Toy trains, ***excellent***tea, and ***impressive***views of four of the world’s highest peaks. Darjeeling’s trademark charms are ***surpassed***only by the niceness of its people, found wildlife photographer Dhritiman Mukherjee and Bollywood composer Shantanu Moitra on the West Bengal leg of their #100DaysInHimalayas project. Between February and December 2016, the duo will make a series of trips in the Himalayas covering reaches running from Kashmir to Arunachal Pradesh, and into the neighbouring foothills of Nepal and Bhutan—and they’re taking *National Geographic Traveller India* along for the ride. Their latest ***dispatch***is from Darjeeling. For centuries, the cool hill station at the foothills of the Himalayas, has been favoured as a health resort for its ***brisk***weather, first by the British, and then by tourists across India and the world. It’s ***predictably***lovely and laid-back, except on some days as this twosome found out.

**Ice, Ice, Baby**

When Moitra and Mukherjee visited, Darjeeling was ***reeling***from an unexpected ***hailstorm***that caused an hours-long traffic jam. “It was white, covered in 3-inch ice,” said Moitra. As soon as they checked into the hotel, Moitra recalled, “Dhritiman said it’s time to take photos now.” The hail had dented cars and smashed holes in roofs and windows. “That’s the difference between us,” Moitra says. “I say, ‘There’s chaos outside, let’s stay in.’”

Outside, they found a town making the most of the ***bizarre***weather. Life was at a standstill and people were playing with the ice in the streets. It was lovely but Dhritiman was surprised with the number of international food-chain ***outlets***. “The Mall Road now has CCD and KFC,” he said. At the very least, they should “blend with local culture; use Lepcha- or Gurkha-style design for the interiors.”

**Hitting The Right Note**

For Moitra, each place they visited came alive with the locals they ***encountered***, and the stories they had to tell. At their colonial-era stay Cochrane Place in Kurseong—famous for birding and tea ***estates***such as Makaibari—Moitra discovered that the hotel’s singer honed his craft on the road. A taxi driver by day with dreams of being a musician, the singer picked up playing the guitar from his church group, bought his instrument at a pawnshop, and expanded his ***repertoire***by asking the Indian and international tourists he ***ferried***daily to play their songs off the car speaker. “I suddenly remembered my college days, when I was not trained in music but I just enjoyed singing,” said Moitra. He was so impressed that he made a recording of the ***musician***before leaving.

**A World Without Pandas**

***En route***to Sandakphu, West Bengal’s highest point, they met a tea-stall owner in his early 30s, who was involved in ***conservation***efforts for the ***endangered***red panda, ***native***to the Himalayan forests of this region. The high school ***graduate***had moved to Dubai to fund his kid’s education but returned two years later when he “realised that family is more important than money,” Moitra said. Deciding that he could just as easily put in the taxing 16-hour work days to develop his village, he started conservation work and joined in community ***initiatives***such as ***coaxing***locals to keep off alcohol and save up for solar panels to help their kids study at night.

**Mountain Lessons**

On their return from Sandakphu, Moitra and Mukherjee shared their jeep with a father and his sick child whose smiles and conversation showed no sign of the ***gruelling***ride and the ***desperation***at the remote access to a hospital. “The Himalayas have a really surprising happiness quotient,” Moitra said, who puts it down to the local ***philosophy***: not to fight the elements but accept life as it comes. “The Himalayas teach me to stop ***complaining***, and life will be better.”

Keep posted for updates from Mukherjee and Moitra, as this mountain ***bromance***yields stunning photos of the Himalayas’ stark beauty, and stories of its ***charming***people.

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| WORD | MEANING | SYNONYM |
| 1. Excellent | Extremely good; outstanding | Accomplished, admirable, attractive, distinguished, exceptional, exemplary, exquisite, fine, finest, first-rate, good, great, magnificent, outstanding, skillful, sterling, superb, superlative |
| 1. Impressive | Evoking admiration through size, quality or skill; grand, imposing or awesome. | Dramatic, exciting, extraordinary, important, imposing, intense, massive, monumental, notable, profound, remarkable, splendid, superb, thrilling |
| 1. Surpassed | Exceed; be greater than | Beat, eclipse, exceed, outpace, outperform, outstrip, outweigh, pass, rank, top, best, better, cap, excel, outdistance, outgo, outmatch, outrank, outrival, outrun, outshine, override, overshadow, overstep, surmount, tower, transcend, trump |
| 1. dispatch | Send off to a destination or for a purpose | Alacrity, celerity, expedition, expeditiousness, haste, hurry, hustle, precipitateness, promptitude, promptness, quickness, rapidity, rustle, speediness, swiftness |
| 1. brisk | Active and energetic | Energetic, lively, quick, speedy, spry, vigorous, alert, animated, bustling, busy, adroit, agile, nimble, sprightly, vivacious, zippy |
| 1. predictably | Anything that you can see or know before it happens | Certain, anticipated, calculable, expected, foreseeable, foreseen, likely, prepared, sure, sure-fire |
| 1. reeling | Wind something on to a reel by turning the reel.  Lose one’s balance and stagger or lurch violently | Addled, befuddled, bemused, bewildered, blind, blinded, dazed, dazzled, distracted, disturbed, dumbfounded, faint, light, muddled, puzzled, staggered, swimming, upset, whirling |
| 1. hailstorm | A storm of heavy hail | Barrage, bombardment, rain, salvo, shower, storm, volley, broadside, cannonade, pelting |
| 1. bizarre | Very strange or unusual | Comical, curious, extraordinary, fantastic, freakish, grotesque, ludicrous, odd, offbeat, outlandish, peculiar, ridiculous, unusual, weird |
| 1. outlets | A pipe or hole through which water or gas may escape;  a point from which goods are sold or distributed. | Channel, aperture, avenue, break, crack, duct, egress, escape, exit, hole, nozzle, opening, orifice, porthole, release, spout, tear, vent, safety valve, way out |
| 1. encountered | Unexpectedly be faced with or experience; meet someone unexpectedly | Bear, bump into, come across, come upon, confront, detect, experience, face, find, meet, run into, suffer, turn up, close, descry, espy, front, sustain, undergo |
| 1. estates | An area or amount of land or property, in particular | Area, farm, parcel, plantation, ranch, residence, acreage, demesne, domain, dominion, freehold, grounds, holdings, territory, villa |
| 1. repertoire | A stock of plays, dances, or items that a company or a performer knows or is prepared to perform | Repertory, range, repository, reserve, stock, stockpile, store, supply |
| 1. ferried | Convey in a ferry or other ship or boat, especially across a short stretch of water | Carry, chauffeur, lug, send, ship, shuttle, tote, transport, bear, buck ,convey, pack, run, move across, schlepp |
| 1. musician | A person who plays a musical instrument, especially as a profession, or is musically talented. | Artist, composer, conductor, entertainer, instrumentalist, performer, player, soloist, virtuoso, vocalist, artiste, diva, session player |
| 1. en route | During the course of a journey; on the way | Advancing, along the way, bound, driving, en voyage, entrained, flying, heading toward, in passage, in transit, making headway, midway, on the road, pressing on, progressing, traveling |
| 1. conservation | The act of conserving something, in particular | Care, conservancy, control, maintenance, management, protection, supervision, attention, custody, economy, governing, guardianship, keeping, safe keeping, salvation, saving, stewardship, storage, supervising, sustentation, upkeep |
| 1. endangered | Seriously at a risk of extinction | Threatened, at risk, facing extinction, in danger |
| 1. native | A person born in a specified place or associated with a place by birth, whether subsequently resident there or not. | Endemic, indigenous, natural, constitutional, essential, fundamental, natal, original, real, wild |
| 1. graduate | A person who has successfully completed a course of study or training, especially a person who has been awarded and undergraduate or first academic degree | Alum, alumnus, doctor, grad, recipient, baccalaureate, bachelor, collegian, diplomat, holder, licentiate, master, Ph.D, product, former student |
| 1. initiatives | The ability to assess and initiate things independently ;  The power or opportunity to act or take charge before others do. | Action, drive, leadership, push, ambition, dynamism, energy, enterprise, enthusiasm, get-up-and-go, gumption, inventiveness, moxie, originality, punch, resource, spunk, steam, vigor |
| 1. coaxing | Persuade gradually or gently to do something | Cajole, entice, induce, tease, tempt, wheedle, allure, barter, beguile, blandish, blarney, con, decoy, flatter, get, hook, importune, influence, inveigle, jawbone, lure, pester, plague, press, soft-soap, soothe, sweet-talk, urge, wangle, worm |
| 1. grueling | Extremely tiring and demanding | Arduous, backbreaking, brutal, demanding, excruciating, exhausting, fierce, laborious, punishing, strenuous, tiring, torturous, trying |
| 1. desperation | A state of despair, typically one which results in rash or extreme behavior | Agony, anguish, anxiety, desolation, despair, discomfort, fear, gloom, grief, heartache, melancholy, misery, pain, sorrow, unhappiness |
| 1. philosophy | The study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality and existence, especially when considered as an academic discipline | Attitude, doctrine, idea, ideology, logic, outlook, reasoning, system, tenet, theory, thinking, thought, truth, view, viewpoint, wisdom, aesthetics, axiom, beliefs, conception, convictions, metaphysics, ontology, rationalism, reason, values |
| 1. complaining | Express dissatisfaction or annoyance about something | Grumbling, protesting, whining, accusing, bellyaching, bewailing, charging, deploring, disapproving, discontented, dissenting, fretting, lamenting, moaning, mourning, murmuring, regretting, repining, weeping |
| 1. bromance | A close but non-sexual relationship between two men |  |
| 1. charming | Very pleasant or attractive | Absorbing, alluring, amiable, appealing, attractive, charismatic, cute, delightful, elegant, engaging, engrossing, fascinating, glamorous, graceful, inviting, likable lovable, lovely ,pleasant, provocative, sweet, bewitching, electrifying, enamoring, enthralling, entrancing, fetching, infatuating, magnetizing, pleasing, ravishing, seducing, tantalizing, tempting, titillating, winning |