

# Camping trip to an island in the umiam lake

Sport & Tourism



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

uring a warm summer in the 1990s, the school I studied at took the seventh graders on a camping trip to an island in the Umiak Lake. On the first evening of our trip, we pitched our tents and helped prepare dinner. Once everything was set up under a starry sky by the lake, we sat around a bonfire to share mystery and ghost stories. That's how many of our evenings on these trips unfolded. Every night, we sat for hours listening to each other's stories, our voices punctuated by the sounds of crickets and gargling toads. There's something about a good ghost or mystery story that has the ability to hook us much faster than other genres.

I've always been drawn to mystery stories and when given a choice, I'd pick a mystery novel over an autobiography, drama, or romance novel. Lately, I've been wondering what draws me to the mystery genre and why I find it so much more compelling than most other genres. While browsing at a bookstore, if I read an interesting synopsis of a mystery novel's back cover, I find myself buying the book.

An alluring feature of good mystery novels is that they tend to be engrossing. Often, while reading mystery novels, curiosity gets the better of us and we can't help ourselves from taking a quick peek at the last chapter of the book. Many a time, I've scrambled through to the last pages of a book with sweaty fingers and then quickly turned back to my original page fearing I'd read too much.

One night at boarding school, I woke up around midnight to use the washroom. I noticed the light on in my cousin's room. As I approached it, I saw that my cousin was lying in bed, reading a book. Initially, the sound of

my footsteps startled her but as she saw me, she let out a sigh of relief and exclaimed in a whisper, “ You scared me!” She was clutching a copy of Sidney Sheldon’s Tell Me Your Dreams. She explained to me in her logical, elder-sister voice that she was just a few pages away from finding out the truth behind the murders and she couldn’t bear to put the book away yet. We both knew the options – reading through the night or missing jogging hour at 6 a. m. It was an easy choice.

One of the leading factors that draw us to mystery novels is the adrenaline rush that comes from reading them. However, over the years, this genre of books has come to mean a lot more to me. Many of these books have helped me get through some of my most trying days. Whether it was dealing with a broken heart, recuperating from an illness, or surviving the loneliness of the first few months of moving to a new city, mystery novels have kept me company.

A couple of years ago when I read Gone Girl by Gillian Flynn, I was intrigued by how cleverly multiple narratives were used and the complex, layered character of the protagonist that seemed terrifyingly real. I felt lucky I was not Nick Dunne! While reading mystery and suspense novels, I often have a habit of placing myself in the protagonist’s shoes and compared to what they were experiencing, my problems always seemed smaller.

Recently, when my mother visited me in Bangalore, I bought her a few books to keep her company while I was at work. I thought a mystery book would keep her occupied and grabbed a book by Mary Higgins Clark. I found that my assessment was correct and, in a very short period of time, she was

hooked. The next day, I was surprised to see her reading only intermittently. On being asked, she told me that she was reading slowly and savouring the book because she didn't want it to get over! On my way back from work that day, I bought her two more books by Clark and soon, she was back to her regular pace of reading without having to worry about running out of reading material.

If you've grown up with siblings or cousins, you may have learned the hard way that reading mystery novels comes with the risk of another person giving away the ending "just for fun" or for the sole purpose of picking a fight. When we are excited, thrilled, or scared, our brain releases dopamine and this helps strengthen the bonds among people sharing the same experience. Although I was always close to my cousins, our time spent reading mystery novels together, sharing similar feelings of nervousness and later, relief as the plot unfolded, has helped us develop a stronger bond. It helped us not only to know a different side of each other but also made us feel like we shared a little piece of another world.