



Lenscapes en route

From *Pehalwan Parathas* to chicken pickles, from old monks to holy cows, the four-wheeled drive threw in many delightful surprises in every turn. No wonder, frequent photo stops became a necessity

Fresh and juicy

The colour orange dominates the route from Panchkula to Shimla. No, it's not about any party flags, but fresh oranges as we screech to a halt by a roadside vendor. At just Rs 25 a glass, the freshly squeezed orange juice was a steal. We gulped down the liquid pleasure and continued our journey with renewed energy and enthusiasm.



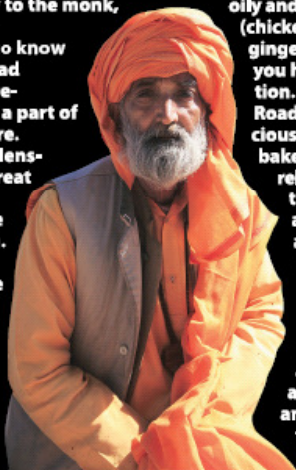
Operation smile

Along our journey through the mountains, we encountered hospitable people with happy faces. Yes, a smile doesn't cost you anything, but the joys it provides to the recipient is priceless. These kids made us feel great.



Old monk and holy cow

Want some blessings for a safe passage? Or how about some insights into the journey of your life? On the way to Shimla, do meet the old monk and his holy cow that would whisper secrets into your ears. We petted the cow and paid some money to the monk, but no, we didn't want to know about the road ahead - unpredictability is a part of our adventure. Instead, our lensman had a great time making the cow pose for his Nikon. Besides, blessings are essential in these tricky mountain roads where every turn throws a surprise.



Highway on my plate

It was a culinary journey as well. The *Pehalwan Parathas* (hot, chat-pata with dollops of white butter) at the famous Ahuja No. 1 on the way to Murthal, just out of Delhi, are a must try. Also try



chicken *achar* at Captain's Inn in Shimla. However, risk the sinfully oily and delicious achar (chicken, mutton, *chana*, ginger and mushroom) only if you have a strong constitution. We also hit the Mall Road and discovered the delicious *kurkes* at the Krishna bakery after which we relished an early dinner at the Embassy restaurant, also in the Mall. The food at the Hatu Hotel in Narkanda, prepared by chef Parshram Sharma (above) will seriously challenge your mom's cooking. Food was accompanied by an ample flow of Old Monk and Coke, which added fuel to our drive.

Once in Shimla, we check in the Holiday Home, the HPTDC resort. Soon we hit the Mall road and discover the delicious *kurkes* at the Krishna bakery, after which we relish an early dinner at the Embassy along with a rum and coke combo at Holiday Home's Captains Bar.

Set for a snow down



After hitting the sack early we head for Narkanda early next morning. My co-driver takes the wheel, and I reluctantly slip into the passenger seat. I can't but enjoy the road to Narkanda which has some spectacular sheer cliffs and grassy terraces. The road starts to hug the mountain side and houses appear nestled far above and below the road. We encounter a week-old snow on the other side of Shimla with thin ice puddles on the road. The road becomes slippery and the drive ahead a challenge, but the SUV remains surprisingly stable and the tail never misbehaves.

Early afternoon, we reach Narkanda

where we check into Hotel Hatu. The temperature here is as low as 0 degree. Teeth chattering, we rush into the hotel. With no warm clothing in our backpacks, we decide to quit driving for the day. It's getting colder by the minute. Later in the evening we are treated to the best dinner ever. The food at the Hatu can seriously challenge your mom's cooking. The cold ensures that Old Monk flows steadily into our glasses. Feeling warm and ready for a challenge, we step out and are greeted by crisp cold air and a snow-covered valley lit up by bright moonlight. It's divine.

The rise and fall

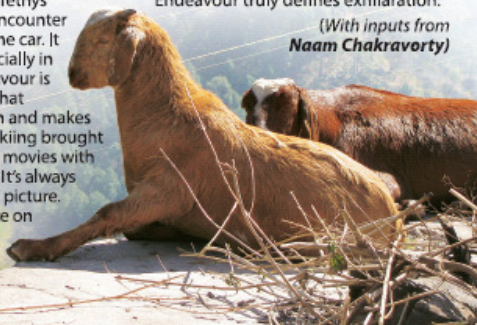
Some friendly natives recommend that we rent gum boots and trek up for a skiing session. On an impulse we decide to check the only other hotel, Tethys Resort, in the vicinity and encounter roads with space for only one car. It is a challenging climb especially in the snow. Aiding the Endeavour is the efficient 4 wheel drive that works at the flick of a switch and makes the drive less of a burden. Skiing brought back memories of old Hindi movies with couples serenading on skis. It's always such an incredibly beautiful picture. However, my first experience on skis is best defined as very brief. After falling for



the seventh time in about 15 minutes, I give up. Ramesh seems to be doing better. He actually manages to go down a slope without falling, only to discover the instructor has forgotten to tell him how to stop. So you guessed it right: There he is all down flat on his back.

Back home as I step out and take one last admiring look at the car, it is easy for me to understand why the Ford Endeavour truly defines exhilaration.

(With inputs from Naam Chakravorty)



CELEB HOLS

ARJUN MATHUR | Actor

'I wanted to meet Arnie'

While in San Francisco, visit Stinking Rose for all food smelly, says the actor last seen in *My Name is Khan*

Your last holiday? San Francisco

Why San Francisco? I was shooting for *My Name Is Khan*

Shooting highlights: I was awed seeing the massive fan following that Shah Rukh has in the States. It's probably larger than any Hollywood star's.

Any Hollywood stars you bumped into? I met Connan O'Brian which was a fun experience.

Holiday high point: Sky diving

Low point: None. San Francisco is a great city. The people are friendly and peace loving.

One peculiar thing about San Francisco: People there are far less paranoid than in any other city in the States. There is very little police presence in the streets, yet you feel very safe.

Shopping: I picked up some great music from Amoeba Records, a pilgrimage for musicians.

Favourite spots in the city: Haight Street and Golden Gate Park. People take care of their city and it shows.

Food for thought: I ate at a place called the Stinking Rose. Everything — from the wines to the starters to the dishes — at the restaurant has garlic in it. Not the perfect place for date, but one must try.

Something you missed doing in the city? We were shooting just outside the Capitol Building and I thought it might have been fun to meet the governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger.

One wish you hope would come true one day? I wish I can live in San Francisco. It's my favourite place in the States.

Summing up: San Francisco is a city for everyone. It just takes you in without hesitation.

— Interviewed by Shruti Chakravorty

