

#TRAVEL

Budget-friendly destinations in India for your November getaway

If you are also planning such a vacation, but without stretching your wallet, we are here to help you find the perfect places.



Jaipur, Rajasthan
As the crisp air fills the air of November, it's the ideal time to plan a trip to end the year on a great note. If you are also planning such a vacation, but without stretching your wallet, we are here to help you find the perfect places. Here, we have listed some of the pretty destinations that promise rich experiences at budget-friendly prices.

Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh



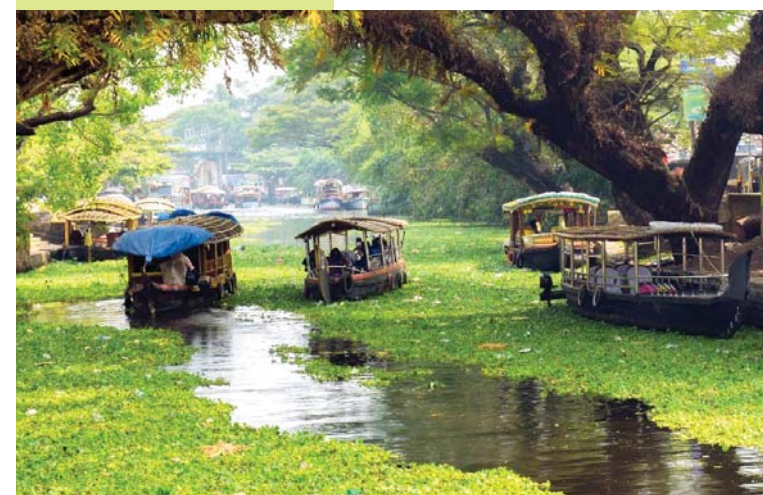
Famous for its stunning temples adorned with intricate sculptures, *Khajuraho* is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. November's pleasant weather is ideal for touring because of its milder weather. You can experience this historical treasure without going over budget. Thanks to reasonably priced hostels and homestays!

Rishikesh, Uttarakhand

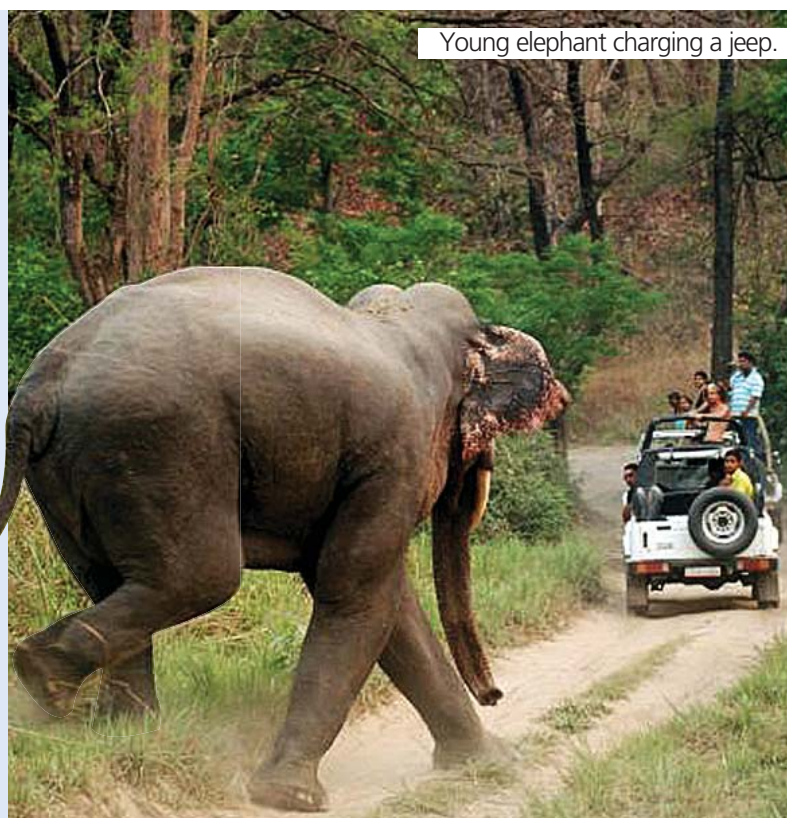
Dubbed the 'Yoga Capital of the World', *Rishikesh* is one of the go-to places that lure travellers with its serene surroundings and meditative atmosphere. Try river rafting, yoga retreats, and picturesque

Alleppey, Kerala

Known as the 'Venice of the East', *Alleppey* is famous for its serene backwaters and houseboat experiences. In November, the weather is ideal for cruising through the lush landscapes and enjoying the tranquil environment. Budget-friendly houseboat rentals and homestays make it easy to experience the beauty of Kerala without breaking the bank. Be sure to savour local delicacies at affordable eateries as you take in the stunning views.



Once I spotted a tiger-like-striper, but later on, it was found to be a hyena. From distance in dim light, one may get confused between tiger and hyena, as both the animals have off-white to golden coat and black stripes all over, except the fact that unlike tiger, hyena's dog-like-face is black in colour and devoid of stripes. Though, it was not far from us but the growing darkness caused this confusion. It is because of this similarity of stripes that often, hyena is mistaken to be a tiger by frightened villagers. It gets killed, even though, it is almost harmless, rather, a friend of humans as it keeps the area clean by eating out carcasses of dead animals.



Young elephant charging a jeep.



Sunayan Sharma
IFS (Retd.), Ex-field Director, Project Tiger, Sariska & Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur

We were trying to scan the jungle but could not notice anything interesting. Then, a mahout with few tourists came close to us. He knew Pushp Jain, my friend. He pointed towards a *haldu* tree, under which a middle-sized leopard was sitting quietly. It was almost camouflaged in the brown-black dry grasses and shade of the tree. Leopards are crepuscular. They are twilight hunters. It is part of their adaptation strategy for survival in tiger lands. Perhaps, this leopard was waiting for the sun to go down to hunt without attracting attention of any tigers in the area. With every growing minute, the sun was fading. The gypsy driver wanted to reach the Dhikala camp before sunset. He said that authorities are very strict, and as a rule, no vehicle or visitor/tourist should stay in the reserve, except at the permitted camps, after sunset. People not observing the rules were liable to punishment like debarring further entry in the reserve. The drivers were the worst affected for loss of their business as they were black-listed, along with their vehicles.

We too did not wish to annoy the authorities so, leaving the leopard-at-rest, we rushed back to Dhikala. With the sun now set at the Dhikala camp, the entire area had become even quieter than the day hours. An hour later, Ramanga, flowing in front of the rest house, got engulfed in darkness, but at places, its sand and pebbles were glittering. Sitting in the verandah, we were enjoying the quietness. Occasionally, some deer's barking could be heard in the distant valley. Rightly, Mr. Jim Corbett had called Dhikala as *heaven on earth*.

Hampi, Karnataka

Step back in time when at *Hampi*, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, known for its breathtaking ruins and historic temples. Explore the fascinating terrain, which includes the magnificent Virupaksha Temple and is dotted with boulders and antique buildings. November is ideal for touring because of its milder weather. You can experience this historical treasure without going over budget. Thanks to reasonably priced hostels and homestays!

Puducherry

Discover *Puducherry's* captivating fusion of French and Indian traditions. It's a joy to be in this place, dotted with peaceful beaches, lively bougainvillea, and lovely streets. The weather in November is ideal to explore its French Quarter, and enjoy leisurely strolls along the Promenade Beach. If you are planning a budget trip, its affordable guest houses and neighbourhood restaurants, that serve delectable South Indian food, will not break your bank.

Darjeeling, West Bengal

Darjeeling, with its stunning tea gardens and breathtaking views of the Himalayas, offers a perfect escape. In November, the weather is crisp and clear, ideal for enjoying the famous toy train ride and visiting Tiger Hill for a stunning sunrise. Numerous budget hotels and homestays provide comfortable stays without breaking the bank.

Certainly, such a fulfillment of spirit can be offered by rare places like this only. We were so lucky to stay here and enjoy the heavenly bliss of nature. There could be no other way better than this to welcome in the new year. We had two more days with us here, which we enjoyed to our heart's content in these whispering woods of Corbett park. Overnight stay in wilderness has always been highly exciting to me. It is so relaxing and blissful. The tranquility of the jungle, all around, gets me freed from worries of routine worldly affairs. The solitude of the calm atmosphere provides a unique opportunity of self-realisation and intimate moments with the soul. The long journey from Jaipur to Corbett, and then, day-long jungle visit on *kutchha* tracks in the gypsy was certainly a bit tiring for my age. Therefore, the opportunity to relax in comfortable

A huge fishing owl, perching on a *haldu* (*Adina cordifolia*) tree close to rest house, suddenly made a loud hooting call, which echoed in the entire residential campus of Dhikala. It is then that the rest house *chowkidar* informed us about a film on Corbett reserve being screened in the open air theatre, in the Dhikala complex itself.

Muddhas, made of sticks of *Sacra munja* grass tufts, was highly rewarding. From our seats placed in the balcony of the legendary forest rest house of Dhikala, the Ramanga river, spread over a width of more than a kilometer, was displaying her charms. In the late hours of the evening, the entire place seemed to be wrapped in a blanket of mist and darkness. Though, it was an ideal time for leopard-like-crepuscular to embark on their hunting expedition but the magnetic attraction of the river kept drawing all the wild creatures, big or small, towards the water stream, irrespective of the fear of the carnivores. Typical brief alarm calls, emitted by chital and barking deer, had started echoing, piercing through the silence of the quiet twilight hours. On every such call, using our binoculars, we were scanning the length and breadth of the river, in the hope of sighting



Sambar Deer in Jim Corbett National Park.

The Mist, The River, The Pebbles... And The Wild

#THE WILDS OF WILD



An Elephant herd in Jim Corbett National Park.

some tiger/ leopard in the vicinity. Once I spotted a tiger-like-striper, but later on, it was found to be a hyena. From distance in dim light, one may get confused between tiger and hyena, as both the animals have off-white to golden coat and black stripes all over, except the fact that unlike tiger, hyena's dog-like-face is black in colour and devoid of stripes. Though, it was not far from us but the growing darkness caused this confusion. It is because of this similarity of stripes that often, hyena is mistaken to be a tiger by frightened villagers. It gets killed, even though, it is almost harmless, rather, a friend of humans as it keeps the area clean by eating out carcasses of

this programme. After all, the dealers had been invited primarily for this entertainment only. The wildlife reserves are important eco-tourism sites. Therefore, tourism inside and around these must strictly be regulated to ensure complete serenity.

Next day, riding the gypsy early morning, we resumed our jungle visit. This time we decided to move towards the northern side. It was freezing cold at this hour in last December. Though, we had warm clothes yet the chill was penetrating our bodies, piercing through the clothes. In the middle of the road, we found some pigs cuddled into one huge lump to evade cold. Surprisingly, the animals paid no heed to the closely approaching vehicle. They did not seem interested in leaving their comfort, in spite of the clear threat of being crushed. But the clever driver steered through with utmost care, lest they get hit. On our right side were few shrubs having orange-like fruits. The driver told us that they were edible and the locals call them *santra*. I examined one. Yes, it could be orange but my jungle experience stopped me from tasting the fruit. Certainly, it is not advisable to take chance by eating any jungle fruit lest it contains poisonous substance.

While trying to cross the river, almost in the middle of the river, we found an old wooden bridge half-submerged in the water. Mist had engulfed the entire river and the valley but the gypsy track was visible. The mesmerizing scene, all around, inspired us to click our cameras incessantly. After crossing the waters, we entered the wooded forest. The towering grass on our left offered excellent hideout to all kinds of animals. Here, we found two trails of pugmarks, indicating presence of two tigers in the area. We tried to locate the tigers by following these trails but could not succeed. They must have disappeared into the woods. We traversed quite a big chunk of the for-

Carl Sagan Day



Always having a keen mind for astronomy and science, Carl Sagan spent his life pursuing education and research in the world of space and planetary discoveries. Though, he encouraged skeptical and critical thinking, Sagan was a personality, who often considered thinking creatively, particularly, when it came to the possibility of life on other planets. Some of his most important contributions include the discovery of the high temperatures on the surface of the planet Venus, as well as understanding of the seasonal changes on the planet Mars, and the comprehension of the atmospheres of both Jupiter and Venus.



PART:2

Bull Elephant.

run very professionally. They gave good food at reasonable cost. The complex had clean toilets as well. I always wonder as to why can we not develop such eco-friendly complexes at other reserves? Such basic amenities seem utmost essential when it is a jungle trip of three hours or more.

After lunch, quickly, we headed back to the forest, where we had the tiger sighting this morning. Now, there were few more tourist gypsies. After an hour's tracking, suddenly, we could spot a fresh trail of pugmarks of three tigers. A close observation suggested movement of a mother with two young cubs. While we were busy tracking the trail, a gypsy, loaded with tourists, reached

us. The tourists, clad in multi-coloured dresses, were beaming with pleasure. They had sighted this trio, half-an-hour ago. Seeing the tourists, the mother had vanished into deeper jungle to ensure safety of her cubs. Though, our driver was cursing our luck, but we were quite content to see the trail of the big cats. In fact, to me, the presence of the tiger in the area in the form of pugmarks, alarm calls or tiger's vocalisation is more thrilling than the actual sighting of the tiger.

The winter sun sets early in the jungles, reducing visiting hours. So, we had to rush to the camp to catch the elephant trip, pre-arranged by us to track the western and southern forests. The elephant ride proves excellent opportunity to locate animals, hidden under cover of trees and tall grasses. Our expert mahout took us through the grasslands, though dry now, but packed with spotted deer, barking deer and several other herbivores. In Corbett, though, the rare *hog deer* can also be located, but *sambar* sighting is quite uncommon, especially in the Dhikala area. Generally, the sambar prefers to stay in hilly areas and not the grasslands. We passed through a man-made hide, which was concealed fully in the woods. I recalled how in my last visit, in the summer of 1993, being the special guest of Shri A. S. Negi, the then Director of Corbett, I had enjoyed the special privilege of watching several animals and birds from this hide (*machan*) for good three hours. For photo-hungry-wildlife-enthusiasts, these hides are most preferred places in a reserve. But seldom,

tourists are permitted by the management to use these hides, due to security concerns. An elephant ride also provides rare opportunity of penetrating interiors of jungles without causing disturbance to the wildlife. It may be interesting to learn that in reserves like Corbett, though, a tiger may safely be tracked, followed and sighted from elephant back, but a tiger show like the reserves of Madhya Pradesh (MP) cannot be organized by circumventing a tiger with the help of three-four elephants. The mystery behind this is that in MP, forests are devoid of wild elephants, therefore, tigers have not been able to test their power in duels against the elephants and are scared of the size of these giants. But in elephant countries, the tiger has decisively established its superiority over all the animals, including elephants, causing them to maintain respective dis-

though Corbett possesses a good number of Kalij, but by nature, it is a shy bird. Certainly, we were extremely lucky that these glossy blackish blue-grey birds, with white crest and inverted V-shaped tail, leisurely crossed our road, displaying their charms for our eyes to feast upon and our cameras to capture a lifelong memory.

ance from tigers lest they are attacked. The tourists, especially in gypsies, should also be careful against wild elephants and tuskers, in particular. The lonely *tuskers* are generally rogues and one must keep safe distance from them, even on elephant back. Apart from elephants, other wild animals may also prove dangerous if they are taken lightly by any person. In Corbett, many accidents have occurred, where people have lost their lives at the hands of wild animals. In 1965, David Hunt, a famous Ornithologist and Bird-watching tour guide was killed by a tiger. Unfortunately, he flouted the reserve rules by getting down from his vehicle, in the midst of a jungle, to take picture of a tiger. This misadventure cost him his life. In the wilderness, one must essentially follow jungle rules to avoid any mishap.

The low-lying southern side of Ramanga river, near Kalagarh



Elephant Family in Jim Corbett National Park.

area, used to support an excellent population of *swamp deer*, a rare species. Also, hog deer, too, had great preference for the low height grasses of this low-lying riverine area spread over around 80 sq. km. To the misfortune of these creatures, in the years 1961-74, a huge irrigation dam and residential colony for the workforce got constructed by the government at Kalagarh. Consequently, a huge chunk of their habitat got submerged. I also supported the conservationists, who fought tooth and nail against the government, to stop this scheme but to no avail.

Certainly, it was an irreparable loss to these species, but perhaps, the almighty nature had some other plans, not known to us, the mortals. Over a period of time, this Ramanga reservoir proved a great wintering ground for the long-ranging migratory water birds, enhancing the value of the reserve many-fold.

On the third day while going back to Ram Nagar, in between Khinanauli and Sarpduli, we were greeted by a train of beautiful *Kalij* pheasants. Though Corbett possesses a good number of Kalij, but by nature, it is a shy bird. Certainly, we were extremely lucky that these glossy blackish blue-grey birds, with white crest and inverted V-shaped tail, leisurely crossed our road, displaying their charms for our eyes to feast upon and our cameras to capture a lifelong memory. This white-crested *Kalij* pheasant (*Lophura leucomelanus hamiltonii*) of Western Himalayas is one of the nine known sub-species.

The Jim Corbett reserve, stretched between a height of 400 mt and 1200 mt, is a treasure trove of mammals, birds, amphibians and reptiles. This is one of the most sought-after destinations for the wildlife buffs. Its magical landscape is home to more than 200 tigers, ranking it among the top tiger reserves in India. I, an old wildlifer, also have a lot to learn from every trip, that I make, to this crown of Himalayas.

Concluded.

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#RESEARCH Reduced Risk of Type-2 Diabetes

The manner, in which coffee is prepared, may impact its health benefits.



A new study published in *Clinical Nutrition* and funded by the Institute for Scientific Information on Coffee (ISIC) has found that coffee consumption may help reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes (T2D), mediated by differences in inflammatory biomarkers in the body. The research assessed the underlying mechanisms by which coffee consumption may help to reduce T2D risk, and found that lower subclinical inflammation may partially explain the association.

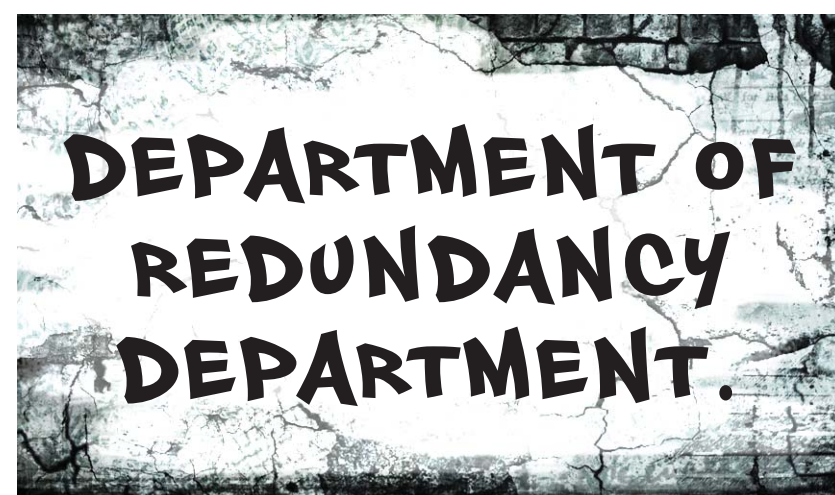
T2D is partly considered an inflammatory disease, thus, by researching coffee's effect on inflammation biomarkers such as C-reactive protein (CRP), which increases when there is inflammation in the body, the study sought to understand the underlying mechanisms linking higher coffee consumption with a lower risk of T2D.9.

Using data from the UK Biobank (n=45,368) and the Rotterdam Study (n=7,111), researchers confirmed that one cup per day increase in coffee consumption was associated with a 4.6% lower risk of T2D. It also predicted further possible favourable impact such as lower insulin resistance, lower CRP, lower leptin and higher adiponectin concentrations in cohort participants. Adiponectin is a hormone that regulates glu-



Elephant Family in Jim Corbett National Park.

THE WALL



BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman