

# TRAVEL & DEAL

MAY 2018, ISSUE NO. 29



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## **FESTIVALS OF MAY**

**LOCAL CULTURE:**

### **THE ARAVATHIMOVAR FESTIVAL OF MYLAPORE**

**HEMA IYER RAMANI**

**LOCAL CUISINE:**

### **PALENG XAKOR KHAR**

**PARINDITA BHATTACHARYYA**

**COVER STORY:**

### **THE HISTORICAL SPLENDOR OF CACHAR DISTRICT**

**SHANKU SHARMA**

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**TREK**

**BURANGHATI, HIMACHAL PRADESH**

**Thursday, 31 May 8:00PM - Mon, 11 Jun 8:00AM**

**Trip Cost: Rs.17500 (Chandigarh to Chandigarh)**

If you pack in the great parts of all our best treks in one superb trek you get Buran Ghati. Arguably, Buran Ghati also has the most thrilling pass crossing amongst all our treks. Even the most sober trekker rediscovers an inner child in him in the Buran Ghati trek! The trek has forests, grasslands, mountain views, even village settings. Buran Ghati is a hidden gem.

The fees include the entire transportation and common accommodation from Chandigarh to Chandigarh and vegetarian meals along the trek route from the Base Camp to Base Camp. The fees however do not include the meals during transit from Chandigarh to Base Camp and

back, any kind of shopping, mineral water, optional sightseeings, and any other expenses of personal nature.

**CONTACT DETAILS:**

India Hikes, The Indian trekking community  
Email: <https://indiahikes.com/contact-us/>

**Fo more information about this event or many other exciting ones, log on to [eventshigh.com](http://eventshigh.com)**

**SPORT**



**LEGENDS MARATHON, KOLKATA**

**Sun, 6 May 6:00AM onwards**

Life's victories don't always go to the strongest or the fastest man. Ultimately, the one who wins is the one who thinks: "I Can!" You like Running... You enjoy greenery... You love Kolkata... How do you combine all three in a fabulous, fun way? Simple! Come, Join us for the Legends Marathon 2018: Run for Better Heart on 6th May 2018.

Run for a Better Heart is an initiative taken up by Legendary Runners, to raise awareness about healthier lifestyles, which primarily includes maintaining a healthy heart. The initiative invites people to participate in a marathon at City Center 1. It aims to spread awareness about the increasing risk of heart diseases among today's youth and to get people out of their sedentary lifestyles and get them to do something physically productive, by means of a marathon. So let's run towards fitness and a healthier heart at this year's Marathon!

Participants :Running enthusiasts of age 10 years and above

**CONTACT DETAILS:**

DC Block, Salt Lake City, Sector 1, Kolkata, West Bengal, India



**HOBBY**

**ART CLASSES FOR ADULTS, DELHI**

**Saturday, 5 May 10:00AM - Sat, 26 May 12:00PM**

**Fee: Rs. 6000**

Sharing my skills in art and craft has been a truly enriching experience for over 4 decades. Guiding the young and old to observe, assimilate, visualise and render on the canvas, handling material and creating a piece of art out of nothing gives a lot of satisfaction.

The trick is to work with their creativity and not impose our own on them. Such short, dedicated capsules of learning go a long way in making the participants proficient in understanding the basics of fine art, sketching, colour, design, layout and composition. They are capable of working independently and become confident to explore new materials, while also experimenting on their own. Our goal is to help in learning and performing, be it for a career or hobby.

- Mrs. Ritu Sangal, Co-founder, Culture Chauraha

**CONTACT DETAILS:**

Culture Chauraha  
A-13, Block A, Gulmohar Park  
New Delhi - 110049

## The historical splendor of

# CACHHAR DISTRICT

With special reference to Khaspur

Shanku Sharma

"In the elder days of Art, Builders wrought with greatest care  
Each minute and unseen part; For the gods see everywhere."  
- H W Longfellow

**H**istorical relics, remains and ruins, art and architecture, customs and traditions, have always fascinated and enthralled the human kind. People take a keen interest to know about ancient places especially those which are on the threshold of losing its name and

existence in the sands of time. **Khaspur** is one such village which is home to the ruins of one of the oldest kingdoms, the century old **Dimasa Kingdom**.

**K**haspur is a picturesque village, located just 20 kms from Silchar, in the Cachar district of the state of Assam.



Photograph courtesy: Partha Seal



© d-maps.com



Photograph courtesy: Partha Seal

Dimasa kingdom was an influential, powerful and dominant kingdom. The rulers of the kingdom were from an ethnic group Dimasa.

Though the kingdom is in ruins and the king's palace is slowly going to be fictional and nonexistent, the entrance gates have passed many suns and storms. It is still there standing tall and magnificent.

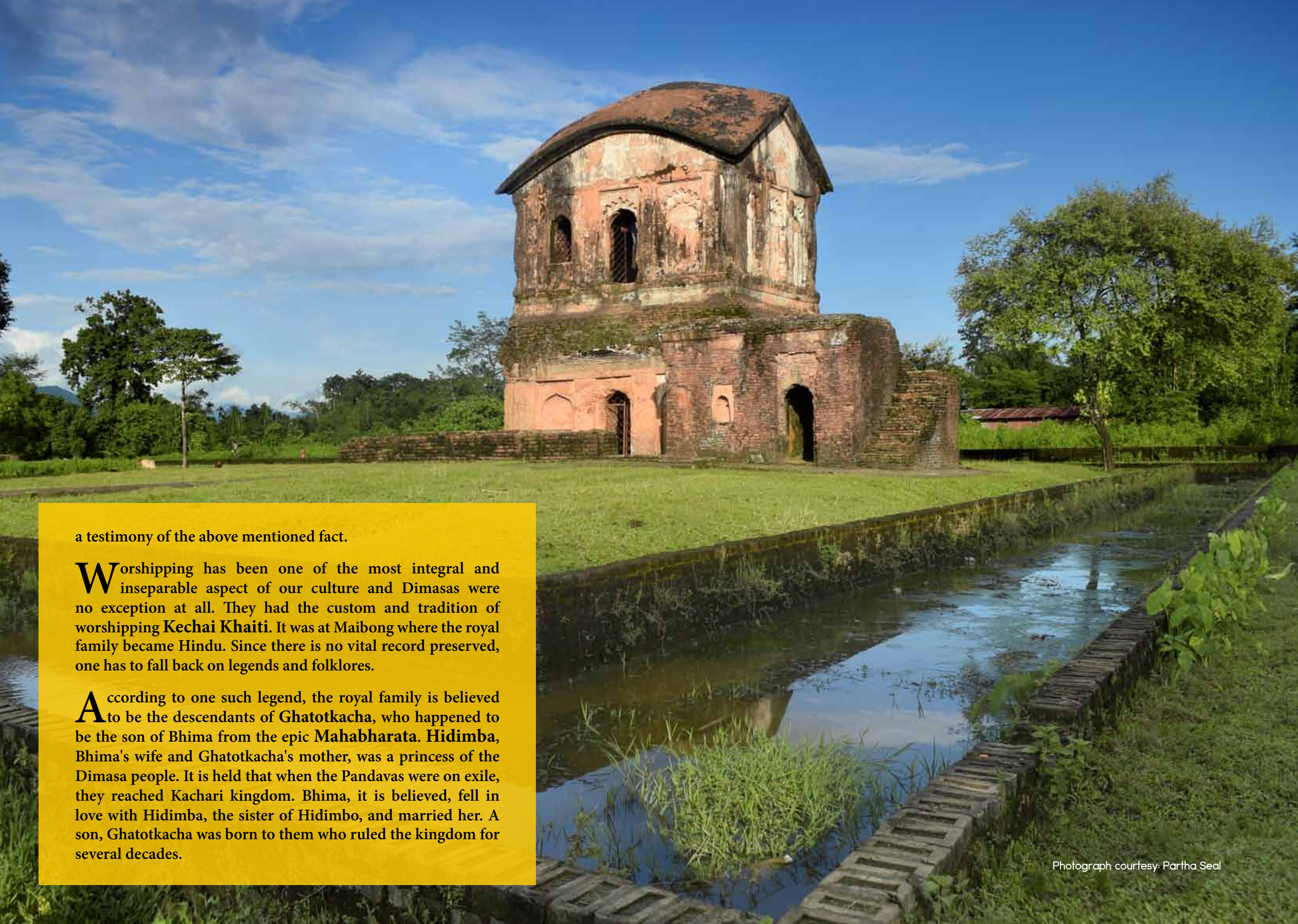
One can however find the centuries old king's temple, the Sun gate and the Lion gate. The gates have been

modeled on the shape of an elephant.

Dimasa kingdom was an influential, powerful and dominant kingdom. Located in Assam, the rulers of the kingdom were from an ethnic group – **Dimasa**. Remnants and relics of this mighty kingdom remained till the arrival of the British. It was this kingdom that named the two districts

of Assam, **Cachar** and **North Cachar Hills** (Dima Hasao district). Owing to the lack of recorded documents in the form of manuscripts, pamphlets or any other such paraphernalia, the origin of Dimasa is vague, misty, mysterious and mystifying. Legends have it that in ancient period, the Dimasas were forced

to leave Kamrupa kingdom because of political turmoil and chaos. Many Kacharis failed to cross Brahmaputra and remained there. But those who could cross the mighty and great river were named as Dimasa which means '**sons of the river**'. Kachari Ghat which lies on the river banks of Brahmaputra is



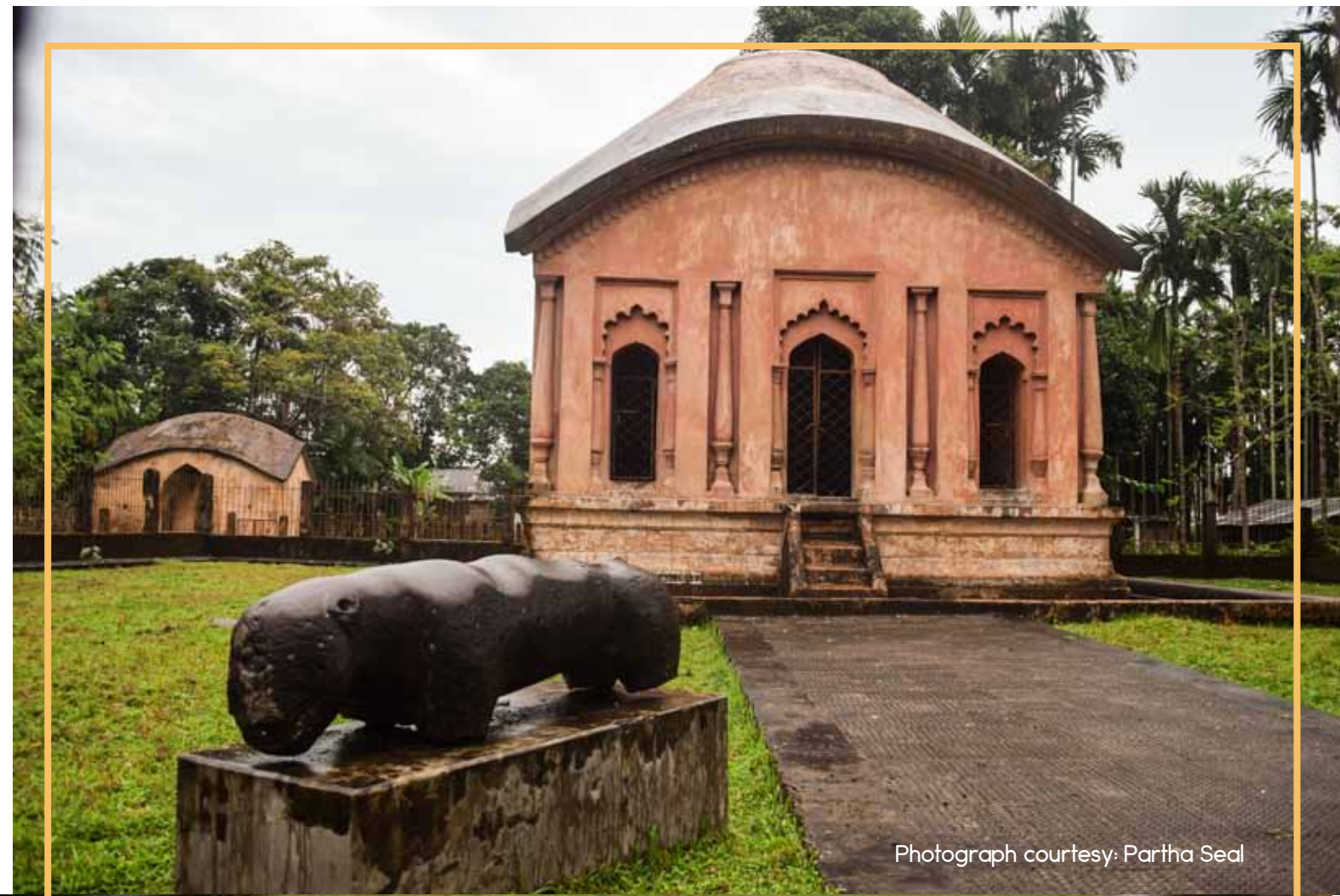
a testimony of the above mentioned fact.

**W**orshipping has been one of the most integral and inseparable aspect of our culture and Dimasas were no exception at all. They had the custom and tradition of worshipping **Kechai Khaiti**. It was at Maibong where the royal family became Hindu. Since there is no vital record preserved, one has to fall back on legends and folklores.

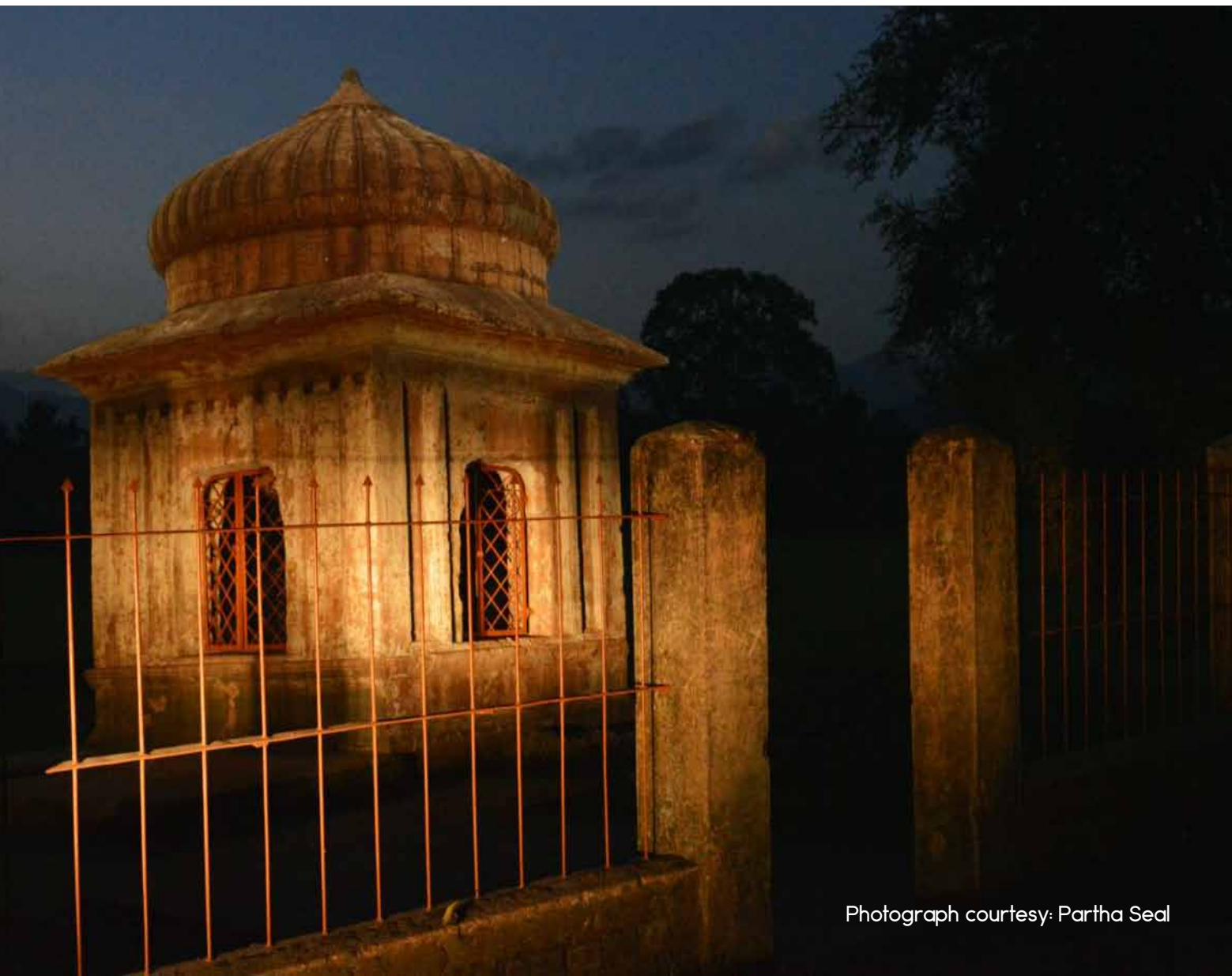
**A**ccording to one such legend, the royal family is believed to be the descendants of **Ghatotkacha**, who happened to be the son of **Bhima** from the epic **Mahabharata**. **Hidimba**, **Bhima's** wife and **Ghatotkacha's** mother, was a princess of the **Dimasa** people. It is held that when the **Pandavas** were on exile, they reached **Kachari** kingdom. **Bhima**, it is believed, fell in love with **Hidimba**, the sister of **Hidimbo**, and married her. A son, **Ghatotkacha** was born to them who ruled the kingdom for several decades.

There is also a strong belief that the Kacharis took an active participation in the war saga of Mahabharata. If one goes by Hindu mythology, **Dimapur** was named after the princess Hidimba and Assam was probably the first capital of the Kachari kingdom before Dimapur was. Dimasa Kachari rule was extended to, and remained unconquered, to the pains of Cachar.

**K**haspur is the place where ruins of this mighty kingdom still exist. In the 16th century, Khaspur, originally a part of Tripura kingdom, was won over by the legendary **Chilarai**. Khaspur became independent only after the decline and weakening of **Koch** power as the Koch rulers passed away sans a successor. Thus, Dimasa Kachari kingdom's capital moved to Khaspur, in **Silchar**. It is also locally known as **Rajbari**, which means the 'King's Palace'. The ruins in disperse inside **Pathimara tea estate** can be easily accessible. A walk around the tea gardens gives a good view of the remnants of this majestic kingdom.



Photograph courtesy: Partha Seal



Photograph courtesy: Partha Seal



Photograph courtesy: Partha Seal



Photograph courtesy: Partha Seal



Photograph courtesy: Partha Seal

Khaspur is not only a place of attraction in and around Silchar and Cachar. A host of temples, educational institutions, historical sites and spots, lakes and rivers, picturesque hills, hillocks, low lying basins known as beel, anwa or howar have also been pulling people towards this part of the North Eastern belt. Shon beel, Rata beel, Chatla howar, Ramnagar anwa are the some of the water bodies supplying fish. Nrimata temple at Barkhola, Bhubaneswar Shiva temple at Chandragiri in Sonai, Badarpur Fort in Badarpur, tea gardens, Siddeshwar temple in Badarpur, Bhuban Hills in Cachar, Malegarh at Latu in Karimganj, Rengti Hills in Cachar, Silchar railway station which is unofficially known as Bhasha Shaheed Station, Rantilla at Mohanpur Mouza in Hailakandi and Kachakanti temple in Udharbond are some of the important landmarks, temples and historical sites which can be counted among the top sites for visiting and taking a slice of history. Each and every aspect of Cachar is dipped in history. Even a seminal tome on Cachar district may not be enough to do justice to this place and its historical significance.



Photograph courtesy: Partha Seal



**A**s the final month of Spring arrives, we find ourselves standing on the threshold to Summer. The flowers are in full bloom, the first phase of planting rituals this year are over, and many varieties of mangoes have already begun arriving, much to our delight! India, the land of myriad celebrations brings forth another bouquet of the most fantastic festivals this month. From the Annual Flower Festival of Sikkim to the incredible Dhungri Mela of Manali, read on to discover as **Travel & Deal** explores the innumerable range of festivities this month!



**INTERNATIONAL FLOWER FESTIVAL**

Sikkim, Gangtok | May 1<sup>st</sup> - 31<sup>st</sup>

Photo courtesy : GoogleImages

The Sikkim landscapes have much to offer this month. Over 400 types of orchids, along with varied species of rhododendrons and many other exotic varieties of blooms. Additionally, along with the gorgeous floral exhibitions, the capital city of Gangtok also hosts lectures and seminars on its numerous foliage.

**FESTIVALS OF MAY**



**MOATSU FESTIVAL**  
Mokokchung, Nagaland | May 1<sup>st</sup> week

Photo courtesy : GoogleImages

The Moatsu Festival is a time of great jubilation as the planting season comes to an end. Basically the festival marks the advent of the upcoming harvest season. It is celebrated by the Ao tribes of Nagaland and involves lot of singing, dancing, and merry making. Men and women put on the best of their outfits, sit around fire, and indulge in eating meat and wine. Sounds like heaven does it not?





**THRISSUR POORAM**  
Thrissur, Kerala | May 5<sup>th</sup>  
Photo courtesy : GoogleImages

A unique festival in its own right, this is an approximately one-and-a-half day marathon of a celebration that goes on non-stop! About ten deities from the all the neighboring temples are assembled at Thrissur, and this majestic procession is carried out with over 50 heavily decorated elephants carting the deities. An exceptional spectacle indeed. Hymns and devotional chants fill the air along with fireworks at night.



**BUDDHA PURNIMA**  
Sarnath, U.P. | May 10<sup>th</sup>  
Photo courtesy : GoogleImages

Sarnath, the place where Buddha is believed to have delivered his first sermon after attaining salvation, still remains an important point of summit for all His followers, these many years after His mortal death. Buddhist monks and followers from all across the world congregate at this remarkable spot to celebrate the birth anniversary of Gautama Buddha. The celebrations are peaceful and extremely profound, consisting of prayers, discourses and meditation.



**DHUNGRI MELA**  
Manali, Himachal Pradesh | May 14<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup>  
Photo courtesy : GoogleImages



The Dhungri Mela goes on for three days, as an ode to Goddess Hidimba's birthday in the gorgeous hill town of Manali. Hidimba was the wife of Bhima, one of the five Pandavas from the great Hindu epic Mahabharata. Her presence has always been considered of honour, and her temple is one of the most important ones in the region. Many Gods and Goddesses from surrounding villages are carried in procession to attend the celebrations. A carnival is arranged, and there is much merry making, complete with stalls of all kinds and joy rides. The festival involves traditional cultural singing and dancing, along with performances of the Kullu Natti folk dance, the local folk dance.



**GANGA DUSSEHRA**  
Varanasi, U.P. | May 24<sup>th</sup>  
Photo courtesy : GoogleImages



**RAMADAN**  
Mumbai, Delhi, Lucknow, Hyderabad | May 15<sup>th</sup> - June 14<sup>th</sup>  
Photo courtesy : GoogleImages

**R**amadan is when Muslims fast daily sunrise until sunset. In the evenings, the streets in traditional Muslim areas are inundated with the very alluring aroma of freshly roasted meat and sweet bread to feed the hungry folks. Ramadan ends with the festival of Eid-ul-Fitr, with more feasting and shopping.

**S**aga Dawa is another celebration paying homage to the life of Lord Buddha. It takes place in the fourth month of the Tibetan lunar calendar and is considered the holiest month for Tibetan Buddhists. In this month, the principal celebration happens on the full moon day, when the birth, enlightenment and death of Lord Buddha is honored. A procession of monks takes place where they carry the holy book from Tsuklakhang Palace Monastery around town, accompanied by the blowing of horns, beating of drums, and burning of incenses.

**SAGA DAWA**  
Gangtok | May 29<sup>th</sup>  
Photo courtesy : GoogleImages



**W**hen Bhagiratha prayed and paid his penance to Brahma for Ganga to come down to Earth, Brahma agreed and ordered Ganga to descend to the planet. However came a warning, that the force with which Ganga would flow may have an alarming impact on Earth. Thus began Bhagirath's second penance seeking Lord Shiva's help in the matter. Pleased with his imploring, Shiva appeared and softened Ganga's fall with his matted locks. Thus prevailed the river of purity on Earth, and Ganga Dussehra is celebrated to mark this auspicious time of her descent. A large number of pilgrims come together alongside the holy river, to bathe in it and worship.



All photograph courtesy: Author

## the anavataloovar festival of tuljapore

Hema Iyer Ramani

You do not always have to travel outside geographical boundaries to experience travel. Just as it is important to journey outside and explore, it is equally important to seek within and introspect. It was this thought that stayed with me as I mused about the city that has been my home for the past two and half decades.

**I**ronically, it has always seemed to me that the city was more old fashioned and orthodox when it used to be called Madras. Chennai, though it sounds more regional, has actually made the city more modern in its outlook. There is so much character to each of the cities that we live in that we often take so much for granted when we are in the midst of it as participants. I have found that there is a fine blend of the old, the modern, the cultural and scientific spirit (seasoned with religious and linguistic

flavour as is noticed in many other cities as well) in Madras, and these come alive during certain important festivals and activities.

**W**hen urbanization claims a city, radical changes quickly colour its entirety, and it readies itself for the sudden change of outfits literally and figuratively speaking - pavadais and dhavanis led to lehengas and salwar kameezes . And yet, amidst all the change, the ones rooting for tradition cling on to the roots ever so



tightly that at the time of festivities, the mask is removed and one gets a peep into the cultural history through the many layers that have wrapped themselves around the city.

Mylapore is a temple town where the grand old temple of Shiva, the Kapaleeshwara temple is housed- a temple pond though dry mostly is a reminder of the grand memories of a beautiful pond in the past. Old buildings, some rambling jostle around with the newly rich ones. Small shops modestly overlook the grand stores. And yet, during the Aravathimoovar (translated 'the sixty three' in Tamizh), it is these small stores that become the toast of the town- bangle sellers, potters, toy makers, all co-exist. The unmistakable fragrance of mallipoo blends with the strong smell of kaapi seeds being roasted. Somewhere a dosai is being roasted in ghee... The flower sellers occupy the adjoining lane that is closest to the temple - there are so many of them getting the garlands ready for the deities, each one more beautiful than the other. Women dazzle in silk saris – some in traditional nine yards and others in six yards. Yet there are many in salwar kameezes too!

The Sri Kapaleeshwarar temple in Mylapore ( a town that was dotted with peacocks (mayil) and sacred groves is considered most sacred to the Shavaites. It is one of the oldest temples tracing its history back to several centuries (prior to 11th-12th CE), but the present temple as it



stands today was rebuilt about 300 years back feel the temple authorities. There is a punnai tree in the outer courtyard of the temple and this is one of the oldest trees in Madras. Beneath it, is a small shrine in which is commemorated the legend which bequeathed Mylapore its name. The sculpture in this shrine shows Goddess Uma in the form of a peacock worshipping Shiva as a lingam.

Around Panguni-Utthiram (March-April), the entire town takes on a celebratory mode. Panguni – Uthiram is celebrated as the wedding of Kapaleeshwarar (Shiva) and Karpagambal (Parvathy). As part of the celebrations, various deities are taken out in processions around the

Women dazzle in silk saris – some in traditional nine yards and others in six yards. Yet there are many in salwar kameezes too!

The unmistakable fragrance of mallipoo blends with the strong smell of kaapi seeds being roasted. Somewhere a dosai is being roasted in ghee...

four mada streets of Mylapore. Streets wear a washed, clean look and every home has a beautiful kolam drawn in its courtyard. In fact kolams are drawn all over the street where the chariot is drawn in a procession. On each day, a different vahana (God's vehicle) - Nandi, is taken on a procession too. The two main events which form the highlight of this festival is the Big Chariot Fest and the Aravathimooar. A gigantic wooden chariot adorned with beautiful carvings, appliquéd fabric festoons, colourful cylindrical hangings called thombais is drawn by hordes of people around the four streets adjoining the temple and taken in a procession. The other event called the Aravathimooar is when the 63 cast bronze images of the



Nayanmars (cannonised Shaivite saints) which normally adorns the outer yard of the temple is taken out in a procession in clusters in small Chapparams (small palanquin).

Devotees from all across the city flock to the temple to witness the grand event and all the streets seem like a sea of humanity with no place to move!

The fest comes to grand finale with the tirukalyanam (the divine wedding) of Kapaeeshwarar and Karpagambal. The festival is on for ten days- beginning with the pandal kaal (sacred bamboo pole) being planted firmly in the ground to announce the commencement of festivities, The thaer (chariot) on the seventh day, the aravatimooar on the

eight day, Pichandi on ninth day (when an angry Shiva takes a begging bowl and goes seeking alms. A patient Parvathy calms him and brings him back) and finally culminates in the wedding on the last day.

The many shopkeepers participate in the festivities each contributing in their own way. Says Satish of Sarangan Flower Shop : “We feel very honoured and blessed to be participating in the floral decoration of stage for the wedding and creating the garlands for the divine couple.”

When the festivities end, once again Mylapore wears the look to welcome the new changes that have been well absorbed into its character.

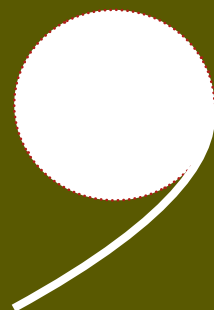


# Parindita's Palette...

## Paleng Xakor Khar (Spinach Khar)

Parindita Bhattacharyya

**A** traditional Assamese dish always starts with Khar, and rice. Khar has health benefits too as it cleanses the stomach. Khar is mainly prepared by drying and burning the banana (specially bhim banana is used for making khar) to get the ashes, later water is added to filter the ashes which is known as (Kola Khar) which is the main ingredient and can be used for making different types of khar.



Photograph courtesy: Author

### INGREDIENTS:

1. Spinach
2. Kola khar
3. Garlic
4. Green chilli
5. Salt (1tb/sp)
6. Mustard oil

### PREPARATION:

1. First we heat up the oil in frying pan.
2. Then we put the minced garlic cloves and chillies in it. Stir and fry it for at least 1 - 2 minute.
3. Then we shred the spinach into it and add 1tbsp salt for flavor to enhance the taste.
4. Finally we add the kola khar, cover it with a lid and adjust the flame to low so that the spinach gets cooked well.
5. As soon as everything gets mushy, turn off the heat.

**A simple dish with a unique taste is now ready for your taste buds!**

# POWDER OF JAPAN

Wenzin Huynh

I'm really not a huge fan of winter at all. Summer sun and beaches are definitely my happy place. Who doesn't love that healthy glow your skin gets from a bit of sunlight? I guess winter in my city isn't so pleasant where it just rains most of the time.

However, one thing I do love about winter is snow. The marriage of ice and snow on trees is truly beautiful. Combine that with snowboarding, amazing Japanese food, and an onsen (Japanese hot spring), and you have the perfect winter combination!

Japan is famous for its fluffy, powder snow so it was a no-brainer to accept a chance to go snowboarding with my friends in Sapporo, Hokkaido. Riding in powder is a completely different experience compared to the Hard Pack (and quite often, icy) snow we get in New Zealand. At least it doesn't hurt when you fall over in Japan. No more sore butts (yay!) but watch out for the trees that may have been covered in snow. I almost fell down a hole because of it...and almost got clothes-lined a few times too.

It was a challenging, yet exciting experience. I mean, who doesn't like getting stuck in deep snow and getting a massive cardio workout as you try to dig yourself out? Seriously though, snowboarding in Japan is absolutely stunning and it's great for total beginners who have never seen snow before, to the top snowboarders in the world.





"The snow just keeps falling!  
There's fresh snow almost  
every day."

A photograph of a snowy mountain landscape. In the foreground, several bare, dark trees stand against a backdrop of a snow-covered mountain peak. The sky is a clear, bright blue. The overall scene is serene and wintry.

## PHOTO ESSAY

"The beautiful morning view we woke up to on our first day in Niseko at Annupuri Lodge. Morning acoustics for breakfast, extremely wonderful staff and a gorgeous view. Not to mention the clean and comfortable rooms. Perfection! The lodge is less than a 5 minute walk to the ski fields too which makes it incredibly convenient. Make sure you book in for dinner (every single night because it's that good) at the onsite Luckyfingers Bar & Restaurant too."

**PHOTO ESSAY**

"Snow, snow and more snow in Hirafu, a popular town centre with shops for snow gear and restaurants. There's also a physiotherapist here if anything happens to you on the snow. We had the most awesome ramen noodles on this night."

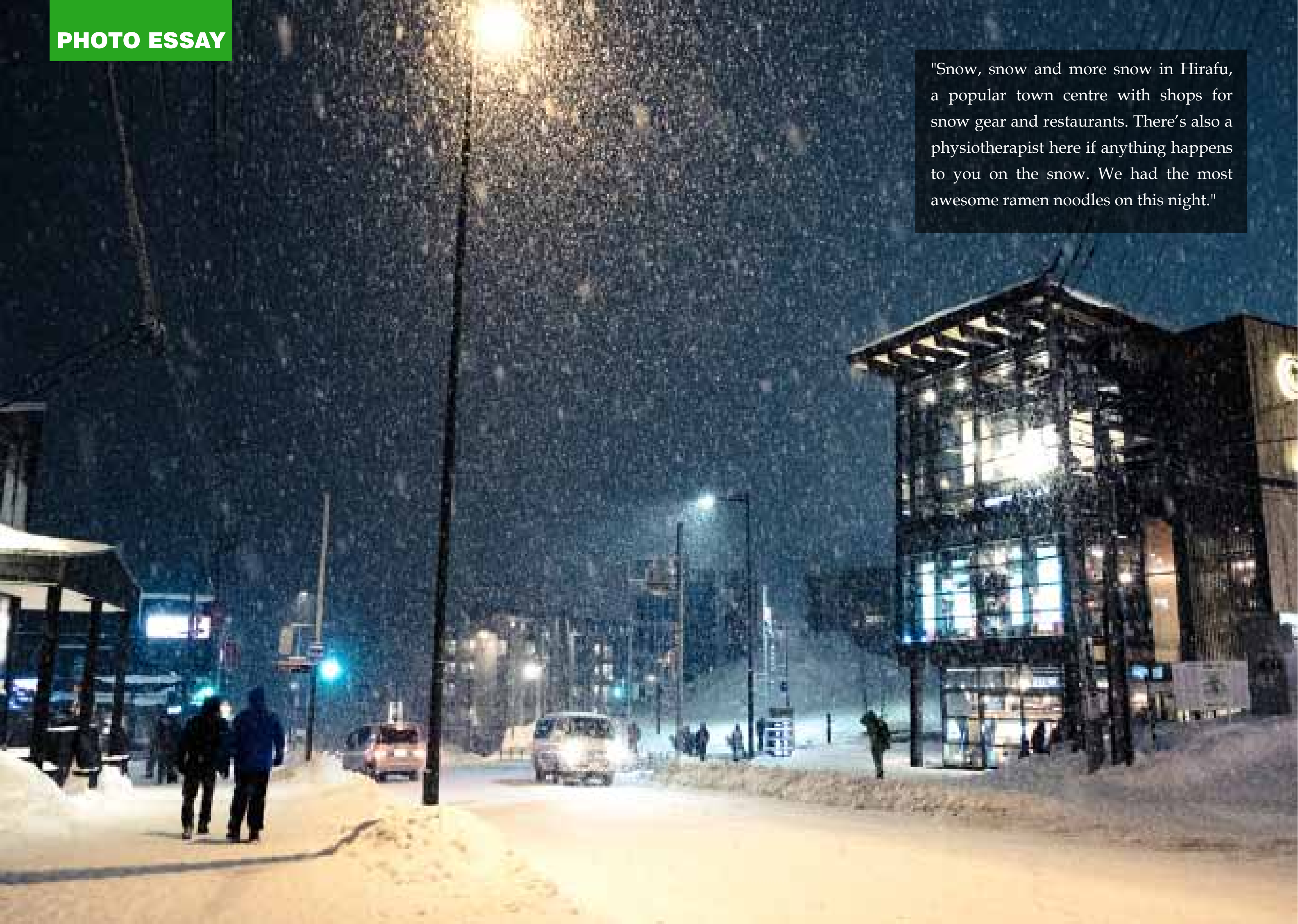


PHOTO ESSAY



"The master's creation of the most delicious, hand-made soba noodles with vegetable tempura, wasabi salt and spring onions. A perfect lunch for a cold, winter day."



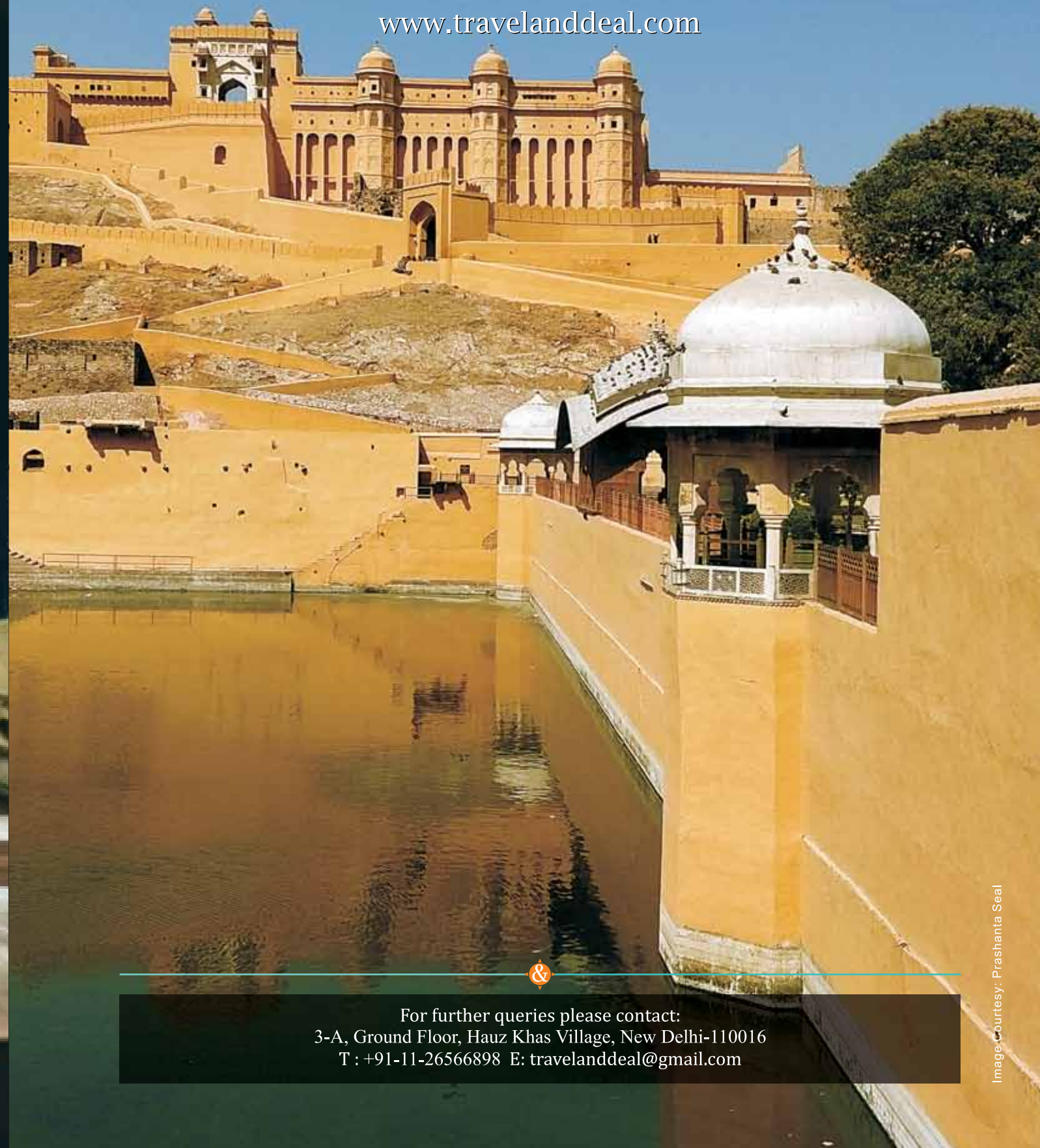


"The Niseko soba noodle master! While making this batch, he accidentally ripped a bit of the soba dough. "Ohh...mistake!" Even monkeys fall from trees. AMAZING noodles here and it's conveniently walking distance from Annupuri Lodge."

# TRAVEL & DEAL

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**JUNE**

**11—17**

**2018**

**TUESDAY—  
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**SUNDAY**  
1–6 P.M.

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**MONDAY**  
JUNE 11  
5–9 P.M.

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