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INDIA

NEW DELHI: The Hub, Plot 66, Okhla Industrial Estate,
Phase-III, New Delhi-110020

MUMBAI: Ganga Jamuna Sangam, A/901, 14th Road, Bandra
West, Mumbai-400052

CHENNAI: No. 145, New 2, 8th Floor, Old, Nungambakkam
High Rd, Nungambakkam, Chennai, Tamil Nadu-
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KOLKATA: 1st Floor, 132A, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee
Rd, Anami Sangha, Kalighat, Kolkata, West
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BENGALURU: 1203, 12th Floor, B Wing, Mittal Tower, M.G. Road,
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SINGAPORE: 15 Scotts Road, #04-10, Singapore 228218

HONG KONG: Unit 1006, 10/F, Capital Centre, No. 151
Gloucester Road, Wan Chai, Hong Kong

MALAYSIA: Mercu Aspire Tower 1, Unit 18-01 & 18-023, Jalan
Bangsar, KL Eco City, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
59200

INTERNATIONAL NETWORK

UNITED KINGDOM

Chris Cutler
TTG Media Limited Friars House
160 Blackfriars Road London
SE1 8EZ England, United Kingdom
T: (44-20) 3714 4102
E: ccutler@ttgmedia.com

EUROPE

ITALY | GERMANY | FRANCE
Barbara Rebora
Italian Exhibition Group Spa
(TTG Italia) Foro Buonaparte
74-20121 Milano, Italy
T: (39-02) 8068 9242
E: barbara.rebora@iegexpo.it

NORTH AMERICA

Natalya Meytin
World Media Inc.19 West 36th Street,
7th Floor New York, NY 10018
T: 212-244-5610 Main
E: Natalyameytin@worldmediaonline.com

NORTH ASIA

SOUTH KOREA | JAPAN
SS Song
First Media Services Corp. #1514, Hwang Hwa B/D, 320,
Gangnam-daero, Gangnam-gu, Seoul, Korea 06252
T: (82-2) 363 3591 M (82) 10 5234 3590 F (82-2) 738 7970
E: fmsc3590@gmail.com, fmsc@unitel.co.kr

For editorial queries, write to editorial.airindia@apxluxury.com
For advertisement queries, write to sales@apxluxury.com

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EDITOR'S NOTE

India is not just a destination. It is an emotion. A melting pot of noise, chaos, and crowds, but also of culture and community. And it has to be celebrated in all its hues—there is definitely an air about India!

In our Cover Story this month, we pay homage to this spirit and look at India through a different lens—of five senses. Padma Bhushan AR Rahman talks to us about the sounds of India that have inspired him; Padma Shri Chef Sanjeev Kapoor believes rice is the one culinary link that binds us together; textile designer Sanjay Garg explores our weaving legacy; our story on *ittars* delves into how the little vials serve as harbingers of memory; and costume designer, curator, and textile revivalist Sandhya Raman takes us inside the world of classical dance.

Inside, join us as we venture to Alappuzha to see the town coming alive as it prepares for the annual Nehru Trophy Boat Race. We give you a peek into some of India's exquisite handlooms, whisk you off to Guwahati, called the 'gateway to north-east India', and urge you to visit two exhibitions both celebrating our culture—the sā Ladakh Biennale (the world's highest regenerative art, climate, and community event) and *The Light and the Lotus: Relics of the Awakened One* with the successfully-repatriated sacred Piprahwā relics of Lord Buddha (in Delhi).

Bringing the world closer to India is our aim and we have become the first Indian airline to implement the government's hub-and-spoke service, aimed to seamlessly connect more domestic cities with international destinations. Our Easy Connect service debuted from Varanasi and will cover over 10 cities in a phased roll-out. This will fundamentally change the way Indian travellers access global destinations.

Even as we take strides to forge new connections, we continue to uphold our time-honoured traditions and celebrate our legacies. And with that, dear guests, we wish you a happy Independence Day.

Happy Reading!

— **Namaste.ai** Editorial Team

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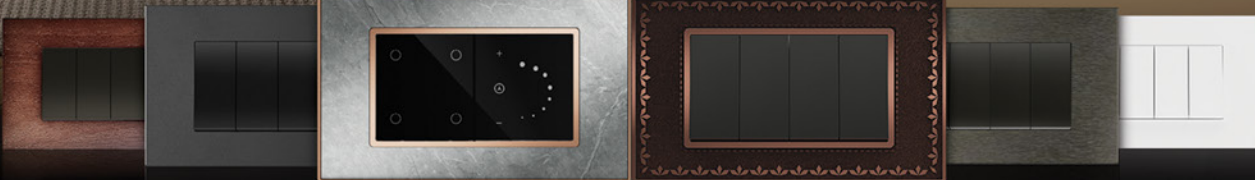
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define India

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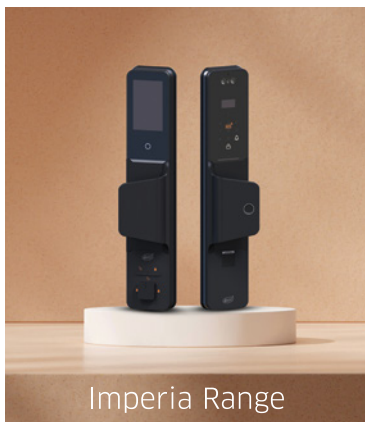
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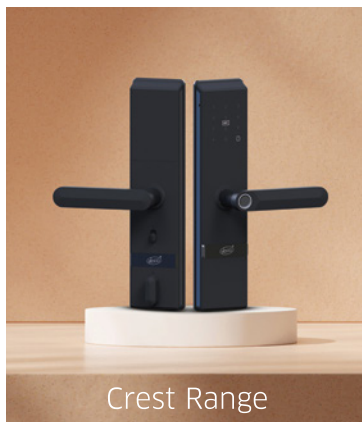
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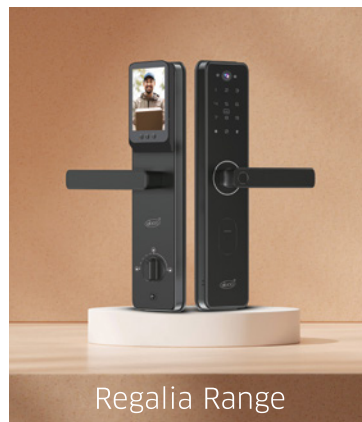
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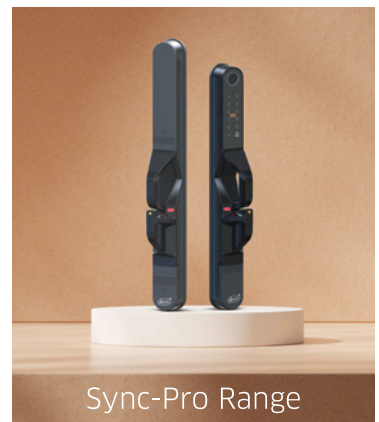
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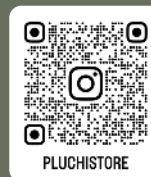


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CONTRIBUTORS

→ Sanjeev Kapoor

@sanjeevkapoor

A globally-renowned chef, Sanjeev is also an entrepreneur, author, and TV personality. A Padma Shri awardee, he is the co-founder of Wonderchef, the founder of FoodFood, and the visionary behind restaurants like Signature and The Yellow Chilli. Here, the culinary icon tells us why rice is integral to Indian cuisine. **page 34**



→ Nishiraj A Baruah

@homestaydibrugar

From being a Delhi-based lifestyle journalist, travel writer, and editor with some of the country's leading English dailies, Nishiraj returned to his hometown of Dibrugarh, Assam, nine years ago to establish the city's first homestay, Homestay By The Tea Garden. Here, he chalks out a guide to making the most of Guwahati in a day. **page 58**



→ Suman Agarwal

@selfcarebysuman

An Oxford-certified nutritionist, fitness expert, and founder of SelfCare, Suman has guided over 20,000 individuals—from Bollywood personalities to business leaders. She shares practical insights on the habits that can help you live a longer, healthier life. **page 94**



→ Sanjay Garg

@raw_mango

Founder of indigenous textile brand Raw Mango, Sanjay is a textile designer known for reimagining handwoven saris through contemporary design. A NIFT and IICD alumnus, his work blends craft revival, cultural inquiry, and fearless experimentation. He writes about India's tactile legacy. **page 22**



→ Pooja Dhingra

@poojadhingra

One of India's most celebrated pastry chefs, Pooja was among the first to popularise French-style desserts in the country. With seven bestselling books to her name, she shares her favourite sweet treat recommendations in Paris. **page 52**

→ Soumya Vajpayee

@soumyavajpayee16

A Mumbai-based award-winning journalist and former senior editor with numerous publications, Soumya covers music, lifestyle, entertainment, and the arts. A TEDx speaker, she is known for her exclusive interviews, and in this issue, she talks to Oscar-winning music composer AR Rahman on the rhythm of India. **page 16**



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“Before divinity I seek silence”

Padma Bhushan **AR Rahman** on the rhythm of India and the sounds that have inspired and shaped his musical trajectory

words by **Soumya Vajpayee**



AR Rahman performing
at the 83rd Annual
Academy Awards held
at the Kodak Theatre
(2011) in Hollywood,
California, USA



If you had to map India only through sound, what would your morning-to-night soundtrack be?

For me, growing up in Chennai, an early morning was always a symphony of familiar sounds. In my hometown, the day would begin with the Soolamangalam Sisters singing *Kausalya Suprabhatam* from a temple or home. Alongside that came the azaan, the sound of vehicles gradually waking up, and around eight in the morning, the vegetable vendors moving through the streets, almost singing the names of brinjals, tomatoes, and onions in their own unique rhythm. By nine, during school-drop time, the city would erupt into a chorus of chaotic horns, and that, for me, was the sound of morning.

My mother would wake me up everyday around 8.30am, saying, "Wake up, son. You have to go to the studio." I had started working at a very young age, so breakfast, usually idli and chutney, would already be waiting. Then I would head to work.

Whatever I happened to be working on—a folk song, a club song, a sad melody or background music for a film—the day would unfold through Reel 1, Reel 2, Reel 3, Reel 4. In the afternoon, a bell would ring for lunch, and then the story would begin again. The music would resume, musicians would jam, and conversations would move to ragas, ghazals, and all kinds of musical ideas.

By evening, when the session ended, the same traffic horns would accompany my journey home. The television would come on, and the famous Doordarshan *shehnai* tune would fill the house. Night had its own mood—the lingering sounds of traffic, the city gradually falling silent, and then, for me, a return to music. I





would go back to the studio and work through the night, often until 5am. Then I would sleep, wake up again at 8.30am, and the cycle would repeat. That was the rhythm of my life.

Is there a sound from your childhood in Chennai that still unconsciously enters your work today?

The sounds of trains and autorickshaws. I lived in a humble neighbourhood, so the sounds around me were incredibly raw and real—people wailing, arguments, babies crying. Then there were the sounds of celebration—the firecrackers of Diwali, and during Pongal, especially on Bhogi, the drums that would come through the streets.

As a musician, what are the sound inspirations that you feel are peculiar to India, and are missing in the West?

Coming from the South, I think the beauty of our traditions is reflected in the sounds that surround us. The voice of [KJ] Yesudas *ji* would be

heard on every occasion—whether at an Ayyappan temple singing *Harivarasnam* or in devotional gatherings. Then there was MS Subbulakshmi, whose songs became a part of everyday life. From the *dargahs*, one would hear the *Na'at*, *Ya Nabi Salam Alaika*, and from the *masjids*, the *azaan*.

Carnatic music was always present too. In places like Mylapore, you could hear concerts unfolding in ragas like *Sahana* and *Todi*. The sounds of the *naadaswaram* and *thavil* at weddings were especially magnificent, and the performances of ragas that, in my mind, the South interprets in a very unique way are *Todi*, *Amritavarshini*, *Bhairavi*, and *Sindhu Bhairavi*. These are the sounds that truly define where I come from. And then there is the sound of the sea. Growing up in Chennai, we would go to the beach quite often. The sound of the waves was incredibly inspiring.

Do you feel this noise and chaos is a blessing for us Indians in a way,



TOP AND BOTTOM

Growing up in Chennai, Rahman visited the beach quite often and finds the sound of the waves inspirational; The artiste fondly remembers the sound of bells (from temples or lunch bells).

FACING PAGE

(top to bottom) The sounds of autorickshaws, trains, and street vendors are reminiscent of his childhood



TOP AND BOTTOM

Musicians play the naadaswaram (right) and the percussion instrument thavil (left); Indian classical vocalist Kumar Gandharva is one of the musicians whose legacy we cherish, says Rahman.

belong to. Faith, undeniably, is a unifying force, and every faith has its own unique music—from temple bells and ceremonial drums to the *naadaswaram* and *shehnai*, from the *azaan* to church choirs sung in Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, Hindi, and other languages. Then there are school choirs, children singing patriotic songs like the national anthem, *bhajans* or the words of Rabindranath Tagore, “Where the mind is without fear...”. That has always been one of my favourites.

Today, we are also seeing a modern India emerge, where DJs are remixing traditional sounds in fascinating ways. It is interesting to see how this has gained international recognition—artists like DJ Snake collaborating with local musicians and how a DJ from a small Indian village can fuse traditional elements with contemporary music to reach a global audience.

As a composer, do you see that as noise to filter out or as an orchestra to conduct?

As a composer, all of us naturally seek silence. We seek serene places that help settle the mind. In cities, that is often difficult because there is always a certain amount of noise around us. If there is one thing I would be critical of, it is excessive honking. Thankfully, people are slowly beginning to realise that it is a form of pollution, especially for those who are walking on the roads. At the same time, there are sounds that feel deeply connected to life in India—the sound of cows, goats, and roosters in the morning. And the beauty of India is that we always have a choice. It is such a vast and beautiful country. If we want



considering they always reflect a sense of being alive?

Of course! Every Indian city I have visited has its own sound. The horns, the chaos, the people—they bring life to the whole city; they bring soul to our existence. I have been to places abroad, where there is so much infrastructure and yet, you may see just two people crossing the road. It feels empty. Whereas in India, the buses are always bustling, the trains are always packed with people, religious places are filled with devotees, and even schoolchildren travel together in lively groups in autorickshaws. I see that as a blessing, because every life born into this world is a blessing. Here, we see that visually every day. We interact with those blessings, through a smile, through love, through hope, and through the way they cheer for your art.

India has a rhythm to its chaos—from a peacock in the rain to people at the ghats washing their clothes or the tractors of Punjab. What is your take on the sounds that embody the country?

Every state has its own traditions. Perhaps what unites us is the idea of faith, regardless of which religion we

Every Indian city I have visited has its own sound.

The horns, the chaos, the people—they bring life to the whole city; they bring soul to our existence.



peace, we can go to our mountains or to the countryside. We have the beauty of choice to choose how much of the noise we want to let in.

Many of your works—*Kun Faya Kun*, *Khwaja Mere Khwaja*, *Maula Wa Sallim*—are deeply spiritual. When you are scoring divinity, do you start with silence, a raga or a real-world sound like temple bells or the sea?

When I compose something spiritual, the first thing I seek is not a particular instrument or sound, but a settled mind. If the mind is already crowded with thoughts, it becomes difficult to absorb the emotion or the challenge of the composition. What emerges from that state can become coloured by personal distractions rather than the essence of what the music requires. I try to do that simply by breathing, closing my eyes, and allowing the mind to calm down. Meditation can help bring clarity. The inner silence makes the direction clearer.

If you had to leave behind a ‘sound capsule’ of India for 2125, what would you choose and why?

I am a big fan of the *naadaswaram*. I have always admired its majesty and the extraordinary way musicians bring out unusual ragas on it. Even when heard from a distance, it has the ability to move you deeply. The *naadaswaram* and *thavil* are extraordinary elements of South Indian music, carrying both power and emotion. I feel they have immense potential, especially when thoughtfully blended with Western instruments, while still retaining their original soul.

What is one Indian instrument or folk sound you believe the world still has not discovered properly, and why?

Any tradition that has lived for thousands of years survives because there is a certain soul in it. Whether it is a religious, folk or classical tradition, it has been protected because people felt its value.

Our classical music—Hindustani and Carnatic—and our folk traditions contain extraordinary melodies. Musicians across different eras have explored its depths and taken it much further through improvisation. Today, we continue to cherish the legacy of artistes like Kumar

Gandharva, [Ustad] Bade Ghulam Ali Khan *sahab*, [Pandit] Ajoy Chakrabarty, and Pandit Bhimsen Joshi. It is important to preserve these selfless renditions that come from a source of inspiration—perhaps from the divine—and carry them forward for future generations. Our classic tradition should be protected and passed on to the younger generation.

THE RHYTHM OF AIR INDIA

Air India's signature track defining its sonic identity, *India Takes Flight*, is composed by Grammy winner Shankar Mahadevan in collaboration with London's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. *A jugalbandi*, it is a joint effort by celebrated artistes—Taufiq Qureshi and Prasoon Joshi—and is performed by over 40 artistes. The track embodies *Yaman*, a timeless Indian classical raga known to effortlessly captivate the hearts and minds of audiences, and reflects the sound of a bold, vibrant, and confident India.

"Touch has an honesty"



Fabric is more than just cloth—it is what we associate with culture and identity, says textile designer and revivalist **Sanjay Garg**

How do you know something is real if you cannot touch it? Every other sense can be tricked. A play of light can make us see water in a desert. White noise apps summon warm, crackling fireplaces to help us fall asleep. Perfumers play hide-and-seek with our memories all the time. Cola companies swear on their bottom lines that they can eliminate sugar from your cola without actually changing how it tastes.

Touch has an honesty. It assures us that what we are seeing is actually there. Touch is how I understand my context. If I feel cold, I reach for something that gives me warmth (usually a pashmina shawl). If I am feeling hot, I want to touch something that brings me relief.

As a textile designer, I am always thinking about the way fabric feels against the skin. It is part of my job to think about its weight and how coarse or smooth it feels. How will it feel when it is being put on? What will it evoke when it is being taken off? The added challenge is that different parts of the body have different sensitivities. Fabric, as a medium, is deeply familiar—it is something we touch, wear, and associate with culture and identity.

Indian handloom traditions have developed in conversation with our local climates, aesthetic preferences, and mythologies. For instance, Bengali cotton is woven in the early mornings because you need the right type of moisture in the air. So what you get is this soft fabric that is lovely to work

with—perfect for the Indian summer. Banarasi brocade, on the other hand, is woven for ceremonial use. *Zari* is woven into the fabric on the loom itself, making the embroidery an inextricable part of it.

The *mashru* tradition was developed as a response to cultural mores of the time. Islamic customs discouraged the use of silk by men, which was considered a luxury, so weavers developed a fabric with two 'faces': a smooth, lustrous silk on the outer face with soft cotton inside. There are textures and surfaces that you can only create on a handloom, and India has a wealth of these techniques that we are still exploring and discovering.

A brush with *mashru* will feel different on the neck than the thigh. A cotton sari will feel different in May than it will in August. That is how complex our bodies are, and at Raw Mango, we are constantly designing to address this complexity. It is why our garments are always lined with *sateen* which has a buttery smooth texture. So, no matter what the fabric is on the outside, the garment is easy to use.

Textiles, in general, and specifically handloom textiles, soften with age. This is why some of our customers choose, not the newest garment in the store but something that has been living on the racks. You might notice this love for aged textiles with T-shirts, which are more comfortable when they have been lived in. Unlike machine-woven textiles, which almost always end as dusters in Indian homes, handloom loves time and time loves handloom in return.

When fibres are woven into yarn, they are twisted around each other for strength. The fibres are then starched for solidity, aligned on the loom, and woven into fabrics. With time, both fibres and fabric settle. The starch gets washed off with continued use. Even if you know nothing about handloom, you can tell the difference between something fresh off the loom and one



TOP AND BOTTOM

Tabu in a Banarasi brocade lehenga featuring floral motifs in gold while the sheer organza dupatta has a flora and fauna jaal with silver hand-embroidered zardozi and aari work (Raw Mango); Mashru is a traditional handwoven fabric that blends silk and cotton.

FACING PAGE

This Raw Mango outfit has a sheer organza odhani with zardozi and aari embroidered motifs that draw from the inlay work seen in Rajputana and Mughal architecture

that has been worn for years. The touch will give it away.

One of the earliest textiles I fell in love with was *mashru ikat*, precisely because of its quality of touch. Its surface is akin to glass. The textile is a tactile treat, changing in layers with lustrous silk on its external side and breathable cotton inside.

But touch is beyond what meets the hand. It does not necessarily represent something physical. You can touch someone with a wistful gaze. The last thing that touched my heart was one of Kumar Bhargava's *Nirgun bhajans*. These songs, inspired by the works of Kabir, express spirituality and devotion without assigning attributes (*gunas*) to the divine. Formless and powerful, they are touched through introspection.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the author



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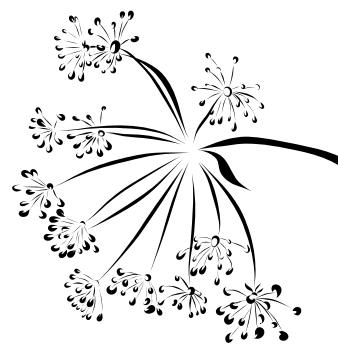


The redolence of home

Indian *ittars* preserve far more than
fragrance—they bottle the stories, soul,
and belonging of a nation

words by
Shrabasti Anindita Mallik





TOP TO BOTTOM
Fresh roses are plucked to be taken to distillers at dawn; Mogra (a variety of jasmine) ittar is known for its calming properties; Saffron is one of the few spices also used to make ittar.

FACING PAGE
The highly-fragrant Damask rose is distilled to create ruh gulab ittar



When I moved to Delhi a little over a decade ago to build a career, I packed a suitcase full of hopes and dreams—and, on my mother's insistence, a small vial of *ittar*. Young and naive, I failed to comprehend the value. "One day, you will," my mother had smiled as the train chuffed away from Kolkata's Howrah station.

A few months ago, I came across that long-forgotten little bottle. One whiff of the pale yellow liquid and my childhood flashed before my eyes—dark grey clouds, sprawling orchards, collecting unripe mangoes that the strong monsoon winds had shaken from the tree, the first drops of rain, that one unforgettable "*sonda gondho*" (petrichor), and then the race back home. Never before had I been so acutely aware of the deep resonance that one single fragrance (*gili mitti* or *gill*) can potentially carry—one that unfolds memories and feelings tucked away in a quiet corner of your being.

This led me to question the relationship between memories and fragrances, especially ones as intrinsically rooted to India as *ittars*. My search for an answer first led me to Giti Datt, an Australian National University PhD scholar and perfumist, whose research delves into the cultural and historical significance of *ittars* in northern India. "I think for some people, fragrance is linked very much to identity. And beyond identity, to a place, because *ittars* capture moments that happen organically in a place. Like the experience of monsoon is very specific to where you are from and once you immortalise the moment of the first monsoon rain by

THE PROCESS

Traditionally, *ittars* are prepared with botanicals and spices. And the time-honoured way to derive pure *ittar* is through the hydro-distillation process, using the *deg* and *bhapka*. The process is time consuming and labour intensive.

- Flowers are hand-picked at the crack of dawn, sometimes even before the first ray of sun appears, and sent to the distilleries.
- They are tipped into large copper cauldrons (*deg*) filled with water and fired. The process is overseen by a master distiller, who carefully monitors the heat and the pace of the distillation over many hours.
- As the water heats up, fragrant steam rises through the *deg* and travels into a receiving vessel or *bhapka* (containing sandalwood oil, considered the best carriers for *ittar*), which is kept cool by being immersed in water.
- As the vapour condenses, the aromatic compounds are captured to create *ittar*.

— Krati Tandon,
co-founder of Kannauj-based
Boond Fragrances



Top to bottom: Shweta Bose/Surkar Raahi Parfums; Shutterstock



capturing it in a bottle, you carry it with you and it becomes an indelible part of not just your identity but also of the place you call home," she explains.

Long before modern perfumery, fragrance was woven into our daily lives—the smoky sweetness of temple incense, the scent of *raat ki rani* (night-blooming jasmine) drifting through humid evenings, the earthy coolness of vetiver mats, cardamom and cloves escaping kitchen windows, tea gardens after rain, saffron fields in Kashmir, and marigold markets before festivals. Swapnil Pathak Sharma, founder of Kannauj (Uttar Pradesh)-based Zighrana perfumers adds, "*Ittar* was born from this intimate relationship with nature. Traditional perfumers in Kannauj did not try to create artificial fragrances; they captured the scents that people already loved and preserved them in sandalwood oil so they could be experienced throughout the year."

It is perhaps this deep association with memory and place that is drawing a new generation of curious, well-travelled Indians towards *ittars*. Yet nostalgia alone does not explain their renewed appeal. Sitting with Mukul Gundi, the sixth generation perfumer of the 1816-established Gulab Singh Johrimal at their store in Dariba Kalan, Old Delhi, I learn that, "Smelling good





and distinct is a necessity for some and luxury for others. Fragrance, today, has become an essential part of our lifestyle and the way we present ourselves daily. While our older customers continue to remain loyal to a fault, we do have a younger bunch of people coming in, wanting to know the alchemy behind *ittar*. Although they still look for synthetic fragrances at times, their emerging curiosity of traditional *ittar* fragrances is heartening.”

But why such renewed interest in Indian perfumes? Why now? The answer lies, again, in our relationship with nature. In earlier times, nature provided us with everything—seasonal fruits, flowers, spices, and produce. “We were able to not just manage and balance ourselves in those seasons but at times, also augment the atmosphere of those seasons and what they evoke,” Datt points out, adding, “But through colonisation, industrialisation, globalisation, and urbanisation, we have become increasingly alienated from nature and this, in part, is what now drives people’s interest in natural aromatics.” Alongside this renewed connection is a growing appreciation for sustainable choices and a renewed pride in India’s artisanal traditions that is driving this demand.

And this demand, *ittar* manufacturers are hoping, will encourage more *karigars* (craftsmen) to enter the industry. Owing to the rising preference for synthetic perfumes, the young generation of



ITTAR IN A NUTSHELL

Most popular fragrances: *Khus* (vetiver), *gulab* (Indian rose), *mogra* and *chameli* (both varieties of jasmine), sandalwood, saffron, *nargis* (daffodils).

Most expensive: According to Gulab Singh Johrimal’s Mukul Gundi, it is Ruh Gulab, priced at ₹10,000 for a 2.5ml vial. Why? “Because it takes 5,000kg of the flower to distil just 1kg of *ittar*.”

karigar families were not interested in continuing the legacy and chose more sustainable jobs, which was a significant setback. “But we hope the new generation of young buyers would encourage these craftsmen to learn this art,” says Mouzzam Mirza of Hyderabad-based Mirza Perfumes.

TOP AND BOTTOM

Flowers and natural ingredients are distilled in copper cauldrons called deg; A traditional ittar distilling unit in Kannauj (Uttar Pradesh), known as the perfume capital of India.

FACING PAGE

(clockwise from top left) Sandalwood and rose ittars are popular in India; Gill ittar is created by hydro-distilling baked clay; Dried vetiver roots are used to make *khus* ittar.

Perhaps that is what makes an authentic *ittar* unlike any other fragrance. Beyond its aroma lies something far more enduring—a landscape, a season, and a memory. As Divy Gupta, co-founder of Raahi Parfums (a Kannauj-based fragrance house), puts it, “Authentic *ittar* is not just fragrance—they are living expressions of India’s botanical heritage and perfumery legacy, and offer something that cannot be manufactured: a sense of place. It carries the character of the season, the soil, the flower, and the hands of the artisan who distilled it. While a laboratory can recreate a scent, it cannot recreate the cultural memory, craftsmanship, and centuries of tradition behind it.”

My little vial no longer lies forgotten in a corner. It now sits within easy reach, not because I wear it every day, but because ever so often, I uncork it and let one breath carry me home. My mother was right. It was never merely an *ittar* she tucked into my luggage all those years ago; it was a piece of home, waiting patiently until I was old enough to understand what it truly meant.

The Dancing Eye

India through a different lens—colour, costume, and classical dance

words by **Sandhya Raman**

To see India through its classical dances is to experience its colours, weaves, and traditions in motion. While costume reflects the identity of a region through fabrics and timeless craftsmanship, the dancer's movement brings these textiles alive, adding new dimensions of emotion and curiosity. A journey begins where the palette becomes the first storyteller and costume opens the door to a mystical world, creating a synesthetic experience where sight awakens imagination and memory.





Sattriya

The quiet radiance of Sattriya unfolds through Assam's prized Muga silks and paat silks. The refined textiles, intricate motifs, and graceful movement in the simply-tied dhoti, a paguri, a chadar, and kanchi reveal a heritage where costume carries the philosophy of preserving traditions. Soft off-white, radiant gold, and natural hues reflect the spiritual serenity of the Majuli island, where beauty lies in restraint. Every thread finds expression through pure simplicity.



Kathakali

This dance form introduces us to a universe where colour and theatrical movement create magic. Painted faces, the kireedam (crown), wood-carved abharanam, and the voluminous costumes layered in soft handloom fabrics create a striking image. The uthareeyam, sported majestically around the neck in a palette of red, black, and white, transforms the dancer into a living, mythological figure. Every layer is crisply starched and carefully tied to create an elevated and dramatic silhouette, reflecting Kerala's mastery of this magnificent dance form.



Manipuri

Here, movement becomes almost weightless. The distinctive wrap skirt, phanek—a sacred garment—with delicate motifs, wrapped along with a Moirang phée dupatta (innaphi), create a visual harmony. Every movement reflects Manipur's relationship between weaving and the poetry of expression. Manipuri dance is known for the Raas Leela, performed in an ornate skirt called potloi, paired with innaphi.

Kathak

This is where elegance emerges as energy, transforming textiles into movement through flowing silks, Banarasi brocades, and tissues in iridescent jewel-toned angrakhas. The circular geometry of the costume mirrors the dancer's chakkars, creating a visual rhythm before the story unfolds. Every swirl reveals north India's rhythmic artistic traditions, where poetry, architecture, music, and weaving come together in celebration.



Kuchipudi

Mythology is reimagined in this powerful dance form that celebrates the brilliance of Andhra Pradesh's textile traditions. Vibrant silk kacham dhotis in Pochampally ikats, Uppada, and Gadwal, enriched with luminous zari, beautifully portray the essence of theatrical storytelling. Rooted in temple traditions and expressive dance drama, Kuchipudi opens a visual journey into Deccan heritage.



Chhau



A landscape where martial energy and storytelling converge through bold movements, dramatic masks, and handwoven textiles that transform the dancer into a warrior, deity or mythical being. Its powerful geometry and visual intensity celebrate the folk traditions of eastern India. Late Astad Deboo (left) brought calmness in his interpretation of the art form.

Mohiniyattam

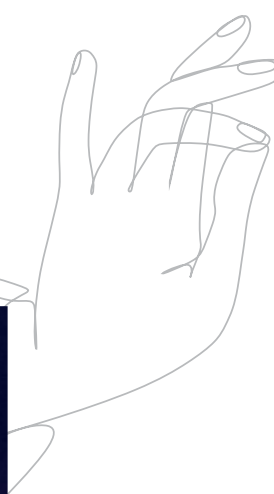
Embodying the beauty of Kerala's kasavu textiles, Mohiniyattam dancers are draped in ivory and gold njuri pavadai (a pleated skirt), creating a visual language of mellow grace. The simplicity of its cotton costume allows the movement to breathe, reflecting the elegance of feminine expression. Here, restraint becomes a powerful aesthetic, revealing how the most subtle colours can leave the deepest visual impressions.



ENGAGING INSTRUCTIONS

Air India's inflight safety video titled *Safety Mudras*, seamlessly integrates safety instructions with *mudras* in eight diverse dance forms: Bharatanatyam, Bihu, Kathak, Kathakali, Mohiniyattam, Odissi, Ghoomar, and Giddha, developed in collaboration with the visionary trio of Prasoon Joshi, Shankar Mahadevan, and Bharatbala. For centuries, Indian classical dance and folk-art forms have served as mediums of storytelling and instruction, and the video is meticulously crafted to showcase the diversity and depth of Indian culture, while delivering essential safety information.





Geometry and devotion become inseparable in this dance form, bringing alive the architectural precision of South Indian temples through Kanchipuram silks. Rich textures, vibrant colours, threads of gold, pleated fans, and intricate kemp jewellery create a distinct visual identity. Textile, body and architecture merge, unveiling a timeless tradition where craftsmanship, spirituality, and visual harmony exist in perfect balance.



About the author:

Sandhya Raman is a designer, curator, and textile revivalist whose work bridges textiles, costumes, and performing arts. Recognised with the Stree Shakti Puraskar, she celebrates India's craft heritage by transforming costumes into a visual language of identity, movement, and expression.



Odissi

This completes the journey through the exquisite beauty of Odisha's ikat silks and silver filigree craftsmanship. Inspired by temple sculpture, every curve and gesture reflects the harmony between textile, architecture, and devotion. The costume becomes a moving canvas, revealing India's extraordinary ability to transform woven threads into living poetry. The distinctive elements of Odissi are the tahaiya—made from sholapith, which adorns the jooda—and the bengapatia (waist belt).



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Padma Shri Chef **Sanjeev Kapoor** says rice is one of India's most unifying factors, and documents his personal journey with the grain

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I grew up in a family where a rice dish was only made on Sundays as a treat or when guests came over (*rajma chawal* or *kadhi chawal* for us and *matar pulao* or *meetha rice* for guests). So, from the beginning, I always had a perception of rice as something special. When I moved to Delhi to study hotel management, I found it was served daily for lunch in the cafeteria—I was in seventh heaven! It always amused my classmates, who came from rice-growing regions, that I enjoyed eating rice there every day.

Unity in diversity

I think after salt, rice is one of the most unifying factors that unites our country. That is a very powerful position for a food ingredient to be in. And rice gets to occupy this spot precisely because it is a universal grain that is a daily part of our lives and because it is so versatile.

Rice can be found in every food category—from soup to dessert, and in between. It can also be eaten for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. In terms of dishes, you can make unlimited options. My mom, for instance, used to make a kind of roti with leftover rice, chopped *dhania*, ginger, green chillies and spices. So, the possibilities are endless.

In fact, each state has its own variation on how they make and serve rice. For instance, Kashmir, which is not an area that first comes to mind when you think about rice. However, they do not eat a meal without rice. When I moved to Mumbai, I stayed with a colleague (also a chef) in accommodation provided by the hotel, and his wife would make Kashmiri food for us. She would make *gosht* and I would offer to make rice, but she would politely decline. Then she told me that

TOP AND BOTTOM

Appam is made from rice flour; Hare lasan ki khichdi is a flavourful variation.



Top: Shutterstock. Bottom: Sanjeev Kapoor



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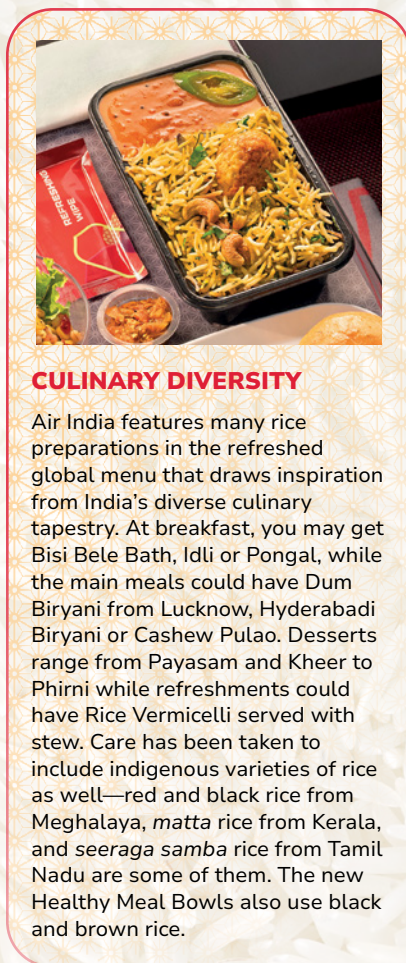
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TOP AND BOTTOM
Chhole palak pulao is not a commonly-known dish; Matta rice is an indigenous variety from Kerala.



CULINARY DIVERSITY

Air India features many rice preparations in the refreshed global menu that draws inspiration from India's diverse culinary tapestry. At breakfast, you may get Bisi Bele Bath, Idli or Pongal, while the main meals could have Dum Biryani from Lucknow, Hyderabad Biryani or Cashew Pulao. Desserts range from Payasam and Kheer to Phirni while refreshments could have Rice Vermicelli served with stew. Care has been taken to include indigenous varieties of rice as well—red and black rice from Meghalaya, *matta* rice from Kerala, and *seeraga samba* rice from Tamil Nadu are some of them. The new Healthy Meal Bowls also use black and brown rice.



Kashmiris would always serve it piping hot, no matter what time we ate. So, in the traditional manner, she would cover the vessel with a blanket to trap the heat. And the fact that the rice was hot when we ate it, really made a difference to the taste of the meal.

Abundant variety

We largely focus on basmati rice now, which is unfortunate because there are so many other varieties that are much more fragrant and satisfying. As a child, when we visited relatives in Mumbai, we always got them 30kg of rice from the rice-growing regions in the north. I was also introduced to *komal* rice from Assam, which you can eat without cooking—you just soak it in hot water and eat. That was a revelation and is just one of the examples of the diverse rice varieties in India. I feel we have not done justice to the local varieties that are not branded. Like I strongly feel that you cannot eat Goan fish curry or a Tamil Nadu biryani with basmati. Even *matta* from Kerala (an indigenous, coarse, red grain rice) has such good absorption powers that it really soaks up the local gravies in a way that basmati cannot.

Special spot

At my home, too, rice has a special place. Guests know that when they are invited for dinner, I will make a *kachhe gosht ki biryani*, and they get really disappointed if it is not on the menu. For my in-laws, who are from Gujarat, no meal is complete without rice. When we have a meal together, they insist that I take at least a spoonful, even if I am eating *roti-sabzi*. We eat *palak khichdi* at least two or three times a week, made in a *matka*. On some Tuesdays, we eat chaat at home, and then, to round off the meal, we have curd rice. I sometimes give guests who come home on that day, curd-rice stuffed in a *pani puri*. It is a unusual combination, but because I am offering it, people eat it, and love it!

— As told to **Mignonne Dsouza**

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words by **Mignonne Dsouza**



GETTING THERE

Air India flies non-stop to Ladakh from Delhi, Chandigarh, Jammu, and Srinagar.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
CHU by Philipp Frank (Germany), 2023;
Glacier's Retreat by Stanzin Tsepel (Ladakh), 2024; Untitled by Jigmet Angmo (Ladakh), 2023.

A dose of culture at over 3,000m? That is the aim of the sã Ladakh Biennale (sã is 'soil' in Ladakhi), which is set to bring together 26 international and Ladakhi artists responding to "land, ecology and the quiet urgencies of our time".

Envisioned as a long-term cultural initiative, it positions Ladakh as not just the site for the exhibition but a space for sustained cultural exchange, and has been curated by Vishal K Dar, with Tsering Motup Siddho as Associate Curator. It is spread over eight sites along the Leh-Kargil corridor, and is a non-ticketed event.

Under the theme, *Signals from Another Star*, the Biennale foregrounds regeneration, learning, and ethical engagement, inviting artists and audiences to attune themselves to the frequencies of land, memory, climate, and lived experience. Pro tip: Spend at least 48 hours in Leh before ascending as acclimatisation here is essential.

1st-10th August; sabiennale.com



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THE LIGHT AND THE LOTUS: A HOMECOMING IN DELHI

An exhibition of revered Buddhist relics can now be viewed for the first time

An incredible series of objects, part of the country's Buddhist heritage, is now on display as a united collection in the Capital. *The Light and the Lotus: Relics of the Awakened One* is a grand international exposition of Piprahwā Relics, discovered during an excavation on the Birdpur Estate in eastern Uttar Pradesh in 1898. These are some of the most significant archaeological discoveries in the history of Buddhism.

The collection consists of a sandstone coffer containing sacred relics of Lord Buddha, along with five exquisite reliquaries. Among the discoveries was a soapstone casket with an inscription in Brāhmī script, the earliest textual confirmation that these were the physical relics of the Lord himself. The inscription helped identify Piprahwā as ancient Kapilavastu, where Prince Siddhārtha spent his childhood before setting out on the path that would make him The Awakened One.

Decades later, additional excavations by the Archaeological Survey of India in the early 1970s further uncovered 2 caskets, 22 pieces of bone relics, and



30 terracotta seals bearing the name of Kapilavastu, deepening the certainty of the site's place in the Buddha's life.

What makes this exposition historic is not simply the age of its objects but their reunion. It brings together, for the first time, relics and jewels that had been dispersed across collections held by the Indian Museum in Kolkata, the National Museum in New Delhi, and private hands, for well over a century. It is a moment the exhibition treats not as a triumph over anyone, but as a quiet act of repatriation.

Facilitated through the efforts of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, the return also recognised that these objects belong to the spiritual inheritance of millions.

At Qila Rai Pithora, Lado Sarai, all through August; 9am to 9pm



TOP TO BOTTOM

The exhibition is housed in a circular hall that is centred on a stupa-inspired installation; Gemstones discovered at Piprahwā, Inscribed relic casket.



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THE AMAZING *Chase*

We go behind the scenes in Alappuzha as it prepares for the annual Nehru Trophy Boat Race

words by **Gaurie Gupta**



The monsoon clouds are casting dappled shadows along the Malabar coast as we leave behind the blazing sun of Chennai. Beyond the promise of cooler weather lies one of Kerala's most extraordinary celebrations.

Our destination is Alleppey (officially Alappuzha), home to the legendary Nehru Trophy Boat Race. The tradition began in 1952, when a snake boat race was organised to

honour then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's visit to Kerala. Upon returning to New Delhi, he gifted a silver snake boat-shaped trophy to commemorate the event. Since that inaugural race, the annual spectacle is held on the second Saturday of August (22nd August 2026) on Punnamada Lake, and has become a cherished event.

Hustle and bustle

By the time we arrive, the town is alive with activity ahead of its biggest

day of the year. Local hotels fill to capacity, police patrol the streets, and government officials rush to coordinate final arrangements. Volunteer teams rehearse crowd management while visitors fan out in search of the best vantage points along the route.

The backwaters, shaped by the interplay of waves and shore currents, provide a spectacular natural arena for the race. Along an intricate network of lagoons and canals, villages have spent months preparing their *chundan*



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT
Kerala's Nehru Trophy Boat Race celebrates centuries of heritage; A tight shot of a snake boat at Vembanad Lake; Banana chips for sale on Race Day.

vallams (snake boats, literally 'beaked boats') for this day.

Originally conceived as war boats, these continue to be built and maintained with deep devotion and ritual significance. Traditionally crafted from local wood (usually Anjili), each boat belongs to the village. Before anyone steps aboard, chappals are left on the bank. Around here, the *chundan vallam* is treated with the reverence of an idol.

Every boat begins with a

master boat builder, known as the *moothashari*, who first draws the *rekhachithram*, a blueprint from which the boat takes shape. Plank by plank, it is assembled, with priests performing rituals to mark every major stage like the commencement of work and the turning over of the hull. *Kamsakaran* (bronzesmith) forge and fit the ceremonial bronze finials.

Closer to the event, repairs are conducted by carpenters before the boat is painted. Earlier, a traditional

blend of various oils and other materials was used to give it an ebony finish. However, now a special paint is used instead. Villagers contribute labour, sponsor meals for the rowers, raise funds, and care for the boat throughout the year. These practices reveal that a *chundan vallam* is far more than a racing vessel—it is the work of an entire village.

Winning contest

By some extraordinary stroke of luck, we have secured rooms at the Ramada by Wyndham overlooking the course. From our balcony, the lake stretches beneath us like a giant silver mirror, framed by gently swaying palms and dotted with eager crowds soaking up the pre-race festivities. Children chase bubbles along the promenade, commentators test microphones, and music drifts across the water as vendors weave through the crowds selling umbrellas, balloons, snacks, hats, toys, and cheering horns. The warm aroma of banana chips and coconut oil rises from the stalls below—a fragrant reminder that we are, unmistakably, in Kerala.

As race morning dawns, we lean over the balustrade, giddy with anticipation. Soon, the mighty crafts appear on the lake, their soaring sterns (*amaram*) rising above the water like the hood of a cobra. Despite measuring well over a hundred feet in length, they move with a grace that defies



LEFT AND RIGHT

Race Day excitement; Sachin Tendulkar with Kathakali artistes at the inaugural Champions Boat League in 2019.



their immense size. Beneath shifting clouds, shafts of sunlight catch the bronze finials adorning the prow and stern, while colourful pennants and silk parasols flutter above the crews, adding colour against the grey sky.

While we wait for the boats to line up, fellow spectators explain that each one carries nearly a hundred rowers. Standing amongst them, the chief helmsmen direct every movement like maestros conducting an orchestra. Beside them, singers and rhythm keepers lead the *vanchippattu*, traditional boat songs that set the pace for every stroke and transform individual rowers into a perfectly coordinated team.

Four-minute finish

For all its history, ritual, and pageantry, the race is also a technical contest. Recent editions have introduced mechanised start-and-finish systems, a virtual finish line, and time lapse recording to settle close results, with differences measured down to milliseconds. In 2025, there were also real-time screens for spectators.

Then, in an instant, the race

BEYOND THE SNAKE BOATS

While the mighty *chundan vallams* may steal the spotlight, the Nehru Trophy Boat Race is an important occasion for the 50 other smaller boats competing in various categories, including the Churulan Vallam (curly boat), Veppu Vallam (cooking boat), Iruttukuthy Vallam (dark-cut boat), and Thekkanodi Vallam (hybrid boat). The race also serves as the prestigious opening leg of the Champions Boat League (CBL). All in all, the event offers a fascinating look at Kerala's rich maritime heritage.

explodes to life. Arms rise and fall in perfect harmony as oars carve smooth arcs before plunging back into the frothing water. At about 100 to 120 strokes a minute—the crews move with stunning precision. Each movement follows the cadence of the *vanchippattu*. Muscles gleam, spirits blaze, and the *chundan vallams* surge almost neck and neck across the shimmering lake. As the 19 competing boats thunder across the 1.4-km course, an entire village's hopes, months of pre-dawn training, and generations of tradition are compressed into a few electrifying seconds. Along the banks, thousands roar their encouragement, willing their village heroes towards the finish.

By next morning, the boats are back in their boathouses, repairs are planned, and another cycle begins. When the monsoon returns, the boats will return too, carrying, perhaps, a new generation of rowers, another year of preparation, and another village's hopes on Punnamada Lake.



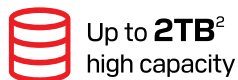
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➔ HOT CHOCOLATE

The hot chocolate (at Carette) is thick and properly bittersweet—the kind you almost eat with a spoon. I usually pair it with a crêpe or whatever pastry catches my eye in the window.

I know this pâtisserie is beloved by all with a guidebook, but I will defend it forever. This is the place that makes me feel like I am actually in Paris. More than a meal, it is a ritual, and one I repeat every single visit.

Where to try it: Carette,
4 Place du Trocadéro



8 dishes TO TRY IN PARIS

Pastry chef **Pooja Dhingra** decides to be 'desserted' in the French capital and gives us a low-down



➔ RASPBERRY MILLEFEUILLE

Café Marly is on every Paris list and that is because sitting on the terrace looking out at the Musée de Louvre pyramid is genuinely one of the nicest things you can do in this city. I always order a perfectly good Caesar salad and finish with the raspberries and cream. Is it the most exciting meal in Paris? No. Is it one of my favourites? Yes. Sometimes the view is the dish.

Where to try it: Café Marly, 93 rue de Rivoli

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→ CROISSANT

I have stood on the street eating one straight out of the paper bag, more than once. No regrets. The croissant has that proper shatter, all honeycomb inside. And the chocolate *babka* is also exactly as it should be: rich, slightly underbaked in the centre, and swirled so generously you get chocolate in every bite. Mamiche is the kind of neighbourhood *boulangerie* I wish I could transplant to Mumbai.

Where to try it:

Mamiche, 45 rue Condorcet



↓ TIRAMISU

I did not expect a vegetarian Italian spot in the 3rd *arrondissement* to land in my highlights, but Big Love did. While the food here is lovely, the tiramisu is the highlight. Perfectly soaked, properly creamy, with that bittersweet coffee hit cutting through the mascarpone—this is probably one of the best I have had, and I have eaten a lot of tiramisu in the name of research.

Where to try it: Big Love, 30 rue Debelleyme



EAT AND CARRY BACK

La Grande Épicerie is magnetic! The food counters are genuinely excellent, being somewhere between a meal and a grocery run, which is my favourite kind of stop. And I never leave without a few blocks of *demi-sel* butter for the suitcase. **La Grande Épicerie de Paris, 38 rue de Sèvres**



↑ CHOCOLATE MOUSSE

They have a selection of chocolates and ice creams, but my favourite is the counter offering a variety of light, airy chocolate mousses. You can choose any one you like; I usually go for the 75 per cent with honey.

Where to try it: Chapon, 34, rue de Saint Sulpice

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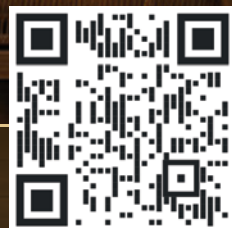
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↓ CHOCOLATE BABKA

If you have one afternoon in Paris and you want to taste the work of the best pastry chefs in the world without running across the city, go to the food hall at Galeries Lafayette. Pierre Hermé, Alain Ducasse, and the whole roster, all under one roof. As someone who has spent a lot of her life chasing these counters individually, I cannot overstate how useful this is. And when you are there, do not leave before trying the chocolate *babka* at Chez Meunier.

Where to try it: Lafayette Gourmet, 35 Boulevard Haussmann



↑ POTATO CHURROS

I walked into Maslow Temple not realising it was vegetarian, which tells you how good the food is, because I never once missed anything on that plate. The potato *churros* (a twist to the classic sweet treat) are what I keep thinking about—crisp outside, fluffy inside, and served with something punchy to dip into. It is the kind of clever, well-made vegetable cooking I love seeing more of—a reminder that 'veg' in Paris has come a long way.

Where to try it: Maslow Temple, 32 rue de Picardie

GETTING THERE

Air India flies non-stop to Paris from Delhi.



🍷 WINE AND ICE CREAM

Folderol specialises in two things—natural wine and ice cream—and does both extremely well. The flavours change constantly, so you go in with no plan and trust whatever they are scooping that day. The crowd spills out onto the street, glass in one hand, cone in the other. It is everything I love about how Parisians eat—simple, unfussy, and committed to whatever is in front of them.

Where to try it: Folderol, 10 rue du Grand Prieuré

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ASSAM AWAITS

While Guwahati's striking new airport is a destination in itself, venture beyond its doors to discover both new and heritage hotspots of this fast-evolving city

words by **Nishiraj A Baruah**

A unique way to enjoy the beauty of the mighty Brahmaputra river in Guwahati is by embarking on an hour-long sunset cruise

🕒 06:00AM

By the banks

📍 Brahmaputra Riverfront Park

Begin with a dose of fitness at this new spot. With the mighty river on one side, enjoy a walk along the landscaped areas, featuring open-air gyms and more. Outside, savour *loosi bhaji* (puri and vegetables) and *jolpan* (a traditional snack) for breakfast.

🕒 08:30AM

Animal kingdom

📍 Assam State Zoo cum Botanical Garden

Spread across 1.75sqkm, this is the largest and most diverse zoo in north-east India. It features a museum, a reptile house, and a botanical garden. Spot the one-horned rhinoceros and hoolock gibbon, along with hippos, giraffes, and colourful birds. Wear sporty footwear to navigate the hilly terrain.

🕒 10:30AM

Shop local

📍 Pragjyotika Assam Emporium

Drop by this government-run, one-stop shop selling authentic Axomia products. Spread over three floors, it offers a stupefying variety of local crafts, including handbags made with water hyacinth and silk *mekhela sadors*—great gifts to carry back.

🕒 12:00PM

Culture hub

📍 Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra

Discover the region's rich heritage at this iconic centre, named after noted poet-playwright, Srimanta Sankaradeva. The sprawling campus boasts an Artists' Village, a museum, a library, eateries, and an open-air theatre. From cuisine, craft, literature, and more—everything that is Assamese, you will find here.



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2/ Taj Vivanta:

Spread across five acres, with stunning views of the surrounding hills, this premium 5-star hotel features 150 rooms, an outdoor swimming pool, and a luxury spa.

3/ The Guwahati Address:

A premium boutique stay, it boasts a lobby adorned with hand-cut granite and a restaurant offering traditional Assamese and north Indian cuisine.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
An Assamese spread; The Brahmaputra Riverfront Park; Xorai (offering tray) and gamosa are Assamese symbols of hospitality; You could spot a one-horned rhinoceros at the Assam State Zoo cum Botanical Garden.



GETTING THERE

Air India flies non-stop to Guwahati from Delhi.



🕒 02:30PM

Local flavours

📍 Heritage Khorikaa

This restaurant—run by Chef Atul Lahkar, a famous name in regional cuisine—comes highly recommended. Try their *masor tenga* (sour fish curry) with *tupula bhaat* (rice cooked in banana leaf), bamboo shoot dishes, *khaar* (an alkaline vegetable or fish stew), and more.

🕒 03:30 pm

Flavour profile

📍 The GTAC Tea Lounge

How can you be in Assam and not sit down for a refreshing cuppa? Nothing better than the lounge at Guwahati Tea Auction Centre. The classy Chai Bar offers an exceptional variety, including Assam CTC, oolong, green, yellow, and purple. Enjoy it with cutlets and sandwiches. You can also buy tea from here to carry back as souvenirs.

🕒 05:00PM

Into the sunset

📍 Alfresco Grand cruise

Board this boat and sail into a glorious sunset. This hour-long ride offers breathtaking views and a different perspective of Guwahati. Live Bihu dance, local music, and good food bring the atmosphere alive. Choose the middle or upper deck for an unforgettable evening.

🕒 07:00PM

Curtain call

📍 GS Road

Now this is where the city truly comes to life. Take a walk along the neon-lit road and check out the City Centre Mall, which has gaming zones, a cinema, and Freemason's Brewworks for craft beer and cocktails. You can also head to the latest nightspot Odiin Experience, nearby. Eat, drink, dance and retire for the night.



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📍 Buñol, Spain

26th August

The world's largest annual food fight is here! The event starts at 11am in the town square, with truckloads of tomatoes being unloaded.

🌐 spain.info

PLAY SPACE GLOWORM FESTIVAL

📍 Nottinghamshire, England
7th-9th August

The 10th edition will feature live shows and acts, workshops, and activities, along with free fairground rides.

🌐 glowormfestival.co.uk



PERFORMANCE TIME PARAMPARA SERIES

📍 New Delhi
7th-9th August

This three-day festival at Kamani Auditorium will see dance acts by Shubhendra Rao, Saskia Rao-de Haas, and Ishaan Rao, a Kuchipudi showcase by the Raja Radha Reddy Troupe, Hindustani classical vocals by Madhup Mudgal-Sawani Mudgal, and more.

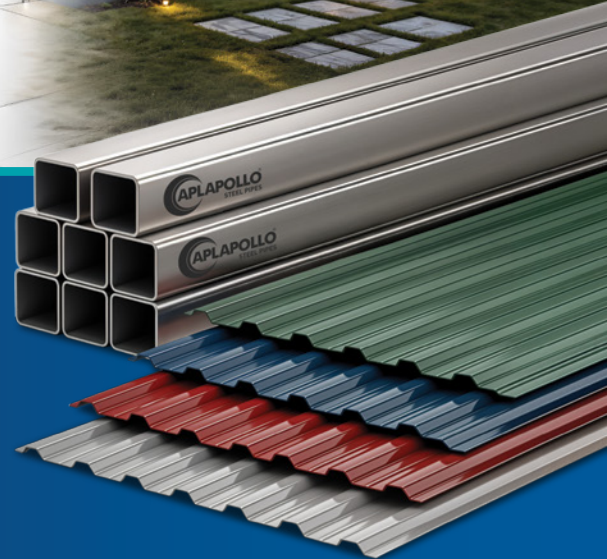
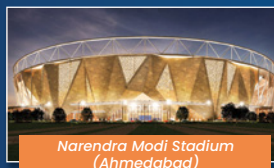
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📍 **Shillong, Meghalaya**

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district.in



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A RAINBOW OF SENSATIONAL OFFERINGS AT PURPLE MARTINI

Nestled in Goa's tropical landscape, Purple Martini serves up delicious cuisine and cocktails amid chilled-out afternoons, gorgeous sundowners, and star-studded nights



SAARTHAK GUPTA
CEO/Founder, Purple Martini

A beacon of culinary excellence, Purple Martini is a much-loved destination among locals, tourists, and celebrities. Founded by Saarthak Gupta, the restaurant began as a passion project and has since ascended to the pinnacle of Goa's dining scene. Purple Martini is not merely a dining experience, it is a symphony of flavours, an embodiment of luxury, and a testament to Saarthak's unwavering commitment to gastronomic innovation. With its stunning sunset views, eclectic menu, impeccable service, and an ambience that fuses sophistication with a relaxed Mykonos-style vibe, Purple Martini, a gem along the Anjuna coast, remains a place where unforgettable memories are crafted. Whether you're seeking culinary delight or a brush with stardom, this lively restobar offers an experience that transcends expectations, making it an enduring icon of Goa's culinary landscape.

DELICIOUS BLISS

Be transported into a world of relaxation and indulgence as soon as you walk in. The bar features a wide selection of signature cocktails, including the famous Purple Martini, Stylish Turkey, Red Decor, and the Floral Whiskey Sour. The menu also boasts an impressive selection of wines, beers, and spirits from across the globe.

But it's not just the drinks that make



Purple Martini a must-visit spot in Goa. The kitchen also offers a delectable cuisine selection that blends Indian and international flavours. From appetisers like Peri-Peri Chicken Skewers and Recheado Prawns to entrées like Banana Wrapped Snapper with fiery chillies and tamarind, the menu has something that tantalises every taste-bud.

Purple Martini's crown jewel, however, is its breathtaking sunset views. With its beachfront location, guests can enjoy a front-row seat to the spectacular hues of orange, pink, and purple that light up the sky during sunset—the perfect backdrop for a romantic dinner, a lively get-together with friends, or a relaxing evening alone. No wonder it's the top restobar in Goa.

ABOUT THE FOUNDER

Saarthak Gupta, an alumnus of The Doon School and the University of Leeds, has been recognised as a leading entrepreneur in the hospitality industry. With his passion for hospitality, astute leadership, marketing prowess, and an eye for detail, he has transformed Purple Martini into one of



the most popular restobars in Goa. His commitment to excellence has been recognised by various institutions, and he has received several prestigious awards for his contributions to the hospitality industry, as well as being named amongst the Times 50 Most Influential Personalities.

Purple Martini has won several accolades, including the Times Nightlife Award for the Best Sundowner Bar and The Most Popular Restaurant four years in a row. The restaurant has also been featured in various publications, including *Conde Nast Traveller*, *Vogue India*, and *The Economic Times*. And we expect many more under Saarthak's leadership in the coming years!

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LEFT AND RIGHT
A Kotpad sari from
Odisha; Pochampally
ikat saris from Telangana.

LOOM AND BEHOLD

India's unique handloom weaves reflect its rich traditions and the artistry of its craftsmen

words by **Shrabasti Anindita Mallik**

Every Indian handloom tells the story of its landscape, people, and traditions. As National Handloom Day (August 7) celebrates our rich weaving heritage, we showcase the unique facets of a few of our textiles that offer a glimpse into the enduring legacy of the nation's craftsmen.

Kotpad (Odisha)

Practised by the Mirgan community

of Odisha's Koraput district for several centuries, it is one of India's few traditions that relies entirely on natural vegetable dyes. Cotton yarn is painstakingly prepared before being dyed with extracts from the roots of the aal tree, producing its signature earthy reds, browns, and blacks. Women prepare the yarn while men weave intricate tribal motifs—from diamonds and axes to crabs and pots—on pit or frame looms.

Woven from organic cotton, *kotpad* is more than a fabric; it is a living expression of the region's forests, indigenous heritage, and generations of artisanal knowledge.

Eri Silk (Assam)

Indigenous to north-east India and woven into the cultural fabric of Assam, Eri is celebrated as *ahimsa* or peace silk because the silkworm emerges naturally from its cocoon,

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
Eri silk threads being prepared for weaving (Assam); A Jamdani sari from West Bengal; Traditional motifs like peacocks and flowers are trademarks of a Paithani sari.



making the process both ethical and sustainable. Unlike the glossy sheen of mulberry silk, Eri has a soft, matte texture and is more resilient and less prone to creasing than linen. Strong yet breathable, it combines the elegance of silk with the comfort of cotton and the warmth of wool, becoming softer with every wear.

Pochampally Ikat (Telangana)

Woven in the villages of Telangana's Nalgonda district, Pochampally *ikat* is celebrated for its intricate double *ikat* technique, where both the warp and weft threads are resist-dyed before weaving. Unlike Odisha's single *ikat* tradition, known for its softly-feathered edges, Pochampally achieves remarkably crisp geometric motifs—diamonds, chevrons, and abstract patterns—through extraordinary precision. Crafted in silk, cotton or silk-cotton blends, it reflects centuries of weaving expertise, making it a fine example of Indian artistry.

Paithani (Maharashtra)

Woven for centuries, this is Maharashtra's most treasured silk, originating in the ancient town of



Paithan on the banks of the Godavari. Crafted using the masterful tapestry technique, silk is interwoven with gold and silver *zari* to create richly detailed *pallus* and borders adorned with motifs like peacocks, lotuses, parrots, and flowering vines. Once prized by royalty and traded as far as Rome, a single Paithani can take months—or even years—to complete. Today, it remains an heirloom, passed down through generations as a symbol of artistry, prosperity, and tradition.

Jamdani (West Bengal)

Delicate yet extraordinarily intricate, Jamdani is among the world's finest handwoven muslins. Woven on traditional looms, each floral or geometric motif is inserted

individually using the discontinuous weft technique, making the process so labour-intensive that creating a single sari can span months—even a year. Once favoured by Mughal royalty, the craft continues to thrive in West Bengal, where it is passed down through generations of weaving families. Light, breathable, and timeless, Jamdani is a testament to the enduring beauty of slow craftsmanship.



TALES OF INDIA

Air India Express' initiative #TalesOfIndia showcases diverse tail designs that represent the vibrant culture of India. Featured here is Phulkari, meaning 'flower work', a traditional embroidery technique that originated in Punjab and is known for its vibrant and intricate designs. The process involves stitching vibrant threads onto a base fabric, usually handwoven cotton or khadi cloth.

MIND

Shifting
Perspectives

74 → Q&A
80 → EXPLORE

POWERING FOR TRIUMPH

Padma Shri Harmanpreet Kaur, captain of the Indian women's national cricket team, reflects on resilience and leadership

words by Pallavi Singh



Harmanpreet was honoured with the Arjuna Award in 2017

You are known for your grit. What experiences made you tough?

When you are in a team sport, you have a lot to learn and unlearn each day. When I got into the team, I was known to be aggressive. I came from an environment where I engaged on the field with boys and language was never

a barrier. That mindset remained when I joined the Indian team. But the legends of the Indian women's team became teammates, and I spent each day learning from them. Anjum [Chopra] *di* guided, nurtured, and helped me evolve. It was tough as a young girl to build

that rapport with seniors, but they supported me in every way. With time, I received bigger responsibilities as a captain, which instilled more patience in me. I became a better listener and strategist, and many more things. That helped me grow into a tougher and better person.



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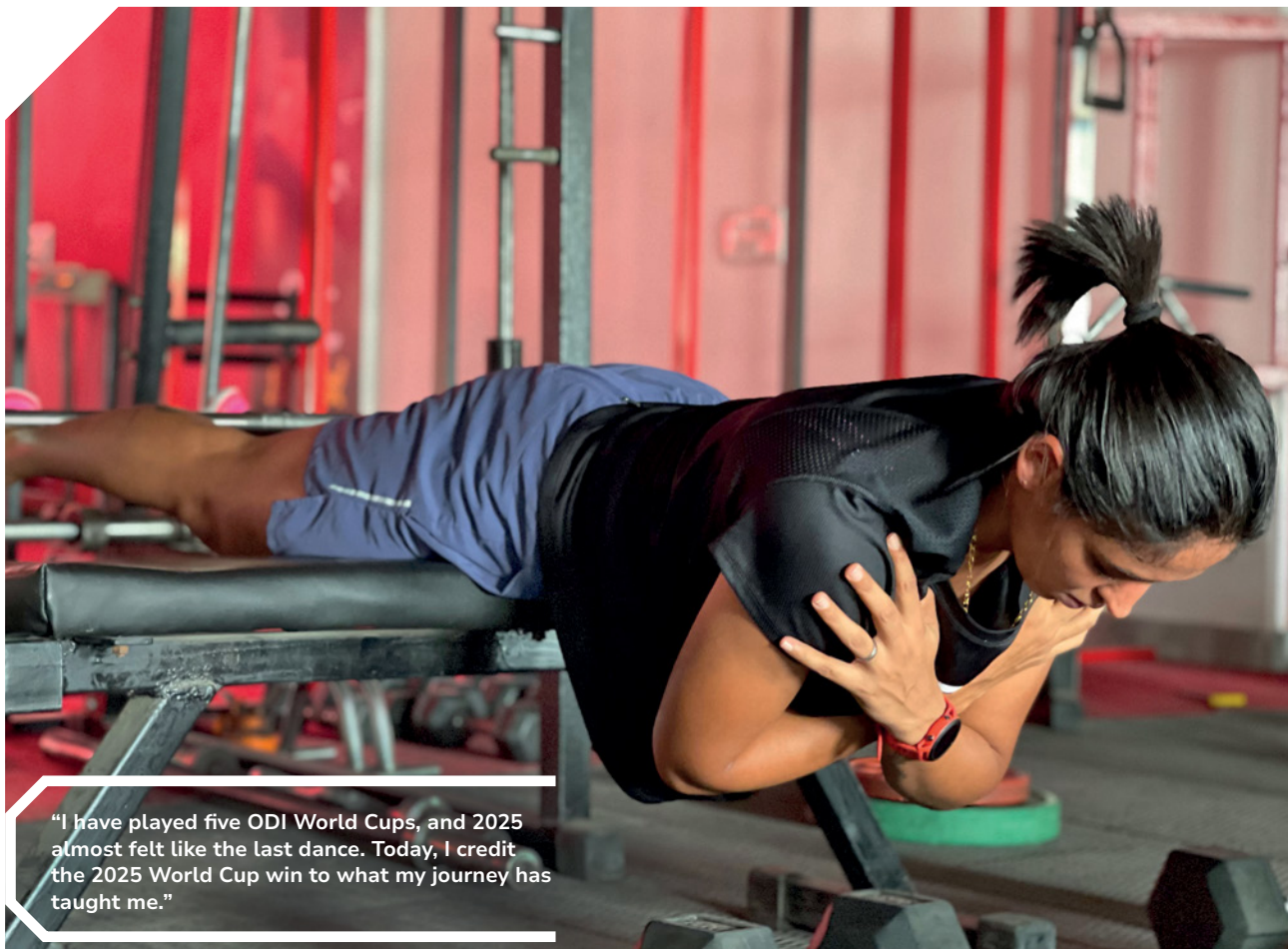


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"I have played five ODI World Cups, and 2025 almost felt like the last dance. Today, I credit the 2025 World Cup win to what my journey has taught me."

Can you recall a moment where you had to dig the deepest to pull yourself or the team through?

The last I remember were the two setbacks—one in the Commonwealth Games [2022], where we came close to winning the championship and fell short by a few runs, and the second one is the Women's Asia Cup [2024] where we lost against Sri Lanka in the finals. These moments got me so numb that I went back to work on my abilities and questioned myself. As an athlete, it is very normal to face such emotions every now and then, but it is how fast we come out of it that makes us better thinkers and doers. Every time we go back to the dressing room as winners or losers, we always appreciate each other and witness good energies.



TOP AND BOTTOM

Harmanpreet always tries to focus on the things she can control, like her fitness; The skipper in action at the 2026 ICC Women's T20 World Cup (played in England and Wales) in June and July.

What has resilience come to mean to you personally, beyond cricket?

Resilience beyond cricket has come to mean showing up with strength even when no one is watching or applauding. It has been about handling expectations and emotions yet staying grounded. In cricket, resilience is often seen in comebacks and performances, but in real life, it is quieter. It is in difficult conversations, in protecting peace, in taking decisions for long-term growth, and in continuing to believe in the path when results are not immediate.

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RAPID FIRE

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Favourite cricketer:

Yuvraj Singh and Virender Sehwag

Slow travel or adventure-packed holidays:

Slow travel

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One place on your bucket list:

North-east India

LEFT AND RIGHT

The captain enjoys some down time with her pets, Furry and Jelly; She believes in moving on from setbacks with a positive mindset.

It has taught me to adapt without losing purpose, to stay kind but firm, ambitious yet patient, and to keep moving forward even when the journey gets difficult.

How do you stay emotionally grounded when expectations are high and scrutiny is constant?

I have always tried to focus on the things that are well within my control, which are my preparation, fitness, effort, attitude, and recovery. Focusing on what is controllable

keeps my mind steady and prevents emotional exhaustion. But if I am ever in exhaustive situations, I always go to a handful of people whose opinions truly matter. Too many voices create too much confusion.

How do you mentally reset after a tough match or criticism?

Setbacks are tough, but yes, I try to objectively assess what happened, what I could have done better, what I still did well, and what was simply beyond my control. Once I have taken

my learning from it, I consciously move on and return to my routine—training, recovery, and preparing for the next phase. I also limit external noise and rely only on a trusted circle for honest feedback. For me, it is important to remember that one performance or opinion does not define me.

Any advice to young athletes?

I would tell them that building a strong game is not just about skill, it is about building the right habits and the right mindset early on.



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A SOJOURN IN *Tasmania*

Emerging as a luxury destination, the region's past is making way for a new, buzzing identity

words by
Riaan Jacob George

We are passing through Hell's

Gates," my local guide tells me, in a rather nonchalant tone, as my massive boat passes through the narrow opening of Macquarie Harbour on the remote western coast of Tasmania. This historic harbour opening, marked by the striking Entrance Island Lighthouse, is curiously named so because it was rather perilous to navigate, in the days of yore, resulting in innumerable shipwrecks at this particular point. Today, modern boats navigate past this iconic lighthouse quite effortlessly, and the entire setting of this spot is anything but hellish—*au contraire*.

Arriving on a deserted landing strip in the town

of Strahan is like stepping through the looking glass into a time capsule. This sparsely-populated waterfront town seems to be disconnected from the rest of the world and is the perfect starting point to explore western Tasmania, an hour's flight away from the capital city, Hobart.

The past and present

Strahan is quite lovely to amble around, exploring the coffee trucks and local boutiques. As the boat takes us past Hell's Gates and to Sarah Island, I reflect on its name. Sarah Island was one of the harshest convict settlements in Australian history, given its remoteness. On the island, the settlement is sensitively recreated and reconstructed, while guides chronicle the region's

undeniable penal history, without sensationalising it unnecessarily. While Tasmania may be emerging as the Southern Hemisphere's new hub for luxury travel, food, and cultural experiences, responsible travellers should familiarise themselves with the region's past, via a visit.

The boat meanders through the Gordon River, which has carved into a gorge, with thick forests on both sides and flanked by towering cliffs. The forest and blue sky reflect perfectly on the calm waters of the river, making it an absolutely spectacular place to visit. The boat anchors at the UNESCO-recognised Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, an earmarked section of the forest that spreads across nearly 1.6 million

STYLISH STAYS

Henry Jones Art Hotel

This boutique stay boasts a remarkable collection of over 400 contemporary Tasmanian artworks. It offers waterfront views over the city's charming harbour docks.

The Tasman

Featuring 152 rooms and a private art gallery, this is the kind of hotel that feels as connected to the city's past as it does to its evolving cultural scene.

Peppers Cradle Mountain Lodge

Located in Tasmania's highlands, at the edge of Cradle Mountain National Park, this lodge is less about the rooms and more about the landscape.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

The author took a cruise on the Gordon River; Kayaking in the Southwest National Park is one of the many ways to discover the area; The lighthouse at Hell's Gates.

hectares. Certain pockets of the area, comprising multiple different national parks, have been rendered visitor-friendly with beautiful paths and wooden pathways that cut through the natural landscape, enabling you to stroll through the wilderness at leisure.

A new lease of life

At first glance, Hobart, the Tasmanian capital, comes across as eerily quiet, sparsely populated, and slow paced. But a few hours in the city, and its buzzing identity starts to shine. Hobart has received a fresh burst of energy in recent years and you will witness this in

the chic Islington Hotel, a colonial heritage structure with a quirky selection of modern art and sweeping views of Mount Wellington. The Brooke Street Pier is a great space to check out the local scene, with fresh seafood restaurants, local breweries, and some great Tasmanian coffee specialists.

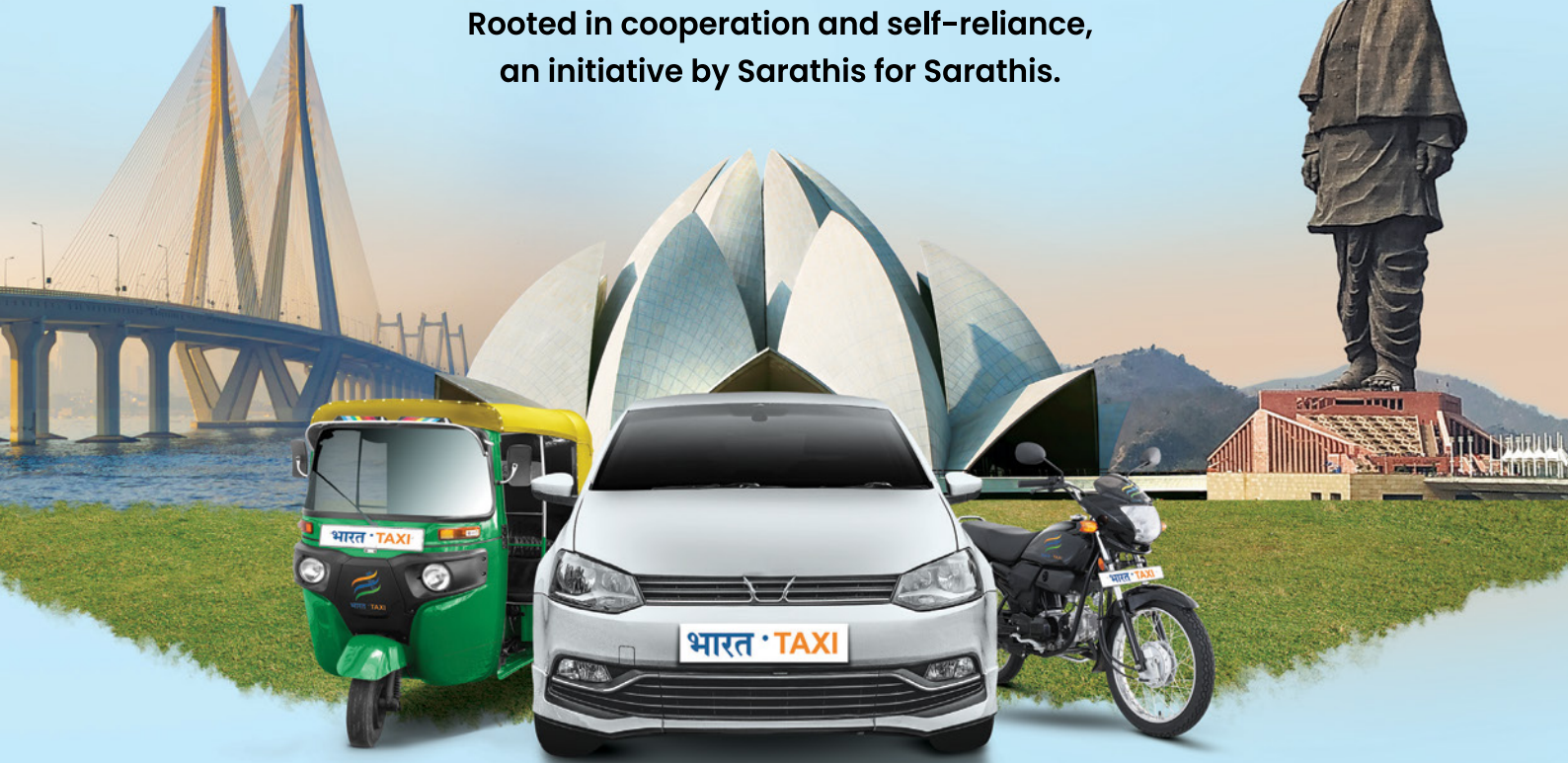
The Mona (Museum of Old and New Art) is one of the city's cultural highlights with a beautifully-curated selection of indigenous and modern art exhibited in an expansive space. I would also recommend going on an hour-long walk of downtown Hobart as part of the Takara Nipaluna 'indigenous history

Clockwise from top left: Riaan Jacob George; Tourism Australia & Graham Freeman; Riaan Jacob George



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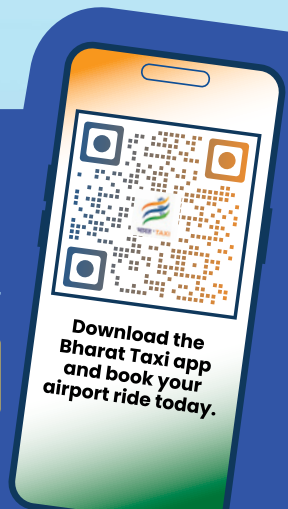
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LEFT AND RIGHT
A Tasmanian devil; The Truffle Farm lets visitors forage for Australia's black truffle.

tour' of the city with a local aboriginal woman named Nunami, who recounts the living history of the city. Each of the British-built avenues and public squares have parallel aboriginal stories, an underlying layer if you will, and Nunami recounts these stories beautifully.

History enthusiasts should make a stop at Hobart's Cascades Female Factory, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. An erstwhile all-female convicts detention centre, it has now beautifully and sensitively been restored to showcase the island's history.

A short drive away from



FIVE TASMANIAN MUST-DOS

- Make a day trip to Mount Wellington. While the mountain can be spotted from parts of Hobart, this trip will be worth your while. The area is ideal for leisurely treks.
- Spot the famous Tasmanian devil at the family-run Bonorong Wildlife Sanctuary, along with numerous other endemic animals, birds, and reptiles.
- Catch the Southern Lights (Aurora Australis). Although it can be seen year-round, the warmer months offer clear sightings. Vantage sites include Cockle Creek, Bruny Island, and Cradle Mountain.
- Fly to the western coast to explore the Gordon River, Hell's Gates, and Sarah Island.
- Discover the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, where you can walk through the centuries-old forests on specially-carved pathways.

downtown Hobart is the upscale neighbourhood of Kingston, characterised by a beautiful waterfront promenade and a parallel stretch of breweries, quaint restaurants, and cafés. This place is quite non-touristy and packed with locals living a slow life.

And finally, look up Sirocco South, a family-run mushroom foraging

tour just outside Hobart, where you can sign up for a foraging expedition with professionals, who will teach you a thing or two about spotting the right mushrooms. Following the tour, you will stop for lunch in the jungle, where you will cook all the mushrooms that you foraged. A truly unique and immersive experience—much like all of Tasmania.



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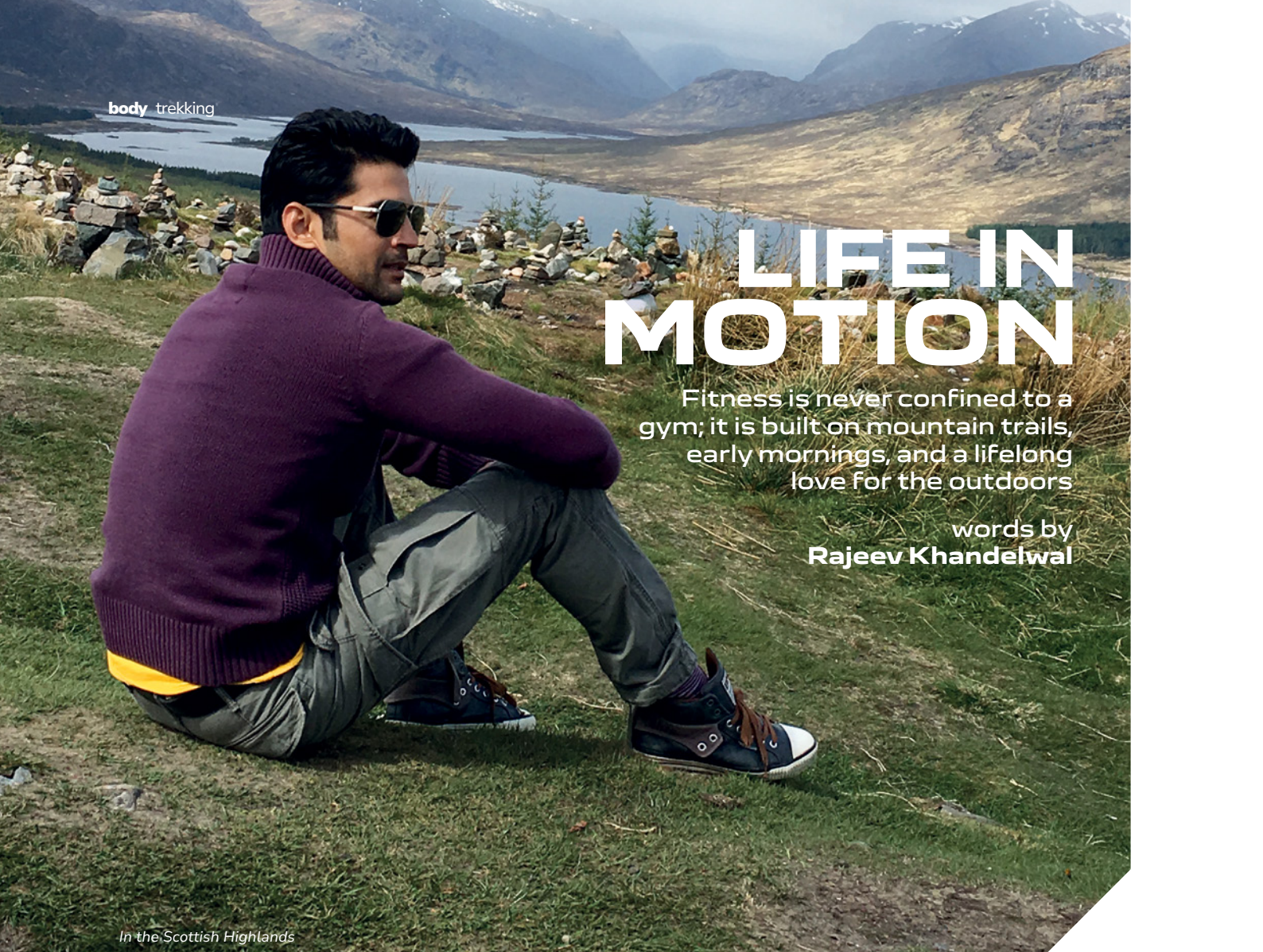


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LIFE IN MOTION

Fitness is never confined to a gym; it is built on mountain trails, early mornings, and a lifelong love for the outdoors

words by
Rajeev Khandelwal

In the Scottish Highlands

I have always lived life on my own terms and never followed any trend. I am an outright outdoorsy person and hate being confined to a gym or a single routine. Therefore, I alternate between running, cycling, mountaineering, trekking, camping, swimming, and rope climbing.

However, there is one constant in life—the mountains. Since childhood, they have drawn me more than beaches. As an Army man, my father was posted in Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, and Ladakh, and I would set out to explore the mountain trails by myself. It was during one such adventure in Arunachal Pradesh that I kept on walking, unaware of where I was headed. Soon enough, I lost my way before coming across some

kind tribal people who took me back home, after feeding me!

Thereafter, every trip, whether alone or with friends, has been to the mountains. At first, it used to be Uttarakhand, as I was closer to the north. Since both my father and brother were posted in Ladakh, I would visit often and that is where my interest in trekking began.

I must have been 15 or 16 when I went on my first trek—to Garnet Hill in Ladakh. Then in 2006, after I became an actor, I bought a camping car and went back with my college friends, where I scaled a peak near Jispa on the Manali-Leh Highway. Although it was rugged terrain, I managed to reach the top without much safety gear.

Go your own way

Although I have scaled several peaks thereafter, uncharted territories remain my passion. Also, I never tried or wanted to be a part of any trekking groups because after one achieves the financial independence that comes with being an actor, you cease to be comfortable in groups, especially ones with strangers. That is how and why I began solo trips. Moreover, whether it is my career or my personal life, I hate doing things already done by others. Satisfaction comes only when I do things my way.

This pattern continues even when I am travelling abroad. About four years ago, my wife Manjiri and I went to Switzerland in summer and made our way to the base of Mount Jungfrau,



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Khandelwal trekked to see the Fairy Pools on the Isle of Skye in Scotland

which is quite steep. Even though a train goes almost to the top, I was keen to walk up to the summit. I actually made Manjiri walk for at least 3–4km while enjoying the beauty and the wilderness with hardly anyone else around. This was truly thrilling as neither a map nor any safety gear was involved.

We hiked through pristine wilderness, armed with nothing more than a backpack carrying snacks, chocolates, and a water bottle that we kept refilling from crystal-clear mountain streams. The simplicity of the journey and the sheer beauty of the landscape made it an unforgettable experience.

Fitness takes time to build

Trekking up and down mountains undeniably requires a certain level of fitness, which cannot be achieved in a

few days. You need to have a specialised fitness regime to prepare your body for it. One major concern while scaling high-altitude peaks is the lack of oxygen. That is why I focus a lot on breathing exercises and regular *pranayama*. To enhance my lung capacity, I follow the Wim Hof breathing method. This increases my oxygen capacity and makes me feel good and considerably light too.

I feel it is as important to listen to your body as it is to respect it. So, if I plan to run a marathon, I ensure I practise uphill running—up and down at least 15 times—so that my lungs get used to taking in more oxygen. Similarly, when I go deep-water diving, I practise scuba diving several times before that. When you are doing something because you want to, make sure you are fit enough to do it.

Yoga, too, is a part of my fitness routine because, to maintain proper flexibility, I need to do stretching that involves all my body muscles so that tomorrow, if someone says “Come, let’s go cycling,” I am prepared for it.

Inculcate discipline

I feel it is absolutely essential to have discipline in life, in whatever you want to do. Truth be told, I have always worked with discipline and with a certain system in place. Whether I was struggling, whether or not I had money—there is always a system, a pattern that I imbibe in my daily life, which is very important.

Carve out me-time

I wake up preferably before the sun rises—it is my ‘me’ time, and I begin the day with about three or four glasses of



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Khandelwal went on a trip with friends 20 years ago to a place called Jispa, on the Leh-Manali highway

INTEGRATING FITNESS

In terms of training, I do not like to go to the gym, nor do I follow any specific format or style. I try to use my own body weight as much as possible and exercise at home with my trainer. I try to work out two to three times a day, usually for an hour in the morning, afternoon, and evening. I prefer to finish my dinner by 7pm as I hate eating late. As for my workouts, I work out with my body weight and also with dumbbells. For example, if I do a handstand, then I do it with my full body weight of 70kg. I do not pump iron, so even my dumbbells weigh a maximum of 22kg each. I do not believe in doing it with, say, 30kg just to show off. My whole idea is never to be captive to any trend or concept whatsoever.



I have always worked with discipline and with a system in place. Whether I was struggling, whether or not I had money—there is always a system, a pattern that I imbibe daily.

warm water, infused with spices and herbs. I then do *anulom vilom* (breathing exercises) and Wim Hof breathing. I can never meditate because my mind keeps wandering but after doing the third cycle of Wim Hof, I feel that mentally I am flying. At that point, I can sit without thinking about anything at all for nearly 2-3 minutes.

I move on to stretching—crucial for me because of a knee surgery I had to undergo due to a ligament tear, which I suffered while performing a stunt. Even though it was not a serious surgery, full recovery usually takes a long time. However, thanks to my disciplined lifestyle, in exactly eight months, I participated in my first marathon to check whether I could run. Unfortunately,

a few days later, I injured myself again while doing another stunt at Pratapgarh Fort for a show. The rope broke and I suffered a slip disc. To recover, I decided to focus on physiotherapy and activities that would help my back. I did all this with such focus and sincerity that I ran the Ladakh marathon in record time soon after that.

Breaking the two-hour mark in a half marathon is an elite feat that takes months of dedicated training to achieve. I clocked 2:11 in my first race and improved to 2:04 after recovering from a slip disc. I may not have reached the two-hour bracket yet, but those comebacks are something I am incredibly proud of.

— As told to **Veenu Singh**

The actor camped next to the Indus river in Leh and walked/ran from Karu to Hemis—his way of preparing for the Ladakh Marathon, which was scheduled a few days later





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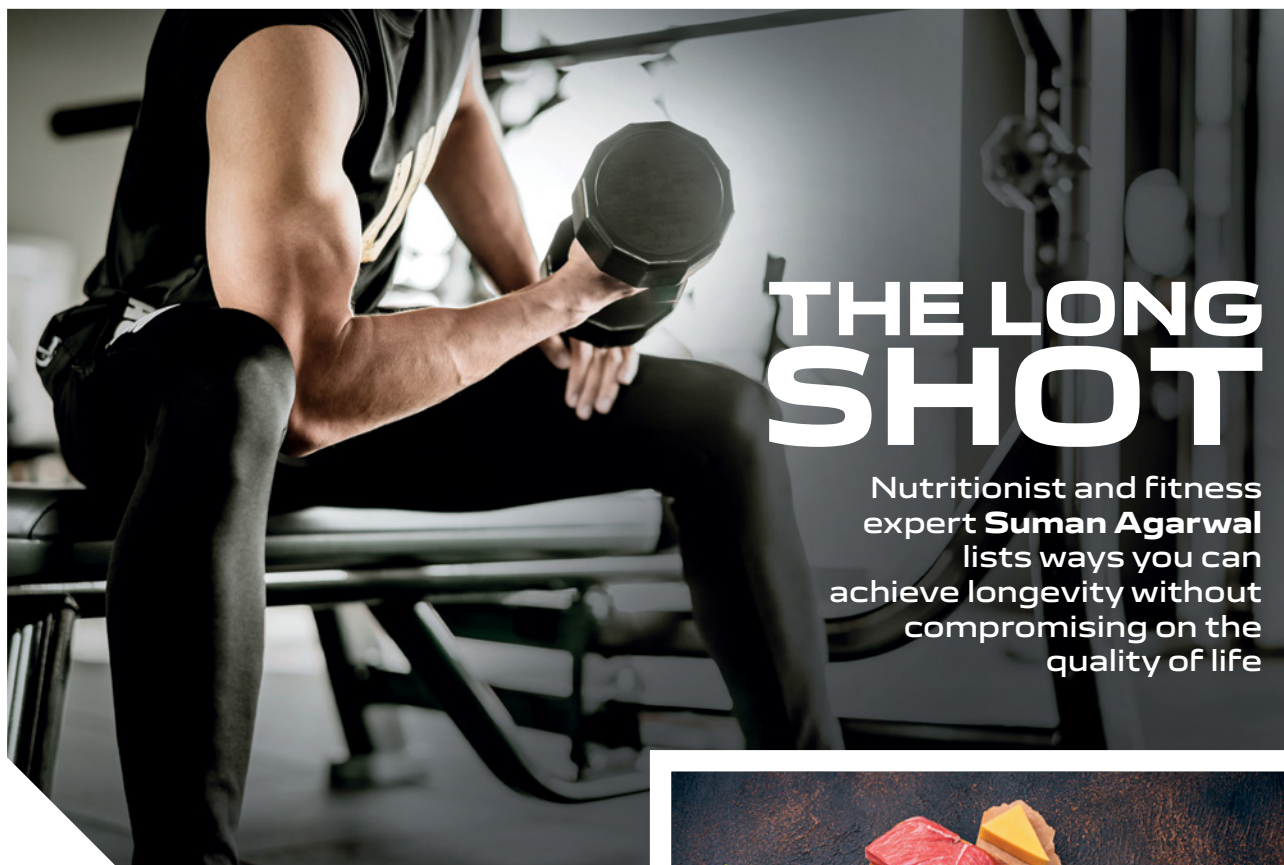


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THE LONG SHOT

Nutritionist and fitness expert **Suman Agarwal** lists ways you can achieve longevity without compromising on the quality of life

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Muscle is the new gold

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most metabolically active tissue in your body. It keeps metabolism high and ensures that blood sugar levels are regulated. An integral part of muscle building is strength training. With age, your muscle mass declines, and in order to maintain it and build it further, you need to work those muscles.

Get your proteins right

In our practice, most people we come across are not meeting their daily protein requirements. Protein forms the body's building blocks. From muscles to hair, skin to nails, and from hormonal health to immunity—everything requires protein. Over years of dealing with



diabetes, hypertension, pregnancy, and more, the crux has been understanding the protein balance, the right amount of first-class protein (chicken, fish, eggs, curd, milk, paneer), and ensuring they are absorbed well.

Reduce inflammation

This is your body's reaction to any long-term trauma,

TOP AND BOTTOM

Strength training is imperative to building muscle, which, in turn, keeps metabolism high; The right kind of protein in the required amount ensures a healthy life.

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infection or injury, which triggers a cascade of reactions to help fight it. In short, this reaction is considered the body's defence mechanism. However, when small amounts of inflammation continue to linger in the body, it becomes detrimental to health and accelerates ageing. Battling long-term inflammation lies in dealing with it from the root cause that could include high body fat, lack of physical activity, compromised sleep, chronic stress, alcohol consumption, tobacco usage, and unattended hormonal and autoimmune conditions.

Gut health matters

Your gut is at the centre of your overall well-being. When not in check, it tends to compromise on nutrient absorption. Tackling it involves ensuring that the integrity of your gut lining is maintained, your gut microflora is in balance, the digestive abilities and acid production by your stomach



is in check, and gut motility is optimal. The base of this lies in making sure all your vital nutrients are taken care of along with a diet balanced in macro and micronutrients.

Get restful sleep

This forms the foundation of longevity. Good quality sleep is essential for tissue repair, hormonal balance, supporting cognitive function, and building your immunity. It also enhances recovery and improves metabolism. Prioritise at least 7-9 hours of restful sleep on a daily basis.

Monitoring is vital

If leading a life full of quality is the goal, early monitoring and looking for red flags is an essential procedure. Get routine tests and ensure you are checking your vitals at regular intervals and running them by your healthcare practitioner. You should not only be looking for micronutrient deficiencies but also for the initial signs of any metabolic syndrome.

Early diagnosis and taking precautionary measures can keep you from developing major lifestyle hazards.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Seven to nine hours of restful sleep forms the foundation of longevity; Addressing inflammation from the root cause ensures a better quality of life; Get vital signs monitored at regular intervals and consult your doctor.

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A SEAMLESS TRANSFER

Flying Air India's first Easy Connect flight showed me why the country's hub-and-spoke policy matters

words by **Ajay Awtaney**



GOVERNMENT'S HUB-AND-SPOKE FRAMEWORK

Air India is the first airline to operationalise the government's new framework, with Varanasi becoming the launch city.

For years, one of the biggest frictions in flying internationally from India's non-hub-airport cities has been the unnecessary steps involved. A passenger travelling from Varanasi, Ranchi or Bhubaneswar to London, New York or Singapore would first arrive at Delhi or Mumbai as a domestic traveller, walk to the international terminal/pier, queue up again for transfer, complete immigration and security, and only then begin the international journey. It worked, but it certainly was not elegant. The extra steps also increased the Minimum Connection Time.

That is precisely what the Government of India's new hub-and-spoke policy aims to simplify. Designed as part of India's ambition to

become a global aviation hub, the new Standard Operating Procedure allows passengers departing from selected non-metro cities to complete their international check-in and immigration formalities at their origin airport before boarding specially-designated domestic flights to a hub like Delhi.

Once they arrive at the hub, they remain in the sterile international transit area and simply walk to their onward flight, much like passengers connecting through Singapore, Dubai or Doha today.

I recently had the opportunity to experience this first-hand aboard

Air India's inaugural Easy Connect service from Varanasi to Delhi. Air India is the first airline to operationalise the government's new framework, with Varanasi becoming the launch city and several more airports expected to join the network over the coming weeks. I flew AI 1111, the first such designated flight for hub-and-spoke operations, which currently connects into flights to London, Rome, Milan, Frankfurt, Zurich, Dubai, Riyadh, and Jeddah within four

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
Info for the new service is displayed on posters, standees, and luggage tags

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while you are away.



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hours of arrival at Delhi.

Walking through the process, what struck me most was not that the experience was revolutionary—it was that it felt completely normal. Domestic passengers received their boarding passes with a big 'D' printed on them. Immigration was completed in Varanasi before international passengers departed, and they were handed their boarding passes with an 'I' printed on them to separate them from domestic passengers. Everyone boarded the plane through the international pier, and domestic passengers could pass through the immigration counters at a specially-designated counter.

Similarly, baggage was tagged through to the final destination, and once in Delhi, there was no need to join long immigration queues or check in baggage again. Instead, one could proceed directly to the departure gate for an international flight, with passport and boarding pass checks at Delhi. Passengers travelling only to Delhi could exit via another designated lane at Delhi Immigration.

It sounds like a minor operational tweak, but it fundamentally changes the passenger experience. For anyone who has ever endured a tight international connection at Delhi or Mumbai, each queue removed from the journey translates into less stress and greater reliability. More importantly, it brings Indian airports closer to the standards passengers have come to expect from other global hubs.

The initiative also has significance far beyond passenger convenience. For decades, travellers from India's Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities have often preferred itineraries that connected through



foreign hubs because those journeys were operationally smoother. India's aviation ecosystem lost valuable transfer traffic—and the associated economic benefits—to airports outside the country.

The hub-and-spoke model attempts to reverse that trend. By allowing seamless domestic-to-international transfers within India, the government hopes to strengthen Indian hub airports while enabling airlines like Air India to build larger connecting networks in the years ahead.

Of course, this is only the beginning. The initial roll-out is limited, there are operational nuances to iron out, and the network needs to expand before it becomes mainstream. But after experiencing the inaugural service, I came away convinced that this is one of the most meaningful passenger-friendly aviation reforms India has introduced in recent years.

Air India and government agencies are now working to launch similar Easy Connect flights, all of which will be designated as AI 11xx for easier identification, from Ahmedabad, Amritsar, Chennai, Goa, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Kochi, Mumbai, Patna, Vadodara, and Visakhapatnam.

Sometimes, the biggest



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
Domestic and international passengers have to proceed via different channels; The author on the flight; Explanatory signs at Varanasi.

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT EASY CONNECT FLIGHTS

- Those with an Indian passport transferring through Delhi or other hub airports will need to have DigiYatra activated for themselves.
- You can only check in at the airport, not online.
- You need to arrive three hours prior at the source airport.
- Only select flights offer the hub-and-spoke connections. For others, the earlier process applies.

improvements in aviation are about quietly removing friction from the journey. India's new hub-and-spoke policy—and Air India's Easy Connect implementation—does that. And once the roll-out continues as planned, passengers from dozens of Indian cities will soon discover that getting to the world can become significantly simpler without ever leaving the country first.



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* Upcoming

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child-proof YOUR TRAVELS

TV actress and parenting influencer **Smriti Khanna** shares lessons and anecdotes from her family holidays to make your vacations smooth



I have two kids, Anayka (6) and Aizah (almost 2), and can categorically say that family holidays right now are tailored around the kids.

Research well: It is not just the destination; even when researching hotels, we check to see if it has enough play areas and if the pool is child friendly. One time, I forgot to inform the property that we would need a baby cot. So that is another item we always check off while planning.

Micro-plan: In daily itineraries, we always schedule one activity with the

kids in mind, preferably an adventurous one (even a trip to a local park counts). At Disneyland and Universal Studios, take note of age or height restrictions for rides. And we always plan where we are going to eat lunch and dinner, so there are no surprises or long walks at the end of the day.

Stock up: When travelling with kids, forget packing light. A holiday without a properly-stocked diaper bag, a good amount of snacks, and toys to amuse the kids can be stressful. I remember once we thought we could manage without a stroller. Then, we found ourselves in Malé airport struggling

with a lot of luggage and a child who had fallen asleep.

Read the fine print: Even if you think you have planned it all, investigate the finer points. That way you will avoid the situation we found ourselves in one time in Europe, where we had to disembark an inter-city train in exactly one minute. I was pregnant with my second daughter, so I could not help my husband with the suitcases. It was a nerve-racking experience, especially since the station had no elevator either. These are the kind of mistakes I hope never to make again.

— As told to **Mignonne Dsouza**

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OUR WINGS

A look at the aircraft in Air India's fleet*

Airbus A319



03

Boeing 777-300ER



19

Airbus A320neo



91

Airbus A320ceo



04

**Boeing 787-9
Dreamliner**



09

Airbus A321ceo



13

**Boeing 787-8
Dreamliner**



26

Airbus A321neo



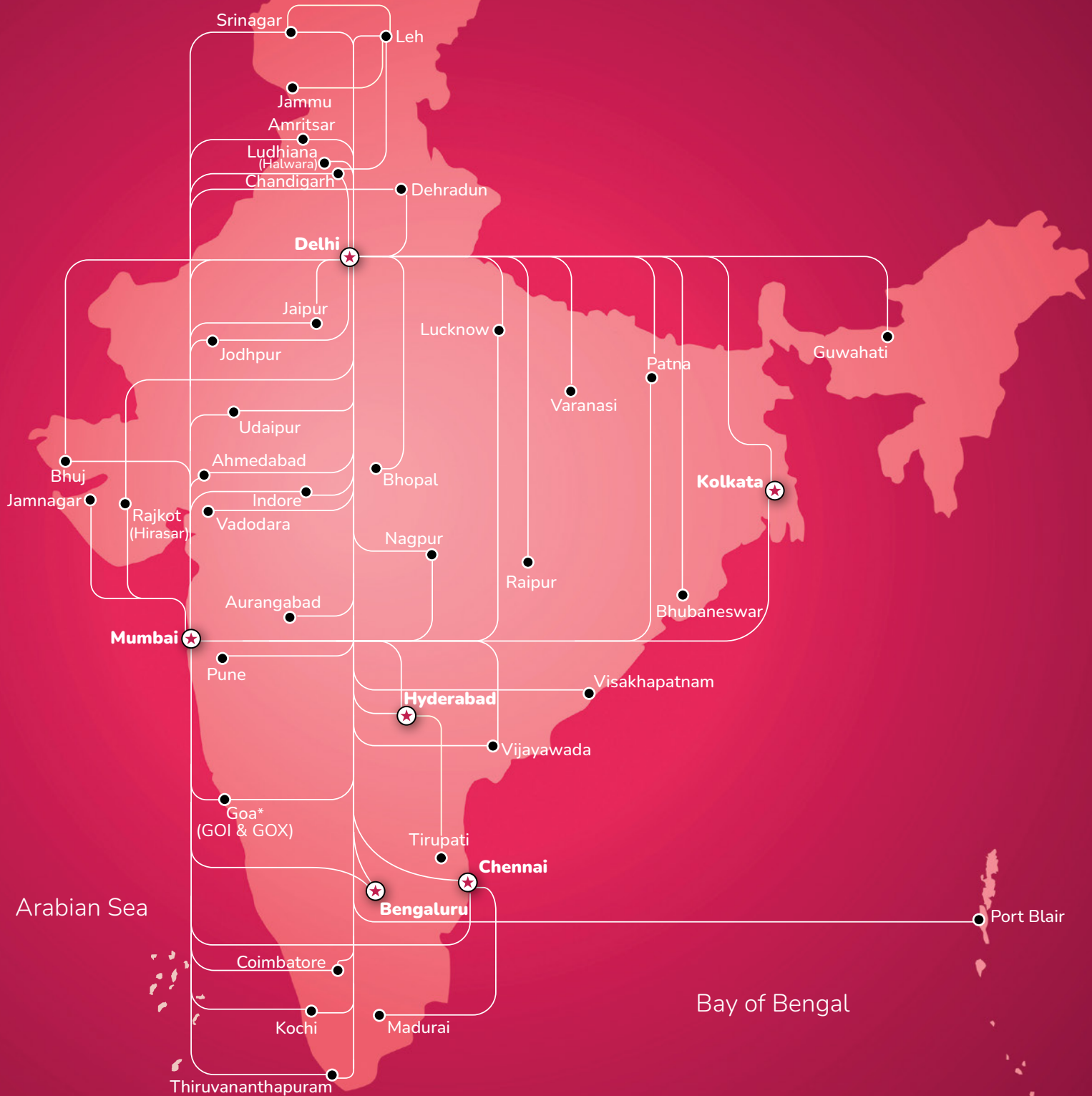
10

Airbus A350-900

06

**FLEET
STRENGTH
181**

DOMESTIC CONNECTIVITY



*Mumbai-Goa is operational via GOI; Delhi-Goa is operational via GOI (DEL-GOX is currently under temporary suspension)

Map not to scale. The depiction and use of routes and boundaries are for informative purposes only

This route map pertains only to destinations served by Air India

Route map as on 13th July 2026

INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIVITY

Air India flies non-stop to
41 destinations across
five continents from multiple
Indian cities (pinned on the
map of India)

Europe



Amsterdam (AMS)	←————→	DEL	
Copenhagen (CPH)	←————→	DEL	
Frankfurt (FRA)	←————→	DEL	BOM
Milan (MXP)	←————→	DEL	
Paris (CDG)	←————→	DEL	
Rome (FCO)	←————→	DEL	
Vienna (VIE)	←————→	DEL	
Zurich (ZRH)	←————→	DEL	

UK



Birmingham (BHX)	←————→	DEL	ATQ
<u>London</u>			
Gatwick (LGW)	←————→	ATQ	AMD
Heathrow (LHR)	←————→	DEL	BOM BLR

North America



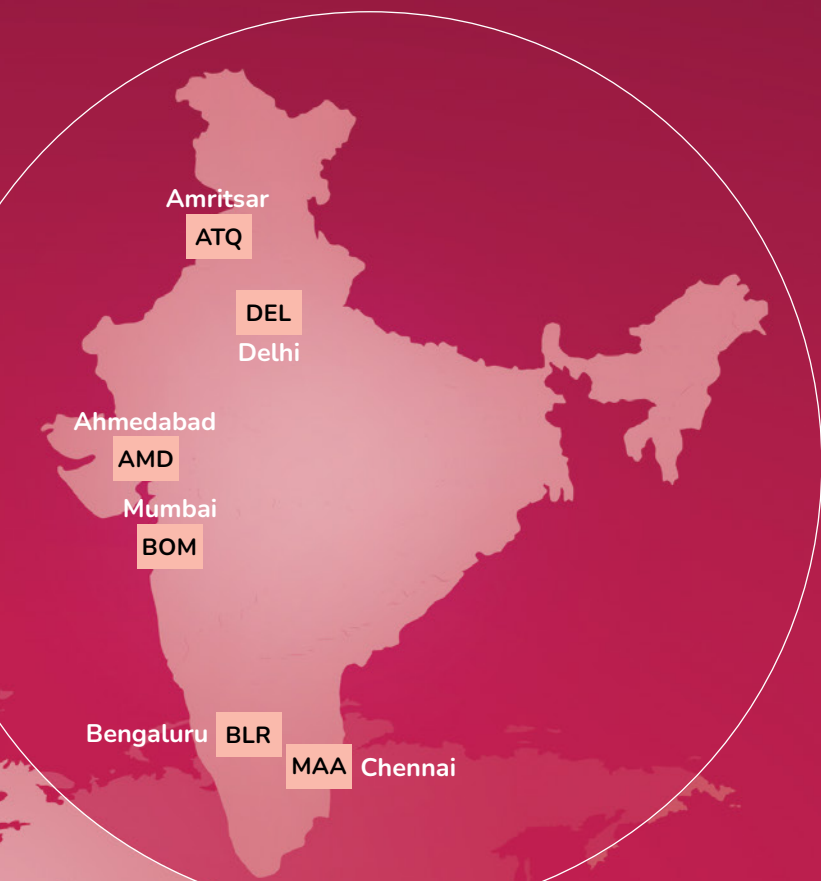
Newark (EWR)	←————→	DEL*	BOM
New York (JFK)	←————→	DEL	BOM*
San Francisco (SFO)	←————→	DEL	
Toronto (YYZ)	←————→	DEL	
Vancouver (YVR)	←————→	DEL	

Middle East



Dammam (DMM)	←————→	BOM
Doha (DOH)	←————→	DEL BOM
Dubai (DXB)	←————→	DEL BOM
Jeddah (JED)	←————→	DEL BOM
Riyadh (RUH)	←————→	DEL BOM
Tel Aviv (TLV)	←————→	DEL*

Connect beyond Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru
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Air India Express. Please turn to page 111 to see
domestic route connectivity via Air India Express.



Far East

Hong Kong (HKG)	↔	DEL
Seoul (ICN)	↔	DEL
Shanghai (PVG)	↔	DEL*
Tokyo (HND)	↔	DEL BOM



South East Asia

Bali (DPS)	↔	DEL
Bangkok (BKK)	↔	DEL BOM
Hanoi (HAN)	↔	DEL
Ho Chi Minh City (SGN)	↔	DEL
Kuala Lumpur (KUL)	↔	DEL
Manila (MNL)	↔	DEL
Phuket (HKT)	↔	DEL
Singapore (SIN)	↔	DEL BOM MAA*



Australia

Melbourne (MEL)	↔	DEL
Sydney (SYD)	↔	DEL



Africa

Mauritius (MRU)	↔	BOM
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Indian Subcontinent

Colombo (CMB)	↔	DEL BOM
Dhaka (DAC)	↔	DEL
Kathmandu (KTM)	↔	DEL
Malé (MLE)	↔	DEL*
Yangon (RGN)	↔	DEL

ABOARD AIX

A look at the aircraft in Air India Express' fleet*

 **Airbus A321neo**
04

 **Airbus A320neo**
15

 **Airbus A320ceo**
9

 **Boeing 737-800 NG**
24

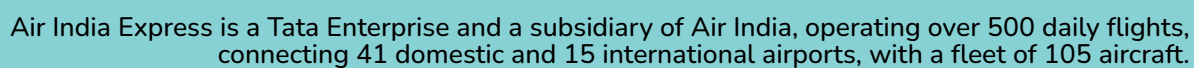
 **Boeing 737-800 Max**
53

**FLEET
STRENGTH
105**

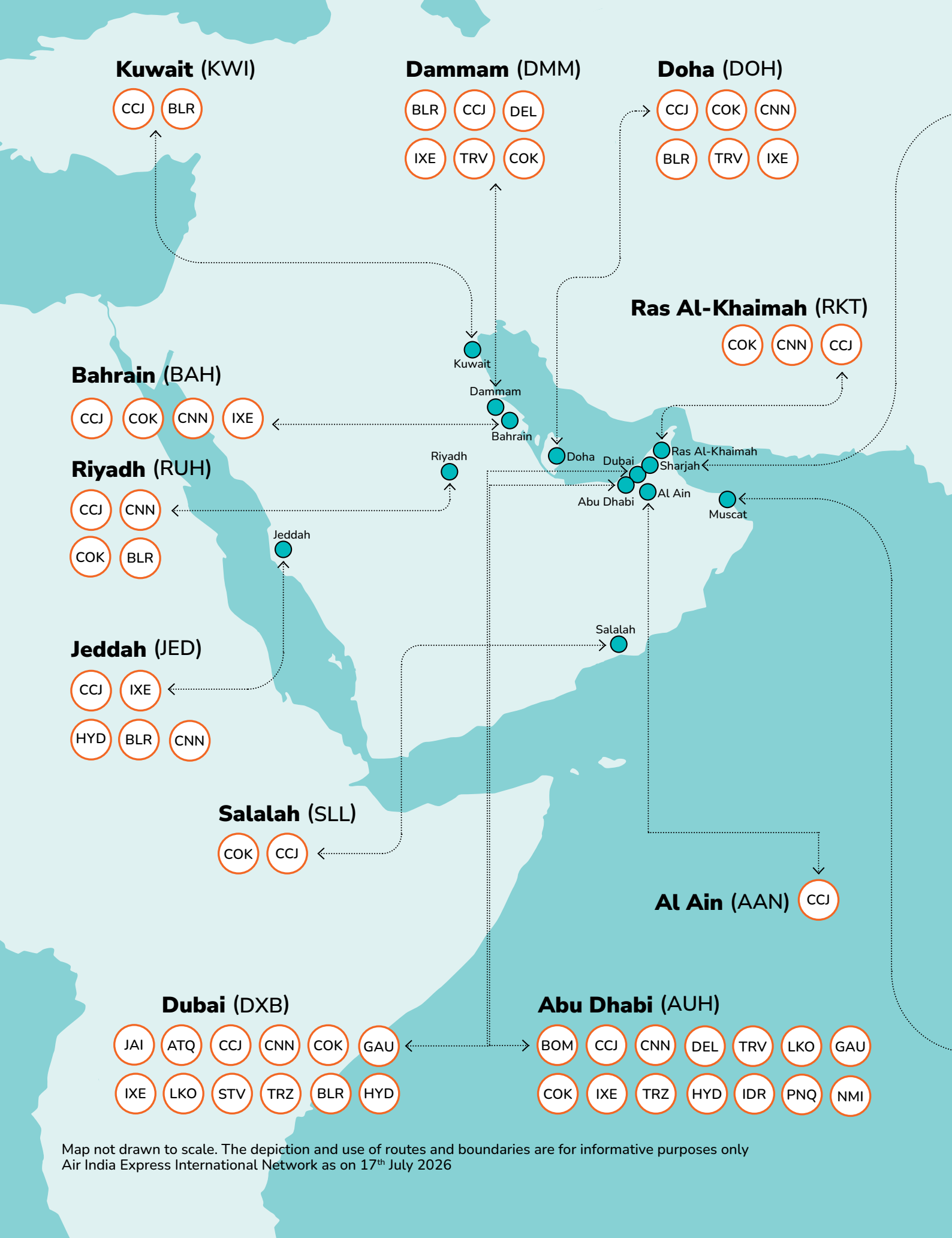


*Total number as on 9th July 2026

DOMESTIC CONNECTIVITY



Map not to scale. The depiction and use of routes and boundaries are for informative purposes only
Route map as on 17th July 2026



AIR INDIA
express

**INTERNATIONAL
CONNECTIVITY**

Sharjah (SHJ)



Bangkok (BKK)



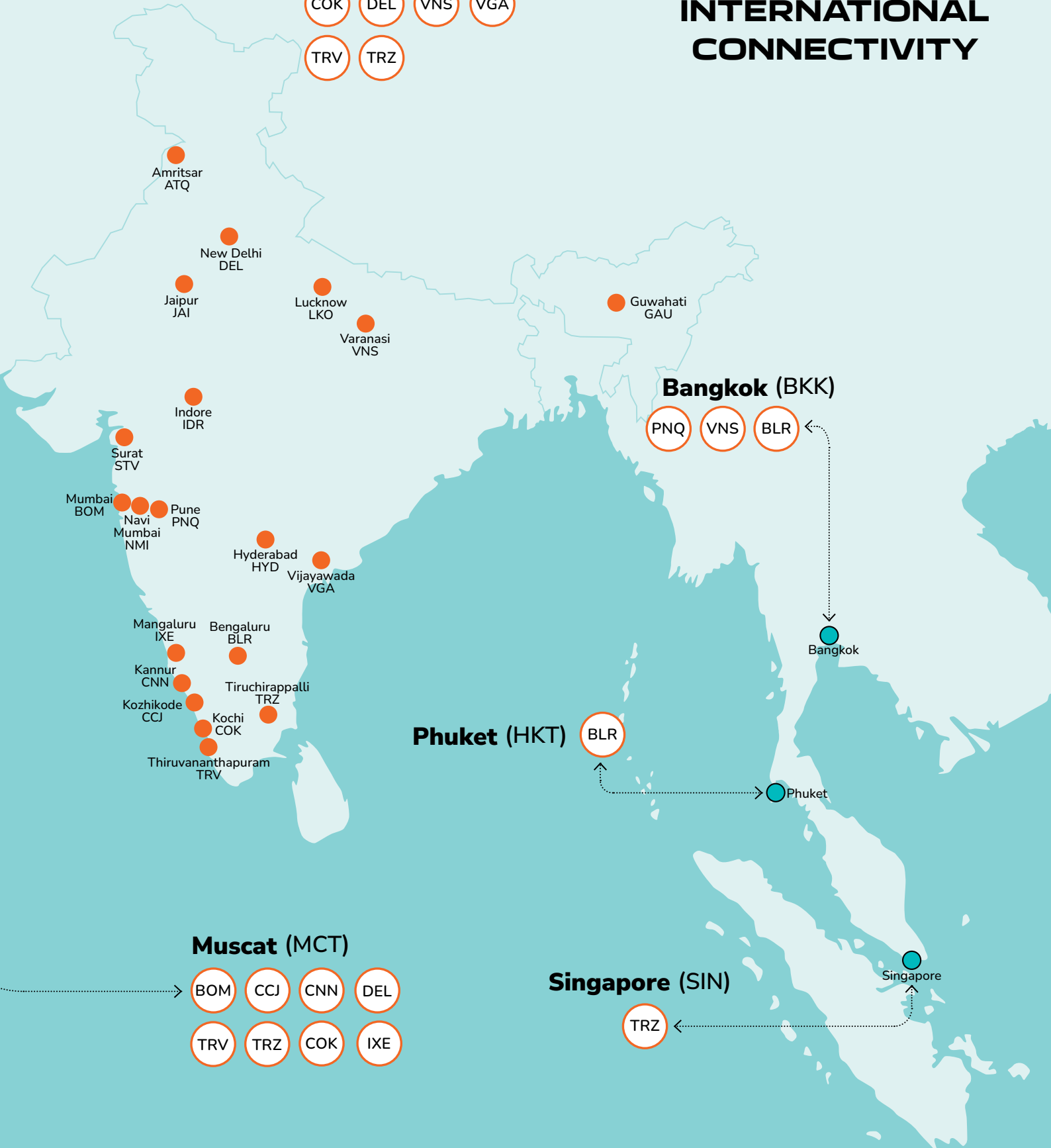
Phuket (HKT)



Muscat (MCT)



Singapore (SIN)





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Cyprus Airways
Finnair
Hahn Air
Iberia
ITA Airways
KLM
KM Malta Airlines
Lufthansa City Airlines
Scandinavian Airlines
Turkish Airlines
Virgin Atlantic
European Rail (Rail and Fly)

Deutsche Bahn (Rail and Fly)

Asia

Air Cambodia
Air China
Air Macau
Azerbaijan Airlines
Bangkok Airways
Batik Air Malaysia
Biman Bangladesh
Cathay Pacific
China Airlines
China Eastern Airlines
China Southern
Garuda Indonesia
Hainan Air
Hong Kong Airlines
Japan Airlines
Jeju Airlines
Juneyao Airlines

Kam Air
Korean Air
Malaysia Airlines
Maldivian
MIAT Mongolian
Myanmar Airways
Nepal Airlines
Philippine Airlines
Scoot
Shandong Airlines
Shanghai Airlines
Shenzhen Airlines
Starlux Airlines
Thai Airways
Vietnam Airlines

Middle East

El Al Israel
Emirates
Etihad Airways
Flydubai

Gulf Air
Kuwait Airways
Middle East Airlines
Oman Air
Qatar Airways
Royal Brunei Airlines
Royal Jordanian

North America

Alaska Airlines
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South America

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Paraguay)

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Air Tanzania
Royal Air Maroc
Rwand Air
South African Airways
Uganda Airlines

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Fiji Airways
JetStar
Qantas

*Both Codeshare and Interline Partners

Some airlines are represented under their respective group names
Codeshare and Interline partnerships as on 15th July 2026



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Near Breach Candy Hospital,
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Mission LiFE is a global mass movement, launched by Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, to inspire people to protect and conserve the environment. Its purpose is to make people aware of the environment and motivate them to take steps to protect the environment.

AIR-SEWA

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The Ministry of Civil Aviation has upgraded its Air Sewa portal that allows users to submit and track grievances/complaints online and get information about air travel in India. For any further service-related information, you can login to airsewa.gov.in

DIGI YATRA

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The Ministry of Civil Aviation has



introduced Digi Yatra facilities at major airports, including Delhi, Bengaluru, Varanasi, Pune, Kolkata, Vijayawada, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Jaipur, Lucknow, Guwahati, Kochi, and others. This platform aims to provide a seamless, hassle-free experience for travellers. To avail of this facility, simply download the Digi Yatra app and complete your registration.

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(IAF JUAs - Joint User Airfields) हवाई अड्डों पर और उड़ान संचालन के दौरान, विशेष रूप से 10,000 फीट से नीचे हवाई और ज़मीनी फोटोग्राफी और वीडियोग्राफी पर प्रतिबंध है। यह प्रतिबंध टर्मिनलों, विमानों और हवाई अड्डों के आसपास के क्षेत्रों सहित विभिन्न स्थानों पर लागू होता है, जैसे की:

- टर्मिनल के अंदर; •विमान तक, या विमान से दूर जाने वाले वाहनो में; •विमान के बाहर; •लैंडिंग के दौरान; •हवाई अड्डे पर; •पुशबैक, टैक्सीइंग, टेक-ऑफ के दौरान, और जब विमान 10,000 फीट से नीचे उड़ रहा हो।

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FTI - TTP (FAST TRACK IMMIGRATION – TRUSTED TRAVELLER PROGRAMME)

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FOR FLIGHTS ARRIVING IN DELHI (DOMESTIC FLIGHTS OPERATING FROM TERMINAL 2)

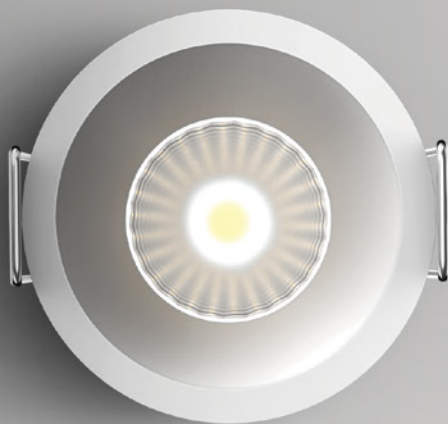
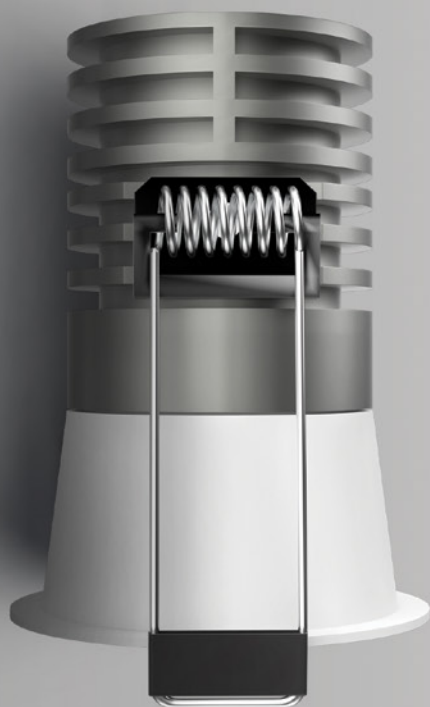
हम आपको सूचित करना चाहते हैं कि 26 अक्टूबर से प्रभावी रूप से, चार अंको वाली आंतरिक उड़ान, जिनके नंबर 'AI 1500 से 1999' के बीच हैं, टर्मिनल 2 से संचालित होगी। यदि आप एयर इंडिया एक्सप्रेस की उड़ान से कनेक्ट कर रहे हैं, तो कृपया टर्मिनल 1 पर जाएं। टर्मिनलों के बीच हर 10-मिनट में फ्री शटल बस सेवा उपलब्ध है, टर्मिनल 2 और टर्मिनल 3 के बीच यह सेवा उपलब्ध नहीं है। दोनों टर्मिनलों के बीच पैदल चलने का समय 10-मिनट है। आपके आगमन पर यदि किसी प्रकार की सहायता की आवश्यकता हो, तो कृपया हमारे ग्राउंड स्टाफ से संपर्क करें।

Effective 26th October, domestic flights with 4-digit numbers starting from 'AI 1500 to 1999' will operate from Terminal 2. If you are connecting on Air India Express, please proceed to Terminal 1. Free shuttle buses are available every 10 minutes between terminals, except between T2 and T3, which are connected by a convenient 10-minute walk. Should you require any assistance upon arrival, please feel free to approach our ground staff.

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A TRAVELLER'S TALE



BIG APPLE BITES

Fashion designer **Payal Singhal's** favourite finds in New York City



AN UNFORGETTABLE MEMORY

This summer's visit to New York felt especially memorable because the New York Knicks made history with their biggest triumph (winning the NBA after 53 years) and the city was completely swept up in celebration. I also met Jennifer Lopez in Bridgehampton. And since I have been a huge fan of hers from the day her first album released (1999, also the same year I launched my brand), it was surreal to bump into her.

A FARE TO REMEMBER

On this trip, I ate at Hutong (refined Northern Chinese cuisine), Ravagh Persian Grill (excellent kebabs and saffron rice), Pio Pio 8 (tried their famous Peruvian chicken and green sauce), and Nami Nori, which does creative sushi hand rolls. I also visited Afghan Kebab House for authentic Afghani comfort food and Hampton Chutney Co. for their iconic dosa with curried chicken.

MY RECOMMENDATIONS

SoHo and West Broadway are my favourite areas to discover emerging designers, independent boutiques, concept stores, and brands that have not yet become mainstream. The West Village is dotted with beautifully-curated fashion, home, and lifestyle boutiques, and is perfect for discovering one-of-a-kind finds. Finally, Bergdorf Goodman and Saks Fifth Avenue continue to set the benchmark for luxury department stores.

— As told to **Mignonne Dsouza**

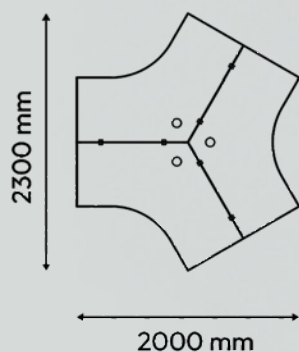


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