

THIS FEELS LIKE WINTER

From a river cruise to an open-air art gallery and from a polar bear gathering to a tea-estate romance, choose from these offbeat vacation ideas this season.

Words Kalpana Sunder

POLAR BEAR SAFARI *Canada*

Head to Churchill, Manitoba, in December, to witness polar bears gathering along Hudson Bay waiting for the ice to form so they can hunt seals. Tundra Buggy Tours offers safe, up-close views, with rustic cabin stays. These specialised vehicles are designed for comfort and safety, allowing you to get close to the bears while remaining at a safe distance. In addition to polar bears, you might see other wildlife like arctic foxes, caribou, and various bird species.



Why Now

The best chance to see the bears.



Getting There

Fly from Winnipeg to Churchill; tour companies like Frontiers North Adventures organise safaris.



Must Do

Try Northern Lights viewing on clear winter nights.





Must Do

A tour of a tea garden to watch workers pluck leaves and see how they're transformed into aromatic tea.



LIVING ON A TEA ESTATE *Darjeeling*

What's a tea estate without a few ghost stories of English "babus" and planters' daughters? As the sun sets early in the hills, casting dark shadows over the rolling green bushes, the long nights are filled with such enchanting tales from the past, enhanced by crackling bonfires. Life at a Himalayan tea estate is idyllic, especially in Darjeeling, West Bengal, where stunning views of snow-draped peaks, manicured gardens, old cafes, and friendly locals create the perfect winter escape. Around 80 tea estates surround this hill station, offering colonial-style luxury, sunrise views, and relaxing activities like mountain walks, hikes, and brookside picnics. Glenburn Tea Estate, an hour from Darjeeling, offers romantic colonial cottages with four-poster beds, chintz, and lawns with a breathtaking view of Mt. Kanchenjunga. Hike the estate trails, tour the tea factory, or spend an afternoon by the charming river lodge.



Why Now

With temperatures below zero, Darjeeling is a lovely winter destination, and snowfall adds a magical touch. Christmas and New Year celebrations are vibrant.



Getting There

Darjeeling can be accessed by road via Siliguri, close to the Bagdogra airport.

CRUISING ALONG THE BRAHMAPUTRA

Guwahati

This mystical river flows as the lifeline of an ancient land, transcending human-drawn boundaries. Sailing along its waters is not just a vacation but a humbling journey through thriving cultures and surreal landscapes and living heritage. Experience it on a seven-night luxury cruise from Jorhat to Guwahati that reveals weavers' villages, settlements of the Mishing tribe, and Sibsagar, the ancient capital of the Ahom kings. One of the most captivating legacies of the dynasty is the two-storied Rang Ghar, said to be the first amphitheatre of Asia! Majuli, the

largest river island, captivates with Vaishnavite monasteries and mask-making traditions. These masks, made of cow dung, clay and straw, depict mythological characters. Buy a mask and watch a Bhaona dance performance, where masked dancers enact scenes from epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Next, a stop at Kaziranga National Park offers the chance to see the endangered one-horned rhino. The MV Mahabaahu cruise introduces Assam's vibrant culture with Bihu dance performances, kantha embroidery sessions, and local cuisine.



Why Now

Winter brings pleasant weather and bird migrations, with the Magh Bihu festival in January.



Getting There

Jorhat is about 300 km away.



Must Do

Experience the Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati.





TIME-TRAVEL *Shekhawati*



Getting There

Jaipur. Shekhawati is around 150 km away.



Must Do

Discover cenotaphs, wells, forts, and village life.



This winter, enjoy time-travel through an open-air art gallery in Rajasthan's hinterland - the underrated region of Shekhawati, where traditional havelis (mansions) blend history, mythology and modernity through exquisite frescoes. Built mostly between the 1750s and the 1930s by rich traders, these havelis are embellished with rich paintings, including a parade of decorated elephants and horses; decked-up ladies of the house and stately gentlemen! Towns like Mandawa boast vivid depictions on mansion walls, ceilings, and arches. In Fatehpur, visit Le Prince Nadine, a restored mansion by a French artist. Nawalgarh, "Town of Havelis," has museums in Ramnath Podar and Mohan Lal Sethi Havelis. The paintings are everywhere - corners, cornices, hanging ledges, door archways, ceilings and even under roofs! As you walk, impressive houses like the Jhunjhunwala Haveli almost sneak up on you, whispering their tales in your ears.



Why Now

Rajasthan is best explored in winter with pleasant temperatures.

CHRISTMAS SHOPPING *Germany*

What can spell Christmas more than traditional market hopping in Europe! In Germany, these seasonal markets are still rooted in ancient traditions - the air is filled with the aroma of regional culinary delights such as *glühwein* (spiced mulled wine), *stollen* (bread), and *bratwurst* (sausage). Cities like Munich, Dresden, and Nuremberg host markets with stalls selling handcrafted decorations, *glühwein*, *bratwurst*, and traditional stollen. The Christmas Museum in Rothenburg explores holiday traditions, while unique markets like Munich's Pink Christmas add modern charm. In Rothenburg try *weisser gluhwein*, made with white wine.



Getting There

Fly to Frankfurt and take a train or flight.



Why Now

No better time to explore the festive heritage of the country.



Must Do

Collect the unique *glühwein* mugs offered each year.



IndiGo Reach

Girl power