dot in a green square. It goes without saying that in India there is no dearth of vegetarian restaurants serving delicious fare. Even non-vegetarian restaurants have several



vegetarian options on the menu. There are many interesting vegetarian options to choose from, rice and lentil-based dishes, vegetable stir-fries, curries, salads, soups and desserts. Walk into any restaurant and order a 'vegetarian thali' and you will get a complete Indian meal—rice, roti (unleavened bread), dal (lentils), curry, papad, curd and dessert. Street foods serving a whole range of interesting vegetarian snacks are also available. The best part is you can rest easy once you say 'vegetarian'. No fish sauce

or animal fat-fried surprises will land on your plate when you order vegetarian food in India. However, you may have to be specific while ordering a vegan meal.

Vegetarian Must-try:

- Dosas - Crisp, fried lentil-based crepes served with spicy coconut condiment
- Samosas - Deep fried triangular snack with potato filling
- Palak Paneer - Curry made of spinach and cottage cheese
- Aloo Parantha - Flatbread with potato filling roasted over a griddle with oil





Thailand

Thailand is a vegetarian-friendly place too. We didn't say vegetarian's haven for a good reason. Though vegetarian food outlets are available here, the concept of vegetarianism translating to 'Mangsawirat' is a pretty loose one, which can include the popular fish and oyster sauces, meat-stock or eggs. However, if you just proclaim 'Gin Jay' meaning 'pure vegetarian', you are good to go (though it can get onions, garlic and spices excluded as well). The concept of vegetarianism is not alien and vegetarians can easily find a wide range of palate-satisfying dishes. However, it is advised to be careful when it comes to street foods, as they may not have the time to



customise dishes according to your needs. Chiang Mai and Bangkok are the two places where vegetarian restaurants are easily available. For in-between times, Thailand has fresh fruits in plenty and it is easy to buy bread, cheese or nuts from

anywhere. The 9-day Phuket vegetarian festival will be a big help if you are visiting at that time (September/October).

Vegetarian Must-try:

- Thai Tom Kha Soup - Vegetables in coconut milk
- Pad Pak Ruam - Mixed fried vegetables
- Vegetarian Pad Thai - Noodles with vegetables





restaurants serving lip-smacking vegetarian fare. For in-between times there are always samosas, jacket potatoes, bread, fruits and cheese. Pubs often serve vegetarian burgers and restaurants too offer vegetarian options. The famous old Rootmaster, a double-decker bus, has received a

London

Named the World's Most Vegetarian-Friendly City by PETA, it is quite easy to be a vegetarian in London. Food products in supermarkets and even in steak houses come with a green 'V' label denoting 'vegetarian' or 'vegan' food. There are many vegetarian



make-over as a vegan restaurant serving organic, freshly cooked food. South Indian restaurants, Turkish restaurants (salads), Melati (for delicious Indonesian food) and



numerous cafes like the Bonington and Vitao offer great vegetarian spread. London even has an annual vegetarian week.

Vegetarian Must-try:

- Orange and Cointreau Cheesecake (Gate),
- The six-course vegetarian menu at Morgan M (not for the budget traveller!),
- Houmous at Hummus Bros

San Francisco

One of the most vegetarian-friendly cities in the US, San Francisco offers fantastic range of healthy and delicious vegetarian options. The Bay area is renowned for vegetarian food options suitable for every budget. There are scores of cafes, restaurants and health food stores catering to vegans and vegetarians offering Indian, Japanese or Mexican delicacies. The local farmers' markets are also treasure-houses for



fresh vegetables and fruits.

Top Vegetarian Must-try:

- Stuffed Avocado Salad (at Saha),
- 'Deep Dish' pizza at Café Gratitude,
- Soy Chicken Shawarma,
- Cha-Ya Roll (Cha-Ya),
- Truffle macaroni and cheese at Source.



Singapore

A vegetarian hotspot in Southeast Asia, Singapore has uncountable numbers of vegetarian restaurants and restaurants serving customised vegetarian food. Over a hundred vegetarian restaurants serve the best of Indian, Malaysian and Chinese

cuisine. Choose from vegetarian imitations of popular meat dishes, vegetarian satays or the delectable vegetarian Nyonya cuisine. You can never be short on protein too in this city that serves tofu, soy puddings



A close-up photograph of a blue plate containing several pieces of golden-brown, fried food, likely fish or chicken, served on a light-colored table.

- South Indian Thali (Komala Vilas),
- Vegetarian Steamboat Buffet (Lotus Vegetarian Restaurant),
- Fried Veg with sweet & sour sauce (Just Greens)



Italy

Italy has reportedly the highest vegetarian population in Europe (10 per cent). Declaration of 'Sono Vegetariano' (I am vegetarian) is not a serious problem in a country where meat is not a compulsive part of every meal. There are many vegetarian restaurants and it is easy to find vegetarian options even in regular restaurants. Fresh vegetables, fruits, cheese, wines, herbs, beans, cereals, soups, pastas and pizza with loads of fresh vegetables – there are enough to keep vegetarians happy in Italy. Just check the toppings, and if in doubt about the ingredients (as in sauces and dressings), 'E senza carne?' (Is it meat free?) should help you out. 'Primi' (appetisers) have many vegetarian pasta dishes and the 'Contorni' (side-dishes) are a gold mine



of vegetable dishes – bell peppers, eggplant, olives, zucchini, artichokes and tomatoes. Note that all cheese is not vegetarian (stay away from Parmesan).

Vegetarian Must-try:

- Pasta primavera,
- Tiramisu (dessert),
- Gelato (ice-cream),
- Pizza Marinara.

Toronto, Canada

This is quite a vegetarian-friendly city. Most of the major cities in Canada are vegetarian friendly. If you can catch the annual Vegetarian Food Festival (September), you can gorge on great vegetarian food samples of various cuisines. There are many vegetarian restaurants and vegetarian options to be found in the city. Faux meat dishes are very popular and there are many options to choose from, including sweet and sour 'chicken' and burgers with veggie 'steaks'.

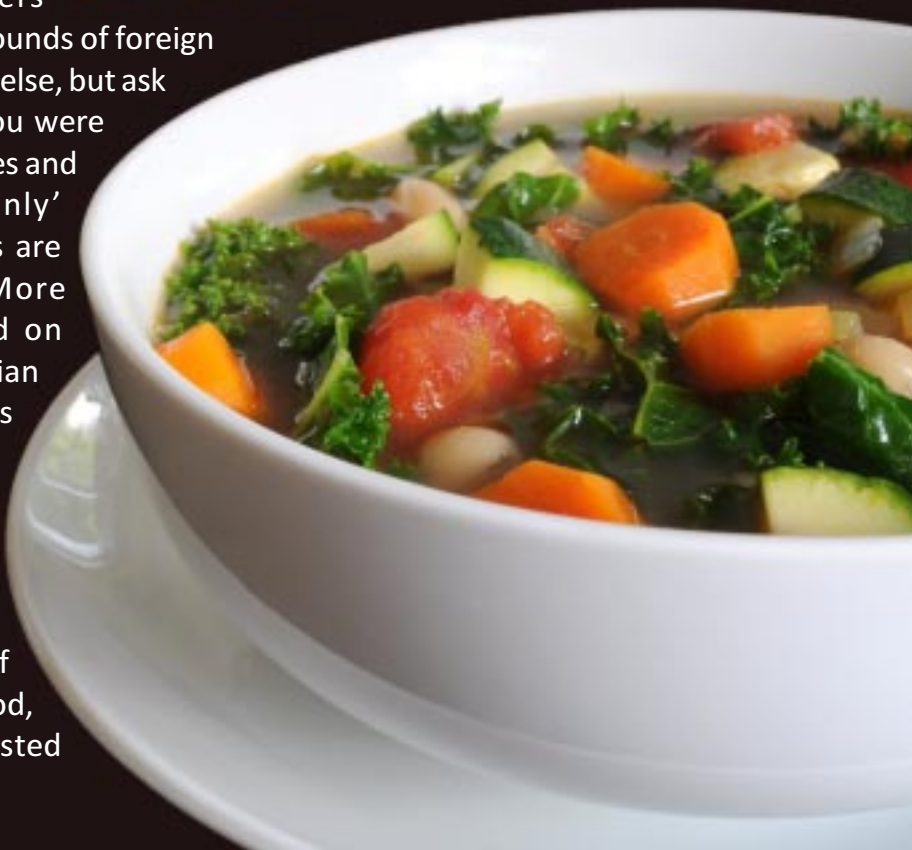
Vegetarian Must-try:

- Vegan Burrito Bowl at Chipotle's,
- Vegetable Soup and Mock Meats at King's Café,
- Raw pizza at Live.



Vegetarian Traveller

Till some years back, vegetarian travellers enjoyed the sights and sounds of foreign travel as much as anyone else, but ask them about food and you were likely to hear tales of woes and 'fruits and salads only' stories. However, things are changing now. More emphasis is being laid on healthy eating. Vegetarian food is rapidly nudging its way into international plates and palates. Vegetarian travellers can look forward to enjoying that most important component of a good holiday - good food, at least in the places listed above.





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Selina Power



Sheila Scarborough



Avijit Arya



Sanjay Vijaykumar



Adam Franklin

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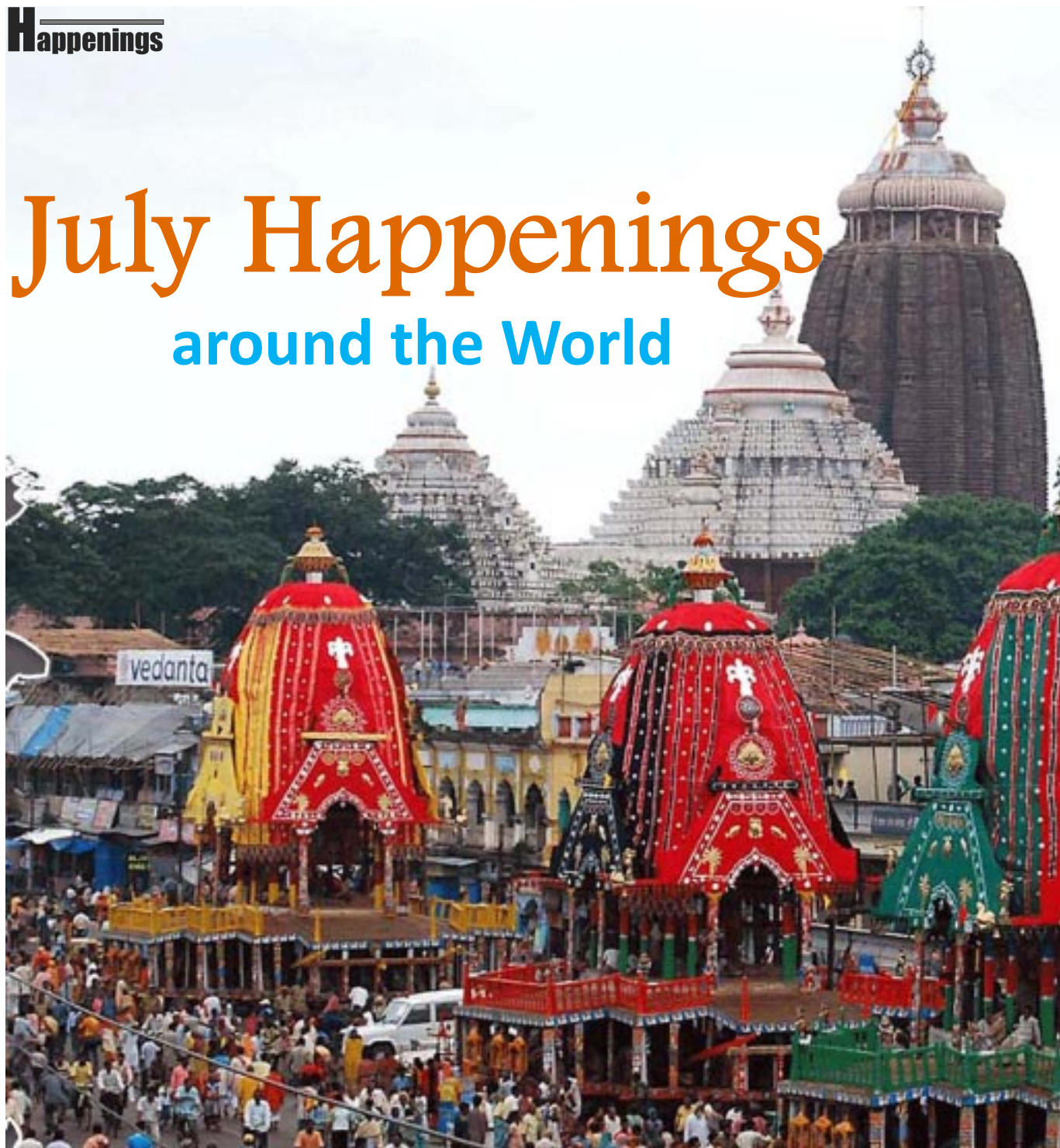


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July Happenings around the World



Rath Yatra (Festival of Chariots)

Where: Puri, Odisha, India

When: July 10, 2013

The quiet temple town of Puri is transformed every year in July with the celebration of the sacred Rath Yatra – the chariot festival. Puri throbs with religious activity and spiritual fervour as thousands of devotees congregate to witness and participate in the huge procession in which idols of Jagannath (the Hindu deity Krishna), his brother Balarama and his sister Subhadra are placed in three 45-foot high yellow chariots or raths, drawn by devotees.

The procession starts at the famous Jagannath Temple, moving along the main street to the temple of Gundicha Ghar where the idols rest for a week. For the eager pilgrims, they are not merely idols but the living embodiment of God and as such it is an intensely spiritual experience for them to view the procession, touch the chariots or even its ropes. The near-hysteria of the crowds can be unsafe at times; however this does not deter the millions of pilgrims and tourists from being part of the sacred festival.

***Trivia:** The idols are half finished with no hands or feet, replicating the original idol; made by the divine carpenter Vishwakarma, who vanished leaving the idols incomplete, upon his condition of complete secrecy while working being violated.*



Kirkpinar Oil Wrestling Championship

Where: Edirne, Turkey

When: June 30 – July 6, 2013

CATEGORY: TOURISM/HOBBY FEST

The Edirne Stadium plays host to this slippery, annual championship. The oldest oil wrestling festival in the world (dating back to 1357) with 'anything goes' as the motto, the main idea here is to deter your opponent from getting a hold on you. Not surprisingly, over 100

drums of olive oil are used during the 3-day tournament. Participants range from school kids to forty -



year old masters.

The oil-coated,
leather
trousers-

clad combatants engage in fierce struggles, till one wrestler emerges after a long process of elimination. If a winner does not emerge after 30 minutes, a 'sudden death' round follows. The winner takes a 14-carat gold belt home. A funfair outside with gypsies from Middle East and Eastern Europe adds to the cheer. The festive atmosphere is increased by music, folk-dancing, various activities and millions of spectators and artistes from all over the world.

***Trivia:** The festival hold the Guinness World Record for the longest running sports competition!*



Wife-Carrying World Championships

Where: Sonkajavari, Finland

When: 1st Saturday of July (July 5 – 6, 2013)

CATEGORY: TOURISM/SPORT

This whacky festival goes back to the



early 19th century when a local bandit Ronkainen developed the custom of stealing women from neighbouring villages as a test for entering his gang. Today, men in Sonkajavari carry wives (their own or another's) on their backs over 250 m. of rough terrain including sand, gravel and water.

The participants are only allowed to carry a belt and they run the risk of a 15 second fine if they drop their 'burden'. The lucky winner receives his partner's weight in beer. Runners-up get awards for the most entertaining couple, the best costume and the strongest carrier.

Trivia: *The lady being carried need not be a 'wife'; she only has to be above 17 years of age and over 49 kg in weight!*



Fiesta De San Fermin (Running of the Bulls)

Where: Pamplona, Spain

When: July 6 – 14 every year

CATEGORY: TOURISM/SPORT

The world famous El Encierro or running of the bulls, immortalised by Hemingway's classic *The Sun Also Rises*, is celebrated in honour of the city's patron saint – Saint Fermin. Two rockets are fired to mark the start of the race and the release of the bulls. Bulls released from their

corrals thunder along

narrow cobbled

streets

charging

behind



thousands of participants who risk fatal injuries in a mad three-minute race along an 825 m. long course. Thousands of people take position along the sides or balconies overheads to watch this nerve-wracking, frenzied annual sport.

The participants are mindless of the actual danger and there has been much



criticism of the gory nature of the sport, the injuries and deaths and cruelty to the bulls. Nevertheless, this adrenaline-pumping sport is hugely popular and continues to attract millions of participants and tourists from all over the world.

***Trivia:** The speed of the bull is 24 km/hour; the longest bull run took 30 minutes due to a bull lagging behind.*



Calgary Stampede

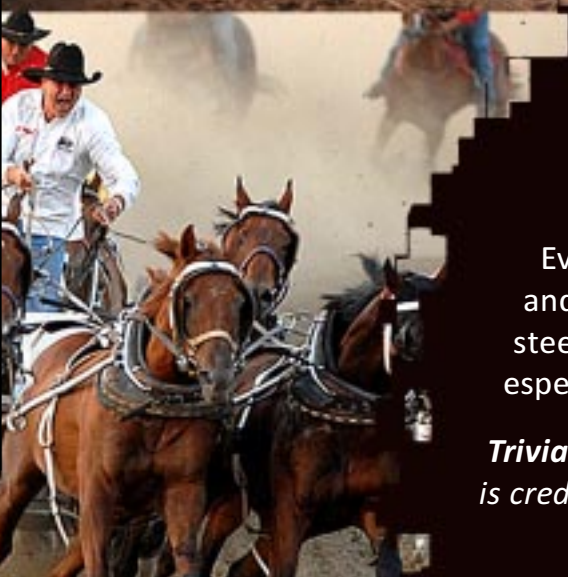
Where: Calgary, Canada

When: 1st Friday after Canada Day; (July 5 – 14, 2013)

CATEGORY: HOBBY FEST/TOURISM

“The Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth” one of the world’s greatest rodeos, is celebrated at Stampede Park, Calgary every year. The Wild West comes alive once again during the ten days of celebration with rodeos, chuck wagon races, concerts and family activities. A grand parade marks the start of the show with the Rodeo being the highlight. The world’s best





cowboys participate and the prize money of C\$ 1.6 million only adds to the keen edge of the competition. The 'half mile of hell' is a popular event, which has four chuck wagons and outriders speeding at 60 km/h around a racing track.

Everyone dresses in cowboy clothing, boots and hats and there are a variety of contests from barrel racing to steer wrestling. The funfair outside is hugely popular, especially the deep fried snacks.

***Trivia:** Guy Weadick, a cowboy and vaudeville entertainer is credited with developing the idea of this show.*



Camel Cup

Where: Alice Springs, Australia

When: July 13, 2013

CATEGORY: TOURISM/SPORT

The Camel Cup is a camel-racing event held at Blatherskite Park every year in July. The quiet town of Alice Springs comes alive with a whirlwind of activities ranging from camel-racing to dancing and music. The camel-race owes

its quirky appeal mainly to the capricious whims of the animals; the animals can race at surprising speed or even refuse to start at all. They can snarl, grunt, bite or just spit at a distance of more than 3 m. making for great entertainment for the thousands of interested tourists.

The event begins with an opening ceremony

and parade and ends with the prize distribution ceremony. There are no cash prizes, only trophies. The races are enlivened with the intervening belly-dancing shows, rickshaw rallies and food stalls.

Trivia: *Australia has the largest wild camel population in the world (around 750,000)!*





**Festa Del
Redentore (Festival
of the Redeemer)**

Where: Venice, Italy

When: July 20 – 21, 2013

CATEGORY: RELIGIOUS

This festival is a thanksgiving to Christ – the redeemer for saving the city from the

plague of 1575 – 1577. The beginning of the festival is marked by the construction of the 'boat bridge' linking the mainland to the Guidecca and forming a temporary pathway to the Church of the Redentore. At



at sunset, St Mark's Basin is full of thousands of illuminated boats decorated with colourful balloons, garlands and flowers. There is a magnificent display of fireworks at midnight lighting up the landmarks of the city. People

continue to celebrate the night away feasting and drinking merrily. The popular gondola regatta takes place the following afternoon on the Grand Canal.

Trivia: Almost 50,000 people died in the plague; the Il Redentore Church was built to fulfil a vow by the Senate to end the plague.

Gion Matsuri

Where: Kyoto, Japan

When: July 1 – 31, 2013

CATEGORY: TRADITIONAL/TOURISM

Gion Matsuri, the festival of Yasaka shrine, is one of the most famous festivals of Japan. It is held over the entire month of July. The festival has its roots in a procession held over 1100 years back to appease the gods and check the spread of a devastating plague. Today the Yamaboko Junko float procession, held on July 17, is the highlight of the celebrations. Thirty two magnificent floats





including the 'Boko' (towering structures up to 24 m high) and 'Yama', drawn by people in a parade around the city form a dazzling spectacle of colour and grandeur. The floats are decorated with ornaments and rich tapestries adding to the sense of tradition and colourful splendour.

A local boy, chosen as a divine messenger, rides the main yamaboko wearing Shinto robes and a golden phoenix crown. Tourists can enter some of the floats during the display and also enjoy evening festivities which also include food and drinks.

Trivia: The festival has a long history. It is has been celebrated uninterrupted since 869 A.D.





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