

Long fabled amongst travellers for its serene Golden Temple, langars at scenic gurudwaras, authentic farm-stays and delicious street food, Punjab could be the highlight of this new year for your solo wanderings



Farm stays

Soak in the winter sun on a charpoy

What: Bright green fields topped with yellow mustard flowers is a scene that one might almost always associate with Punjab. There are no better environs than a span of sprawling vegetation around you to relax and unwind. Top it with the warm Punjabi hospitality and you have a perfect lazy holiday planned for you. The farm stays of Punjab, offer just the experience to nudge you towards pacing down and enjoying the simple way of living. This is perfect for city slickers who want to slow down the pace of life.

Be it Punjabyat farm stay near Amritsar, A Hotel off Ludhiana, **Citrus Country** in Hoshiarpur or **Deep Roots** in Ranjitpura, the options to get your hands dirty in the farmland or tending to cows are plenty.

Why: Nothing trumps the crispy air of the countryside along with every dish prefixed with 'fresh from the farm' before you dig into your meal. The solo traveller can sink deeper in solitude and enjoy a good book or a chat with the farmers.

How: Punjabyat is amongst the most well known farm stays of Punjab with an authentic touch of local living. Contact: (0) 98187 05508; www.itmenaaanlodges.com

Langar hopping

Spiritual journey with a twist

What: More than religious inclination, many travellers are fascinated by the *langars* served at the Gurudwaras. Simple yet memorable, skip from Golden Temple in Amritsar

to **Takht Sri Keshgarh Sahib** in Anandpur and Tarn Taran to sample the tranquil environs and the brilliant food that they serve to all.

Why: While it is impossible to

visit all gurudwaras, visiting a few gives you an essence of the religion that took shape under the ten Sikh gurus, each with a unique characteristic of bravado and kindness. While Golden Temple is considered the holiest, Anandpur Sahib is where Guru Teg Bahadur stayed and Tarn Taran's Goindwal

Sahib is where even Emperor Akbar stopped for *langar*. It's also famous for a *baoli* (step well).

How: Between October to March is the best time to visit Punjab. Plenty of local buses connect the cities; else one can hire a cab for a speedy trip. Avoid overnight local buses.

The nationalistic twist

The Indo-Pak Sarhad experience

What: Punjab is undoubtedly one of the key states that was affected by the poignant separation of the country in 1947. Till date, it bears testimony to the severe rift that was created almost six decades ago. Nationalistic tourism seems to have created a niche for itself. Whether it is the beating retreat ceremony of the Wagah Border or lunch at the heart warming **Sarhad Restaurant**, the constant reminder of an unbroken cord with the land across the border is hard to miss.

Why: While the Wagah border is bubbling with excited visitors on either side during an exaggerated mock rivalry show by the guards, a restaurant like Sarhad bridges the gap between the two countries. The restaurant not only imports spices, recipes and even a Pakistani beer but even aesthetics from across the border. The restaurant is a refreshing break from the unpleasant association that nationalistic themed tourism can bring. Other spots like Pul Kanjri and the border villages are also veritable spots.

How: Amritsar is well connected to Delhi by both flights and train. Explore the city during winters for a pleasant weather. Wagah border ceremony takes place from 5 pm to 6 pm/entry free. Book a table at **Sarhad**, tel: (0) 98155 55931

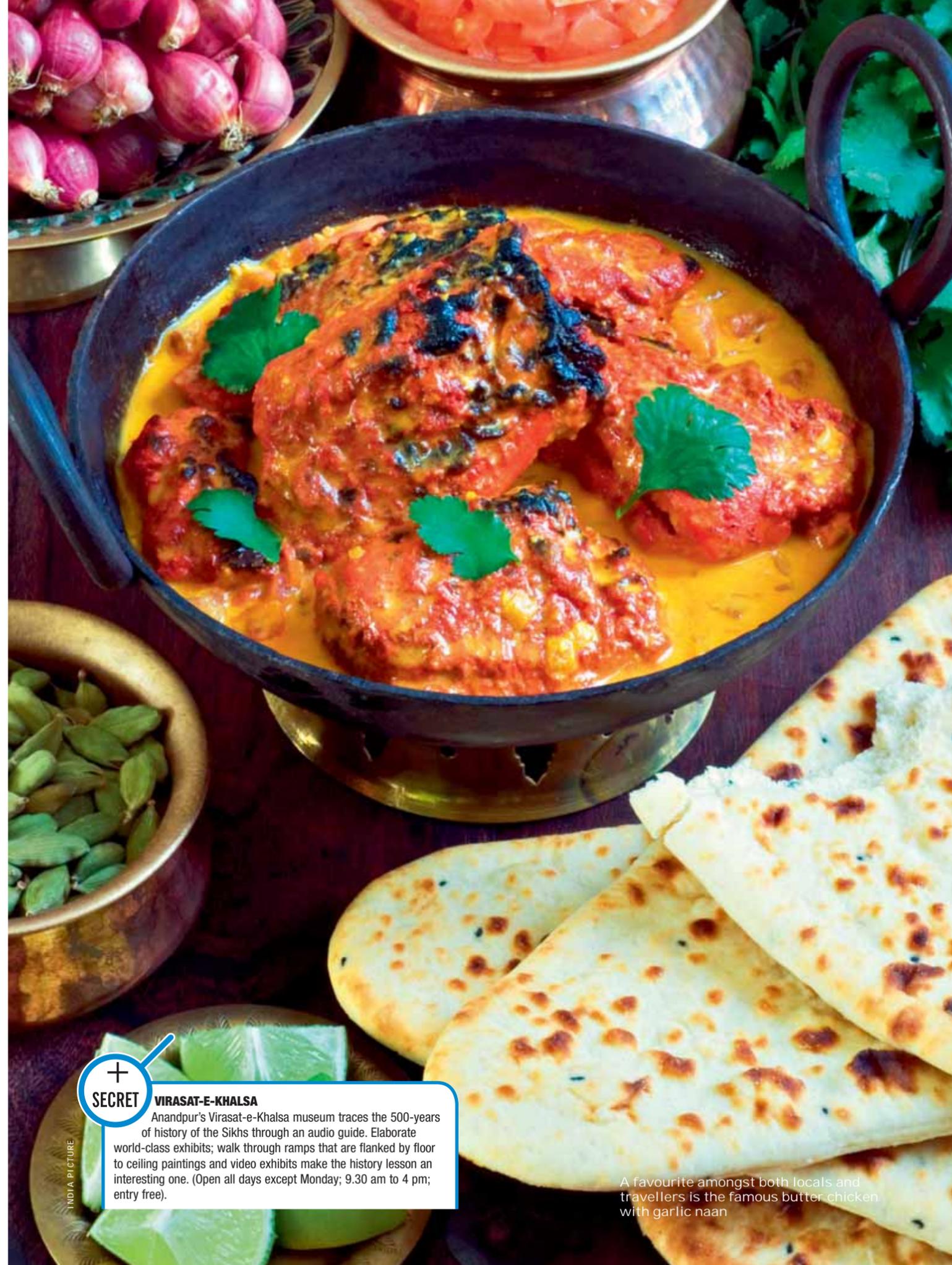
Food fetish

Sign up for a heritage food walk

What: This trip should be a single-minded endeavour to go back with some extra kilograms. Warm up with a hot cup at Gurmit Singh's tea stall, which has been around for 58 years and then make your way to the sinful Makhan Ka Dhaba for staples like boneless sole fish. Neutralise the spices with Ahuja's kesar wali lassi before taking a short break. The evenings call for Amritsari machi, mutton tikka, and tandoori chicken at Surjit Chicken House or Kesar Da Dhaba for its signature maa ki daal. You will need another day to try other local delicacies like pudina kanji at Brijwaasi, the pure ghee thali at Bhrawan Da Dhaba and the specials at Pappi Dhaba.

Why: Ditch the calorie count and dive into the heady mix of *paranths*, *lassi*, Patiala *wale chhole* and the best *chai* cup you would ever set your hands on, in the bustling streets of Amritsar. Soaked, dipped and sizzling in fatty splendour, one this is for sure; you will never view street food without thinking of this city.

How: Sign up with **Davinder Singh Chawla (0)99885 03458;** www.punjabtourism.gov.in for an Amritsar Heritage Walk themed around food.



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SECRET

VIRASAT-E-KHALSA

Anandpur's Virasat-e-Khalsa museum traces the 500-years of history of the Sikhs through an audio guide. Elaborate world-class exhibits; walk through ramps that are flanked by floor to ceiling paintings and video exhibits make the history lesson an interesting one. (Open all days except Monday; 9.30 am to 4 pm; entry free).

A favourite amongst both locals and travellers is the famous butter chicken with garlic naan