

TRAVEL
ON THE
WEB

www.wanderlustandlipstick.com

NEW JERSEY-based Beth Whitman began travelling when she was 20. She didn't just want to travel — she wanted to make a living out of it and along the way inspire others to pick up that bag and leave. She has been doing so for 25 years. And she has had a hand grenade pulled on her in Cambodia and been threatened in Nicaragua.



AS BEAUTIFUL AS IT GETS

ANDREA PERULLO believes she was born with a gypsy spirit. For her the world is her country and she wants to explore all of it. She has been to 50 countries in six continents. She is a Chinese medicine doctor based in Charlotte, North Carolina. Go to her website www.mybeautifuladventures.com for some top-quality eye relief

CHECKLIST

ASHLIN MATHEW checks out the best deals and must-visit places

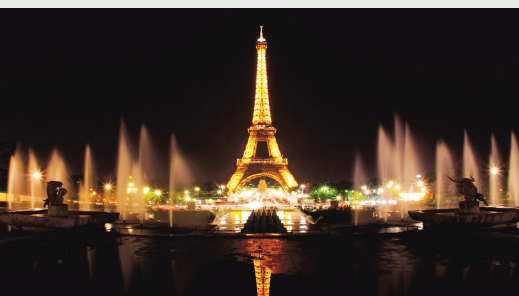
Love with a Moroccan twist



HOW about taking off to Morocco this Valentine's? At Amanjena resorts in Morocco, you can enjoy a candlelight dinner in the onyx-columned restaurant. Or have a private dinner set in an olive grove within Amanjena's outdoor tent, under a starlit Moroccan night. Prices for two start from ₹1,900 (₹10,11265) per night. Visit www.amanresorts.com for details.

After Rameshwaram and Tirupati, Daiwik Hotels, India's first specialty chain of four-star pilgrim hotels is all set to woo pilgrims in Dwarka with its new property. Daiwik Hotels will host 120-140 keys with a mix of superior, deluxe and suite accommodation options. The full service four-star facility will offer a multi-cuisine restaurant, banquets and an activity room for kirtans, bhajans and discourses. Maybe it's time for you to embark upon a pilgrimage.

Summer's not too far away



What's your plan for the summer? Ezeego1.com might just have the right itinerary for you. Along with Contiki Holidays, Ezeego1.com has come up with special summer packages for the youth (aged between 18-35). 'The Little Hopper' is a nine nights and ten days tour covering Paris, Swiss Alps, French Riviera, Florence and Rome priced at ₹94,526 per person. All tours include airfare, accommodation and meals. Visit www.ezeego1.com for details

FOR ALL those seeking a quick impromptu getaway, SOTC has announced the launch of 'Zero Planning Holidays.' You just have to identify your preferred holiday destination from available options and SOTC ensures that within 24 hours the holiday is planned. Thailand, Bali, Mauritius, Maldives, Macau, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka and Fiji are the international destinations on SOTC's list while those opting for a domestic getaway can choose from Darjeeling, Manali, Yelagiri and Ooty. Visit www.sotc.in for details.

Pampered with grape in Goa



DID YOU know there's more to grapes than wine? At the Kenilworth Resort & Spa in Calcutta, Goa, a unique grape therapy is offered. The spa ritual starts with a foot bath followed by grape and cane sugar body scrub. This is followed by an aromatherapy massage where grape seed oil is one of the key ingredients. And as if this is not enough the therapy is completed with a warm wine bath. If you want two hours of complete bliss, head to Kenilworth and enjoy the grape therapy at ₹9999. Visit www.kenilworthhotels.com for details

If you have information to share on travel deals and hotel packages, mail it to ashlin.mathew@mailtoday.in

VOLCANIC
ROMANCE

There's a new reason to visit Sicily — the rising popularity of the luscious wines from the slopes of Mount Etna. Delhi got to savour the wines and discover the roads that lead to them

By Sourish Bhattacharyya

SICILY HAS just made an offer you can't refuse. And no, you are not likely to find a decapitated head of a horse by your side when you wake up tomorrow morning — that's what Sicilians do when they migrate to America and get greedy.

The offer is to travel to Italy's sunniest part, where people exude the warmth of the sun, to sample wines that have become the rage across the world. The plump red, Nero d'Avola, is gaining new followers and the sulphurous lava spewed intermittently by Mount Etna, one of the world's most active volcanoes located on Sicily's east coast, pump those enriching minerals that gives the soil the power to nurture the seductive Nerello Mascalese grapes grown at a height of 1,200m.

Unsurprisingly, it was Jancis Robinson, one of the English-speaking world's finest wine writers, who first suggested in her weekend column in *Financial Times* that the "brooding cone" of the Etna may just be the "Burgundy of the Mediterranean". In the last five years since the time she made her observation, the popularity of the wines of Etna, and of Sicily in general, has seen a significant surge. It's been a dramatic turnaround in the image of the region that was not long ago dismissed as Europe's wine lake — it produced bulk wines that others used to shore up theirs in bad harvest years.

Delhi, with a little help from the Indian Wine Academy, got to savour the luscious possibilities of Sicilian wines this past week when a delegation of the region's top producers landed in the city to present their offerings at a masterclass conducted by Susan Hulme, Master of Wine (MW). An MW is the wine world's equivalent of a Nobel Laureate — just 280 men and women from 23 countries have qualified for the title since the first examinations for it were conducted in 1953 — but Hulme (www.susanhulme.com) wears her great-



Sicily's castles and cathedrals atop steep hills (above) are as striking as the vineyards that flourish on the slopes of Europe's largest active volcano, the brooding Mount Etna (above, right). The region's wine estates also produce some of Italy's finest olive oil (right).

ness lightly. Sicily, Hulme said, "is very dear to my heart". Her romance with the region started when she went there as a teacher of English as a foreign language after graduating from the University of Warwick with honours in English Literature. "I felt like I'd come home when I first landed in Sicily. The people are as warm and welcoming as the Sicilian sun," Hulme said.

Sicily has about 20 unique wine varieties — from the Grillo and Carricante (fruity whites oozing character) to the Perricone, the Cerasuolo and of

course, Nero d'Avola, all fruit-forward reds. "They are like a breath of fresh air in a world full of chardonnays and cabernet sauvignons," Hulme said, adding that they stand out for the wine lover because they are "not massive" and therefore "allow space for food". Wine writer Michele Shah (www.micheleshah.com), who is one of the most ardent promoters of Italian wines around the world, said Sicilian wines stand out because they are "more generous, more open, more playful". It is easier of match such wines with food, especially the

For the wine tourist, Sicily is a matrix of over 20 local grape varieties and 100 different terroirs



Ashok Dilwali captures a solitary sadhu meditating at Gaurikund in Gangotri

Reliving

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A photoart enthusiast who has two rooms full of cameras, Dilwali warns rookie trekkers about the dangers of dehydration in the mountains, "lack of water in your body can easily kill you before the cold does," he says.

Here's another customised nugget of wisdom from him: The beauty of life, especially in the Himalayas, is not in the destination, it's in the journey. The moments you'll remember are not of just when you get to Kedarnath or Badrinath, but it is also in the sights that you see on the way to the peaks that you want to see.



www.vacationgals.com

THE Vacation Gals are three professional travel writers — and mums — who are eager to share their favourite destinations for family trips, girlfriend getaways and romantic escapes with all. Usually Beth Blair, Jennifer Miner and Kara Williams travel around North America, Mexico and the Caribbean. They write about their experiences while on their many sojourns.



WELL-HEELED LIFE

TRAVELLING is Mark's lifeline and not so surprisingly he has been to 80 countries in all the continents. He blogs about the most memorable destinations. And being a keen photographer, he has pepped up his website, www.travel-wonders.com, with great pictures



QAMAR SIBTAIN



occasionally problematic Indian food, because they don't have the austere tannins that overpower what's on the plate and yet have the complexity to speak for themselves. There's place for both the wine and the food on the table — one doesn't overpower the other.

Carrying forward this theme, Sicily's wine ambassador and one of Italy's most critically acclaimed producers, Diego Planeta (www.planetawines.com), said his wines sell in 70 different countries because of "the very good balance of price and quality," which he says is true of most wines from his part of the

world. An Indophile who's been visiting this country since 1972, traveling mostly by train to "know India", and a fighter for the protection of the geographical appellation of Basmati rice, Planeta said Sicilian reds are "ideal" for Indian food.

For the wine tourist, Sicily — it produces as much wine as Australia and has as much land planted with vines as Chile — is a matrix of 100 different terroirs that offer the most amazing diversity. Take Etna, for instance. This tiny region's foremost winemaker, Giuseppe Benanti (www.vinicolabenanti.it), reminded us at the masterclass that the

number of producers in Etna has shot up from five to 60 in the past 20 years. It is possible for you therefore to visit Mount Etna and knock on 60 different cellar doors.

And Sicilian wine producers inveigle you to stay on in their stunning estates where talented chefs serve you the best of the local cuisine. You could check in at Le Foresteria of the Planetas (www.planetaestate.it), or take a guided tour across the Benanti estate and pray at the ancient chapel sitting there, or stretch yourself at Regaliali, the farm villa dating back to the 19th century in the estates of Tasca

d'Almerita, whose scion, Giuseppe Tasca, spoke ecstatically of the mouth-watering acidity of his wines and the silky edge to their tannins.

Tasca said his cousin spoke English with an American accent because of the number of tourists who came from across the Atlantic to the cookery school his aunt, Anna Tasca Lanza, ran on the estate. "You too can be a part of the experience," he said, rolling a cigarette. "Sicily is all about warm people, good food and great wine, and the best way to enjoy all three is to check into a wine estate resort." Carry those words with you when you fly to Sicily.

SICILY FOR STARTERS

France
Tyrrenian Sea
Italy
Rome
Sicily
Palermo
Messina
Marsala
Pantelleria
Etna

Sicily is all about warm people, good food and great wine, and you can enjoy all three by checking into a wine estate resort

— **GIUSEPPE TASCA**
Tasca d'Almerita

Our wines sell in over 70 countries because of the very good balance of price and quality. This is true of most wines from our part of the world

— **DIEGO PLANETA**
Planeta Wines

Sicilian wines stand out because they are much more generous, more open, more playful. It is easier of match such wines with food

— **MICHELE SHAH**
Food and wine writer

I felt like I had come home when I first landed in Sicily. The people are as warm and welcoming as the Sicilian sun

— **SUSAN HULME**
Master of Wine

Himalayas through Roerich

But of course, the exact moment of a blanket of clouds embracing Nanda Devi before moving on, or a shot of Leh's high mountains emerging from under thick clouds, is what the photographer classifies as a Roerich moment. "Photographing landscapes is so much better than photographing people on shoots," says Dilwali, "There's no one dictating anything to you, no requests to tilt your head a little to the left or a little to the right, no instructions on how much to smile — you're just left in

awe of the sheer majestic landscape in front of you."

Dilwali, who believes that bad weather is a photographer's best friend, has ventured into the range from all places possible — from Leh, through Himachal and Arunachal Pradesh, along the Indo-Tibetan border and Sikkim. He has been to every Himalayan peak you have ever heard of, and has even camped under the shadow of Mount Everest at one point.

"I've been regularly visiting Lahaul since 1986, and every twist on Lahaul's roads have always been stunning," he says. While the Kailash Mansarovar in Tibet, he promises, will draw you in with its air of spirituality and beauty, the rainforests of Arunachal will leave you spellbound.

"The thing that is really fascinating about the Himalayas is that every month lends a different personality — the colours of the landscape change with the passing of summers, winters and autumns," he says. Before the snow melts away, head to the mountains for your own Roerich moment.



The photographer Ashok Dilwali poses with his trusted companion amid the many pictures he has taken

When you're in the Himalayas, lack of water in your body can easily kill you before the cold does