

# Of Moonrise and Sunsets

Watch some of nature's most spectacular sights at this historical town as you enjoy a mesmerising art festival at The Lalit Temple View Khajuraho. **BY PALLAVI PASRICHA**

**I**T WAS A NIGHT like no other. The sky was pitch dark, and looked bleak without its usual make-up. The stars were in hiding and their silver companion was doing an equally good job of crouching behind the hill, as if it didn't want the world to see it that night. But when the moon finally made an appearance, it was grand in every sense... it bathed the river and everything around it in its pure and white light. The hill, the forest, the river, which had been swallowed by the dark night, began to emerge as independent forms

again. I had grown to believe that only sunsets and sunrises are beautiful but it took a moonrise at the ancient temple town of Khajuraho to turn this idea on its head. Even if I had returned home without seeing the legendary temples that make Khajuraho famous, I would not have complained.

I was at the gala evening of the two-day Art Festival, organised by The Lalit group of hotels twice a year. Running into its third year, the venue this time was Karnavati Interpretation Centre along the banks of River Ken outside Khajuraho. The unusual setting was beautiful, with the glow from hundreds of candles, diyas and soft lamps adding to the radiant and calm ambiance.

I quickly took my place in the amphitheatre. Within five minutes it was over to Kathak dancer Sharmistha Mukherjee who mesmerised the audience with her performance. She combined Kathak and western classical music, a composition I had neither heard of, nor witnessed earlier. But I really enjoyed this unique amalgamation in which Indian dance steps were cleverly matched the notes of Western classical music. After the dance, it was time for some Indian

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classical music by Gurinder Harnam Singh before we head back to the hotel, The Lalit Temple View Khajuraho, for dinner. After a lazy meal I was about to retire to my room, but there was more in store. To catch the third performance of the gala evening we went to the lawns to be enchanted by violinist Anupriya. That night I went to bed with these lilting melodies still resonating in my ears. Indeed my first day at Khajuraho had begun on a wonderful note.

The next day was my tryst with the famed temples, of which I already had a fleeting glimpse on my way from the airport. Till now I had known them only through the pages of history books and internet surfing, but no amount of reading could have prepared me for what I was about to see. Stepping into the western group of temples, the painstaking detailing of these sculptures avested my attention. The carvings in the temples depicted mundane daily scenes, but none of the figures wore the same expression. It was tough to believe that they were made of sandstone. The guide told me that there were more than 1,000 ways of styling the hair to make a bun, all depicted in the wonderful temples. Better than a contemporary salon! In fact, taking inspiration from these lovely statues in the temples, the theme for this year's The Lalit Art Festival was *Shringaar*, which was beautifully

1. Anupriya on the violin
2. Sharmishtha Mukherjee charms with her dance at The Lalit Art Festival
3. Kandariya Mahadeva Temple
4. The temple at The Lalit property
5. Replicas of the famed statues of Khajuraho
6. View from the Lakshman Temple



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depicted through various programs over two days.

Lakshman temple is the one with the famed erotic sculptures. But I was surprised when the guide told us that less than three percent of the sculptures depict erotic art. After roaming around in the sweltering heat and admiring the ancient art, all I could think of was a refreshing drink and snooze. But I got a better deal. A long spa session followed soon.

The mere thought of a classic Swedish massage rejuvenated my tired body much before I had stepped into the Rejuve-The Spa. I began with a body scrub followed by the massage and ended with a clay pack. The treatment was heavenly. The orange scented body scrub was soothing and refreshing and I even managed to catch a nap till a cold clay pack was evenly applied on my body. After a warm shower the only thing I wanted to do was return to my

comfortable room and slip into slumberland for a while.

A short nap later I rushed out to catch the much talked about evening *aarti* at the temple in the hotel premises. I was a little late, but made it before it ended. Against a bright orange sunset, five priests chanted prayers and conducted the *aarti*. It was a surreal sight. I was looking forward to the *prasad*, which I was told would be a *peda*. What I got instead was *misri* and nuts. But I could not complain as it was 'god's offering'. By now the sun had turned into a bright red ball of fire, painting everything around in the same colours, that slowly turned pale and faded away into the darkness.

Khajuraho has a certain charm that grows on you in many ways. You slowly fall in love with the temples, the sunsets and moonrise, stark surroundings and of course the festivals that make it so famous.

But I wanted to experience all these and the town again in winter to do it justice. So while I headed to catch my flight back home I promised myself to return soon.

## FACT FILE

- Getting There: Fly Delhi-Khajuraho-Delhi on Jet Airways. Air India also flies from Delhi thrice a week. Fare: Rs. 7,000 (approx).
- When to go: October to March is the best season to visit the temple town.
- Plus Says
  - Stay: The Lalit Temple View Khajuraho, tel: (07686) 272 111; www.thelalit.com
  - Eat: Must try malpua at Panna restaurant at The Lalit Temple View Khajuraho.
  - Shop: Pick up miniature statues of the sculptures of the temple from shops outside the Western Temples complex.
  - See: Add a wildlife safari at Panna National Park to your itinerary and also visit Madla, a village that is famous for its pottery.