

TRAVEL & DEAL

COVER STORY:

AMBUBACHI MELA

THE TANTRIC FERTILITY FESTIVAL

SHANKU SHARMA

TRAVELOGUE:

DOODHPATHRI

A VIRGIN PLACE ON THE VERGE OF SRINAGAR

NISHA AGGARWAL

PHOTO PROFILE:

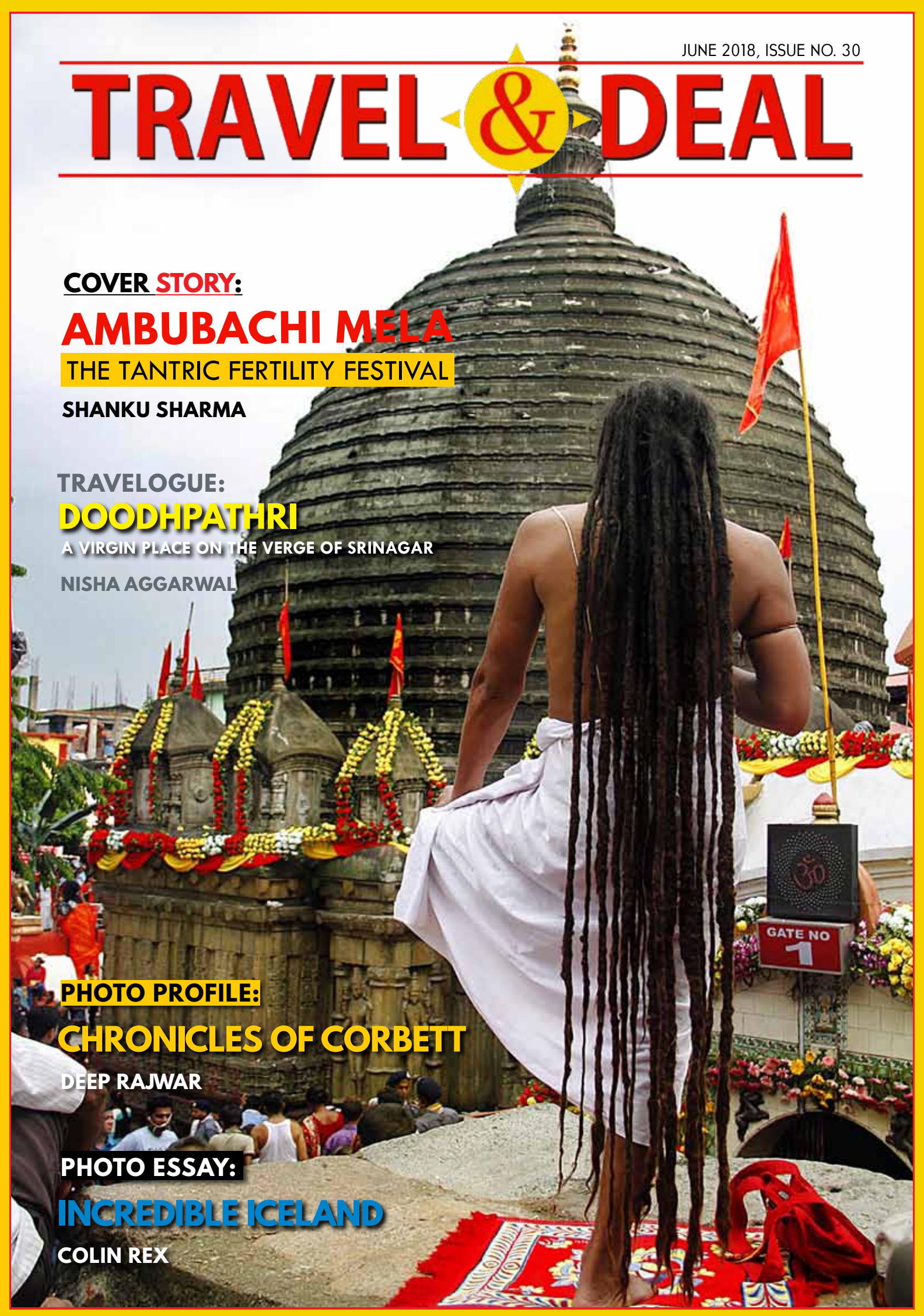
CHRONICLES OF CORBETT

DEEP RAJWAR

PHOTO ESSAY:

INCREDIBLE ICELAND

COLIN REX

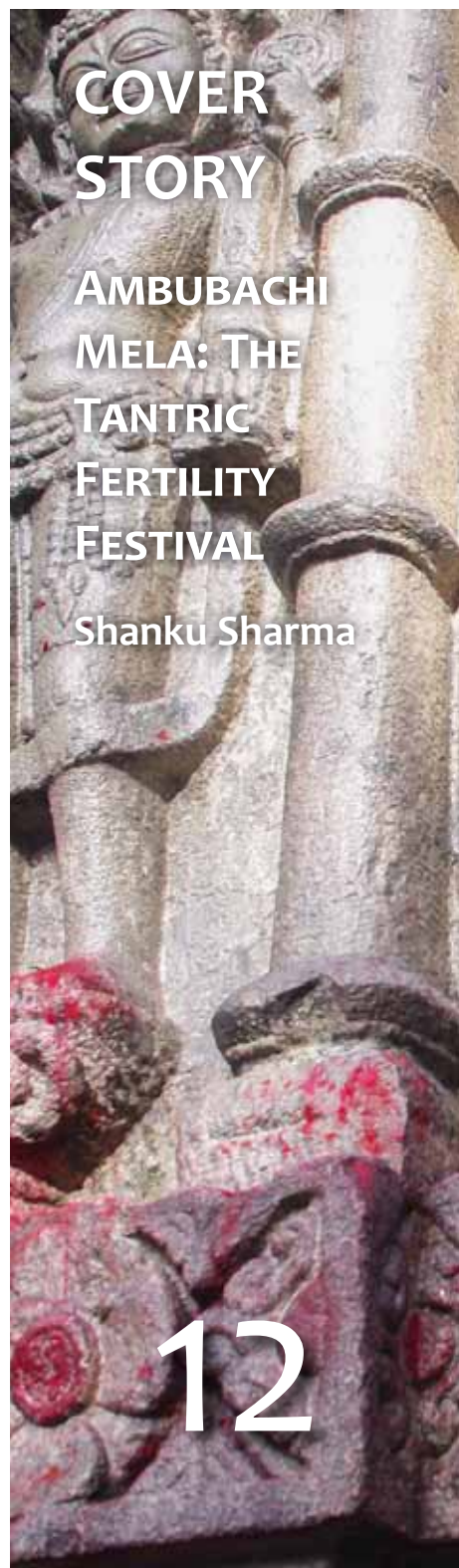


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The mangoes have arrived in full swing and so has the heat! Summer is here folks, and this month, like last month brings with it some more spectacular occasions to celebrate. From stunning local festivals like Assam's Ambubachi Mela at the Kamakhya Temple to the nationally celebrated Eid-al-Fitr, to the internationally observed World Environment Day and International Yoga Day, this month brings forth a potpourri of reasons to rejoice. Sojourn with us as **Travel & Deal** explores the myriad festivals of June!



World Environment Day

Worldwide | 5th June 2018

The World Environment Day holds greater significance this year as India will be playing host to the event. Traditionally, Indian philosophy and lifestyle have been rooted in the concept of co-existence with nature. With the "Beat Plastic Pollution" theme this year, the focus is essentially on governments, industry, communities, and individuals to come together and explore sustainable alternatives and urgently reduce the production and excessive use of single-use plastic polluting our oceans which are evidently damaging to our marine life and also pose danger for human health.



Sindhu Darshan Festival

River Sindhu (Indus): Shey Manla, Leh | 1st-3rd June 2018

On the banks of the ancient Indus River in Shey Manla, the very colourful and culturally heterogeneous Sindhu Darshan festival is celebrated as an ode to the diverse tradition of India. The festival marks the beautiful blending cultural hues of our country, where earthen pots of water drawn from various rivers across India is immersed into the waters of Sindhu River. Participants are given a grand reception, followed by performances from the local folk troupes. In addition, local music and food create a spectacular ambience of cheer.



Eid-al-Fitr

All over India | 15th June 2018

As the first day of the Islamic month of Shawwal, Eid-al-Fitr marks the end of Ramadan, a month of fasting and prayer. Many Muslims attend communal prayers and listen to a khutbaor sermon on the first day of the month of Shawwal. Festive meals are prepared elaborately and people wear new clothes, visit relatives and give presents or candy to children.





Saga Dawa

Gangtok, Sikkim | 15th of June 2018

The silent, serene hills of Kanchenjunga sees a sudden eruption of colours in the month of June. Saga Dawa is considered the most important festival of the Mahayana Buddhists, and celebrates the three most significant events of Buddha's life: His birth, death and enlightenment. The celebrations happen with enormous fanfare! Each ritual is performed with a strong essence of spirituality and understanding.

Maharana Pratap Jayanti

Primarily Rajasthan
16th June 2018

Born in the 16th century in Kumbhalgarh, Rajasthan to Maharana Udai Singh II and Rani Jaiwantabai, the legendary Maharana Pratap was a true patriot who initiated the first war of independence. In the famous battle of Haldighati against Mughal monarch Akbar, the Maharana along with his equally able Rajput comrades, fought back heroically irrespective of being heavily outnumbered. Maharana Pratap is respected throughout the country for being an epitome of valor, heroism, pride, patriotism and standing for the spirit of independence. His birth anniversary is celebrated on the 3rd day of Jyestha Shukla, when Special puja and processions are held in his remembrance.





International Yoga Day

Worldwide | 21st June 2018

Centuries ago, a great Indian sage named Patanjali wrote the 'Yoga Sutra' – an exhaustive documentation on the art and science of yoga, where he recommended eight stages of yogic discipline. Years from then, yoga still subsists as a way of life for most Indians and people all over the world. Such has its significance grown in the last decade that a special day was launched to honor the phenomenon in 2015. Since then, the International Yoga Day acclaims the art of righteous living and the attainment of the physical, mental and spiritual wellness.



Ambubachi Mela

Kamakhya Temple, Guwahati (Assam) | 22nd -25th June 2018

One of the most unique and popular festivals of India, the Ambubachi Mela attracts pilgrims from all over the country. This festival is distinctive in its own right, and stoutly confronts many of the usual temple customaries. It is believed that during this time of the year, typically in the monsoons, Devi Kamakhya (a form of Goddess Shakti) goes through her annual menstrual cycle. Owing to legends, the Kamakhya temple is regarded as one of the Shakti Peethas, and this spot was where the yoni (vulva) part of the Goddess' body fell. During the festival, the temple doors remain closed for three days. No idol of the deity is in display. Instead She is worshipped in form of a black yoni-like stone. All other daily worship, religious performances and farming procedures are suspended at that time. On the fourth day, the temple doors are opened, when the deity is believed to have attained fertility and She blesses the land with good crops. Shreds of red cloth is distributed among devotees as an offering by the God.



Sao Joao Feast

Across Goa, mainly Siolim | 24th June 2018

Abound with flowers, feni and lots of fun, Sao Joao is an exclusive fiesta made only for the newlyweds. The festival involves husbands wearing floral wreaths on their heads, getting drunk on feni (a locally procured alcoholic drink) and then jumping into wells to impress their wives. Too much fun! And if only the rains begin while the festival is still underway, which it often does, the entire level of merriment shoots up by scores. The feast is absolutely delightful, fresh and local; and the quirky Goan dance and music perfectly leitmotifs the event. Makes for some very memorable moments, to be savored for life by the participating young couples.



Hemis Festival

Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir | 26th-27th June 2018

According to popular belief, the festival of Hemis is primarily a religious affair. However, there may be more layers of significance around this event if one thinks about it. The Hemis monastery, the largest Buddhist monastery in Ladakh, forms the pivot point of all festivities. The masked dances, also known as 'Chham Dance', illustrate triumph of good over bad, and are thus the highlights of this festival. Some sacred plays are also an important part of this festival, as are 'Devil Dances'. 'Chang', a local liquor is served publically. Also, Exhibition of striking handicrafts adds to the charm of the gala. The lamas from the local community pose as artistes and perform to local folk music. The head Lama or 'Rinpoche' is the presiding person of the event. As per traditions, these monks wear long gowns, elaborate masks and a headgear. Every mask holds a special significance associated with it. The extravagant dance rituals along with soulful music keeps spectators spellbound in bliss.



Kabirdas Jayanti

All over India | 28th June 2018

"All know that the drop merges into the ocean, but few know that the ocean merges into the drop."

– Sant Kabir

One of India's highly celebrated and revered poet-saints, Kabir Das, was born in the 15th century in the holy city of Benaras, Uttar Pradesh. Till date, his birth remains a mystery and a thing of legends, where a definite consensus has still not been reached whether he was Hindu or Muslim. His esteemed works and poems describe the greatness and oneness of the Supreme Being. Kabir Jayanti commemorates the birth anniversary of such distinguished poet. It is celebrated on Purnima or full moon day, during the month of 'Jyesta' as per the traditional Hindu calendar. Poems of Sant Kabir Das are recited with great fervor among his followers. Various meetings and satsangs are held in different places. Religious sermons are held at Kabirchaura Math in Benaras where religious and spiritual leaders preach his teachings to the common man. In certain places a procession called the 'Shobhayatra' is taken out that culminates in the Kabir temple of that location.



All photograph courtesy: Google Images



Experienced something new in your city? Got any enchanting travel stories? Any heritage site you visited of late? Are you a photography enthusiast wanting to showcase your work? Discovered an interesting local culture you want to apprise the world about? Any lodging/transport personal review you want to share? Came across a cuisine/eatery/shack that you are dying to give a shout out to? Got your own creative recipes that now need a bigger platform than your own kitchen? Are you or someone around you doing something exceptionally special, in a big way or small? Tell us everything! We are Travel & Deal, and we are listening...

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ambubachi mela

THE TANTRIC FERTILITY FESTIVAL

Shanku Sharma

*“Asato Maa Sad Gamaya
Tamaso Maa Jyotir Gamaya”*

It is true that menstruation or menstrual cycle is mostly considered a taboo as far as religious doings are concerned, and people seldom like to open up about the subject without considerable reluctance. However, lakhs of people throng the famous Kamakhya Temple atop the Nilachal Hills of Guwahati in Assam during the famed Ambubachi Mela (Ambubachi Fair) or Ameti, also known as the Tantric fertility festival which generally falls on the last week of June. It is a ritual, a ceremony which is observed according to Tantric ways. It is a most celebrated belief that Devi Kamakhya, the Goddess of Shakti (Power), undergoes her annual cycle of menstruation. Interestingly, during this fair, the doors of the temple remain shut for three whole days.

It is held that the Goddess remains impure and unclean for these three days. So, any kind of productive work like farming is not exercised during these days. Even worships and other religious activities remain ceased during the fair. All through these days devotees do not cook, do not perform Puja and do not read holy books. The Kamakhya temple

is one of the 51 Shakti Peethas which lies distributed in the Indian sub continent. The doors of the temple are opened only after the completion of three days. Doors will only be opened after the Goddess Kamakhya is bathed and other rituals are carried out.

It is a ritual of the Tantric cult. It is only on the fourth day when devotees of the Goddess are not stopped from entering the temple for worshipping her. There are several layers of mystery, myth and other-worldliness about Ambubachi Mela. Kamakhya is also called *Kamarupa* - the form and shape of love, desire and lust. The Goddess is worshipped in both her maternal and erotic roles. In fact, there is no idol of the deity. She is worshipped in the shape and form of a Yoni like black stone from where, quite mysteriously, a natural spring flows.

Tantric cult is quite prevalent and common in the eastern parts of the country. The Tantric Babas who remains in isolation and seclusion for the rest of the year, make their appearances public only during these four days. One can find some Babas exhibiting their psychic and extrasensory powers like inserting their heads in a pit and standing upright on it and remaining in a standing position on one leg for a long time. It is of importance and interest that the Prasad distributed is always in forms of Angodak and Angabastra. Angodak is the fluid part of the body and Angabastra refers to the piece of red cloth which is used to cover the stone Yoni during these three days.

Pilgrims, lakhs in number, from Sadhus to shareholders, from writers to wrestlers and from ministers to masons visit this temple. Sanyasins, Sadhus, Sadhvis, Aghorasa and even Bauls of West Bengal do not forget to visit this place during the Ambubachi Mela. In addition to this, people from abroad also come to seek the Goddess' blessings. **This year the Mela will begin from June 22nd. Devotees can worship the Goddess on June 26th.** The police and civil administration of Guwahati makes adequate and ample arrangements for all tourists and the pilgrims. Camps are set up

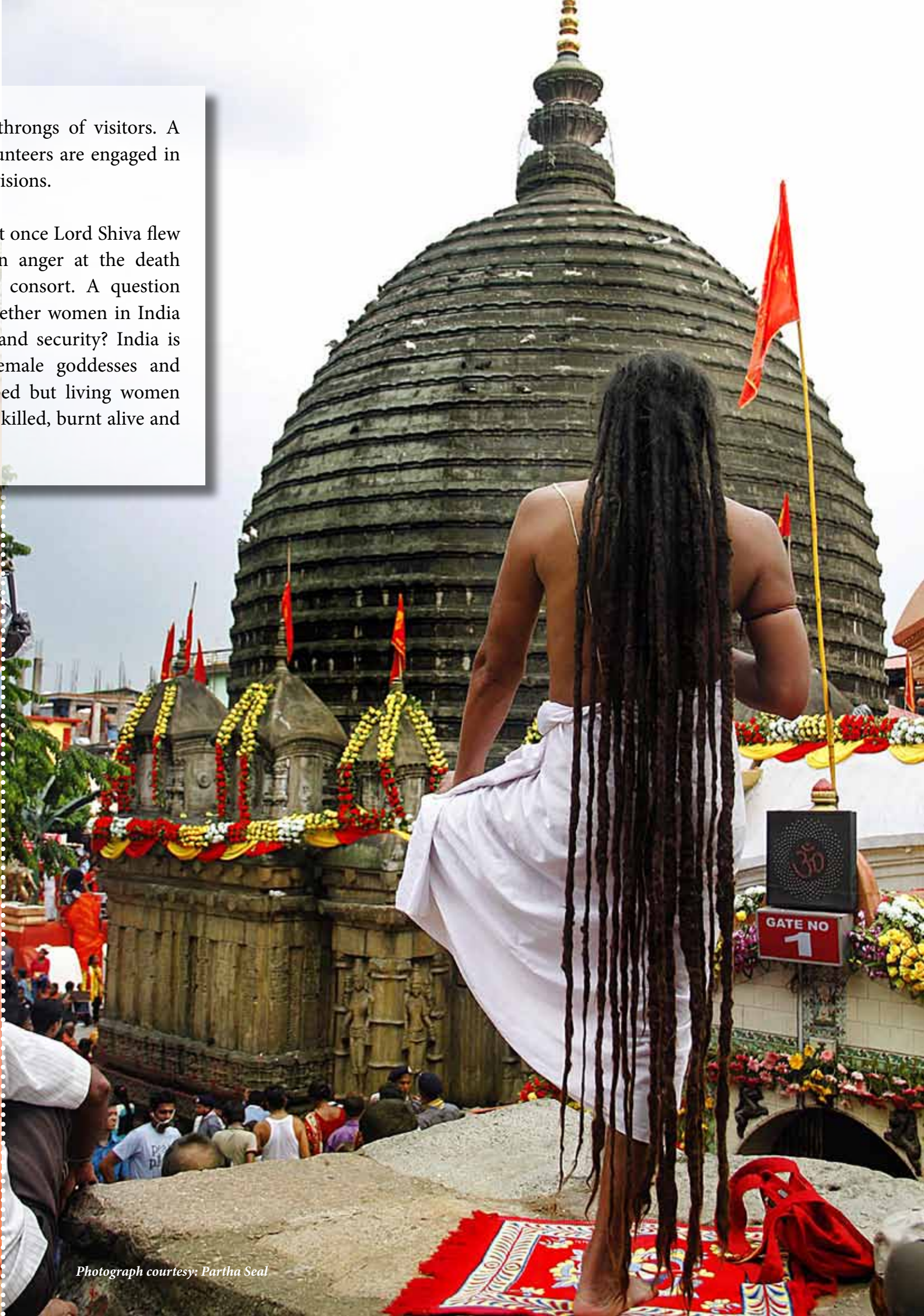


to accomodate the throngs of visitors. A huge number of volunteers are engaged in making suitable provisions.

Mythology has it that once Lord Shiva flew through the skies in anger at the death of Sati, his beloved consort. A question that haunts us is whether women in India will ever get safety and security? India is a country where female goddesses and deities are worshipped but living women are tortured, beaten, killed, burnt alive and raped.



Photograph courtesy: Partha Seal



Photograph courtesy: Partha Seal

THE SUMMERY, SPICY AND VERY RAJASTHANI: KER SANGRI

Sowmya Sisodia

Ker Sangri is an extremely popular dish from Rajasthan, which is quintessentially sour and spicy, much like pickle. Ker, or dried dessert berries and Sangri, or dried dessert beans are found in the more barren parts of Rajasthan. Cleaning the Ker and Sangri are quite the task, otherwise it is a relatively easy dish to make. It is traditionally eaten with bajra roti.

INGREDIENTS

- 0.5 Cup Ker
- 1 Cup Sangri
- 8 Dry Red Chillies
- 2 Tsp Cumin Seeds
- 2.5 Tsp Ginger Paste
- 2.5 Tsp Garlic Paste
- 0.5 Tsp Turmeric Powder
- 1 Tsp Coriander Powder
- 1 Tsp Fennel Seeds Powder
- 1.5 Tsp Red Chilli Powder
- 5 Tsp Dry Mango Powder
- 6 Tbsp Yogurt
- Salt
- 2 Tbsp Mustard Oil


METHOD

1. Thoroughly wash and ker and sangri with water, then soak them overnight.
2. Next day, drain the water and wash ker sangri once again.
3. Boil 2.5 cups of water in a big pot. Put the ker sangri in it and add salt.
4. Cook for 5-7 minutes and turn off the heat.
5. Heat oil in a deep pan and add cumin seeds and dry red chillies.
6. Add ginger and garlic paste when the cumin seeds begin to crackle.
7. Add turmeric powder, coriander powder, fennel seeds powder, red chilli powder and mix.
8. Add 3-4 tablespoons of water and cook the spices for a minute.
9. Now, add ker and sangri along with 3-4 tablespoons of water in which they have been boiled along with dry mango powder. Cook for 2 minutes.
10. Beat yogurt and transfer to kadai. Also adjust quantity of salt at this stage.
12. Cook for another 5-7 minutes and turn off the heat.
13. Serve with hot rotis or parathas.

DOODHPATHRI

A virgin place on the verge of Srinagar

Article and photographs: Nisha Aggarwal



The month of June has arrived, so have the sweltering summers. And there is no doubt that we Delhites experience it a bit hotter being the residents of a hustling crowded capital of the country. But one relaxing thing the month of June brings is summer break. If not for the working professionals other than the educators, then at least for school going kids and for college going youngsters. Parents must be ready for insistence of the first and for the already ready plans with friends of the second. Yes, I am talking about the insistence and plans for a trip to some cooler places.

Delhi has many hilly and snow clad places to travel around its vicinity. Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Jammu & Kashmir are the top neighboring states which provides a perfect summer getaway. Srinagar in Jammu & Kashmir has been an all-time favorite not only for us Indians, but foreigners as well. In this regard I feel I have been extremely lucky that at least once in a life time I had an opportunity to live in such a place which is known as 'the paradise on earth'. The two years when I was posted in Kashmir valley were perhaps the most peaceful and beautiful days of my life. **When you have beautiful 'outside', it becomes peaceful 'inside'.** Taking a limited trip to some place of your choice is one thing, but living there instead for a considerable amount of time becomes an entirely different game. A limited duration of tour



can provide you a glimpse of an overall scenic view, local culture, and local cuisines but a fixed long stay makes you an integral part of that space and you become a localite yourself, at least till the time you are stationed there.

The best part of becoming a localite is you are not bound by a time limit for visiting the places around. You can go out for a daylong getaway with colleagues, friends or family members, and can get back home and plan another daylong outing next week or month. **It facilitates the deeper understanding of the place rather than a tour around its skin and an exploration to the lesser known places.** Kashmir is best known for Srinagar's lakes, Mughal gardens, and a few historical monuments and nearby places like Sonamarg, Gulmarg, and Pahalgam etc. Srinagar city doesn't provide larger landscapes which includes grasslands and waterfalls, for that one has to go to either Gulmarg or to Pahalgam. But Srinagar is the central stay point if one wants to travel to all these places, as the city has better accommodation facilities and an airport.

Pahalgam is the place which provides views of mountains, meadows and river falls at some broader level which is about 92 kms from Srinagar. **If one has less time to travel and stay but wants to experience an essence of all of these at once, I would suggest they visit Doodhpathri.** Doodhpathri, literally means 'a valley of milk' is located in Budgam district of Jammu & Kashmir and 42 kms from Srinagar. Doodhpathri lies in a bowl shaped valley in the Pir Panjal Range of the Himalayas. It is an alpine valley of mountains and the meadows of Pine Fir and Deodar. The natural meadows, which are covered with snow in winter, allow the growth of wild flowers such as daisies,

forget-me-nots and butter cups during spring and summer.

It is said that the famous saint of Kashmir, Sheikh-ul-Aalam had prayed here. Once when he was in search for water in the meadows to offer prayers, he hit at the ground with his stick in search for water. However, milk came out instead. He addressed the milk, "you can only be used for drinking and not performing ablution." Hearing this, the milk at once changed its state to water and the meadow got its name, Doodhpathri. The water which is at present flowing through the meadows has a milky appearance from distance and remains very cold throughout the year. I went there in the beginning days of June along with colleagues (also friends), and still remember while writing this, as to how chilled the water and weather were. It was a rainy day and my colleagues were in their woolen jackets. I was somehow without any woolens and was literally shivering. The lush greens over the vast meadows and silver shining streams running over the large stones were further adding to its beauty.

Doodhpathri has no permanent settlement and is inaccessible during winter due to heavy snowfall. Because unlike Sonamarg and Gulmarg there is no governmental effort to make it a tourist destination. That is the reason Doodhpathri is a fresh discovery in Kashmir tourism, beauty of which is still untouched. The thing you should bring into notice before you pack your bags for Doodhpathri is, you won't find any proper restaurant there so make sure you pack some food items along with you. However, the benefits to this place are, no left over garbage, no trouble from vendors and very less crowd. All that you will get is a vast expanse of natural beauty and nothing to distract you from taking it all through your eyes.

The famous Tosa Maidan lies in the west of





Doodhpathri and has been officially opened to visitors from 30 May 2016. During summers shepherds from the plains of district Budgam bring cattle for grazing and remain in Doodhpathri seasonally for about six months. The routes of Doodhpathri are from Srinagar to Budgam, Budgam to Khansahib and Khansahib to Doodhpathri. Total distance of about 42 kms. This route is near to Srinagar airport. Another route is from Srinagar Gulmarg road, the route starts from Srinagar to Magam, Magam to Beerwah and Beerwah to Arizal. Total distance is about 50 km.

Before you reach Doodhpathri, a beautiful place of small valleys welcomes you. This place called 'Tangnar' is filled with deodar and pine trees on small hills. As you reach to the place Doodhpathri, from the parking area, you can reach the river 'Shaliganga' by pony or by walking. Cars may also reach this place in summer, when



there is no snow. But until March-April, when roads are covered with heavy snow, commuting happens through pony ride which takes about 20 minutes, and walking which takes around 30 minutes. It's a beautiful spot with flowing river-which you can cross over a wooden bridge. There is a small hamlet called 'Mujpathri' on the banks of river Shaliganga. The other side of the river includes picturesque landscapes with lot of pine trees and a beautiful meadow called 'Diskhal' on top of the mountain and overlooks the Ashtaar glacier. It's approximately a 10 kms long trek from Shaliganga nallah.

While returning back from the Doodhpathri, thwrw is another treat for the eyes at 'Palmaidan'. The name of this place is after the 'Big Stones' because there are huge stones all around the ground. It situated at a distance of about 5 km from Doodhpathri and is the favorite spot of shepherds and cow herders, where they gather in large numbers in summer and graze their cattle and livestock. It is beautiful place with a small stream running on one side of the ground. You can find some ruined structures made of bricks, a place which may provide you nice backgrounds for clicking away!



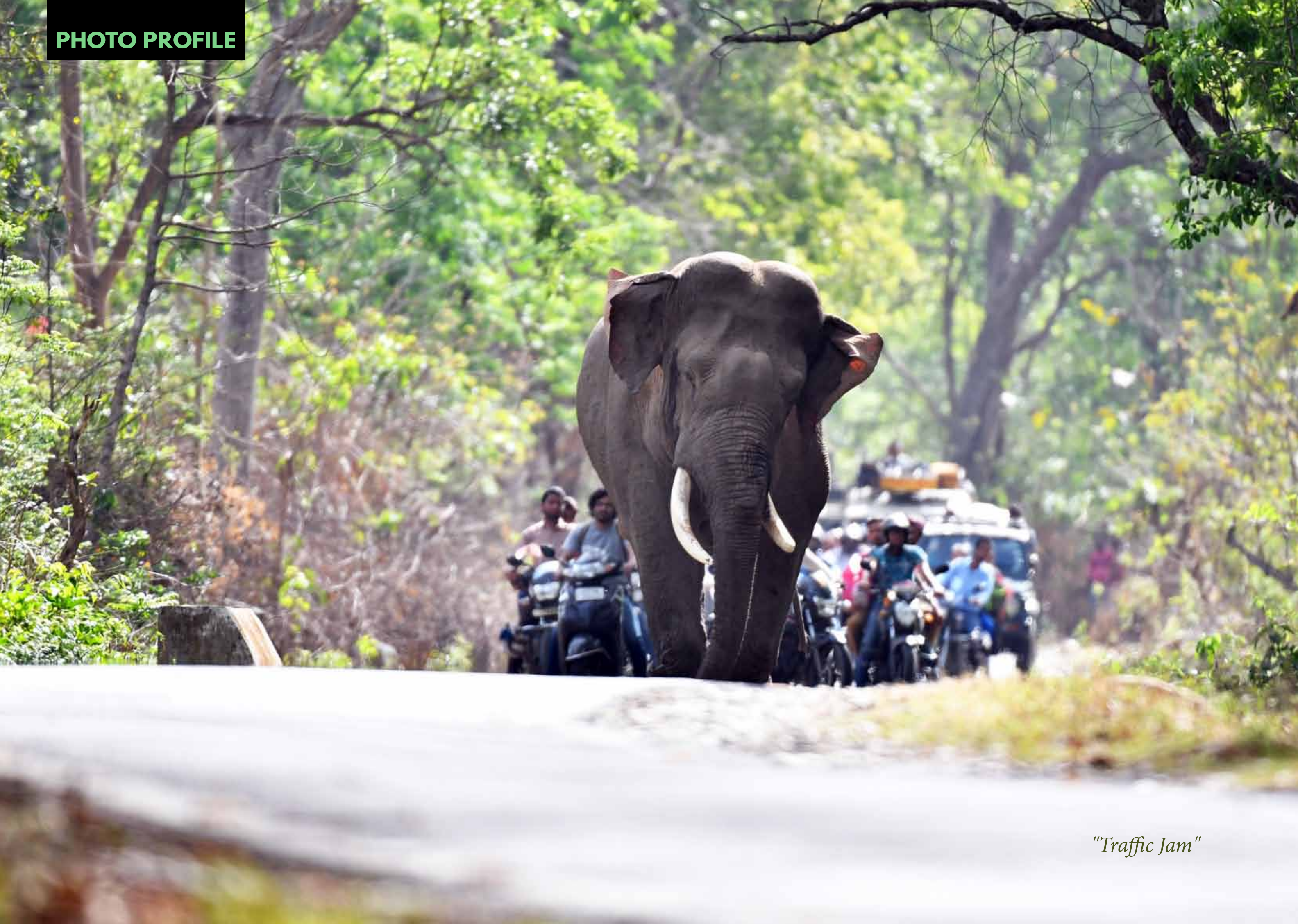
PHOTO PROFILE



"Queen of Ramganga River"

THE CHRONICLES OF CORBETT

Photographs and titles by: Deep Rajwar



"Traffic Jam"



"They have the first right to cross the road..."



"The magnificence in Darkness..."

INCREDIBLE ICELAND

Travel & Deal features budding freelance adventure photographer **Colin Rex**, born and raised in Raleigh, North Carolina, United States.

Colin received his B.A. in Journalism and Mass Communications from the University of South Carolina in May 2016 with a major in advertising and minor in media arts, and currently works in Washington, D.C. as a Marketing Leader and Photographer for ARC'TERYX Equipment. He strives to travel the world using photography as a means to study and explore it.

"While many of my images are focused on landscape, I am interested in weaving together an expanded idea of adventure by documenting the relationships between natural and cultural aspects of the places I visit," he says. "I strive to document the unique personalities of each geographic region I visit and the people I meet along the way, and stay motivated by my own passion for adventure.."

In this feature we have a selection of breathtaking vistas from the Nordic land of fire and ice, Iceland. An ever popular tourist destination world renowned for its dramatic landscape with it's volcanoes, massive glaciers, geysers running deep into the northern earth, hot springs, Aurora Borealis and dynamic national parks.

Here we get to take a glimpse of this climactic country through Colin's lens.



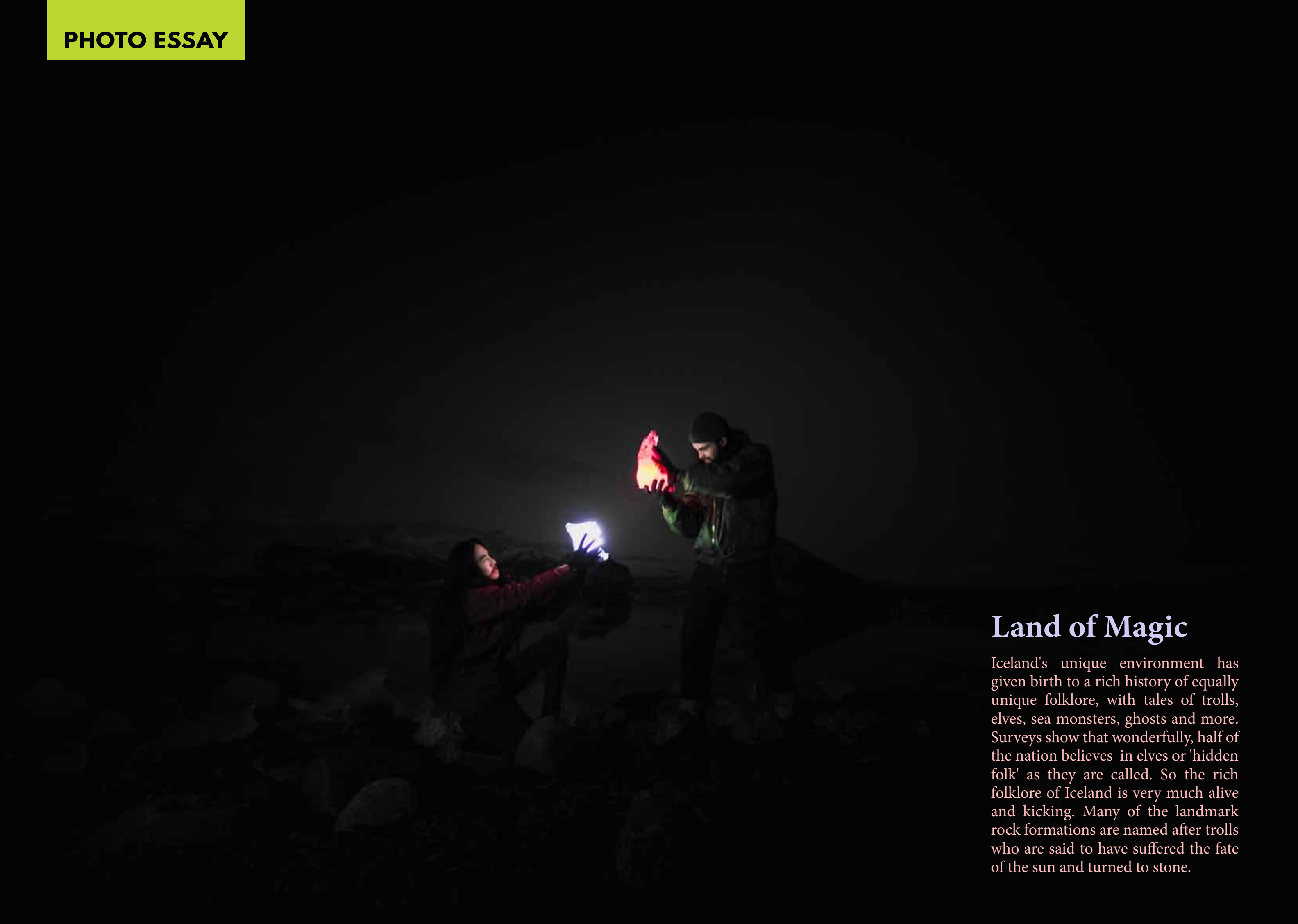


Land of Waterfalls

The collection of water falls in Iceland rivals those of perhaps everywhere in Europe, and they are everywhere! Luckily these glorious aqua features are difficult to miss as you travel around the county, however some of the famous ones include 'Kirkjufellsfoss' (church mountain falls) near the distinctive Kirkjufell mountain on the north side of the Snæfellsnes Peninsula. Gullfoss Waterfall which is a main 'Golden Circle' attraction, a vast two-tiered waterfall which is partially obscured until you get really close. And Skogafoss, a former sea cliff, which is now situated between Iceland's Highlands and coastal area. It is perhaps most famous for its rainbow which can be seen on most days provided there is adequate sunshine.

PHOTO ESSAY





Land of Magic

Iceland's unique environment has given birth to a rich history of equally unique folklore, with tales of trolls, elves, sea monsters, ghosts and more. Surveys show that wonderfully, half of the nation believes in elves or 'hidden folk' as they are called. So the rich folklore of Iceland is very much alive and kicking. Many of the landmark rock formations are named after trolls who are said to have suffered the fate of the sun and turned to stone.



Glacial Cave

Much of the scenery of this sparsely populated land looks like it could be straight from the set of a Sci-Fi movie!

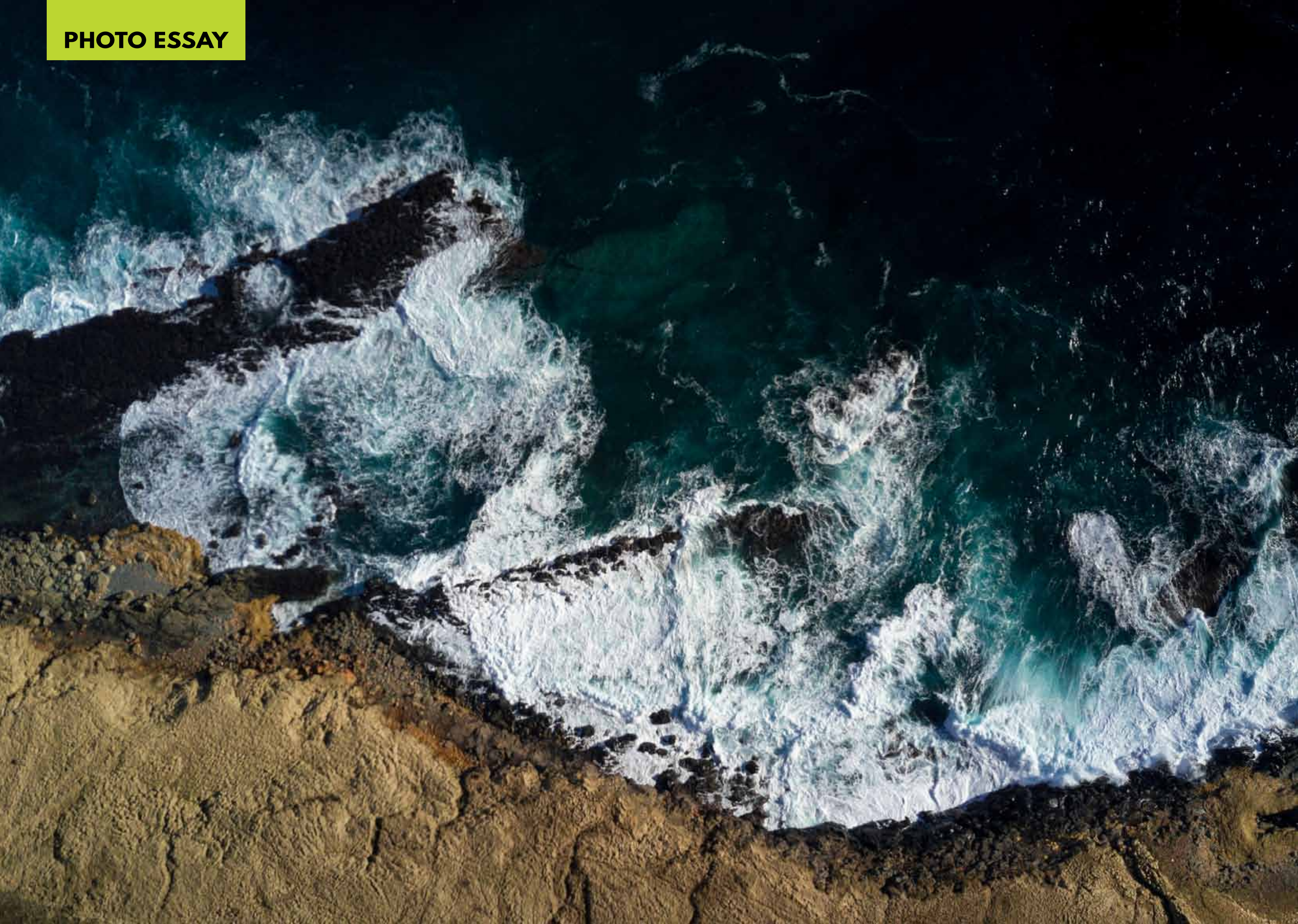




PHOTO ESSAY



PHOTO ESSAY



Birds and Animals

In this harsh climate, the fauna and flora in the country were largely introduced by viking settlers, such as the Icelandic Sheep, Icelandic Dog and Icelandic Horse. One exception however is the Arctic Fox which is native to the country. The variety of migratory birds draws many a keen bird watcher during the summer seasons also.





How to travel to Iceland

Suggested connections from India are via Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Paris, Oslo, Frankfurt and Helsinki. Direct flights to Iceland are available from the majority of European countries, and it cuts down costs to take a stop-over flight.

Once you've arrived in Iceland it is relatively easy to travel around due to its small scale, and buses are available to all major cities. Popular options are renting cars, four wheel drives, and bicycles to travel around. Internal air travel tends to be a convenient option during the harsh winter months.

JUNE
11 – 17
2018

TUESDAY – SATURDAY
1 – 8 P.M.
SUNDAY
1 – 8 P.M.

PUBLIC
OPENING
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JUNE 11
9 – 8 P.M.

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