

48 BARKHA DUTT
THE MARTYR'S DAUGHTER

54 SANJAY MANJREKAR
STRUGGLE WITH SPIN

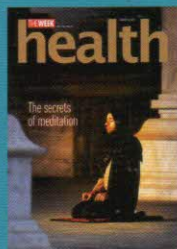


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The new Indian traveller
is pushing boundaries



Letter from the Editor

THE SUMMER OF 1965.

Unforgettable. Fresh out of school, I was in the belly of a steamer crossing the Bay of Bengal. Madras to Penang. My fellow travellers were workers bound for rubber and tea plantations in Malaysia. The engine room was below us. Outside, the sun was pure fire. Sweat dripped off the tip of my nose, and rivers ran down my back. To add to all this, the yawing and pitching had made every other guy seasick. The floor was awash in vomit. Who was to blame for my misery? The Reserve Bank of India, of course!

Fine, we'll start from the beginning. I wanted to visit friends in Malaysia, and the easiest way was to take the 'Straits Service'—steamers that ran from Madras to Singapore. These steamers hugged the east coast of Sri Lanka for a bit and cut sharp left in a straight line across the Bay of Bengal, brushing the northern tip of Indonesia, across the Strait of Malacca, on to Malaysia. First port of call: Penang, in five days.

In those days, to go abroad, you needed a P Form. Which essentially is the RBI's permission to travel. As I was a student on a personal trip, I was not issued the form. Then, someone told me that deck passengers did not need P Forms. MM Foam, a family venture, was then bringing out bed-rolls. I grabbed a showroom sample, bought a ticket and set sail. On the very first day, someone vomited all over my bedroll. From there on, the trip was 'memorable' to say the least. Five days on orange juice and Marie biscuits. Fighting a heaving stomach. Fighting the ship. Fighting the heat. The very

sight of Penang was bliss.

Now, people fly Chennai-Kuala Lumpur nonstop in just under four hours. That's puddle jumping, compared with the new Qatar Airways route: Doha to Auckland in slightly over 16 hours! As I look back at my steamer trip, the memories are all sweet. There is not even a hint of bitterness. Travel does that to you.

As THE WEEK brings out its first travel special, I could not but wax nostalgic. This issue is backed by THE WEEK-MaRS survey on the most tourist-friendly states in India. Our takeaway from this exercise has been that the new traveller is not interested in destination-hopping. He wants immersive tourism. And, that cannot be provided by states alone. What a guest feels about your state has to do with you, too.

One memory that comes to mind is about the time when Bina and I were in Johannesburg for an International Press Institute event. After dinner, we popped out for a stroll and walked a fair bit. Then, a stranger hurriedly crossed the road and stopped us. "You don't look like you are from around, sir. I insist that you go back to your hotel," he said politely, firmly. Taking his hint, we walked back. Later, we heard stories about how the city can be quite rough on strangers. Something bad could have happened to us that night. Perhaps, we would have been safe, too. But, our everlasting memory about Johannesburg is about the kind man who crossed the road to ensure the safety of two strangers in his city. Like I said, beyond governments and hoteliers, so much depends on you.

Philip Mathew,

Philip Mathew



CONTENTS

COVER STORY

56



SAUL BERA

HIT THE ROAD

Gone are the days when travel was a luxury. Today, it is a much-needed break or escape from the chaos that rules our lives. In this issue, which comes with the first-ever THE WEEK-MaRS Travel Survey, we take you on a trip that will give the travel junkie in you a high

COLUMNS

- | | |
|--|--|
| 16 Power Point
Sachidananda Murthy | 106 Strange Encounters
Jerry Pinto |
| 20 Forthwrite
Meenakshi Lekhi | 109 Racket Science
Saina Nehwal |
| 32 General's Jottings
General Bikram Singh | 112 Arugula Guy
Manu Chandra |
| 50 PMO Beat
R.Prasannan | 116 Last Word
Shashi Tharoor |

- | | |
|--|---|
| 24 Current events:
A war veteran's fight against corrupt politicians and officers who demolished his home in Maharashtra | 34 Local body polls: BJP's victory in Maharashtra has set the stage for a showdown with the Shiv Sena |
| 28 Manipur:
Veteran politician Rishang Keishing, 97, recounts his memories of India's first Lok Sabha | 52 Cricket: India fell to spin in the Pune Test, but might return stronger
● Our generation played spin better, says Sanjay Manjrekar |

NEXT WEEK

INSIDE NORTH KOREA

COVER DESIGN: **BINESH SREEDHARAN**
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- 48 **PATRIOTISM**
Barkha Dutt writes on the controversy surrounding Delhi college student Gurmehar Kaur



- 96 **EUROPE'S TRUMP**
Anita Pratap writes on the Dutch elections and its effect on far right populism across Europe



- 103 **@LEISURE:**
At 75, age is just a number for kalaripayat exponent Meenakshi Raghavan

