+8 DECCAN HERALD Sunday, August 16, 2009+

SundayHerald travel

Basecamp trek

Basecamp announces a trek to Mulliyananagiri-BB Giri-Kallathagiri from August 29-30. The trek to the top of the peak and then to Baba Budanagiri gives the best view of the entire range. Post monsoon is the best season to trek this route.

ATLANTIC BEAUTY

Rhode Island blues

A playground of industrial barons in the 19th century that hosted some of America's posh parties, Newport today is a tourists' paradise, says **HEMA NARAYANAN**

y visit to Newport city in Rhode Island state reminded me of the famous rock number 'Roadhouse Blues' from Jim Morrison's album, 'Doors': "...Yeah, we're going to the roadhouse, Gonna have a real good-time. Yeah, the back of the roadhouse, they've got some bungalows..." Listening to this song on the bus journey from Boston to Rhode Island's Newport only elevated my first-reaction to this quaint city.

So true, this natural seaside beauty certainly has huge bungalows and mansions beside the deep-blue Atlantic. Tightly packed colonial-period houses of Newport's downtown is a charmer. Interestingly, Newport was the summer playground of industrial barons of America's gilded age from the 1880s to early 20th century. Such wealthy families as the Vanderbilts and Astors had their elaborate mansions (their summer cottages) along the rugged coastline. They liked to outdo the others, by throwing 'extra' lavish summer parties here.

The sea ennobled the landscape; the play of light on the rippling waves and on the mansions made for a fascinating sight. I remembered to note down interesting names of a few mansions: The Elms, Marble house, Rosecliff, Beechwood, The Breakers, Ochre Court and Rough Point — these truly defined the skyline here with a certain delicacy. Visitors who love architecture, design, and history would cherish tours of these

To me, the attractive characteristic of this city was its ability to appeal to a variety of travelling styles; not many port cities offer this distinctive layout.

Surf's up

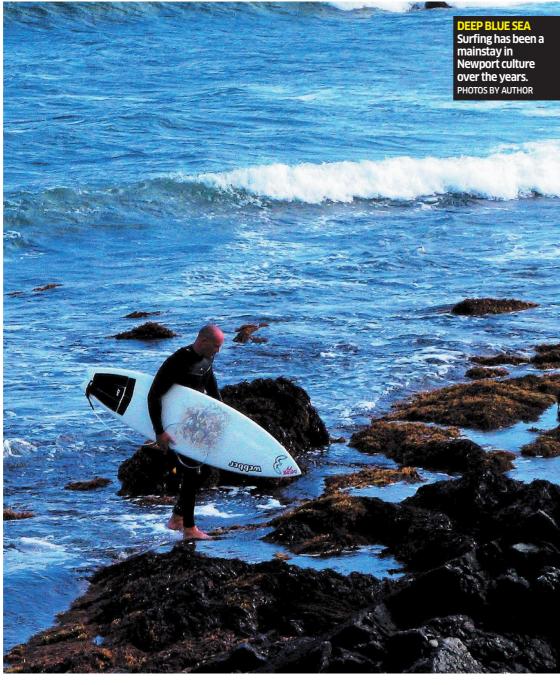
Newport sits on the southern end of Aquidneck Island; home to miles of scenic coastline ideal for exciting sailing excursions, surfing, rejuvenating walks and ocean drives or bike rides.

Even as I touched the chilly-cold water of the sea, the sea gulls fluttered past me as if in fear. The gulls would walk with grace at a distance, adding to the glamour of the already-deep-blue-sea. After several failed attempts, I finally photographed a gull at close quarters; my joy knew no end.

At first sight, it seemed like a deep-sea diver; but apparently he was a surfer clad in similar attire. Surfing has been a mainstay in Newport culture over the years. Due to decent surfing conditions, enthusiasts can surf 12 months of the year.

It has spectacular waves coming from tropical storms and hurricanes in the late summer and early fall. And even when storms don't make landfall, they are capable of bringing 10-15 foot swells from hundreds of miles offshore.

Residents love yachting and boating here. Newport has hosted America's cup,



the world's premiere yacht regatta from 1930 to 1983. Even though the contest moved out of Newport later, yachting and boating remain deeply ingrained along Newport Harbour and at the city's Museum of Yachting. Types of cruises in and out of local waters are offered

The cliff walk

Number of walking tours reveals the history and charm of the city. Of the walks, the Cliff Walk turned out to be a favourite, per-Newport's famous mansions on one side with the rocky beaches dropping off, on the other. This 3.5-mile elevated, winding path along the shoreline had extraordinary views of Narragansett Bay and the rocky coves below.

The walk has a twist mid-way (the best part!), as one has to negotiate unpaved sections and rugged paths. I observed that this stretch attracted all manner of people for a stroll - some came to relish the dash of fresh-Atlantic-air on their face, some enjoyed the view from the heights and some clambered down to the rocky blue beaches. By the end of the walk, I had indulged a bit, in all the three.

There is always something happening in Newport...it hosts events ranging from music and cultural festivals to professional sports tournaments. This complements the unique shops and galleries along the city's wharves and cobblestone streets of the upscale touristy Harbour area, from where visitors can pick up bits of Newport style home.

While folk and jazz festivals are held in summer, other ethnic festivals are seen through all seasons; the Black Ships Festival in July, celebrating culture and commerce with Japan, an Irish Festival at Labour Day and Newport Winter Festival



FAMED BUNGALOWS There are some great sights along the shore.

If you want to taste fine distinctive wines in an island setting, Newport Vineyards in Middletown is the place to go. The winery has grown to 50 acres of varietal and hybrid grapes and has hospitable operators—they offer a tour, five wines on the house and a wide smile.

Imagine seeing this beautiful city from mid-air in a helicopter ride for some airborne thrill? The majesty of Newport is well-known but the view from the air magnifies the effect, sending visitors home with fabulous photos and lifelong memories.

As the journey ended, $\ensuremath{\mbox{N}\mbox{e}}\mbox{wport}$ made its entry into my list of "firsts"...Not to forget, Rhode Island as a state is already known for many firsts: First to act against British rule, first Synagogue, first successful water-powered cotton mill and the first ocean state to receive the prestigious Inter-

national Star Diamond award. This certifies Rhode Island as a worldclass destination offering some of the best natural beauty, history, cultural attractions and culinary offerings. And why not, when it has a city like Newport which showed me bungalows and gave me a good time -Rhode Island Blues!

SKYE FULL

That special feeling

he weather on Skye is so unpredictable and quick to change that listening to the forecast becomes something of a joke, since everything is possible at any time. Bright sunshine and a startlingly pure, pale blue sky could vanish in an instant, as a flat gray lid of cloud slams down and emits a high-velocity spray of rain. When we woke up in our self-catering cottage, shafts of sunlight were sending fused rays over glen and heather. Yet, when we sat down for breakfast, rain was sweeping across the island.

The misty Isle of Skye, off the northwest coast of Scotland, is the largest of the Inner Hebrides. Dominating the land of streams, woodland glens, mountain passes and waterfalls are the Cuillin Hills. For the Scots, however, the island will forever evoke images of Flora MacDonald, who conducted the disguised Bonnie Prince Charlie to Skye after the defeat at Culloden.

Not wanting to be cowed down by the rain, we set off for a long drive in our rented Land Rover. We were staying near the village of Broadford. Perfectly placed between the spectacular Red Cuillin and the distant mainland Torridon mountains, the village centrepiece is a new landscaped garden area, where quiet picnics can be enjoyed while watching ducks dabble on the foreshore.

The main centre of population on Skye, and by virtue of that the focus of commerce and trade on the island, is the town of Portree. Wentworth Street, the main thoroughfare of the town, is packed with hotels and shops catering to every need. We were surprised to find a shop selling, of all things, Indonesian batik products. The chatty shop assistants told us the colourful sarongs and wall-hangings had, in fact, been produced in

Any visitor to Skye and Lochalsh and the Western Isles will quickly be made aware of the area's rich and living Gaelic culture. Gaelic road signs point the way. Through Gaelic, place-names illuminate the landscape and the past. And whether it's in song or conversation, the language can be heard throughout the island.

We reached Dunvegan Castle just after noon. Nowadays, the castle is still the official home of the MacLeod chief and is said to be one of the oldest inhabited castles in Scotland. However, instead of repelling invaders, the fortress is now open to visitors.

Among the prize exhibits is the famous Fairy Flag, the sacred banner of the Clan MacLeod. It is surrounded by legends of victory and the prophecy that it will be unfurled again to bring victory in the clan's darkest hour. Also on display is the MacLeod drinking horn which each successive chief must in one gulp to inherit the titl

Given the fact that Skye is cheap, very comfortable and welcoming, why are there so few tourists? We certainly didn't see too many on our outings. Several pleasant hotels overlook the loch adjoining Portree, but most of the people wandering its streets are there to market, bank or spend an hour at a

laundrette. Not that the island is bereft of virtues. For starters, it is easily accessible: You may drive from Inverness through Wester Ross to Kyle of Lochalsh. Of course, there are the old salts who charter sailboats and know Skye by its lochs, cliffs, waterfalls and modest marinas.

The lack of visitors could be because of the fact that the island bears the burden of much rain, May and June being exceptions. The sea that intrudes disarmingly into every nook and cranny is too cool for swimming.

Add to this the absence of sights for the compulsive sightseer - no churches, museums or palaces. And, importantly, there is no night life. You're on your own with nature. We travelled to the Trotternish peninsu-

 $la\,in\,the\,nor the ast\,(mind\,you,Skye\,is\,a\,mere$ 60 miles across at its largest dimension) next day. On the peninsula, a dramatic road over tilting moors speckled with crofts (fenced, arable land) leads to the ruins of Duntulm, the MacDonalds' stronghold before they opted for Sleat in the south. All that remains are the castle's modest little ruins perched precariously high above the pounding surf with a frieze of islands filling out the background.

The peninsula, chief refuge of the Gaelic tradition on Skye, also boasts some odd stacks (isolated rock formations that resemble huge stalagmites): Quiraing, which rises off the road connecting Uig and Staffin Bay, and the Storrs, great rocky outcroppings standing on old glacial landslips, the Old Man of Storr holding himself elegantly aloof.

Can anyone's holiday be complete without taking home long-lasting memories of a wonderful meal in new surroundings? Not mine, anyway! Home baking is the pride of many Scottish kitchens as we discovered when we entered a rather unremarkable looking café

Superbly baked breads, cakes, scones, oatcakes, shortbread, fruit dumplings, tarts and crumbles were on display. And, if you are offered real heather honey, home-made marmalade, lemon curd, jams and chutneys, or savoury fruit and herb jellies, you will know that you are being looked after by someone who really cares about good Scottish food. Opting for a hearty meal of red pepper and lentil soup served with oatcakes, we finished off with chocolate brownies and ice cream.

On our last day in Skye, we headed for Glenbrittle — the starting point for many walkers and climbers who wish to experience the Black Cuillin mountains. However, we did not intend to walk or climb. We drove $across \, the \, flanks \, of \, these \, magnificent \, hills \, to \,$ the dark sandy beach at Glenbrittle.

We hoped to catch the sunset, but found that we would have to walk a long way to get good photographs. So, we drove to Sligachan, Red Cuillin on one side and the dramatic peaks of the Black Cuillin on the other.

We returned to our cottage on the shores of Loch Slapin. It was a quiet, still evening and there was no noise of traffic or mobile phone. Lichens were everywhere, covering bark in leafy rosettes. Even the ordinary felt

Nivedita Ganguli



MISTY LAND Quiring: Isolated rock formations that resemble huge stalagmites. PHOTO INDRANIL CHOUDHUR

TOP TEA Tourists at India's last tea shop at Mana. PHOTO BY AUTHOR

GREAT ESCAPE

SOMETHING

HAPPENING IN

HOSTS EVENTS

RANGING FROM

NEWPORT...IT

MUSIC TO

SPORTS.

High tea at Mana village

had ever had. No big or new brand names involved here. It was a simple brew, but made at India's highest tea shop at

Mana, a tiny village near Badrinath, is located just few meters inside the Indo-Tibet border in the Himalayas. This village, referred to as the last village of India on the Indo-Tibet border, has been designated as a 'tourism village' by the Uttarakhand gov-

With 10,248 ft above sea, Mana village holds a lot of mythological relevance and we can actually see traces of the Mahabharata scattered across this small village. Veda

composed the whole Mahabharata and Ganesha Guha where Lord Ganesh wrote the Mahabharata as dictated by Veda Vyasa, are some of the attractions here.

Another interesting must-see is Bhim pul, a huge rock formed as a bridge across river Saraswati. Legend has it that when Pandavas were crossing this river on their 'swargarohana', Draupadi was panic-stricken. Bhim then lifted a huge rock and placed it over the river to form a natural bridge, thereby making it easy for her to cross the

Inhabitants of Mana village are the last generation of Bhotia community of Mongo-

lian tribes. During October to March, because of the extreme winter conditions, they reside at Chamouli, 100 km away from Badrinath. When Badrinath temple opens on 'Akshaya Tritiya', devotees start to visit. For Bhotias this is the time to come to Mana village.

In Mana, the houses are small with a kitchen garden in the backyard, where the locals grow their own vegetables like spinach, cauliflower and potato, and sell these to small hotels in Badrinath.

Guest houses are another source of income for Mana's residents. These houses usually consist of two rooms. They charge Rs 500 to 1,000 per day, while many youths

work as tourist guides.

After climbing about a thousand odd steps — the air becomes more rarified and it is difficult to breath—we reached the top of the hill at Mana. There a board announcing 'India's last tea shop', stands distinctly with a neat crowd of tourists mingling about. Chand, the owner of hotel, welcomes you with smile and a cup of tea.

"Take this tulsi tea. In the Himalayas tulsi is available in plenty," he says. While drinking the tea, you can have a view of border road on the one side and Himalayas on the other side. From here, there is no other way to go!

Ananda Teertha Pyati