



Mark Shand with his elephant, Tara

Man Singh palace in Madhya Pradesh

## My own private... India by Mark Shand

The conservationist, younger brother of the Duchess of Cornwall and author of *Travels on My Elephant* is mad about the land of Ganesh

### When did you first go to India?

When I was 17. I was on my way to Australia to work on cattle stations. In those days, that was the usual remedy for fathers with errant sons. I was supposed to stay overnight in India. I spent three months.

### Your first memory of it?

The smell – a smell so intoxicating it's like when you first fall in love. It's a combination of jasmine, spices, dust, heat, sweat, smoke, shit and the first fall of rain on a parched desert.

### Who's the best host?

Every single Indian. They are the most hospitable people in the world

### What's your favourite hotel?

An unassuming little place – the Mal Bazar Tourist Lodge, in a tea-planting area in West Bengal. On a clear day, you can see the Himalayas. It becomes a haven when I'm writing and filming. It serves the best fish curry, has the slowest service and is a breeding ground for mosquitoes. But I love it and the people who run this splendid establishment are the best. The hotel has a unique way of advertising. A large sign outside proclaims 'Cold Beer, Sold Here, Here Sold, Beer Cold'. The Bengalis are famous for their poetic prowess.

### Your favourite place?

I suppose Kipling Camp in Madhya

Pradesh, where my elephant Tara lives. I ride, feed and wash her every day – the ultimate therapy for me. Or sleeping under the stars on a sandbank in the middle of the mightiest river in India, the Brahmaputra, listening to the calls and rush of wings, as the bar-headed geese migrate south from the icy Tibetan plateau to warmer climes. That's as about as good as it gets.

### The best restaurant?

Trichna, the best seafood restaurant in the world, in Bombay. The crab dishes are to die for. Try the garlic and chilli crab served in the shell.

### How do you escape the crowds?

I don't. I love crowds, particularly at festivals. The Sonepur Mela in Bihar has not changed in hundreds of years. Still hardly any tourists. You get to experience the real gut of India here – raw, mad, untouched.

### What's your favourite shop?

Phillips, the wonderfully eclectic antique shop in Bombay. I've been going for years and the owner is a great friend. I spend hours bartering with him over endless cups of tea – usually he wins. My latest passion is old tribal wooden Ganesh masks, used in dances in Kerala. I have been collecting them for years. You can never have enough Ganeshes.

**Hot pink**  
Silk kaftan dress, £1,250, by Temperley London, at Net-a-Porter



**Gold standard**  
Resin, pearl and gold-plated earrings, £185, by Isharya, at Net-a-Porter

**Shoe in**  
Leather sandals, £1,085, by Alaïa, at Net-a-Porter



## Sleeping beau

### Pitcher Inn, Vermont, US

Vermont is a different place each season. Winter's the big one – the woods are so dark and deep, so quote local boy Robert Frost as you explore by snowshoe, and at Sugarbush and Mad River Glen, when they're still cranking their old single-chairs (and no boarders allowed). In spring the sugar shacks are steaming and it's time for 'sugar on snow' (hot maple sugar drizzled over shaved ice, which turns into taffy). Autumn is famous for leaf-peeping, when New England puts on her best frock and her favourite fiery pumpkins. But locals' secret favourite is summer. There's unspoiled woodland trails for rambling and clear, refreshing water – jump in the Mad River from fat boulders or just float carefree on Blueberry Lake. Back at the hotel they have a delicious little afternoon tea ready in the library (homemade Oreos) and virtual shuffleboard in the games room. Even taxidermied critters in the bar look chill out. This adorable place has been a favourite of weary travellers since the 1850s – casual and quirky, it's chock-full of love touches. Each of the nine rooms is a different world, so choose carefully, as some are better than others. In the Mallard Room there is a full gun case, so best for happy couples only. Ski has a headboard made from antique sledges, a gorgeous picnic bench to snuggle at and a roaring open fire. With great coffee and perfect muffins, scones and cakes, as well as a huge and wonderful wine collection the Pitcher Inn is maple-syrup sweet – a perfect little hidey-hole for you and your honey. It just grows and grows on you. Double, from £265. To book, visit [pitcherinn.com](http://pitcherinn.com). British Airways ([ba.com](http://ba.com)) flies to Boston daily, from £375.

