



Route Map

GO CAMPING



Want to treat your children to a cutting-edge summer camp — with a difference? Book a place for them with Switzerland's Les Elfes International Camps for a 2-week jaunt. The Ski and Alpine Sports Camp will operate from May 13 to May 29 for children between eight and 18. Starting from Mumbai/Delhi to land in Geneva, it will also take them to Vevey and Berne. They will learn to ski in the Swiss mountain village Zermatt, visit the offices of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva. Other visits include Einstein's house in Berne, the Callebaut Chocolate factory in Broc and more. The trip will cost approximately Rs 2.5 lakh, which includes return airfare from Mumbai/Delhi, visa charges, full boarding and lodging, transfers by bus and cashless medical insurance with 100 per cent cover. Contact 9810078050.

My favourite holiday

LOPAMUDRA MITRA, singer

I cherish my trip to Tapovan in the Gahrwal Himalayas in 2002. We walked 6km from Gangotri to Gomukh, the source of River Ganges. I had gone there with my husband and friends and was mesmerised by the unearthly beauty that stood in front of me. It was a heavenly experience to see the Shivaling standing tall with all its splendour. It's reflection shimmered in a pond below. I enjoyed the long walk as well. Given an opportunity, I would definitely want to go back to Tapovan and get immersed in the divine beauty of the place.



Ready reckoner



■ **Getting there:** Fly to Brisbane from India via Singapore. Then take a Virgin Blue domestic flight to Whitsunday Coast Airport in Proserpine or the Great Barrier Reef Airport on Hamilton Island.

■ **Staying there:** Reef View Hotel on Hamilton Island or the Coral Sea Resort on Airlie Beach. Go to www.tourismwhitsundays.com.au.

■ **Best time to visit:** Between August and October, when the weather is mild and dry.

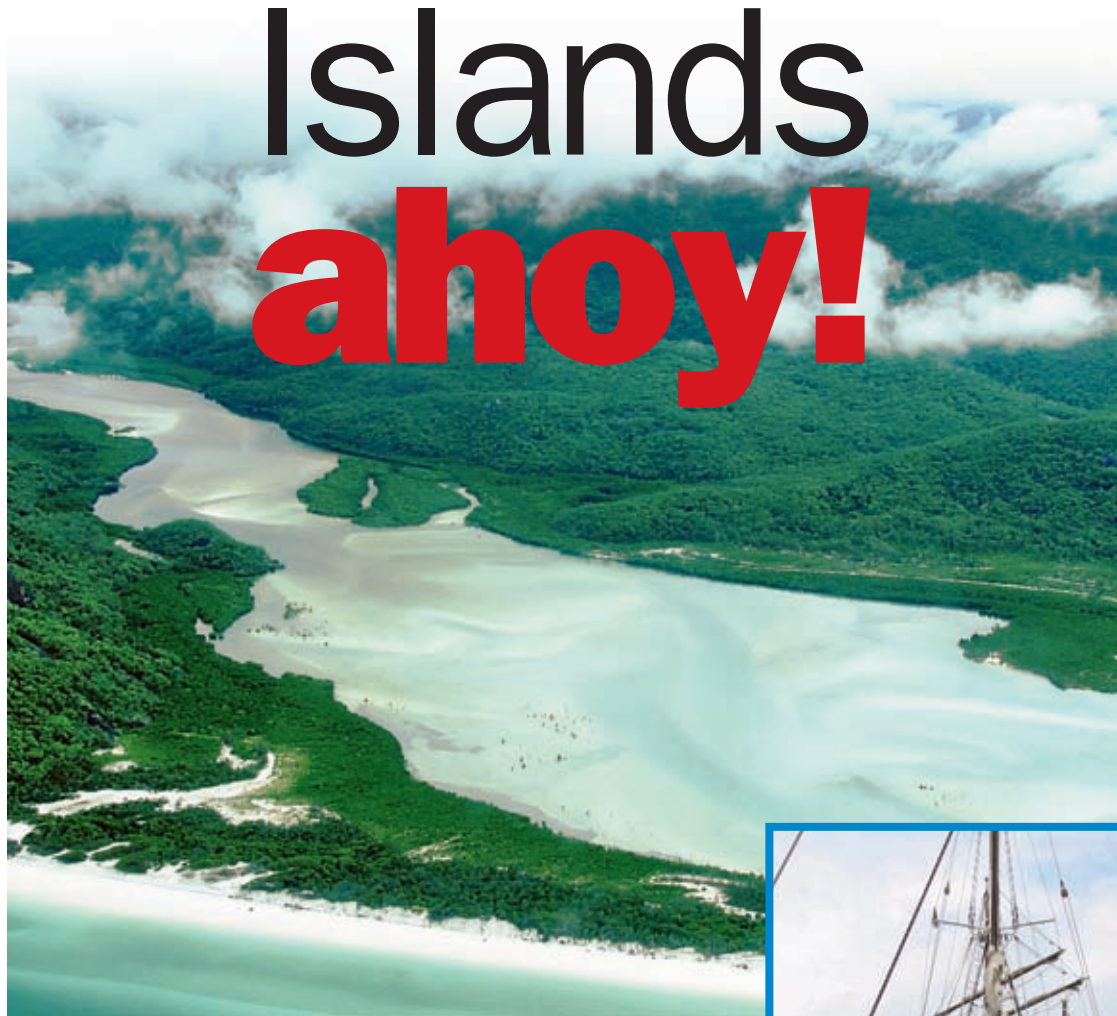
Ominous black clouds gather over us, as the seaplane glides to a graceful landing. "Looks like a bit of rain, mate," says our pilot, in a typical Aussie understatement. Heavy rain lashes us, as we board a boat to reach Long Island. Bleached white sand, jade waters and verdant vegetation, this really is Robinson Crusoe territory!

We reach the exclusive Paradise Bay Eco Resort where there are no phones or television sets. It's an eco-friendly resort that runs on solar power and natural gas. Bush turkeys and wallabies hover around the island-style bungalows, stylishly decorated with aboriginal art. It's truly a place to re-connect with nature and oneself.

The Whitsundays are 74 tropical islands in Queensland, Australia, bordered by the Great Barrier Reef and cradled by the calm waters of the Coral Sea. Geologically, the Whitsundays are all exposed peaks of half-submerged mountains. About 70 per cent of the islands is National Park territory and protected, and resort development is strictly restricted to just eight islands. We land first on Hamilton Island, the largest inhabited island in the Whitsundays — incidentally, the television show, *Best Job in the World*, was based here. Thousands of applications poured in for the job of caretaker on the island after the series.

Imagine owning an island. Hamilton Island is owned by Australian billionaire Robert Oatley, a yachtsman who made his money from the famed Rosemount Wines. Hamilton's high point each year is the annual Audi Hamilton Island Race Week when it attracts yachts from all over the world and of course, celebrities. It has a bustling marina, a 1,000-plus population and the only mode of transport is golf buggies!

Our hotel, the Reef View Hotel, looks nondescript from the outside



WAYFARER ▶ The picturesque Whitsunday Islands, off the coast of Australia, are the perfect getaway for the city-weary soul, says **Kalpna Sunder**



(Above) A view of the Marina on Hamilton Island; (right) The sprawling golf course on Dent Island

but its large rooms with spacious balconies fronting the turquoise Coral Sea and billowing yachts, more than make up for its shortcomings. I wake up to squawking birds and watch entranced as yellow crested cockatoos



Travel trivia

■ The explorer, Captain James Cook, discovered the Whitsunday Islands in 1770 and named the surrounding waters 'Whitsunday's Passage' in his journal entry. He believed that the passage was discovered on a Whitsunday (the seventh Sunday after Easter) but further studies of Cook's journal revealed that it was actually a Monday.



CALCUTTA
SATURDAY
30 APRIL
2011

26

its copper roof and stunning spaces, vaguely resembles the Sydney Opera House. Come sunset, we are at One Tree Hill — a hilltop lookout, where the whole island congregates for early evening cocktails and the legendary Whitsunday sunset view.

Next morning, we walk to every child's dream breakfast venue — the local Wildlife Park, where we had breakfast with sleepy koalas who munch on gum leaves and pose, as if they were movie stars. There is a photo-op with Elvis, the celebrity koala who was cuddled by none other than the talk show queen, Oprah Winfrey, on her recent tour through Queensland.

A short boat ride away is Dent Island, home to a spanking new 18-hole championship golf course designed by champion golfer Peter Thomson. We drive golf carts through the native bush and rugged terrain for panoramic views across the waters. In a totally different genre is Daydream Island, which caters to a 'families with kids' clientele. Here, there are beautiful sea-facing rooms, a spa offering therapeutic and pampering treatments and even a waterfront

chapel where one can get married! There's also a kitschy 'Putt your way around Australia' mini golf course, lagoon pools and an outdoor movie theatre. What I enjoy most is Lover's Cove, with its white coral beach and wallabies basking in the sun.

Whitehaven Beach is considered to be one of the world's top ten beaches and is the Whitsunday showpiece. It has a huge sweeping arc with an inlet at one end. We leave our virgin footprints on the beach made of pure white silica sand, which looks like icing sugar. We land on Tongue Bay and trek through the acacia and native hoop pine forests to reach the Hill Inlet Lookout. We could see sand patterns

left by the shifting tides from here, in all muted hues.

The high point of my journey is a trip on *Solway Lass*, a beautifully restored turn-of-the-century vessel. The owner's children, dressed as pirates, greet us with cheery cries of 'Ahoy there!' and we take an active part in hoisting the sails. Taking in the balmy breeze and wondrous views from the deck, it seems like a supremely indulgent way to experience the islands — including anchoring around them, sleeping on the deck under a star-spangled sky and snorkelling or scuba-diving to see colourful coral gardens.

My Whitsundays experience can be best summed up in the tourism slogan of Queensland — "Beautiful one day, perfect the next."

Photographs by author



(Above) An aerial view of the Whitsunday Islands; (inset) The restored *Solway Lass*, a 100-year-old sailing boat

and lorikeets greet me from the railings of the balcony.

On the secluded northern tip of the island is qualia, a secluded upmarket luxury resort with smooth timbers, glass and stone interiors and an infinity pool which wows you. The Australian Ballet performs here every year in early summer, and you can just imagine how stunning it would be in this surreal setting.

The iconic Australian architect, Walter Barda, designed the new Yacht Club near the Marina, which with

TRAVEL 360 ▶ Travel to places like Tuscany or Australia's Hunter Valley and see how cheese is made — and taste some too. By **Yashodeep Sengupta**

Say cheese

If you oh-so-love cheese

and crave for it regularly, look no further: Pamper your taste buds and get to learn about one of your favourite foods by heading off on a cheese tour. You could taste some of the most popular cheeses of Italy or Belgium or travel in an entirely different direction and savour delicious cheeses Down Under in Australia. But if you fancy a shorter journey, Coonoor has put India on the cheese lovers' map by offering farm stays, during which people can participate in a cheese-making course. So go ahead and take a bite!

ITALY

Cheese, or formaggio as they call it in Italy, is a culinary



must-have in every Italian household. Asiato, Fontona, Mozzarella and Ricotta are some better-known varieties of Italian cheese. Tuscany and the region around Florence



are popular cheese-producing areas. There are cheese tasting options in Florence — a great change after you've had a surfeit of art in the city.

▶ HOT TICKET!

Italy Guides offers daily cheese tours in Florence at 29 euros (around Rs 1,803) per person. The tour starts at 5pm local time everyday in 2011 until December 15, and lasts for about 90 minutes. It includes wine, fruit and cheese tasting. Airfares (approx. Rs 48,000 from Calcutta to Florence) and accommodation excluded. Go to www.italyguides.it.

BELGIUM

If you think Belgium is famous only for chocolates and Georges Remi (or Hergé, as we popularly know him), the creator of Tintin, think again. This European country, with varieties of cheese like Beauvoorde, Limburger and Passendale, is a prime attraction for cheese lovers from the world over. Central



Belgium is extremely pretty; add to that a melt-in-the-mouth cheese tasting experience, and your day is made!

▶ HOT TICKET!

Tour by Locals offers guided cheese tours in central Belgium. That excludes airfares (approx. Rs 31,000 from Calcutta), accommodation or meals. A four-hour guided tour will cost \$294 (around Rs 13,000) for up to four people, which includes entrance fees. Tasting sessions are charged extra. A trip to the brewery of Val Dieu, where one can taste varieties of cheese and wine, is the prime draw. The tour starts from June 1. Go to www.tourbylocals.com.

AUSTRALIA

Here's a delicious add-on to a holiday Down Under — Australia produces almost 100 varieties of cheese. A key cheese-producing region is the Hunter Valley in New South Wales. Victoria and Queensland are also known for their local cheeses while Cheddar is the most popular of all Australian cheeses.

▶ HOT TICKET!

Activity Tours offers day cheese tours to the Hunter Valley for AUD\$95 (around Rs 4,450) per person per day. It includes cheese tasting sessions and hotel transfers. Sydney is the nearest airport. Airfares (approx. Rs 32,000 from Calcutta) and accommodation excluded. Go to www.activity-tours.com.au for tour dates.

INDIA

India may be a cheese novice, but there are a few places here, where one can get a glimpse of how cheese is made. The cheeses made in Coonoor in Tamil Nadu are distinctly different from their European counterparts, though it still has a long way to go. The nearest airport is Coimbatore, 71km away.

▶ HOT TICKET!

A farm stay at Acres Wild in Coonoor offers you a cheese tour, which includes cheese tasting sessions. The two-hour guided day tours are priced at Rs 100 per adult and Rs 50 per person below 18 years of age. The cost of a night's accommodation in the farm ranges from Rs 2,000 to Rs 4,000, depending on type of room and the season. It includes six-hour cheese-making sessions at an extra Rs 5,000. Airfares (around Rs 7,000 from Calcutta) are excluded. The tours are available on weekends (on weekdays only on request). Log on to www.acres-wild.com.

www.selimhill.com

A FAREWELL TO SUMMER
Selim Hill. The sun is here. The summer isn't.

Selim Hill
A HIDEAWAY. WITH A HERITAGE.

Kurseong, Dist Darjeeling P +91 9830822937
9836362937/9932374725 E info@selimhill.com

A Solutions Inc. Enterprise

Only genuine
Gemstones guide you
to Good Luck

Also avail astrological counseling
by eminent astrologers

D. K. CHANDRA
JEWELLERS

HEAD OFFICE: 34, B.B. Ganguly Street, Kolkata - 700012, Ph: 2236 8539, 2221 6043
BRANCH: Chandra & Sons (DKC) Jewellers, Suri, Birbhum, Pin-731101, Ph: 255 244

enigma/010

SUMMER DEPARTURES

BANGKOK / PATTAYA
5 Days • 24th May, 8th June ₹ 23,899/-

BEIJING / SHANGHAI / KUNMING
7 Days • 22nd May ₹ 49,899/-

MALAYSIA / SINGAPORE
7 Days • 18th May, 4th June ₹ 55,899/-

HONGKONG / MACAU / SHENZHEN
5 Days • 1st June ₹ 55,899/-

SWITZERLAND / PARIS Ex-Del
6 Days • 27th May, 4th June ₹ 98,500/-

ALL INCLUSIVE PACKAGE - AIRFARE EX- KOLKATA
• ACCOMMODATION • ALL MEALS • SIGHTSEEING

90073 11663 DOMESTIC 91639 91777 INTERNATIONAL

68 Ballygunge Circular Road, Annapurna 7th Floor, Kolkata - 19. Tel: 4014 3920 - 21.

Preferred Sales Agents
ASANSOL 9093300723 • **KANCHRAPARA** 8961348397 • **CHANDANAGAR** 9432894276 • **DURGAPUR** 9434133176 • **SILIGURI** 9434467236 • **SIKKIM** 9593782847

ZENITH HOLIDAYS