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# ECOTRAIL

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## ON THE BRINK

*BROW ANTLERED DEER*



## EDUCATOR'S COLUMN

*CORAL REEFS - A GRAVEYARD OF BEAUTY*

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# EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

As we move into the critical kharif season, the Indian Meteorological Department of the Government of India say they have to recalibrate the monsoon season and move it a little further down the calendar. This appears as a small news article item in some corner of a newspaper, but for wildlife biologists or environmentalists it's a reconfirmation and reiteration of what was being said for more than 2 decades. The climate is changing. Is this a fait accompli or can we bring the wheel back on track?

Climate change is a serious global concern, the effects of climate change might discomfort the rich, but it will have an evident and harsh impact on the poor who are more vulnerable. Thus, the acute concerns cannot be pushed under the carpet even if the President of USA feels disengaged.

The water crisis that has hit large parts of India pre monsoon is another concern that needs to be addressed at various levels. Chennai the metro city in the south was impacted severely as also many districts across the country. Now more than ever the rivers of this country so revered, need protection and the lakes need security. A more serious concern is the ground water level across the country is diminishing and many are just drying up. All of this is connected to the rampant destruction of our green and brown cover of the earth. The massive development plans being undertaken by the government in a hurry to reach the 5 trillion-dollar mark, in order to be recognised as a powerhouse globally, will take a heavy toll on the environment.

An exaggerated focus is needed to enable the recovery of lands, hills, open spaces and the forests. We need to engage the youth especially university students of NSS and NCC to regreen India. The window of opportunity is in the monsoon months. Thus, in league with universities, social forestry and forest departments we need to make an effort to bring alive barren lands with saplings. It would also help if a vast majority of villages participated in greening the earth by creating nurseries in their villages. These plants can then be sold to the forest department who in turn give them free to authorised institutions. The forest department must initiate seed collection drives for endemic species and distribute it to locals, to ensure native trees are planted. To create a measurable impact, this activity needs to be taken up on a national scale.

The green cover is also important to create a biomass to help another critical resource that is constantly underplayed, the brown cover - the soil. Biomass is critical to nurture the soil and enrich it. It is the soil that helps plants to create a good hydrological cycle underneath the earth. This life-giving resource that we are so insistent on concretizing, is the very reason we have food on the table. On one hand we teach our children that mud is a dirty thing and not to play in it and on the other we buy exorbitant cosmetic mud packs that are supposed to make us look younger. If we change the way we look at the soil and all it has to offer, it would help in not just conserving the brown cover but also the forests, the rivers and all life on earth.

The good news is there are many smart efforts like close cropping of plants that will result in the growth of a jungle in a few years, there is use of updated technology in simplifying methods of research and conservation, and vegetables being grown in homes, offices and on terraces. The Government must strictly ensure that private enterprises doing these massive projects adhere to strict guidelines put in place for the environment. This is a crucial step that is missing in almost every place.

The ultimate lesson is that humans need to stay connected with nature in some way or another. It's a psychological craving, an inherent instinct that is coming into play. I have faith in human beings, and I strongly believe we will find a sustainable solution but sometimes we need a catalyser and here I must give the example of the toilet scheme of the government. The entire government machinery went into play and the success of this project is a fitting answer to critics who think that all is lost. If we are able to convince the government of the importance of greening and browning (GB approach), or the Ghar – bahar approach we can turn the tide on climate change and Chennai and all the other districts will have plenty of water.

Ranjan Biswas  
Editor- Ecotrail  
Managing Director - Trailblazers Adventure Travel Pvt Ltd  
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## BROW ANTLERED DEER

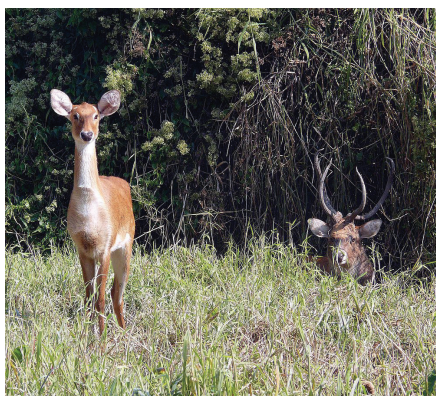


Image Courtesy Dr. Raju Kasambe

The Sangai (*Rucervus eldii eldii*) is the state animal of Manipur. It is also called the Brow Antlered Deer. Folklore of the Manipuris mentions Sangai as binding soul between humans and nature. It is also called dancing deer; not because it dances but it looks as if it is dancing when its hooves sink in the spongy ground.

This unique species of deer is endemic to Manipur and has been classified as endangered by the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature).

The habitat in which they are found are as rare as the deer itself. In the heart of the Keibul Lamjao National Park, one can find a floating grassland, locally known as phumdis. An entanglement of vegetation and organic debris forms these islands, that can reach up to 2 metres in depth. The Sangai has adapted to living on these floating masses and grazing on the water plant sprouts.

Danger lurks around the corner as the entire landscape is under threat due to a hydroelectric project in the vicinity. The rise in the level of water of the Loktak lake is making it harder for the deer to survive and migrate between islands. This is leading to a rise in inbreeding and deterioration of the gene pool. Other threats include disease from the livestock and poaching.

Their current population is estimated to be around 200. Upto 1950 they were thought to be almost extinct, however the Manipur government is taking great efforts to protect this species. Talks are ongoing to translocate some of them to a new area to ensure increase in population.

## BIOPLASTIC? LET'S SHELL IT!

Lobster bisque and shrimp cocktail make for scrumptious meals, but at a price. The food industry generates 6 million to 8 million metric tons of crab, shrimp and lobster shell waste every year. Depending on the country, those claws and legs largely get dumped back into the ocean or into landfills.

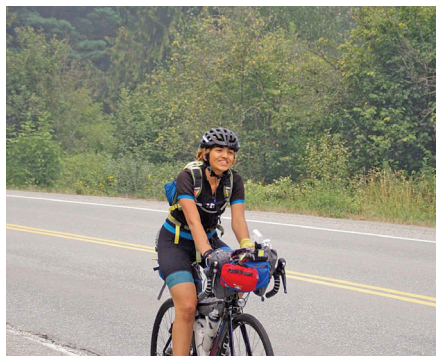
Some scientists think it is possible to tackle the two problems at once. Crustaceans' hardy shells contain chitin, a material that, along with its derivative chitosan, offers many of plastic's desirable properties and takes only weeks or months to biodegrade, rather than centuries.

The challenge is getting enough pure chitin and chitosan from the shells to make bio-based "plastic" in cost-effective ways. "There's no blueprint or operating manual for what we're doing," says John Keyes, CEO of Mari Signum, a start-up company based just outside of Richmond, VA, that is devising ways to make environmentally friendly chitin. But a flurry of advances in green chemistry is providing some guideposts.

You can read more on [www.sciencenews.org](http://www.sciencenews.org)



## GEARING UP FOR THE FUTURE



Vedangi Kulkarni recently became the fastest and the youngest woman in Asia to have circumnavigated the world on bicycle. She is an Indian endurance cyclist. It took her 160 days to pedal 29000 km, across 14 countries. She was 19 years old when she started and turned 20 when she finished, celebrating her 20th birthday around the halfway point in Canada. An adventure and travel enthusiast from a young age, her parents' encouragement to explore the outdoors made her passionate about pushing her limits and challenging herself while she also survived the worst situations by herself.

Vedangi's outdoorsy spirit, determination and hard work, is an inspiration to everyone. All the best for her future endeavours.

# CORAL REEFS - A GRAVEYARD OF BEAUTY

Jacques Cousteau very aptly said that, "Water and Air, the two essential fluids on which all life depends, have become global garbage cans"

As school going children, while learning Geography, the most awing topic was the beauty of coral reefs. This marvelous bounty of weird shapes, sizes, color, texture thriving in the turquoise depths of the oceans and seas has been an attraction to man for generations. It is said the oldest coral reef dates back to 500 million years which means its creation is yet a mystery.

Coral reefs are diverse ecosystems formed underwater, held together by an exoskeleton of calcium carbonate. This  $\text{CaCO}_3$  is secreted by the polyps from which the coral is formed. Coral reefs are known to support tiny marine animals. These animals can include sea anemones and jellyfish. Though this 'Rainforest of the Sea' occupies only 0.1% of the world ocean surface it is home to nearly 25% of marine life.



Coral reefs need sunlight, clean water, warm temperatures and salt water to thrive. All of these in the essentially adequate amount ensure that the reef continues blossoming and blooming.

**Bells of Destruction:-** Tourism, oil spills, climate change play a major role in the mass depletion of this natural marvel. The effect of human intervention on the environment are clearly visible today. Man plays a pivotal role in causing depletion of marine ecologies, ocean acidification and calcification of Coral reefs.

What are the main causes for this bountiful formation to wither away?

AquaView an online Scuba magazine wrote in 2013 that "As coastal construction increases and global temperatures rise, an estimated 33% of corals are in danger of extinction. Marine studies have shown an 80 percent decline in some forms of coral over the last decade"

Coral reefs die if the water temperature is too high. Global warming has already led to increased levels of coral bleaching, and this is predicted to increase in frequency and severity in the coming decades. Such bleaching events may be the final nail in the coffin for the already stressed coral reef ecosystems.



Climate change is a grave and perilous problem that is looming large and creating havoc.

Pollution is another major reason for the depletion of Coral reefs. Urban and industrial waste, sewage, agrochemicals are freely let out into open waters. These toxins dumped directly into the ocean or carried by river systems from sources upstream damage the coral reefs. Some pollutants increase the level of nitrogen in seawater, causing an overgrowth of algae, which smothers reefs by cutting off their sunlight.

Tourism in excess can be a major hindrance with activities like careless boating, diving, snorkeling, and fishing. With people touching reefs, stirring up sediment, collecting coral, and dropping anchors on reefs we have accelerated the rate of extinction. Live coral is removed from reefs for use as bricks, road-fill, or cement for new buildings. Corals are sold as souvenirs to tourists and to exporters who do not know or do not care about the long term damage done.

Oil spills from major and minor fishing vessels and VLC's (Very Large Containers) cause oil slicks to coat the top layer of the water. Since the oil is denser than water, it becomes impossible for sunlight to penetrate through the oil layer thereby causing the temperature to drop inside the water making it difficult for the coral reef to thrive. Even the slightest difference in temperature can cause damage to the coral reef.

Exposing corals to small amounts of oil for an extended period can be just as harmful as large amounts of oil for a brief time.

Coral reefs come in contact with oil in three ways:

1. Oil floating on the surface of the water is deposited on the coral when the water level drops at low tide.
2. Rough seas mixes up the lighter oil products into the water column where it descends to the coral reef.
3. Heavy oil gets mixed with sand and sediments from the oceans becoming dense and heavy enough to sink to the coral reef and smother them.

**Make a difference:-**The Nature conservancy and organization based in Arlington (Texas) has provided us with some simple ways which each of us may practice to slow down the rate and eventually end the threat of extinction of coral reefs across the globe.

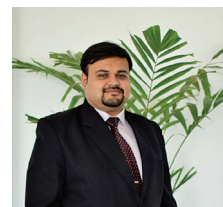
1. Research the chemicals you use. Although you may live thousands of miles from a coral reef ecosystem, these products flow into the water system, and can harm coral reefs and marine life.
2. Support reef-friendly businesses: Ask the fishing, boating, hotel, aquarium, dive or snorkeling operators how they protect the reef. Ask if the organization responsible is part of a coral reef ecosystem management effort.



3. Practice safe and responsible diving and snorkeling: Do not touch the reef or anchor your boat on the reef.

4. Volunteer for a coral reef cleanup: You don't live near a coral reef? Then do what many people do with their vacation - visit a coral reef. Spend an afternoon enjoying the beauty of one of the most diverse ecosystems on the Earth.

The article was also published on <http://oneindiaonepeople.com/a-graveyard-of-beauty/>



*Mr. Karn Ragade is the MYP Co-ordinator at Ela Green School, Kandchipuram and teaches English and Literature*

# THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING PAINTING

## A Sherlock Holmes Adventure

The Human Resource team of a renowned organisation decided to send their employees' children on an enticing summer camp. They trusted Trailblazers to ensure that their children have a great time and come back home with memories to treasure.

While this was being decided, the Trailblazers team got the news of the "The missing tiger painting". This would be a summer camp like no other! We decided to make use of the creative minds of the children to solve this case. The students were powerhouses of energy and great ideas. Under the expert guidance of Trailblazers, they were set onto a path full of clues to solve the mystery. Trailblazers were delighted to see the young children completely equipped with their thinking caps, eager to find the culprit.

During the camp, their skills were sharpened with creative art activities, thrilling adventure activities and a variety of team games. These tasks helped them to face challenges and overcome their fears. A Trailblazers camp counsellor poised as the Indian counterpart of the famous Sherlock Holmes guided the students and occasionally distracted them as well with red herrings. After rigorous brainstorming sessions, collaborative learning and critical thinking, the young detectives were finally able to crack the whole case and nab the culprit. That night, all of them decided to have a gala night and party hard. For their excellent detective skills and witty minds, they all were rewarded with a badge to remind them about the mystery of the missing painting.



Taking a break from crime fighting



Digging for clues



Depicting the entire mystery through creative artwork



Participating in adventure activities

# SABARMATI SOJOURNS

## *Reliving the past*

Trailblazers led a student group from a prominent Navi Mumbai school during their field trip to Gujarat. Gujarat is one of the most diverse States in India. Its history stretches over a time period of the Harappan Civilization to the Mughal Empire. Gujarat's endless journey from roots to wings is interspersed with historical and cultural traditions glorifying the State.

Gujarat is the birthplace of many freedom fighters like the legendary Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and many others who fought for the country, infusing qualities of tolerance, brotherhood, non-violence and patriotism into Indians. The focus of this trip was to help students experience what they learned in their history textbooks. Students visited Mahatma Gandhi's house in Ahmedabad and learned about his life in the museum. This helped them better answer the questions for their history project.

Lothal was a part of one of the earliest known urban cultures, the Indus Valley Civilization. The remains

present from centuries ago offers the most insight into the story of the Indus Valley Civilization. Students were able to get a glimpse of the past and imagine the birth of civilization. Talking about the past, we took the students further back in time to the Triassic era with a visit to a dinosaur park in Indroda. Here they observed fossils that included dinosaur eggs and bones! This visit helped the students better understand the concepts of Geology, Geography and Environment Science.

For their Economics project, the group visited the famous Amul factory to understand the various processes involved in dairy production and circulation. As a surprise, the Trailblazers team offered the group a treat of Amul products.

On our outbound programmes, we always strive to cover every aspect of learning. In line with this thought, the students got an opportunity to visit the National Institute of Design (NID) Ahmedabad campus and explore the world of innovation and design. The visit was

enhanced by an interaction with few students who were more than happy to talk about the various projects they were working on.

Finally, to add a touch of heritage and culture, the group visited the magnificent Rani ki Vav, a stepwell which is an UNESCO Heritage Site. The carvings in the stepwell are evidence of the master craftsmanship of the Solanki dynasty. Students saw science and culture merge at the impressive Modhera sun temple built on the Tropic of Cancer. The temple has been built in such a way that the first rays during the summer solstice would directly hit the gold idol of the Sun God, illuminating the entire temple. Every carving in the temple describes a scene from the Hindu epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

A visit to a site is incomplete if one does not taste the local food. The group enjoyed a traditional Gujarati thali that satiated their hunger to try out new food. Through the Sabarmati Soujourn Camp, the group truly experienced the many nuances of Gujarat.



The student group at Modhera Sun temple

# OUTDOOR TRAINING COURSE

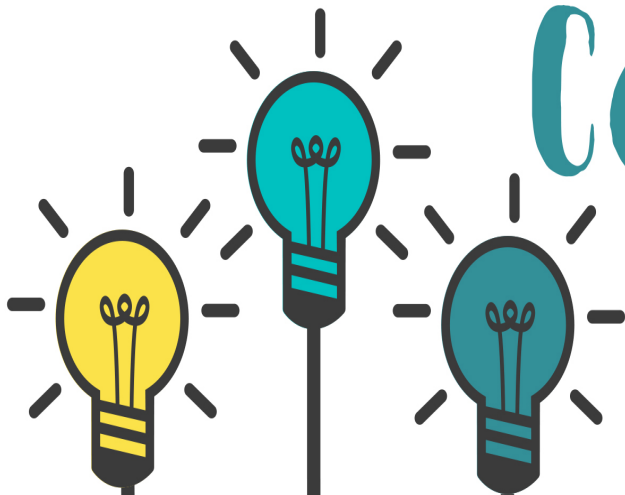
Being one of the leading outdoor education companies we understand that being an Outdoor Trainer requires one to be trained in many different domains. Where knowledge about the outdoors plays an important role, there are many other skills which come handy when it comes to imparting knowledge and giving participants a memorable outdoor experience. Keeping this in mind Trailblazers gives opportunity to youngsters to get trained to inspire campers and make them fall in love with the outdoors through the Outdoor Trainer Course.

This course is designed to create leaders who can conduct outdoor programmes efficiently and effectively. For achieving that the participants are trained in such a way that their general awareness about the different aspects of the Outdoors increases along with other important soft skills. The participants are always thrilled when they get to attend sessions from our team of experts on topics like Indian Wildlife, Different Ecosystems, Plant Identification, Adventure Activities and Equipments, Cultural Tourism, Photography, Risk Assessment, etc. Along with these varied topics they learn about Business Communication, Voice Projection, Group Dynamics and Leadership, Crowd Control and other important skills which are essential for being an Outdoor Trainer.

We recently concluded the fourth batch of Outdoor Trainer Course where participants understood what all goes into conceptualizing, organising and eventually executing a camp. As a part of the course, participants conducted an overnight camp for the course facilitators on one of the highest fort in Thane district, Maharashtra, where they planned and organised everything. It was great fun to trek up to the fort and camp overnight on top, where participants did everything from setting up the campsite to feeding the campers and conduct activities. They were well equipped for all the possible contingencies and were making sure that the facilitators which in this case were campers had a good time. Trailblazers is proud to have well trained Outdoor Trainers as a part of our team to make sure the campers have the time of their life!







# Conserve ENERGY

Every little bit helps. Here are some suggestions of high-energy consuming items to use less or not at all during evening hours. Highest power demand times are from 6 - 10 p.m.

Turn off all lights, electronics and unplug charging cords when not connected to a device.

Turn your refrigerator down. Refrigerators account for about 20% of household electricity use. Use a thermometer to set your refrigerator temperature as close to 37 degrees and your freezer as close to 3 degrees as possible.

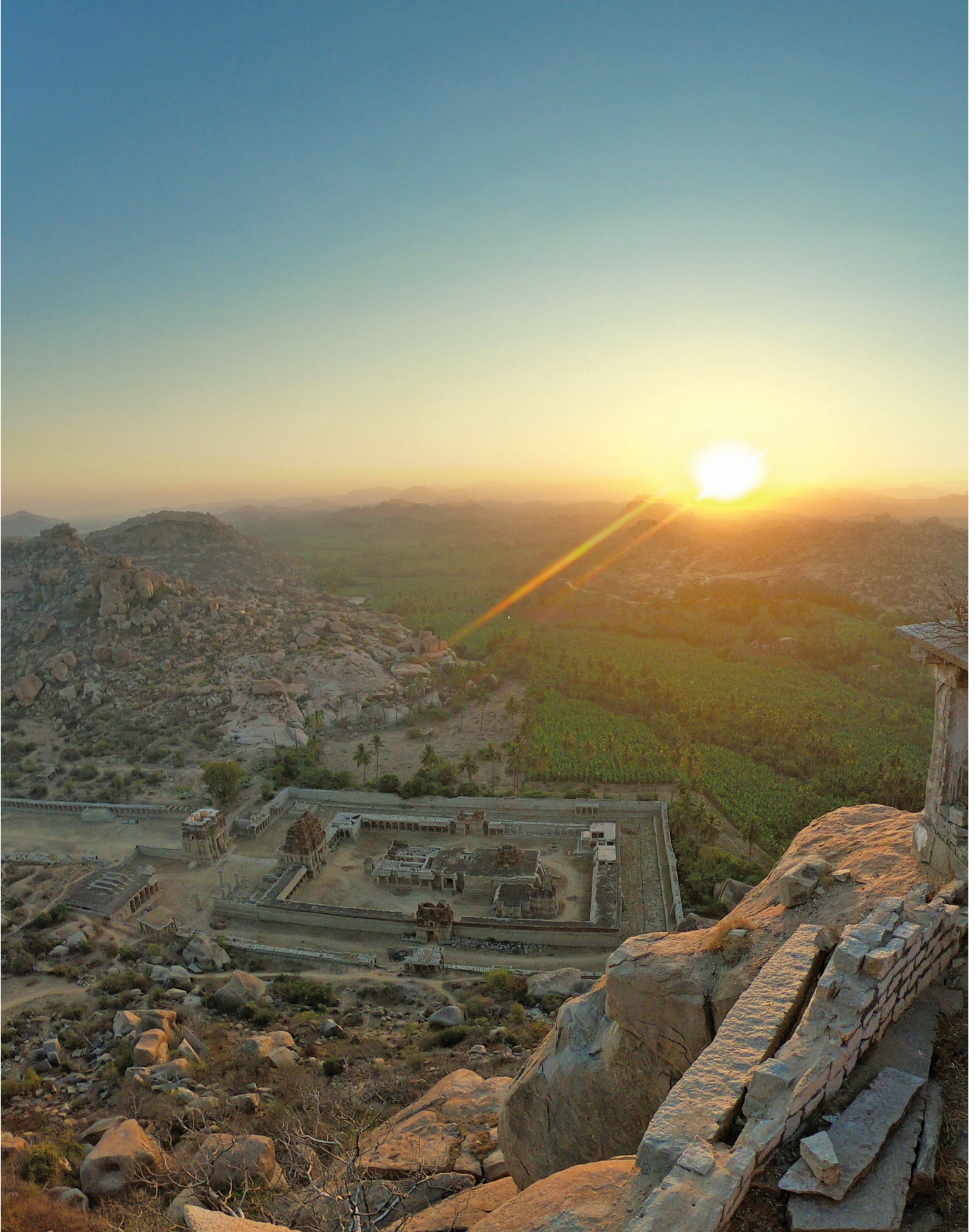
During the night time hours you don't require the same level of conscious cool. Try turning your air conditioning down (so it is running less) during your sleep hours or an hour or two before bed.

Turn off your water heater when you're not using it. If turning it off is not an option, at least turn down your water heater thermostat. Thermostats are often set to 140 degrees F when 120 is usually fine. Each 10 degree reduction saves 600 pounds of CO<sub>2</sub> per year for an electric water heater, or 440 pounds for a gas heater.

Make sure your dishwasher is full when you run it and use the energy saving setting, if available, to allow the dishes to air dry. You can also turn off the drying cycle manually.

36th Wing Public Affairs • Andersen Air Force Base, Guam • U.S. Air Force Infographic by Senior Airman Katrina M. Brisbin

*A mesmerizing sunrise reveals the hidden secrets of the ancient Vijaynagara empire.*



# AMAZING AMAZON

What was the first image your mind conjured, on reading the word? Was it a meandering river that travels the breadth of the South American continent? A tropical rainforest with some of the most bizarre looking creatures on the planet? Or let's be real, the multi billionaire e-commerce and digital streaming technology giant.

There is nothing wrong if you thought of the latter, we are living in the digital age and it would be absurd if one did not relate the word Amazon, to the start-up that made Jeff Bezos one of the richest humans in the world. However, if you ever grew up watching documentaries narrated by Sir David Attenborough, this magical word, Amazon, transports you to a mystical jungle, where plants battle their way to the sun, wildlife is abundant and the indigenous tribes of the jungle specialize in poison darts. If you wish to experience the magnificence of the Amazon forest, you can from Brazil, Peru, Columbia or Ecuador. Almost 73% of the forest expands across Brazil and Peru. The Ecuadorian side of the forest is highly recommended as you can club the visit with a tour of the Galapagos Islands, another natural marvel. The forest in Ecuador though smaller in

area is just as diverse as any other part. Standing in a carpet of leaf litter with gigantic emergent trees towering over you, you can

feel life thriving all around you. The sounds produced are other worldly, from the call of the Oropendola that sounds like dripping water to the screaming Piha that sound like its riding a rodeo. The best way to spot birds in the

Amazon is to go for a canopy walk. Huge towers connected by suspension bridges offer a view of the Amazon that is unparalleled. Within 10 minutes of being in the canopy you can see flashes of exquisite colours all around you.

Toucans, macaws, tanagers, woodpeckers and more flit in and out of the jungle. If you are lucky you can even see troops of monkeys doing what they do best, monkeying around.

A walk through the jungle, introduces you to a variety of plants with leaves and flowers of all shapes and sizes. The rainforest is the home to the cocoa

tree, the source of all things chocolate. To truly understand the forest, you must have a local tribal guide, who is more than happy to unravel the secrets of the forest. In Ecuador you can also visit a local Quechua village, where you can test your dart skills, and enjoy a

traditional meal. Be warned! The meal consists of an Ecuadorian version of *Patrani Machi* (a Parsi steamed fish preparation) and cooked plantains. The highlight of this meal however is a

skewer of roasted juicy grubs!! It takes an adventurous soul to actually put these things in your mouth but once you get over the disgust, they actually taste just like chicken.

Of course, a visit to the Amazon is incomplete if you do not traverse the mighty river itself. Black Caimans, turtles and giant otters are just some of the

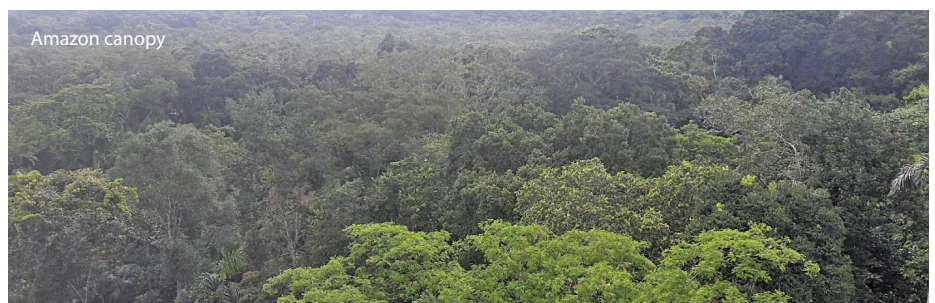
animals you might see on a river cruise. If you opt for a canoe ride in one of the smaller tributaries, don't be surprised if you come across the world's largest snake, the Anaconda, basking in the sun.

Being a rainforest, one should always be prepared for rain! The rain can vary from a light drizzle to a thunderous downpour! Gumboots, ponchos and umbrellas will be your best friends. Everything in the Amazon is gigantic, the trees, the flowers and the mosquitoes!

However, as a responsible traveller, you should avoid the use of intense insect repellents in the forest. Long sleeved shirts, full pants and a mild repellent are a better option for the environment.

This is just a small picture of what transpires in this amazing rainforest. Words cannot describe the spell you are put under in this enchanting forest. A visit to this natural wonder

is a must for all nature and wildlife enthusiasts!



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