

# REVISITING THE PAST

Visit synagogues, eat Jewish cuisine and listen to Klezmer music in Kazimierz, Poland



The Old Synagogue

PHOTOS: KALPANA SUNDER

Kalpana Sunder

We are sitting at an outdoor table at the Jewish restaurant Ariel in the Jewish district of Krakow, Poland called Kazimierz. The witty waiter has worked on large cruise ships and regales us with stories of Indian guests on board. Inside the restaurant is a Fiddler On The Roof ambience with paintings of bearded rabbis covering the walls, seven-branched menorah candlesticks and a shelf of kitschy wooden dolls portraying

Jewish musicians. Before the Holocaust, Poland had the largest Jewish population in Europe. Of the six million Jews killed by the Nazis, almost half came from here. Kazimierz was an independent town, a vibrant Jewish quarter till the Second World War. It bears the name of its founder, King Casimir the Great, who had welcomed the Jews and granted them generous privileges. Another story goes that King Casimir wanted to house his lover Estereka in a separate part of town and that was the origin of this locality. During the communist era, Kazimierz was in

disrepair — a place that visitors shied away from. It started experiencing a renaissance thanks to Spielberg and Schindler's List which was shot largely here. Every year this area is the venue of a festival of Jewish culture with lectures, film showings and street happenings. Two great religions existed here for centuries: we see the Gothic church of Corpus Christi alongside synagogues. The Corpus Christi church, has a plain brick exterior in contrast to its gorgeous interiors with a golden boat in the pulpit, held up by mermaids. Legend goes that this church was formed on the spot where a robber who had

stolen a precious relic repented and left it behind. In the heart of the Jewish district stands defiantly the Remu'h Synagogue. Inside are rows and rows of Jewish tombstones, carefully restored after Nazi damage. At the other end is Krakow's largest synagogue, the Old Synagogue which has been made a museum. The main scene of action is Szeroka Street with its multi-hued, distressed-looking buildings with peeling fasades, restaurants offering Jewish fare and Klezmer music venues. Kazimierz is more than just a Jewish quarter today. It's the artsy side of Krakow. Come night, Kazimierz plays host to

hip cafés and is the place for the pub crawl crowds. There are atmospheric smoky cafes like Singers with old machines converted as tables and Alchemia with its candle lit tables and a huge replica of a Narnia wardrobe leading into another room. Dinner is at the Klezmer Hois restaurant with old world decor filled with lace doilies and sepia photographs of people from long ago. The restaurant serves Jewish food and has a talented trio playing Klezmer music. They play traditional Jewish melodies as well as an eclectic collection of music with varied influences. We are surprised to hear that all the

performers are Polish and have learnt Yiddish, and are trained musicians from the Krakow Music Academy. The next day we visit Podgorze, across the river where the Nazis herded the Jews in 1941 to establish the infamous ghetto. Many Jews were sent to a labour camp, others perished at Auschwitz. Today, Schindler's factory (in the movie) has been converted into a museum which offers a multimedia look into Krakow's experience under the Nazis. The outside world encroaches: a hypermarket across the road and the distracting sounds of traffic. Kazimierz and Podgorze have truly taken us back in time.



Restaurant offering Jewish fare



## Family Trip

### Q&A inbox

**Q** I am planning a trip to Nainital, Binsar and its surrounding areas with my family from April 22 to May 8. I am planning to spend a week in each of these places. All I want to know is whether seven days in each of these areas would be enough? I am with two small children (aged 5 and 2). We want to avoid lots of travelling.

**A** Vedraj I would suggest you check in at major locations and take short trips to nearby attractions. This would also help in avoiding the hassle of packing and unpacking a number of times.

There is no limit to the time one can plan for holidaying in the Himalayas. The more time you add, the more memorable it would be. Since you will be traveling with your family, spending time with them in the mountains would be an experience in itself.

I would suggest the following for you. Start with four days in Almora, visit Binsar and Mukteshwar in between for day trips or stay in Binsar for four days if you want to skip Mukteshwar.

Next stop in your itinerary can be Kasuani for three days, visit Ranikhet for a day trip you want.

After Kasuani, a five day stay in Nainital, have a day trip to nearby attractions. You can spend the rest of the day in Nainital, strolling in mall road, boating on the lake and enjoying the charm of the Himalaya's and Nainital.

Last, a two-day stay in the Jim Corbett sanctuary, will be a perfect way to end this journey. Or starting with Corbett may help you in acclimatizing as well.

**Q** I am planning to go to Delhi next month. My friends will be joining me there from different parts of the country. I wanted some details with regards to good pubs we can visit there. What would be the entry fees and how long will these places be open? If you could also provide me with details like transportation after a party, I would be really grateful. Waiting for a quick response.

**A** Mahesh Good to know that you are visiting the capital of India. There are many clubs in Delhi. A few are named below. There are lots more.

Blues in Outer Circle, Ruby Tuesday in Outer Circle, Aqua on Parliament Street, Spirit in CP above Bercos, Thugs, Hotel Broadway, Geoffrey's and many more.



## Switch off TV. Light up the sky.

Hindustan Times invites you to a spectacular laser and fireworks show on No TV Day.



On No TV Day Hindustan Times presents a two hour laser and firework show including dance performances by renowned dance troupes. The grand finale will be fireworks in the sky.

Date: 29th January  
Time: 6 pm to 8 pm  
Venue: Juhu Beach, Hotel Ramada Plaza parking lot.  
Entry: Free

It is time.



# Few sights grander than this Canyon

Shivangi Ambani-Gandhi

Escape the dazzling lights of Vegas for the magical landscapes of the desert lands beyond

You've seen it a million times already—in tourism brochures, in films, and on TV shows. A tourist magnet such as this one—over four million visitors come here each year—can turn most discerning travellers away. In peak season, it's hard to find a hotel room and some rafting trips have a year-long waiting list. Yet, the Grand Canyon and its almost equally inspiring neighbours in the Colorado Plateau can overwhelm the weariest of visitors.

The Grand Canyon National Park itself is part of the Grand Circle road trip that includes Zion NP's Emerald Pools, the quirky hoodoos of Bryce Canyon NP, Capitol Reef NP, The Arches NP and others. A quick browse through a government map will also reveal that much of the land in the state of Arizona is Navajo Indian reservation—a semi-autonomous territory, governed by the Navajo Indian tribes, the second-largest native tribes in North America. The stories of European domination of these peoples and the more recent re-establishment of their land rights form an important tale in the millennia-old narrative of these ancient lands.

You approach the Grand Canyon south rim from Vegas through nothingness—no other pit-stops, just a few small towns to get your fill of petrol and grab a quick bite. The park entry fee includes the frequent shuttle buses that run across the South Rim, stopping at all the look-outs—several of which are closed to private vehicles—and so we hopped on from the south entrance station.

Approaching the visitor center at Mather Point, you can almost look over the edge and onto the North Rim—



Grand Canyon

almost palpitating with anxiousness, I begin to run towards to edge, and then that's the jaw-drop moment. No image — still, moving or even IMAX — nor can my words, capture the vastness and the grandeur of the Grand Canyon. There are a lot of tourists around, but the immensity of what lies in front silences everyone—as if in a temple or a museum, people talk in hushed tones. Most are lost in a silent contemplation of the vast, deep canyon as the clouds rush past, the light smothering the rocky surface with hues indefinable. It is quite unfair to call this Red Rock Country—it's more like Indeterminable-Shades-of-Red Rock Country!

And there are other colours too. Sometimes you can spot the sparkling blue-green Colorado River meandering through—from this

distance, its delicate curves seem too tender to have carved out this mighty canyon. You can feel the river's power perhaps if you take the rafting trip—booked a year in advance of course.

The carving of the canyon though, is only the most

recent event, a geological blink of an eye in the two-billion-year long story from the collision and drifting apart of land masses, mountains rising and eroding. The sequence of lay-ers from bottom to top of the canyon unravels the history of the planet to those who can read it. And there is also the story of man—from Paleo-Indian spears about 12,000 years old to the more recent indigenous Hopi tribes that guided Spanish explorers here.

To end our day at the canyons, we drive to the Desert View Watchtower built in 1930 at the eastern

end of the south rim to provide uninterrupted westward views of the Grand Canyon. Each stone in the structure was hand-picked to ensure the old-worldly appearance of the exterior. Inside, viewing galleries wind along the round walls, covered in murals depicting Hopi mythology and religious ceremonies. The galleries lead up to the main observation deck at the top of the tower.

However, it was the view from the observation deck just outside the tower that will remain with me forever. It was about sunset time: the clouds had gathered again and shafts of light pierced through to dance with the browns and reds of the canyon. As if concluding the show with a bang, a single bolt of lightning thundered through, and the further edges of the canyon faded into ethereal shades of grey, before the dark slowly engulfed the rest of the landscape behind a curtain of the night sky, held up in place by the shimmering stars.

No image—still, moving or even IMAX — or words, capture its vastness and the grandeur

