

# Conservationist Couple

Situated in the beautiful countryside, Sarai at Toria is all things sustainable and environmentally friendly. Run by Raghu & Juana, they opened this abode while looking to have a livelihood in the central Indian area while pursuing research and community conservation programmes.

It's community-based, generating low footprint with zero single-use plastic usage. Sustainability and responsibility were therefore at the core of the project from inception so are reflected both in the building and in the running. The architecture is based on local vernacular buildings, the power was solar and all the staff is from the local area.

The conservation programmes here are operated through their trust, Baavan, with the objective to create satellite areas through inclusive conservation models, using tourism as an economic driver. As a first step, Baavan is pursuing nature education programmes, organising nature camps and improving school infrastructures; along with running eye-camps.

Here, the Green initiative involves Organic Gardening, low room to land ratio among others while the community impact can be gauged by their roots in the local community and planet-friendly practices. All of this while preserving local Heritage, Art and Culture and Wildlife & Nature conservation at the forefront.

Finally, the seasonal operations allow them to run without air conditioning and their mud structures help them to reduce the use of heaters in the winter months.

On being asked, what motivated you to take up conservation practices, they responded by saying 'the more appropriate question would be what motivated you to take up being hoteliers in order to further conservation practices in the area? This says it all.

*It's not the glitzy luxury but truly homegrown, local and minimalistic.*

# From Broadway to Belgadia...

The Belgadia Palace in Orissa, is reflective of royalty in modern times, keeping the lineage relevant and alive.

Praveen Chandra Bhanjdeo is the 47th descendant of the Bhanjdeo dynasty. The 200-year-old Belgadia Palace in Mayurbhanj district of Orissa is his home, where he resides with his wife and his two daughters Mrinalika and Akshita, the charming Princesses who are working towards building a sustainable tourism model with positive social impact at its core in this tribal-dominated region.

Mrinalika is a yoga practitioner while Akshita is a communications strategist bringing AI technology for social empowerment. The two are the quintessential faces of India's Millennial Royalties and they carry it with great poise.

*Incent spoke to Akshita about their journey, palace and all the shebang. Edited excerpts from the conversation…*

- **What made you open the doors of your home to the public?**

We wanted people to come and experience everything Odisha has to offer be it art, culture, heritage, or the tribal people. Our family is totally involved and engage with the guests, and often times my sister and I act as tour guides. We want people to come and explore Mayurbhanj.

- **When it comes to Palaces most people tend to think of Rajasthan. What makes Belgadia stand out?**

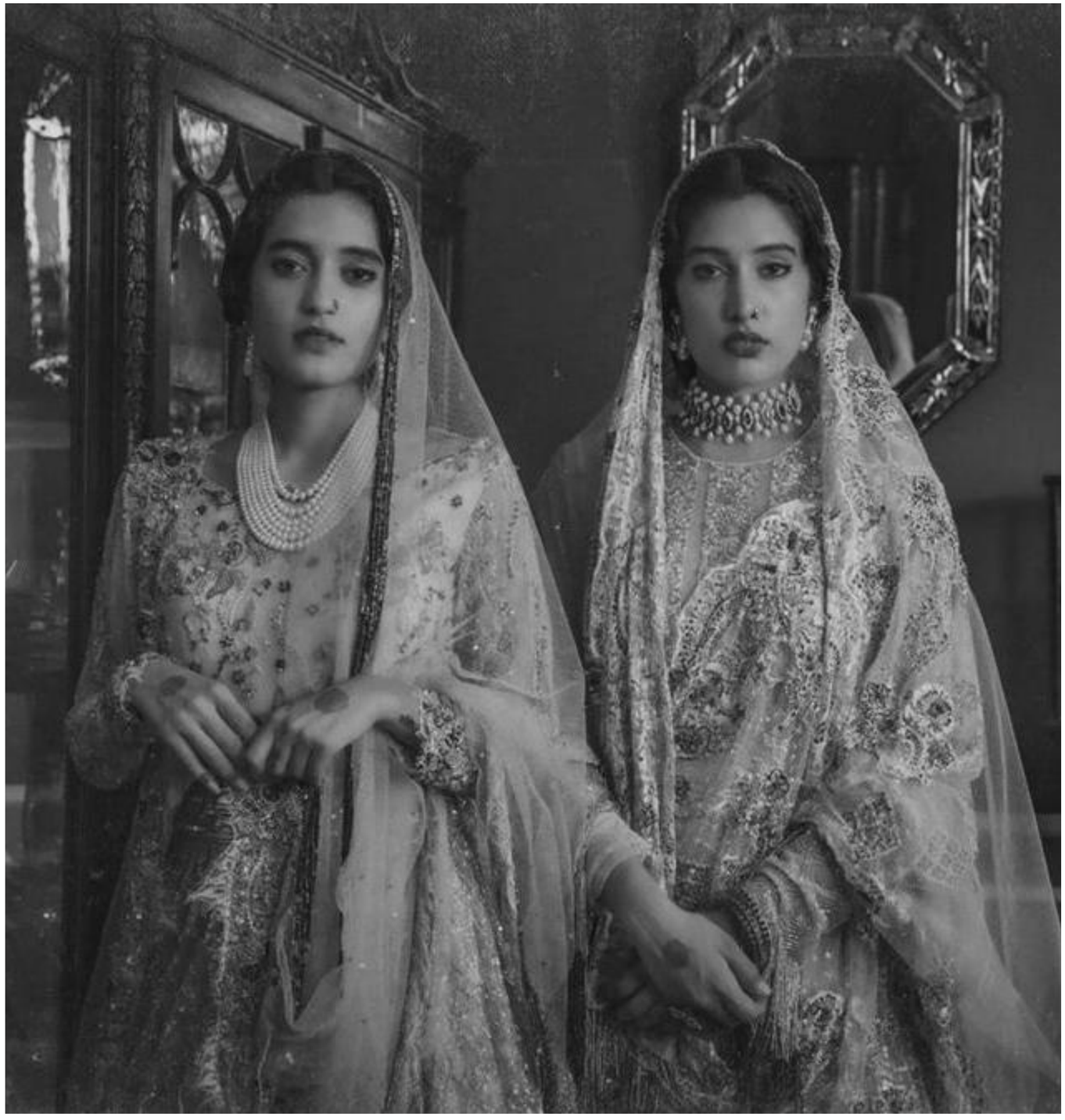
Belgadia Palace operates differently. The property was converted into a hotel to promote Tourism in the region and empower the people. The Mayurbhanj Foundation promotes sustainable Tourism related activities to plough funds into the rural economy.

Mayurbhanj has over 20 different indigenous tribes each with its unique culture, rituals, cuisine, attire, and occupations etc, and the workers at the Palace come from 15 of these tribes.

- **What's the world war connection?**

We were one of the few Royal families that possessed their own aircraft and airstrips, and they were handed over to the Allied forces fighting the Imperial Japanese forces in Burma. Interestingly, one of our planes, a Douglas DC3, is on display at the Mayfair Hotel in Bhubaneswar.

*"There is an old saying here that great Emperor Ashoka tried to conquer the mighty Kalinga empire but failed because this land (Odisha) breeds peace. At The Belgadia Palace, we intend to provide the same," Akshita says.*



*The Bhanjdeo Sisters show royalty in its truest sense, where it is not just about the Kings and the queens, but also the people. With local community and sustainable development at the forefront, they let you in not only into their private residence, but also the Remote Land that Orissa is…*




# The Lady Driver

Breaking the stereotypes, one traveller at a time.

Plying rickshaws are essentially male-dominated spaces in India and it always takes courage to steer away from established norms. Well-groomed, confident, liveried hostesses plying-rickshaws and breaking the glass ceiling, the lovely ladies at Pink City Rickshaw Co. are nothing short of exemplary. They perform their duty with the same ease as the homely chores they were confined to, earlier.

An initiative by ACCESS Development Services, a non-profit led that trains and employs 200-odd women from Jaipur, all from the lower-income groups. They are well-equipped on managing the rickshaws and have undergone training to gain soft skills like speaking basic English. Later, they become equity holders in the company and eventually own and manage the business themselves.

These rickshaws are battery-powered, making them environmentally friendly, and sport a colourful stylized gold canopy with ergonomically designed seats, water bottle holder, locker for your valuables and a mobile charger.

Hop-on and travel through the winding roads and lanes as these women show you Jaipur through their eyes. They never run out of charge, both the rickshaws and the enthusiasm of the ladies driving them!