

#SERVICES

These Are Yours On The Indian Train  
Essential Services Offered by Indian Railways



Indian Railways and its ticketing platform, IRCTC, offer a variety of services designed to enhance passenger comfort and safety throughout their journey. From affordable accommoda-

Comfortable Stay Options: Dormitories and Retiring Rooms

For passengers with long layovers or who need a rest between connecting trains, Indian Railways provides dormitories and retiring rooms at many major stations. Dormitories are budget-friendly shared accommodations with basic bedding and amenities, perfect for solo travelers or those on a tight schedule. Retiring

Secure Your Belongings: Locker and Cloakroom Facilities

At many stations, Indian Railways offers locker and cloakroom services for temporary baggage storage. This is especially handy if you have a long wait at the station or want to explore without carrying heavy luggage. Cloakrooms allow storage of

Assistance When You Need It: Medical Emergencies on Trains

Medical emergencies can occur anytime during travel, and Indian Railways ensures passengers have access to prompt medical aid. Train staff are trained in basic first aid and can assist passengers who fall ill. In serious sit-

Travel with Peace of Mind: Free Travel Insurance

When booking tickets through the IRCTC platform, passengers can opt for travel insurance that provides coverage against accidental injury or death during the journey. This insurance is available for confirmed and

Food During Delays: Complimentary Meals

Indian Railways understands the inconvenience caused by train delays. For premium trains like Rajdhani, Shatabdi, and Duronto, if the train is delayed by more than two hours, passengers are entitled

Compensation for Delays: Refund Policies

In the event that your train is delayed by three hours or more, you have the right to cancel your ticket and claim a full refund. Passengers can file a Ticket Deposit Receipt (TDR) online via the IRCTC

Additional Passenger Benefits

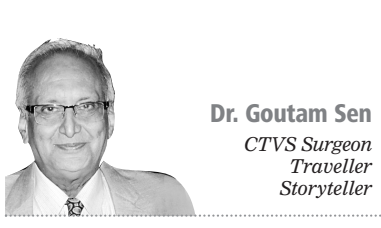
Beyond the above, Indian Railways provides several other helpful amenities. **Waiting Rooms:** Access to waiting rooms with seating and sometimes air-conditioning is provided for ticket holders at many stations.

**Complaint Redressal:** Passengers can report grievances via helpline 139, online portals, or station complaint boxes. **Wheelchair Assistance:** Available at most major stations to aid differently-abled

and elderly passengers. Knowing about these free and paid services from Indian Railways and IRCTC empowers you to travel smarter and more comfortably. Whether you need a place to rest, a secure spot for your bags, emergency medical help, or compensation for delays, Indian Railways has systems in place to support you. Always check the specific amenities available at your boarding and transit stations to plan your journey better.



tions to emergency medical assistance and compensation for delays, knowing these services can make your travel experience much smoother. Here's a comprehensive guide to some of the key services available to train travelers in India.



he ancestral home, Sansar Villa, was built on an elevated area in the middle of the giant plot gifted to the Dewan of Jaipur in the late 19th century. Many generations have lived in this place which consisted of two buildings.

The big central one surrounded by garden and vegetable patches was the residential building. It was enlarged as the family grew larger. The other smaller building in the front on one side was called the 'Baitakhana.' It was there from the beginning. This was the place where formal meetings of visitors and hosting of grand dinners were conducted. At times, distinguished visitors even resided there. As children, we often peeped behind the large doors to see the elegantly dressed Indians and White men who came to dine. As a family, it was not our practice to dine there.

This time, it was decided that when the family gathered for Durga Puja, we would make an exception and have a really formal meal there. The one with the best crockery and cutlery! The menu was regal, well thought out and cooked over many days. A whole troop of cooks followed mother's instruction to serve a meal gargantuan in proportion with all kinds of meats and favourite vegetables for each child followed by various Bengali sweets, Gokul Pithe, Sandesh and Pati Shanta were on the list. Caramel pudding was an oddity.

We began early and ate with a gusto not commonly seen. The dinner lasted long in to the night! The mahogany dining table, a silent witness to countless gatherings, groaned under the weight of empty plates and forgotten crumbs. The last remnants of a feast, a half-eaten roti, a lone dal bowl and a scattered array of pickle jars, lay like a

to free meals onboard. IRCTC staff distribute meals that typically include staples like rice, pulses, pickles, tea, and coffee. This service helps alleviate hunger during unforeseen delays and ensures passengers remain comfortable.

website or app. This policy encourages accountability and offers financial protection to travelers affected by significant delays. For delays shorter than three hours, refunds are generally not available.

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battlefield after a truce. The sweets remained to be savoured at a slower pace. The formal dinner was long over, but the family remained, a constellation of four siblings and their spouses held in orbit by a force more potent than gravity: sobremesa.

Sunil, the eldest, whose hair had started to recede, leaned back in his chair, a contented sigh escaping his lips. "I swear, Mom's aloo sabzi tastes better now than it ever did."

His younger sister, Anjali, a successful architect with a sharp mind and an even sharper wit, scoffed good-naturedly.

"That's because you've been eating bland, overpriced restaurant food for the past ten years, blai. Nobody seems to cook in your household." She cared little at the lifted eyebrows of her elder Bhabhi!

The third sibling, the ever-jovial and single Rohan, chuckled as he reached for another helping of the leftover mango pickle. "Don't listen to her, Sunil. She's just jealous as she can't cook like Mom."

"And you, Rohan," their youngest sister, Priya, chimed in, a mischievous glint in her eyes. "You're just trying to distract us from the fact that you've finished off all the pickle."

Laughter filled the room, a warm, melodic sound that seemed to chase away the years of separation. They had grown up within these very walls, their lives a tapestry woven with shared memories, triumphs and heartbreaks. The house itself felt alive, each creaking floorboard and faded wallpaper a testament to their history. The marble mantelpiece, with giant white marble flower vases on both sides of the large brass framed picture of Sansar Chandra Sen looking down, benignly gave an additional glow to the room. The two large sideboards stacked with treasures of various dishes gave a homely atmosphere. The waiting staff had long disappeared, as if aware that this was a very private and intimate moment.

The conversation meandered like a lazy river, drifting from the mundane to the profound. They talked about their childhood, a time when the world was a simpler place, where their biggest concern was whose turn it was to close all the

Dad's coffee with a cup of hot tea," Sunil confessed, his voice a conspiratorial whisper. "He just took a sip and said, 'Huh, this coffee tastes a bit weak today,' and then just drank the whole thing." The others stared at him in disbelief. "You did that?" Anjali exclaimed, a mix of horror and amusement on her face. "And he never found out?" Sunil shook his head, a smug smile on his lips. "Never. He thought it was just a bad batch of coffee."

Rohan, not to be outdone, told the story of the time he and Sunil secretly hosted a party in the house when their parents were away for the weekend. "We told them we were



Sobremesa



#FAMILY



doors at night. "Remember that time, we tried to climb onto the roof to get the cricket ball?" Rohan reminisced, a wide grin spreading across his face. "Priya, you were so scared, you almost cried."

Priya's eyes widened in mock indignation. "I did not! I just said I didn't want to get yelled at by Dad." "And then you slipped and landed right in Mom's rose bushes," Anjali added, her laughter echoing in the quiet room. "She was furious, but Dad just pretended he didn't see anything." A collective wave of nostalgia washed over them. They remembered building forts out of bed sheets and pillows, turning the living room into a magical kingdom. They remembered late-night study sessions fueled by masala and endless cups of chai. They remembered the hushed conversations they had on the terrace, their dreams and fears whispered into the cool night air. The topic shifted to mischief they thought their parents never knew about.

"I remember I once switched Dad's coffee with a cup of hot tea," Sunil confessed, his voice a conspiratorial whisper. "He just took a sip and said, 'Huh, this coffee tastes a bit weak today,' and then just drank the whole thing." The others stared at him in disbelief. "You did that?" Anjali exclaimed, a mix of horror and amusement on her face. "And he never found out?" Sunil shook his head, a smug smile on his lips. "Never. He thought it was just a bad batch of coffee."

Rohan, not to be outdone, told the story of the time he and Sunil secretly hosted a party in the house when their parents were away for the weekend. "We told them we were

building a life with someone. Anjali, who had chosen to focus on her career, defended her decision to not marry with a quiet confidence. Rohan, still single, joked about his 'bachelor for life' status, but a hint of longing in his eyes gave him away. Priya, the last to get married, spoke of the beautiful and messy journey of finding your soulmate.

Their spouses, who had been listening with a mixture of amusement and fascination, now joined in, sharing their own perspectives and anecdotes. The circle grew wider, the conversation more inclusive. They were no longer just a family of four, but a larger, more complex unit, bound not just by blood, but by love and shared experiences.

As the hours passed, the moon rose high in the night sky, casting a silver glow through the window. The candles on the table had guttered down to stubs, their flickering flames casting dancing shadows on the walls. No one wished to get up. The stories flowed, one tale after another, each one a thread in the rich tapestry of their lives.

Sunil confessed to a childhood mischief they all thought the parents never knew about: he once hid a stray puppy in the garden shed, feeding it scraps from the dinner table for a week before their father, a dog lover himself, found it and officially welcomed it into the family. The others were shocked and amused, their laughter a mix of surprise and fondness.

Rohan recalled a secret pact he and Anjali had made in their teenage years. If they were ever in trouble, they would lie for each other, no matter what. The pact was tested many times, and they always stood by it, their silent conspiracy a source of strength and comfort. Anjali's eyes welled up with tears as she recalled a time when Rohan took the blame for a broken vase, saving her from their mother's wrath.

Priya, the quietest of the bunch, surprised them all with a story of her own. In her college days, she had a secret part-time job as a barista to save up for a trip to Paris, a trip she never told her parents about. She revealed that she finally went last year, and it was a "dream

models slowly evolving into masterpieces. Rohan, ever the social butterfly, regaled them with tales of his fraternity life, the endless parties and the friendships he forged that lasted a lifetime. Priya, the baby of the family, spoke of her own college experience, a mix of nervousness and excitement as she navigated a new city and new friendships.

From college, the conversation naturally transitioned to their careers. Sunil, now a respected engineer, spoke of the challenges and rewards of his work. Anjali, a renowned architect, shared her passion for creating spaces that were both beautiful and functional. Rohan, who had started his own business, talked about the joys and heartbreaks of entrepreneurship.



Mahishadal Rajbari at Mahishadal Town under Purba Medinipur district in West Bengal.

Celebrating the Ocean's Most Intelligent Invertebrate

Observed every year on October 8, World Octopus Day honours the mysterious and highly intelligent octopus, a creature known for its remarkable problem-solving skills, colour-changing abilities, and unique three-heart circulatory system. The day highlights the importance of marine conservation and the need to protect delicate ocean ecosystems where these fascinating animals thrive. From their incredible camouflage techniques to their ability to squeeze through tiny spaces, octopuses showcase nature's creativity and adaptability. World Octopus Day encourages people to learn more about ocean life, reduce plastic waste, and support sustainable seafood practices to safeguard marine biodiversity for future generations.



#VITTORIA COLONNA

First woman poet of 16th century!

The book chronicles Colonna's development as a writer, her grief over the death of her husband, and her friendship with Michelangelo, with whom she carried on a long and moving correspondence

A new book just published by Macmillan introduces readers to Vittoria Colonna, a 16th-century writer who was the first woman to publish a book of poems in Italy.

Little known and long neglected, she channelled her grief about her husband's death and profound religious yearnings into sonnets that inspired women writers for centuries. Earlier this year, Ramie Targoff, a professor of

English at Brandeis University, published a biography of the poet: 'Renaissance Woman: The Life of Vittoria Colonna.' The book chronicles Colonna's development as a writer, her grief over the death of her husband, and her friendship with Michelangelo, with whom she carried on a long and moving correspondence. The following is a sample of her writing, a poem titled 'Di cosi nobil fiamma Amor mi cinsc' (which Targoff translated):

Love wrapped me in so noble a flame  
That even once spent it continues to burn.  
Nor do I fear new fire, since the first  
Is so strong it extinguishes all other.  
So rich a bond ties me to that fine yoke,  
That my heart burns all lesser chains.  
It feels no longer either hope or fear,  
Since one fire inflames it, one knot binds it tight.  
A single pungent arrow afflicts my breast  
So that it keeps alive the immortal wound,  
It shields all other love from entering.  
Love consumed the passion where once he lit it,  
He broke the bow with his enduring shot,  
Melted all other knots in tying this one.

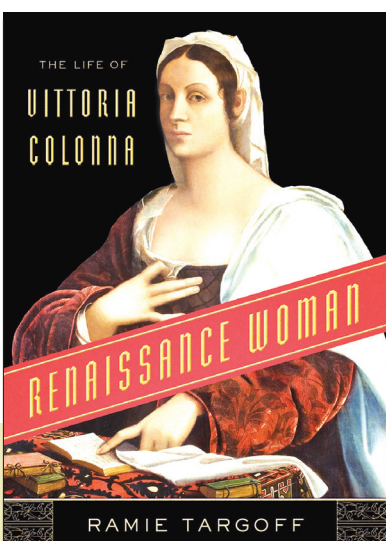
The New Yorker called Targoff's book a 'richly realized biography.' A reviewer in the New York Times wrote, "Vittoria Colonna has always deserved to be better known. Ramie Targoff's fine book will surely make that happen." Here, Targoff answers questions about the book, her work, and Colonna.

What motivated you to write this book?

I think this is a moment in which a lot of people are asking what role women played in our past. There are so many stories that haven't been told. My book allows you to glimpse history through a female lens. Colonna was quietly involved, but absolutely central, to all the things hap-

Why do you find her poetry so engaging?

Colonna wrote two books of sonnets, one mourning her husband after he passed away, about dealing with her grief. She wrote another set of 103 poems, which she gave to Michelangelo, and then, when she was in Manhattan, and they dedicated a whole part of the gallery to his friendship with Vittoria Colonna. A lot of people saw her name, and she was featured in the New York Times review of the show. I think those things help. The book I wrote is for non-academics to read, meaning I didn't do a lot of intense analysis of poetry. Normally, when critics are writing about poems, they do a line by line reading, but there's almost none of that in this book. The book is a narrative history, so, poems come along to illustrate the material, but I don't do poetic analysis. The book reads fast, it's meant to be enjoyed, not studied. It's scholarly because so much research went into it, but I write only to vent my inward pain." She says that she's writ-



What do you think she would have thought of your book?

I think she'd be delighted. My book presents her in a very sympathetic way but also in a very complex way as a person who had real struggles. The idea that she was just a saint diminishes her. That's not all of who she was. At the same time, I didn't want to represent her as a person who was just struggling all the time. She was a very formidable person, who also had a lot of grief. This book represents many different facets of her life, with sympathy but also with objectivity.

What's your next project?

Because of this work on Vittoria Colonna, I started getting more interested in women's writing. I want to write a composite biography of three or four extraordinary women who wrote at the time of Shakespeare who we don't know about. If you asked someone who had taken a college English class on Shakespeare to name a woman from that time, they typically can only think of Queen Elizabeth or fictional characters in Shakespeare's plays. I want to change that.

By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

BABY BLUES



ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman