

EAT YOUR WAY THROUGH



Mobile markets on the Mekong with fruits and vegetables

If you had enough of history, take a trip through Vietnam's many cities and taste its unique local street food culture

Kalpana Sunder

I am feasting on vegetarian Banh Mi, a salad of radish and carrot, inside a soft baguette with chilli sauce and mayonnaise. Food has been an omnipresent companion in my two-week sojourn through this country packed with a rich history and culture. Street food culture is big in Vietnam. Bia Hois or pavement pubs have men sipping cold beer over boiled quail's eggs. Every corner is a portable restaurant with plastic stools, and people bent over bowls of the national comfort food — Pho (pronounced fuh). Pho is a fragrant broth of rice noodles with beef or chicken, spring onions, bean sprouts, and a garnish of fresh herbs. You have to eat Pho with a chopstick and a soup spoon and slurping is de rigueur. Hue, in central Vietnam, used to be the imperial capi-

tal of the Nguyen dynasty for more than 70 years and we enjoy our time in this city of pagodas, citadels and tombs of emperors. But Hue is also known for its imperial cuisine, which developed because the finicky emperors would refuse to eat the same dish twice in a year. These are visually-arresting dishes carved like dragons and tortoises, using a variety of ingredients. These days you can opt for a royal style set meal with dishes carved out of fruits and vegetables. Local favourites are Banh Beo — tiny plates of gelatinous rice with dried shrimps and Banh



Every pavement is a portable cafe

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Street food culture is big here

Khoai — an egg and rice pancake stuffed with meat and bean sprouts. Being a major Buddhist centre, Hue has attractive options for vegetarians, with meals of 'fake meats' made out of tofu and gluten. We have an interesting set meal with fake shrimp cakes, jackfruit salad and grilled 'deer' with lemon grass. Dried chillies and spicy chilli sauces are tabletop staples in most eateries. Fermented seafood sauces are an integral part of the cuisine. The Vietnamese widely use the crackly rice paper, which is used to wrap up almost anything; the enjoyable deep fried spring rolls called Nem is just one of the examples. Vietnamese recipes also make use of a range of herbs, including lemongrass, mint and long coriander. Hoi An, in Central Vietnam with a wealth of architecture on the UNESCO list is the place to taste Cao Lau — a



Rice balls served as snack

rough, thick noodle which had its origins in Japanese soba noodles brought by Japanese traders to this town long ago. In the Mekong Delta, we sail through a mosaic of mangroves, rice paddies, fruit orchards and shrimp farms and visit floating markets vending succulent fruit and fresh vegetables. Lunch is at Mr. Kiet's Historical Home, a restored house, built in 1838. With orchards, ponds, exquisite bonsai and trees bursting with star fruits, jackfruits and pomelos around, the setting is wondrous. The local speciality is 'elephant ear fish', wrapped in small rolls of rice paper with mint and lettuce, and dipped

Don't miss this



- Vietnam is a paradise for fruit lovers. Feast on pink guavas, juicy mangosteen, passion fruit, jackfruit and longans as well as ice cold smoothies.
- To those with a sweet tooth, don't miss out on Che, which is like a sweet soup with an eclectic mix of tapioca pearls, ice shavings, coconut milk and bits of jelly and corn.
- Vietnam is the second largest exporter of coffee in the world. Get addicted to the vanilla-ish taste of ice-cold coffee served with a shot of condensed milk.

in pungent fish sauce. Our 'aha' moment is a dish of vegetarian rice in a clay pot with curry made of lotus root and Bok Choy — simple when you look at it, but delve deeper and a myriad flavours astound you, much like the country itself.



PICTURE FOR REPRESENTATION

Q&A inbox

Enjoy snow in Manali

Which are the must-see attractions in Kovalam? I have heard about only about the beaches out there. Is there more to see apart from the beaches?

Vivek
The main attraction of Kovalam is its beaches. These include the Lighthouse Beach, which has a lighthouse atop a hill by the Arabian Sea, Hawah Beach, Leela Beach and Samudra Beach. Out of these, the Lighthouse Beach is frequented mostly by foreigners. The other beaches are crowded in the evenings. The beach experience is best enjoyed during evenings. Lighthouse Beach is best for bathing and relaxing in the sun, while Hawah Beach is great for walking and speedboat rides.

Other beaches can be explored, if you have sufficient time.

I want to tour north India, but have no idea where exactly to go. Which is the place that is favourable to visit in December? Kindly suggest destinations that will make the trip a memorable one.

Manjith
In the north, you could plan and go to Kullu-Manali, a lovely hill station. It will be cold, but you can enjoy the snow. Or, visit Rajasthan and tour the forts in Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Jaipur and Udaipur. In fact, winter would be the ideal time to visit Rajasthan. Here you will find many architectural splendours and scientific marvels, including Hawa Mahal and Jantar Mantar. You could also go to Uttarakhand.



Digital art fuses past with present

Veteran artist Jaideep Mehrotra works with layers of paint and print, displays new collection in city

Shweta Mehta

Jaideep Mehrotra's first solo show in the city in four years is a clear testimony to his status as the pioneer of digital art in India. The past meets the future and online meets offline as viewers shuffle between layers of paint and print, combining them to gather the full effect of Metonymical Subtext, a show of 30-odd works — large and small. Binary and ASCII codes are painstakingly inscribed on digital overlays that transform conventional paintings. "The premise is that we're moving into the digital age, where all of us are offloading our alter egos onto the virtual world," explains the veteran artist. "Working from something in the past and moving towards something in the future is my attempt to show how both are inseparable." Mehrotra's subjects are varied: politicians making hollow promises; concretisation of jungles; and the obsolescence of typewriters. There's a tribute to Mehrotra's recently deceased friend too, actor Shammi Kapoor via a glittering work that quotes the Bhagavad Gita: "Never the spirit was born. The spirit shall cease to be never. Never was time it was not, end and beginning are dreams." Metonymical Subtext is an exemplary display of the



Silver Screen



Chairman



Jaideep Mehrotra

challenge was the radical nature of everything at hand, including from the approach to the materials: "It's technically very difficult. In India, we don't have machines to create varied textures or diverse surfaces to paint on, or even pigmented inks that last longer. In one of my works, I used white ink, for which I had to leave the machines on 24/7." But that hasn't hindered the artist, whose plans for future works are even more ambitious: "I have some ideas, but I'm yet to research them. From modern pigments to colour shifts, it's all quite fascinating."

adapting it in every aspect. It's become an essential part of our work. It's the future. We're at the inception of the digital age, and there's a long way to go from here." For Mehrotra, the biggest

AROUNDTOWN

Go mountain rappelling



PICTURE FOR REPRESENTATION

Pinnacle Club will conduct a preliminary training session in rappelling on December 4 and 11 at Kanheri Caves, National Park, Borivali. This session is open for those interested in heading for a rappelling camp at Takmak Point, Raigad Fort, from December 21 to 25. Apart from rappelling, there's sightseeing around Raigad, educational slide shows on mountaineering and camp fires. Successful participants will be honoured with certificates. For further details and enrollments please contact, 98694 79794 and 9224813797. Visit the site www.pinnacleclub.org

MP in a frame

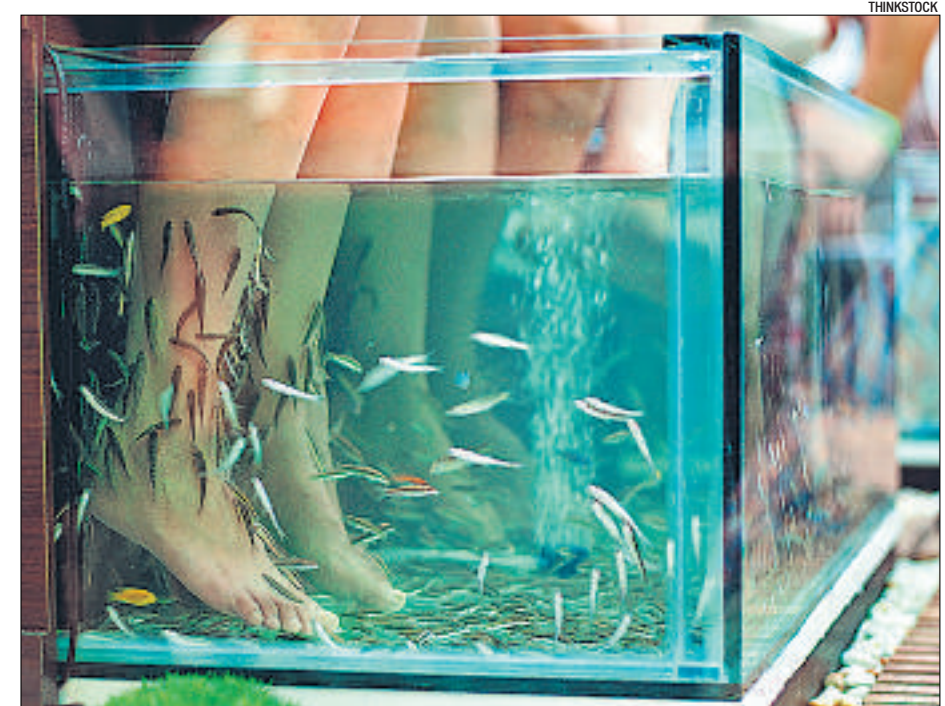


PICTURE FOR REPRESENTATION

Life Away From Life is organising a trip to Orchha, Madhya Pradesh for amateur photographers. Participants can explore aspects of experimental travel photography in this lesser-known country-side. From December 10 to 17. For details, call 6609 6693 or 98691 58351.

Fish spa in troubled waters

International study claims that the garra rufa therapy can spread HIV infection; spa owners rubbish the scare



THINKSTOCK

Vaishali Bhambrī

Been to a fish spa at the neighbourhood mall recently? You may just want to think twice before repeating the 'relaxing' experience. An international health study has recently called it "risky", suggesting that the popular therapy in which small fish nibble away the dead skin from the feet of the users, can spread infections as serious as HIV and Hepatitis C. However, outraged spa owners claim they follow stringent international hygiene and safety standards. The study, conducted by the Health Protection Agency (HPA) in UK, says that the 'garra rufa' fish which is commonly used in fish spas can transfer infections if they nibble on the skin of an HIV infected person. Indian medical experts support the view. "If infected blood is transfused in the water and someone else with cuts or abrasions dips their

feet in it, chances of transmission are fairly high," says skin consultant Dr. Gulshant Panesar. Spa owners vehemently oppose the claim. "This is utter nonsense. The garra rufa fish nibbles on the dead skin, but it has no teeth to bite or draw blood. We clean the water daily and use a UV filter. Also, the water temperature is maintained at 30-33 degree Celsius, which is not suitable for bacteria to survive," says Shikha Chandra of Happy Feet Fish Spa. "The fish release enzymes in the water that kill many infections. Also, we always check clients' feet for bruises or infections before accepting them," says Jai Chandra, owner of Something Fishy spa. "We take proper precautions and change the water regularly, we don't even recycle it," says Lily Yephtho from the Body Spa International. The doctors continue to be skeptical. "I'd say no to a fish spa. Though the chances of HIV infection are rare,

Scary study

As per the study by UK-based Health Protection Agency, even though the danger of illness and bacteria being transmitted during the fish spa is very minute, there is no guarantee that the risk of the infection being passed on can be completely removed. However, the study states that if salon owners follow proper disinfectant procedures, the risk of infection can be minimised.

Online fight

The debate about the safety of fish spas is raging the world over. So much so that Ric Bertora, owner of Feet Bliss spa in St. Peter's Street, Canterbury, UK recently started a Facebook campaign to reassure customers that the treatments are perfectly safe.

one can easily pick up other infections," says Dr. Navin Taneja, director at the National Skin Centre.