

# The Ghost Town



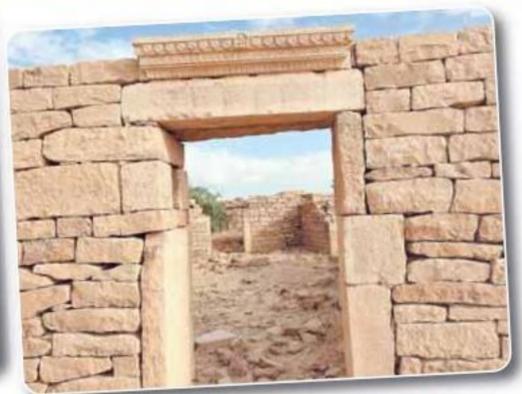
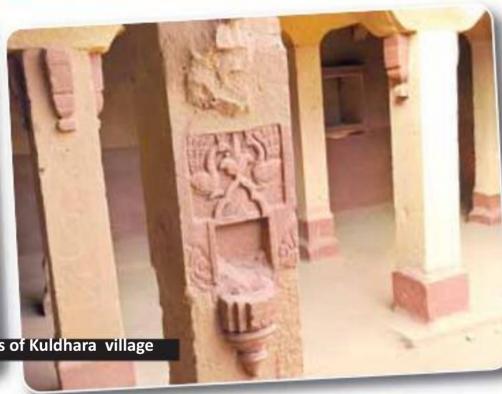
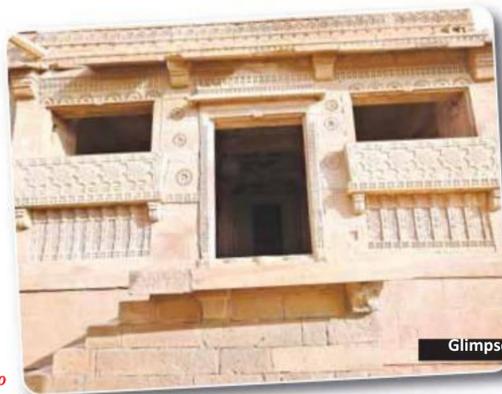
The deserted village of Kuldhara has a fascinating story from the past but you really will not see any ghost connections here...

**O**n a trip to Jaisalmer, when I was about to make a mandatory trip to the desert, I discovered that the Sam Dunes could be reached driving through Kuldhara. As I had always wanted to see this place, I decided instantly to take a detour before proceeding to the dunes and it was among my most memorable experiences of the trip.

"This is a ghost town, it was abandoned over 200 years ago," said our driver. That statement was met with varied reactions among our small group of three. While one of our companions was scared, one more was cynical, and I had a sense of disbelief. This was the place where the Paliwal Brahmins used to reside and is located on the edge of the Thar Desert. Known for being well known for their techniques of irrigation, there were at many families that used to live in the 84 villages around this place. The ruling diwan Salim Singh was cruel and known to be power hungry as well as had a roving eye. On one of his outings he saw one of the young girls of the village and wanted to marry her. The entire village of pious Brahmins was horrified at the thought. When the diwan's men came to fetch the girl, they were asked to come the next morning and then deserted the village overnight. While there is no record of where they went, it is said that the girl in question became a victim of honor killing and it is her spirit that is believed to haunt this village. It is also said that the Paliwal Brahmins cursed that the village will always remain abandoned and by a strange quirk of fate this place has never been inhabited since.

The village has a gate that is manned by a security person and once we enter all we see are a lot of exposed brick buildings – many in ruins. Walking around the village there is a sense of stark emptiness it almost feels like no one lived here. And just when I started thinking all the ruins are the same, I discovered a multi storied home. This home also had a central courtyard and had several tourists who were more interested in taking selfies rather than observing the small corners of the home. This building in fact has some interesting architectural elements like beautiful arches on the upper level and small floral motifs. A small stairway leads us to the upper level which gave us a stunning aerial view of the entire village. Enthused, I walk around now looking for other buildings and soon enough I stumble on a dome like structure that was probably a place of worship, but no one can say for sure. I also see a house that has motifs of deer and lion on either side of the entrance etched on the bricks walls as well as a four layered decorated panel on one of the homes that has a figurine of Ganesha in the center. There is very sparse vegetation here that adds a small bit of colour to this place. While I was here my thoughts kept going back to the villagers who left this place overnight. What you cannot miss however is a sense of poignancy that the place has which is probably why people still through the village to see its ruins to reconnect with a past that has more questions than answers.

-Text and images: Bindu Gopal Rao



Glimpses of Kuldhara village

## Witness animals in their natural homes

### Wildlife Attractions in Southeast Asia...

**W**hether it's the elephants of Thailand, the Komodo dragons of Indonesia, or the tigers of Peninsular Malaysia, Southeast Asia is known for its rich biodiversity and thriving wildlife. Animal attractions are an important part of tourism, something that everyone would want to experience. Here is a list of ethical wildlife parks you can visit across Southeast Asia to spend time in the wild, without contributing to the ill-treatment of animals...

#### Elephant Nature Park, Thailand

Thai elephants are world-famous and it would be a shame to not get a close look at these gentle creatures when you're in Thailand. Many elephant parks in the country are notorious for their appalling treatment of these friendly animals but there are a few others that take excellent care of them. Elephant Nature Park in northern Thailand is a sanctuary in the truest sense of the word - it is dedicated to the rescue and

rehabilitation of elephants. Every elephant is carefully tended to, while also ensuring they have the freedom to be themselves. Interactions are kept to a minimum in order to protect the elephants as they heal from past traumas.

#### Semenggho Nature Reserve, Malaysia

A forest reserve with semi-wild orangutans roaming free in their natural habitat - this is Semenggho Nature Reserve. Young, rescued, or orphaned orangutans are cared for and provided proper nutrition to help them grow strong and healthy. No restrictions are placed on the animals. They are usually seen coming by themselves from the nearby forests during the feeding hours. You can visit the Orangutan Gallery and Botanical Research Centre to learn more about these wonderful animals and their habitat. Regular buses ply between Kuching and Semenggho, and the commute takes around 40 minutes.

#### Kho Yai National Park, Thailand

Thailand's oldest National Park, Kho Yai is a pristine rainforest spread over 2,168 sq km with a thriving wildlife. Elephants, deer, macaques, gibbons,

bears, and jackals are some of the commonly spotted mammals here. A plethora of resident and migratory birds make these jungles even more lively. In fact, it is believed to have the largest population of hornbills in Thailand. You can even spot reptiles like crested lizards, reticulated pythons, Chinese water dragon, and water monitors at Kho Yai. A safe distance is maintained between the animals and the visitors, to ensure the animal isn't disturbed.

#### Komodo National Park, Indonesia

Indonesia is home to the legendary Komodo dragon, the heaviest lizard on earth. Komodo island itself is a part of the Lesser Sunda chain in Indonesia and forms the renowned Komodo National Park. These rare lizards inhabit the rugged island along with other animals like deer, boars, water buffaloes, Asian palm civets etc. The island is also known for its flourishing marine life. It was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1991. The national park is best reached from Labuan Bajo by ferry, and tours can be booked to get to different parts of the island.

- Courtesy: Ithaka Travel



TRAVEL TRAIL

Elephant Nature Park, Thailand



Lake Lucerne Cruise

## Bask in warmth of Swiss autumn

**S**witzerland is a country that will enchant you with its spectacular snow-capped peaks, glistening lakes and charming old towns, all transformed with the blazing glory of Autumn.

#### Lucerne

Nestled amongst mountains and an aquamarine-tinted lake, Lucerne will make you feel like you have time travelled to a quaint fairytale-town with all its trimmings – cobblestone streets and centuries-old pretty wooden bridges all

surrounded by blazing autumn trees reaching up through a mysterious veiled mist.

#### Engelberg-Titlis

Autumn is a good time to visit Engelberg and Mount Titlis. Not only are you welcomed with a blanket of snow, you also experience the added bonus of bathing in clear, bright sun reflecting off the coloured autumn leaves of the alpenes.

A not-to-be-missed highlight is the Trubsee Playground.

## Get that adrenaline rush

**J**umping into any new sport or hobby can be not only daunting, but downright confusing. If you've never rowed or paddled before, your first time nestled within the bowels of a kayak may leave you feeling like a fish out of water.

**Before you set off**  
**Dress for the water, not the weather**

Regardless of whether it's a cold near-winter morning or a hot mid-summer afternoon, dress for the water. For example, if you'd normally wear a wetsuit in those waters, wear one kayaking. If it's more board shorts appropriate water, a well-fitting swimsuit will suffice.

**Invest in water-proof storage cases**

There's nothing that can ruin your kayaking adventure more than coming back to find your expensive smartphone is now wa-



ADVENTURE CORNER

ter damaged. While press-and-seal storage container will work just fine for your food and wallet, we'd recommend investing in something more sturdy to store your electronics and clothing.

#### Rent if you can

Get a feel for kayaking first before investing in any equipment, if you can. Kayak renting services have become more and more popular in the past decade. Be sure you to

also rent helmets and life vests in addition to the kayak and paddles.  
**Know river language**  
There's actually a series of hand signals and gestures that help kayakers communicate with each other. After all, rapids can be quite noisy and distracting. If you're kayaking in a group, it may be helpful to brush up on these simple signals.

- The Adventure Junkies