

GOING RETRO IN RIGA

The capital of Latvia is home to more than 800 Art Nouveau buildings built in the late 19th and early 20th century

Kalpana Sunder

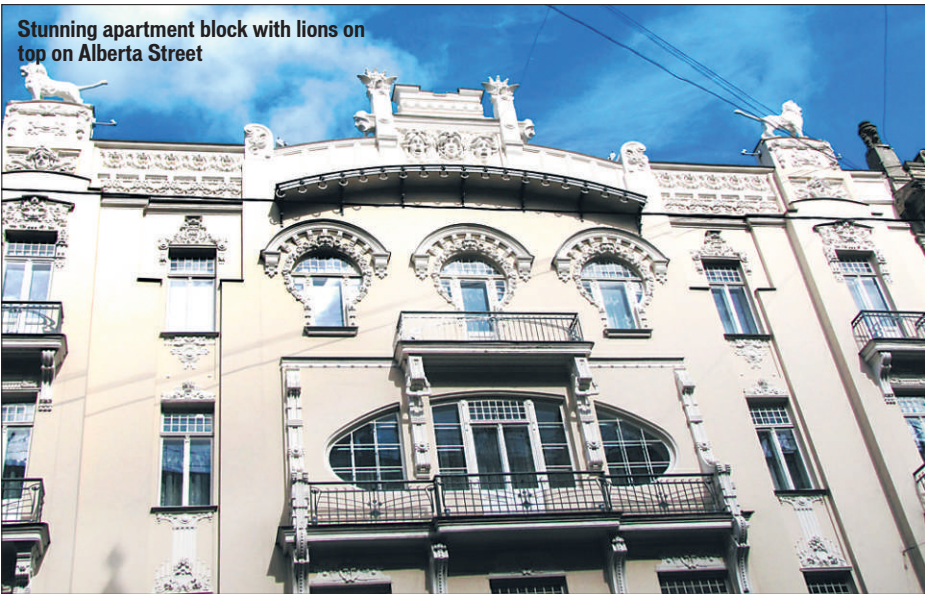
Sculpted cats and larger-than-life faces of women, men growing out of trees, winged lions astride turrets, a shepherd, a satyr and exquisite peacocks... all embellished on the facades of buildings... this is an architectural feast. The Art Nouveau Movement was a rebellious reaction to Victorian sensibilities by a new wave of architects and designers, who used futuristic elements and artwork to express them.

Riga, the capital of Latvia, has an amazing wealth of more than 800 Art Nouveau buildings built in the late 19th and early 20th century. How did Riga's buildings survive?

When Art Nouveau was popular, Riga was riding a wave of prosperity and the Russians, Jewish, German and Latvian merchants poured their riches into its real estate. Later, when Art Nouveau went out of fashion, many buildings all over Europe were pulled down but Latvia's economic position compelled many of the buildings to be converted into Soviet communal apartments. Many of the buildings became shabby and unkempt. In recent times, foreign investment as well as banks and cultural preservation funds have helped to renovate buildings to their past glory though many of them are still in the throes of transition.

One name that appears with amazing regularity in the Art Nouveau Movement in Riga is Mikhail Eisenstein, the father of the popular film director, Sergei Eisenstein, who made movies like Battleship Potemkin. Sergei was not a fan of his father's work and said of his father's fanciful creations,

Stunning apartment block with lions on top on Alberta Street



Apartment on Elizabetes iela

"He must have had nightmares, putting all that detail into his buildings," and called him a "a maker of cakes, who placed statues of human beings one and a half storey high". Mikhail was known for his use of coloured bricks and tiles, decorative masks and



The staircase and ceiling designs in the Art Nouveau Museum building

geometric motifs. We see Mikhail Eisenstein's creations especially on Alberta iela where five of his buildings lie next to each other. Wrought iron balconies attract, giant faces peer down at us and gargoyles look menacing. There is the home of the philosopher

Isaiah Berlin with motifs of Egyptian Sphinxes.

Art Nouveau was not confined to the facades of the buildings alone. It spread to posters, furniture and permeated to the interiors, the bathrooms and even the kitchens of apartments! We see this in



School of Economics (above) and Riga School of Law building (below)

the gorgeous Art Nouveau Museum in Alberta Street, the building owned by Konstantin Peksens, another genius of Art Nouveau. There are stylised plants, pine cones, squirrels on the facade; windows have stained glass representing exotic plants and the spiral staircase has ornamental motifs on the ceiling.

Art Nouveau in Latvia went through a phase of 'National Romanticism', when Latvian architects introduced elements from ethnic mythology and folklore in to their designs.

Many of these buildings have a rough finish with sandstone and plaster and look much less ornate than their flamboyant

Art Nouveau counterparts. The recurring motifs in the Art Nouveau buildings had some meaning—lions symbolized safety and protection; women symbolised beauty. There are women's faces — smiling, shy and screaming in horror, kings and queens and even macabre dragons and wolves. Many of the buildings are today embassies, some like the Neiburgs building with a woman's head is a design hotel, others are apartment blocks or schools; unfortunately some are still crumbling from neglect.

Though many tourists come to Riga for the nightlife and cheap beer on lucrative airline deals from across Europe, Riga's eclectic architecture is a reason in itself to visit this historical city!



Many places to see around Gangtok

Q Currently I am posted in Gangtok and I wanted to know about where could I travel to from Gangtok? I have four days on hand and want to go to some places and do some sightseeing. Kindly suggest some good places.

Abhishek
A There are many attractions in and around Gangtok for you to see. You can go for a day's excursion to Baba Harbhajan temple, Changu Lake and Nathula Pass. For all this, you need to get the permit two days prior to your visit. Local sightseeing contains visiting flower gardens or shows, Rumtek Monastery, Ganesh Tok, Hanuman Tok etc. For shopping, you can go to MG Road and Lal Market.

You can also visit north Sikkim (Lachung, Yumthang Valley, Zero Point, Lachen, Gurudongmar Lake), which can be a five-day excursion if you want to cover both Lachung and Lachen.

Hope this helps.

What will be the flight and train charges? And how much time will it take for both the routes?

Aditi
A You must stay at least for four days (excluding the days of travel) to cover all the sightseeing (in a hectic manner). Ideally, I would recommend a week's stay. Do make it a point to visit the Peshwe Park Zoo. It is quite far off, covers a huge area, and worth visiting. The white tiger is simply superb.

At Pune, you could visit temples, forts and museum like Bhimashankar temple, Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum, Panshet Dam, Parvathi temple, Rajgad Fort and many more.

The Delhi-Pune-Delhi roundtrip air fare is around ₹ 6,500/- per head. The fastest train is Durgam Express travelling non-stop. The round trip train fare for 1AC is ₹ 7,000 (costlier than air travel) and for second tier AC, it is about ₹ 4,000. Three tier AC costs about ₹ 3,000.

HolidayIQ
www.holidayiq.com

Wear Suppandi on your sleeve

Amar Chitra Katha launches official range of T-shirts with organic clothing company to coincide with city's first Comic Con



Rochelle Pinto
rochelle.pinto@hindustantimes.com

Even if you can't tell the Green Hornet from Flash Gordon, there's no reason you can't be involved in the city's first Comic Con, at least sartorially. Organic clothing company DoUSpeakGreen, which retails online, has tied up with popular Indian comic Amar Chitra Katha, to be their official clothing partner, releasing a line of T-shirts that bear the series' most loved characters.

"The team at Amar Chitra Katha had approached us to design something for them before, so we had made limited edition pieces which went

Amar Chitra Katha told us they are participating at Comic Con, so we decided to make the line available at the event itself.

— Shishir Goenka, DoUSpeak Green

up for sale last week," reveals Shishir Goenka of DoUSpeak Green. "Then they told us that they would be participating at Comic Con, so we decided to expand the line, and make it available at the event itself."

The line features Gods like Lord Shiva and Krishna, along side characters from Indian history like Chanakya, all chosen because they are considered powerful masculine icons. T-shirts for kids



The line is available on DoUSpeakGreen.com for ₹ 790 (adult) and ₹ 570 for kids. It will also be available at the Comic Con, World Trade Centre, Nariman Point.

feature characters like the bumbling hunter Shikhar Shambu and India's most iconic sweet simpleton, Suppandi. "At the moment, we have nothing on offer for women," Goenka says, adding, "Since we settled on only a few designs in the beginning, we decided to rate the response and then decide on creating pieces for women. Though the T-shirts start from a size small to XXL and are fairly unisex in design."

Ask if they expect any trouble, given that India has not always been kind to those seeking to reinterpret its mythology, and he says, "We were very clear that the designs would only be released once they were approved of by the legal team. And we have taken pains to make sure they are non-controversial.

CASESTUDY

You are normal

Dr Kavan Lakdawala

A 20 year old complained about feeling sexually stimulated after surfing porn on the net for a few minutes. He said that the penis became erect and secretions followed. I reassured him that it is absolutely normal.

"Many people get sexual feelings upon hitting puberty. This is due to interplay of hormones. Sexual urges need to be satisfied from time to time. Self-stimulation is a healthy way to relieve this energy. Watching or reading sexually explicit material may be followed by arousal and



PICTURE FOR REPRESENTATION

ejaculation. This is indicative of a normally functioning genital system.

However, in a few, surfing becomes akin to sex addiction. They cannot live without it. Few may develop withdrawal pangs if they miss their daily dose of porn. This situation warrants psychiatric help. Try to involve with other productive hobbies."



SEX & THE CITY

I am a mother to a 10-month-old baby. Since his birth, I have not got my period. Are there chances of me being pregnant again?

Breastfeeding is a natural method of contraception. During the initial few months after childbirth, exclusive breastfeeding does increase levels of various hormones. Hence ovulation does not occur. However, once the frequency of breastfeeding reduces, the menstrual cycle returns to normal. There have been definite reports about pregnancy even during this time. Visit a doctor at the earliest.

I want to have sex with a friend and without a condom. Is it safe?

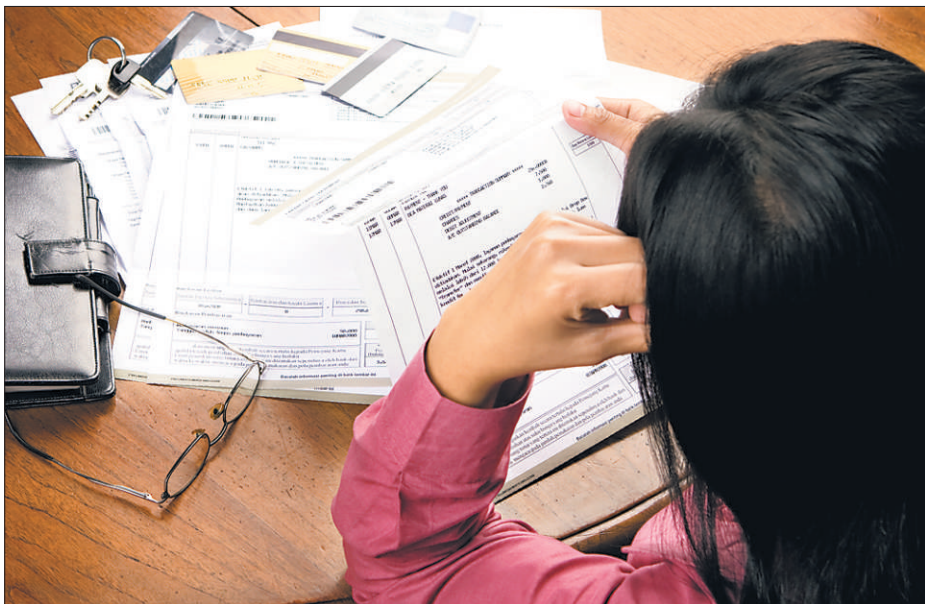
It is said that most humans are product of accidents. Please stick to condoms. Though not fool-proof, they offer additional protection against STDs. The safe period is usually the seven days before and after the girl has her menses. The days of the menses are also included

in the safe period. As the name implies, during this period there is little chance of a woman becoming pregnant even after unprotected sexual intercourse. This is one of the natural methods of contraception called the calendar method. Remember that all the above figures are prone to natural variations. It offers no protection against STD.

Is it fact that a girl has a better sex drive?

Women are aroused gradually and like to savour the moment. Men are tuned to go for the kill directly. Women do not want to stop till they are sexually satisfied, but majority of their partners are done and dusted. The human sexual drive begins from puberty and lasts till old age. It does fluctuate from time to time. In the olden days, it was believed that sexual drive reduces with increasing age. However, recent reports suggest that this is not the rule.

Mail your queries to Dr Kavan Lakdawala at: HT Media Limited, 2nd Floor, Mahalaxmi Engg Estate, Mahim (W), Mumbai: 400016; email: lakdawalakavan@gmail.com



Set reminders for regular payments like credit card or phone bills

Bid adieu to late bill payment, fines

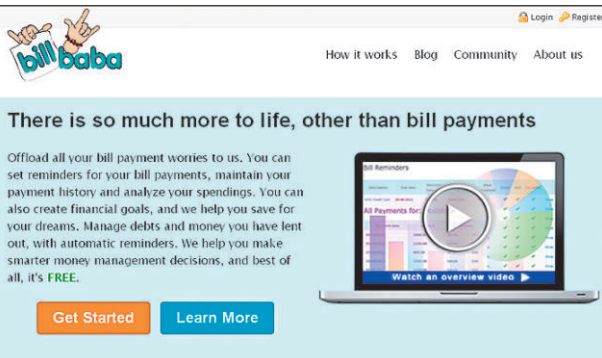
Website lets people monitor their bill's payment dates, send reminders to friends to return money and even offers a financial planner's services

Sneha Mahale
sneha.mahale@hindustantimes.com

Ever had to pay a humongous penalty for late bill payment or been embarrassed because you didn't return your friend's borrowed money in time? There's hope. Bill Baba has come to the rescue. The website that was started earlier this year reminds subscribers via email, SMS, Facebook or a combination of all three, about their bill's due date, as well as informs when it is time to pay money borrowed from a friend. If that's not enough, people can also sign up to remind their friends when to return money. The system has 600 subscribers.

"The average person spends hours tracking and paying bills. Service providers send reminders, but at the last minute when the bill's due date is near. Also, there is no centralised system for bill monitoring," says Sarika Saxena from Bill Baba.

As part of this service, people can set reminders for their regular payments like credit card or phone bills. The frequency of alerts too can be customised. This means that you could ask for multiple alerts on a single day,



a single alert daily or even one after a week. Once you complete the payment, you need to send an email saying your task is done and the alerts will stop. Apart from bills, you can also set reminders for tasks you tend to forget like returning borrowed books or picking up grocery.

If that's not all, you could also remind a friend who has borrowed money from you to pay up. "Borrowing and lending can become embarrassing for individuals. This helps prevent it," says Saxena. The website also has a feature that breaks down each bill, telling you how much you spend and where.

Bill Baba has moved out of the virtual world as well. The community on the website often leaves posts giving details of when their bill is

Make money

To help people realise their goals of buying a dream car or home, the website allows you to employ the services of a financial planner. The service is especially for those who want to go beyond fixed deposits or savings accounts. The first session is free, but there is a charge for every session after that.

For more info, log on to www.billbaba.com

due and where they are going to pay it. Other members heading in the same direction to pay their own bills lend a hand and clear the bill along with their own. "Thus you can harness the power of the community," says Saxena.