

## TRAVEL PACKAGE



### WINTER SPECIAL

The Seven Stars Resort in Turks and Caicos is offering 40 per cent off as part of its winter special scheme. With the discount, rooms start at \$390 a night through March 31. A three-night minimum stay is required. The resort recently opened the Deck, a bar complete on the sands of Grace Bay beach.



### MEAL DEAL FOR MARCH

Also in March, the 125-room hotel is offering seven nights for the price of five. The special package includes continental breakfast, and kids under 12 eat free. The deal is available the entire month of March. To reserve, call (866) 570-7777 or visit [www.sevenstarsgracebay.com](http://www.sevenstarsgracebay.com).



The stunning beach front by night

### RUPALI DEAN

Paradise... is just the word for Ko Samui. It only took us an hour to get here from Bangkok and the airport was quite an eye candy. The airport building was a series of wooden looking beach huts, and oh so beautiful!

After a quick bath, some lazing and munching around at the beach the whole afternoon, we went for the most incredible meal in the evening, probably one of the best meals I have ever had. Now I really love seafood and the seafood out here is so cheap and fresh that we had to try it. Samui Seafood did a whole range of seafood for a set price which was the best option to experience and try a whole range of different dishes. Well, to say I was stuffed by the end of it would have been an understatement. I literally couldn't move, but the food was incredible and so unbelievably tasty. I think the best dish was the blue crabs. I have eaten crab a few times, but these were far better than I have ever had before and there was so much meat on them.

After finishing our feast, we headed into the busy part of town to see what the nightlife had to offer. Night time is really special here. As the sun starts to drop, tables get dragged onto beaches everywhere and a million captivating fairy lights begin to twinkle, transforming a beautiful world into an entirely magical place. It is very easy to lose track of time and we stayed up late every night, enjoying the cooler night air.

We also hopped by at Zazen, it looked brilliant at night. The biggest nightclub known as the Green Mango was huge and we ended up partying till the early hours.

Hubby thought it would be a good idea to tour the island. I wasn't too excited at first as I

wanted another beach day, but I am glad we did it. We booked the "around the island" tour which took us to different points of interest around the island. The first stop was at the Chaweng viewpoint, where the panorama was stunning. The grandfather and grandmother rock were next, and these Ko Samui attractions can stop any tourist on their tracks for a snapshot clicking moment. These rock formations, shaped by nature, resembled human genitals.

who sell different ingredients for cooking (spices and things). Finally, the Thai are the farmers who grow and sell fruits and vegetables. Foodies that we are, we loved the walk through the market.

Mummy Monk was after that. It is a mummified monk sporting sunglasses. The monk lived and taught on the island and a temple is currently being constructed in his honour.

Lunch by the waterfall was a beautiful stop. I loved the minced pork salad (*baikapau*) along with some fried chicken.

We had an hour to shop in Nathon Town. I didn't buy anything, but I enjoyed looking at the flowers carved out of soap. The details on them are amazing and it smells really good. The last two stops were at the Big Buddha Temple and Phai Laem Temple. Both temples featured some pretty big Buddha statues.

The temples were done Thai style with amazing coloured glass. Hubby and I enjoyed the tour and it was a great way to spend our last day on the island.

Next day we headed to the pier, caught the early morning ferry, and then flew to Bangkok. *Sawadee kah* Thailand!

The writer is a travel enthusiast

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The third stop was at a fishing village. Our guide explained that there were three groups that lived and worked there. The Muslims are the fishermen who fish at night and come back to land early in the morning to sell their fish. The Chinese are the merchants



(Above) Sun beds on the beach; (right) Lemongrass king prawns with kaffir lime

### GETTING THERE

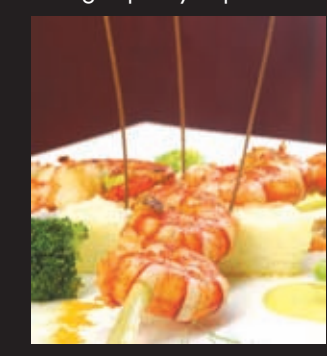
**By Air:** Ko Samui Airport (USM) is a private airport originally built by Bangkok Airways, which is still the main operator, in addition to Bangkok Air, Ko Samui is served to flights a day by Bangkok with Thai Airways as well as by Berjaya Air from Kuala Lumpur and Firefly from Penang and Subang Airport (Kuala Lumpur) in Malaysia. **By Bus:** Pick up trucks/public passenger pick up vehicles (Songthaews) also serve as group taxis. Hail one on any major road with a wave or yell, negotiate a fare, and sit down on the bench in the back. Fares are around 10 Baht per person, in the event you wish to hire your own personal taxi then you ought to negotiate the cost first. Please contact the Immigration Department for more details.

**Tourist information:** TAT Tourist Information Centres in Thailand 1600 New Phetburi Road, Makkasan, Rajatevee, Bangkok 10310

Tel: +66 2250 5500 Fax: +66 2250 551

Email: [center@tat.or.th](mailto:center@tat.or.th)

**Accommodation:** Thailand is well-equipped for tourism, so there is ample variety of selection when it comes to finding accommodation. The Passage Samui is a brand new boutique resort on the Thai Island of Ko Samui. The Passage Samui resort and Spa has villas to meet all budgets, from exclusive beach front villas to simple and high quality superior ones.



## Unspoilt NZ and fascinating Thailand

### CELEB TRAVEL

### SHENAZ TREASURYVALA

When I was 13, I made a pact with myself. I planned to explore the world and till date I've kept that promise and touched every continent and country and swam all the seas. Had I been in the 1400s, I would have sailed with Christopher Columbus on his ship, Santa Maria, across the oceans with an eye patch on. My father was a captain on a ship and I spent the first seven years of my life onboard and was very upset when I had to come ashore and was enrolled in a school. I guess that is where this wanderlust comes from.

I love adventure and want to explore and try everything that the universe has to offer. I try and visit places I've never been to before and try locations that are off the beaten track. I yearn for outdoors and nature is my first love but I also love buzzing cities and small towns.

I always try and take a couple of weeks between two hectic shooting schedules and take off on my own, discovering the locales around the world. All my recent shoots have been in and around Mumbai, so I often buy a ticket and just take off. I am very passionate about travelling and writing and I amalgamate both by writing travel articles. Among all the places I've traveled till now, New

Zealand has thrown some of the most exciting experiences. I drove from the North Island to the South Island and nothing can beat the extraordinary scenery that changes with every 100 meters you cover. Small, remote and thinly populated, the world is a gentler, more respectful and beautiful place down there. It is just pristine, untouched and pure. And that is how I think the world looked like before we humans arrived at the scene, populated and spoilt it. One just can't get bored of New Zealand and the excitement it offers, and it is the place I could visit again and again for simply this reason. Another one of my favourite holiday destinations is Thailand. It is just three hours away from India, it's inexpensive and I simply relish Thai

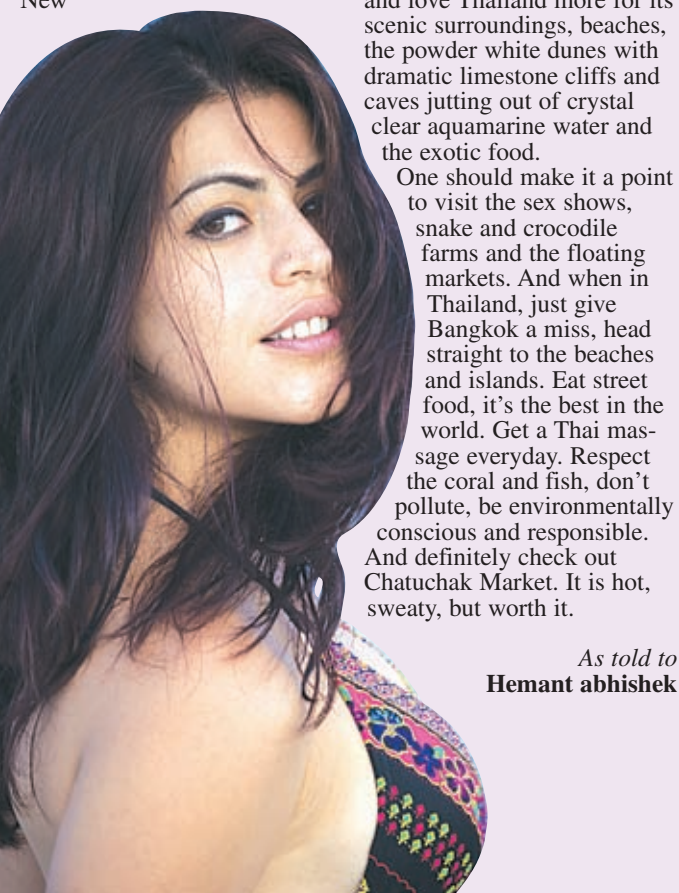
food, massages and their big smiles. They also have the best beaches in the world. Sometimes I think it isn't fair; there are 200 countries across the globe and Thailand has truly managed to snag a disproportionate number of the world's best

I love Thailand for its scenic surroundings, beaches, white dunes with dramatic limestone cliffs and caves jutting out of crystal clear water.

beaches. And there is a suggestion that I have for anyone touring Thailand — be very careful about the massage you sign up for. The nightlife here is wild with full moon parties and more. But I'm more of a day person and love Thailand more for its scenic surroundings, beaches, the powder white dunes with dramatic limestone cliffs and caves jutting out of crystal clear aquamarine water and the exotic food.

One should make it a point to visit the sex shows, snake and crocodile farms and the floating markets. And when in Thailand, just give Bangkok a miss, head straight to the beaches and islands. Eat street food, it's the best in the world. Get a Thai massage everyday. Respect the coral and fish, don't pollute, be environmentally conscious and responsible. And definitely check out Chatuchak Market. It is hot, sweaty, but worth it.

As told to Hemant abhishek



## Experience a Krishna moment in Vrindavan

### ARATI BHARGAVA

It is sundown, the time when Lord Krishna like fellow cowherds leads the animals home after a day long grazing in the wooded span around Vrindavan. This is when I arrive in this deeply religious town where nearly 5,000 years ago, Krishna spent his childhood. I head straight to the famous Krishna temple called the Banke Bihari temple and leave the car near the bylane that leads to it. On both the sides are shops selling *mithai* from *pedas* to *malai kuliyas*, fancy clothes in silk brocade to fit idols, pictures of Krishna, some alone and some with Radha, and flower stalls.

The Banke Bihari temple appears to be a simple structure from the outside, but inside the atmosphere is charged and scores of people gather in the open space ahead of the chamber in which Krishna's idol is placed. One looks at the idol and the huge eyes of the

deity look back at you — brilliant and overpowering. One watches mesmerised. The offerings include Krishna's favourite lotus garland, bunches of *tulsi* (basil) leaves and sweets. The *pundits* here called *Gosains* accept the offerings and give *prasad* to people.

There are over 5,000 temples in this small town spread over a 2.25 sq km area situated on the right bank of the river Yamuna including the Krishna Balram temple and the Shahji temple. At one time the place had innumerable *tulsi* groves and it is said that this is how Vrindavan got its name. Vrinda came from *brinda* or *tulsi* and *van* being a forest. As most lanes are narrow, the easiest and fastest way to get to a place is in a *rickshaw*. It is early morning when I take a *rickshaw* to Keshi *ghat* where Krishna killed the demon Keshi. The students one meets on the road offer to act as guides. It is quite common here I am told. I take one of them along who narrates Krishna's story as we reach the *ghat* with its impressive stone steps lead-

One looks at the Krishna idol and the huge eyes of the deity look back at you — brilliant and overpowering.



ing to the Yamuna river. There are many restaurants here. From Sagar Ratna with South Indian food to the roadside shop serving *puri sabzi* or *kachoris*, and I settle for the latter. Having visited Nidhivan, a small *tulsi* grove, where locals believe that Krishna and Radha come here every night, I drive to

Govardhan. The Govardhan Parvat is near Vrindavan and about 25 km from Mathura. Govardhan Parvat is on a narrow sandstone hill near a large tank called Mansi Ganga. I expected to see a hill, but as I reached the cluster of shops and the temple, I realised that the



(Left) There are over 5,000 temples in this small town situated on the right bank of the river Yamuna; (above) Govardhan Parvat seems a span of open hilly ground

approach is too gradual to be starkly visible. Govardhan seems a span of open hilly ground, but it is most revered. Krishna, when he was a child, held up the Govardhan Parvat on the tip of his finger for seven days and nights when the great deluge took place as Indra's wrath at the people not performing *yagya* for him. The *parvat* many believe was a manifestation of Krishna himself. Many take a *parikrama* of Govardhan along the 23 km path around it. But I visit the temple, walk around the shops near it and drive back to Vrindavan passing the beautiful *sarovars* enroute. I am at peace, content and filled with wonder.

The writer is a travel guru