

# Destination India



*Pallavi Shah and Anita Trehan are two innovative Indian women who have made it big in the Big Apple with their exclusive luxury travel and cultural service agency — Our Personal Guest — which orchestrates personalised itineraries to the Indian subcontinent*

“Hop on to our palkhi and we will take you on your most enchanting tour of India,” — is their promise, and it's one they fulfil amply. Our Personal Guest (OPG), set up in April 1989 by Pallavi Shah and Anita Trehan, organises luxurious individualised tours to India as well as several cultural projects. In the process they function as India's unofficial PR department in the US. There is seldom an international art festival or Indian event which does not involve OPG. The duo are closely connected with the high-flying art world in New York and in India, thanks to which their client list reads like a who's who in New York.

Their first clients were straight from the top drawer — comprising New York's unofficial nobility. There were Henry Kravis (multi-billionaire owner of RJR and Nabisco, a worldwide conglomerate), wife Carolyne Roehm Kravis (a fashion designer in her own right); Oscar de la Renta (fashion designer) and his wife; Annette Reed (one of the heiresses of the greatest fortunes in the US), Susan and Carter Burden (they have a fabulous Indian art collection) and another socially well-known couple Francesca and Peter

Tufo. Indeed, on their return to the US, one of the local magazines trumpeted — “New York's social maharajas and maharanis have returned home...”

With the success of their first assignment, Pallavi and Anita became firmly entrenched on the social circuit. Their illustrious list of clients include families like the Lindemanns (owners of the US-based Metro-Mobile Corporation which manufactures cellular phones and also owners of the largest collection of Cartier jewellery in the world, presently housed in a museum). The Lindemanns flew to India in their private jet. Mr. Burt Manning (Chairman of J. Walter Thompson Associates) and his wife also went to India through OPG, stopping over at Bombay and later at Rajasthan.

What started off as a small business (it wasn't a major investment — they pooled in their resources, Anita brought in her home computer to start with) has today a turnover of over a million dollars. How did it all begin? Pallavi had immigrated to the US 25 years ago and was working with Air India. Anita came to the US nine years ago. She was with the Sheraton, Welcomgroup. They met through their jobs and developed a great working rapport. “We

did a lot of promotions together,” says Anita in her carefully-controlled professional voice, “We vibed so well that we decided to branch out on our own.”

Pallavi's work at Air India involved planning itineraries and dealing with the press, particularly specialised itineraries and customer promotion schemes. “I'd often give letters of introduction to my clients and people I knew, setting up meetings, events and even travelling with them. So I realised that there was a role for a personalised service — the first thing that stayed in their minds was the people they had met,” says Pallavi.

“If we had to send our friends to India, how would we deal with their trip? We would get them to meet with people who they would vibe well with. That's our approach in OPG. Travel is all about people as far as we're concerned. It's not about a monument,” says Anita.

OPG has some exclusive groups coming up early next year, one such being the trustees of the Whitney Museum, one of the richest museums in the US (focussing on American art). “Art lovers are always more alert culturally and they are also very busy peo-