

RELIVING MEMORIES OF GOOD OLD DAYS

India's leading bloggers share their most memorable experiences of outbound travel before the pandemic with *India Outbound*.



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Parnashree Devi

I did not see Northern Lights, but met the Sami in Lapland

Unlike many, my inclination to meet the Sami was way more than seeing the Northern Lights or meeting Santa Claus in the Finnish Lapland. Ever since I had read about the Sami, I was fascinated by their history, culture and lifestyle.

My first tryst with the Sami began at the Ivalo Airport in Lapland where I was greeted with a big smile and a warm tight hug by Timo, my Sami guide. I couldn't have asked for more. I

decided to spend most of my time there with Timo to get a real sense of the Sami way of life.

The Sami are one of Europe's last remaining indigenous people. It is believed that they were the first people to come here after the ice age. The origin of Sami dates back to around 4,000 years ago. Their ancestors were nomadic in nature and belonged to no particular country as they used to move with their herds in search of land for grazing their reindeer, an integral part of Sami lifestyle and culture. Sami are believed to have been herding Reindeer since 800 CE.

I always wanted to stay a few days with the Sami in the most rustic way. Whether it was taking a Reindeer safari in the snow-laden deep forest, relishing the traditional Sami cuisine at Lappish wooden log hut, visiting the Siida Sami museum in Inari district, or snowmobiling, I managed to do it all with the Sami. I also tried their traditional costume, Gákti, helped by Timo's wife. I still remember her twinkling eyes when she dressed up along with me as a local Sami woman and we walked down to the forest to click a picture together. It was undoubtedly one of the most treasured memories from the winter wonderland.

Devi did a major road trip with one of the leading youth television channels of India as an anchor and became permanently hooked to travel blogging. She splits her time between New Delhi and Assam.

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Lakshmi Sharath

Small wonders of the world - HUM

It's not every day that you find yourself in the world's smallest town, as declared by the Guinness Book of World Records. Nestled in the lush environs of Istria in Croatia, Hum is home to just 29 people. Surrounded by mountains and valleys, it is not lost to the world because, as the locals say, 'The world comes to us.'

Sipping a glass of humska biska, a home-made brandy peppered with mistletoe, I am lost in a world of castles and churches. The ageless recipe is a secret as it has been handed down from generation to generation. The rolling hills, carpeted with vineyards, fields, and orchards surround the fortified town which is lost in a medieval stupor.

Located in the hinterland of the Istrian peninsula, Hum, earlier known as Cholm, is as old as the hills and is encircled by an old wall.

A gentle melody waltzes in the air as a singer greets the tourists at the entrance of the 12th century gate that still stands today. An inscription on the main gate welcomes everyone with open arms as it says "come and visit this little town, the warmth radiates from its hard stone."

A 500-year-old watch tower dominates the traditional homes which housed the nobility in the Middle Ages. Frescos adorn the walls of the Romanesque church of St Jerome. A 12th century castle referred to as Castlelum Cholm once stood here at the site of the parish church which was built six centuries later. The Venetian town, which was a seat of the feudal lords, was used for defense. Years of conflict eventually ended in the burning down of the castle, only to be replaced by the church much later.

Yet even as a melancholic air looms large over the watch tower you are lured by the fairy tale atmosphere. According to legend, Hum was built by giants who used the stones left behind after they erected the pretty towns in the Mirna valley. I walk around the two streets within the ramparts where the old homes lie huddled together. While some of them have been converted into cafes, restaurants, museums, shops and bed and breakfasts, the locals still stay here as one big family.

Sharath is an award-winning blogger of India who started as early as 2005. Other than having regular social media assets she also does a lot of international podcasts. Originally from Chennai, Lakshmi now lives in Bangalore.

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Manjulika Pramod

Street art whispers excitement to my belly

Ever since I travelled to the German capital, delved in the city's hidden alleys, learned tricks, picked on notes from local artists and painted 'my version of Monalisa' in one of the art workshops, I have seldom forgotten to brag about it. Berlin is indeed the mecca of contemporary street art and I have had the pleasure to admire the finest, oldest, prestigious, genuine and identifiable art works, peppered all around the city. I have some of the best memories from this trip where all I did was wandered around in search of street art, the kind that spoke to me, left me awe-struck and made me happy. The city is a true treasure trove for urban art lovers like me.

In contrast to the mindless vandalism and scribbles that disrespect the monuments, I have always been fascinated with the symbolic art that breathes in cheer and character into a dull neighbourhood. Berlin was the place where I realised my true love for it. Despite its impressive history and heritage, the city made me swoon with its bold and vindictive street art. The most interesting fact is that graffiti is still illegal in Berlin but the city is full of remarkable graffiti and street art. Also, none can deny that Berlin's title as the UNESCO's "City of Design" has a lot to do with its credible artworks, that capture the true spirit of the city.

Renowned street artists and international graffiti heavyweights itch to showcase their work in the city. I also explored the largest open-air art street art gallery, or the East Side Gallery, which also happens to be the longest remaining strip of the infamous Berlin Wall. If numbers are to be believed, it was painted by more than 110 artists from 21 different countries. The mash-up of world's largest stencil work, fabulous eye-catching murals, largest stretch of wall, to the dilapidated houses and dingy lanes adorned with colours and creativity, Berlin's street art will always be thrilling and memorable to me.

Pramod was an electronics engineer before she started travelling and eventually came into blogging. Besides travelling she does a lot of sketching and is proud to have published her first book of 50 illustrations on life during lockdown. Hailing from Lucknow, she now lives in New Delhi.

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Tanayesh Talukdar

The breathtaking beauty of the Erawan Waterfalls, Thailand

If you adore the beauty of nature and love looking at and listening to the flowing water, then you must experience this unique waterfall near Bangkok. Just 190 km from Bangkok you can experience one of the most beautiful step waterfalls in the world. The Erawan waterfalls are located in west Thailand in the

Tenasserim Hills range of Kanchanaburi province. It is a must-visit for anyone who loves peace and tranquility with a mix of nature and adventure.

The Erawan waterfall is seven-step waterfall, each with its own character and shape. None of the waterfall steps resemble each other and these characteristics make it really unique. To reach there, it is necessary to do a small trek in the Erawan National Park to come face to face with turquoise blue water or emerald green pond, depending on which level you are on. One can see the beautiful colours of water forming into pools just below the falls. The best part is you can swim under all the waterfalls. While swimming under the waterfalls you can also get a free fish spa as the ponds under the waterfalls are filled with lots of fish.

There are also a few caves inside Erawan Park. The waterfalls are named after Erawan, the three-headed white elephant of Hindu mythology. It is said that the top tiers of the waterfalls resemble the elephant head and hence the name. Swimming here is a must and don't forget to carry your swimsuits. The 3rd & the 4th waterfalls are the best waterfalls to dive into the water. If you are interested in hiking then you can try the 5th, 6th & 7th step but be aware that the route is slippery and steep at the same time.

Talukdar works at one of the leading IT firms during weekdays to make a living but continues his social media activities on travel and tourism like a full timer. He lives in Kolkata.

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Sandy N Vyjay

Experiencing Gorilla Land

Travel for us is all about experiences. Some ordinary and others extraordinary. Memories of some experiences fade with time, but some remain etched in the mind forever. One such experience was that of trekking in the rainforests of the Virunga mountains in the Volcanoes National Park of Rwanda in Africa.

The trek started early as we walked past some potato farms on flat land. Soon we were climbing some near-vertical cliffs to enter the rainforest. Accompanied by AK-47 toting rangers, we made our way deep into the forest. The vegetation was thick and

a path was cleared with the use of machetes. Prickly and evil-looking nettles hovered dangerously close, safari ants crawled up our legs, as we walked through marshy terrain.

After a couple of hours of trekking, we saw them right in front of us. An entire family of the endangered mountain gorillas. There was a massive silverback, who was the head of the family, who let off a warning cry in typical 'Tarzan' fashion. A small baby gorilla was being nursed in the protective lap of its mother, while a mischievous adolescent, bristling with sibling rivalry, hovered in the vicinity.

The gorilla family went about its morning chores ostensibly oblivious to our presence apart from the initial war cry. We were within a few feet from them and were happy that they were vegetarian and feasted on fruits and plants. The gorillas were almost human and in spite of their massive dimensions looked so gentle. Their eyes seemed to convey a sadness that was so poignant and heart-rending. They seemed to tell the stories of persecution and poaching which had taken them to the brink of extinction. Thankfully, owing to the efforts of the government and all stakeholders, the gorillas are back from the brink but still an endangered species. We left the gorillas to their peaceful existence, but their eyes haunt us to this day.

Sandy and Vyjay are a couple who took a risk of leaving their corporate jobs together for the passion of travelling about 10 years ago. What started as a passion slowly burgeoned into a business venture with brands approaching them for collaboration opportunities. The couple lives in Bangalore.

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