

# Of Tranquil Trails and Tea Cups

Climb the mountains, see the world, they said. For, this world would be unlike any other. The moment the cacophony of civilisation is left behind, this world beckons, almost like a dream. The melodious notes of babbling brooks and rainbow world of wildflowers give the greener-than-enemy fields of Palampur in Himachal Pradesh an 'Alice in Wonderland' charm. As if it is all but just a matter of a moment and adorable beings from another side would come tumbling down the rabbit holes.

The tech-less existence at the Rakkh resort with a bird's eye view of the deodar-engulfed pastures and snowy peaks of Dauladhar as a backdrop further adds postcard-perfect memories. That rooster, however, whose cock-a-doodle-doos tear through the quiet and calm morning, could elicit different emotions. Yet, the embracing warmth and hues of the winter sun and ceaseless chirping of birds make for quite the spectacle for the sunrise in the hills—the golden crimson rays and smoke from the village homes adding surreal to the picture.

The activity at the dugout pits at Rakkh would mean a special feast—*Kangri dham*, the traditional vegetarian festive meal of

Andretta Pottery Studio; (right) mud sculptures at the studio



It may be the less popular cousin of Dharamsala and McLeodganj, but Palampur's stunning vistas, art and food are a traveller's delight

By GARIMA VERMA



(Clockwise) Palampur landscape; freshly plucked tea leaves being brought in for processing at the Himalayan Brew Tea Factory; varieties of tea; *Kangri dham*; *lungdu pickle*

Himachal Pradesh. Till then, a quick yet somewhat demanding walk for city legs through the lanes and life of the Rakkh village—the tiny panchayat office, cattle rooms, mud houses, colourful idle looms and reluctant kids off to school—churns up quite the appetite.

## Himachali delicacies

The *dham*'s origin is believed to date back more than 1,000 years. The no-onion, no-garlic feast is said to have been inspired by the 36-course Kashmiri

wazwan. Chamba's king Jaistambh, a descendant of Lord Ram's son Kush, asked his cooks to evolve a similar elaborate menu as per the local traditions and Himachali produce. Its cooking techniques and the order of serving the dishes were based on Vedic knowledge. According to some, *dham* may have developed from Himachali temple cuisine too. In any case, the slow-cooked sattvic feast was made only by a group of Brahmin cooks known as *botis*, who still follow strict practices while cooking it in *charotis* (copper and brass vessels with narrow mouths). They are also the custodians of the ancient unwritten recipes that are passed on by word of mouth.

The traditional *dham* meal is devoid of bread. It includes plain rice, *madra* (yogurt-based lentil curry),



(Clockwise) Palampur landscape; freshly plucked tea leaves being brought in for processing at the Himalayan Brew Tea Factory; varieties of tea; *Kangri dham*; *lungdu pickle*

*khatta* (chickpea curry), *sepu badi* (black lentil dumplings), *kulthi dal*, and sweet rice served on *pattal* plates.

## Tea times

A scrumptious meal like that should be duly followed by some activity before indulging in more epicurean delights. It's time to expand the tea horizons from the known Assam and Darjeeling to the unknown tea capital of northern India and be awed upon introduction to Kangra teas at Himalayan Brew Factory. Started in 1894, Kangra teas were, in the late 1800s, hailed superior to many of their international counterparts.

Palampur owes its place on the world map to that tea bush in 1849, brought by one Dr Jameson, the botanical gardens' superintendent, from

## More to it

Besides the many treks that start from Palampur, a quick trip to Bir (1.5 hours) for paragliding can be considered.

Apart from *dham*, other vegetarian and non-vegetarian delights include *khatta* mutton, *lungdu* pickle and local *saag* with *makke ki roti* made from freshly ground flour.

Almora. Palampur's weather helped the tea, and these black and green varieties found their way to far off tables across the globe. They were, however, dealt a cruel hand by nature in 1905. A 7.8 earthquake meant that along with numerous lives, the estates were also lost. Kangra tea is currently trying to make its presence felt again and striving for the past glory.

PHOTOGRAPHS: GARIMA VERMA



## Art alert

Half an hour away from the resort is another connection with history that Palampur is proud of. For, Andretta village is not only keeping 1,000-year-old pottery techniques alive, but is also quietly leading the pottery movement in the region. Right from Andretta Pottery Studio's signature slip design to other studios in and around Palampur, introducing enthusiasts to basic and advanced skills, even the 16th-century Japanese technique of glazed ceramic firing—*raku*—the therapeutic presence of clay is all around. Norah Richards, an Irish theatre artist, laid the foundation of Andretta artist colony in the 1920s. Sardar Gurcharan Singh and later his son and daughter-in-law, Mansimran and Mary, built and expanded the pottery studio.

The humming wheels and soiled hands are inspiring enough to make visitors give clay work a try. The experts' direction and encouragement bring life to the imagination. And, who knows, it might even be worth skipping city beats for a slow tranquil life in the hills, making a few cups and pots in the process, some of them finding pride of place in the shopping windows of the world.

## Veg Wonders from the Alps

Restaurants in Switzerland are stepping up to craft green menus

By PALLAVI PASRICHA

For those who thought Swiss cuisine and vegetarian food don't go hand in hand—except for a generous splash of cheese in some dishes—their next Alpine visit will be a surprise. With the rise of vegetarianism, Swiss restaurants are stepping up to create green menus, and their offerings are not limited to just potato and cheese dishes, but sophisticated preparations.

Perhaps not many would know that the world's oldest continuously run vegetarian restaurant certified by the Guinness Book of World Records is in Zurich. In 1898, a German tailor named Ambrosius Hiltl was advised by doctors to eat vegetarian food. The restaurant he opened initially got a negative reaction from people accustomed to large portions of meat, but it has slowly climbed up the popularity charts. At Haus Hiltl, located near the luxury shopping street of Bahnhofstrasse, one can choose from a buffet option of about 100 dishes on the ground floor or head to the opulent first floor for an à la carte meal with specials such as gnocchi with saffron sauce, baby spinach, cherry tomatoes and pine nuts, Hiltl Bolognese made with carrot, celery and soy mince, and mushroom stroganoff. For vegetarians who don't mind eggs, one of the restaurant's bestsellers is the Hiltl Tartare made with organic eggs, eggplant and capers. There are burgers



(Clockwise from above) Hiltl burgers; Chef Paolo Casanova; Rolf Hiltl; kohlrabi dish; A dish at Chesa Stüva Colani, which changes depending on what the chef finds during foraging

made either with pickled cucumbers or pea guacamole and pimientos. Some desi signature dishes such as *palak paneer* are available too. The 'vegetarian butchery' sells *paneer*, tofu and soy sausages.

The fourth-generation owner, Rolf Hiltl, a flexitarian, says, "When I eat meat, I don't feel good." His view reflects a new shift. In 2020, the Swiss population bought 52 percent more plant-based meat substitutes than in the previous year and this number is set to keep increasing each year, according to the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology. Last year, on October 1,

Switzerland celebrated Swisustainable Veggie Day for the first time, where restaurants across the country offered only vegetarian fare.

Plant-based menus are not just limited to big cities like Zurich, Basel, Geneva and Bern, but have found their way to small villages and charming Swiss towns, where the focus is on local produce. In the gorgeous village of Madulain near St. Moritz, which is home to just 230 people, Chef Paolo Casanova heads a Michelin-star restaurant named Chesa Stüva Colani. Its most innovative dish is *Io Faccio Colazione*, an interpretation of breakfast that includes a toasted almond drink, a croissant, mixed seeds and peanuts granola, and cappuccino made of peas with parmesan foam and fermented chestnut powder.

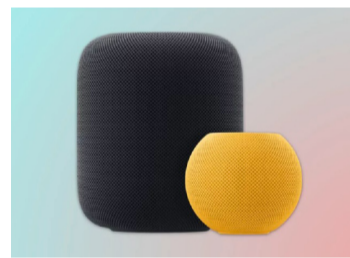
As Swiss cuisine does not have a strong vegetarian heritage beyond a handful of dishes such as *fondue*, *raclette*, *rosti*, *polenta croutés au fromage* and *Alpen macaroni* to name a few, chefs are letting creativity



loose by connecting with nature. Casanova, for instance, gets inspired as he forages in the nearby forest to gather pinecones, mushrooms and berries with his staff. He feels it's not easy to get quality ingredients in the market. "The plate always looks different because it completely depends on what I find in the forest," says Casanova. For example, in summer, he makes the 'Window in the Summer', which is garden greens, dough ravioli stuffed with goat cheese and leeks, with summer truffle that he has picked himself. "Gourmet deserves quality. That starts from the mind."

The charming village of Vitznau at the foot of Mount Rigi is home to a two-Michelin-star restaurant, Sens, at Hotel Vitznauerhof. "You can play more and go deeper into the flavours with vegetarian food," says Dutch chef Jeroen Achtien at Sens. Swiss vegetarian fare can get as complex as a meat-based dish. For instance, at Sens, the meal starts with a dish that has a bed of marinated kohlrabi and green apple with lovage sorbet, along with a dash of vinegar made from elderberries. Then there is foam made of yoghurt and damask roses topped with crispy potato and quinoa, finished with verbena and marigold leaves (chew them well to get out the flavours). Ready for a green bite?

## QUICK TAKE



## LOST AND FOUND

The HomePod software version 16.3 was launched in January and Apple has already added new features to the product. Some of these include tracking your family or friends or things you may have lost. This is done through the Find My feature. Powered by Siri, Apple's digital assistance, all you have to do is say "Hey Siri, where is (name of family member, friend, or item you're looking for)". Siri will then give you the location, including their/its distance and a nearby address.



## NEW NIGHT FIX

Noida has got a new food, drinks and music hub with Molecule. The cabanas on its wooden deck is a highlight feature besides food signatures such as *avocado crostini*, *mutton adana kebab*, Cantonese lamb chop, diced Asian pork belly, spicy mushroom cream cheese, spicy miso salmon roll and burrata Neapolitan pizza. Its dimsum menu is not to be missed, according to the man behind the restaurant, Sahil Sambhi, who has given the city some of the most popular food and nightlife haunts—Molecule, Vietnam and Distillery.

Where: Fifth Floor, Skymark 1, Sector 98, Noida

## Breath of Fresh Air



By MAITHREYI SOOREJ

Going green is getting a tech stamp. A bioengineered superplant may just be the tool of the future to purify air at home. Even though there are several indoor plants used to do the job, nothing compares to Neo P1, a genetically engineered plant that offers purification equivalent to 30 indoor plants. A type of pothos, a plant variety that is efficient at removing volatile organic compounds (VOCs) from the air, Neo P1 is the creation of a Paris-based biotech startup called Neoplants.

Open for pre-orders through its website, the plant has its unique soil, replete with biochar, the black carbon residue remaining after the heating of organic materials, such as biomass. This efficiently captures large amounts of formaldehyde, benzene, toluene and xylene—the four most toxic substances found indoors.

At its core, Neoplants believes nature to be the most powerful piece of technology. Leveraging

**All that Neo P1 plant requires is some water—once a month during winter, and once in two weeks during summer**

this idea through the interplay of genes added to the plant's DNA, the enzymes that are produced convert the environmental toxins, especially the four VOCs, into harmless compounds, which are used by the bio plant. The formaldehyde transforms into fructose and benzene, and toluene and xylene change into amino acid.

Neo P1 doesn't need much attention either. A plant supplement called power drops is added to the soil once a month, which takes care of all its nutritional needs. Other than that, all it requires is some water—once a month during winter, and once in two weeks during summer. The built-in reservoir in the pot helps with efficient absorption. Ready to turn to greener pastures?

## AIR PURIFIER OR A BIO-PLANT?

While air purifiers are great at capturing particulate matter, they aren't able to catch the four volatile organic compounds (VOCs) or the most toxic substances found in household air—formaldehyde, benzene, toluene and xylene. Bio plants don't require electricity and run around the clock.