

ON SUNDAY Travel Mail



FACEBOOK CHALLENGE FOR CONRAD FANS

Conrad Macao Cotai Central's Facebook fans have the chance to win an incredible getaway when they upload a photo of one of the hotel's signature bears at a world famous landmark to their Facebook timeline between July 14 and August 31, 2017.

By Adila Matra

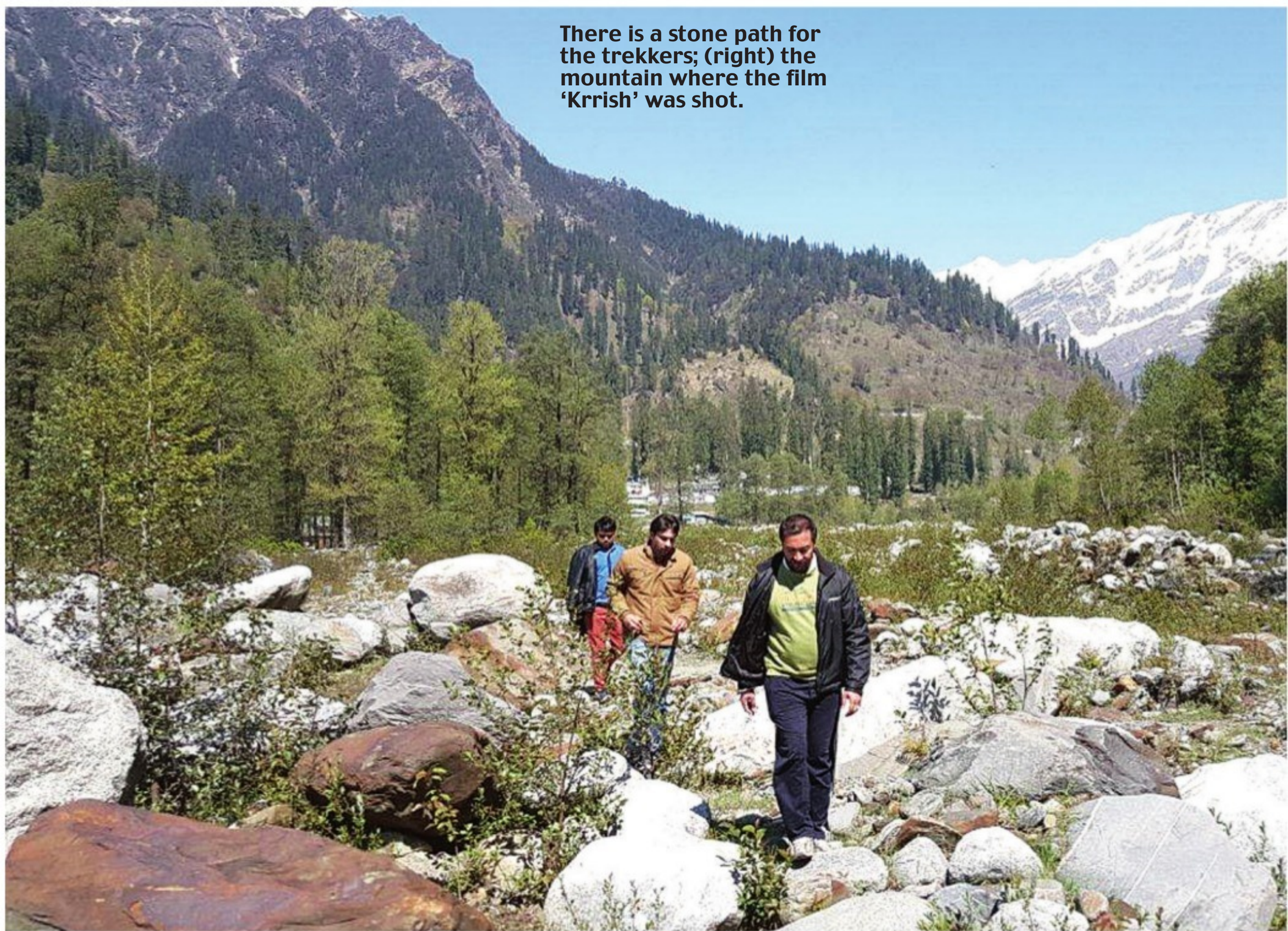
IT WAS one of those long weekends in the scorching Delhi heat and all my neighbours, their neighbours, kids, dogs and huge SUVs were making a beeline for the hills. I badly wanted to go without having to find another Delhi when I arrived. So, I played smart, decided to find a hiding place and ditch all the touristy things.

That's how I zeroed in on the Solang Valley Resort in Manali — away from the Delhi/UP registration cars that were choking the mall road and Old Manali. Brainchild of Sakshi Manchanda, a 30 something Delhiite, the resort started out with 20 rooms and now has 64. It is a destination in itself. The bus ride was daunting but once I set my foot on the property, surrounded by hills and the roaring Beas, everything else was forgotten. The rest of the day was spent gazing at the paragliders moving in and out of the clouds, munching on fries and sipping green tea.

YOGA IN THE HILLS

Come dawn, walk towards the foothills and do some yoga. It is silent, with just some early birds chirping and the river waking up. If you want, walk up to the Solang Valley, which is deserted and yet to be thronged with tourists. I saw a lot of those who stayed in nearby rooms, getting ready for Rohtang Pass. Cars were already lining up on the roads. So, I picked up a book and sat by the river, reading.

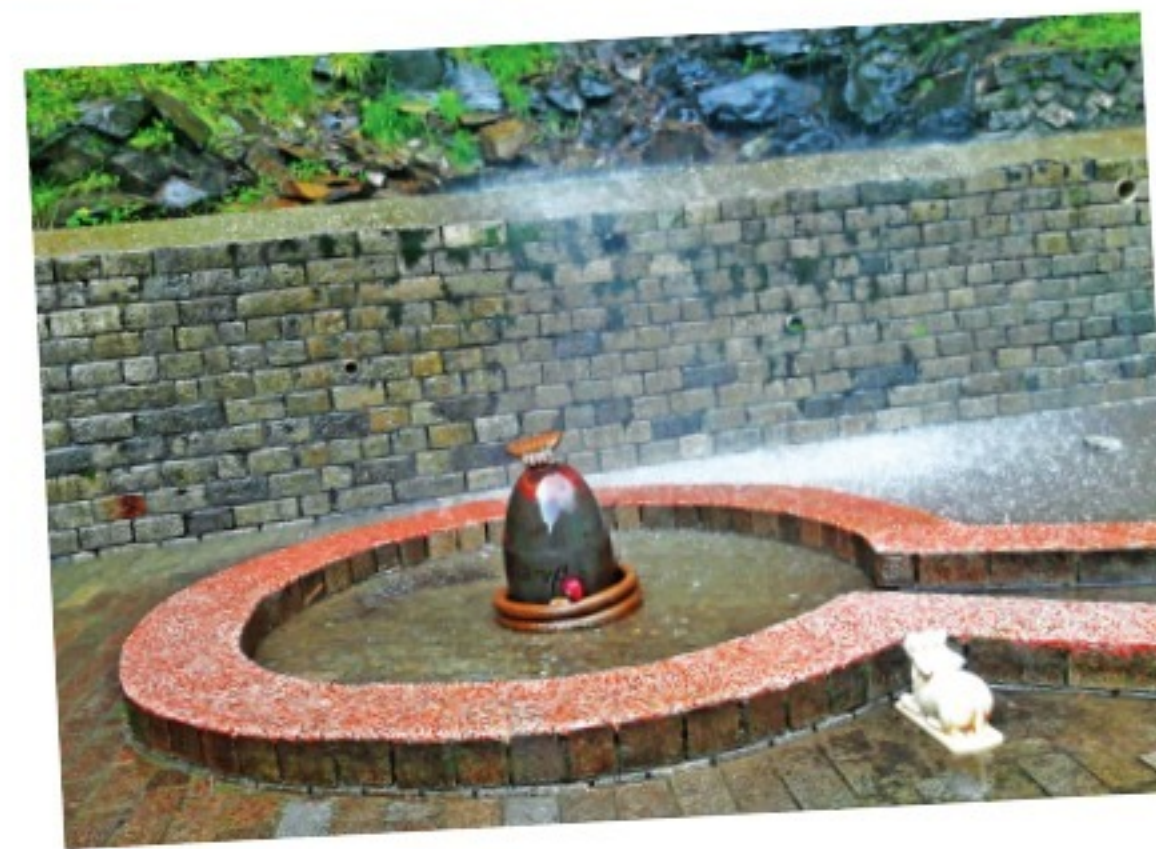
After lunch and a nap, it was time for some pampering. I headed to the spa where Julie Jimo, my masseuse for the day, worked magic with her deft hands and homemade mixes — apricot, honey and turmeric for the body; banana, coconut oil and honey for the hair and glacial water and local clay along with avocado for the body. She was a natural talker too. Amidst tales from Nagaland, she eased out the knots on my shoulders that hours in front of a computer gift you.



There is a stone path for the trekkers; (right) the mountain where the film 'Krrish' was shot.

Go fishing, pack a picnic lunch and take an early morning trek in Solang Valley

VALLEY OF TRANQUILITY



Then, I headed back to the restaurant for some pastries. The vanilla cream cheese cake was heaven and there was a bonfire waiting to be lit, with some traditional hill dance followed by a duo nailing Bollywood songs on the drums and guitar. Nights are for contemplation and if it is a clear sky, you will catch stars winking at you, almost smirking at the fact that no tourist, Delhi or otherwise, could ever reach them.

FISHING IN THE BEAS

The next day, I met Amandeep (who answers to AD) and Deepak, cousins who I recognised from the night before, crooning melodies. They apparently also oversee the fish tank where trouts are kept. Take fishing lessons and if you are lucky enough to catch one, they will fry it for you on spot. A plate of freshly caught trout with a side of mashed potatoes and boiled veggies is best enjoyed at the campsite near the river.

What disappointed me were the shreds of glass bottles covering the boulders that line the river. Maybe, the concept of pristine is



lost on Indians, I rued. After the fishing stint (I let mine back in the water), I headed back to the resort which is dotted with apple trees, the fruit turning a beautiful shade of pink. There are also walnut trees and when I spotted cotton balls wafting in the air, I followed them to find a few fallen cotton plants. Hills never cease to amaze you.

GRAND FINALE

When I signed up for the early morning trek, I was just trying to break out of my morning slumber pattern. The 5 km trek with guide Sonu Sharma and a few others was nothing I had in mind. We started at 6:30 a.m. and walked through plains, small hills and even tarred roads. The first stop was the Nag Temple that lay

deserted just before Solang Valley. Sonu also pointed out the mountain where Krrish was shot (the scene where PC gets caught in the trees). The sky was a perfect blue but as we passed the deserted Solang Valley and went higher, a light fog began to descend.

Horses and cows grazed around and there was a stone path for the trekkers. We stopped, sat on

the rocks and glanced around — no plastic, no construction and lush greenery. I began to wish this was the end point. But we had miles to go. About 3.5 kms in, fatigue set in. So did hunger. We had reached Beas and just after crossing a small bridge made of tin sheets and logs, we dipped our faces in the cold glacial water and it worked wonders!



(Extreme left) Freshly caught trout with a side of mashed potatoes and veggies; (left) the Solang Valley Resort.