VOL. 1 · NO. 11 · NOVEMBER 2026

WAYFARER

One Planet. Endless Journeys.



New Zealand's Great Walks, and how to book one

- MEGHALAYA: BRIDGES GROWN FROM LIVING ROOTS
- KANHA AFTER THE MONSOON, WITH THE WOMEN WHO RUN THE MUKKI ZONE
- NEPAL: AN AUTUMN TREK TO POON HILL
- TORRES DEL PAINE AND MADEIRA'S WATER-CHANNEL PATHS

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EDITOR'S DISPATCH

The Great Outdoors

A note from the editor

A good walk is a plain pleasure. You put one foot in front of the other and the day does the rest. What this issue tries to add is a second question: who made the path, and who looks after it?

In Meghalaya, people grow bridges out of tree roots and then spend years repairing them. In Kanha, women from the villages around the forest have become guides, drivers and guards. In Nepal, a young guide had to get past the doubts of her own relatives before she led her first group. Their stories come from published reporting, which we name on each page, and we have not interviewed them ourselves.

We have also been careful with the practical details. Hut prices, permit fees and visa rules change, and some of them were described differently by different sources, so we point you to the official page rather than tell you what to pay. Where a date is not yet confirmed, it says so.

Go gently. Carry out what you carry in, and leave the path in better shape than you found it.

Go gently. Carry out what you carry in.

EDITOR'S DISPATCH

- Gitanjali Gautam

November is when a lot of the world's best walking seasons open. The monsoon has cleared from the Himalaya, New Zealand's huts take their first bookings of summer, and Patagonia's spring begins. This issue is about walking and watching: trails built by people over centuries, forests kept by communities, and the guides and rangers who make a good day outdoors possible.

TRAVEL TIP

Carry a head torch for levada tunnels, and check for trail closures before you set out.

DID YOU KNOW

Meghalaya's root bridges are grown from rubber-fig roots guided across streams, and some take decades to bear weight.

DID YOU KNOW

Madeira's levada network exceeds 2,170 km, and construction began in the sixteenth century.

DID YOU KNOW

Torres del Paine has been a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve since 1978.

DID YOU KNOW

Parliament recognised New Zealand's Whanganui River as a legal entity on 15 March 2017.

DID YOU KNOW

Kanha's mascot is a barasingha, or swamp deer, named Bhoorsingh.

TRAVEL TIP

Book Great Walks huts as soon as the season's booking window opens; the most popular ones fill quickly.

TRAVEL TIP

Hire trekking guides and porters through registered agencies that pay and equip their staff fairly.

Leave the path in better shape than you found it.

WAYFARER EDITORIAL

Prices, timings, permits and visa notes are approximate - please verify before booking.

IN THIS ISSUE

Contents

COVER STORY

New Zealand's Great Walks, and how to book one

NORTHEAST INDIA · MEGHALAYA

Meghalaya: bridges grown from roots, forests kept by communities

INDIA

Kanha, after the rains: a tiger reserve and its neighbours

ASIA · NEPAL

Nepal after the monsoon: an autumn walk toward Poon Hill

AROUND THE WORLD

Torres del Paine: walking Patagonia in spring

Madeira's levadas: walking the water channels

REAL STORIES FROM THE ROAD

Keeping the bridges alive: Morningstar Khongthaw and the root-bridge builders

From porter to leader: Sumitra Acharya

The women of Mukki: guides, drivers and guards in Kanha

A river with a legal voice: the Whanganui

READER AND CONTRIBUTOR BRIEFS

Proposed commission: “My first long walk”

FOOD, HERITAGE AND NATURE

The Taste of Travel: the Khasi kitchen

Heritage Without Borders: the sacred forest at Mawphlang

The Natural Calendar: November

Responsible travel: seven habits for the trail

PRACTICAL TOOLKIT

The Trekker's Checklist

The 24-Hour Destination: Pokhara

COMMUNITY

The Traveller's Lexicon: kaitiakitanga

Travel Quiz — November

Your turn: the trail that taught you something

The Traveller's Bookshelf

The World Celebrates: festivals & events radar

Masthead

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How to read Wayfarer

RESEARCHED	Compiled from public sources; field verification pending.
PROPOSED	A commission, brief or concept - not a published story.
ILLUSTRATIVE	An example itinerary; check times and costs locally.
TEMPLATE	A format showing how offers appear; no real prices.

Go gently. Carry out what you carry in.

FROM THE EDITOR'S NOTE

I feel like a leader.

SUMITRA ACHARYA, TREKKING GUIDE, QUOTED BY NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TRAVELLER, 2024

Now I feel I was made to do this.

LAKSHMI MARAVI, FOREST GUARD, QUOTED BY IANS, 2018



Photo: Real Sovan · CC BY-SA 4.0

Prices, timings, permits and visa notes are approximate - please verify before booking.



COVER STORY

New Zealand's Great Walks, and how to book one

A national network of multi-day trails, a hut-booking system that rewards early planners, and a river that has been recognised in law as a living whole.

RESEARCHED

Photo: A Editing · CC BY-SA 4.0

NEW ZEALAND'S DEPARTMENT OF Conservation manages a set of long-distance tracks it calls the Great Walks, and November is when the main summer season begins. The Milford Track, in Fiordland, is the best known. According to the department's own page, the Great Walks season for the track runs from 1 November to 30 April, and the last departure for the 2026–27 season is on 28 April 2027. Outside those dates the track is unmanaged, with fewer facilities and no ranger.

The Milford Track is walked in one direction only, over three nights and four days. Walkers start at Glade Wharf on Lake Te Anau and finish at Sandfly Point on Milford Sound. The daily distances on the department's page add up to about 53.5 kilometres, a figure we have summed ourselves rather than found stated. The high point is Omanui/McKinnon Pass at 1,154 metres, reached on the third day after a climb of more than 500 metres, followed by a long descent to the last hut.

Three huts, one per night, are the only places to stay; camping on the track is not permitted. The huts have bunks, mattresses, heating, toilets, basic cooking facilities and cold running water. They do not have cooking utensils or showers, so you need to carry a lot of the basics yourself. In the Great Walks season, you must book huts online in advance, and the department says that without a valid booking you may be turned away or charged a penalty.

Prices matter, and they differ by residency. The department's fees page for the Milford Track shows an adult rate of NZ$106 per person per night for New Zealanders and NZ$152 for international visitors, with half-price for children, for the 2025–26 season. Rates can change, so check the current schedule at booking.

The weather is part of the plan. Rainfall in the area can reach as much as 9,000 millimetres a year, and the department warns that cold, snow, wind and heavy rain can arrive at any time and that closures are possible. It also reports more than 57 avalanche paths on the track; in the Great Walks season it manages the risk to a low level, but it notes that avalanche risk can extend into December. Travel insurance is recommended.

Elsewhere in the network, the Whanganui Journey is a canoe trip on a river that New Zealand's Parliament recognised as a legal entity in 2017; the profile on our People pages explains how that happened. The point of mentioning it here is that New Zealand treats its outdoor places as more than scenery, and the booking system is one result: limited numbers, fixed itineraries, and an expectation that you carry your rubbish out.

Entry rules: Indian citizens generally need a visitor visa for New Zealand; the NZeTA electronic authority is for visa-waiver nationals. Reports in September 2026 said the visa application process was moving to an upgraded online system around the end of September or 1 October, though sources gave different dates. Check Immigration New Zealand before you apply.

How to go well: book early, since the most popular huts fill when the season's booking windows open; pack for four seasons in a day; tell someone your route; and follow the Mori and conservation guidance on the department's pages.

At a glance

SEASON	Great Walks season on the Milford Track: 1 November to 30 April (last departure 28 April 2027), per the Department of Conservation
GETTING THERE	Fly to Queenstown or another southern airport, then travel to Te Anau; a boat takes walkers to the start of the track.
ENTRY	Indian citizens generally need a visitor visa; the NZeTA is not for them. Confirm on the Immigration New Zealand site.
BOOK AHEAD	Huts must be booked online in advance in the Great Walks season; prices differ for New Zealand and international visitors.
CHECKED	10 November 2026. Fees, dates and visa rules must be re-confirmed.



Photo: Anushtup · CC BY-SA 4.0

Prices, timings, permits and visa notes are approximate - please verify before booking.

HOW TO REACH

Milford Track, Fiordland, New Zealand

AIRPORT	Queenstown Airport (ZQN) is the common gateway for Fiordland, roughly two hours by road from Te Anau (approximate); Invercargill and Te Anau-area services also exist.
RAILWAY	No passenger railway to Te Anau.
BY ROAD	Te Anau is the base town; a boat takes walkers across Lake Te Anau to the start of the track at Glade Wharf.
GETTING AROUND	Shuttles and boat transfers are booked with licensed operators; the finish at Sandfly Point connects by boat to Milford Sound.

Distances approximate; check transfer timetables when you book.
Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Department of Conservation: Milford Track (official) (www.doc.govt.nz); Immigration New Zealand (official) (www.immigration.govt.nz); Tourism New Zealand (official) (www.newzealand.com)

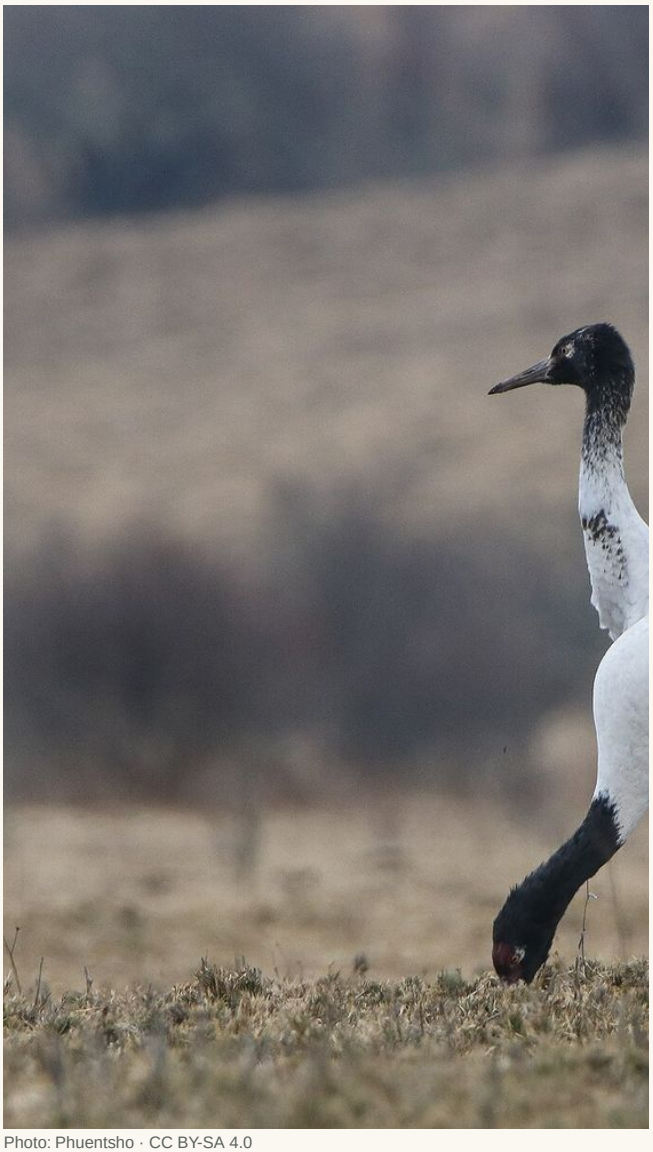


Photo: Phuentsho · CC BY-SA 4.0

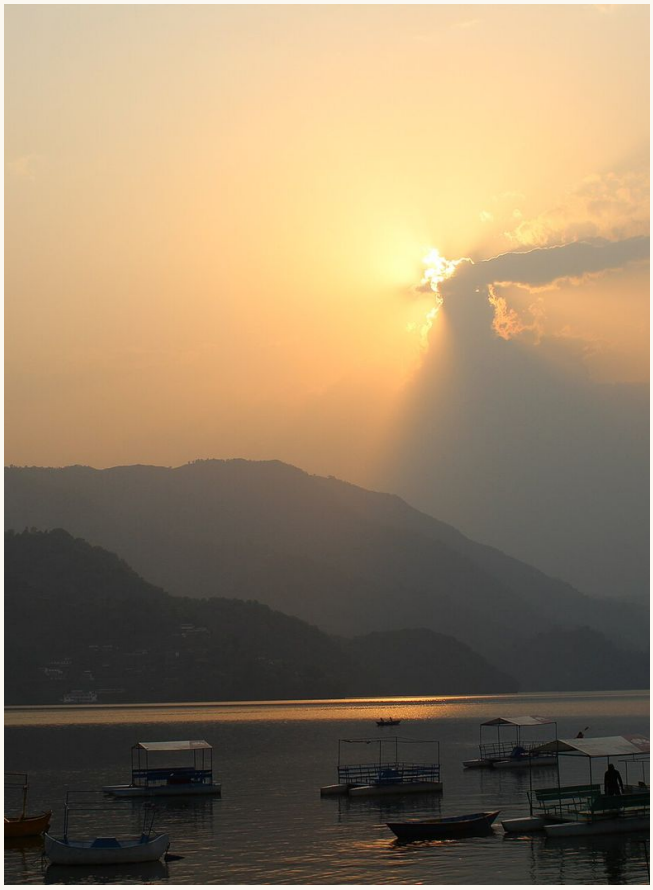


Photo: Iamavinashk · CC BY-SA 4.0

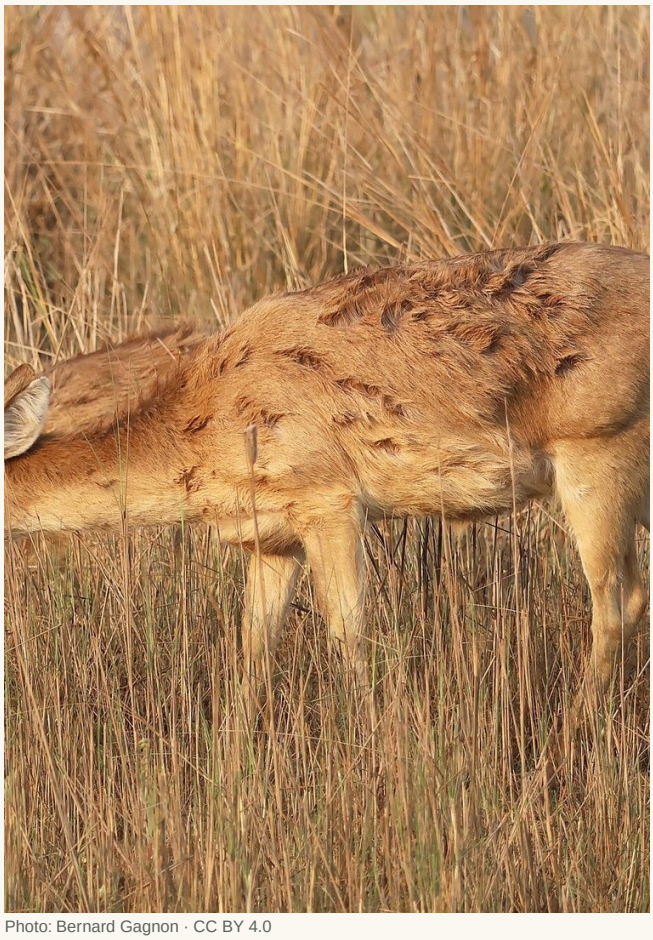
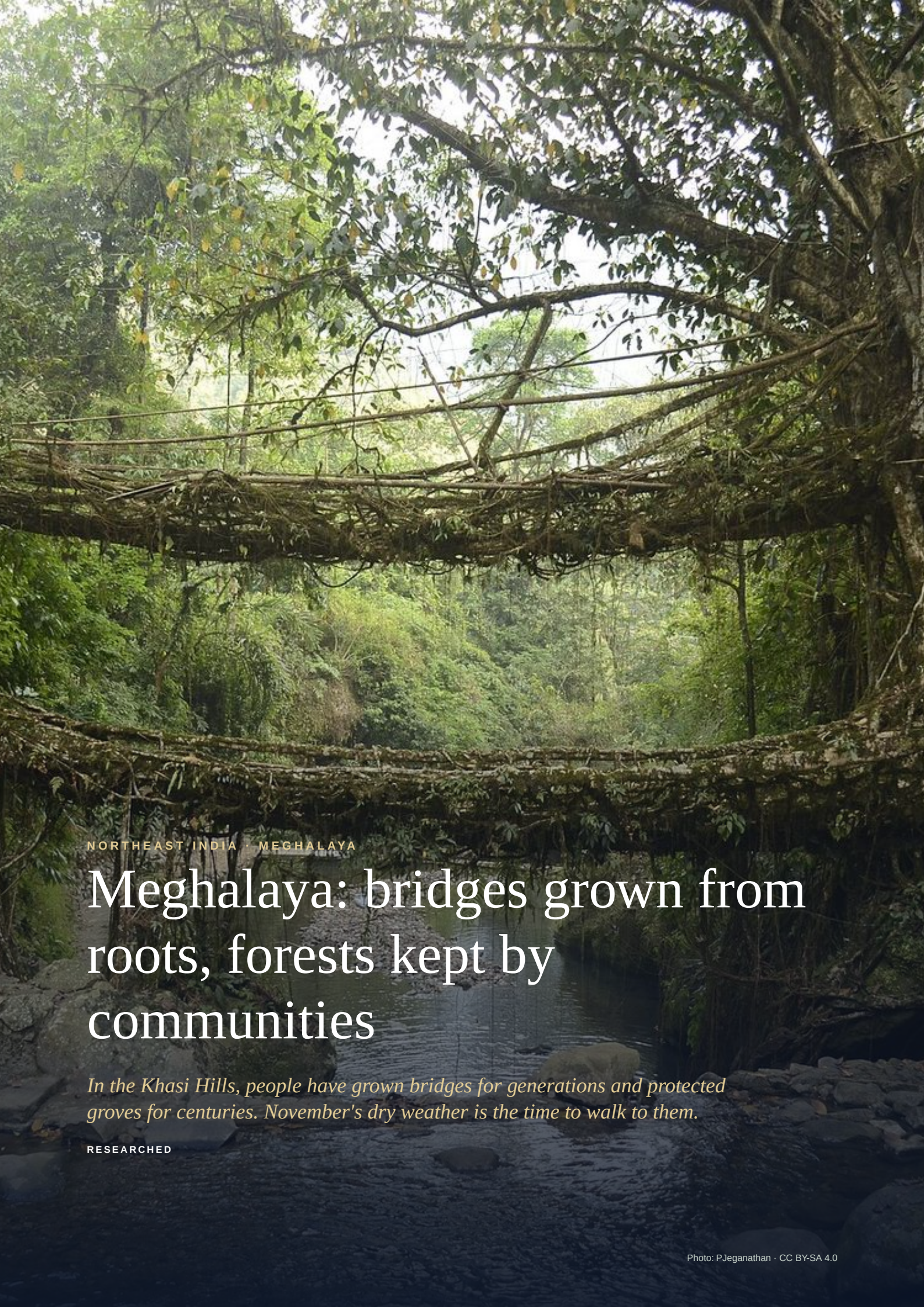


Photo: Bernard Gagnon · CC BY 4.0



NORTHEAST INDIA · MEGHALAYA

Meghalaya: bridges grown from roots, forests kept by communities

In the Khasi Hills, people have grown bridges for generations and protected groves for centuries. November's dry weather is the time to walk to them.

RESEARCHED

Photo: PJeganathan · CC BY-SA 4.0

MEGHALAYA, FORMED IN 1972 from part of Assam, takes its name from the Sanskrit for abode of clouds. It is among the wettest places on earth, with Cherrapunji (Sohra) holding the record for the most rain in a calendar month and nearby Mawsynram the record for a year. About 70 per cent of the state is forested, and its three largest communities, the Khasi, Garo and Jaintia, follow matrilineal custom: lineage and inheritance pass through women, and the youngest daughter inherits the family property.

The state's most unusual landscape feature is the living root bridge. Builders guide the aerial roots of the rubber fig, *Ficus elastica* , across a stream or gorge, using hollowed areca palm trunks and bamboo scaffolding for support; further roots are woven in to make steps and railings. A bridge can take decades to become strong enough to carry people, and many in use are very old. A 2019 mapping recorded 75 bridges, and the heritage committee at the centre of our People profile has mapped more than 132. The bridges were put on India's tentative list for UNESCO World Heritage status in 2022, which is a first step and not an inscription.

The best-known one, the double-decker bridge near Nongriat, is reached by a steep descent on stone stairs. Meghalaya Tourism advises that the trek is not recommended for people with vertigo, and one published account puts the walk at roughly two and a half hours each way, with stair counts that vary by source. Less-visited bridges around Rangthylliang and Mawkyrnot offer quieter walks. Tourism is also the main threat: reporting records popular bridges being reinforced with concrete or steel and paths being paved, while less-visited bridges are neglected.

For a different kind of heritage, spend a morning at Mawphlang sacred forest, about 25 kilometres from Shillong. Khasi communities protect groves like this one as religious sites, and visitors are asked to take nothing out of it, not even a twig; a local guide is effectively required, and entry and guide fees quoted in different sources vary, so confirm on the day.

Dates for planning: the Shillong Cherry Blossom Festival is scheduled for 20 and 21 November 2026 at the New Shillong Highland Grounds, according to news reports, with ticketed music performances. Book accommodation early if you plan to be in Shillong then.

Practical notes: Indian visitors do not need an Inner Line Permit for Meghalaya, but a 2019 amendment to the state's safety and security law, as reported then, requires non-residents staying more than 24 hours to register; we could not confirm the current process, so check with Meghalaya Tourism. Best months are October to April. Stay in homestays, hire local guides, and treat the bridges as village property, not a gym.

At a glance

BEST TIME	October to April, the drier months (general guidance)
GETTING THERE	Fly to Shillong (Umroi) or Guwahati; roads link Guwahati to Shillong and Sohra.
PERMITS	No Inner Line Permit for Meghalaya; a visitor-registration law was reported in 2019 and its current status should be checked with Meghalaya Tourism.
CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVAL	Scheduled for 20–21 November 2026, New Shillong Highland Grounds; confirm tickets and dates.
RESPONSIBLE-TRAVEL NOTE	Hire local guides, do not damage or climb on the bridges, take nothing from sacred groves.
CHECKED	10 November 2026

HOW TO REACH

Sohra, Nongriat and Mawphlang, Meghalaya

AIRPORT	Shillong Airport (SHL) at Umroi, roughly 35 km from Shillong; Guwahati (GAU) in Assam is the larger gateway, roughly 100 km from Shillong (approximate).
RAILWAY	Guwahati is the practical railhead; Shillong has no railway of its own.
BY ROAD	Guwahati to Shillong is about 3 hours; Mawphlang is about 25 km from Shillong; Sohra is a longer drive south.
GETTING AROUND	Shared taxis and hired cars; local guides for the root-bridge treks.

Distances approximate; roads can be slow in the rains. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Meghalaya Tourism (official) (meghalayatourism.in); Mawphlang (Meghalaya Tourism) (meghalayatourism.in); Mongabay India: living architecture (1 Nov 2024) (india.mongabay.com); Meghalaya (reference) (en.wikipedia.org)



INDIA

Kanha, after the rains: a tiger reserve and its neighbours

A sal-and-meadow reserve in Madhya Pradesh, now in its best season, and the villagers who work in it.

RESEARCHED

Photo: Charles J. Sharp · CC BY-SA 4.0

KANHA TIGER RESERVE, IN Madhya Pradesh's Mandla and Balaghat districts, is often linked to Rudyard Kipling's Jungle Book country. It began as a wildlife sanctuary in 1933, became a national park on 1 June 1955 and was made a tiger reserve in 1973. Its core is about 940 square kilometres, with a larger buffer zone around it. Besides tigers, it holds leopards, sloth bears, dholes, gaur and about 300 species of birds. It is also known for the barasingha, a swamp deer adapted to wet meadows, which is the reserve's mascot, Bhoorsingh.

Safaris run on a seasonal calendar. Published guides say the reserve is open from October to June and closed during the monsoon months of July to September, though they disagree on the exact opening date, so check the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department's booking site. There are four core zones, Kanha, Kisli, Mukki and Sarhi, with entry gates at Khatia, Mukki and Sarhi, and permits are limited, so book early.

The reserve has a harder history. Baiga villagers were moved out of the park beginning in 1968 to protect tiger habitat, and reports describe the relocated families struggling afterwards. Today the surrounding communities are part of its economy. In the Mukki zone, a state programme started in 2017 trains women from nearby villages as guides, drivers and forest guards; our People section describes it. Another initiative, supported by a conservation foundation and the forest department, works with Baiga women on traditional jewellery as a livelihood.

A good visit is two or three days, with an early morning and an afternoon drive on each day, because sightings are never guaranteed. Wear muted clothing, keep your voice down, and let your guide choose the pace; many of the best moments are birds, deer and the meadows themselves.

How to go well: book safaris through the official channel, choose lodges that employ people from the surrounding villages, and ask your guide about the history of the reserve as well as its animals.



Photo: debanutosh · CC0

At a glance

BEST TIME	Safari season runs roughly October to June; the park closes in the monsoon (confirm opening dates)
ZONES	Kanha, Kisli, Mukki and Sarhi core zones; gates at Khatia, Mukki and Sarhi
BOOK AHEAD	Permits are limited; book through the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department's official site.
RESPONSIBLE-TRAVEL NOTE	Choose lodges that hire locally; follow guide instructions; keep distance from wildlife.
CHECKED	10 November 2026. Seasons and permit systems must be re-confirmed.

HOW TO REACH

Kanha Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh

AIRPORT	Jabalpur Airport (JLR) is the nearest major airport, roughly 160–200 km by road depending on gate; Nagpur (NAG) and Raipur (RPR) are alternatives (approximate).
RAILWAY	Jabalpur and Gondia are the main railheads; Nainpur is also used.
BY ROAD	Allow 4–6 hours by road from Jabalpur or Nagpur to the Khatia and Mukki gates (approximate).
GETTING AROUND	Safaris use licensed gypsies with a guide; lodges arrange transfers.

Distances approximate; confirm with your lodge. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Madhya Pradesh Forest Department (official reserve information) (forest.mponline.gov.in); Madhya Pradesh Tourism (official) (www.mptourism.com); Kanha Tiger Reserve (reference) (en.wikipedia.org)



Photo: Rohit Sharma · CC BY-SA 4.0



ASIA · NEPAL

Nepal after the monsoon: an autumn walk toward Poon Hill

A short, popular route into the Annapurna Conservation Area, best walked when the rains have washed the air.

RESEARCHED

Photo: Aditya Pal · CC BY-SA 4.0

THE ANNAPURNA CONSERVATION AREA is Nepal's largest protected area. It covers 7,629 square kilometres and rises from about 790 metres to the summit of Annapurna I at 8,091 metres. Its trails include the Annapurna Circuit and the Annapurna Sanctuary. The monsoon runs from June to September, and the post-monsoon months of October and November are among the clearest, which is why the trails are busy.

For a first trek, the Ghorepani–Poon Hill route is a common choice. It climbs through villages and rhododendron forest to a viewpoint, Poon Hill, at roughly 3,200 metres, where the Annapurna and Dhaulagiri ranges appear at dawn. Most itineraries take four to five days from Pokhara. We have not checked the route with an operator, so treat the outline as a starting point and ask a licensed agency for the current plan.

Permits and rules change. Several sources give the Annapurna Conservation Area entry fee as NPR 3,000 for most foreign nationals and NPR 1,000 for the SAARC category, which includes India, with children under 10 exempt; we could not confirm this on an official page. Sources also disagree on whether the TIMS trekkers' card is still required for most Annapurna treks, with some saying it changed in 2023, so ask the Nepal Tourism Board office in Pokhara before you set out. Indian citizens can generally enter Nepal without a visa but must carry accepted identification; confirm with Nepal Immigration.

Hire a licensed guide or porter through a registered agency and pay fairly. Women guides and porters are increasingly part of the trekking workforce, and our People pages carry the story of one. Carry a reusable bottle and a bag for rubbish, and do not buy single-use plastic in the high villages.

How to go well: allow a buffer day for weather, take a good rain jacket even in the dry season, and acclimatise slowly; altitude sickness is a real risk above about 3,000 metres.



Photo: Prof. Vikramjit Kakati · CC BY-SA 4.0

At a glance

BEST TIME	October to November (post-monsoon) and spring are the main trekking seasons; the monsoon runs June to September
GETTING THERE	Fly to Kathmandu, then to or by road to Pokhara, the usual start for Annapurna treks
PERMITS	Conservation area permit required; fee rates and TIMS rules are described inconsistently by sources. Confirm with the Nepal Tourism Board.
ENTRY	Indian citizens can generally enter Nepal without a visa, with accepted ID; check with Nepal Immigration.
CHECKED	10 November 2026

HOW TO REACH

Annapurna Conservation Area, Gandaki Province, Nepal

AIRPORT	Tribhuvan International Airport (KTM), Kathmandu, is the main gateway; Pokhara (PKR) is the base for most Annapurna treks.
RAILWAY	Nepal has no passenger railway network for visitors; travel by air or road.
BY ROAD	Kathmandu to Pokhara is typically 6–8 hours by road; trailheads are a further drive from Pokhara (approximate).
GETTING AROUND	Taxis and tourist buses; guides and porters hired through agencies.

Distances approximate; permits and rules change. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Nepal Tourism Board (official) (www.welcomenepal.com); Department of Immigration, Nepal (official) (immigration.gov.np); Annapurna Conservation Area (reference) (en.wikipedia.org)



Photo: Diganta Talukdar · CC BY-SA 4.0



AROUND THE WORLD

Torres del Paine: walking Patagonia in spring

A Chilean national park whose W and O treks are among the best known in South America, and what the booking rules and fire history mean for visitors.

RESEARCHED

Photo: Thomas Fuhrmann · CC BY-SA 4.0

TORRES DEL PAINE, IN Chile's Magallanes region, was created in 1959 and designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 1978. The park covers about 181,000 hectares. Its name comes from a Tehuelche word for blue. Guanacos are among the most common animals, pumas and the endangered huemul live there, and the Andean condor is one of the 15 raptor species that breed in the park.

The two famous routes are the W, a trek of roughly three to five days, and the O, the full circuit of about seven to nine days. The usual season runs from September to April, so November is spring: longer days, changeable weather and fewer people than in January and February. Winter daylight drops to about eight hours a day, which is one reason the shoulder months are popular.

The park's rules reflect its history. Large fires in 1985, 2005 and 2011 each burned more than 100 square kilometres; the 2005 and 2011 fires were linked to accidents involving backpackers. Since October 2016, campsites and refuges must be booked before you enter. Book early, do not light fires, and cook only in designated places.

Staffing has been a recurring theme in reporting on the park, and independent coverage has been thin. If you go, choose operators who are open about their safety and conservation practices, and carry your own emergency plan.

Entry: Indian passport holders generally need a visa for Chile, but sources vary, so check with the Chilean consulate or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

At a glance

BEST TIME	Roughly September to April; November is spring
GETTING THERE	Fly to Punta Arenas or Puerto Natales region; the park is about 112 km north of Puerto Natales.
BOOK AHEAD	Campsites and refuges must be reserved before entering the park.
RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL	No open fires; follow park rules.
CHECKED	10 November 2026. Fees, trek routes and entry rules change.

HOW TO REACH

Torres del Paine National Park, Magallanes, Chile

AIRPORT	Punta Arenas (PUQ), roughly 310 km by road from the park; Puerto Natales has a small airport with limited flights (approximate).
RAILWAY	No passenger railway.
BY ROAD	Route 9 links Punta Arenas and Puerto Natales; the park is about 112 km north of Puerto Natales, and roads become gravel for part of the way.
GETTING AROUND	Buses from Puerto Natales; hired cars; guided transfers.

Distances approximate; check bus timings. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Chile Travel (official tourism board) (chile.travel); Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs (visas) (www.minrel.gob.cl); Torres del Paine (reference) (en.wikipedia.org)



Photo: Udit Kapoor · CC BY-SA 4.0



Photo: Extreminatethejuice · CC BY-SA 4.0



AROUND THE WORLD

Madeira's levadas: walking the water channels

More than 2,000 km of irrigation channels, many with a path beside them, on a Portuguese island in the Atlantic.

RESEARCHED

Photo: muffinn from Worcester, UK · CC BY 2.0

A LEVADA IS AN irrigation channel. On Madeira, construction began in the sixteenth century to carry water from the wetter northwest of the island to the drier southeast, chiefly for sugar cane, and the most recent were built in the 1940s. The network now exceeds 2,170 kilometres, and many levadas double as walking paths. Today they also supply drinking water and generate hydroelectric power.

Walks vary enormously. The Levada do Caniçal is described as an easy walk of about 11.5 kilometres lined with acacia trees. Longer routes such as the Caldeirão Verde track involve narrow ledges, long drops and several tunnels, for which you need a head torch and, on some routes, a helmet. After the 2010 floods and mudslides, authorities improved maintenance and installed safety fences on dangerous stretches, but some paths remain narrow and exposed.

The history deserves a place in the visit. The channels were built using forced labour, including enslaved people and convicts, and a local guide can explain more about how the system came to be. Choose a walk to match your head for heights, check trail closures with local authorities or your guide before setting out, and avoid walking after heavy rain.

Entry: Portugal is in the Schengen area, and Indian passport holders need a Schengen visa; check the official Portuguese visa pages.

At a glance

BEST TIME	Walks are possible most of the year; check weather and trail closures
GETTING THERE	Madeira has an international airport near Funchal; flights from mainland Portugal and other European cities.
ENTRY	Schengen visa required for Indian citizens; check the official Portuguese authorities.
SAFETY	Carry a head torch for tunnels; check closures; avoid exposed paths in wet weather.
CHECKED	10 November 2026



Photo: Vikramjit Kakati · CC BY-SA 4.0

HOW TO REACH

Madeira, Portugal

AIRPORT	Madeira Airport (FNC), on the east of the island, roughly 15–20 km from Funchal (approximate).
RAILWAY	No railway on the island.
BY ROAD	Road tunnels and expressways connect Funchal with the coasts; levada trailheads are reached by hired car, bus or guided transfer.
GETTING AROUND	Buses, taxis and guided walks; some levadas need a guide.

Distances approximate; check trail closures locally. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Visit Madeira (official) (www.visitmadeira.com); Portugal visa information (official) (vistos.mne.gov.pt); Levada (Madeira) (reference) (en.wikipedia.org))

REAL STORIES FROM THE ROAD

Keeping the bridges alive: Morningstar Khongthaw and the root-bridge builders

In the Khasi Hills, a village committee is mapping, adopting and repairing living bridges, and asking for them to be protected on its own terms.

PROFILE · FROM PUBLISHED REPORTING · NOT INTERVIEWED BY WAYFARER



Photo: Anselmrogers · CC BY-SA 4.0

The living root bridges of Meghalaya are grown, not built, and they need years of upkeep. A feature by Barasha Das in Mongabay India, published on 1 November 2024, describes how builders guide the aerial roots of the rubber fig across a stream, using hollowed areca trunks and bamboo for support, and add more roots later for steps and railings. A structure can take decades to carry weight, and the bamboo has to be replaced as it decays.

Morningstar Khongthaw, chair of the Khyrim Syiemship Heritage Committee, is one of the people the article follows. The committee has set up a knowledge centre with support from the United Nations Development Programme,

has mapped more than 132 bridges and has adopted 30 of them across three villages: Rangthylliang, Mawkyrnot and Mynrieng. Young people apprentice with elder practitioners each monsoon, and the work is being documented. Montila Khongbeh, from Mawkyrnot, is quoted on the role women play in building and maintaining the bridges and in guiding younger women.

The article does not present this as a simple success story. Tourism is the main pressure it describes. Popular bridges have been reinforced with concrete or steel and their paths paved, some villages are moving from farming to tourism income, and many less-visited bridges are being neglected. The committee has proposed a protected forest of 50 metres around each bridge, and local stakeholders criticise a top-down approach in official protection guidelines that gives too little weight to the people who do the work.

For a visitor, the guidance is plain. Walk with a local guide from the village, stay on the path, never climb or hang from the roots, and pay the fees that go to the community.

At a glance

VERIFICATION	Facts and figures are taken from the cited reporting and must be re-checked against the original before print.
REPORTED BY	Mongabay India, Barasha Das, 1 November 2024
PEOPLE NAMED	Morningstar Khongthaw; Montila Khongbeh; Prof. Ferdinand Ludwig; Pori Das
NOT INTERVIEWED BY US	This profile paraphrases published reporting. We have not spoken to the people named.
TO FEATURE THEM PROPERLY	Approach the Khyrim Syiemship Heritage Committee through Meghalaya Tourism or a local operator; seek written consent for names and photographs.

HOW TO REACH

Rangthylliang and Mawkyrnot, East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya

AIRPORT	Shillong Airport (SHL) at Umroi; Guwahati (GAU) is the larger gateway.
RAILWAY	Guwahati is the practical railhead; Shillong has no railway.
BY ROAD	The villages are in the Pynursla area of East Khasi Hills; from Shillong allow a long drive of several hours (approximate), then a walk.
GETTING AROUND	Taxis to the trailhead and a village guide for the trek.

Distances approximate; confirm with Meghalaya Tourism or your guide. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Source article (Mongabay India) (india.mongabay.com)

REAL STORIES FROM THE ROAD

From porter to leader: Sumitra Acharya

A Nepali trekking guide who started as a porter at 27 is leading trips to Everest Base Camp and Annapurna.

PROFILE · FROM PUBLISHED REPORTING · NOT INTERVIEWED BY WAYFARER



Photo: Jmhullot · CC BY 3.0

Reporting by Angela Locatelli in National Geographic Traveller (UK), published on 7 June 2024, profiles Sumitra Acharya, who began work as a trekking porter in 2019, aged 27, carrying loads of about 15 kilograms for roughly ten miles a day. She had at first turned the job down because she had little interest in physical work; her mother encouraged her to try it.

The article records that five years later she was leading trips to Everest Base Camp and Annapurna. Born in a rural village in Sindhupalchok district, she grew up in a city in the Kathmandu Valley and first discovered a taste for hills at 20 on a day hike while studying agriculture. She says relatives and friends told her she was making a mistake, that she saw no local women on the trails, and that some male porters mocked her. Colleagues taught her practical skills such as pacing, and hotel owners along the route helped when she felt homesick.

She told the magazine that she hopes to inspire other Nepali women, some of whom face family opposition to outdoor careers. The article notes that the guiding industry remains male-dominated and that long, multi-day assignments, often with all-male groups, make the work hard for women to take on. It reports that the operator Intrepid Travel's team of female porters, assistant guides and leaders grew from a handful when she joined to 37. Acharya says of her work, “I feel like a leader.”

If you trek in Nepal, hire through a registered agency that pays and equips its porters and guides fairly, ask about its policies, and give credit when you write about your trek. Our Annapurna feature in this issue has practical notes.

At a glance

VERIFICATION	Facts and figures are taken from the cited reporting and must be re-checked against the original before print.
REPORTED BY	National Geographic Traveller (UK), Angela Locatelli, 7 June 2024
PEOPLE NAMED	Sumitra Acharya
NOT INTERVIEWED BY US	This profile paraphrases published reporting. We have not spoken to Ms Acharya.
TO FEATURE HER PROPERLY	Approach through the operator she works for; seek written consent for quotes and photographs.

HOW TO REACH

Annapurna region, Nepal

AIRPORT	Tribhuvan International Airport (KTM), Kathmandu; Pokhara (PKR) for the Annapurna region.
RAILWAY	No passenger railway for visitors; travel by air or road.
BY ROAD	Kathmandu to Pokhara is typically 6–8 hours by road (approximate).
GETTING AROUND	Buses, taxis and trekking agencies.

Permits and rules change; confirm with the Nepal Tourism Board. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Source article (National Geographic) (www.nationalgeographic.com)

REAL STORIES FROM THE ROAD

The women of Mukki: guides, drivers and guards in Kanha

In one zone of Kanha Tiger Reserve, women from the surrounding villages hold jobs that were once mostly done by men.

PROFILE · FROM PUBLISHED REPORTING · NOT INTERVIEWED BY WAYFARER

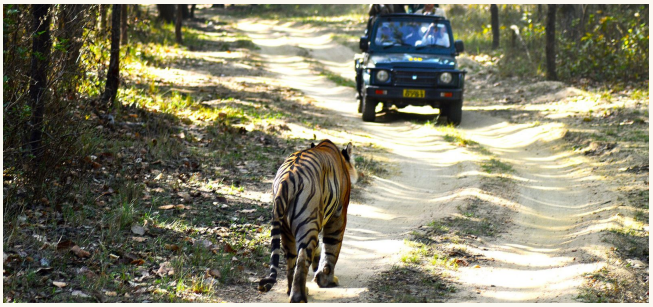


Photo: Ashishmahaur · CC BY-SA 4.0

A report by Kushagra Dixit for the news agency IANS, carried by The Morung Express on 30 July 2018, describes an experiment in the Mukki zone of Kanha Tiger Reserve. At the time of writing, the zone had two women drivers, six women guides, one woman forest guard and about ten women running the forest canteen, all from nearby villages. Training was under way for six more guides in local ecology and ten women in kitchen hygiene. The initiative had started in December of the previous year, and the forest authorities hoped to make Mukki the country's first women-operated forest zone.

The report names several women. Neeta Markam, a Gond woman from Mukki village, became the first licensed forest driver in Kanha. Madhuri Thakur, a licensed driver, said she did not want to marry yet. Lakshmi Maravi, a Gond forest guard who patrols at night and is the only earner in her family, said she felt she was made for the work. Suhkati Dhurvey, a guide, wanted more women in the sector.

S.K. Khare, an assistant director at the reserve, described the programme as part of a broader effort to build trust between tribal communities and the forest department. Guides earned about Rs 10,000 a month at the time, though the park's three-month monsoon closure cut into their income. The report also notes that Madhya Pradesh has the highest number of displaced tribal families and that the programme was raising aspirations in villages that had initially resisted women taking these roles.

The article is eight years old, so the numbers have probably changed. If you visit, ask your lodge whether you can book a woman guide or driver, and tip fairly.

At a glance

VERIFICATION	Facts and figures are taken from the cited reporting and must be re-checked against the original before print; the figures are from 2018.
REPORTED BY	IANS (Kushagra Dixit), carried by The Morung Express, 30 July 2018
PEOPLE NAMED	Neeta Markam; Madhuri Thakur; Lakshmi Maravi; Suhkati Dhurvey; S.K. Khare
NOT INTERVIEWED BY US	This profile paraphrases published reporting. Roles and numbers have probably changed.
TO FEATURE THEM PROPERLY	Approach Kanha Tiger Reserve management and the village committees; seek written consent for quotes and photographs.

HOW TO REACH

Mukki zone, Kanha Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh

AIRPORT	Jabalpur Airport (JLR) is the nearest major airport; Nagpur and Raipur are alternatives (approximate distances 160–270 km).
RAILWAY	Jabalpur and Gondia are the main railheads.
BY ROAD	Allow 4–6 hours by road from Jabalpur or Nagpur to Mukki gate (approximate).
GETTING AROUND	Safaris with a licensed guide and driver; lodges arrange transfers.

Seasons and bookings change; confirm with the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Source article (The Morung Express) (morungexpress.com)

REAL STORIES FROM THE ROAD

A river with a legal voice: the Whanganui

In 2017, New Zealand's Parliament recognised a river as a legal entity, ending a claim that had started with local iwi in the 1870s.

PLACE PROFILE · FROM OFFICIAL AND REFERENCE SOURCES · NOT VISITED BY WAYFARER



Photo: David Thomsen · CC BY-SA 4.0

No named individual could be profiled from reporting we had read, so this is a place profile built from reference and government sources. The Whanganui is about 290 kilometres long, the third-longest river in New Zealand. It is treasured by the iwi, or Mori tribes, of the river as a taonga, a treasure, and was home to many villages before European settlement.

Local iwi first petitioned Parliament about the river in the 1870s. After decades of litigation and negotiation, an agreement was reached on 30 August 2012, and Parliament passed the Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui River Claims Settlement) Act on 15 March 2017, giving the river its own legal identity. It was reported to be the world's second natural resource to receive this status, after Te Urewera.

For travellers, the Whanganui Journey is a paddle through the Whanganui National Park, run as one of the Department of Conservation's Great Walks. Much of the land beside the upper river is in the park, though the river itself is not part of it. If you go, book through the official channel, use a guide or operator who works with local iwi where possible, and treat the river as a living whole in how you camp, cook and carry out waste.

The Mukki and root-bridge profiles in this issue deal with communities and their places in other ways. What links them is the idea that the people closest to a landscape are often its best custodians.

At a glance

VERIFICATION	Facts are taken from reference and government sources and must be re-checked against the Act and the Department of Conservation before print.
SOURCES	Wikipedia article on the Whanganui River; Department of Conservation Great Walks pages
PEOPLE NAMED	None. Approach iwi representatives and the Department of Conservation for consent and interviews.
NOT VISITED BY US	This profile is built from reference sources only.
TO FEATURE THEM PROPERLY	Approach Whanganui iwi representatives through the official settlement bodies; seek consent for quotes and images.

HOW TO REACH

Whanganui River, North Island, New Zealand

AIRPORT	Whanganui has a small regional airport; most visitors fly to Auckland (AKL) or Wellington (WLG) and travel onward (approximate).
RAILWAY	Limited passenger rail on the North Island; most visitors use road transport.
BY ROAD	State highways link Whanganui with Wellington and Auckland (several hours by road).
GETTING AROUND	Canoe operators, shuttles and guided trips.

Check seasons, river conditions and bookings with the Department of Conservation. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Whanganui River (reference) (en.wikipedia.org); Department of Conservation (official) (www.doc.govt.nz)



Photo: Rumelade · CC BY-SA 4.0

READER AND CONTRIBUTOR BRIEFS

Proposed commission: “My first long walk”

A brief for a real reader or contributor. Not a published story.

PROPOSED COMMISSION · NOT A REAL STORY

What we want: a first-person account (800–1,200 words) of a multi-day walk or trek you actually took: the route, what you packed and wished you hadn't, who helped you on the way, and one moment you would take back with you.

What we need from you: a true story; photographs you took, with permission from any people shown; and a short trip recap with dates, route, cost (with currency and date), the guide or agency you used and one thing you wish you had known.

Rights: you keep your copyright; we ask permission to publish and archive with credit, and we will show you the edited text first. Please do not send invented or composite stories.

FOOD, HERITAGE AND NATURE

The Taste of Travel: the Khasi kitchen

Mild, fermented and smoky: what to eat after a long walk in Meghalaya.

RESEARCHED



Photo: Real Sovan · CC BY-SA 4.0

Khasi cooking, the best documented of Meghalaya's cuisines, relies less on spices than on fermentation and smoking. Three dishes appear in almost every guide. Jadoh is rice, often red rice, cooked with meat, usually pork or chicken. Dohneiiong is pork cooked in a black sesame paste, often eaten alongside jadoh. Tungrymbai is a fermented soybean dish, stir-fried with onion, ginger, garlic and often pork; a pork-free version can sometimes be arranged, so ask.

Many meals are served with tungtap, a chutney made from small dried fish. Sources differ on whether dohneiiong is always made with pork, so ask what is in a dish before ordering.

Where to try it: Shillong has restaurants specialising in Khasi food, and a homestay will cook for guests if asked. Vegetarians should say so early; many dishes involve meat or fish.

At a glance

SAY IT	Ask for the name of each dish and what goes in it.
ETIQUETTE	Accept food graciously; ask before photographing a meal in someone's home.
VEG-FRIENDLY?	Possible with notice; confirm with your host.

HOW TO REACH

Shillong, Meghalaya

AIRPORT	Shillong Airport (SHL) at Umroi; Guwahati (GAU) is the larger gateway.
RAILWAY	Guwahati is the practical railhead; Shillong has no railway.
BY ROAD	Guwahati to Shillong is about 3 hours by road (approximate).
GETTING AROUND	Taxis and walking in the Police Bazar and Laitumkhrah areas.

Restaurants change; ask locally. Distances approximate - verify.

FOOD, HERITAGE AND NATURE

Heritage Without Borders: the sacred forest at Mawphlang

A grove protected for centuries by Khasi communities, and what its rules ask of visitors.

RESEARCHED



Photo: Anushtup · CC BY-SA 4.0

Across Meghalaya, communities protect small groves as sacred sites, and these often shelter rare species. Mawphlang, about 25 kilometres from Shillong, is the best known. Published tourist guides say the grove has been

preserved for more than 800 years by the local Khasi community, and that it is protected by a local deity.

The rules are simple and strictly kept: visitors go with a local guide, and take nothing out of the forest, not even a pebble or a twig. Entry and guide fees vary by source, and opening hours are reported as roughly 9 am to 4 or 4.30 pm, so confirm on the day. October to April is the drier season; in the monsoon the paths are slippery.

The grove is a reminder that conservation in this region often predates national parks and is guided by belief as much as by law. Treat it as a place of worship that is open to visitors, not as an attraction.

At a glance

ETIQUETTE	Follow your guide; take nothing; dress for a muddy path.
CHECKED	10 November 2026. Fees and hours must be confirmed locally.

HOW TO REACH

Mawphlang sacred forest, East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya

AIRPORT	Shillong Airport (SHL) at Umroi; Guwahati (GAU) is the larger gateway.
RAILWAY	Guwahati is the practical railhead; Shillong has no railway.
BY ROAD	About 25 km from Shillong, roughly 1 to 1.5 hours by road (per tourist guides).
GETTING AROUND	Taxis from Shillong; a local guide is arranged at the site.

Distances approximate. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Mawphlang (Meghalaya Tourism) (meghalayatourism.in); Incredible India: Mawphlang (www.incredibleindia.gov.in)

FOOD, HERITAGE AND NATURE

The Natural Calendar: November

What to look for, where, and how sure we are.

RESEARCHED



Photo: Arunachal2007 · CC BY-SA 4.0



Photo: Phuentsho · CC BY-SA 4.0

Black-necked cranes (Phobjikha Valley, Bhutan): the cranes winter here and start to arrive from about late October, with a crane festival at Gangtey Monastery each year on 11 November. A national count reported in February 2025 found 709 birds in Bhutan, including 640 in Phobjikha. Departure dates vary, from mid-February to mid-March. *Predictable season; exact dates vary by year.*

Patagonian spring (Torres del Paine, Chile): the park's season runs roughly from September to April, so November has longer days and changeable weather. *Reliable season, unreliable weather.*

Post-monsoon skies (Nepal's Himalaya): the monsoon ends in September, and October and November are among the clearest months for views. *Predictable season; individual days still vary.*

FOOD, HERITAGE AND NATURE

Responsible travel: seven habits for the trail

Small things that keep a path usable for the next walker.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

Carry out what you carry in. That includes fruit peel, tissues and small plastics.

Stay on the path. Short-cuts cause erosion, and paths in sacred or fragile places are marked for a reason.

Use a local guide where one is expected, and pay the published fee.

Do not touch or climb on heritage structures, such as bridges, walls or carvings.

Keep your distance from wildlife, and never feed it.

Respect closures. Weather and rockfall closures exist because people have been hurt.

Ask before you photograph people, and thank them.

PRACTICAL TOOLKIT

The Trekker's Checklist

Twelve things to sort out before a multi-day walk.

PRACTICAL · EVERGREEN

1. **Permits and bookings:** huts, campsites and conservation-area permits, booked or bought in advance where required.

2. **Insurance:** check it covers trekking, altitude where relevant, and emergency evacuation.

3. **Route and weather:** check closures and forecasts; tell someone your plan.

4. **Footwear:** broken-in, waterproof boots, with spare laces.

5. **Layers:** base layer, warm mid-layer, waterproof shell, hat and gloves.

6. **Rain cover:** for you and your pack.

7. **Water:** a reusable bottle and a way to treat water.

8. **First aid:** blister care, painkillers, any personal medicines in original packaging.

9. **Navigation:** offline maps and a paper map; a head torch with spare batteries.

10. **Cash:** huts and village shops often take only cash.

11. **Fitness:** train with a loaded pack for several weeks.

12. **Respect:** learn a few words of the local language and the local rules.

PRACTICAL TOOLKIT

The 24-Hour Destination: Pokhara

One illustrative day in the lakeside city that starts many Annapurna treks. Hours and weather will change it.

ILLUSTRATIVE ITINERARY · VERIFY LOCALLY

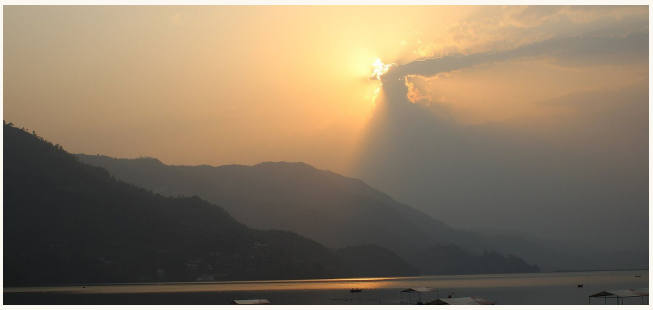


Photo: Iamavinashk · CC BY-SA 4.0

Before dawn: a drive up Sarangkot hill for sunrise over the Annapurna range; clearer skies are more likely in autumn and winter.

Breakfast: at your lakeside hotel.

Morning: Davis Falls and Gupteshwor cave, where water disappears into the ground.

Lunch: a simple dal bhat or momos near the lake.

Afternoon: the World Peace Pagoda for views of the lake and mountains, reached by a short climb or a drive to the base.

Evening: a boat on Phewa Lake, with a stop at the island temple if you wish.

What to skip if short on time: the cave and the falls; keep sunrise and the lake.

Hours and costs are placeholders to be verified locally on production day.

HOW TO REACH

Pokhara, Gandaki Province, Nepal

AIRPORT	Pokhara Airport (PKR) with flights from Kathmandu; Tribhuvan International (KTM) is the main international gateway.
RAILWAY	No passenger railway.
BY ROAD	Kathmandu to Pokhara is typically 6–8 hours by road (approximate).
GETTING AROUND	Taxis, rented bikes and walking around the lake.

Timings approximate. Distances approximate - verify.

COMMUNITY

The Traveller's Lexicon: kaitiakitanga

A Mori word for guardianship of the natural world.

LEXICON

Kaitiakitanga — a Mori word, from New Zealand, often explained as guardianship or stewardship, especially of the natural world and of the people who live within it. It carries an idea of responsibility that is handed on from generation to generation.

Like most such words, it is best learned from the people who use it. Treat it as an invitation to listen, not as a slogan.



Photo: Vikramjit Kakati · CC BY-SA 4.0

COMMUNITY

Travel Quiz — November

Five questions. Answers appear in next month's issue.

QUIZ

1. Which New Zealand Great Walk runs from Glade Wharf to Sandfly Point?

2. Which Indian state is known for its living root bridges?

3. Mukki is a zone of which tiger reserve in Madhya Pradesh?

4. Poon Hill is in which mountain region of Nepal?

5. In which country is Torres del Paine National Park?

Answers (for the editor's copy — reveal next issue): Milford Track · Meghalaya · Kanha · Annapurna · Chile.

COMMUNITY

Your turn: the trail that taught you something

Reader engagement idea for the next issue.

READER INVITATION

Tell us about a trail you walked: 150 words and one photograph you took. Say where, when, and one thing it taught you. A selection will appear in a later Readers' Pages with your name and photo credit, only with your permission.

COMMUNITY

The Traveller's Bookshelf

Three books we would pack for a long walk.

RECOMMENDED READING

The Living Mountain by Nan Shepherd: a short, close account of walking in Scotland's Cairngorms, written in the 1940s and first published in 1977.

A Walk in the Woods by Bill Bryson (1998): a funny account of an attempt on the Appalachian Trail.

Wild by Cheryl Strayed (2012): a memoir of a long solo walk on the Pacific Crest Trail.



Photo: ANKAN · CC BY-SA 4.0



Photo: Madhumita Das · CC BY-SA 4.0



Photo: Aravind Manickam · CC BY-SA 4.0

THE WORLD CELEBRATES

Festivals & events radar

Dates come from our festival guide and are approximate. Confirm with the official organiser before booking; lunar-calendar and annually announced events are provisional until confirmed.

NORTHEAST INDIA & INDIA

EVENT	WHERE	WHEN (APPROX.)	WHY GO
Diwali	India	8 November 2026 (Lakshmi Puja)	The festival of lights, with lamps, sweets and fireworks; check local rules on fireworks..
Rann Utsav	Dhordo, Kutch, Gujarat	1 November 2026 to 7 March 2027 per the organisers' release; other sources give different end dates	A seasonal tent city beside the white salt desert, with craft and cultural programmes..
Pushkar Camel Fair	Pushkar, Rajasthan	Listed as 17–24 November 2026; climax at Kartik Purnima on 24 November	A livestock fair and pilgrimage beside a sacred lake..
Shillong Cherry Blossom Festival	New Shillong Highland Grounds, Meghalaya	20–21 November 2026	Two days of music and culture timed to the Himalayan cherry blossom..
Sangai Festival	Imphal, Manipur	Traditionally 21–30 November; 2026 dates to be confirmed by Manipur Tourism	A state festival named for the Sangai deer, with crafts, dance and sport..
Hornbill Festival	Kisama Heritage Village, near Kohima, Nagaland	1–10 December 2026	Nagaland's tribes gather to perform songs, dances and games..
Konark Festival	Konark, Odisha	1–5 December 2026	Classical dance at the open-air auditorium near the Sun Temple..
Jaipur Literature Festival	Jaipur, Rajasthan	14–18 January 2027 (20th edition)	A large literature festival with authors, panels and readings..

ASIA

EVENT	WHERE	WHEN (APPROX.)	WHY GO
Black-necked Crane Festival	Gangtey Monastery, Phobjikha Valley, Bhutan	11 November 2026	A local festival celebrating the cranes that winter in the valley..
Loy Krathong	Thailand (Bangkok, Sukhothai, Chiang Mai)	Full moon, most sources say 24 November 2026; local events run several days	Floating baskets and lanterns on rivers and lakes..

EUROPE

EVENT	WHERE	WHEN (APPROX.)	WHY GO
Strasbourg Christmas Market	Strasbourg, France	Opening expected around 27 November 2026; the city had not published final dates when we checked	One of Europe's oldest Christmas markets, spread across the city..
Edinburgh's Hogmanay	Edinburgh, Scotland	29 December 2026 to 1 January 2027	A multi-day New Year festival with a torchlight procession and street party..

AFRICA & THE AMERICAS

EVENT	WHERE	WHEN (APPROX.)	WHY GO
Marrakech International Film Festival	Marrakech, Morocco	20–28 November 2026 (23rd edition)	A nine-day film festival with screenings and industry workshops..



Photo: Dinesh Valke from Thane, India Derivative work: UnpetitproleX · CC BY-SA 2.0

OCEANIA & INTERNATIONAL

EVENT	WHERE	WHEN (APPROX.)	WHY GO
Melbourne Cup	Flemington Racecourse, Melbourne, Australia	3 November 2026 (carnival 31 October to 7 November)	Australia's best-known horse race, a public holiday in Victoria..
Great Walks season opens	New Zealand	1 November 2026 (Milford Track season runs to 30 April 2027)	The Department of Conservation's managed season begins, and huts require advance booking..

THE TRAVEL BRIEFING

Format example

Dated developments from the last weeks, each with its source. Rules and dates must be re-confirmed before you travel.

Gujarat: the 2026–27 Rann Utsav season at Dhordo was announced to begin on 1 November, with organisers giving 7 March 2027 as the end date; other sources give different closing dates. Source: Republic World, 3 November 2026. www.republicworld.com

Rajasthan: the Jaipur Literature Festival announced its 20th edition for 14 to 18 January 2027. Source: Outlook India. www.outlookindia.com

Morocco: the Marrakech International Film Festival, 20 to 28 November 2026, announced its competition lineup. Source: TelQuel, 2 November 2026. telquel.ma

New Zealand: reports in September 2026 said visitor-visa applications would move to an upgraded online system, with sources giving 24 September or 1 October as the start. Source: NRI Information. nriinformation.com

Mizoram: the Bairabi–Sairang railway line completed one year of operation in September 2026. Source: Akashvani News, 13 September 2026. newsonair.gov.in

Tell us where you are going next

WRITE	editor@travaah.com
CALL	+91 70022 09781
PLAN	travaah.com/planner
CONTRIBUTE	Send a story or photograph via the contact page



Photo: Sourabh.biswas003 · CC BY-SA 4.0



Photo: Original: Nina R from Africa Derivative work: UnpetitproleX · CC BY 2.0



Photo: KennyOMG · CC BY-SA 4.0

Prices, timings, permits and visa notes are approximate - please verify before booking.

WAYFARER

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