

REVIEWS FOR LIFE AT URBANIA

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Life at Urbania is an eye-opener. As a non-resident at Urbania, I didn't think reading a whole book on Urbania would interest or benefit me. But contrary to my expectation, right from the start, the book wowed me with how small steps undertaken by the residents of Rustomjee Urbaniacommunity in Thane are contributing to more extensive, impactful changes. Hats off to community-led initiatives such as Green Crusaders who are committed to reducing, recycling, and reusing plastic waste. Their model, along with tips provided in the book, can be easily replicated elsewhere. The book indeed is not only a go-to Bible for Urbania dwellers but also akin to the Lonely Planet guide for tourists. The book covers a range of topics that would be a delight to gourmands and nature enthusiasts equally. The description of local delicacies such as misal pav made my mouth water and left an unexpected desire to visit Thane the next time I am in Mumbai. The author has undoubtedly put great effort to provide an exhaustive list of cuisines and restaurants one can avail at Thane. The naturalist/botanist in the author shines through in the book, whether it is the mention of Ayurveda, the excellent listing and description of fauna and flora in the region, or the details on sustainable urban farming. I loved the information on gardening; though not one with a green thumb yet, I would like to tap into the therapeutic effect of gardening. The tips on gardening, as well as the motivation and ideas that a gardening group can provide, all shed light on the general positivity and the possibility for sustainable living even in a crowded urban area like Mumbai. The book will serve as a great coffee table book for all residents at Urbania and Thane. I highly recommend this book to people who would like to know how they can improve community living and contribute to a cleaner, less-toxic world.

DR LAKSHMI RAMACHANDRAN

Singapore,best-selling co-author of Roomies-Foodies, blogger at <https://www.aproductivelife.org>

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This book is a “Thane-logue” and shows a naturalist's knowledge and passion for the local flora and fauna. The author has broken his experiences in his Urbania community and Thane into chapters and provided informative ideas about various themes – commuting, shopping, eating out, especially local fares, etc. Reading this book was a vicarious visit to the local parks, nature preserves, temples, and forts, and I was able to learn about the birds, insects, and plants that are native to this area. Interspersed among all these are tidbits about how to make small changes in your life, be a part of a community gardening club, reduce your environmental footprint, and be an activist on the local front – and be the change you desire in the world.

PADMA KRISHNAN

Denver, Colorado

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Life at Urbania can be aptly referred to as “Life in Thane”. This interesting compilation of articles written by Girdhar Pai offers a truly insider view to living as a part of the new-age Urbania Community in age-old Thane city keeping pace with all the modern developments. The book is carefully divided into various sections, which are appropriately titled. They cover a broad range of topics, ranging from initiatives by responsible citizens who want to re-establish their connect with nature and contribute positively as urban city dwellers, to viewing Thane city from the eye of a local guide. In fact, at a point in time, this book transforms itself into a handy guide for someone who has newly settled down in Thane or is planning the same. Girdhar's in-depth knowledge in the field of horticulture is reflected in sections that cover urban gardening and nature offering a treatise to the reader. This book turns out to be a ready guide for anyone and everyone who wants to know and experience Thane city better and wants to be among committed citizens who want to bring nature back in their courtyard.

DIGANNT DAGHA

Mulund, Mumbai

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The experience of reading Life at Urbania can be summed up in a word: sonder, meaning the realization that each random passer-by is living a life as vivid and complex as your own. It offers us a panoramic view of life in and around this small corner of the world, tucked away in Thane, Maharashtra. I found the book thoroughly enjoyable and informative. It filled me with renewed vigor. In the words of the author, “it is a shining example of what a group of committed people can do.” The moral that sunk in as I read the last chapter was that every action has an outcome, and it is up to us if we want to make it a positive or a negative one.

ANANYA ADIGURU

Delhi,blogger at <https://windowintoanasmind.wordpress.com>

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Life at Urbania is cogent with many diverse subjects just like a well-maintained garden with many plants and flowering shrubs. The vast range of topics, from gardening to food to lakes to transportation to Ayurveda that the author has touched upon, make the book more likable and relatable to anyone. I had enjoyed reading the chapters when they featured as weekly issues of the Times of Urbania newsletter. This book gives information about Thane and its many aspects, which is very hard to find in any other printed book or website. Informing the reader is the real achievement of the book, and this book would be convenient for anyone who stays in Thane or wants to know about Thane. Though Urbania is at the center, subjects covered go beyond Urbania and substantially include details of Thane city.

GURURAJ AGNIHOTRI

Thane

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This book is a versatile one with lots of amazing facts to know about the city of Thane. It speaks about diversified topics, which makes it interesting to the readers. The perspective of the author makes you want to visit the places and experience them. I have stayed in Thane since childhood but was not aware of the biodiversity and the specialities of this city until I read the book. Awaiting more such books from the author to read and know the beauty of Thane

AYESHA KELSHIKAR

Thane

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Life in Mumbai city is 'so full of care that one has no time to stand and stare' (lines I borrow from WH Davies). But Girdhar Pai's Life at Urbaniatells us that 'leisure' too is a state of mind. A refreshingly different kind of travel writing focused on a gated community at Urbania, the book reveals the multiple interests of the author who draws from his vast knowledge, experiences, and insights to paint a clear picture of what it is to 'live' a wholesome, meaningful life in the township in Thane. Initially brought out as a weekly newsletter and meant for the residents of the Urbania township, it has come to encompass a lot more and appeals to all sections, be it future residents, foodies, shoppers, fitness freaks, travel buffs, or green activists. There is something in it for everyone. It reads like a township guide spiced with a bit of history, botany, zoology, philosophy, management, and some insightful exploration, all in one bag.

The chapters on activism lend a sense of purpose to living in the community and doing something for the larger community outside. The book is so absorbing and detailed that even if one has not lived in Thane, one begins to clearly visualize the place and feels a sense of belonging as one reads along. The book is almost conversational in tone and therefore one feels like going back to it for some tips on community living. The book certainly gives one the feel that Urbania is not an unexplored aspect of the city of lakes (which has more than thirty lakes).In the section on nature, I would strongly recommend it as a coffee-table book and particularly for young enthusiasts who seek a quality life in a gated community far from a maddening city life. Well-researched, thought-out, and implemented practices provide tips for the daily hassle of commuting, ways of getting together with a common purpose, be it green activism or pest control or gardening, knowledge of nature and history of the place or just traveling around on purpose or for sheer pleasure.

The book makes an easy, accessible, enjoyable, and enlightening read.

DR SUCHETHA PAI

Bellary

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First off, I think the effort to document life in the township & offering a slice of life in Urbania is novel and commendable. I'm sure this is not just a good read but also useful for quick reference! I like the passion the author brings out when he writes about nature, gardening, parks, and travel.

DEEPAK SUBRAMANI

Azziano, Rustomjee Urbania

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Life at Urbania gives the reader a thorough insight not just into the UrbaniaTownship but also into the city of Thane as well. The book is a compendium of all the things that a resident of Urbania needs to know. Life at Urbania includes details of places to eat, shopping, travel spots, parks, walks, commuting, and activities at Urbania. The author's detailed description of the places in the book helps the reader visualize those spots. The author's engaging style of writing makes the book very interesting and absorbing for the readers and helps them to keep exploring more within the book.

ASHRAF KHAN

Azziano, Rusotmjee Urbania

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Life at Urbania by Girdhar Pai is an engrossing and intriguing encyclopedia of Thane city. As you begin reading the introduction, you can immediately relate to the feeling of how rewarding it is to be a part of Urbania. The book has been thoughtfully divided into sections, which are subdivided into chapters. Each chapter establishes a connect as your progress. One section highlights activism and the selfless contribution of GreenCrusaders, a group of volunteers with a common goal and passion. The author definitely has a green thumb and thanks to his exhaustive proficiency in gardening, he has successfully mentored several amateurs and first-time gardeners. He is suitably titled “The Plant Doctor of Urbania.’ The Seven-S formula in the Gardening Section highlights the must have aspects of gardening. In addition, the author takes you through an amazing nature trail educating you about various kinds of trees, birds, butterflies, lakes, parks, and so on. Another section which I found very resourceful was about the various commuting options available. The section on eating out appealed most to me because I am an absolute foodie. The Smt Gladys Alvarez Marg christened the New FoodMile by the author now features on my priority list of must-visit places, post lockdown. I hope to partake on some delectable savories at this food street newly discovered by Girdhar Pai. I am especially keen to feast on the pani puri at Swingby. Every aspect of Thane city has been meticulously researched, and it is apparent as you read through. Detailed descriptions of historical monuments, forts, religious places, shopping havens, holistically nurturing centers, khaugallis, flea markets, bargain hunters' paradise, and events have been penned down so vividly that it gives you the 'been-there done-that' feeling. This book gives an insight into the unexplored aspects of the city of lakes (which has more than thirty lakes).In the section on nature, the author clarifies myths about plants as air purifiers and he educates us about the self-healing power of nature. This resourceful book is a must-have for everyone who is not native to Thane district and also for the less-informed locals. An absolute blessing for foodies, travelers, students, and nature lovers.

Y ZAFIRA KAGZI

Azziano, Rustomjee Urbania

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Life at Urbania by Girdhar W Pai highlights everything we experience at Urbania and Thane. It is a non-fiction book and has completely original content not found elsewhere. The book shows us the different colors of Thane through the year. The section on activism describes how a small community can come together and bring about a significant change for the betterment of society. The author's description of the Green Crusaders group is inspiring and carries a strong message to the community members to keep it clean and green. For food lovers, the book is like a map to the exquisite range of eateries at Thane where you could satisfy your every craving. The book also highlights Thane's annual art, shopping, and food event, the Sanskruti Arts Festival, a pride for the city's residents. It was amazing to read this book, especially during the lockdown in May 2020. As I was home, this book took me on a virtual journey of the culturally diverse city of Thane and made me nostalgic for the time we used to spend touring and living in this beautiful city during normal times (before lockdown).

PRAGATI PARKAR

Azziano, Rustomjee Urbania

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It's an exhaustive book about Thane. The division of chapters is done category-wise making the book more organized & better. All the chapters in the section on eating out are interesting, especially from foodies perspective. The list of eating joints is good & exhaustive. Parks, shopping, health, etc., all chapters are very well written, & the author shares his immense knowledge about our nearby places through the book.

VANITHA KOUSHIK

Azziano, Rustomjee Urbania

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This book is a great guide for those who are new to Thane. It gives you a complete round of the city, right from the apartment balconies to city's local shops, a trip to a forest or to Urban Farming Zone, Thane city's flyovers to butterfly parks to khau gallis, including some great gardening tips for use at your apartment. I am going to complete my second year at Thane city. When I shifted to Thane I fell in love with its wide, beautiful green roads. The city is pretty different from the south Bombay where we lived prior to relocating to Thane. Thane gives you the cozy feeling of your hometown. The author has penned down the beauty of the city in a very simple and charming way. You can get the feel of Thane city while reading the book. It includes the details of annual festivals also, which are conducted in Thane in different seasons. It's a great guide to people who wish to pursue their passions.

SHILPI SINGHAL

Azziano, Rustomjee Urbania

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It's a good read indeed. It's a commendable and outstanding effort, and one can know almost everything about Urbania as well as Thane. The book is very detailed, and aspects that have been minutely observed by the author have been described in the book.

SONIKA BHUDOLIA

Azziano, Rustomjee Urbania

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Ever need a guidebook to survive home life? Perhaps you'd secretly be glad to get one. Maybe you wish every house you choose to live in came with one... to make living there feel like visiting an exotic monument with decades of history behind it? This charming masterpiece by Mr. Pai does just that – takes away all the impenetrable boredom out of the regulation 127-acre block of concrete and cooks up instead a sumptuous, gratifying idea of an enticing lifestyle. All while leaving behind a vague aftertaste of awe and pride. It casually holds you by the hand and gently urges you to look deeper into the beauty of things that are “local”, “regular”, events that run like clockwork and everything else that you took for granted. It is comforting, for it's all about things you ought to know. It's thrilling because nobody ever wrote a book about where I live! It is a miasma of a diverse history, witty prose, and personal anecdotes? But all it really does is whisper, “YES you have all this at your disposal! Why should that come as a surprise?” The experience threatens to make you want to look no further and feel contented with everything you already have. Does that scare you?

MEENAKSHI SESHAGIRI

Azziano, Rustomjee Urbania

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The book is a definitive guide that unearths great details and is definitely a ready reference and guide to someone new to Thane. The author starts the journey of the reader in the book from where the author stays, theRustomjee Urbania Township. The initiative, The Green Crusaders of Urbania, described in the book, helps keep the community clean & green. The author has also suggested twelve steps to reduce trash and contribute toward Swacchh Bharat. The book also details journeys from RustomjeeUrbania for easier & quicker travel to Thane and nearby places and lists ten hacks for hassle-free commutes. The best part of it all is that the hacks are from the author's real-life experiences. The reader's journey in the book then goes toward exploring wider areas of Thane and prominent developments around Thane, be they the Mumbai Metro or the other infrastructure projects that will transform Thane in the near future. The book also covers places for dining and hangouts and hangouts and hangouts serving traditional Maharashtraian food to other cuisines. One can easily use this book as a definitive guide to Thane's Food Street at Mancharpakadi. The author has also listed his personal initiatives like the Urbania GardeningGroup. The section on gardening gives insight into cultivating plants at home and also shows the author's expertise on pest control. The most vibrant and interesting part of the book is the coverage on lakes of Thane. The author's immense knowledge about his surroundings at RustomjeeUrbania is captured perfectly, and he gives a virtual tour to the reader through Life at Urbania. The author is also known for his love for birds, and he has captured wonderful memories about birds through the seasons at Rustomjee Urbania. The author also delves into what he calls RustomjeeUrbania's best-kept secret, the Urbania Farming Zone, and in that chapter, he has described various types of plants in the zone. In the section on parks, the chapter on the best five parks in Thane helps the reader learn about green places to visit at Thane. I was happy to see the author cover the most sought-after places for all, in the section on shopping, which covers EdenSuper Bazaar to Thane's most sought-after shopping place, the JambhaliNaka. Life at Urbania also covers the forgotten forts of Thane and places of worship and their histories. The author's engaging style of writing keeps the book interesting even during lengthy descriptions of the subjects. For his wonderful articulation and insights from personal exploration, if one word could sum up the author's understanding of Thane and nearby areas it might be “Explorer.”

SANJAY RASTOGI

Azziano, Rustomjee Urbania

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I've never lived in Urbania. And I cannot relate to everything that the author writes. Yet I have read his essays on life at Urbania regularly through his weekly newsletter. It's almost weird! Mr Pai's pure zest for life shows in his writing. His glimpses into otherwise mundane things are marvelously exciting. Who'd have thought driving through Thane could be exciting too! It has been many years since I lived in Mumbai... and all I often remember is the mad rush to get somewhere. Mr Pai inspires me to move back! To the same rush. Except a promise of it being enjoyable this time.

ANUP PURANIK

Hong Kong

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Girdhar has been very dedicated and disciplined in publishing every edition of his Times of Urbania weekly newsletter, and he has beautifully compiled all the issues in one book, Life at Urbania. For us, moving from Hiranandani Gardens, Powai, to RustomjeeUrbania at Thane in 2018 was a very difficult decision, and Girdhar'sTimes of Urbania was quite helpful in knowing our surroundings, and I have read almost all issues of this newsletter. “An appeal not to feed pigeons” where he writes: “In our business, we call pigeons, flying rats, as pigeons do whatever rats do, but by remaining in the air and on the wing” shows his deep knowledge & experience of his industry where he is coming from. It is very true though many people are quite sentimental about feeding pigeons, but that does not change the fact. I am not a great fovee but still I loved the chapter “A definitive guide to Thane's food street” in the book. After reading it, I didn't even know that there is a Khau Galli in Thane at Mancharpakadi. I was so curious that one weekend evening I asked my driver to take me to this place and I was surprised how lively it was, though a bit crowded, but I enjoyed my time there. We saw some policemen clamping the cars, but it was still OK, as I had a good bite at eateries there. And finally, “Trees of Urbania” gives me now some sense while I go around for jogging. There are many more, and in sum the book is a beautiful collection of almost everything we have in our surroundings with some bonus of gyanon Ayurveda and other topics.I congratulate him for his awesome creation and wish him great success in coming days!

RANJEET KUMAR

Resident, Rustomjee Urbania

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At the outset, I would like to declare that I am not a very avid reader and don't venture much outside the realm of medical journals and textbooks. So, when Mr Girdhar Pai asked me to read Life at Urbania, I was a bit reluctant. This was also because during the lockdown, I was all tied up amidst household chores, online consultations and a medical journal article, which I was working on. But I am very happy that I decided to go on a journey exploring the happenings around Urbania and Thane through this book. I must admit I really enjoyed reading every chapter. It made me discover so many new things about my own city where I have lived all my life! The chapters of the book were so relatable and fun to read that you won't feel like keeping it down. The book has covered a wide variety of topics ranging from civic issues like waste recycling to creating awareness about social and environmental issues like saving electricity with LED lights and more usage of public transport to reduce pollution. There is a lot of practical information on subjects like the various modes of traveling to and from Urbania, various food joints all over Thane, etc. The author has an immense knowledge on the indigenous fruits, flowers, vegetables, and trees local to the Thane region that no Wikipedia can provide! All in all, I would recommend this fun way to boost your general knowledge about the city to each and every Thane-ite!

ADITI BHAGAT

Resident, Rustomjee Urbania

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Life at Urbania is not a book but a guide for people living in and aroundThane. It simplifies your life across all aspects of living and provides you a detailed insight into the various services in the vicinity. As I am relatively new to Thane, for me, this book doubled up as an encyclopedia that shared the rich historical background of the monuments in the area. The most enjoyable part for me, though, was the section on the local food stalls. Being a foodie and a fan of the local cuisine, reading the book, I was able to visit the hidden jewels of Thane's eateries and sample the food there myself and was amazed at the variety that they have to offer. Overall, I would state that this is not a book, rather it's an encyclopedia of Thane and is a must read for people living in Thane.

MOHIT MALOO, RESIDENT

Rustomjee Urbania