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ON THE BRINK
GOLDEN MAHASEER

EDUCATOR'S COLUMN
EDUCATED A MEMOIR

COUNTRY CHRONICLES
WORSHIPPING WAGHOBHA

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EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

India is a part of the Indo Malayan ecozone and is home to a veritable species of wildlife, be it plants or animals. Beginning from the national symbol, the Tiger to its national bird the peacock or the lotus flower in its marshy landscape, India is truly an abode for a rich and diverse wildlife. It is sad though that only less than 10% of the wild scape exists. This despite the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) scientists stating that any nation to be viable from the economic or environment front should have at least 33% of its land mass under the forest cover. The pressures on our natural ecosystems will come under much assault looking at the way things are progressing. The alarm bells should be ringing as India aims to reach a 5 trillion-dollar economy. Add to that the burgeoning population, the demands from its people and the impact of climate change, together they pose a huge challenge to wildlife conservation.

India has over 865 protected areas including 104 national parks, 551 sanctuaries, 88 conservation reserves and 27 community reserves; totally covering a landmass of 1,650,088.57 sq. Kms which is only 5% of India's total landmass. We need to work harder to increase this area to meet the international norms, and this will be a tough ask.

Conservation of wildlife is becoming a bigger challenge every day. As education levels soar all over the world so do the aspirations for material goods. This increased demand tends to impair political judgments when it comes to decision making. The impact is obvious in the legislative assembly where laws seem to be compromising green open space to accommodate for the needs of the people. Although there are many models available to maintain a balance, the political class, looking at only short term objectives, seem to find it easier to give in to human needs.

The world's biggest consumer USA is at odds with climate change scientists. Their change in belief about climate change is working its way towards a catastrophic end, this could mean a serious consequence for all. Outrageous forest fires, melting of glaciers, extreme summers, delayed onset of winter, excessive rains are all indicators that something is not right. To summarily say that this is climate change may also be wrong.

As wildlife enthusiasts we can see the avian migration pattern is changing, wildlife in the forest is still being hunted and species are slowly disappearing. In 2018 alone we have lost Sudan, the last white Male Rhino and the vaquita Porpoise is on the verge of extinction, amongst many others. Habitat loss and logging forests down for railways, roads and mines is a cause of serious worry as large mammals usually migrate on these same routes. People remain blind to the fact that this is the main reason for the increase in Man-Animal conflicts. The worry increases exponentially as we have not yet learned about our ecosystems fully. We are losing them to the axe, machines and men much quicker than we can study them. In the year 2019, researchers have discovered new species of snakes, geckos, spiders and mushrooms in our forests. Our biodiversity hotspots still hold a treasure trove species yet to be discovered.

My other concerns are the greater emphasis being laid on wildlife tourism. The efforts taken to make the remotest natural sites on earth accessible to human beings only increases the dangers for that ecosystem. Though it is necessary that people should be exposed to the natural wealth of the country, a sustainable model should be developed. One of the solutions to protecting sites from excessive tourism is to follow a rotation system where some areas remain closed for a decade. This allows its inhabitants to prosper and prevents the construction of expensive resorts that disturb the environment all year round. Another useful tool for conservation is inclusive management and community conservation, involving local communities. There are many success stories where locals have taken it upon themselves to protect the fragile ecosystems around them.

The Wildlife of India needs the support of its people and the government. Though difficult we must try to enmesh development with conservation and not look at it as an either-or situation. This conflict must be reduced through greater discussions, research and active participation by Indian Universities. The forest department has some great experts and we must engage with them and seek out their expertise to resolve outstanding issues. After all these are our natural resources and saving, protecting them is in our self-interest.

Ranjan Biswas

Editor- Ecotrail | Managing Director, Trailblazers Adventure Travel Pvt Ltd | Trustee- Trailblazers Foundation



GOLDEN MAHASEER



There are 47 species of Mahseer in the world, India is home to 15. The Mahaseer in general are large edible freshwater fish of the carp family. The word Mahaseer is a compound word derived from Sanskrit mahi (fish) and sher (tiger) therefore it is also called tiger among fish. The Golden Mahaseer (*Tor putitora*) is characterized by its golden dorsal side with reddish yellow fins. The fish has large scales, thick powerful lips with large barbels (sensory hair like organs in front of the mouth). It inhabits the Himalayan foothills, the Indus, Ganga and Brahmaputra basins and can also be found down south in the Balamore, Cauvery, Tambraparini, and Kosi Rivers. Upon maturity, the adults inhabit lowland rivers and lakes and migrate upstream in torrential monsoon conditions to reach suitable spawning grounds.

The fish generally breed during floods and spawn over rocky, gravel substrates, often in ephemeral headwaters. Sexual productivity is low (6,000 – 10,000 eggs per kg). The individuals of the population grow at an average rate of 10cm annually. It is omnivorous in feeding habits. During migration, fish of all ages remain carni-omnivorous and the fish <46 cm size become piscivorous.

Mahseer is a sensitive species that can barely tolerate a modified water environment. This is evident from the decrease in its size (length) recorded over the last century, size composition (predominance of young/ immature individuals) and reduced share in the catch (as low as 5% from 40-50%) from its distribution ranges.

The species have suffered severe population declines in much of its distribution range, and are now considered threatened due to pollution, habitat loss, habitat fragmentation due to construction of dams and barrages, over-fishing, destructive fishing methods, Current conservation initiatives include survey on current population, prioritize habitats for conservation and restoration of the population, awareness programme on breeding biology and with stakeholders i.e. villagers, students, political leaders, angling associations. (Source: WWF)

CAN SLEEPING HELP DETOX?

Laura Lewis, Assistant professor of Biomedical Engineering at Boston University, and her team recently published a paper in *Science* that shows how our bodies clear toxins out of our brains while we sleep. This research could open new avenues for treating and preventing neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's.

Her research showed that during non-REM sleep, large, slow waves of cerebrospinal fluid wash the brain. An ECG revealed that this was because neurons start to synchronize, turning on and off at the same time. "First you would see this electrical wave where all the neurons would go quiet," says Lewis. During this quiet phase, the brain does not require as much oxygen, meaning a reduction in blood flow. However, this space would be taken up by an influx of cerebrospinal fluid which helps in clearing out toxins like beta amyloid and other molecules like tau, a protein that gets tangled in Alzheimer's patients' brains and harms the connections between neurons. This study was significant also because it was the first time that there has been evidence of the brain's electrical activity causing fluid movement.

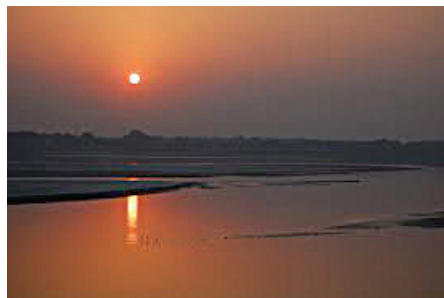
The current study involved non REM sleep in young healthy adults. Lewis now plans to study what happens during other stages of sleeps and also study older participants who may be developing neurodegenerative diseases.

Do not miss your daily dose of brain wash - Sleep adequately.

(Source: www.wired.com)



SHILPIKA GAUTAM



Shilpika Gautam left her investment banking job in London and decided to follow the path of adventurous activism.

She, paddle boarded the entire length of the Ganga (approx 2500 kms) in a 101 day expedition, from source to mouth. In doing so she also became the first woman to break the record for the longest distance, stand up paddle boarded by a woman in 1 journey. The higher purpose behind this expedition was to create awareness on the health of the Ganga. When she started this journey she thought the main threat to the Ganga was single use plastic, however on her journey she realized that the issue that needs to be addressed more urgently is untreated domestic sewage that freely flows into the river. She has now joined hands with WaterAid to create toilets with on site treatments, that solves the problems of sewage pollution and open defecation.

(Source: www.shilpikagautam.com)

WORSHIPPING WAGHOBHA!

When monsters become Gods - Sahil Pimpale

Large carnivores namely tigers and leopards are one group of animals that elicit extreme positive or negative attitudes of humans. Despite being the apex predators and umbrella species, these animals are often killed or relocated from their home ranges to avoid conflict or loss to human property. India apart from being the second most populated country in the world, also has a good population of tigers and leopards. This has its positive as well as negative impacts. Positive impacts include a healthy environment which maintains our life support system on which our very own existence depends. We also witness many negative impacts, despite the importance of these animals, such as human-animal negative interactions, in which people living on the fringes of forests lose their livestock to these animals, resulting in situations where mostly the animal suffers.

The practice of felid worship in the form of Waghoba- a large cat deity, overlooks this conflict. This institution has helped people build tolerance towards large cats throughout India. It has been noted from previous studies that fear, ownership and brotherhood were the prime reasons of the worship of large predatory cats.

Worship due to fear: In some instances, people worship animals out of fear of the animal itself. This can be seen in the Lynghyam tribe of Meghalaya who believe that the tiger is a part of the human spirit and is responsible for rewarding or punishing humans according to his/her conduct.

Tigers as owners: Another important role played by the tiger, and reason for worship is that of an 'owner' of the forest. The tigers of the Sundarbans are believed to be the owners of the forests and are worshiped as 'Banabibi/ Dakshinray' by both Hindus and Muslims.

Tigers as protectors: Tigers have also been documented to play the role of a protector among Garo tribes of Meghalaya, Gonds of Madhya Pradesh and Tulunadu tribes of Karnataka. In Maharashtra, the Dhangars who are pastoralists, and whose livestock often fall prey to the tiger, also view the tiger as a protector of their livestock.

Tigers as family: The Panwar clan and Kols of Central India believe that the tiger is the part of their family. Similarly,



Shrine in Malkarni, Quepem



A vibrant waghoba idol at Vangni



Waghoba at Vagregal, Sanguem(Kallay)

in Maharashtra the Warlis consider the tigers as their guests and worship them as 'Waghya'. If cattle are lost to a tiger or a leopard, it is believed to be the need of the God Waghya.

To mention a few, in Maharashtra, Waghoba shrines are found in Asaniye and Hewale of Sawantwadi district, Vangani and Sanjay Gandhi National Park of Mumbai. These shrines are usually placed in a forest in which a tiger or a leopard is carved in wood or a rock. Every year on the occasion of 'Kartik barshi' a ritual called as 'Waghbaras' is carried out, in which 'Waghoba'

is worshipped by offering sacrifices (Chicken or Goat) and various activities like dances and songs are performed retelling the story of 'Waghoba worship'. When interviewed, the priest of the Waghoba shrine in SGNP said 'This forest belongs to Waghoba, and he will never cause any harm to the one who worships him. If cattle or a human is harmed/killed by a leopard, it is believed to be his wrath for our sins'.

No matter how strong such beliefs are, it will never solve major conservation problems; but it does develop tolerance and better understanding among rural populations towards large cats. People begin to understand the behavior of these large cats and live accordingly. This tolerance and acceptance of large cats among the rural populations could be very important in felid conservation, as accepting their presence around us is one of the best ways of conserving these large predators.

Institutions like Waghoba have helped in developing different perspectives among human beings towards large cats. It can be said that, such institutions could help in prevention of the persecution of large cats by providing better knowledge to deal with their presence. It also gives them cultural and social space among the grassroot levels of human society which could result in a peaceful co-existence between the two groups.



A researcher by profession but a conservationist at heart, Sahil is a post graduate in Biodiversity from Abasaheb Garware College. Sahil's Master's thesis was based on 'Waghoba- A large cat deity in Maharashtra and Goa, where he documented human tolerance towards large cats through the lens of large cat worship'. At present Sahil works with Center for Wildlife Studies, where he is involved in implementing education programmes in and around Melghat Tiger Reserve. He is fond of travelling, reading, painting and wildlife photography.

TRAILBLAZERS JUNIOR NATURALIST

Igniting a generation of outdoor and nature enthusiasts in partnership with Decathlon



Children after an informative nature trail at a City Park

Satoshi Tajiri, from Tokyo, is known for developing one of the most followed video game and cartoon series around the world, Pokemon. Short for 'Pocket - Monster' his inspiration for the creation of this fantasy world stemmed from his childhood hobby of collecting insects. As a boy, he grew up in rural Japan and dreamed of being an entomologist someday.

Observing nature and wildlife is known to be a source of inspiration for many of the greatest minds on earth. Thus, inculcating this habit from a young age not only makes children more observant but also helps boost their creativity. Trailblazers in partnership with Decathlon, launched its Young Adventurer Programme to help children connect with the outdoors.

This programme is a graded course with different levels, each focusing on a different aspect of the environment. Each of these levels are assigned a different cap colour with white being the beginners level and black the expert level.

Recently Trailblazers conducted the second level of this programme, Junior Naturalists at a city park in Bangalore. Children from different parts of the city learned about plant and butterfly identification and the interdependence between both. Keeping up with the digital age, the children were introduced to mobile apps that can help in the identification of species. Inspired by the colours of nature that surrounded them, the children also unleashed their imagination and created stunning paper butterflies. On completion of the trail, the children received the yellow cap badge. This brought them one step closer to achieving their final goal of the black cap.



Children learning about local flora and fauna



Origami session in progress



Young adventurers filling their log book

THE TIGER COUNTRY AND THE PINK CITY

The land of rulers - Rajasthan

Students of an international school recently joined Trailblazers for a wildlife camp in Rajasthan. Although they did have some idea of what to expect, the forest is place of mystery and the unexpected. Right from the start the group stayed in proximity to the forest to get used to its sounds and sights. The camp kicked off with a wildlife Safari in one of the best Wildlife spots of our country, the Ranthambore Tiger Reserve. Bumpy rides on the dusty roads and the enchanting forest put a smile on everyone's faces. As they passed through the dense jungles, the group sighted sambar deer, spotted deer, peacocks, wild boars, marsh crocodiles and many other species in their natural habitat. Unfortunately, the enigmatic tiger eluded the group.

Building on to the excitement of the wildlife safari, Trailblazers engaged the students in fun-filled and informative nature games. The games lead to an in-depth conversation about wildlife conservation and climate change. The group openly shared their

thoughts about how we can bring about a positive change for the natural wealth of the country. To understand the historical significance of the region the students visited the Ranthambore fort. Ruled by the Chauhans, Mughals, Nawabs, state of Jaipur and now a property of the Indian government. The fort has visible influences of various religions and cultures. Students were stunned by the extensive history of this formidable fort.

A visit to Rajasthan is incomplete without a visit to the pink city, Jaipur. Students were given various challenges to complete at some of Jaipur's most iconic sites. They visited the oldest museum of Rajasthan, the Albert Hall Museum which also happens to be the state museum. Different teams competed against each other to complete a scavenger hunt in the museum. Similarly, at Jantar Mantar, students were awestruck by the extraordinary astronomical advancements made in the 18th century using nothing but stones. The visit allowed them to

connect the dots between the lessons they learnt in their classrooms and the practical implementations of those concepts. Another visual treat encountered in Jaipur was the Amer fort. Students felt like Rajput rulers as they re-enacted the scenes that had taken place in the Diwan-e-aam, Diwan-e-khaas, Sukh mandir and the Sheesh mahal. As they explored the fort, it made them appreciate the hard work of the artisans that worked on it. Every single structure is not just exceptionally beautiful but also brilliantly showcases the thought that went behind it.

Later, the students surprised the teachers and Trailblazers instructors with their negotiation skills in the colourful markets of Jaipur. They had a gala time buying unique artifacts and souvenirs for themselves and their family members.

Having been sensitized to the environment and historical structures, the student returned home with pleasant memories.



VANISHING VULTURES

Raising awareness on a critically endangered species

Trailblazers organized an awareness trail on one of the Earth's most crucial and critically endangered species, Vultures.

A key component of the ecosystem, they are responsible for keeping habitats disease free and healthy. They have evolved in a way where their highly acidic digestive system can kill microorganisms that usually proliferate on decaying bodies.

The rocky outcrops - a special habitat - act as a perfect roosting and nesting site for two species of vultures. The Long-Billed Vulture and the Egyptian Vulture have both been declared critically endangered by the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature).

This one day trail to this unique place was organized for a group of students to get the best view of the valley and to increase the chances of spotting a vulture. The children hiked up

a renowned hill while observing the local flora and fauna. Due to the steep decline in vulture numbers, the group missed out on seeing a vulture. This decline has been majorly caused by the widespread use of a veterinary drug called Diclofenac.

Students were made aware on how the chemical remains in the bodies of the livestock even after their death. Vultures indirectly ingest the chemical when they feed on these carcasses. The drug eventually causes the death of these birds on a large scale presumably because of a combination effect of kidney damage and decreased uric acid excretion.

Apart from making the students more aware about the plight of vultures, Trailblazers also made sure the children had a fun time with games and songs. This was just a tiny step from Trailblazers in raising environment conscious citizens. We look forward to introducing generations of children to the wonders of wildlife.

Join us on our wildlife camps to explore and find out more about the country's vast natural heritage.



Working their way to the top.

LONG BILLED VULTURE

Sci. Gyps indicus

Length: 80-100 cm
Wingspan: 205-229 cm
Weight: 5500-6300 g



Identification: Bald head, whitish ruff at the neck base, very broad wings (brown, black) and short tail.

Habitat: Open country, plains, cliff, forest, grassland, shrubland, savanna, terrestrial.

EGYPTIAN VULTURE

Sci. Neophron percnopterus

Length: 58-70 cm
Wingspan: 155-170 cm
Weight: 1600-2200 g



Identification: Odd-looking, pale, narrow bill with a black tip, white with black flight feathers, a bare face solemn-looking yellow face.

Habitat: Open or semiopen areas, trees, rocky areas, cliffs, wetlands, grassland, shrubland, terrestrial.



Excited students after a fulfilling hike and knowledge session near a vulture habitat.

EDUCATED A MEMOIR

Alka Deshpande, an avid reader and professional in the field of Early Childhood Education, shares her review of "Educated" by Tara Westover

'EDUCATED' is one of the most riveting books I have read in a long while, as well as an extraordinary memoir. That a story like this would come from a young person, barely 35 years old, living in the USA, is even more astonishing.

Tara was born in rural Idaho (the youngest of seven children) to a dogmatic and religious Mormon family. Her father had radical beliefs and influenced his family into believing that Doomsday loomed ahead and the world of men would fail. He deeply mistrusted the government and any federal agency, as a result of which four of his seven children did not have birth certificates, they did not attend school and the family did not ever go to a hospital or medical facility, despite the most horrific accidents and grievous injuries they suffer throughout this shocking narrative.

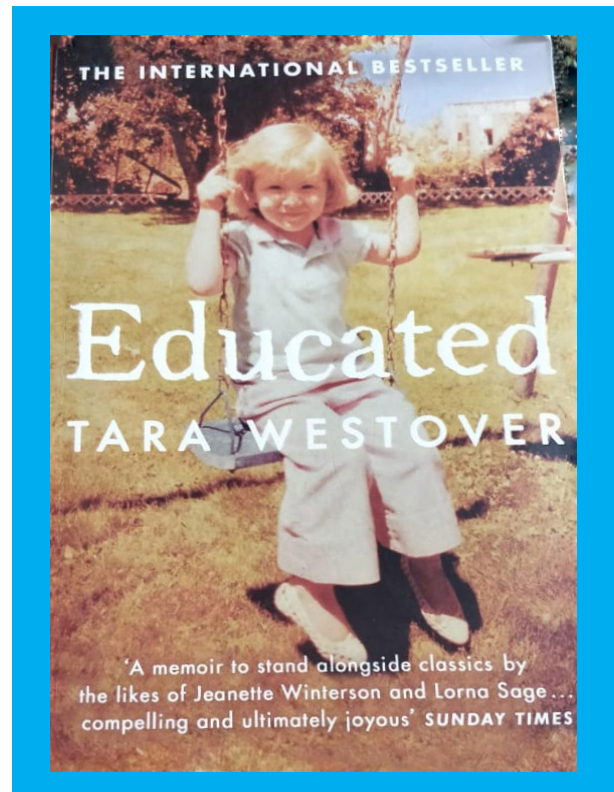
The paradoxes in Tara's account of her life in the midst of a severely dysfunctional, yet oddly dedicated family leave the reader angry, repulsed, horrified and surprised. And just when one thinks things couldn't possibly get worse- they do! Tara grows up with a decidedly skewed view of the world, as propagated by her father. Isolated, as she and her family are, with no media devices, telephones, newspapers, education and minimal contact even with the local communities, she has no cause to doubt that she is grossly misinformed and biased in her knowledge about the world. She believes in the ideas endorsed by her parents well into her teenage years, as the first time that she ever steps into a classroom is when she is 17 years old. And thus begins her tryst with education.

Fired by the belief that her father has instilled in her (and her siblings) that she can 'teach' herself anything that she wants to learn, she prepares herself to take the ACT, even managing to learn enough Algebra to finally clear the exam. Her classmates at Brigham Young University are shocked and aghast at her ignorance, particularly when she shows no knowledge of significant events or famous personalities like the Holocaust, apartheid and Rosa Parks.

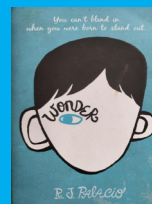
Faced suddenly, by a world that is very different and far more complex; ideas that are radically different than those she was brought up with; and abundant possibilities of what her life could be, Tara struggles to cope with this dichotomy. Life at home is a roller-coaster of disaster with an abusive brother, an apathetic family and gruesome, life threatening accidents. Showing grit and resilience, Tara begins a long journey to get "educated". A crossing that is in turns painful, difficult demanding, revealing, rewarding and heartbreaking. As Tara evolves and grows as an individual and surges ahead academically; she is forced to confront the growing chasm between her and her family and their acceptance of each other. This is a beautifully written account of how she grasps the enormity of the world – and struggles to find her place within it.

This is a highly recommended read, not only for teachers and parents but everyone. The author raises pertinent and valid questions about what it is the aim of education, what does it mean to be educated, what is the process of getting educated and what is the standing of education in today's world. Does it fulfill the purpose of creating an individual or is it being manipulated and exploited to manufacture an 'employable product'?

Do read this book...it is worth all the accolades it has won.

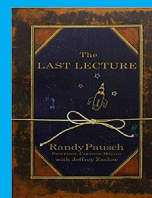


Recommended must read books:



WONDER by R.J.Palacio

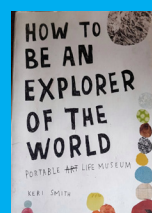
Narrated from the view of a disfigured 10 year old, this book gives you an insight into some of the dark realities of the world.



THE LAST LECTURE by Randy Pausch

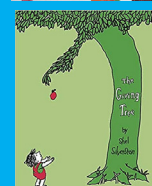
Pouring his heart out to his students after being diagnosed with a terminal illness, in this book Randy Pausch talks about the best way to achieve childhood dreams.

For young readers:



HOW TO BE AN EXPLORER OF THE WORLD by Keri Smith

This journal is a fun way to trigger off creative thought processes and "out of the box" activities. Get ready to go on an exciting journey of exploration and discovery.

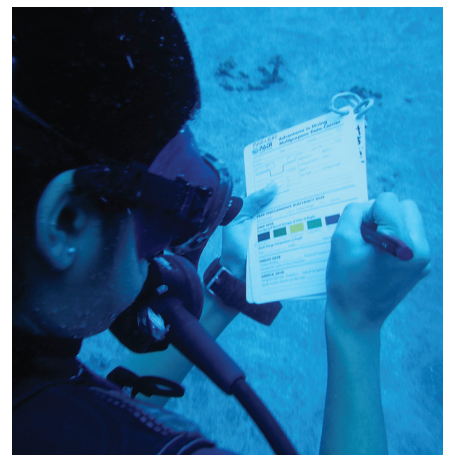
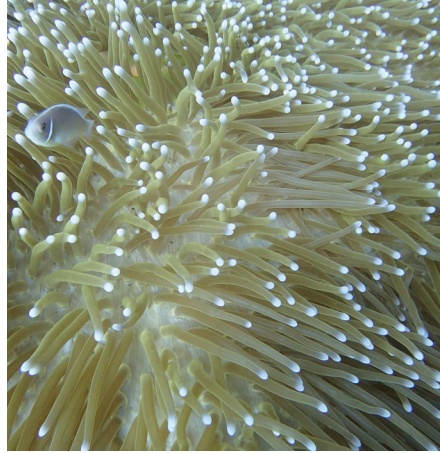


THE GIVING TREE by Shel Silverstein

Open to interpretation, the book is an evocative and thought provoking one not only for children but for adults as well

SCUBA DIVING SNAPSHOT

Life beneath the water, is an alien world full of strange and bizarre creatures. From ethereal manta rays gliding through blue waters to delicate feather stars swaying in the ocean currents. Corals of every colour cover the ocean floor inviting a myriad of fishes to feed amongst them. Dive into the hues of blues to experience mystery, enigma and a world otherwise unknown.



Scuba Diving is a widely popular and upcoming international sport. At Trailblazers, we offer a PADI certified scuba diving programme that will permanently change your relationship with water. With some of the world's best rated dive sites and state of the art dive schools, Bali in Indonesia is the perfect place to begin your journey into the exciting world of scuba diving.

KNOW YOUR SURROUNDINGS – A TREE TRAIL



Tree trail in progress

Trailblazers Foundation conducted a trail “Know Your Surroundings – Tree Trail” on Sunday, the 13th of October 2019. Trailblazers Foundation expert showed a variety of trees, shrubs and herbs during the trail. Interesting facts as well as information on how to identify morphological characters was shared to the participants.

African Mahogany, Foxtail Palm, Frangipani, Devil’s tree, Night flowering Jasmine, Banyan, Drum stick, Cluster fig tree and Geometry tree were some of the beautiful trees seen during the trail.

The objective of creating awareness on the local flora was achieved. It was also an endeavor to promote outdoors and create connections with the natural surroundings we live in. Research shows that just spending two hours a week in natural environment makes one feel healthier and happier.



Frangipani



Jamun Tree



Drum Stick



Coral Jasmine



Cluster Fig



Jackfruit Tree



Foxtail Palm



Mango Tree



Banyan Tree



DID YOU KNOW

Until 1978, most of the world was unaware of the existence of foxtail palm. It became known to the world when an Aboriginal man named “Wodyeti”, presented it to the botanists. The genus name of the plant - Wodyetia - also comes from the same. Foxtail palm is an Australian endemic species and the only species under genus Wodyetia.

SUMMER PROGRAMMES



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- AND MUCH MORE



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- AND MUCH MORE



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- ADVENTURE ACTIVITIES
- HIMALAYAN CAMPING
- AND MUCH MORE



**CAMP
SURF'S UP**
ex. Chennai
12- 18 Years

- SURFING
- BEACH GAMES
- EXPLORE PUDUCHERRY
- AND MUCH MORE

WHY SEND YOUR STUDENTS ON SUMMER CAMPS?

We believe nature is one of the best places to teach children. Trailblazers camps are designed to build 21st century skills that are difficult to learn in the four walls of the classroom.

Get introduced to the world of outdoors, build confidence and perseverance, gain independence and learn about the world in a fun and experiential way! Enable your students to discover their potential and develop into global citizens of the 21st century.

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