

TAURUS & TAURIAN



India's First Luxury Overland Truck

New Concept in India

Taurus is 5 Star for those who are passionate for outdoors, not for those who seek 5 Star comforts.

The best logistical support that one needs for outdoor travel and outdoor photography! The most innovative way to travel the magnificent parts of India & explore its cultural treasures with your cameras.

Savour the Flavour of New Experience

A New Experience!

Imagine enjoying a different kind of holidays, one of a kind. Offers locales which are away from the crowd and pollution, in the lap of Mother Nature. We ensure you get “quality time” together as family, friends and couples for romance in wilderness.

1st Time Ever in India – Indigenous

experience ECSTASY to the hilt

Our programs are special and unique in every aspect, full of excitement and satisfaction, with unlimited FLEXIBILITY & FREEDOM'

Connecting Moments of your Life

Quality Time

TAURUS IS A SPECIAL TRANSPORT ... to deliver YOU to the invisible cosmic world within you ... Offers romantic travel to the bewitching sight of Himalayas, sand dunes, secluded beaches where you hear sounds to sooth your soul, colours and taste of vibrant cultures ... connecting you to the hypnotizing moments that ordinary travellers and photographers don't get to experience.

Complete Mobile Camping Concept!

- It's the Game Changer

Conceptualised and steered by experts, hard-core outdoor travellers (they have logged 165,000 kms in their self-made caravans in India, unparalleled fete for an Indian), photographers and wildlife experts (those who have globe trotted in pursuit of new species).

Supporting Nature & Social Commitments

Life with responsibilities is meaningful

Part of the proceeds go to support Mission: Nature Conservation Through Tourism & Photography. You not only get a wonderfully unique experience where you taste pure rejuvenation in real, but you become Green Ambassadors and champions for the cause, without any extra cost added to the tariff of your expeditions.

1. Eco-friendly Tourism with least impact on environment
2. Sustainable Tourism with benefits to local communities

www.greendotexpeditions.com



Capt Suresh Sharma

Founder of Green Dot Expeditions

Designer, Fabricator, Caretaker, Photographer, Driver and Cook
of **Taurus**

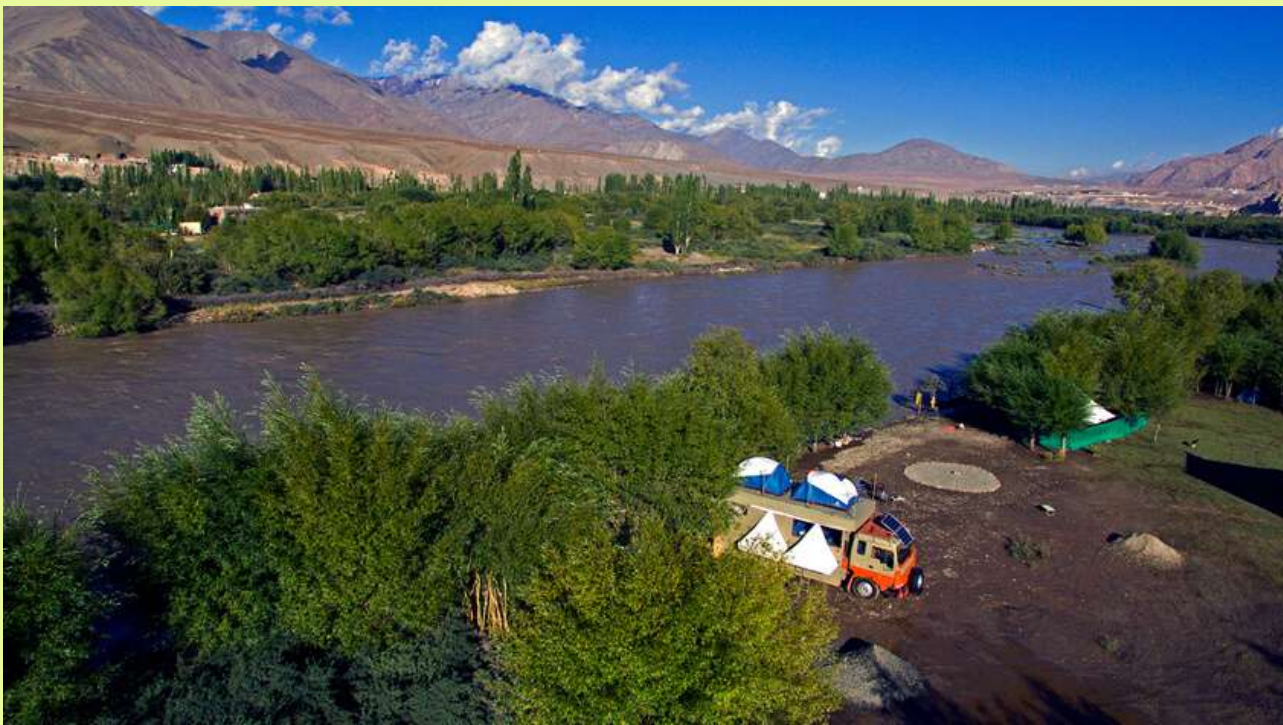
With outdoor experience of 35 years, 6 years of active service with the Indian Army, 18 months of battlefield, odometer 165,000 kms over 19 years of passionate caravanning - an unparalleled feat for any Indian in India, travel photography published in international publications, contributed to the creation of two wildlife documentaries for the National Geographic Society, USA, two prestigious coffee table books ("The Indian Army - An Illustrative Overview" and "LEGACY OF A LEGEND" MiG-21 in The Indian Airforce - Illustrated Testimony of a Reticent Air Warrior), 29 years of quality tourism ops, champion of the "cause of the green", self-funded SAVING INNOCENT SNAKE & IGNORANT PEOPLE for 22 years. Our Team Leader Capt Suresh Sharma has wide variety of experiences from various fields, now he is a sought after consultant for experiential tourism, caravans, camping, how to earn freedom from 9 to 5 job - convert your passion into your profession, photography, travel, etc.

Dr.Rajbir Kaur, a qualified homeopathic doctor, is a soulmate who juggles motherhood with the life of adventure as a team member. Their lives have been enriched by their shared experiences and has supported each other through their common passion, from handling snakes for the photo-sessions with Captain.

Suresh and his wife Rajbir have designed and custom built two caravans (RVs) themselves and has clocked more than 165,000 km with family and friends in their home on wheels for almost 19 years, which they fondly named 'Kingcobra' and 'Taurus'. The couple has now founded the `GREEN DOT EXPEDITIONS' and introduced a new concept of overlanding in India, built India's first luxury overland truck named TAURUS ("Mobile Camping" an RV - recreational vehicle) to take serious photographers and adventurers to exotic locales to explore local culture what others don't get to see, freeze and frame their live experiences, offering vanlife, campervan holidays. They presently live in Chandigarh with their two children.

Capt Suresh Sharma is fondly addressed by friends as 'CAPTAIN', is the one who has given shape to his dreams and has lived with them - accrued the traits of a true leader. Has lived like a free bird who could not be caged by the worldly compulsions. Meandering around like a snake, knowing no boundaries, Suresh makes anyone envious with his life style and the life he has lived. Spirit of the outdoors and adventure got him to the army, but again hung his boots to explore `Life' unconditionally.

A man with courage to live life on his terms, which most people find difficult in India. Suresh has dedicated his life to the pursuit of photography as a passion, which he is exploiting as his tool to disseminate awareness about nature conservation and snakes.



Nature Conservation Education Program



Dr Rajbir Kaur Sharma, wife of Capt Suresh Sharma, son enjoying with snake

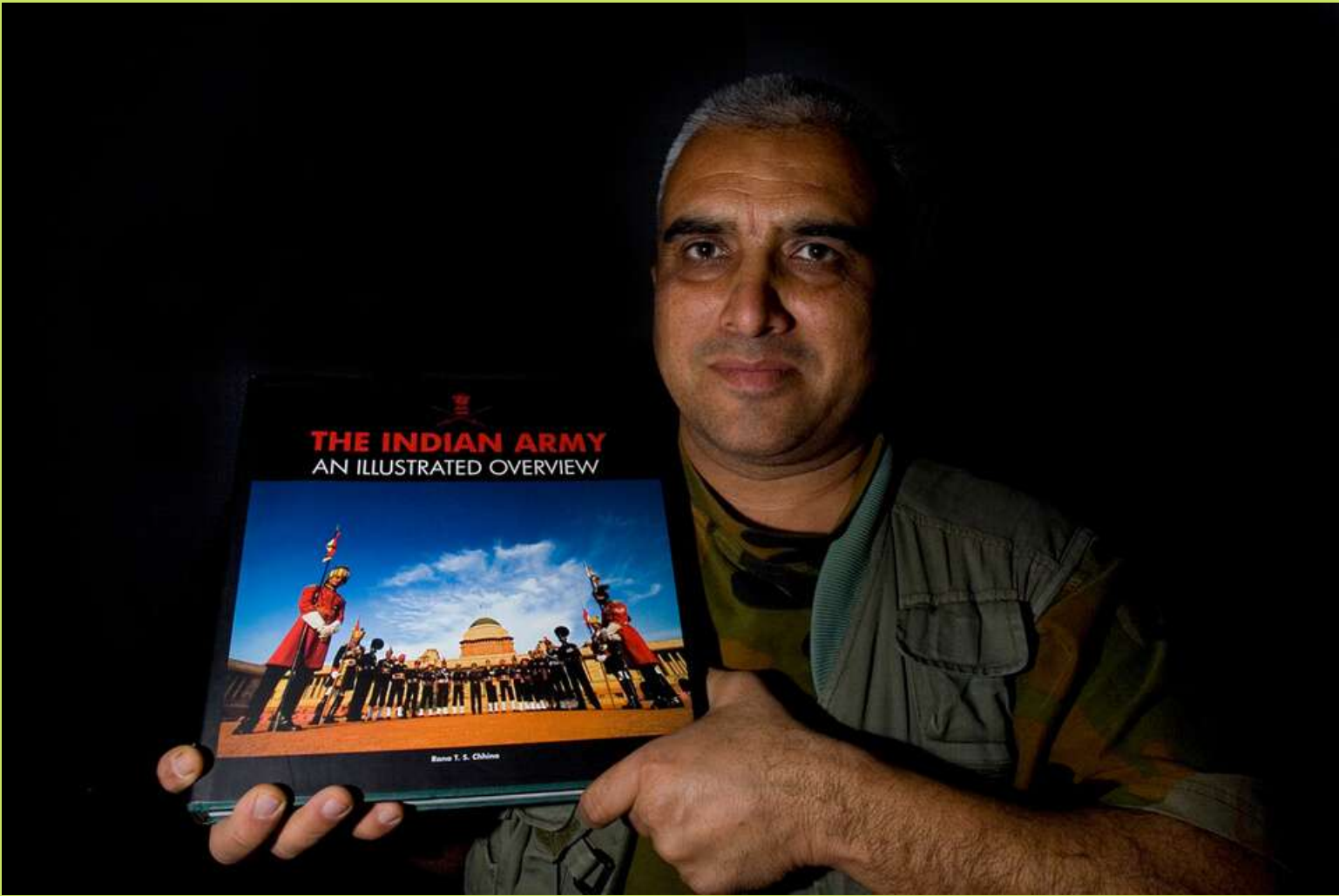




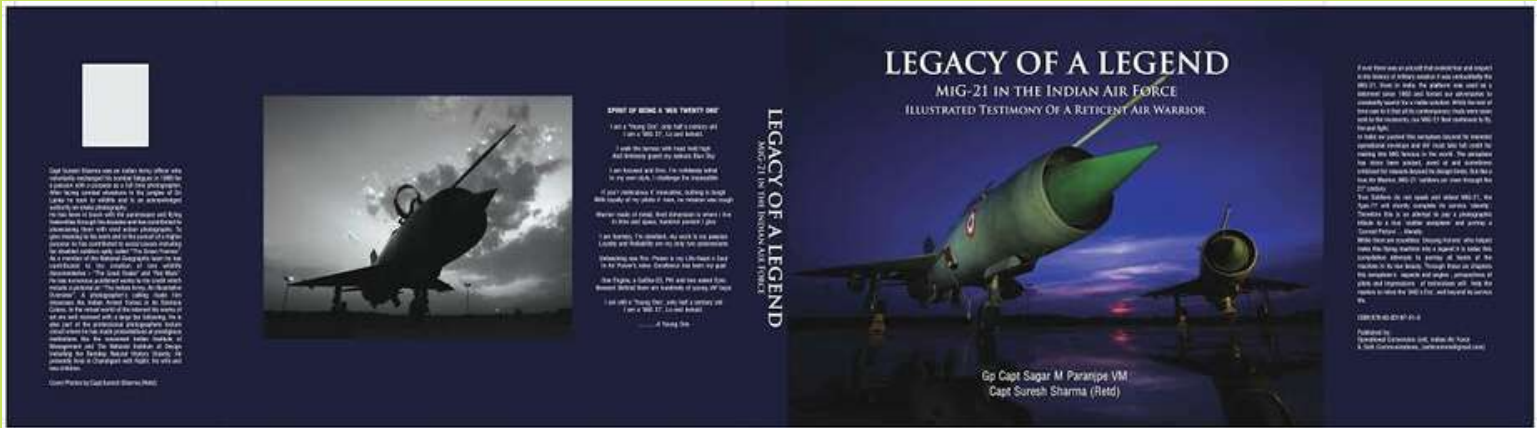




Photographer of the two prestigious coffee table books

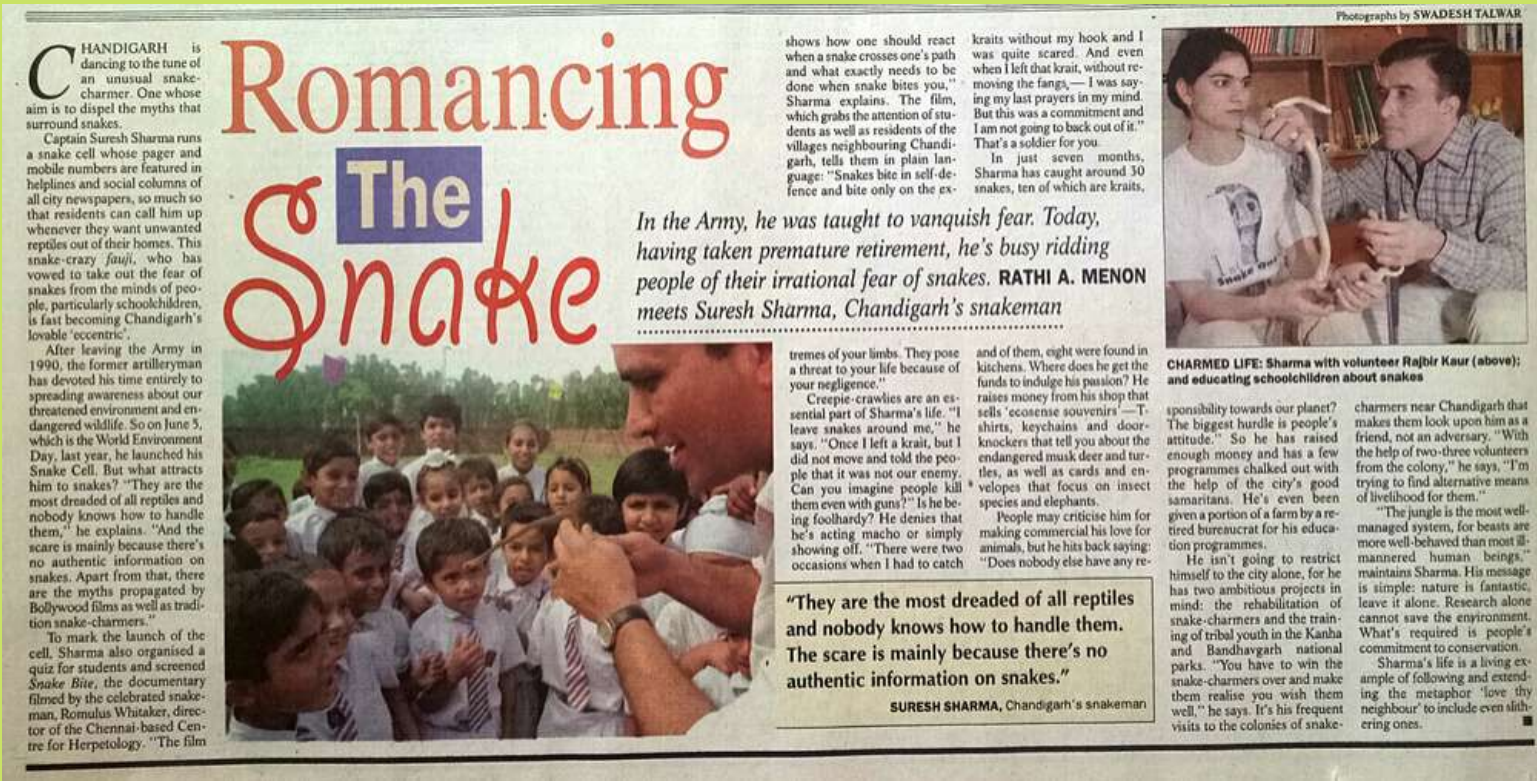


Coffee Table Book - Indian Army



Coffee Table book - MiG 21

Press
has appreciated the work of
Capt Suresh Sharma
with front page features to numerous pages





From one battle to another

The Good Snake commissioned by the National Geographic Society, he went on to fabricate the natural history sets to stimulate natural habitat indoors. That was done for wildlife photography under controlled conditions.

Incidentally, during the making of *Silent Valley and Indian Rain Forest*, Sharma and other members of the team had caught a 12-feet long king cobra — the deadliest of all snake species. However, Sharma insists that snakes are the most misunderstood creatures for they never attack unless provoked. To drive home the point, he plans to make a video film and organise a snake cell during the

nature" is engrossed in printing T-shirts with logos devoted to wildlife. Besides this, he is bringing out a host of daily use products shaped like animals. The rationale is simple. "You can't force environmental education on people. The best way to involve them is by surrounding them with objects/messages which constantly remind them of nature". So you have a door knocker shaped like a turtle. Scribbled along are a couple of lesser known facts about the slow-paced creature.

Though the response to his range of products, which include paper weight, envelopes and even jewellery, has been fairly warm, yet he rues, "Government-run bodies and institutes have given me a cold shoulder." While his proposal to set up a souvenir shop at Chhatbir Zoological Park is being considered, his rather unique idea of organising a weekly envi-

Even when on a mission to fight the deadly guerrillas, Captan Suresh Sharma could not shake away the lure of nature. NONIKA SINGH meets a man who left the cause for another one — dearer to his heart

ensuing rainy season. Besides this, he will inform the masses regarding different kinds of anti-venom injections available in the market. He is not too happy with the phrase "law of jungle", for in a jungle, all animals live in perfect harmony and do not harm out of greed or lust.

When researching for the film *Rat Wars*, another one for National Geographic, he discovered myriad aspects of a rat's life. In a country where, traditionally, rats connote

Lord Ganesha's vehicle, the rodent is revered by some, abhorred by others ... and eaten by a particular tribal community.

Sharma rates the country as wildlife. And Indian forests,

ronmental quiz hasn't elicited much enthusiasm. He avers, "Tourist destinations like Pinjore are the ideal locale to begin environmental education which can couple learning with fun. But the authorities concerned would rather rent out outlets to vendors, who only add to the litter and pollute the environment." Not that such apathy deters him.

At a personal level, he reuses envelopes, plastic bags for "the answer to environmental degradation is not recycling but generating less trash." Also, he never misses an opportunity to help a cause. Like during his trip to Kanha National Park, when one of the foreign visitors refused to lend a pair of binoculars to an expert guide with the refrain "I will catch an infection", our young crusader was truly moved. The money

me forth into the light of things let
be your teacher

William Wordsworth

AR generates either hero-
ism or heart burn. Yet
strangely enough,

In fact, Sharma's love for nature dates back to his childhood days, when morning walks along with his father figured as a daily must on his schedule. After the Srilankan tenure, an encounter with the director of Madras Crocodile Park led to an initiation into snorkelling and the fascination grew into an obsession. The

सांप काटने के इलाज की जानकारी दी

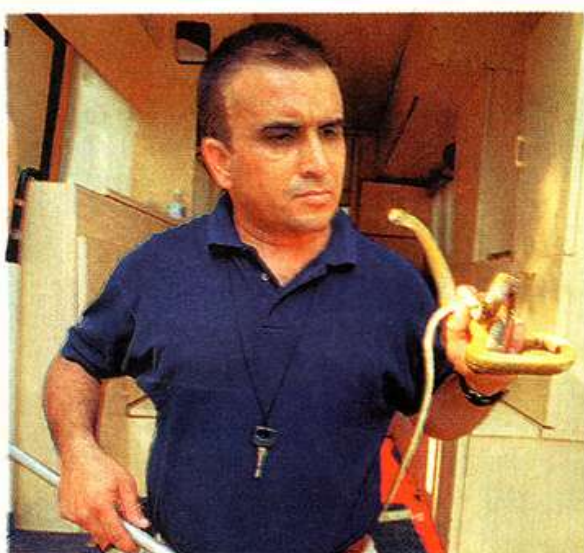
चंडीगढ़, 19 अगस्त (भाससे)। 'इंडियन हॉक्स' समाज सेवी संस्था ने रविवार को मलोया कॉलोनी में सांप काटने के तुरंत बाद के इलाज की जानकारी देने के लिए एक शिविर का



मलोया कॉलोनी में पहली बार लगाया गया इस इलाज का शिविर।

भास्कर

आयोजन किया गया। सर्प दंश से लोगों के दिमाग में बैठे डर को दूर करने और उनमें जागरूकता लाने के लिए यह शिविर का पहली बार लगाया गया था। इस शिविर में 'स्नेक सैल' चंडीगढ़ के इंचार्ज एवं विशेषज्ञ कैप्टन 'सुरेश शर्मा' मौजूद थे। शिविर का उद्घाटन मलोया सेंटर के प्रौढ़ शिक्षा केन्द्र की नोडल प्रेरक 'रूपम गुलाटी' ने किया। संस्था के निर्देशक एवं संगठनकर्ता वरिन्द्र बांगा ने बताया कि भविष्य में भी ग्रामीण इलाकों में ऐसे शिविर लगाए जाएंगे।



Photo/Sanjay Ahlawat

◆ CAPTAIN SURESH SHARMA

Hiss... first love

Snakes usually make people's skin crawl. But Retired Captain Suresh Sharma loves them. Guns weren't his calling, so he left the army to start a 'snake cell' in Chandigarh. Suresh catches snakes from people's houses and leaves them in the jungle free of cost.

A photographer, he has made a few documentaries on reptiles. Suresh, who moves around in his Tempo Traveller-turned-home called King Cobra, was in the capital recently to educate school kids about snakes.

6 The Tribune, July 25, 1998

Saturday Plus

A one-man mobile snake cell

By Nonika Singh

COME monsoon and romance is in the air. But it's also the time when serpents make their presence felt. As rain fills their 'guest house' snakes live in rat holes or termite mounds — they shift out to inhabit mother earth. As per Hindu mythology, snakes are a revered species, still the fear

nightmare could well translate into reality.

But don't panic! So advises Captain Suresh Sharma, a man devoted to the cause of environment and who lives by the adage, "The wild life of today is not ours to dispose of as we please. We have it in trust and must account for it to those who come after us". Sharma's advice is not mere mouthing of oft-repeated platitude. A one-man mobile snake cell, he

hedges and bushes to a manageable size.

Snakes are divided into some 2700 species. Their sizes range from the pencil-long African thread snake to the 6-metre-long python and anaconda. In India, cobra, Russell's viper, kraits and sawscale viper are the dreaded species. Shockingly in Chandigarh, out of the 10 snakes (later released into Shivalik Hills) four were kraits, one of the deadliest snakes in Asia. The commonly found species in Chandigarh are Russell's viper, cobra, krait, Gunther's racer ratsnake, striped keelback and checkered keelback.

However, no estimates are available about the snake population. Sharma recalls, "Before starting the snake cell, my friends jeeringly told me there were no snakes in Chandigarh. And even I am astonished by the number of calls (35), I have received. I guess earlier there was no centralised body where information on snakes could seep in."

In all likelihood, people depend upon snake charmers who for centuries have only fuelled the myths and added on to the mystique of these creatures with lethal fangs.

Snakes do not have the sense of hearing but pick up vibrations. This is a well-known scientific fact. Yet how many of us know that snake's vision is two-dimensional and monochromatic. In a layman's language it implies that a snake can't discern between a flat board surface and a human being. It identifies its prey/enemy by their movement (hence the snake's much hyped rhythmic dance to the constantly moving flute). The best defence against a snake attack would be to 'freeze dead in your tracks'. But even if you flee the scene, a snake can't chase you like a dog for it has little idea of the distance separating you and his fangs because of its limited two-dimensional vision. Eightyfive per cent of the snakes found are

non-poisonous, yet they kill more than 20,000 people a year.

Sharma informs, "No snake wears a crown. Though cobra raises its hood, krait is bluish-black in colour. Russell's viper hisses like a pressure cooker, the common man can't differ-

remain on paper.

Sharma rues, "So many of us are oblivious to the fact that anti-venom serum is available in the market." In the future he plans to organise street shows to educate the masses.

Indeed, what was it that

important link in the ecological chain of balance. Every snake eats two to three rats in three months or so. As each rat devours roughly 14 kg of food grain every year, the significance and direct bearing of snakes on human life cannot be

Chandigarh Heartbeat

that these slimy creatures evoke in human mortals is unparalleled. Though the lush green vegetation is their natural habitat and Chandigarh is not really a snake-infested region, these limbless reptiles could well slither on to concrete areas, in the middle of your living room. A closed encounter with the wily serpent? Your worst waking

promises to be right there to tackle the monster head-on, provided you can page him in time.

(His numbers are listed with the police control headquarters too). In a little over a month (the snake cell came into inception on June 5, World Environment Day), he has already picked up 10 snakes. A majority of these, of course,

were discovered in areas that encompassed lush green foliage like the PEC and G.C.G. campuses. Suresh Sharma has received calls from city residents and found snakes in unimaginable places like kitchen, bedroom... He says that once a snake enters the house, there is no way of knowing where it could be hiding — you might be literally sitting on it. So the only way out, he cautions, is to deny access to these reptiles by keeping doors and windows shut, plugging holes in coolers and more significantly cutting



Suresh Sharma: Tackling the monster head on



Helping children quell the fear of snakes

entiate between a poisonous and a non-venomous snake, unless he is exposed to the species through live demonstration and orientation programmes."

Herein the man who said goodbye to uniform to begin his environmental crusade is dismayed with the government response, its lackadaisical approach and its indifference towards some of his commercially viable projects. Unlike other NGOs, he believes in self-financing and came out with an innovative venture, Ecosense Souvenirs. Nevertheless, he is handicapped by the paucity of funds. So many of the snake cell's proposed objectives — first aid cell, distribution of literature, interpretation centre, workshop for doctors etc.

prompted him to turn into a wanderer, picking up snakes from people's homes, especially when there are no financial incentives involved? He reveals, "My ultimate aim is to bring about environmental awareness. I know that human beings are selfish. If I stand on a pulpit and start a discourse, no one would listen to me. However, if I reach out to people in their hour of need, they will realise I am not a hoax. They will sit up and pay attention."

Whether, he succeeds in his mission — a war against quelling ophidiophobia (fear of snakes) — and makes people realise the beauty of these 'works of art', the future will tell us. But people can be reminded that snake is an

undermined. So our revulsion and fear notwithstanding, we just can't do without snakes.

First aid steps:

1. Tie a cloth tourniquet or band (but not a thin rope or rubber) above the bite, but not too tightly. If bite is on the hand, tie it on the upper arm. If on the foot/leg, tie it on the thigh.
2. Wound should be gently cleaned with antiseptic or simply with water and soap. Avoid potassium permanganate.
3. Do not make incisions or cuts around the wound. Let a skilled doctor handle it.
4. Last but not the least — anti-venom serum is the only cure.
5. Rush to a hospital.
6. In the event of sighting a snake, call pager 9612-6401.

A man in a military-style vest is crouching in a field, holding a large video camera with a microphone, filming a large tortoise on the ground.

Jasmine Singh

To begin with, "Snakes are not interested in us. They don't see us as their food. They cannot run or pounce on you. They have a far

jasmine@tribunemail.com

A black and white photograph of a man with a mustache, wearing a striped polo shirt, sitting outdoors and holding a small object in his hand. The background shows some foliage and a fence.

[illegible]

પ્રજ્ઞાતીય - લાભદાયક

Disney Brar Talwar

He has attended emergency calls from up to 1250 houses till date, particular between April

A man in a camouflage shirt is holding a large cobra with its hood flared. The snake is coiled around his arm, and he is looking directly at the camera. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Don't worry:
Capt Sharma
also runs a
website and
takes people on
rainforest tours.

Don't worry: Capt Sharma also runs a website and takes people on rainforest tours.

But the lack of financial support is demoralising, he says. "My wife and I have been running the Snake Cell with our own funds. We arrange Wild Hiss Eco Tours and also design books, wildlife paintings, photographs, camping gears, first-aid kits, tees and silver jewellery to gather funds."

Capt Sharma's number is 0172-2556013.

FOLLOW US:
 [metroplus.thehindu.com](https://www.facebook.com/metroplus.thehindu)
 twitter.com/metroplus



The kinetic beauty of Kohka
 pg 2



Meet the youngest girl to scale Mt. Stok Kangri
 pg 3

Bengal on a platter
 pg 4



Making destinations on the way

Capt Suresh Sharma introduced the concept of caravan travel in India as part of his efforts to spread the message of nature conservation through tourism and photography

BY NIVEDITA GANGULY

While in the Indian Army, Capt Suresh Sharma got a chance to travel extensively within India and explore the beauty of its remote regions. Having served in the Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka during the peak crisis period, he finally swapped his combat fatigues in 1990 for a photographer's jacket and jungle boots. It was then that he decided to follow his passion of nature conservation through travel and photography and show the rest of the world what he had seen, in the most unusual way - through caravan travel. "I feel I am the chosen one, a medium to connect people with nature and show them the beauty of the world in its most extraordinary ways," he says.

Overland truck Taurus
 Also an expert on snakes, Capt Sharma worked on three docu-

mentaries for the National Geographic Society helping them film natural events difficult to document in the wild by creating simulated natural conditions under controlled environment to film the laying of snake eggs and other fascinating things of the wildlife. It was through all this that he discovered a special connect with nature and a whole new world of overland adventure, a travel concept popular in Europe and other western countries, and decided to chase his dream of pioneering the touring idea in India with a custom-made overland truck called Taurus.

In 2012, he purchased an Eicher 20.16 chassis to turn into a custom-built overland truck. After much research and equipping it with world-class equipment, its external transformation was complete and two years later, Taurus was ready to hit the roads. Incidentally, before Taurus became a reality he also made a caravan

named as 'King Cobra' built for his family as their 'home on wheels'. For last 14 years, he has clocked more than 1.37 lakh kms this 'King Cobra' with his family and friends.

Exploring remote places

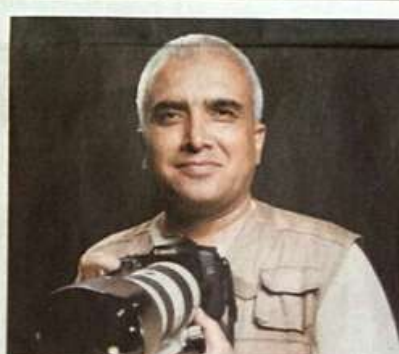
"I went through my own set of challenges and financial difficulties. But that never stopped me from dreaming about making a self-contained mobile camping unit that would help people discover and appreciate nature. This was my time to pursue my passions like a free bird and travel to explore the best kept secrets of India in some remote magnificent places. We make destinations on the way. And while I do all that I also wanted to spread the message of nature conservation through photography and travel," says Capt Sharma, who is in the city as the chief guest of the World Photography Day programme organised by Visakh-

Camera Club.

To raise funds for his nature conservation efforts, he founded Green Dot Expeditions - the most unique venture in Indian tourism and photography - that organises special tours and photo safaris for nature and wildlife enthusiasts with the overland truck Taurus. "The tours are designed to encourage people about life outdoors and follow sustainable conservation practices. For instance, we try to minimise the use of plastics and disposables and ensure the place visited remains clean and undisturbed after we depart," says Capt Sharma, who hails from Chandigarh.

Photographer's delight

Being a passionate photographer himself, the Captain was well aware of the challenges that photographers face trying to get to and find a place of stay at remote locations. Lugging heavy camera equipment around, figuring out a



way to reach the place and also finding a safe camping site with the costly camera gears - these

were issues that often come in the way of a seamless travel experience. That was the key idea be-

Spectacular sight The overland truck Taurus seen against the Milky Way at Ladakh; Capt. Suresh Sharma (bottom) •

hind Taurus, to offer photographers the road trip of a lifetime, driving them into some spectacular locations of the country like Ladakh and Rajasthan. Taurus can accommodate eight travellers and its typical trips that last for about 10 to 15 days or even more. Along with a well-equipped kitchen, a capacity to carry 700 litres of water, individual lockers and plenty of charging stations for travellers and photographers to charge their batteries, the unit has 'on the move' outdoor camping, roof-top tents and four altogether new types of tray tents with foam mattresses, for single and double that are unique to Taurus. There are separate dormitories for those who seek total privacy on such tours and comfortable camping chairs for outdoor seating.

While the Captain of Taurus manages practically everything single-handedly, he has a dedicated driver for the trips who also assists him to cook some of the best Indian dishes you have ever tasted. But he doesn't shy away from going behind the wheels. "I want to be self-sufficient just like Taurus. In fact, I recently drove solo from Chandigarh to Leh through the fearsome Zoji La - an experience that made me respect nature and humankind more," he says.

For Capt Sharma Taurus means much more than just an overland truck that takes travellers to dream destinations. "Photography has made me a better human being and Taurus has connected me with people across the globe in miraculous ways that only reinforces my trust in humanity. Through Taurus, I want to spread the message of humanity. And if you are passionate about life and nature and are a good human being, you are most welcome to come aboard Taurus," he says. (To know more about Taurus and the expeditions, log in to greendotexpeditions.com)



Let children explore nature: lensman

Then they will understand the issue of climate change, he tells parents

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
 VISAKHAPATNAM

"If you do your work honestly and earnestly, you will enjoy every bit of it," said Capt. Suresh Sharma, wildlife and nature photographer who bid adieu to the Indian Army to follow his passion in photography and nature conservation.

He was speaking at a programme organised by Vishakhha Camera Club in association with Rotary Club, Visakhapatnam, at Hawa Mahal on the eve of World Photography Day here on Friday.

"Today, people are so enamoured by gadgets and social media that they have very less time to spend outdoors.

As responsible parents,



Photographer Suresh Sharma speaking on his experiences on the eve of World Photography Day, in Visakhapatnam on Friday. ■ K.R. DEEPAK

we must let our children explore outdoors and only then they will understand the issue of climate change, how to make the world a better place and conserve

nature," he said.

Giving a presentation of his photography works, he stressed on the critical role photography plays in nature conservation.

Earlier, VCC secretary Suresh Gorantla, club founder president B.K. Agarwal and art connoisseur Mayank Kumari Deo welcomed the gathering.

Bombay Natural History Society

Founded 1883

PRESIDENT
 B. G. DESHMUKH
 I. A. S. (Retd.)

Ref.No. 2346/2005

Capt. Suresh Sharma
 233, Block - I, GH-2
 Shikar Apartments
 Sector - 5, MDC
 Panchkula - 134109
 Haryana

20th June, 2005

Dear Suresh,

It was wonderful to meet you in Ambala and to listen your excellent talk on the snakes and snakebites. I must say, it was the best talk on this subject which I have heard. Actually, it was one of the best natural history talks of my life. You had presented the subject very beautifully, with the right mixture of natural history, science and your own experience. I request you that whenever you are in Mumbai or Delhi, please let me know so we can arrange your talk to our members.

With good wishes,

Yours sincerely,



Asad R. Rahmani
 Director



Tiny-tots seem to enjoy the feel of a snake during a programme on snakes at Sector 23 Bal Bhavan in Chandigarh on Friday. — A Tribune photo by Pankaj Sharma

Children's date with snakes

Tribune News Service

CHANDIGARH, June 5 — Educational programmes, talks, shows and plays marked the 'World Environment Day', which was celebrated in different parts of the city with usual enthusiasm.

An environmental training programme for teachers of various schools was organised jointly by the Department of Environment, Urban Administration, and the Environmental Monitoring Instruments Division of the Central Scientific Instruments Organisation at the CSIO complex in Sector 30.

The Director of the organisation, Dr R.P. Bajpai, said the conservation of environment was the main issue which was confronting the world today.

Mr H.S. Sohal, Director, Environment, gave a detailed account of vehicular pollution in the country, especially at Chandigarh. The training was attended by 20 teachers selected from various schools.

The day was celebrated by the Department of Adult Continuing Education and the Department of NSS of the Panjab University at the Sector 25 Labour Colony.

Dr C.L. Narang, Director of the

department, said too much of urbanisation and industrialisation was responsible for environmental degradation.

Speaking at a function organised at the State Institute of Education, Sector 32, the institute Director, Dr H.C. Sharma, said that effective environment education could only be imparted by specially trained teachers with an ability to generate consciousness regarding healthy environment.

To commemorate the day, a play, "Dharti ki Pukar" was organised by the Green Environment Club at Punjab Kala Bhawan. Earlier, the club members also participated in a rally, which started from the Government Central Crafts Institute for Women and passed through different parts of the city.

However, the environment day was celebrated with a difference at the Sector 23 Bal Bhavan, where scores of schoolchildren had a date with snakes, as an educational programme on snakes organised by "Ecosense Souvenir", an environmental organisation. The highlight of the programme was a quiz on snakes and demonstration of snakes of organisation team leader Capt Suresh Sharma.

A documentary of snake bites was

also screened. Children could be seen feeling the thrill of touching different species of snakes brought for them by Captain Sharma, who also answered a number of queries.

Addressing the gathering, the UT Chief Wildlife Warden, Mr H.S. Sohal, said there was an urgent need to protect snakes, which by and large were harmless unless disturbed by the human beings. "Like tigers, none of the snakes were aggressive, except when disturbed," he said. He pointed that mostly victims of snakebite died of fear and not by the poison as there were only four groups of venomous snakes in our country, he added.

In another function organised by the Environment Society of India at Khodda Ali Sber village, near here, desludging operation of the village pond was launched. Dr K.K. Garg, Joint Director, Ministry of Forest, inaugurated the operation. The society president, Mr S.K. Sharma, said the village ponds were very helpful in ecobalance as they resulted in lowering of temperature in the vicinity.

A seminar in connection with the environment day was organised by the Environment Society of Haryana at Majri Chowk at Panchkula.

Snake charmer with a difference



Capt. Suresh Sharma has committed himself to the cause of nature conservation and snake welfare

OUR Heroes

By Vivek Gupta

He is still the best known professional in India for designing and fabrication of natural history sets and also designing cine support equipment and contraptions for wildlife filming. Such is his knowledge about snakes that he can earn lakhs from wildlife film projects by filming the thrilling limbless reptiles of the world. He worked this for the National Geographic, USA for two years in the early 80s. But here and today, the man has bid farewell to all else to keep his environmental crusade alive for bigger cause of the society. Meet Panchkula based Captain Suresh Sharma, an ex-army officer and a keen photographer and traveller, who has committed himself to the cause of nature conservation and snake welfare since many years now.

Snakes are Captain Sharma's best buddies. Such is his

bonding with this animal that for the last 15 years, he has devoted himself to creating awareness about the myths and misconceptions about snakes and snake bites, and also about the role of snakes in maintaining the ecological balance. He has been indefatigably educating people in schools, colleges and sometime roadside shows in various cities across India. He has delivered lectures in colleges like IIMs, IITs, Punjab Engineering colleges, various foreign embassies and numerous schools in the region.

People of the tri city are familiar with his Snake cell, a one man mobile snake van that he started in 1998 to rescue snakes from houses, offices, factories. This fearless man has single-handedly caught about 2000 snakes from the tri city including Cobra, Russel Viper and Common Krait (the deadliest Indian snake).

"Snakes are the most misunderstood animals in the world. I am trying to dispel the myths, fear and hatred," says Captain Sharma. How many people know that snakes do not have

sense of hearing. It's vision is two-dimensional and monochromatic and it identifies its prey/enemy through his movement? Despite this fact, about 40000 people die every year due to snake bite in India. It is because people panic and go into a frenzy that gives enough vibration to snakes to identify their position. He informs that the best defence against a snake attack is to freeze and act dead. "But even if you flee, a snake can't chase you," he adds. His web site www.snakecell.org has everything one needs to know about snakes and snakebites.

Positive minded as he is, Captain Sharma never frets over lack of financial help from the government for nature education; rather he is raising funds on his own to continue his welfare and education programmes. He and Dr Indraneil Das, a leading scientist specializing in biodiversity, have pooled together their expertise to establish Wildhiss Ecotours, an NGO that organizes wildlife tours for people. Whatever money they raise, they use it



Daredevil Capt. Suresh Sharma

for Nature Conservation education. They take people to various wild life sanctuaries in India, forest areas and educate them about overall environmental issues.

"Notwithstanding all the fear and revulsion attached to them, snakes are an important link in the ecological chain," says he, adding, "If that chain breaks off, the important ecological system will shatter."

A fine photographer, Sharma is an expert on snake photography. He is working on a book titled 'Snake Bite and Common Man' to forward his cause. He firmly believes that every individual's contribution is very vital for conservation efforts.



How the snakes in their mobile home and office, and has helped them to bring the 420000000 outreach programme across the length and breadth of the country.



How the snakes in their mobile home and office, and has helped them to bring the 420000000 outreach programme across the length and breadth of the country.



How the snakes in their mobile home and office, and has helped them to bring the 420000000 outreach programme across the length and breadth of the country.



How the snakes in their mobile home and office, and has helped them to bring the 420000000 outreach programme across the length and breadth of the country.



How the snakes in their mobile home and office, and has helped them to bring the 420000000 outreach programme across the length and breadth of the country.

An eye opener for NGOs engaged in voluntary work

NEW DELHI, July 17: (UNI): A young officer, who left a promising career in the Army, has launched a self-financing venture to generate funds to educate people on ecological conservation.

At a time when "obtaining foreign funds" and "accepting donations" seems to be the objective of a majority of non-Governmental organizations, Captain Suresh Sharma's effort is an eye opener for those engaged in voluntary work.

The die-hard wildlife enthusiast, who was a member of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) that went to Sri Lanka, is not at all influenced by the "changing face" of NGOs where numerous perks and other facilities are the order of the day. Keeping in mind the difficulties of

getting support for wildlife projects, Capt. Sharma, along with his friends started a workshop at Ambala in Haryana under the name Ecosense Souvenirs. The souvenirs, all of them designed by him, include a wide range of attractive paper-weights, door knockers, bottle-openers, letter boxes, jewellery, T-shirts and envelopes are to be sold through nature clubs, associations, NGOs and nature shops throughout the country.

"The entire money generated through this project would be utilized for educating the people on ecological conservation and to conduct scientific research," he said, during his recent visit to the capital to explore the possibility of setting up of similar units all over the country.

Capt. Sharma said that during the last two decades much had been said about the need to create awareness among the masses about the importance of animals and plants. Yet, the consequences of environmental imbalances are unfortunately not as widely disseminated as desired, partly due to lack of dedicated environmental education, support for teaching, training and research besides a dearth of personnel to conduct these exercises.

"The wildlife enthusiast said conservation and education should not be imposed on people. The message has to be interesting that people want to listen to you and are educated in the process," he added. "It is high time that we understand the

importance of environment and we have to protect it at all cost. We are heading towards environmental disaster. If environmental awareness is not created among the masses, the very existence of humanity is in danger," warned Capt. Sharma, who left the Army in 1990.

Asked why he quit the job, he said, "I loved the Army, but with a regular job, I could not have done all that I wanted to, do for the cause of animals." After leaving the Army, Capt Sharma worked at the Madras Crocodile Bank on an international project funded by a US organization. "I have also been engaged in informal research in the national parks and the wildlife sanctuaries, trying to make out where we have failed in mak-

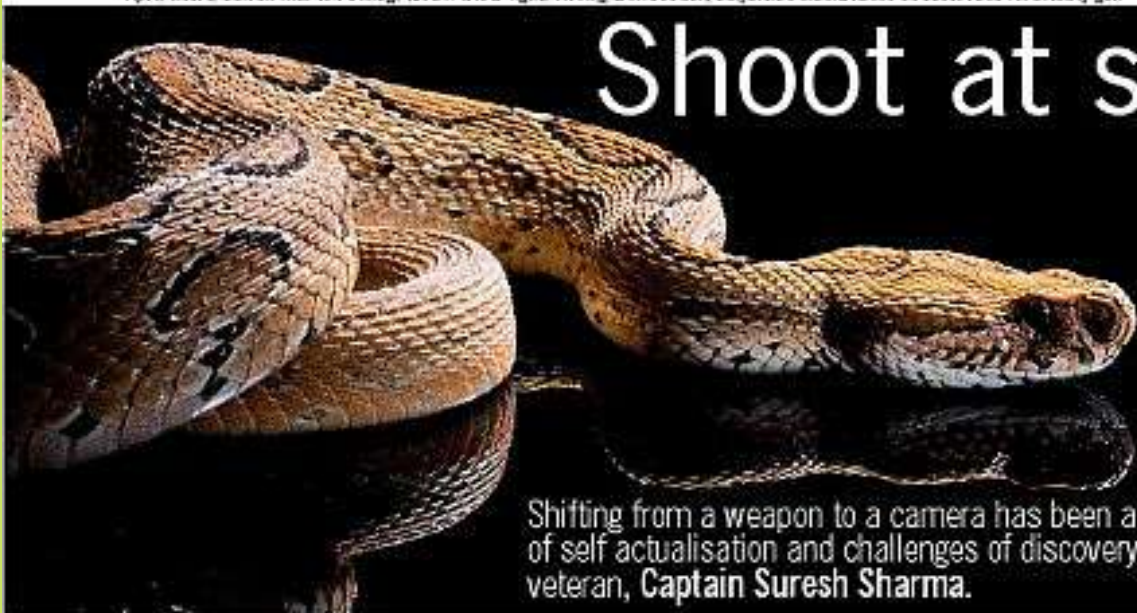
ing people aware of how they can contribute in saving nature," he said.

Capt. Sharma said activities supported by Ecosense Souvenirs included lectures in schools, colleges and public places, production and distribution of literature and other aids to disseminate conservation education amongst people, especially children through books, video-films, stickers and posters.

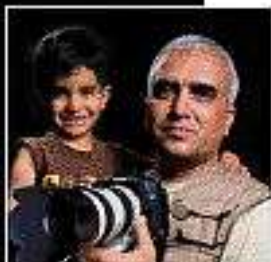
He said that he was willing to organize awareness programmes free of cost for any schools or colleges all over the country. They would also organize environment-oriented competitions among children such as painting, quiz and essay writing.

SECOND INNINGS - LENS MAN

Viper, (Inset) Guesh with son Chirag, (Baby left to right) Moving tank at dusk, Gurgaon main bridge at sunset and An artillery gun



Shifting from a weapon to a camera has been a journey full of self actualisation and challenges of discovery for the veteran, Captain Suresh Sharma.



PRACHI RATURI MISRA

Born to a teacher father and homemaker mother in Kanthalu, Chandigarh in 1960, young Suresh still remembers his childhood walks to the nearby jungle patch on morning walks.

His love of nature, photography and travel, gravitated him towards Indian army where he received a short service commission and rose to become a Captain. And, had a rewarding stint of six years which took him to various corners of India and abroad. As a young officer he served in the 93 Field Regiment and had a memorable year with 111 Racket Regiment. He was a marksman and won Div Championships for three consecutive years. He was a hockey player and an ace mountaineer and was also selected as liaison officer for foreign mountaineering expeditions.

But the most challenging yet most rewarding opportunity with army was his being a member of IPKF in Sri Lanka for

a year and a half where he was also injured. "IPKF changed my life," he says.

In 1988, he came in contact with Satish Bhaskar at Chennai, well known for his work about marine life, especially the sea turtles. This was the turning point in Captain's life. Satish introduced Suresh to Dr Indraneil Das at Madras Croc Bank, Mammallapuram. He applied for 'leave without pay' from the army and went to work for three months on a film called 'Love at first sight'.

With his love for nature in full bloom, he bid the Indian Army adieu but only in letter. Because he remained, a zealous soldier in spirit. Like he puts it "I owe a lot to the Indian Army. I have learnt a lot and now apply it with a bit of modification in my civil life and I get results in life to be happy."

After some initial hitches, he could see his path clearly. He began focusing on 'Conservation through education' and started 'Snake Cell'. With his wife, another snake enthusiast, he took the venture to a different level.

Alongside, he has been constantly been fuelling his passion for filming and photography, his creative skills, making him a favourite with some experts. He has been associated with wildlife film projects including two for the National Geographic Society, USA. With his assiduously built knowledge bank, he is considered an expert by the experts. He was appointed as Assistant Director of a World Bank project involving breeding of the green frog in captivity.

Multitasking, he has also shot pictures for a coffee table book on The Indian Army, been a special invitee for exclusive photo-session with Prince Charles during his visit to Punjab, travelled to Egypt to do a project for Egyptian tourism and has been highly applauded by International community on Flickr where he has had more than 2,40,000 hits on his photo-stream.

"Camera", he says, "has made me humble, taught me how to look at my own country, people and culture."



From action on battlefield to saving nature, this Army captain has come a long way on a caravan

Sulagna Mehta
@timesgroup.com

Jalgaon: It is seldom that you come across a photographer who tours the exotic, explored parts of the country in a caravan of his own and reads the message of nature conservation by promoting tourism and photography. But Captain Suresh Sharma from Chandigarh is an exception.

Having served in the Indian Army way back in the 1980s, Captain Sharma left the Army and devoted himself to pursuing his passion for photography. Currently, the renowned photographer is in Port Blair to address enthusiasts on the eve of World Photography Day (August 19).

The specialty about Captain Sharma is that he takes photographers in a caravan called 'Gurun Truck' for camping and expedition to exotic locales



like Ladakh and Thar desert to promote the art of photography as well as nature conservation. This specialist in snake photography also promotes the cause of snake conservation and their importance to the environment.

Earlier, he and wife Rajbir Kaur designed another caravan 'King Cobra' as their home on



FINE MIX OF PASSION & PURPOSE: Captain Suresh Sharma's caravan parked at an exotic location in Rajasthan

wheels. For the last 14 years, he has clocked more than 1.3 lakh km in King Cobra. To raise funds for his conservation efforts, he has now conceived the 'green dot' expeditions.

"Photography, especially on wildlife, has changed my per-

ception about culture, life, people and made me a better human being. During my days in the Army as part of the National Geographic wildlife filming team, I got a chance to work on two wildlife documentaries on the Indian cobra and rats,

which took me towards wildlife photography," says Captain Suresh, who has many works published to his credit, including two coffee-table books 'The Indian Army, An Illustrative Overview' and 'Legacy of a Legend MiG 21 in the Indian Air Force'.

"Through my photography I want to highlight the beauty of nature, especially despised and dreaded animals like snake and also promote conservation of environment," he said, adding that cactus, snakes and soldiers are his favourite subjects of photography. Asked why he has taken to a caravan, Captain Suresh says, "Inside a caravan, you have full control of what you eat and where you sleep. Photographers and travellers can also get a feel of nature outdoors and spend time bonding with family, friends under a star-studded sky in the lap of nature, away from neon lights of crowded cities."

Mission: Educating people about snakes

Capt Sharma is working on third documentary

GURNEET BHULLAR

THERE is, perhaps, not a single soul in the City who hasn't heard of 'snakeman' Capt Suresh Sharma. The sight of these reptiles might give you jitters, but Capt Sharma enjoys their company all day-long, not only to earn his bread and butter but also thanks to his passion for animals. The one-time Armyman, who has worked on two documentaries for National Geographic channel, is now working fulltime on a project titled, "Natural Education through Conservation", through which he wants to educate people about snakes, snakebites and remedies!

For the man who quit Army to devote himself fully to the protection and conservation of the forever-deteriorating environment, it all started in 1989. "I was serving with the Army then. I took four months' leave to work

PAWAN SINGH



on the project titled, "Silent Valley and Indian Rain Forests," which bagged four international awards and three national awards. Later, I worked on two documentaries for National Geographic, USA, where I recreated natural habitats under controlled conditions, which is not possible in the wild otherwise." The first one was on the Indian Cobra while the second was on rats, and how they are worshipped in the country.

Through his present project, he wants to educate people about snakes. "Killing snakes will disturb the ecological balance. Environment conservation should not be imposed on people, rather they should understand it themselves." His three-member team, which includes his wife, himself and a helper, is working painstakingly in the completion of the project. "I think we should be through in a year's time. And no, it's not for money that I am making the documentary but personal satisfaction is what I am striving for."

His mobile snake cell with a 24-hr service is pitching in to educate people. "Whenever I catch a snake on a call from City residents, I lecture them on the spot so as to remove false notions prevailing among people that all snakes are venomous."

Incidentally, Capt Suresh Sharma has also conducted lectures at IIM, Ahmedabad, NID, Ahmedabad and at the Canadian embassy on umpteen environment conservation issues like polythene menace, its disposal, reuse, fuel and electricity conservation. He strictly advocates non-use of polythene bags. "No shopkeeper in the City gives me a polythene bag when I visit the shop."

FEATURE

TAURUS OVERLAND TRUCK

Mobile caravanserai

This indigenous truck is an all-in-one experience for any overlander

By **Rishabh Mody** and **Suresh Narayanan's Captain Suresh Sharma**

130

OVERDRIVE DEC 2015

DEC 2015 OVERDRIVE 131

FEATURE

TAURUS OVERLAND TRUCK

Five minutes into a conversation with Captain Suresh Sharma and it becomes clear, the man is a relentless perfectionist. Before I know it, we're discussing dedicated long handled tea spoons for pickle jars and how his overland truck has more household equipment on board than most folks have in their homes. Sewing kits, rubber bands, magnifying glasses, safety pins, cable ties, you name it and it's probably on board the Taurus Overland Truck. The key, the Captain tells me, is that his guests should have an incredible experience. Something small, like a broken shoelace for example, shouldn't ruin a trip to the wilderness. So naturally, there's a good stock of laces on board too.

At this point, I was really keen to take a look at the Captain's creation but I had to hear the story behind it first. After retiring from the Army, Captain Sharma, who's also an expert on snakes, worked with some big TV channels in the environment genre. He specialised in helping them film natural events that simply cannot be documented in the wild, like the laying of snake eggs and other such weird and fascinating things. But through all this, Captain Suresh had his heart set on overland adventure, a touring concept that's very popular in Africa and Europe. But the idea of an overland truck, built for a group of people to travel and live in over long periods simply didn't exist in India. Clearly, that wasn't going to stop the man from making it happen.

On March 11, 2012, after much research, Capt Sharma purchased an Eicher 20.16 chassis to turn into a bespoke overland truck. He chose the Eicher because it was the right size, had a reliable, smooth and relatively quiet engine and most importantly a tight turning radius. Going by the date of purchase, he decided to name it Taurus and was assured by his local chassis builder that its external transformation would be complete in just 45 days. About two years later, Taurus was finally a reality.

Being an avid photographer, the Captain knew the challenges that outdoor and travel photographers face trying to get to and stay at remote locations. Hauling all that equipment around, figuring modes of transportation, setting up a campsite - it all detracts from the experience. That was the key idea behind Taurus, to offer photographers the road trip of a lifetime, taking them into some of the most beautiful parts of the country like Ladakh in the summer and interior Rajasthan in the winter. All the transport and logistics would be taken care of, while allowing the photographers to focus on capturing the wilderness around them.

The next day, I had the opportunity to get up close and personal with Taurus. It's quite the intimidating sight in its stealth grey shade, a shout out to the Captain's army connection. The vehicle is huge and has very little in resemblance with the Eicher it was originally based on. Fully stocked with eight passengers, three crew members and its overkill of supplies, Taurus weighs in at about 11 tonnes. That's well under the 20.16's rated gross weight of 16 tonnes but the bodyshell was reinforced nevertheless to ensure that the tall body work stayed secure and most importantly, safe to the passengers.

There's so much happening with the Taurus that we'll have to break it into sections, starting with the exterior. Between the familiar headlights is a spare tyre which gives the face a very rugged and purposeful look. There are

A comprehensive tool set is locked away in these cool Army-spec fuel cans. There's enough foldable furniture on board for a picnic anytime, anyplace

The rear opens out into a full kitchen with three burners and a dedicated food tray. The detachable stairway to enter the truck bolts to the side when not in use

auxiliary lamps mounted on the roof and even a set of simple cornering lamps that point at an angle on either side of the bumper and can be turned on from the cabin while on road bends, especially in mountains. The passenger section is designed with large, sliding glass windows to aid photography on the move. Below the windows, the Taurus looks like a reinforced bank vault thanks to all the decorative rivets along the bodywork but it's the rear that is the business end of this truck. In a few minutes, with the unfastening of some bolts, the rear section turns into a kitchen, complete with a three burner stove and all manner of vessels, cutlery and ingredients. It takes a while to fully set up because everything is clamped down firmly to ensure things don't break.

While the captain was brewing a hot cup of coffee for us, I escaped the Ladakhi chill by climbing into the main cabin which is at such a

132

OVERDRIVE DEC 2015

DEC 2015 OVERDRIVE 133

FEATURE

TAURUS OVERLAND TRUCK

height you have to use a ladder to get in. Inside, I discovered that the roof wasn't tall enough for 6'1" me but there is enough space for the average Indian. The Captain says this was as tall as he could safely go. The plywood lined cabin has just eight reclining seats, very similar to the ones in a Volvo bus but with vastly more legroom. There is a wall of drawers near the entry and more storage space in lockable overhead cabinets that are sprung on hydraulic struts and backlit with LEDs. Guests are requested to bring their luggage in soft bags so they can load their belongings into the lockers and the bags can be folded away. Care has been taken to ensure no sharp edges are exposed and even simple things like drawer handles are replaced with soft rope pulls. Power supply is key when working with cameras and laptops and Taurus has that covered with upto 24 outlets available via heavy duty extension boxes. At the back is an aircraft style chemical toilet which is mounted primarily for ladies (while on the move) or when the weather is particularly nasty and people are reluctant to step out.

Behind the seats is a couple of box style beds that lift up to display a huge collection of ration. Coffee, tea, multiple cereals, assorted chocolates, rice, different types of daals, biscuits, snacks, cheeses and of course, an assortment of pickles - it's a well stocked department store under these beds. And then the Captain lifts up a hidden trap door in the wooden floor to reveal an even bigger stash of supplies. A typical trip in the Taurus lasts for about 10 to 15 days or even more, but there's enough ration in here to keep everyone well fed for nearly two months. Water comes from a 700-litre under the belly tank that is constructed in food grade stainless steel. Captain Sharma makes sure he carries a seriously comprehensive first aid kit everywhere and he's even gone as far as to include what he calls the pink box - a stock of ladies hygiene products in case the need ever arises! The list goes on, there are 12 golf-sized umbrellas on board which could be holed up in a designated place even when fully wet, even a dedicated set of photographer's lights should a guest wish he hadn't left his behind.

Night time accommodation is split between four tents that hang off the side of the truck while tents for another four are set up on the roof. If the guests are game then they can all climb up on to the roof for an evening cup of tea or to watch the stars appear. There is a full stock of sleeping bags of three temperature ratings. Whether it's a

A simple foldable metal contraption that can be hammered into the earth holds a pipe. The on-board chemical toilet is reserved for lady travellers or inclement weather

cool summer's night or a frostbite inducing minus ten degrees, you're sure to be snug at night. It's pretty clear that Captain Suresh has gone out of his way to ensure his guests are comfortable and well provided for. There was no expense spared in building Taurus. The base chassis cost about ₹12 lakh but by the time the entire project was complete, the Captain had sunk in a good ₹65 lakh.

I had a short go behind the wheel and I was both intimidated and impressed. This thing is a full size truck and it was the first time I was driving something so big. I immediately appreciated the light clutch and power assisted steering but I struggled a little finding the right gear. The Captain has a dedicated driver for the trips but he doesn't shy from getting behind the wheel. In fact, he just drove it solo from Chandigarh to Leh and that includes getting it up all those mountain passes including the famous Zaskar Respass!

You can find out more about Captain Suresh and the tours he organises by visiting his website www.greenotexpeditions.com or checking out the Facebook page (Green Dot Expeditions) for more details. As it stands, he is the only person in the country offering this kind of a road trip experience. **603**

134

OVERDRIVE DEC 2015

DEC 2015 OVERDRIVE 135

SURE-SHOT EXCITING

Fasten your seat belts, for a new idea is about to drive you crazy; overlanding photo tour comes to India



Swati Goel Sharma

swati.sharma@hindustantimes.com

Thanks to the big idea of a former army officer, India might gear up to travel the new way.

In overland truck expeditions, Captain Suresh Sharma of Chandigarh brings a new concept to the domestic market from Africa. He offers to let you take on rugged terrain aboard a vehicle turned into self-contained movable world, with passenger seats; kitchen with enough foods and water; space for camping and leisure equipment; luggage lockers; and washroom all attached.

Sharma quit as short service commission officer in the army only to get into shooting with a camera and travelling, his passions. "The tour will give the travellers a thrill that only going into the wild can offer," he says. "Where else do you see a wild elephant sloshing its way across the waterway."

Besides the simple joys of travel, passengers explore unfamiliar cultures and the excitement of capturing rare photographs. "It is an overland

photo tour, where my role is of a mentor and guide," says captain Sharma, whose photographs were included in the coffee table book "The Indian Army: An Illustrated Overview", which the defence minister had released in September 2007.

Many of his photographs have also made it to reputed newspapers, magazines, textbooks and websites. His next coffee table book is about fighter aircraft MiG-21. In his overland adventure venture Green Dot Expeditions, the support of his wife, homoeopathic doctor Rajbir Kaur, has made the journey smoother.

In the past three years, the couple has detailed every aspect of the expedition and engineered equipment to need. Push-back seats, thick mattresses under the on-board roof-top prefabricated tent canopies, an LED monitor, and a library are a few of the overlander's many features.

"The on-board outdoor studio equipment comes handy to capture unannounced delights such as a camel trader cooking food with family over sand dunes," says captain

Quick overview

Concept: A journey to the wild, picturesque wonders, with all the help to record it on camera

Promoter: Captain Suresh Sharma (retired), ex-army, from Chandigarh

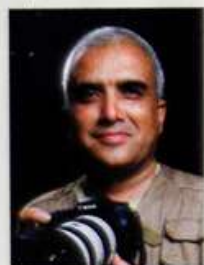
Vehicle: Overlander, a truck made for rugged terrain, modified to become a self-contained movable world, with passenger seats; kitchen with food and water; space for camping and leisure equipment; luggage lockers; washroom and a complete photo studio on board.

Sharma, who has logged more than 1-lakh kilometres in the country in his self-designed caravan (he maintains a logbook). Of late, he delivered a talk in New Delhi on "caravan tourism: India by road", which the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry had organised.

His first overland expedition takes off next month, to Kullu, Teerthan Valley and Manali, for 10 days. In winter, the destinations are warmer Rajasthan and coastal India.

LOOK WHO'S SHOOTING

Capt Suresh Sharma



"The joy of traveling and photographing in places whose existence most people do not know about is beyond compare."

Photographing Unexplored Corners of the Country

Capt Suresh Sharma at 52 years of age is an avid traveler and an experienced wildlife photographer who has traveled to diverse corners of the country. He served as a Captain in the Indian Air Force till the year 1990 before he decided to hang his boots and switch to photography.

His first experiment with photography goes back to his college days when film was still a costly affair. It was his stint with the Indian Peacekeeping Force in Sri Lanka that he went behind the camera again. Today, he is known for his expertise in recreating the natural environments of snakes so as to photograph them with artificial light. This stems from his love for snakes as well as an effort to conserve their natural habitat.

Naturally, his love for wildlife has resulted in several wildlife conservation programs across the country.

Suresh says, "In a bid to travel to the most remote regions of the country, I have a custom built caravan for photography. Equipped with everything a photographer might need, this vehicle is the perfect tool to experience the joy of the countryside with all the facilities of a modern world." He also conducts photography tours and workshops that provides photographers, amateurs and professionals alike, the opportunity to learn and experience travel photography like never before.

To know more, visit www.greendotexpeditions.com

—Written by Ketan Kundargi



Capt Suresh Sharma

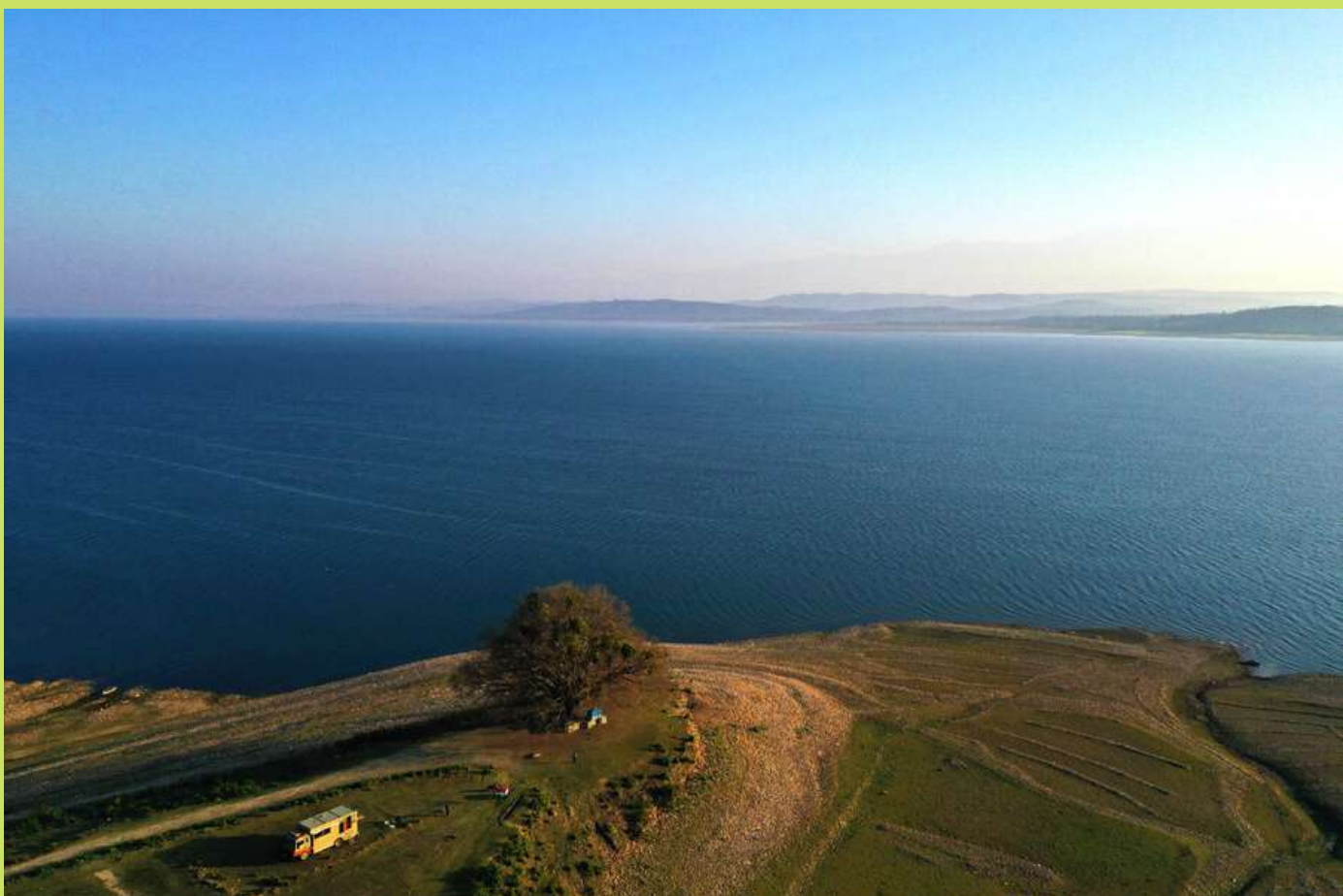
➤ The pristine sand dunes in the deserts of Rajasthan are one of Suresh's favourite destination to shoot at.

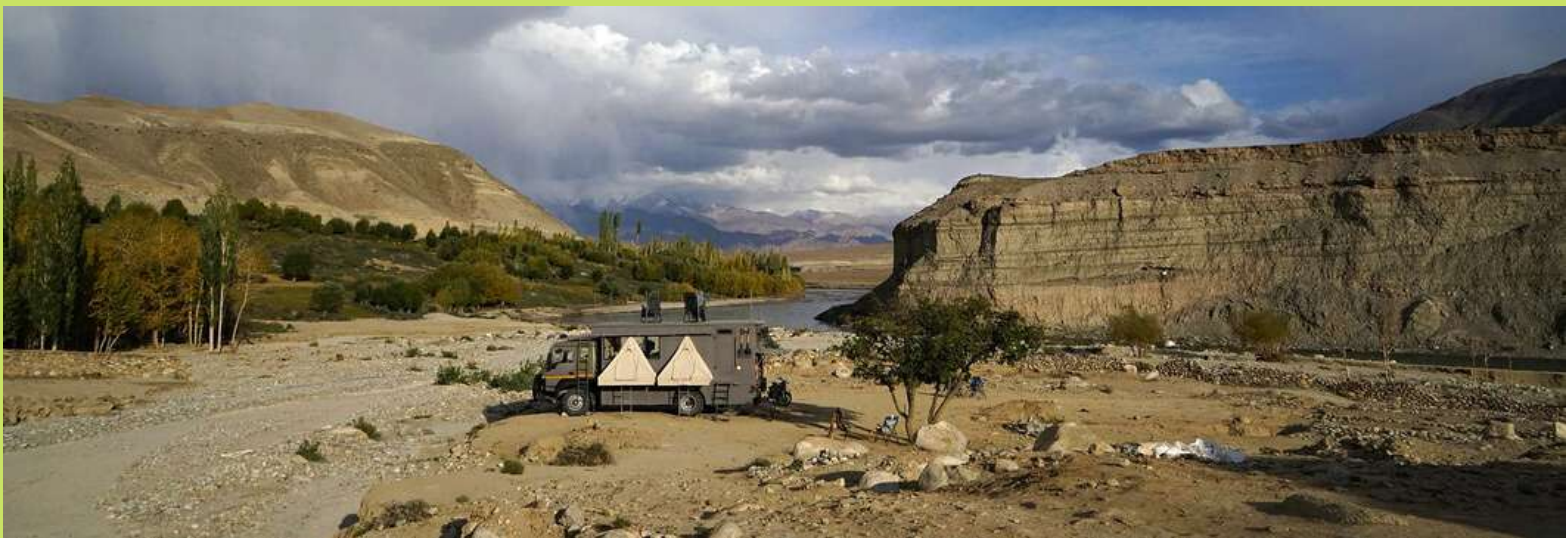
Mesmerizing Locations are the result of hard work
by **Capt Suresh Sharma**





















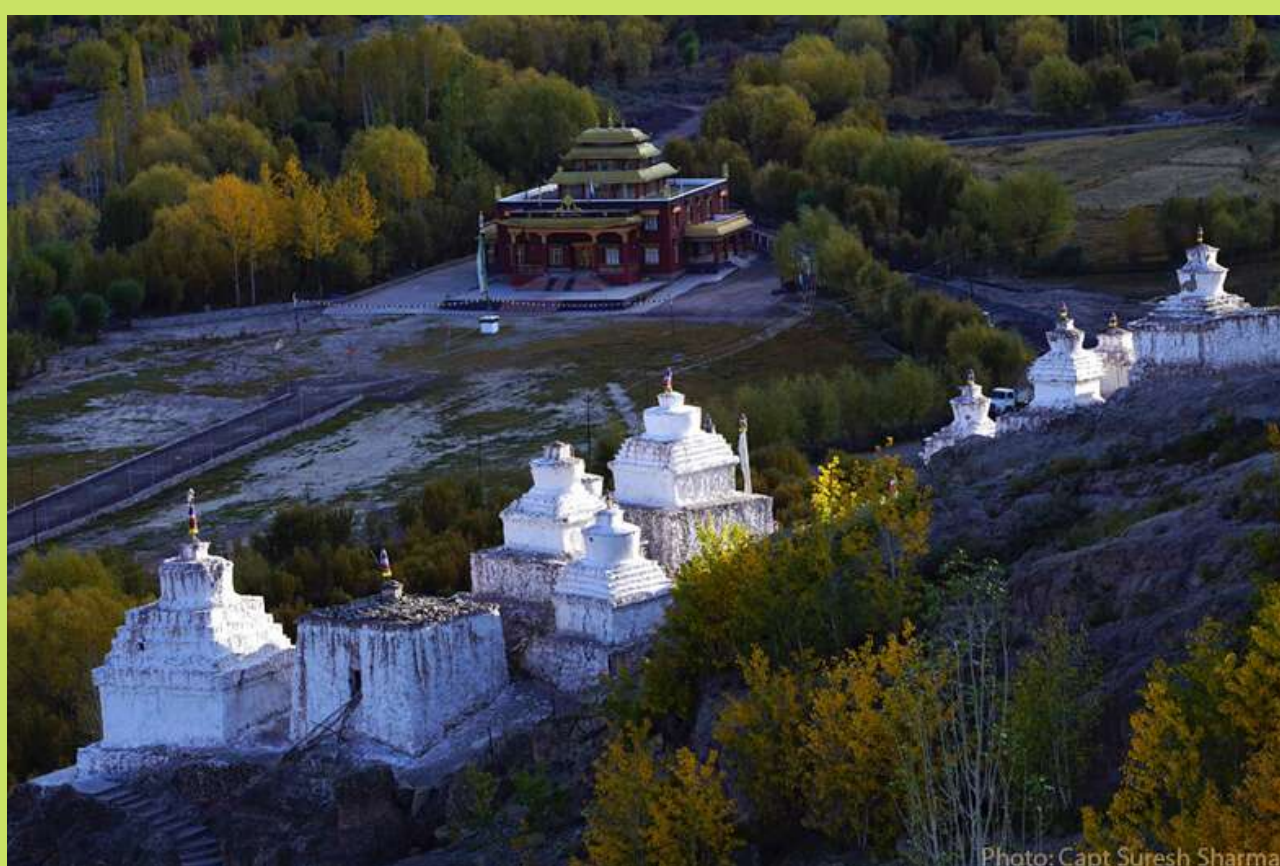
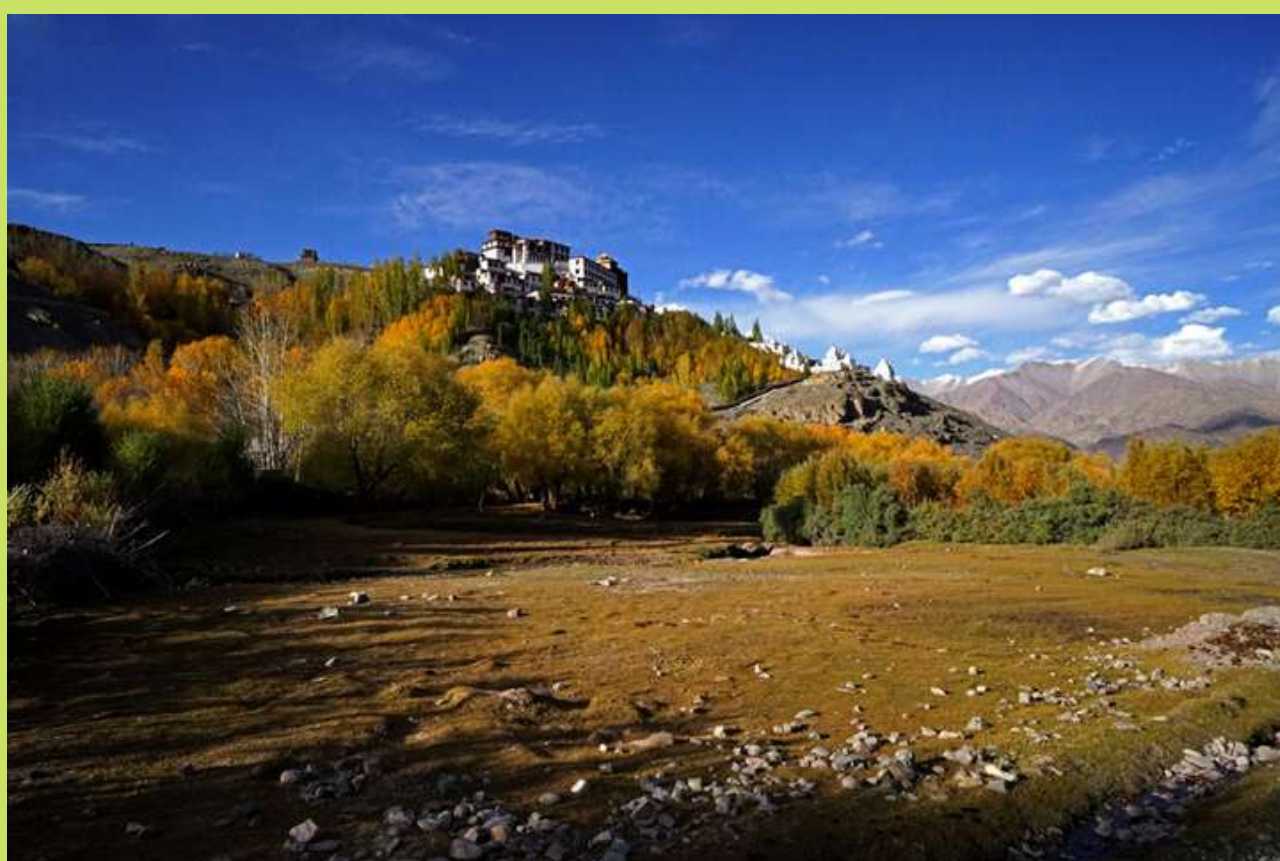












+91-9888 380386

+91-6280 595008