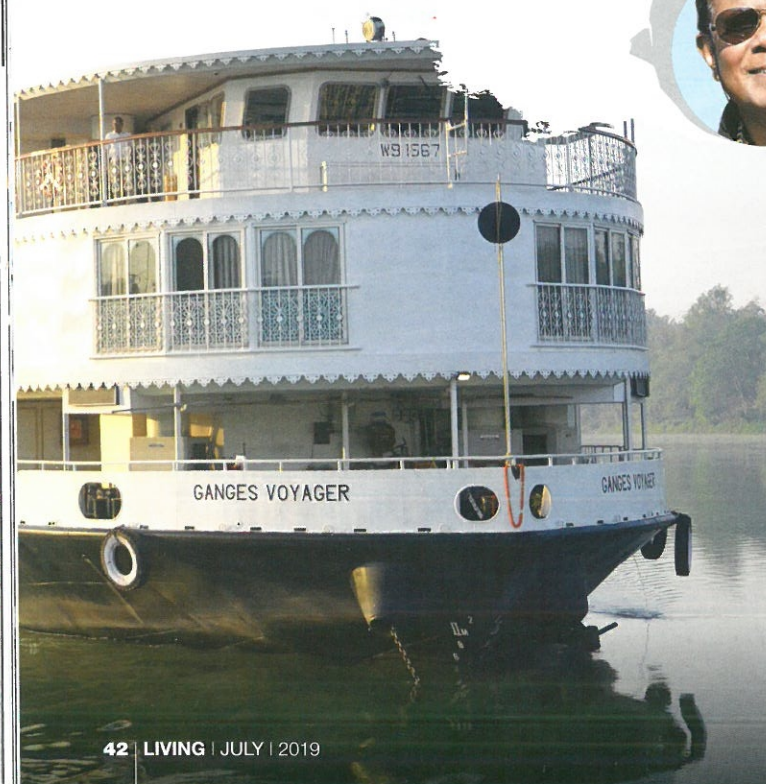


Kolkata's Vibrant Ethos

Sandip Hor waxes hot on the lure of Kolkata's colonial past and lively present



MEDIA SERVICES PHOTOFILE (SANDIP HOR)/INGIMAGE®

Formerly known as Calcutta, the city of Kolkata in eastern India is a highly seductive one. The British liked this riverside locale so much that they lived in the city for almost 250 years, making it the capital of the British Raj and nerve centre of the sub-continental east. Now, even though the country's rulers have changed, its capital shifted to New Delhi and the cultural landscape transformed, its seductiveness remains.

Today, visitors to Kolkata are lured by its colonial legacies and cultural richness. However, what seems most captivating is the city's never-ending high energy. All day and night, something is happening somewhere, making one believe that life is full of excitement and elation. Perhaps this distinct feature is what inspired French novelist Dominique Lapierre to call it the 'City of Joy.'

DAYS OF THE RAJ After being annexed to the British Empire, the city was built as a replica of London featuring stately buildings, cathedrals, manicured gardens and wide boulevards. Some of these edifices still exist to remind us of that regal era with the Victoria Memorial being the biggest crowd puller.

LOCAL CULTURE Culture buffs are drawn here by the glory of Bengali culture, which revolves around literature, cinema,

drama, music and food. Asia's first Nobel Laureate, poet and novelist Rabindranath Tagore, was born in Kolkata. His ancestral place (Jorasanko Thakur Bari) is as much revered as Shakespeare's home in Stratford-upon-Avon.

MOTHER TERESA Many around the world remember Kolkata in conjunction with Saint Teresa of Calcutta (formerly Mother Teresa) who arrived from Macedonia in 1929 at the age of 18, and dedicated her life to caring for the city's poor and homeless. She was canonised in 2016. Her humble home now stands as a site of pilgrimage.

LOCAL FESTIVALS Lively celebrations throughout the year are part of city life. The most prominent is the four day Durga Puja celebration, which focusses on the worship of the eponymous Hindu goddess. The festival is celebrated as a large-scale community event out on the streets in temporary temples made with bamboo frames, multicoloured textiles and other materials. After sundown, the landscape is brightly illuminated with creative lighting.

GANGES RIVER A relaxing way to explore Kolkata and nearby attractions outside the city limits is to take an eight-day river odyssey from bustling Kolkata to historic Murshidabad aboard the luxurious Ganges Voyager. The journey also provides visitors a chance to see many sites of historic, cultural and religious importance.

