



March 2015



Thinking Aloud

Have money, will travel! - Jay

Podium

Interview with **Milind Bhide** – Director - Countryside Adventure Holidays Pvt. Ltd.

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Movie Reviews

Standing Ovation

Foundation for Mother and Child Health (FMCH) - Mumbai, Maharashtra

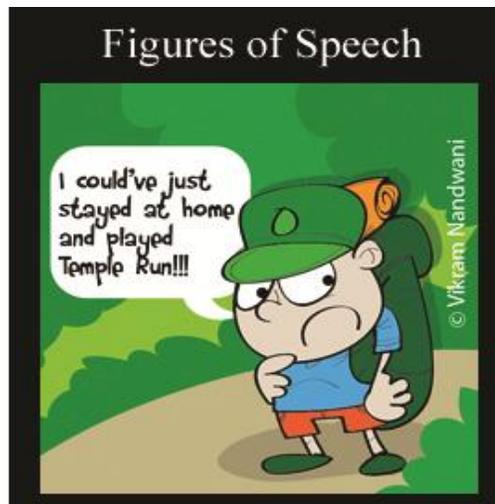
Dear Reader,

The word 'vacation' always has a sweet ring to it. The mere utterance of the word takes one to a world of fun, yet relaxing and probably where none of us would want to come back from. Tag 'vacations' with backpacking in the mountains, hiking, rafting or even cycling along the coastline, and we get what is in vogue today – adventure vacations.

Adventure as a way of travel is gaining prominence and is appealing to travellers. The main point to be noted here is that adventure travel emphasizes interaction with the environment, people and cultures of the regions visited. Adventure travel encompasses a wide range of options including hiking tours, walking tours, biking tours, skiing, rafting among others. Some adventure tours feature physically active itineraries, while others feature unique or exotic ones. To make the experience even more memorable, many adventure vacations utilize local guides who take travellers to lesser known, more secluded attractions.

Adventure tours are available for all skill levels, and the pace ranges from easy going to challenging. The style of adventure travel varies also from budget to luxury. There are dozens of companies planning backpacking trips both at home and abroad, for a variety of skills and time frames.

The main advantages of this segment of vacationing is that it involves healthy-physical activities, allows for a deeper cultural exchange with different people, and an appreciation for the various places of visit. Physical activity is a part of adventure vacations as there are places and moments in the world best experienced in this manner. There is an emotional power associated with outdoor adventure; it has the power to be both transformational and empowering. With the vacation season just around the corner, kids too look forward to summer camps and adventure related



activities. Today, tour operators also organise various outdoor adventure programs to encourage interaction with nature.

Many of life's most memorable moments come from reaching the peak of a small mountain and taking in the view, from a quiet walk on a secluded forest trail, or from a trek along a coastline. ET this month features the subject of Adventure Vacations. It is said that the world is a book, and those who do not travel read only a page of it. With adventure vacations forming a part of the entire travel experience, go ahead indulge and be the author of your own book of memories!

In **Thinking Aloud**, Jay explains that Indians have been familiar with travelling since time immemorial. Of late, there is a new breed of travellers arising from the traditional ones. Tourist Boards and media today have kept tourists curious about the exotic charms of the rest of the world. Travel operators today target the new generation of travellers – the rising middle class. Foreign Tourist Boards and governments are luring travellers and are walking the extra mile to ensure that Indian travellers seek new lands to visit, through unbeatable offerings and assistance. There is a new segment of people who seek a date with nature after being satiated with classic global sights. This is an emerging class ready for a trade-off on physical comfort, where safety comes first while enjoying nature at its best – the Himalayan trail, jeep safaris to name some.

On the **Podium** this month, Mr. Milind Bhide, Director of Countryside Adventure Holidays Pvt. Ltd. informs readers of the key factors to bear in mind while planning for a holiday. He agrees to the fact that today, Indians have become more experimental backed by higher disposable income amid a booming economy. Travel plans differ among different people, some being more experimental than others who wish to go on off-beat holidays. Mr. Bhide drives home the importance of outdoor and adventure camps for the overall well-being and development of children. These camps not only enrich children with life lessons but also facilitate personality development and in acquainting the child with the environment, thereby creating a link between academics and reality. Mr. Bhide also looks at the challenges from the tour operators' point of view and speaks of his entrepreneurial journey and the travel packages offered by Countryside Adventure Holidays Pvt. Ltd.

In the **We Recommend** section this month, we have reviewed some exciting adventure based movies that will keep you at the edge of your seats till the very end. These 'must watch' movies have some of life's lessons, a sense of adventure and thrill underlying them.

We feature Foundation for Mother and Child Health (FMCH), a Mumbai, based organisation in **Standing Ovation**. What started off in 2006 with the help of a volunteer in Jakarta who returned to India with a belief to help children and women, today is an NGO dedicated for the eradication of malnutrition in children below the age of six, and in pregnant and lactating mothers from economically underprivileged families. The Foundation mainly operates in Dhobi Ghat, Mumbai providing pre-school education, health and nutrition clinics, English classes for mothers and a youth programme. FMCH also carries out child developmental awareness through programs like Accha Baccha classes, pregnancy clubs and community support volunteer programs.

In **Figures of Speech**, Vikram's toon has second thoughts of his adventurous camping trip!

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Thinking Aloud

Have money, will travel! - Jay

The itinerant Indian is an old and familiar figure across the world. Doubting Thomases need only look at the wide Indian diaspora as evidence of the lengths to which Indians have traveled across the world.

However, that group of old travellers have given way to a new order. Historically, Indians went round the world primarily as traders, indentured labour, or those in search of new economic havens to fulfil their potential. But what we have been witnessing of late is a new breed of travellers - the curious tourist in search of the exotic charms of the rest of the world.

This is a recent phenomenon, post the liberalisation era, when the middle class was suddenly made aware of the pleasures of group tours. What the Japanese tourists were to foreign lands in the eighties and early nineties, is today the norm for Chinese and Indians. In fact, according to forecasts by respectable sources, the world of travel and tourism is now dominated by hordes of Chinese tourists and the inimitable Indian Travel groups, clutching their airbags and backpacks tightly. From the current estimate of 15 million, the outbound number from India is set to rise to 50 million by 2020.

Fuelling this hunger is the rise of Tourist Boards of various hues from all over the world. While Hindi films made Switzerland the romantic destination - who can forget Yashraj films' contribution to this cause! - the cue was wisely picked up by other Boards too. Targeting film producers has been an easy cue to follow, leading to the promotion of Australia, New Zealand, and later South Africa and Spain, and thereby shifting the emphasis from the favourite locales of South East Asia (Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia).

While the old favourite was MICE destinations (jargon for Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions), which catered to the incentive need of salesmen, dealers, distributors, etc., the new focus of travel operators is to fulfil the pent up needs of the rising middle class. This group is not just the urban nuclear family of four, funded from corporate salaries, but a new generation of travellers. This surprising class includes the senior citizens, women only groups, and a large number from smaller towns of India, who are now exposed to the world through excitement offered by the satellite television. The search of the exotic locale, sightseeing and shopping, are now par for the course, for this new crop of travellers.

The traditional two fears of this non-business, non-regular traveller has always been lack of knowledge of English and the need for Indian food. Intrepid and enterprising travel firms have found solutions to these issues and have discovered a gold mine waiting to be exploited!

Much to the dismay of the snooty, wealthy and traditional traveller, this neo-Indian traveller lacks the social graces that the old fashioned ones were used too. Admittedly this can lead to many embarrassing situations, but I am sure, these rough edges will get polished over a period. What the foreign Tourist Board want is the Dollars that this new breed is willing to spend. Therefore, the unlikely Indian traveller is seeking new lands to visit, and assisting them in this process are a host of new Travel Agencies who know what best works for the Indian Uncle and Aunties. Be it

traditional meals, made by the accompanying Maharaj, or special budget deals that only an Indian will ask for, these Agencies are packaging them all into an unbeatable offering. And, before you know, the 50 million outbound travellers may well be an underestimation! I say this with confidence as even when the Dollar was rising last year, the size of outbound Indians did not dip.

And, with the new government boosting tourism, it will not just be inbound travel that we will see, but also more groups flying to neighbouring Sri Lanka and even distant Egypt and Turkey, not too worried about the ISIS elements at the gate.

Added to all this will be a further niche, those bitten by the adventure bug. This is currently the young and urban executive who is willing to seek a new thrill after having his fill of the classic global sights. Sometimes accompanied by his equally adventurous spouse, this new group also has some older members of the corporate world, who are satiated by the material pleasures and now seek a tryst with nature. This is an emerging class, who understand that safety comes at a price and may even be ready for a trade-off on physical comfort for the joy of walking an untrodden path. While this relatively small group is today still focused on Indian locales - the well-known haunts of the Himalayan trail, and a few forests, etc. - some are also game for bicycle holidays, and jeep safaris to Ladakh, etc. And, I am sure, very soon, a few will be ready to go overseas in such of these challenges. While very nascent now, keep an eye out for this section of trendsetters.

The mantra for today's generation is, 'Have money, will travel!' And, the good news is that the world is welcoming their credit cards like never before!

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Podium

Milind Bhide – Director - Countryside Adventure Holidays Pvt. Ltd.



Mr. Milind Bhide, the inspiration behind Countryside Adventure Holidays knew what he wanted to do right from the start - make his passion his profession!

It was on a family mountaineering trip back in 1982 that he discovered his love for the mountains. Months after the trip, Mr. Bhide struggled to get the mountains out of his mind but when he just couldn't, he decided to do a basic course in mountaineering. The greatest challenge and the turning point in Mr. Bhide's career came only a few years later when he was a part of the epic expedition to Mt. Everest Base Camp. After this, there was no looking back.

Making a jump from a science education and a finance profession, Mr. Bhide took the next leap by organising an adventure trip in 1993. What started as a common interest of the Himalayas with a bunch of like-minded mountaineers soon became a business idea. The demand for trips and treks grew and soon the

company found itself caught up in scheduling full-fledged adventure travel to the mountains, especially Ladakh. Now, 21 years later, Countryside Adventure Holidays, has developed into an outfit which provides safe and effective travel.

In the year 2002, Countryside Adventure Holidays captured a new benchmark when they ventured to the Everest Base Camp and followed it up with a trip to Tibet and Bhutan in 2003-04. Today, they cover almost the entire Himalayan range of mountains. Mr. Bhide decided to add other dimensions to his mountaineering company by introducing 'Winter Wanderings', a vacation package that included wildlife and adventure sports (skiing, rafting, etc), 'Kidventures' which was a specialized, tailor made programme for children and 'Freespirit', the weekend getaway solution for young adventure enthusiasts.

Presently, Mr. Bhide's vision is to make Countryside Adventure Holidays the leading adventure travel company known for its comfort, safety and travel experience and to expand it internationally at different locations and inspire more people to really interact with nature. When not in transit, Mr. Bhide enjoys reading tales of adventure and philosophy. Trekking is one of Mr. Bhide's favourite activity as it is one of the best ways to discover the nuances of a place and absorb its culture.

ET: What are the key factors to be borne in mind while planning for a holiday?

MB: Expectations: While planning a holiday one needs to be sure of what to expect from the adventure holiday that they have opted for. There are various parameters by which one can assess.

Services: Accommodation, vehicles, guide tour managers, other staff (on the trek). Usually these are directly proportional to the budget to be spent. Customers expect more value in the budget that they have planned and hence there is a possibility of disappointments.

Tour Operator/Travel Agent: It is important to check on the track record of the agency or the tour operator. One can ask for references and check for the experience that they have in conducting such trips.

Challenges: It is very important to understand the physical challenges and risks that are expected in a trip. So it is an informed choice that you make and you would get enough time to prepare.

Duration: Due to work pressure, many people try and do a lot of things in a short duration of time without making any provision for uncertainties such as bad weather, road blocks, sufficient time to acclimatize for high altitude etc.

Safety & Contingency Plan: This is very critical for adventure trips to understand what are the safety measures, first aid kit, trained staff in first aid and evacuation plans. Also, it is important to have a contingency plan in case of bad weather, road blocks or if it is required to split the group.

ET: Indians have become more experimental when it comes to travelling and off-beat holidays. What are the latest trends among holiday goers in India who wish to go off-the-beaten path?

MB: Yes, Indians, amid a growing economy and disposable income have started travelling and exploring. The nature of off-beat/adventure/experiential travel that they take would differ depending on the age group. Teenagers and youngsters have started backpacking as time and budget is of importance. The age group of the 30s singles and young married couples are more into exploring the unknown/new destinations or indulging into adventure holidays such as trekking trips/rafting trips/sailing trips/wildlife and bird watching trips. The elderly age group of the 40s and early 50s are into exploring soft adventure options which they can do as a family; as singles, a more

challenging option where they would aspire for certain serious treks like the Everest Base Camp or summiting Mt. Stok Kangri or Mt. Kilimanjaro

ET: Please elucidate the importance of outdoor camps/adventure camps for the overall well-being and development of children.

MB: Our Kidventure programmes for children, facilitates the development of qualities like leadership and team spirit while harmoniously working with the environment. They involve group outdoor activities like nature trails, trekking, camping, orienteering, community work, rappelling, rafting and night sky observations, while living amidst natural surroundings. The children have a blast; the fun and the camaraderie that they will carry back with them will leave them enthusiastic and motivated and the lessons that they learn will always be with them. An enriching experience like this will help in his/her personality development as well as in acquainting the child with the environment, thereby creating a link between academics and reality.

ET: What are the challenges from the tour operators' point of view to ensure that travellers enjoy their holidays?

MB: As we offer services and the experience, we need to be extra careful. As regards services, we need to be sure of the information that is being shared with the guests and make sure that it is interpreted properly. The logical planning and detailing is very important and crucial for safety. As regards experience, it is important that the personnel interacting with the guests are knowledgeable, experienced, trained and professional. This itself will enhance the experience of the traveller. As of date, I find that the Indian traveller is yet to evolve and to understand the value behind such services. With online media, the traveller gets information in abundance which is good, but at the same time confusing. The costs are elusive and typically they buy into something cheap giving less value or something that is overvalued.

ET: Tell us your entrepreneurial journey. What are the services and packages that you offer to prospective travellers?

MB: Countryside Adventure Holidays, since 1993 till date has been an adventure within the business. We started off when the idea of adventure travel which was very new to Indians. Adventures and holidays were mostly related with children camps. In the initial days, we had to educate and convince customers to try and experience such a way of holidaying. Over the years, this scenario changed, and today many would like to experiment and try such holidays. Information is readily available and there are many companies and individuals offering such holidays at various price points making the business competitive. In such an environment, there are challenges on the marketing and communication fronts. The passionate, knowledgeable, experienced and trained staff is very critical, so we keep doing refreshers workshops, tour leader's trainings, first aid courses and product training all the time. The business environment is very dynamic and we keep changing and innovating our strategy all the time. On retrospection, the past 22 years of Countryside has been an amazing journey and an exciting learning experience.

Today, we offer trips across the Indian subcontinent, within India, Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka, among others. We also offer trips to Tibet, Tanzania, Kenya and Oman. Our packages are designed with some element of adventure and we usually try an offer something different and off-beat from standard packages. Our focus is on Safety, Comfort and Personalized Services.

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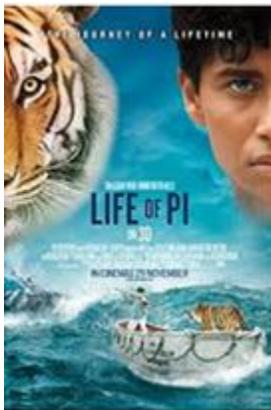


We Recommend

Movie Reviews

In this section, we take you through an adventurous journey filled with life lessons of the outdoors, nature and survival skills. And what better way than through sight and sound – movies. Here are some movies that are worth a watch:

1. Life of Pi (2012)

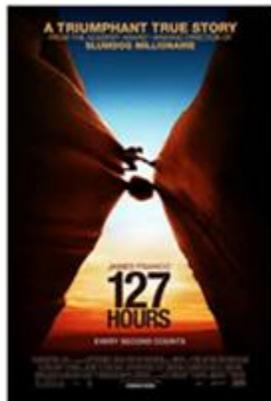


Based on the book written by Yann Martel, Ang Lee's movie Life of Pi is about the 227 days a teenage hero (Piscine, in short, Pi; played by Suraj Sharma) who survives a disaster at sea and is dashed into an epic journey of adventure and discovery.

The story begins in a small family zoo in Pondicherry, India. The zoo is unable to sustain itself and Pi's father puts his family and a few valuable animals on a ship bound for Canada. The ship encounters a storm and sinks while a zebra, an orangutan, a hyena and a lion tumble into the boat with Pi. Over some time, the hyena kills the zebra and then the orangutan. At this point, Pi learns that a tiger (named fancifully as Richard Parker by Pi) has been hiding under the boat's tarpaulin; Parker kills and eats the hyena. The heart of the film focuses on the sea journey, during which Pi demonstrates that he can think with great ingenuity and the tiger shows that it can learn. Pi and Parker share the same possible places in and near the boat.

The movie is worth watching as it highlights the power of storytelling and imagination, weaved in an enthralling adventure tale through the use of 3-D effects.

2. 127 Hours (2010)

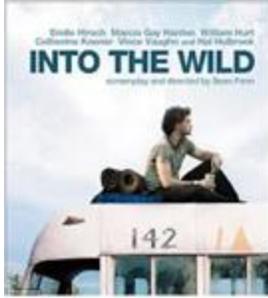


A true story, 127 Hours is a biographical survival drama of mountain climber and outdoor adventurer Aron Ralston (played by James Franco). The invincible that he is Ralston takes on an adventure trek alone through the Blue John Canyon without informing anyone. While descending a canyon, a boulder comes loose and he falls into a canyon crack. Although he is unharmed, Ralston finds his hand wedged between the boulder and the canyon wall. 127 Hours is the amount of time that is spent in staying alive in this situation, with his gear and his small supply of rations, as he tries to move the boulder or chip away at it so that he can get his wedged hand free. Amid the extreme weather conditions, his mind drifts off as he introspects of his relationships in his life.

This is a thrilling story of an adventurer, who eventually finds himself out. The movie was nominated for three Golden Globe Awards, including Best Actor, Best Screenplay and

Best Original Score.

3. Into the Wild (2007)



Unsullied by money or the career rat-race, top student and athlete Christopher McCandless (Emile Hirsch), on graduating, abandons his possessions, gives his entire savings account to charity, gets in his car, and drives away to Alaska without telling anyone where he is going, abandoning the use of his real name in the course of his journey.

Along the way he faces a flash flood, works at various places, but not too long, often living on the streets, and keeping as little money and as few possessions as he can. Christopher encounters a series of characters that shape his life and who admire his intensity and willingness to live completely by his beliefs.

After two years of itinerant travel, he plans on spending time in the wilderness and devotes a few months preparing, learning all he can about hunting, edible plants, and other skills. Near Mt. McKinley, he spends weeks in hunting small game, foraging, reading, and living in a deserted bus, not seeing a single human in sight.

The film is presented in a non-linear narrative, cutting back and forth between McCandless's time spent in Alaskan wilderness and his travels leading up to his journey to Alaska. The movie is an adaptation of the non-fiction book of the same name by Jon Krakauer.

4. **Eight Below (2006)**



Walt Disney Pictures presents Eight Below, the tale of incredible friendship between eight sled dogs - Buck, Dewey, Max, Maya, Old Jack, Shadow, Shorty and Truman, all of whom are taken for a scientific research station along with their guide Jerry (Paul Walker). Stranded in Antarctica, Eight Below is based on a true story of a pack of dogs that were left to fend for themselves over the course of many months, as brutal cold forces the explorers to leave them behind.

5. **Vertical Limit (2000)**



Vertical Limit is a high-adrenaline story of Peter Garrett (played by Chris O'Donnell) a wildlife photographer for National Geographic, and an avid mountain climber. His sister Annie (Robin Tunney) is also a climber, now working as a mountain guide. She is a part of a team assembled to climb to the top of K2, the second highest mountain in the world. This team was assembled by wealthy Texas businessman Elliot Vaughn (Bill Paxton), who planned the event to honour the first flight of a new airlines scheduled to fly overhead as they reach the summit. Tom McLaren (Nicholas Lea) is chosen to accompany them because of his reputation as one of the best climbers in the world.

Bad weather and tragedy befalls the attempt, leaving the only three survivors, Vaughn, Annie and McLaren, trapped in a cave beneath the snow. The rescue teams organised by Peter, have 36 hours to reach the trapped climbers.

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Standing Ovation

Foundation for Mother and Child Health (FMCH) - Mumbai, Maharashtra



In 2001, a group of expatriate nurses and other professionals in Jakarta established Yayasan Balita Sehat (Foundation for Healthy Under-fives) to feed children whose growth was faltering and offer pre-school education, skills training for mothers and a micro-credit scheme for women. Later in 2006, a volunteer in Jakarta returned to India and believed a similar model could help children at risk in Mumbai slums. "Bal Sehat Kendra" (Child Health Centre) was opened in Ganeshnagar in the Dhobi Ghat slum area and ran as a Balwadi, providing pre-school education, health and nutrition clinics, English classes for mothers and a youth programme.

Originally the focus was a broader group of services focused on a smaller area but in 2010 the emphasis shifted to a more focused group of services that could reach more beneficiaries, was more sustainable and could be replicated. Since 2011, FMCH India has been an NGO solely dedicated to the eradication of malnutrition in children below the age of six, and in pregnant and lactating mothers from economically underprivileged families.

Mission

To work in economically underprivileged communities to provide full access to Preventive Health and Balanced Nutrition.

To reduce malnutrition, FMCH activities are focused on the most important determinants of malnutrition. This means emphasizing disease control and prevention activities, education to improve domestic child-care and feeding practices like one on one nutritional counselling, cooking demos, home visits and micronutrient supplementation. Activities are targeted towards the most vulnerable age groups, while supplementary feeding activities are better targeted towards those who need it most, and growth-monitoring activities are performed with greater regularity, with an emphasis on using this process to help parents understand how to improve their children's health and nutrition.

The Foundation has been operating at Dhobi Ghat in Mahalaxmi, Mumbai, since 2006. While Dhobi Ghat has been the center of the Foundation's operations, they also run their centres in Ganeshnagar, Ramdev Nagar and Sukhawani, where early child developmental awareness through programs like Accha Baccha class, pregnancy clubs and community support volunteer programs are organised. Over 2,000 children have been assisted at the Dhobi Ghat clinics. A new clinic in Powai in conjunction with NGO Vidya has been set up where their model is duplicated and nutrition is provided to support children.

One can visit <http://www.fmch-india.org/> for more information on FMCH.

ET wishes the very best to FMCH!

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