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OUTDOOR LABORATORY

OUTDOORS IS THE GREATEST TEACHER OF ALL

ON THE BRINK

INDIAN BISON

**OUTDOORS AS A
LEARNING LABORATORY**

*HOW OUTDOORS IS GREAT
LEARNING LABORATORY*



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I, Ranjan Biswas, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Date: 15-Mar-2019

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THANK YOU



Dear Reader,

Namaste!

In the hot summer of Bombay (now Mumbai), 25 years ago, I walked up four floors of the Havelivala Building stairways in the heart of one of the most expensive real estate in Fort & Flora Fountain to start India's almost first social enterprise Trailblazers Adventure Travel Pvt Ltd – The Outdoor School.

This old building, we often camouflaged it by calling it a "Heritage" office of Trailblazers, was to set the tone of creating a paradigm shift in learning. It was set to using the outdoors as a laboratory to nurture and create a series of valuable pedagogies to understand a vast array of subjects being taught in schools and universities. The zeal and passion has been to give a holistic experience of just not various subjects but also share the deeply interconnected realms of life skills, creativity, art, music and adventure through our various curated programmes for children as well as adults.

Having worked with many families, corporates and over 600 finest schools and colleges with all curriculums across more than 20 cities of India, I wish, along with a dream team of Trailblazers colleagues, to renew the pledge we started out with-

- Where the clients' needs and concerns are ours
- Where safety at mental, physical and spiritual level of all individuals will be our paramount responsibility whilst we execute the outdoor experiences
- Where we always seek to learn and grow from every experience
- Where shared and cooperative learning is the key
- Where we do not compromise on our core values of safety, honesty, environmental protection and transparency in our doings
- Where we foster a respect and understanding for all individuals
- Where we are committed to help each one make a small shift in thoughts, words and deeds through our outdoor experiences
- Where we ensure that every Trailblazers experience's carbon footprint is minimal

On behalf of team Trailblazers, I wish to acknowledge and thank you for your support in our journey and feel blessed that we crossed paths. Every interaction was beautiful. This glorious journey has seen many ups and downs. Meeting you was one of the ups and I thank you for that.

Trailblazers' success has been due to the contributions of many individuals, colleagues past and present, corporate heads, parents of many children, teachers, principals of some of the finest institutions, government officials, my friends, my son Aditya, my late and beloved wife Mala, the brain behind this enterprise; Mr. Ramanathan Iyer, a director of Trailblazers, a former consultant to United Nations and the first National Director at NSSO under the Planning Commission of India; my co-director Sujay Chohan and my senior colleagues who need a special mention- Ms Kiran Islania and Ms Rashmi Sharma.

This transformative journey of Trailblazers Adventure Travel Pvt Ltd has only just begun and seeks your blessings to navigate the uncertain but beautiful future with fresh thoughts, new ideas and dynamic people whilst keeping our values intact.

Warm regards,

Ranjan Biswas
Managing Director | Trustee- Trailblazers Foundation | Editor- Ecotrail

INDIAN GAUR



Indian Bison (*Bos gaurus*)

If you have watched documentaries on the African savannah, you must have heard of the imposing Cape buffalo, one of Africa's big five. These creatures are known for their ferocity, strength and power and are known to kill lions! However, did you know that the largest bovine (cow family) animal is found in India! Bigger and stronger than the Cape buffalo is our very own Indian Bison also called as Gaur. Gaurs can weigh anywhere between 650 to 1500kgs and reach a height of 170 to 250 cm at the shoulder. Largely confined to evergreen and moist deciduous forests, they can be found in Central India, the Western Ghats and parts of the Nilgiri biosphere. Diurnal in nature, these incredible hulks graze on a wide variety of plants and have been known to show a preference for the upper portions of plants. There have been records of Royal Bengal tigers and saltwater crocodiles taking down an adult Gaur.

The major threat to the Gaur is the ones we as humans pose. Rampant deforestation is forcing the Indian bison to wander into agricultural areas. Once in human territory they are under great risk of catching cattle borne diseases. They have been listed as Vulnerable by the IUCN.

Hope is on the horizon for these gentle giants as the government is taking great efforts to protect them. An excellent example of this is the successful reintroduction of the species in Bandhavgarh National Park, where the numbers had drastically deteriorated.

LUMINESCENT OCEANS

The oceans are an incredible

The oceans are an incredible sight to see, the brilliant blue waters, expanding as far as the eye can see. What sight can be better than this? How about if the stars came down to light up the ocean? Sounds impossible?! However two to five days after the full moon, the Pacific Ocean comes alive at night with bright glowing lights. This magical sight is caused by Bermuda fire worms, around 2.5cms long they are found throughout the Caribbean.

"The female worms come up from the bottom of the sea and swim quickly in tight little circles as they glow, which looks like a field of little cerulean stars across the surface of jet-black water. Then the males, homing in on the light of the females, come streaking up from the bottom like comets — they luminesce, too", Siddall, a curator in the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) Division of Invertebrate Zoology, said in a statement.

Bioluminescence is commonly found throughout the natural world and occurs due to the presence of an enzyme called Luciferase. An interesting insight into bioluminescence was discovered in August 2018; when scientists studied the Bermuda fire worm. The genes responsible for the bioluminescence of *Odontosyllis enopia*



Photo Credits: Dan Hershman

(Bermuda fire worm) are evolutionary unique and unlike any found in other bioluminescent organisms. This gives brand new insights into bioluminescence! The mating cycle of this tiny creature revolves around the phases of the moon and the worms intrinsically know that the ritual should occur when the moon is not at its brightest. How they know this still needs to be studied. Nature is full of mysteries and there is so much we still need to discover and learn! So, develop a keen sense of observation next time you are in the outdoors, keep a lookout for some inspiring phenomenon.

THE TREE WOMAN

The woman whose children are trees.

Saalumarada Thimmakka was awarded Padma Sri this year by Government of India. Fondly called the "Tree Woman" 108-year-old Thimmakka is a green crusader who has planted over 400 trees on a 4-km stretch between Hulikal and Kudur in Bengaluru Rural District. Thimmakka and her husband decided to plant and nurture banyan saplings like their own children after they failed to have their own kids. A recipient of many awards, she's the oldest living environmentalist in Karnataka.



Saalumarada Thimmakka

OUTDOORS AS A LEARNING LABORATORY

How outdoors is a great learning laboratory

In today's highly digital world, where one can vicariously travel and learn, through high resolution documentaries, through blogs and photographs of explorers, sitting in the comfort of our homes, a question arises- why bother leaving the house?

Edmond Hillary is a well-known name, the first man to scale mount Everest. Many may have also heard of George Mallory, who is believed to have climbed Everest 30 years before Hillary. His fellow climbers saw him disappear into a cloud towards the peak, but he never returned. Whether he died before reaching the peak, or on his way down is still a mystery.

When George Mallory was asked- Why do you want to climb Everest, his most famous response is – "Because it's there." However, in another interview, he gives a more detailed answer. "People ask me, 'What is the use of climbing Mount Everest?' and my answer must at once be, 'It is of no use.' There is not the slightest prospect of any gain whatsoever. We may learn a little about the behaviour of the human body at high altitudes. But otherwise nothing will come of it.

We shall not bring back a single bit of gold or silver, not a gem, nor any coal or iron... If you cannot understand that there is something in man which responds to the challenge of this mountain and goes out to meet it, that the struggle is the struggle of life itself, upward and forever upward, then you won't see why we go. What we get from this adventure is just sheer joy. And joy is, after all, the end of life."

But when we asked successful Everest summiters about their experience, trekking up in brutal sub zero temperatures, in the biting cold, with such low oxygen that they could barely breathe, the unanimous answer that was given was that it was certainly not joyful.

Climbing with the weight of multiple oxygen tanks, in pitch darkness, where every step feels like a marathon, it is arguably one of the toughest feats for human kind.

But that brief moment at the top, standing on the highest point in the world, so close that you almost feel at one with it. That moment would have brought such joy in their hearts, joy that for sure stays with them even today. Joy that no materialistic object would have ever given them.

Why do trekkers want to scale Mount Everest. As Mallory said, there isn't any gold or silver waiting at the top. If anything, there is a high probability of death waiting at the top. But one attempts because there is an addiction in tasting life on the edge of human understanding. And this is not true just for whacko adventurers, but as true for scientists on the brink of a finding a cure for cancer.

We humans have an innate urge to find beyond the edge of current human understanding.

We also interviewed scuba divers about their first experiences in the world of diving. Most try it as a one-time adventure sport, knowing little that it would open up a whole new world for them.

Once in the deep blue ocean, one realises how little one knows about the ocean. From the surface, the ocean just looks like a uniform expanse of choppy water. But as Dave Barry says, "There's nothing wrong with enjoying looking at the surface of the ocean.

Except that when you finally see what goes on underwater, you realise that you've been missing the whole point of the ocean!"

It is a whole new world down there. A world of fish and sharks and corals and whales and manta rays and jelly fish. Every dive takes one more and more beyond their current understanding. Diving with sharks, one realises how peaceful they are contrary to popular culture. On the ocean floor lie organisms unheard of like sea cucumbers. The underwater can give surreal experiences of visiting abandoned cabins of an underwater ship wreck.

Ask a diver, and they will tell you how easy diving makes it to understand the concept of buoyancy, far easier than any physics lecture inside a classroom. Soon it becomes a way of travel, to not just explore the land, but also explore the water wherever you go.

If there is one thing that all adventurers, whether climbing Mount Everest or diving the great oceans, will concede to, is this- We humans are a tiny speck in front of the mighty Nature.

It is experiences like these that have instilled in people a deep humility and a deeper sense of wonder and love towards the planet. A love that cannot be taught in classrooms, or understood from friendly discussions, but one that has to be experienced on one's own.

-Nitisha Sethia



A ROYAL EXPERIENCE

A Royal experience in the Land of Kings

The place most synonymous with the word Royal in India, is definitely the city of Jaipur! With its exquisite forts, colourful streets and intricate local arts, one can't help but be captivated by it. So, when Trailblazers was asked to design a programme that showcased the highlights of this magnificent city, we were more than happy.

The traditional art of a place has a lot to do with its story and often, we miss out on these tiny details. Exposing students to these stories is something we wish to achieve on our camps.

Blue pottery is a widely known traditional art from Jaipur. However, its origin can be traced to Persia, when artisans from Persia visited Jaipur, they taught the art to the locals in an art school set up by Sawai Ram Singh II. The brilliant blue, that gives the art its name comes from a cobalt dye. Apart from the striking blue, in recent times other colours such as greens and yellows have also been incorporated into the art. Each student was given a coaster to paint, all of them let their imagination run wild and created some interesting pieces of art.

The next fascinating art form the group observed was block printing. Armed with natural plant dyes and a plethora of intricate patterns, this art flourished in India. Now passed on from generation to generation, this art requires great precision, presence of mind and skill. Though the principle behind it seems simple, there is a lot of complexity involved. Every dye used varies with weather conditions and the type of water used. So, water from different parts of Rajasthan can give rise to different shades of the same colour. After the tour of a block printing workshop, a variety of blocks and colours were provided to the students to print white handkerchiefs.

Art, was also seen in the form of creative architecture! A visit to Amer fort, proved that the kings of Jaipur were fond of grandeur. Sheesh Mahal, one of the major attractions, a palace made completely from mirrors, imported all the way from Belgium is a great example. The ceiling is made in such a way that when light shines on it, it looks like the night sky. This was truly a beautiful sight and the students were amazed by it.

The most important part of a city is its people! Their very being reflects the aura and soul of the city. The group being from an international school, got an opportunity to interact with local children through their service activity. Together both sets of students created educational charts that were later put up in the orphanage that the group visited. The activity was an exchange of learning and cultures.

Through this camp the student group was able to truly experience all the aspects of Jaipur. These kind of wholistic experiences are what Trailblazers provide to all its clients!



Students participating in Blue pottery session.



Hands on experience of fascinating art form of block printing



Students interacting with local school students and preparing educational charts

OUTDOOR - THE BIGGEST LABORATORY

Sitting in the outdoors, observing the nature unfold has inspired poets, painters, musicians, scientist, mathematicians to reach enlightened heights changing the world in so many ways that people only could dream off.

Be it Newton and the story of the apple to discover the existence of a force called gravity or Archimedes discovering the weight of gold with literally the Damocles sword hanging over his head, or Rabindranath Tagore who has unabashedly written about the beauty, and melody of nature and started the world famous university of Shantiniketan where the classroom were under the shades of the trees. The outdoors is where you will learn the most. Children learn more whilst playing in the outdoors then when ensconced in a room.

The outdoors has everything in plenty most important of that is space. The openness the wide expanse in itself put the mind at ease, all the senses open up and the mind and body begin to explore the new sense of smell, touch, colours, shades, tastes and hearing new words. Nature involuntarily sends the brain, the signals to ask the forbidden questions of why, what, where, how and when. That sets the mind racing to seek answers followed by more questions and thus the learning by enquiry is set in motion.

The formal curriculum has barely recognised the possibility of learning and teaching using the outdoors. The old ashram or gurukul system had it all set up, which was lost to the world and now we are slowly but surely recognising the glory of outdoor learning giving it various nomenclature but alluding to the same possibilities. Be it experiential

learning or picnics the practice was to kill the monotony. The nearest schools ever came to using the outdoors truly as a tool of learning was the dream of Scouts and Guides movement, which was collectively killed by the schools and the teachers who were involved in this great movement, which I still urge schools to initiate it in earnest. Lord Baden-Powell used the scouts movement to help children understand the outdoors and live of and with it in harmony.

As I write this, I am glad to share that Trailblazers Adventures Travel Pvt Ltd sits on a perch celebrating 25 years of Trailblazing outbound education.

Today Trailblazers is one OUTDOOR School using the outdoors to undertake CAS, or Global Perspective, G4 & G3 camps for IB, IGCSE camps, Project camps for CBSE or ICSE or unique Economic camps or Science camp called YES or adventure, wildlife, anthropological, historical, geographical camps in the outdoors or lead expeditions in India or a scuba camp in exploring the sea in Bali or ski camp in Switzerland, it keeps the curiosity of learning using the outdoors as a laboratory. All academic institutions should try this recipe, all will benefit.

Ranjan Biswas

Editor

ecotrail@trailblazersindia.com



IS NOW



UNVEILING THE SECRETS AND WONDERS OF THE OUTDOORS

ETHICAL BUSINESS PRACTICES

ENSURING SAFETY ALWAYS

ASPIRING TO TRANSFORM PEOPLE

LEARNING FOR LIFE

PROVIDING ENRICHING EXPERIENCES

SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICES

RESPECT, COMPASSION AND EMPATHY TO ALL

MAKING OUTDOOR EXPERIENCE FUN

CAMP RIVER ROCKS

Trailblazers CAS camp in Uttarakhand

Enhanced self-esteem, higher self-confidence and a stronger sense of personal control are only few of the positive benefits that are gained by adventure and wilderness programmes. Camp River Rocks is a Trailblazers curated programme aimed at the above learning outcomes in the scenic setting of a Himalayan campsite by the river Alakananda.

On February 10th, team Trailblazers led a group of 29 teenage students from a renowned international school in Bangalore, to spend a week in the lap of the mighty Himalayas.

The camp objective was to offer an opportunity to the students to experience the lower Himalayas, see its villages and challenge themselves to various adventure activities. The camp covered a variety of activities like trekking, rope and water based adventure activities, service and volunteering activities and fun team building games. The programme was designed to cover activities that would bring about self-confidence, create environmental awareness, build knowledge about the Himalayas and foster team building among the students.

After a long journey, the students made it to the beautiful campsite overlooking the river, and after a hot meal and some hot chocolate, they checked into their cozy tents, which would be their home for the coming week.

From the next morning itself, the students deep dived into exploring the world of the local villagers. The students visited an elementary village school where each one partnered with a local child to make a kite together. This collaborative activity enabled close interaction between the two similar yet widely different sets of young minds and gave them a perspective into the other's life. Many rich conversations emerged in the evening reflections where students discussed how they took their privileges for granted. Many spoke about a guilt they felt during the school interaction, and the camp counsellors helped the students understand how to channel the guilt into a more positive emotion.

While the school interaction gave the students a peek into local village life, they were given another challenge to test their sense of outdoor survival. The students were divided into two groups and were given clues from which they were to find food. They navigated through villages, communicated with the villagers and gathered utensils and food from different points. After reaching the top of the mountain, the students collected

firewood and learned how to create a fire. They then did a cook-out using natural resources and all of them enjoyed a well-deserved snack after the difficult challenge. Through the course of the week, the students were also given a first-hand experience of mountaineering techniques like rappelling, jumaring, bridge slithering and valley crossing. They were taught different mountaineering knots and their uses. The students enjoyed these thrilling activities and came out stronger and more fearless from the experience.

Apart from adventure activities, the students also volunteered their time and effort in the form of a service activity in the village. The students were divided into groups and they created multiple compost pits for the villagers to use their wet waste in a better way. After toiling with the spades to dig a pit, they collected cow dung and wet waste to complete the pit.

Post completion, they explained the process of composting and its benefits to the villagers.

The cherry on the cake for Camp River Rocks were the water activities. Getting into the cold waters of Alakananda, doing kayaking and body surfing provided some beginner's lessons of Himalayan rivers to the group. This activity was an introduction and precursor to the big day of white water rafting on the Alakananda. After safety briefings, and instruction on different commands and strokes, they boarded their rafts with the instructors for a 12km rafting route. It was a tiring but adrenaline pumping session, and everyone enjoyed the cold

splashes of Alakananda immensely. No camp is complete without a camp fire and team games. From volleyball to survival challenges to yoga sessions, the students bonded very well over these fun sessions and made memories that they would treasure for a lifetime.



Creating compost pits for the villagers



Cooking food after collecting firewood and learning to create fire



Teaching how to make kite to local school students at elementary village school

HISTORY IN CARVINGS

Explore the Land of Victory



Students from an international school recently visited the glorious empire of Vijayanagara, now known as Hampi. They visited various spectacular landmarks of Hampi and were thrilled to know about the distinguished history of the land. Students were also fascinated by the diverse wildlife, rich flora and fauna, eminent architecture and much more.

The group watched a short film about Daroji Sloth Bear Sanctuary before entering the Sanctuary which gave them a lot of information about the local wildlife and sloth bears. The group was thrilled when they got to see sloth bears in their natural habitat. Boulder activity was truly enjoyed by all. It helped the students to push themselves and gain confidence as they overcame their fears. Students also played some unique team games and had a great time as they used their presence of mind and athleticism to help their team win.

Students went back in time when they visited the archaeological and

architectural wonders of Hampi. These sites narrate the story of rich cultural significance and history of the Vijayanagara empire. Every temple, market, enclosure, stable, idol, cave even a platform for that matter has a story to tell. The students were captivated as they unravelled the testimony of history which reiterated the importance of the great empire. Group of monuments at Hampi which is a UNESCO world heritage site, gives justice to the tag that has been given to the place that is, world's largest open-air museum. Virupaksha temple, Vitthala temple, Lotus temple, Royal enclosure, Elephant stable are some of the places students were really awe inspired by.

The students also got an opportunity to visit the Tungabhadra dam, where they saw an audio-visual film about the importance of the dam and how it has helped the community. Tungabhadra dam was back in the day a joint project between Hyderabad state and Madras presidency when the construction started. Later it was a joint project between Karnataka and

Andhra Pradesh after its completion post-independence.

Along with these activities students also tried their hands on banana fibre weaving at an NGO which has been empowering women and helping them get independent through this art in Anegundi. The students thoroughly enjoyed the activity as they initially struggled but later on got the hang of it with the help of ladies who were experts at the art. The group was energized as they climbed up the Malavanta hill early in the morning. As they reached the top, they meditated for a while. It was a pleasure to meditate at a place from where all you can see is beautiful landscapes consisting of lush green rice fields, banana plantation, blue skies and an abundance of boulders.

Overall, the camp was highly appreciated by the group and the students learnt to respect the history, nature and oneself.

TRAILBLAZERS OUTDOOR TRAINER COURSE 2019

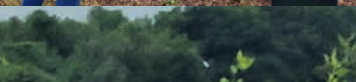


HIGHLIGHTS

- Learn the basics of wildlife, adventure, photography, psychology, crowd control, outdoor survival, first aid and much more
- As part of the course, experience Trailblazers camps, all expenses paid

COURSE DATES

- 5th May to 9th June 2019
(Only on Sundays)
- 16 Indoor Sessions
- 1 Outdoor Session
- 1 Overnight camp



TO KNOW MORE AND REGISTER

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I have always been a nature enthusiast. When I heard about the Outdoor Trainer Course by Trailblazers I immediately enrolled in it. When it started off.. I wasn't yet sure what I'll learn from this but as our training was conducted and I went on trips as an outdoor instructor, I started learning how to communicate properly with different age groups, how to be "quick on your feet" as not everything will go as you plan and most of all I learnt how to be a part of a team.

These skills that I have gained as an experience in this programme will also help me in my life moving ahead.

And something else that will always stay with me are the memories made.

-Eshaan

AWARENESS ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Trailblazers Foundation Trustee conducted lecture and demonstration on Climate Change

Mr. Ranjan Biswas, Trustee Trailblazers Foundation conducted a session on Climate Change with unique module at Extension Centre, College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan. Besides the theoretical aspects on Climate Change students saw demonstration on it in the classroom with an innovative system representing earth. The theoretical aspects included difference between weather and climate, causes and effects of global warming and endeavours of various countries to control the greenhouse gas emissions. Short informative film on the efforts of developed and developing country in controlling global warming and conferences on climate change with major resolutions were also shown. As a part of demonstration, they also saw how soot formation occurs because of vehicular pollution. At the end of this session, students had clarity on the concept of Climate Change. Mr. Ranjan Biswas was thanked by in-charge Mr. Anand Lalge of Extension Centre, for yet another informative lecture.



Top and Bottom: Mr. Ranjan Biswas, Trustee, Trailblazers Foundation conducting session on Climate Change

TRAINING THE TRAINER

Trailblazers Foundation conducted Career Vision workshop for B.Ed. Student Teachers and Inservice Teachers

As a part of series of Career Vision Workshops for students, student teachers (B.Ed. students), in-service teachers, Trailblazers Foundation conducted a career guidance workshop for 42 student teachers of Dnyanganga B.Ed. College, Kasarwadavali, Thane on 19 January, 2019.

The workshop was inaugurated by lighting the lamp, reciting prayer and seeking blessings of Goddess Saraswati.

The workshop began with fun and learn session. Team activities were conducted to engage the teachers. As a part of these activities, teachers brainstormed and reflected upon the basic but important questions related to career and how to guide the students on the same. Trailblazers Foundation experts facilitated various activities to help teachers understand basics of career guidance. Student teachers learned how to identify students' interests, motivate them to set targets and help them to plan the road map to achieve the career goals.

According to Assistant Professor, Mr. Ketan Kamble, teachers by default have to be career counselors. Students especially from 9th to 12th grades have questions

regarding their careers and invariably have questions related to career choice and planning the road map to become successful in their chosen careers.

Mr. Kamble and Principal, Mrs. Anjana Rawat thanked Trailblazers Foundation for conducting the workshop in a simple, engaging and effective way. Student teachers too appreciated Trailblazers Foundation for conducting this workshop on career counseling in an innovative way.



A B.Ed. student teacher giving feedback after the workshop



A team of student teachers sharing their thoughts on career guidance

UPCOMING CAMPS

WHAT ARE YOU DOING THIS SUMMER?

CAMP FOOTLOOSE

29th April to 1st May 2019
Age Group: 8- 12 Years

From outdoor survival to little chef, crafts station to exciting games, bonfires to dance sessions we have it all plus more!



SAHYADRI, MAHARASHTRA



SAHYADRI, MAHARASHTRA

CAMP PATHFINDER

29th April to 1st May 2019
Age Group: 13- 16 Years

Build new skills and challenge yourself to do more this vacation! From trekking and kayaking, to rifle shooting and archery, we have it all!

CAMP DISCOVERER

19th to 23rd May 2019
Age Group: 14- 18 Years

Become an outdoor expert by camping in the wilderness, discover Uttarakhand by trekking, cycling and white water rafting!



UTTARAKHAND

SCUBA DIVING CERTIFICATE CAMP

2nd to 8th April 2019
21st to 27th May 2019
11th to 17th June 2019
Age Group: 13- 18 Years


Dive among corals and turtles, explore an underwater World War 2 ship wreck, while getting your PADI scuba diving certification.





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Visit www.trailblazersindia.com for more details

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