

HERITAGE COMES FIRST

BENGAL DAILY



WEST BENGAL: HERITAGE STATUS PLEA FOR SANDAKPHU LAND ROVERS

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KOLKATA: With the number of Land Rovers—which have been ferrying tourists and trekkers between Maneybhanjan and Sandakphu and then to Phalut for decades—dwindling, their owners have decided to approach the state government to seek help for conserving and securing the heritage tag for the vintage vehicles on the lines of Darjeeling Himalayan Railway. After a gap of two months, Sandakphu opened for tourists on Friday and four vehicles carrying at least 20 Bengal tourists departed for the state's highest point.

In the past five years, the number of Land Rovers has shrunk from over 50 to around 39. Most of these vehicles made been made between 1954 and 1957. After a key meeting of the Land Rover Owners' Association (LROA), its co-ordinator Anil Tamang said the vehicles that have been traversing tough terrains to take travellers to Sandakphu and Phalut deserve to be preserved.

In the 32 km drive from Manebhanjan at 1,928 m to Sandakphu at 3,636 m, these vehicles scale 1,708 m. The next 21 km from Sandakphu to Phalut at 3,600 m is a long stretch across boulders. "The Land Rovers have been here for around 70 years. We want the fleet to stay fighting fit," said Tamang.

"With spares difficult to source, it is becoming expensive to maintain the vehicles and many have junked the vehicles. If the last lot is not conserved, the fleet will be lost forever," said Suraj Gurung, an owner. The owners had decided to approach Mamata Banerjee three years ago but the pandemic had scuppered their plans. A heritage tag, they feel, will pique the curiosity of tourists.

SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL GOALS
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BANGLA ORIGINS

The name Bengal, also referred to as Bangla, has its roots in the ancient kingdom of Vanga or Banga, as mentioned in early Sanskrit texts. By the 4th century CE, the region came under the Gupta empire rule led by Samudra Gupta. Subsequently, it was governed by the Pala dynasty. From the early 13th century until the mid-18th century, Bengal was under Muslim rule, sometimes under the Delhi sultanate's influence and often under independent rulers until British control was established. However, Bengal also saw other European influences, with Hooghly hosting a Portuguese trading post until 1632, Hooghly-Chinsura being the Dutch post until 1825, Shrirampur the Danish post until 1845, and Chandernagore remaining under French rule until 1949.

The Battle of Plassey

In Indian history, the Battle of Plassey holds great significance as a pivotal event. It signified the British East India Company's triumph over the Nawab of Bengal, Siraj-ud-Daulah.

On 23 June 1757, near Plassey village, this battle unfolded, resulting in a decisive victory for the British and their subsequent dominance over Bengal. This victory marked the initiation of British governance in India.

The Battle of Plassey stands as a landmark moment in Indian history, as it set the stage for British rule in India, ultimately leading to their dominion over the entire country.



Chandannagar: A walk on the French side

Ayandrali Dutta

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As you stroll down the strand at Chandannagar, larger than life mansions and other architectural

beauties with a strong French influence catch your attention. This little town with its magnificent buildings and boulevards that have stood the test of time, is Bengal's French secret.

Located about 35 kilometres north of Kolkata stands this former French colony that was established in 1673 for trade purposes; it remained a French colony till 1951. It makes for an interesting day trip from Kolkata with its gorgeous mansions, heritage architecture, and museums located along a promenade by the banks of the Ganges. The Chandannagar Strand happens to be the hub of the town. At the mid-point of the strand stands the Durgacharan Rakshit Ghat, built in 1920. Nearby is a gate constructed in 1937 that has the French Revolution slogan "liberté, égalité, fraternité" (liberty, equality and fraternity) etched on it.



Among the other notable buildings on the strand is the Dupleix Palace, which houses some rare artefacts. Now converted into a museum, it also houses a French-language school. A few steps ahead is a distinct red building—the French Fort, now a court. And almost 50 metres from there is the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church.

TRAVEL

Tourism in West Bengal is upcoming rapidly and people have started thronging to the state to explore the wide gamut of destinations that it has to offer. Nature enthusiasts, adventure seekers, art and culture lovers, it has something for everyone. Let us see some of the few places you can explore in your itinerary next time you visit Bengal.

MIRIK

Mirik is a lovely little hill station known for its serene lakes and lush tea gardens. The Sumendu Lake, is a major attraction where visitors can enjoy leisurely strolls and paddleboat rides. It is surrounded by a garden on one side and pine trees on the other side with an arching footbridge called Indreni Pull linking both the sides. Apart from the lake, there are tea gardens, monasteries and temples, orange orchards, flower gardens including orchids etc.



SHANKARPUR

Shankarpur, a destination less frequented by tourists, is known for its untouched white sandy Shankarpur beach and its refreshing cold waves possess a soothing quality that can help ease a troubled mind. As a fishing harbor, Shankarpur offers the opportunity to observe fishermen setting out on their boats every morning with expansive nets. Additionally, you can embark on a brief tour to witness the vibrant red crabs that inhabit Shankarpur. Tajpur and Mandarmani beaches, both offering equally peaceful settings.

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BISHNUPUR

Bishnupur is truly a hidden gem waiting to be explored. As you wander through the historical sites, you'll be transported back in time, surrounded by the intricate terracotta architecture that tells stories of a bygone era. The Rasmancha temple, standing tall since 1600, is a testament to the rich cultural heritage of Bishnupur, with its exquisite terracotta artistry that will leave you in awe. Venture further and you'll discover the enchanting Jorebangla Temple. Madan Mohan Temple and many more, each offering a glimpse into the artistic marvels of Bengali architecture.



GI TAGS

Geographical Indication (GI) is a term or symbol assigned to specific products connected to a particular geographical area. The use of Geographical Indications serves as a guarantee that the product is made using traditional methods, possesses specific qualities, or holds a unique reputation due to its origin.

These indications are commonly applied to food and beverage items, agricultural goods, handicrafts, and industrial products. The GI Tag ensures that only authorized users registered are permitted to use the renowned product name, establishing its origin. To qualify as a GI, the symbol must indicate the product's origin from a specific place.

JOYNAGAR MOA

It is unsurprising that in a region renowned for its confectionery delights, all its Geographical Indication (GI) tags pertaining to food have been bestowed upon various sweets. Prior to the rosogolla, this distinction was conferred upon three other confections, with the Joynagar moa being the first recipient in 2015. Diverging from its crispy gur-khoi relative, this moa comprises a softer composition of roasted Kanakchur khoi blended with nolen gur, ghee, kheer, raisins, cashews, and infused with cardamom for a delightful flavor profile.

SANTINIKETAN LEATHER GOODS

In 2008, accreditation was bestowed upon the leather goods originating from Santiniketan. Originating nearly a century ago within the rural development initiative of Visva-Bharati University, this craft has since evolved into a unique art form. Crafted from vegetable-tanned leather and adorned with hand-painted designs using natural dyes, the array of items such as bags, pouches, notebooks, and more from Santiniketan are renowned for their traditional artwork and motifs inspired by nature.



BALUCHARI SAREE

The rich silk Baluchari saree got the tag in 2012. A centuries-old handloom craft, the silk sarees' first home was an eponymous village in modern-day Murshidabad. Today, however, Baluchari sarees are woven predominantly in and around Bishnupur. These drapes are characterised by their mythological motifs and the stories woven in silk threads that adorn the aanchal or pallu. Other GI tagged sarees from the state are tangail, korial, garad, Shantipuri and Dhaniakhali.

DARJEELING TEA

Darjeeling tea, renowned for its delicate and distinct flavor, has a rich history that dates back to its first GI tag in Bengal. The muscatel notes of this brew have captivated tea enthusiasts worldwide, making it a prized possession among tea connoisseurs. The iconic logo, featuring a woman gracefully holding a tea bud and leaves, symbolizes the elegance and authenticity of Darjeeling tea. Darjeeling Tea was the first Indian product to get a GI tag.



SPORTS

In West Bengal, sports holds significant importance, with cricket and football being the most favored sports in the state. While cricket is typically the most popular sport in many Indian states, West Bengal stands out with football as its primary game. The state is known as India's football hub and is home to renowned clubs such as East Bengal, Mohun Bagan, and Mohammedan Sporting Club. Additionally, cricket enjoys immense popularity among the people of West Bengal, with the iconic Eden Gardens stadium located there, which was the erstwhile largest cricket stadium in India. This distinction is now held by the Narendra Modi stadium in Ahmedabad also known as Motera.

HAVE SPORTS IN MIND? KOLKATA GETS INDIA'S FIRST SPORTS MUSEUM

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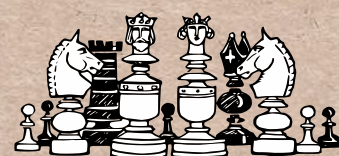
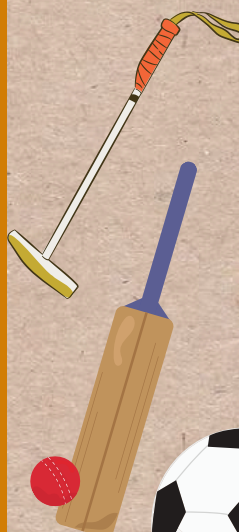
The city of Kolkata is known for reasons more than one. You are looking for a cultural heritage trail, the West Bengal capital has plenty for you. Besides this, the port city of Kolkata is also renowned for its madness over sports.

The presence of Eden Garden, often called the Mecca of Indian cricket, automatically gives Kolkata an edge over other cities. The common cricket fan of Kolkata is so strongly driven by emotions that it is a treat to watch a match in Eden Garden. Many famous cricketers have admitted that playing in Kolkata is a distinct experience which is unmatched and unparalleled. Same is the case with football. Kerala, Goa and the northeast India also have a flair for football but the air in Kolkata is visibly distinct. Be it a local match or a game between Mohun Bagan and East Bengal or an international tie-up, Kolkata knows how to keep the spirits high.

It is this sports legacy that may have played its invisible hand in bringing about India's first sports museum in Kolkata. Named Fanatic Sports Museum (FSM), this is a first of its kind set up located in Newtown region of Kolkata. India already had various sports memorabilia collections in cities like Pune and Chennai but their collection was confined only to cricket, hockey and football. Fanatic Sports Museum however goes beyond those three sports and celebrates other sports like chess, swimming and golf. Brainchild of one of India's seasoned sports historians, this museum has a number of items from his personal collection. You can find the gloves worn by Sachin Tendulkar when he hit his 100th international century in this place. When it comes to football, Fanatic Sports Museum has a signed jersey worn by Brazilian football legend Pelé during the 1970 FIFA World Cup. You will be thrilled to see autographed caps from tennis superstars like Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer. Badminton player P V Sindhu got glory to the nation by winning the silver in 2016 Rio Olympics and her final match jersey is one of this museum's esteemed possessions. The gold medal winning gloves of Abhinav Bindra from 2008 Beijing Olympics also finds an honourable place here. You can also spot shirts worn by Para Olympian shot putter Deepa Malik and javelin thrower Devendra Jhajaria in Fanatic Sports Museum.

Sports Trivia

The Calcutta Polo Club holds a significant place in the history of polo. It's fascinating how the origins of polo trace back to Manipur, where it was known by various names such as 'Sagol Kangjei', 'Kanjai-bazee', or 'Pulu'. The adaptation of the game by British soldiers stationed in India led to its formalization and eventual spread to the West. Captain Robert Stewart and Major General Joe Sherer played pivotal roles in this process, establishing the Calcutta Polo Club in 1862 and introducing the sport to their peers in England.



FOOD CUISINES

West Bengal is famous for its food. It has been influenced by the different rulers that ruled over the area through the ages. It is not just the non vegetarian food items but also vegetarian dishes are in plenty and flavourful. Bengali sweets are a favourite all across the country.

SHUKTO STORIES

Sukto, a traditional dish in Bengali households, is a vegetable medley featuring an assortment of vegetables. The primary ingredient is bitter melon, accompanied by pumpkin, sweet potato, ridge gourd, drumsticks, eggplant, and raw papaya. Dried lentil dumplings (badi) play a crucial role in the recipe, tempered with a spice known as radhuni, which can be substituted with dill seeds if necessary. In the absence of both, methi seeds can be used. Poppy seed paste and mustard paste, along with milk and ghee, are essential components, but green chillies are never included in sukto. This authentic Bengali dish is typically served exclusively during lunchtime as the first course, paired with hot steamed rice.



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DAAB CHINGRI

Daab chingri, or chingri daab, is a traditional Bengali prawn curry prepared and presented in a green coconut shell. The key ingredients inside include large prawns, butter, ghee, or mustard oil, along with onions, turmeric powder, chopped green chillies, garlic paste, and ginger paste. It is seasoned with a blend of spices and served in the green coconut shell.



The tale of Rasgulla's history is a delightful and intricate narrative that goes beyond regional borders. Whether its beginnings trace back to Odisha or Bengal, Rasgulla has evolved into a significant element of India's culinary legacy. Known as Roshogolla or Rasgulla, this iconic sweet delicacy holds a special place in the hearts of dessert enthusiasts in the Indian state of Bengal. Its spongy consistency and sugary syrup have enamored dessert aficionados not only in Bengal but globally as well.



CROSSWORD OF THE WEEK



Across

2. A HISTORIC BATTLE WAS FOUGHT HERE
6. A TYPE OF FISH FAMOUS FOR ITS UNIQUE TASTE
8. A FAMOUS VARIETY OF MANGO FROM BENGAL
9. HIGHEST POINT OF WEST BENGAL

Down

1. VARIETY OF TEA TO RECEIVE FIRST GI TAG
3. THE FIRST EVER INDIAN TEAM TO WIN THE IFA SHIELD
4. FAMOUS FOR TERRACOTTA TEMPLES
5. A STATION ON THE TOY TRAIN ROUTE
7. AN OFFBEAT HILL STATION

Some Trivia on West Bengal

- The city of Kolkata is home to the oldest and the largest museum in the country. The Indian Museum is home to a wide range of antiques, fossils, art works, historical documents, and more.
- West Bengal is home to one of the largest banyan tree in the world. The banyan tree is located in Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Indian Botanic Garden in Shibpur, Howrah.
- The Ghum Railway Station in the district of Darjeeling is the highest railway station in India and one of the highest in the world. It is also recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage site.
- Durga Puja has been declared by UNESCO an 'Intangible Cultural Heritage.' The religious festival is also a massive cultural feast, something that binds every community in the state.



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