

KERALA'S BEST-KEPT SECRETS

AIR INDIA

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to Hanumankind

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Kochi-Muziris Biennale

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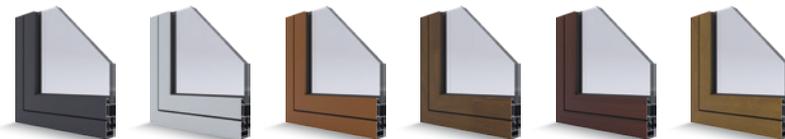


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Burda Media India Private Limited

Ambience Mall, 7th Floor (AWfis), Gate No - 04, Ambience Island, NH-8, Gurugram – 122002, Haryana

Burda Media India Private Limited is a company of The Hubert Burda Media Group

Hubert Burda Media India

Chief Executive Officer BJÖRN RETTIG

Burda International Holding GmbH

LEGAL ADDRESS Hubert Burda Platz 1, 77652 Offenburg, Germany

POSTAGE ADDRESS Arabellastrasse 23, D-81925 Munich, Germany

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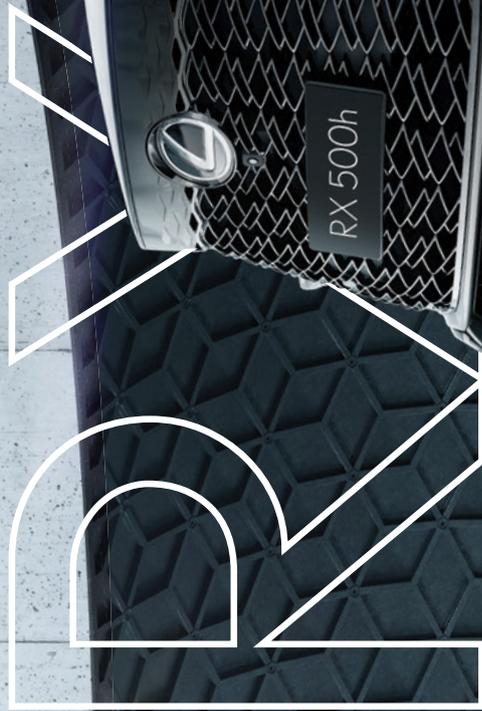
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# EDITOR'S NOTE

**F**rom lush tea gardens to gushing waterfalls and from exciting snake boat races to calming Ayurveda—Kerala's richness and diversity is unmatched.

And that is why, our Cover Story this month takes you to God's Own Country, with insider secrets on immersive experiences shared by an award-winning travel guide. We take a peek into the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, feature a stunning display of photographs that capture the range of Kerala's raw beauty, and speak to global sensation, rapper Hanumankind on the little things he loves about his home state.

Home, of course, means different things to different people. For author Ruskin Bond, his home and the environs of Landour, Mussoorie, have offered him immense inspiration over the years. Booker winner Kiran Desai, on the other hand, has lived and worked in many places, and she reflects on how "the ideas of home change all the time".

Festivals, for one, feel like home, wherever you may be celebrating. This December, we take you to Christmas markets in Delhi and in Vienna—the latter boasts some of the world's oldest and grandest Xmas markets that envelop you in a blanket of cheer.

Elsewhere, explore Lisbon through eight quintessential dishes, find exciting vegan options in cuisine-rich Singapore, and plan a day out in Rome with our itinerary.

The end of the year is also a good time to reflect, and Milind Soman talks to us about his passion for running and why it is much more than a physical sport. If you want to introspect, try something unique, like flotation therapy—it promises clarity of thought through sensory deprivation.

As we put 2025 behind us and move on to a hope-filled 2026, we continue to strive to make your journeys better, with a sprinkling of our distinctive hospitality and warmth.

Happy reading!

– **Namaste.ai** Editorial Team



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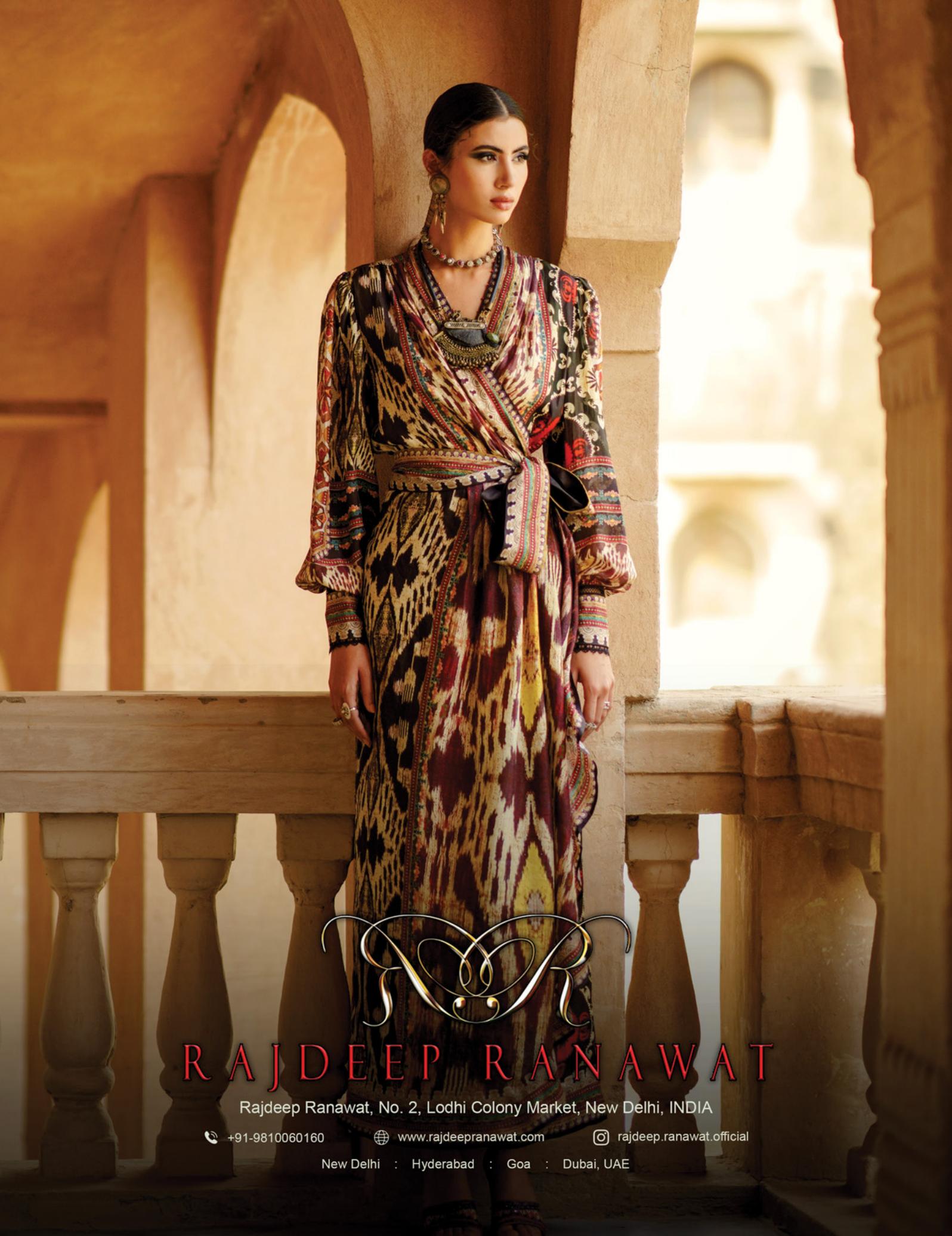
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that reflect the  
beauty of Kerala

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An artiste prepares for a Theyyam performance in Kannur, Kerala, India

Cover image courtesy Shutterstock

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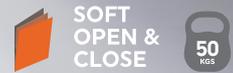
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## → Chaitali Verma

[@chaitali.verma](#)

A social media strategist-turned-travel creator, Chaitali explores the world one slow adventure at a time—planting paddy in Vietnam, dancing *bachata* in Kenya, and more. A lover of saunas, safaris, and salsa, she is on a mission to show that travel is never just about places, but about the people who shape them. She explores the Christmas markets in and around Delhi. **page 106**



## ← Christina Khalil

[@100001dreams](#)

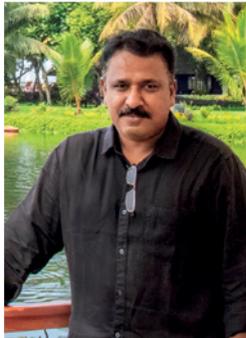
A writer, author, poet, and photographer, Christina divides her time between Linz (Austria) and Bengaluru (India). Her published works include *I'll Do It My Way: The Incredible Journey of Aamir Khan and Ginger Soda Lemon Pop*. Her writing is shaped by her extensive travels across 19 countries spanning four continents. She takes us on a magical tour of Vienna's largest Christmas market. **page 30**



## → Manoj Vasudevan

[@manojphotography](#)

Based in Kerala, Manoj is a tourism consultant, author, and published photographer. He has worked with several notable names, including authors Amitav Ghosh and Javier Moro, and has been part of many TV series like *Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations*, *Ghost Fleet* with National Geographic, and *Weekend Explorer* with Jeffrey Lehmann. He writes about discovering the state through immersive experiences. **page 20**



## ← Milind Soman

[@milindrunning](#)

An actor, supermodel, and endurance athlete, Milind has spent decades redefining India's relationship with fitness. A national-level swimmer and Ironman triathlete, he writes about the importance of running and how the sport has redefined the way he views life. **page 92**



## ← Varisha Tariq

[@varishaghazalatariq](#)

Hailing from (and based in) the city of Nawabs, Lucknow, Varisha is a culture and travel journalist whose love for the world ensures she always has one foot out the door. She is the co-founder of ETA Gaia, a Swiss travel company, and her motto is: If all else fails, there is always Lucknow's food to get your heart racing. She offers tips on exploring Rome in a day. **page 54**

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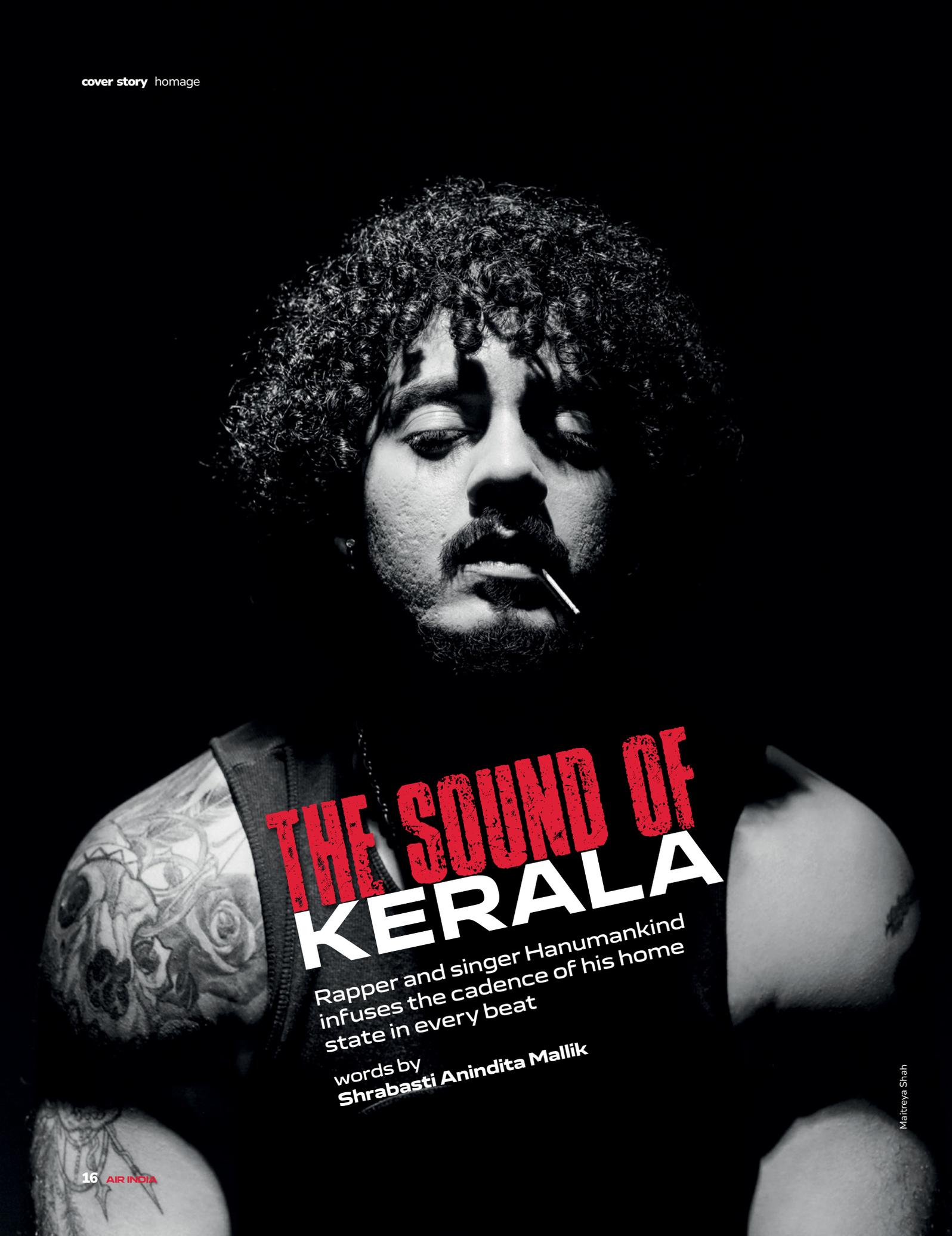
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# THE SOUND OF KERALA

Rapper and singer Hanumankind  
infuses the cadence of his home  
state in every beat

words by  
**Shrabasti Anindita Mallik**



The cascading Adyanpara Waterfall, in the Kurumbalangodu village, is a star attraction of Kerala's Malappuram district

**FACING PAGE**  
Sooraj Cherukat took the stage name Hanumankind as a portmanteau of the Hindu deity Hanuman and 'mankind'

**T**he stage was set—Coachella 2025, one of America's biggest music and art festivals. Amidst a line-up of stellar musicians and performers came a set during which, the air reverberated with the pulsing beats of *chenda* (a percussion instrument native to Kerala, India). And as the tempo rose, in walked Sooraj Cherukat, aka Hanumankind—curly-haired, mic in hand, swagger in every step.

That performance might have marked his debut on a world stage, but what made it groundbreakingly unique was the personal touch he added—representing his home state of Kerala by teaming up with a US-based *chenda* ensemble called Kochuveettil Beats. “You can take the boy out of Kerala, but you can't take Kerala out of the boy,” he declares, rather proudly.

Born in the state's Malappuram district, he grew up in many cities around the world, owing to his father's work, finally settling in Houston (Texas, USA). While the city introduced him to the hip-hop scene, the annual trips to India kept him grounded. “I didn't get to grow up in Kerala in the traditional sense, but it was the only constant in my life. One to two months of every year were spent there, usually



## RHYTHM DIVINE

"If there is one sound from Kerala that has truly influenced my creative direction, it has to be mainly *chendas*. My dad loved going to *chenda melams* [percussion groups] whenever we got the time. Those days were always special to me. It was only on these days that I got to see my dad actually enjoy himself. I rarely got to see that side of him. Our dynamic didn't give us much room for fun. In those moments, I tried my best to cheer as loud as him."

during the monsoon season. All the music and stories that built the foundation of who I am, came from Kerala," he says.

Listen closely and you will notice that his music—with its astounding global appeal—carries the ethos of the state in one way or another. And often, it is not even deliberate. "Sometimes, I don't even realise that we've incorporated certain elements and *thaalams* into the music until someone else points it out. So much of what we do is percussive; and if there's one thing that we know in Kerala, it is drums. Whether in functions or in family... it runs in our code," he points out.

Adding indigenous percussion instruments and Kerala's martial energy into his music and visuals is not a conscious act either. He reasons, "It's what I believe will bring the most to the song. You can't force these things, you know?" There are elements from all over the world in the music he makes. "It just depends on what hits the hardest," adds the 33-year-old rapper. "That's life in my world. Who I am, will reflect in the sound."

Such is his love for Kerala that he shot the official video of his hit song *Big Dawgs* in a *maranakinar* (a motor-stunt arena) in Ponnani, a place close to his home in

the Malappuram district. Although the setting was new to his audience in the West, "Anyone across India can relate to this carnival classic," he clarifies. A visual treat, the video captures the artiste, in a car, performing a gravity-defying stunt. "My brother Bijoy and I thought this [the stunt] was the best thing to make a music video around because the song gave us the same energy we felt when watching it as an audience. And the fact that we got to do it there [in Ponnani] makes the experience all the more sweeter in the end." There is even a short behind-the-scenes clip of Cherukat doing the stunt at the end of the video.



**TOP AND BOTTOM**  
Hanumankind shot a part of his music video, *Run it Up*, in Kollengode, Kerala; The artiste captured the state's ancient art form of *Garudan Parava* in the video.

**FACING PAGE**  
The artiste at a global fan event with a chenda ensemble earlier this year



Kerala, however, has bestowed the artiste with more than just its cultural ethos. It has given him some of his most cherished childhood memories. Even those as simple as, “eating together and jumping in the water”. Though years have passed since his boyhood days, in his eyes, “My area in Malappuram always has a certain feel to it that hasn’t changed”. And although he acknowledges the developments in the towns and neighbourhoods, especially in the last two years, “The feeling I have for home has always been the same though—a natural ease and grounded energy. I do my best to not let things change how pure that is.”

And he prefers to keep everything that way—pure and simple. It is surprising to learn that it is “usually just at home” that the

artiste best reconnects with himself. “By spending time with my family and my dog. I don’t get to do that often. So, it makes such a difference when I finally do,” he explains.

Ask him about his favourite spots in Kerala and pat comes the reply, “Home. And my aunt’s house,” adding, “You might find me walking my dog on a random day. That’s my go-to thing to do, place to go, and way to live.” Even in terms of his work, he feels different—both lyrically and emotionally—when he is at home as compared to anywhere else. “But that’s the case with anybody, right? Kerala makes sure I slow down and appreciate things better,” he smiles.

And which of his tracks best captures his bond with the state? *Pharmaceuticals*, he says. It was the first song

he made with Parimal Shais, another Kerala-born artiste. “There’s something about the track. It was part of a project Parimal did, called *Kumari Kandam Traps* that had so many sounds and elements from Kerala in it. I’m blessed to be a part of it, and I highly recommend y’all checking it out. The project is so progressive but so *nadan* [traditional] at the same time. I love it, man,” he wraps up, with that effortless swagger that makes him unmistakably Hanumankind.



# KERALA UNFILTERED

Award-winning travel guide Manoj Vasudevan takes you off the beaten path in God's Own Country

## Explore traditional art forms in Thrissur

Kerala is home to many forms of performing arts, which can be seen live at Kerala Kalamandalam, an institution that imparts teaching in art and culture. Accompanied by a guide, visitors can observe students in class as they learn the nuances of Kathakali, Mohiniyattam, and Ottan Thullal, and master music instruments like the *chenda*, *maddalam*, and *edakka*. This is better than viewing a performance, as one can see students working to perfect their art.



## Cycle in Fort Kochi

This heritage area is a magnet for travellers who love its cosmopolitan vibe. It is said to be home to over 30 communities from across India. One special way to navigate this stretch is via cycle. Drive past

ancient religious structures, including a synagogue, church, and temple, and the Mattancherry Palace, before you end the trip with a meal at a local eatery. Don't forget to stop by the iconic Chinese fishing nets for a selfie.

### GETTING THERE

Air India flies non-stop to Kochi from Delhi and Mumbai.





**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT**

Trying traditional fishing at Kumarakom; Cycling is a memorable way to explore Fort Kochi; Visitors try their hand at tea plucking in Munnar.

**FACING PAGE**  
(top and bottom)  
Tourists explore the Vaikom backwaters; Students in rehearsal at Kerala Kalamandalam.



**Attend a cooking class in Kochi**

Nimmy Paul has been hosting cooking demonstrations at her home for over 20 years now. Dishes from the Syrian Christian community (which she belongs to) are her forte, but she can customise a class or meal to suit individual tastes. Instagram favourite Chef Neema Mathew also hosts hands-on cooking classes, even offering vegan, vegetarian, and gluten-free variations. Both chefs have welcomed several celebrities, including Paul Theroux and South African Chef Sally Williams.

**Pluck your own tea leaves in Munnar**

Tea has been grown in Munnar since the late 19<sup>th</sup>

century. At Talayar Valley Bungalow, visitors get to pluck the tea leaves (many give up after 15 minutes; it is a daunting task). Next, you can watch how the leaves you plucked are processed, and then enjoy a tea-tasting session.

**Visit the backwaters of Vaikom**

This is an hour away from Kochi or Kumarakom, and the attraction here is that visitors can traverse very narrow canals via a boat, offering them glimpses of village life. These canals are too narrow to allow for the passage of motorised boats, so this becomes an intimate and more authentic experience. The boats make stops where one can watch people making coir ropes

etc.; a food stop can also be arranged where travellers can enjoy a traditional Kerala *sadya* meal.

**See a 'Responsible Tourism' village in Kumarakom**

This lets travellers actually experience village life. They can see farmers out in the paddy fields, women weaving baskets, and see toddy tappers hard at work. The project seeks to make the villagers an integral part of the growing tourism industry and promotes pride in their land and culture.

*(All these tours can be booked via your hotel or a tour operator)*

— As told to **Mignonne Dsouza**

**WHERE TO STAY**

**Philipkutty's Farm**

Set by the backwaters in Kumarakom, these homely villas offer a taste of traditional life. [philipkuttysfarm.com](http://philipkuttysfarm.com)

**The Heritage 1866**

A 159-year heritage home in Thalassery. [heritage1866.com](http://heritage1866.com)

**Tissa's Inn**

This boutique Fort Kochi option offers yoga and meditation facilities. [tissasin.in](http://tissasin.in)

**Amaryllis**

Go birdwatching in Wayanad at this property. [amarylliskerala.com](http://amarylliskerala.com)

**Vanilla County**

Stay in a 75-year-old bungalow in Vagamon. [vanillacounty.in](http://vanillacounty.in)

**Dewalokam Kerala Homestay**

An ancestral farm around 75km from Kochi (Idukki district), it offers Ayurveda packages. [dewalokam.in](http://dewalokam.in)



# POSTCARD PRETTY

From rolling tea estates and scenic beaches to historic quarters, and more, Kerala's diversity has something to offer every kind of traveller



### **CHINESE FISHING NETS**

Located at Vasco da Gama Square in Fort Kochi, these nets are made of teak wood and bamboo poles, and work on the principle of balance. Each net is lowered into the water early morning and evening, and then raised by pulling on the ropes to haul in the catch.



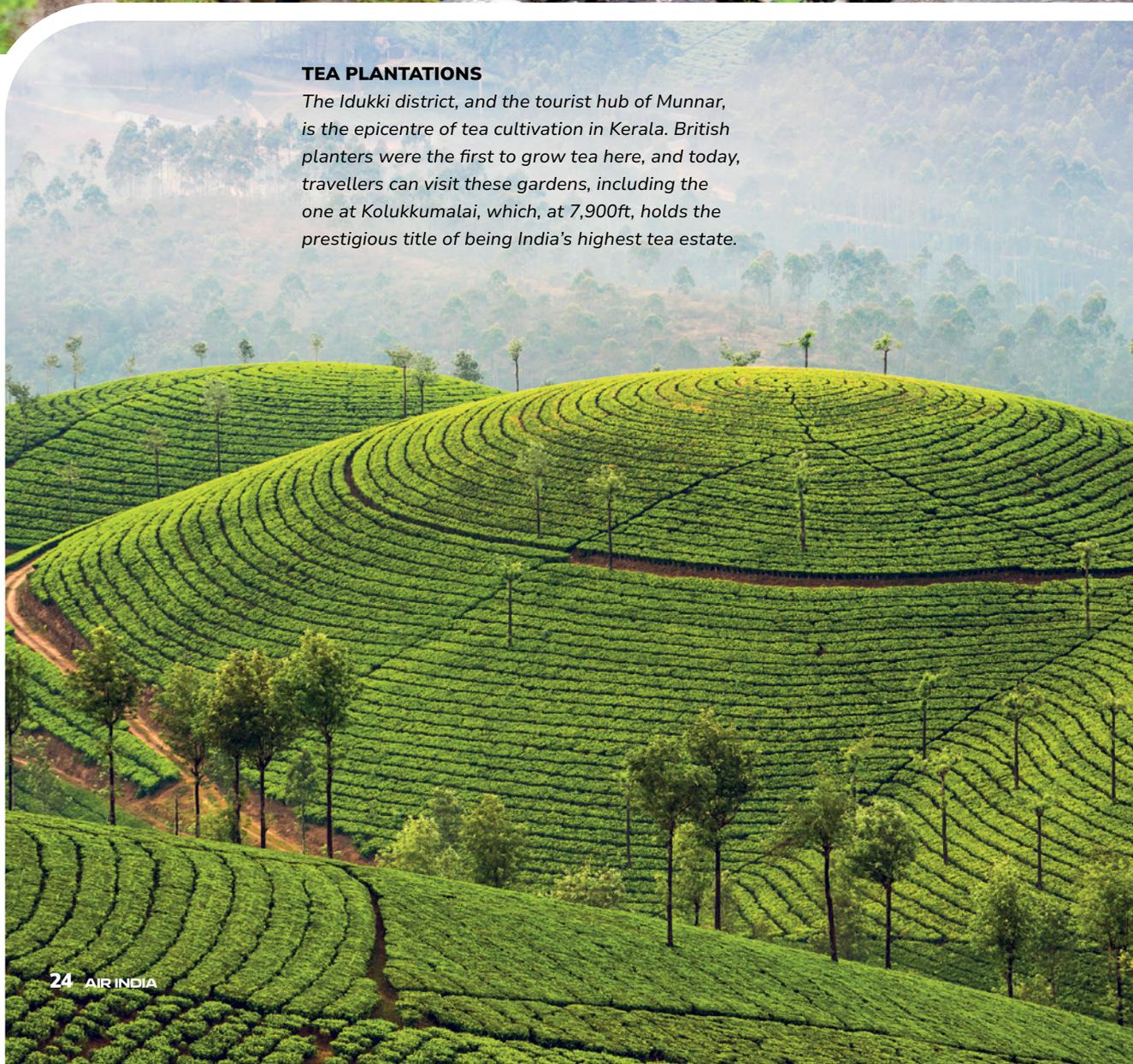
### **SNAKE BOAT RACES**

These are a majestic sight to behold and never fail to attract large crowds. Held on Ashtamudi Lake, in the Pamba and Muvattupuzha rivers, as well as many other locations, such races often coincide with local festivals. Not just a sporting event, they are cultural celebrations and landmark occasions in the state's tourism calendar.



### TEA PLANTATIONS

*The Idukki district, and the tourist hub of Munnar, is the epicentre of tea cultivation in Kerala. British planters were the first to grow tea here, and today, travellers can visit these gardens, including the one at Kolukkumalai, which, at 7,900ft, holds the prestigious title of being India's highest tea estate.*





### **ERAVIKULAM NATIONAL PARK**

One of the highlights in this park (near Munnar) is the high density of Nilgiri Tahr. The Park is also home to around 120 avian species and a large number of plants that are endemic to the Western Ghats.



### **TEMPLE FESTIVALS**

Elephants arrayed in breathtaking costumes accompanied with traditional music, colourful processions, and intricate rituals, are a common sight at temple festivals like the Uthralikkavu Pooram festival in Wadakkanchery, Thrissur (pictured here). Immersive experiences, each one offers a unique glimpse of local customs.



### **MUZHAPPILANGAD BEACH**

With a 4km stretch of sand that travellers can drive on at low tide, this is Asia's longest drive-in beach. It is a swimmer's paradise as the natural black rocks provide shelter from the strong currents of the ocean. Located near Thalassery, the beach welcomes around 30 species of migratory birds during the winter months.

Clockwise from top left: Kerala Tourism; Mano Vasudevan; Shutterstock; Shutterstock

# Brush Strokes

We pick six artists to watch out for at the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale

words by Gitanjali Dang

## ↓ LAKSHMI NIVAS COLLECTIVE

An artist collective formed in 2018 by Namrata Neog and Sunoj D, it is based out of Parudur, a village in Kerala, where the artists' lives revolve around animal grazing. Cutting grass, foraging for animal fodder, and taking them to graze is an integral part of the artists' methodology to understand the entangled landscape that surrounds them. At the Biennale, the collective is exhibiting, among other works, two sculptural installations—*Faith Was Never About Us* and *Resistance Prayer Song*—that look at faith-based practices like prayer where the focus is always on something other than the human being, like praying for better weather. But prayer in itself is so human centric that even when one is praying for better weather, in a way one is also praying for one's own sustenance within that environment.



Titled *Herd*, this is from Lakshmi Nivas Collective's first solo exhibition, *Sentient Beings (2024)*, at Durbar Hall, Kochi

All images are courtesy the respective artists



**TOP AND BOTTOM**  
 Shiraz Bayjoo's Pa Bliye Mwa (Don't Forget Me) from an earlier exhibition; A still from Pallavi Paul's video *Alaq* (2025).

← **SHIRAZ BAYJOO**

The artist has been researching along India's western coast since 2013. That, and recent researches, manifest in an installation titled *Sa Sime Lamer*, Creole for *The Path to the Sea* (2025), at the Biennale. The installation reflects on what the land has yielded in terms of extraction through the spice trade, and on colonial industrialisation. Based between London and Mauritius, the artist's installation includes handwoven textiles onto which he has printed early illustrations of medicinal plants as printed in the work, *Treatise of the Drugs and Medicines of the East Indies*. Through these pieces, Bayjoo thinks through legacies of colonisation including erasure of ecologies and the displacement of people.

→ **PALLAVI PAUL**

Since Covid-19, Paul has found herself reflecting on illness and health issues—concerns around which she has already anchored her work. For the Biennale, she roots these concerns in the realities of Kerala. Following research, the artist focused on the Nipah virus outbreaks; on the other hand, her research introduced her to a female mystic healer called Beema Beevi. The Delhi-based artist is showing a three-channel video work called *Alaq*, a series of still-to-be-titled print works, and a suite of fabric sculptures (all 2025). The still-to-be-titled print works, which are juxtaposed with the video, all speak to the entanglement of life, faith, and contagion as Paul tries to assemble a visual vocabulary for things that can be sensed but not seen—like the virus, faith or healing.



➔ **RATNA GUPTA**

Making, keeping, holding, taking, and spending it—Gupta is interested in all varieties of time. Her work at the Biennale focuses on this. The labour-intensive nature of the Mumbai-based artist's *Untitled* (2025) drawings demanded an investment of deep, meditative time. She engaged in mark-making with graphite, ink or thread on paper. Like so many before her, Gupta casts her knitting as a feminist act. Since she chose to knit at home, Gupta had to carve out time to knit and in any setting, this may be seen as a political act. Time shows differently in her sculptural work. Here, it is an active agent of transformation.

Her use of barks, twigs, and seeds, means time will cause this material to decompose before the viewers' eyes.



TOP AND BOTTOM  
Artist Ratna Gupta's studio: A still from the film, *A Missing Can of Film*, by Naeem Mohaiemen.



➔ **NAEEM MOHAIEEMEN**

For the past decade, Mohaiemen has been invested in the story of filmmaker, late Zahir Raihan. This has led to a new film, *A Missing Can of Film* (2025), which will premiere at the Biennale. The New York-based artist is interested in the conflicting narratives surrounding Raihan's death. While official records count him among the martyrs of the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, Mohaiemen's film points to Raihan's disappearance 45 days after the war. The artist is drawn to the idea of what it means for Raihan to not be able to tell his own story but instead become a symbol for other people's stories.

**TALES OF INDIA**

The Biennale is Asia's biggest contemporary art festival, bringing together 66 artists and collectives from over 25 countries. Air India Express has been a proud and long-standing supporter of this global celebration of culture and imagination. The association is built on shared values—connecting people, places, and cultures in

meaningful ways. One of the highlights of the previous edition was the distinctive tail art created by the Biennale for Air India Express' Boeing 737-NG aircraft, VT-AXN, carrying a piece of the event's artistic spirit across the skies. This year, the airline continues its patronage as part of the 'Tales of India' initiative, through which the airline

spotlights India's rich culture by proudly showcasing unique art and designs on its aircraft tails, representing the stories of India's many regions.



The Kochi-Muziris Biennale will take place from 12<sup>th</sup> December 2025 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026, at multiple locations across Kochi

# CHECKLIST

Everything worth  
checking out

30 → NAVIGATE

38 → IN FOCUS

44 → EVENTS

46 → FOOD

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58 → NOW TRENDING

# A Festive Symphony

Vienna's largest Christmas market is 50 years old and a spectacle to behold

words by **Christina Khalil**



The Rathausplatz Christkindlmarkt has come to represent the spirit of Vienna

Getty Images



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**N**othing lights up a European winter in December like a Christmas market. Twinkling lights, rows of decorated wooden huts, the scent of cinnamon, and a warm cup of *glühwein* (mulled wine). All of these combine in perfect harmony when we enter Vienna's Rathausplatz Christkindlmarkt. Quite literally, Christkindlmarkt translates to 'Market of the Christ Child', and is among the city's many Advent festivities.

Rising up like a page from a medieval legend or the magical world of a favourite childhood fairytale, you cannot help but be mesmerised by this spectacle of a market nestled under the Rathaus or the City Hall's Gothic spires and arched windows. This is the largest Christmas market in Austria, and possibly the world.

### How the legend came about

The festive-market tradition is deeply rooted in the city's memory and goes back to the late Middle Ages, when Duke Albrecht I granted citizens the right to hold a December market. This would later evolve into the city's annual Christmas fair on the Graben, before it permanently shifted to Am Hof.

The Rathausplatz Christkindlmarkt



**INSIDER TIPS TO REMEMBER**

- Dress warmly:** Temperatures hover near freezing. Pack gloves, hats, and sturdy boots.
- Prepare for the rain:** Always carry an umbrella with you. Choose waterproof jackets.
- Carry cash, always:** It's still king in Austria. Especially when buying food and drink.

though, opened at its current location (City Hall) in 1975, and has stayed here since. While there are other markets that might be older, none of these compare with the scale of the Rathausplatz Christkindlmarkt. That's why it is officially dubbed the Wiener Christkindlmarkt. It has come to represent the character of the city, more than any other Xmas market in Vienna.

### From medieval to modern

Tradition meets modernity at this market. Every year, this centuries-old custom now plays out against a contemporary setting, as it brings together 150 stalls offering Austria's best Xmas crafts. A giant tree presides

over the square and each year it is donated by a different federal province, symbolising unity and goodwill.

A crib featuring Nativity scenes is usually set up at the foot of the tree. It is a symbol of the deeper spirituality that inspired its earliest market. But in the background, an enormous Ferris wheel, a carousel, and a skating rink are the new symbols. They point to how these traditional markets have evolved into modern cultural celebrations.

We wander through stalls that display both fine porcelain and exquisite decorations. As one of the first countries in Europe to manufacture porcelain, Viennese craftsmanship was highly regarded across the world when the Habsburg dynasty ruled the Austro-Hungarian empire. It has now come to be embedded into the country's heritage. Nowhere is this more on display than in the Xmas markets.

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT**  
A giant Ferris wheel is one of the new attractions at the Market; mulled wine is a festive favourite.



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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT A different federal province donates the tree each year to the Wiener Christkindlmarkt; a Nativity scene is set up under the tree; Typical Xmas ornaments.

pastries are also really comforting when outdoors in the Austrian winter.

A wider Advent trail

The same festive elements shine across all of Vienna's markets, yet each has its own character. The Old Viennese Christmas Market at Freyung offers a nostalgic, artisanal atmosphere, while Am Hof brings elegant craftwork. The Belvedere Palace stages its market in front of a Baroque façade, and Schönbrunn Palace also transforms into a regal Christmas wonderland. But for most visitors, Rathausplatz remains the city's festive epicentre. It's here that history, architecture, and music fuse into a living postcard of a European winter.

A taste of Christmas

Food and drink are central to the Christmas market experience. It's not hard to see why. With the promise of snow always in the air and temperatures routinely reaching around 0° Celsius, you always need a steaming cup of glühwein, and a bag of roasted chestnuts by your side.

Another favourite festive drink in an Austrian Christmas market is the punsch (punch). This is usually a blend of tea, fruit juice, sugar, and rum or brandy. But it comes in many flavours, like the orangepunsch (orange), beerenpunsch (berry), apfelpunsch (apple), and even tee-punsch (tea-based). You could pair these with a traditional bratwurst in a stew or würstl (sausages), and oven potatoes. But in a country that excels in its sweet treats, make sure you dig into the buchteln and baumkuchen. These

WHERE TO STAY

Hotel Altstadt Vienna: A boutique art hotel in the Spittelberg district. Every room is individually designed and unique, so, no two experiences will be identical.

Hollmann Beletage Design & Boutique Hotel: Located near St. Stephen's Cathedral, behind an unassuming façade, is this small hotel that blends playfulness with comfort. Think breakfast theatre and reading hammocks.

Dalia - Dolce Duo Homes: Cozy apartments with a thoughtful host add a personal touch. Public transport is nearby, placing the big landmarks about 30 minutes away.

GETTING THERE Air India flies non-stop to Vienna from Delhi. Includes airplane and location pin icons.



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# CULTURE HUB

This December, all roads lead to Panaji as the Serendipity Arts Festival (SAF) brings a stellar line-up to the sunshine state

words by **Mignonne Dsouza**

**T**his year marks the 10<sup>th</sup> edition of this multi-disciplinary event, which takes place along the banks of the Mandovi river in Goa. From exhibitions and live performances to workshops and culinary experiences—it promises to be a true celebration of inclusivity, creativity, and exchange.

Venues include the Art Park, which will host large-scale public art installations, and Azad Maidan, which will celebrate traditional crafts from across India through multiple mediums. The barge parked by the Mandovi in Old Goa will become a space for sensory discovery and connection.

Each category at Serendipity has been assembled by an expert curator, including musicians Ehsan Noorani and Shubha Mudgal, dance exponent Tanusree Shankar, artist Sudarshan Shetty, theatre veteran Mahesh Dattani, and chefs Rahul



**TOP AND BOTTOM**  
The event is one of South Asia's largest multi-disciplinary arts festivals; (inset) Internationally-famed bassist Mohini Dey (stage name dey\_bass) performed at SAF in 2024; Art installations are a big draw at the fest.

Akerkar and Thomas Zacharias. A full quota of activities—a live performance by Manganiyar musicians; a play set on the final day of Lord Krishna's life (*Nihshango Ishwar*); and a culinary workshop titled *The Joy of Chocolate*, among many others—renders this year's edition a must visit.

12<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> December, at locations across Panaji



## GETTING THERE

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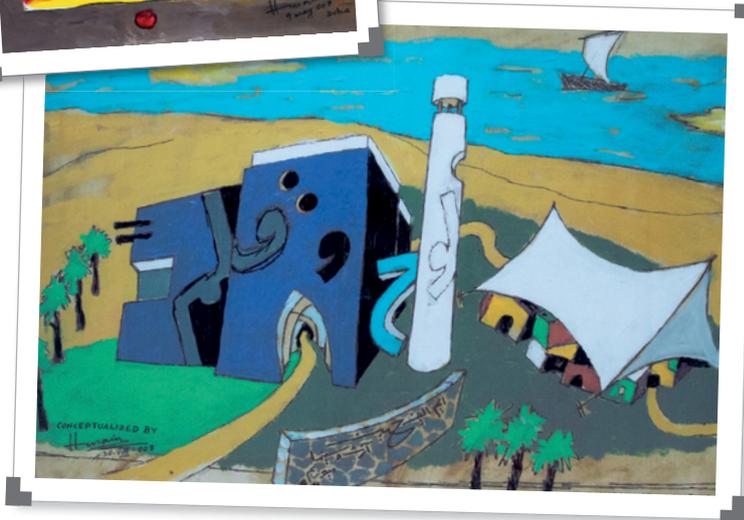
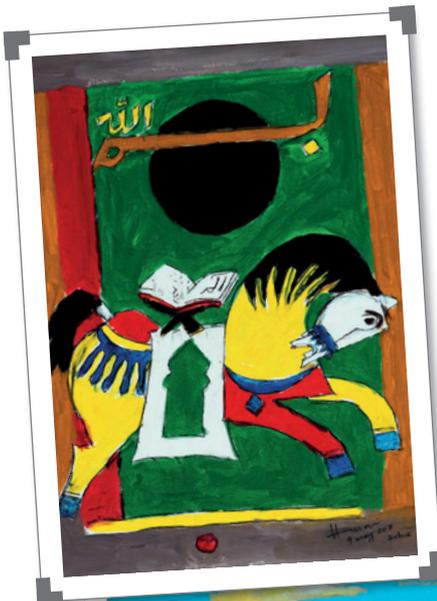
Art

# OF THE MATTER

The Lawh Wa Qalam: M. F. Husain Museum has opened in Doha

words by Mignonne Dsouza

**TOP TO BOTTOM**  
The museum is located in Education City, Doha; Zuljanah Horse, one of the exhibits; The design of the building mirrors a sketch done by the artist.



The first institution dedicated entirely to the works of one of India's most celebrated and decorated artists, has opened in Education City, Doha, Qatar. The Lawh Wa Qalam: M.F. Husain Museum, modelled after one of the artist's sketches from 2008, titled *M.F. Husain Art & Cinema Museum*, will trace his journey from the 1950s till his demise in 2011. The permanent collection will display paintings, films, tapestries, photography, poetry, and installations. The museum will bring Husain's creativity to life in bold and innovative ways.

Among the showcased masterpieces will be a series of around 35 paintings commissioned by Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Chairperson of Qatar Foundation, which is inspired by Arab civilisation. *Seeroo fi al ardh*—Husain's final masterpiece, a 2009 installation depicting humanity's progress—will be incorporated into the museum as a dedicated gallery, where visitors can experience the artist's work through a specially-curated presentation.

[lawhwaqalam.org.qa](http://lawhwaqalam.org.qa)



## GETTING THERE

Air India flies non-stop to Doha from Delhi and Mumbai.



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[visitbristol.co.uk](http://visitbristol.co.uk)



## DESERT TRIP JAIGARH HERITAGE FESTIVAL

**Jaipur, Rajasthan**  
6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> December

This second edition will feature performances by Papon and Kabir Café along with The Manganiyar Seduction concert. The line-up also boasts shows by Nathoo Lal Solanki and Shyopat Julia.

[jaigarhheritagefestival.com](http://jaigarhheritagefestival.com)

## FESTIVAL ROUND-UP

### HORNBILL FESTIVAL

**Kisama, Nagaland**  
1<sup>st</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> December

All the state's tribes come together to showcase their culture and cuisine. This year, Air India Express is the official travel partner.

[tourism.nagaland.gov.in](http://tourism.nagaland.gov.in)

### JASHN-E-REKHTA

**New Delhi**  
5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> December

Held at Sarai Kale Khan, this will feature performances by Sukhwinder Singh, Salim-Sulaiman, a books bazaar, and culinary delights.

[jashnerekhta.org](http://jashnerekhta.org)

### TANSEN SAMAROH

**Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh**  
14<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> December

This year's edition promises six days of soul-stirring performances, at Tansen's *samadhi* (tomb).

[tansensamaroh.com](http://tansensamaroh.com)

### ALT EFF 2025

**India and abroad**  
4<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> December

The film festival is known for collaborations and impactful initiatives that position it as a movement for environmental change.

[alteff.in](http://alteff.in)



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# TO TRY IN LISBON

*8 dishes*

Portugal's capital delights the palate with rustic, comforting plates brimming with bold, sun-soaked flavours

words by **Shibani Bawa**



## ↑ FRANGO ASSADO COM PIRI-PIRI

Succulent, flame-grilled, and brushed with a saucy blend of spicy, smoky and tangy notes, this chicken dish is unpretentious yet deeply satisfying. At once rustic and refined, it is usually served with crisp fries, buttery rice or a fresh salad. Although piri-piri originated in Africa, it was first produced by Portuguese explorers who got it back.

**Where to try it:** Restaurante Bonjardim, Tv. de Santo Antão 11

## ↓ FLAME-GRILLED CHORIZO SAUSAGE

When I first ordered Chouriço Assado, I had no idea that it would come with a side of table theatrics. A thick Portuguese sausage arrived, its surface scored with shallow cuts, resting on a small glazed terracotta dish. Then, after a quick splash of alcohol, the sausage was set on fire. The chorizo crackled and blistered under the blue-orange flames. Not only is this a highly Instagrammable dish, but the delicious char and smokiness makes it one of my all-time favourite ways to enjoy this sausage. Once the flames die down, the meat is sliced and served with chunks of crusty bread and a glass of local wine.

**Where to try it:** Tasca do Chico in Bairro Alto



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### ↪ CALDO VERDE

Across most menus is this hearty bowl of green soup that has its roots in the country's northern parts. It is prepared with potatoes, onions, and garlic simmered into a silky base, before finely-shredded collard greens or kale are blended in. The addition of sliced *chouriço* or *linguiça* sausage lends it a distinct richness but if you want a vegetarian option, most restaurants will omit the sausage. A drizzle of olive oil gives it a luscious finish. It is best paired with *broa*, Portugal's rustic cornbread.

**Where to try it:** Merendinha do Arco, R. dos Sapateiros 230



### ↑ GINJINHA

Tasting this liqueur is quite literally the cherry on top of any Lisbon experience. Known locally as *ginjinha* or simply *ginja*, this sweet-yet-tart Portuguese classic is made by infusing sour cherries in brandy with sugar. Locals sip it from tiny glasses at streetside bars, chatting with friends. Traditionally served as a shot, it is best savoured slowly to enjoy its rich, aromatic depth. Another popular way of having it is also in an edible chocolate cup, milk or dark, evoking the indulgence of a liqueur-filled truffle.

**Where to try it:** Ginjinha Sem Rival, R. das Portas de Santo Antão 7

### ↓ BIFANA

If looks can be deceiving, it is certainly true for this dish. It may appear to be a dry, crusty sandwich at first glance, but one bite reveals its secret: tender, marinated pork, thinly sliced and simmered slowly in a punchy sauce laced with garlic, white wine, and paprika. In Porto, the sauce is richer, redder, and simmered with beer and tomatoes, while Lisbon's take is bolder, the pork marinated in garlic and chilli, and the bread swiped with mustard.

Even though it makes for a quick meal, be prepared for long queues.  
**Where to try it:** O Trevo, Praça Luís de Camões 48





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### ➔ GRILLED SARDINES

In Lisbon, the smoky scent of this freshly-grilled fish fills the cobbled streets. Whole sardines are charred over an open flame and served with boiled potatoes, a salad of tomato, onion, and peppers, and a drizzle of olive oil and vinegar. Get your hands dirty to enjoy the crispy skin and tender flesh. It is best enjoyed with crisp white wine. Insider tip: If you enjoy sardines, buy canned sardines to carry back home.

**Where to try it:** Solar 31 Da Calçada, Calçada Garcia 31



### ➔ PASTEL DE NATA

It is impossible to visit Lisbon without trying the famous custard tart. Served warm and fresh, they are known for their crisp, flaky pastry and creamy custard filling. The story began in Belém, where monks at Jerónimos Monastery first created these golden, blistered, and deliciously flaky sweet treats, with a hint of lemon and cinnamon, and a dusting of powdered sugar. Many bakeries make them but Pastéis de Belém, some 7km from Lisbon's city centre, is most popular.

**Where to try it:** Pastéis de Belém; Manteigaria (locations across the city)

### VEGETARIAN OPTIONS, REIMAGINED

If you are seeking vibrant, plant-forward fare that feels as good as it tastes, look no further than Honest Greens (outlets spread across the city), which serves wholesome, plant-forward cuisine crafted from ethically sourced, organic ingredients. Even dessert is guilt-free, made without refined sugar. Opt for any seasonal garden bowl or go for the bestsellers like roasted pear with *stracciatella* and pistachio pesto, and roasted cauliflower with tahini and harissa that are ideal for sharing.

### GETTING THERE

Fly to Lisbon with Air India's Codeshare partner, TAP Air Portugal.

### ➔ PASTEL DE BACALHAU

Bacalhau is dried and salted cod, a key ingredient in Portuguese cooking, and has its roots in the country's maritime history, where preserving fish in salt meant sailors could carry it home. Before cooking, these need to be soaked in cold water for 24 to 48 hours, to remove excess salt. Once rehydrated, it can be used in many dishes. Pastel de Bacalhau are much-loved crispy cod-and-potato croquettes that can be served hot or cold.

**Where to try it:** Olhão Bacalhau at Time Out Market Lisbon



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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!

**Disclaimer:** Connectivity details are subject to change. Please visit [airindia.com](http://airindia.com) for the latest flight schedules.

 @purplemartinigoa; For reservations, call or WhatsApp: +91 8793242210

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# ALL ROADS LEAD TO ROME

And when you get there, do not forget to experience the best the Eternal City has to offer, from iconic sights to yummy tiramisu

words by **Varisha Tariq**

The historic Colosseum has featured in several Hollywood films, including *Gladiator* and *Roman Holiday*

🕒 8:00AM

## Begin with a wish

📍 *The Spanish Steps and the Trevi Fountain*

Head to these iconic locations before they fill up with travellers. Make sure you take a picture on the Spanish Steps. Close by, Trevi Fountain is renowned for making wishes at, so carry a few coins. Throw a coin over your left shoulder with your right hand, if not for a whimsical fancy, then for the fact that the money is donated to local church charities.

🕒 09:30AM

## Bow to the gods

📍 *Pantheon*

This temple, which was built to honour the 12 Roman gods, also serves as the final resting place for illustrious figures, including Renaissance artist Raphael. Since 609 CE, it has been the Church of Santa Maria Rotonda or Santa Maria ad Martyres. Visit it to witness a masterpiece of Roman architecture.

🕒 10:30AM

## Tuck into tiramisu

📍 *Two Sizes*

After taking in the glory of the Pantheon, it is time to delight your taste buds. In a city filled with numerous outlets making delicious tiramisu, this dessert establishment has every traveller's heart (and a queue to match). They offer traditional tiramisu served in small cups, which allows you to indulge in more than just one flavour. Do not miss the pistachio.

🕒 11:00AM

## Experience a serene moment

📍 *Chiesa del Santissimo Nome di Gesù*

Rome is dotted with a plethora of Baroque-style, breathtaking churches, and this one, located on Via degli Astalli, houses a striking fresco of Jesus. The peace and calm here offers the spiritual experience you might be looking for.

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## EXPLORE THE VATICAN CITY

An independent country inside Rome, the area consists of St. Peter's Basilica, the Sistine Chapel, the Vatican Museums, the Vatican Gardens, among others. To do justice to these attractions, set aside at least four hours. To include it with this itinerary, opt for a Breakfast Tour of the Vatican, which includes a buffet breakfast in the courtyard followed by a tour, before the crowds get in.



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT**  
The Castel Sant'Angelo overlooking the Ponte Sant'Angelo bridge; Pistachio tiramisu from Two Sizes; St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City; They say tourists who toss coins into the Trevi Fountain, return to Rome.

### STYLISH STAYS

**1/ Palazzo Talia**  
Nestled between Piazza di Spagna and the Trevi Fountain, this boutique property features Renaissance-era architecture.

**2/ Rome Marriott Grand Hotel Flora**  
Overlooking the grand skyline, this property will delight all your senses.

**3/ Hotel Donna Camilla Savelli**  
Located in Trastevere in a former monastery, this property just might be exactly what you are looking for—historic yet palatial.

### GETTING THERE

Fly to Rome with Air India's Interline partners, Lufthansa, Air France, KLM Royal Dutch, and Scandinavian Airlines.

**🕒 11:30AM**  
**Wander by the Tiber**  
📍 Castel Sant'Angelo and Parco della Mole Adriana

The Ponte Sant'Angelo bridge over the river provides a unique vantage point to view the city. Then head to Castel Sant'Angelo to explore the museum or enjoy the breeze in Parco Adriano. The latter has benches and numerous pine and cypress trees.

**🕒 01:00PM**  
**Grab lunch**  
📍 Trastevere

This area offers many lunch options. Go for a *trapizzino*, a delicious pizza sandwich with oozing cream, or mouth-watering pasta and pizzas. Insider tip? Look for restaurants serving homemade dishes for an authentic culinary experience. Finally, make your way to Fiordiluna for gelato or to Bar San Calisto if you are craving a shot of coffee.

**🕒 03:00PM**  
**Go back in time**  
📍 Roman Forum

Straight out of a story book—and the setting of multiple movies—this archaeological site (now in ruins), is still impressive. Late afternoon is the best time to visit to see it bathed in sunlight. Slowly watch as the rays of the setting sun lend it an ethereal charm.

**🕒 07:00PM**  
**Enjoy the nightlife**  
📍 Piazza Trilussa

It is now time to immerse yourself in the nightlife Rome has to offer. Head to Regoli Pasticceria for their famous *marituzzos* and from there, find your way to Roma Sparita, the restaurant once frequented by world-renowned Chef Anthony Bourdain, where you can enjoy delectable *cacio e pepe*. End the day with lively street music at Piazza Trilussa.

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# ALL IN VOGUE

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## ↑ ONE-STOP SHOP

Global fashion chain Galeries Lafayette has opened a 90,000sq ft flagship store in the Kala Ghoda district, south Mumbai. Visitors can browse and shop from over 250 revered luxury and designer brands from across the globe under one roof.



## ↑ HOSA OPENS ITS DOORS IN NCR

**Why:** For a taste of South Indian flavours, beyond the stereotype, through traditional recipes reimaged with a modern lens. **Where:** *One Horizon Centre, Gurugram*  
**Recommendations:** *Elaneer Pepper Fry, Pamban Chicken, Toddy Shop Prawns, Aubergine Steak, Karwar Fried Fish*

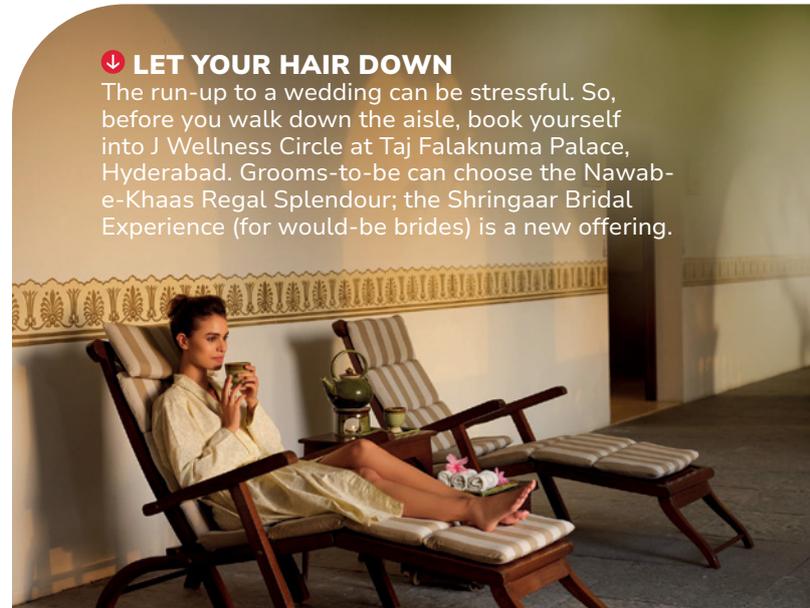


## ↑ A MALDIVIAN SUCCESS STORY

Ozen Reserve Bolifushi is not just another 5-star luxury resort in the Maldives' South Malé Atoll, but also a Michelin Key-recognised sanctuary. Each villa offers ocean views and private decks that extend over the water. Their acclaimed RESERVE™ PLAN offers an all-inclusive experience, including dining, snorkelling, and spa treatments.

## ↓ LET YOUR HAIR DOWN

The run-up to a wedding can be stressful. So, before you walk down the aisle, book yourself into J Wellness Circle at Taj Falaknuma Palace, Hyderabad. Grooms-to-be can choose the Nawab-e-Khaas Regal Splendour; the Shringaar Bridal Experience (for would-be brides) is a new offering.



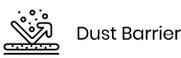
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**↑ WORLD ON A PLATE**

To mark its 16<sup>th</sup> year, Indian Accent, Delhi, has launched a new tasting menu. It is curated by Chef Shantanu Mehrotra and boasts delectable dishes like Aab Gosht with Lamb Dumpling, Kanyakumari Crab, Dahi Gujiya, Apple Eggplant Bhaja, and more.



**↑ BRENNERS PARK-HOTEL & SPA REOPENS**

**Why:** All 27 accommodations have been redesigned, some with connecting room options. **Where:** Baden-Baden, Germany **Highlights:** Augustinus Bader facials, forest bathing, vineyard picnics

**↓ ONE OF A KIND**

Swiss luxury watchmaker Baume & Mercier's latest two-model collection, *Clifton*, is crafted for women. They boast, for the first time in the brand's history, 34mm cases and self-winding Baumatic Manufacture movement, previously reserved for only men's models.



**↓ BARBET & PALS MAKES A SPLASHING DEBUT**

**Why:** To enjoy innovative cocktails crafted by award-winning bartenders Jeet Rana and Chirag Pal, with a side of delicious fare. **Where:** M-51, GK 2, Delhi **Recommendations:** Gol Gol Bread, Tickle My Pickle, Root Cause, Creamy Dreamy Potatoes



All images courtesy respective brands

# MIND

## Shifting Perspectives

- 62 ➤ Q&A
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- 86 ➤ GOURMET STOP

Getty Images

# “I AM AS MUCH OF A READER AS I AM A WRITER”

At 91, the legendary Ruskin Bond remains one of India's most prolific authors—writing, reading, and still finding joy in life's little moments

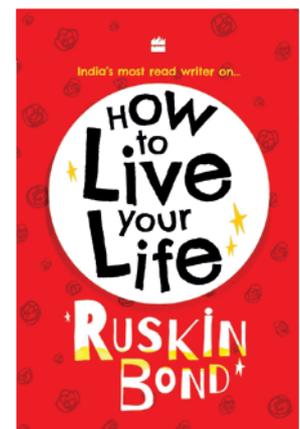
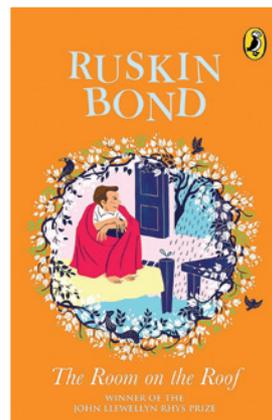
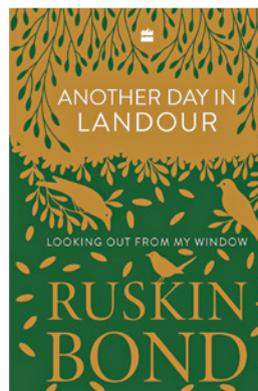
words by  
**Shrabasti Anindita Mallik**

**Our heartiest congratulations on your latest book *Another Day in Landour...***

It's really a journal or extracts from a journal, about my life up here in the hills and a quiet period... now that I am 90 or just over (*laughs*). So, it's a reflective sort of journal.

**What has kept the motivation alive for so many decades?**

I think I've never lost my enthusiasm for writing. Also, because of my love of books and literature, I've always wanted to be part of the literary scene. I am, by nature, someone who loves putting words to paper. And I've done so over the years. I started writing in the 1950s... freelancing around 1954 or so. And I've not stopped. Nobody could stop me. So, I have written... I started off writing as a boy—keeping a diary and a journal—and then it became storytelling and other things like poems and essays. I've tried almost every genre. And I am still trying.



**TOP AND BOTTOM**  
Ruskin Bond has been honoured with the Padma Shri (1999) and the Padma Bhushan (2014); The author has penned over 500 books, with *The Room on the Roof* being his first and *Another Day in Landour* being the latest.

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# “ I WRITE, OF COURSE, BY HAND BECAUSE MOST OF MY LIFE I HAVE WRITTEN BY HAND.



**LEFT AND RIGHT**  
A young Ruskin Bond at his writing desk in Mussoorie; The author with his Siamese pet cat, Suzie.



**Your stories are truly timeless—loved and adored across the ages.**

I'm glad you feel that way. Because I've always wished to give pleasure to readers, young and old alike, and to share something in common with them through my writing, which is almost conversational, you might say.

**How do you keep every story so fresh and relevant?**

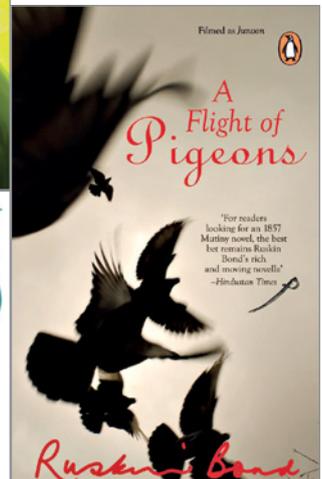
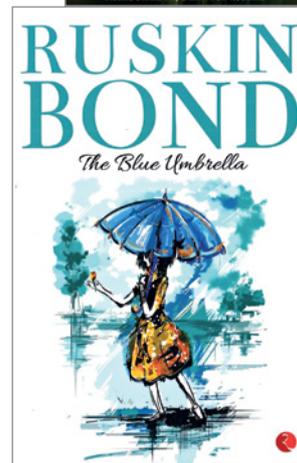
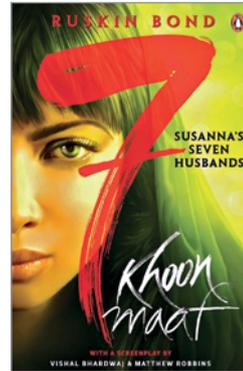
I try to be natural and myself. I try not to be too literary or academic. Because I want to communicate with the reader. So, I just sort of chat away. Sometimes, it makes sense; sometimes it does not. But I enjoy writing; I always have. Also because, I am a reader too. All my

life, I have been a great reader. I am as much of a reader as I am a writer. And I probably still read two or three books a week. My eyesight is very weak now, but I manage it by sort of putting my nose right into the book and going along, word by word. So, I read as much as I can. And I write, of course, by hand because most of my life I have written by hand. And I have decent handwriting (*chuckles*). So, my publishers don't seem to mind it.

**From vivid descriptions of your grandfather's zoo to a tale of a rather interesting race of bugs—you have always been a keen observer of your surroundings. Tell us about**

**finding inspiration in the small, often amusing, aspects of everyday life.**

Everything is important. Little, small things add up to big ones. For example, I wrote a story, not a very well-known one, about a snail crossing a road and how it almost gets run over about 20 times because it's a busy road. But it is determined to go to the other side because there's a field of lettuce there. And so, in a way, it becomes a suspense story. Did the snail get across? Or did it get run over? Well, the snail did manage to get to the other side in the end, because I was on his side (*laughs*). I find beauty in these small things. Like a few months ago, towards the end of the monsoon, it was evening and a



**LEFT AND RIGHT**  
*The author as a child in Jamnagar; Three of Bond's works have been made into movies—Susanna's Seven Husbands was released as 7 Khoon Maaf, directed by Vishal Bhardwaj; A Flight of Pigeons became Junoon, directed by Shyam Benegal; Bhardwaj also directed The Blue Umbrella, based on the eponymous novella.*

firefly flew into my room... giving out its little light, and it struck me as being something very beautiful. So, I wrote a poem about it. There is so much beauty in the little things all around us that we take for granted, you know. We don't look twice at them... like a ladybird [beetle] sitting on a rose petal.

Also, when I look back to the 1980s, air travel was still in its infancy. So, mostly everyone used to travel by train; and a lot of my early stories are set in railway stations and in trains. And I have had these romantic encounters with girls on railway platforms (*laughs*). The way people travel has altered quite a bit, hasn't it?

**Indeed, and you have captured some of those emotions so eloquently—be it childhood innocence, family, friendships, first love...**

It all goes back to childhood, in a way. In my early years, I grew up in Jamnagar's palace area, where my father worked, which had beautiful gardens and trees and flowers. So, I grew up there, in a sort of rather fairytale atmosphere. And then with my granny in Dehradun, her house had a lovely garden. I partly grew up there till I was seven or eight. I, really, only discovered books and the joy of reading when I was in boarding school and became a real bookworm. I used to dodge PT classes and extra

homework, all so I could go and read quietly in some corner. So, I was always on the lookout for the things that made this world interesting, and are, in themselves, timeless. Small creatures and plants and, of course, people... every person is a story. So, I have never run out of story ideas simply because I keep meeting interesting people or characters. My stories are often about people; not so much about the plots.

**Drawing from what you said, your love for nature reflects quite poetically in your stories. You have written: "Live close to nature and... You will never feel lonely." (*smiles*).**



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**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT**  
Bond grew up surrounded by nature—an enduring muse he writes about with much ardour; He reads a story to one of his young fans; Bond reads a book at the 2019 edition of the Dehradun Literature Festival.

Yes. How lovely that you know this! You see, even if you're living alone, you can go out for a walk in nature. You can take an interest in natural things that grow—different kinds of plants, trees, and wildflowers—even insects and birds.

I find birdwatchers to be very balanced people—ones who like to watch birds and sometimes get up early and go for morning walks. I truly find them fascinating because of the interest they take in the natural world around them. And what could be more

beautiful than a bird? Except, maybe, a butterfly.

**Can you recall one of your fondest memories of Landour?**

Well, I think it was during the time I first came up to the hills, going back 40-50 years now. I was walking home late in the evening and I saw this fox, a sort of wild fox, on the road, dancing in the moonlight. It was a wonderful sight. And I wrote a little poem about it that goes something like this—

*As I walked home last night,  
I saw a lone fox dancing  
In the bright moonlight.  
I stood and watched,  
Then took the low road, knowing  
The night was his by right.  
Sometimes, when words ring true,  
I'm like a lone fox dancing  
In the morning dew.*

**A nugget of advice...**

Whenever a young writer or somebody asks me for a suggestion or some advice, I always tell them to keep a notebook. Because you can always jot down your thoughts, your feelings, and your observations. And even if you don't use them immediately, you can use them later on in some form or the other.



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# CRAFT A MEMORY

Learning a new skill is an immersive, fun-filled activity that lets you delve into the spirit of a destination via its heritage, culture, art, and food

words by **Manjulika Pramod**

*The author attended a lantern-making workshop in Vietnam*

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**LEFT AND RIGHT**  
*The Lindt Home of Chocolates in Zürich, Switzerland, conducts chocolate-making workshops; The author took an impromptu jewellery-making class in Ibiza, Spain.*



**W**e all travel for several reasons but of all of them, I feel most satiated when I come back with a new skill or engage with local culture to discover my hidden abilities. Some of my cherished travel memories have faded away but the workshops I attended in various destinations remain with me.

**Lantern making in Hoi An, Vietnam**

Paper lanterns hold a special cultural significance in the country. And Hoi An is famous for its delicate and vibrant selections. So, when I visited the city, I did not miss the opportunity of signing up for a lantern-making workshop. There are several places that offer them but I took the advice of my homestay owner, who recommended a popular spot called 'Lantern Lady'. The instructing guide was friendly and laid down the materials—bamboo, wires, wooden rings, fabric, tapes, twisters, etc. It was fun to choose from a variety of fabrics and make a customised piece. From making a frame with wires and

bamboo sticks and gluing the loose ends to cutting the fabric so that it fit the perfect size—my husband and I created two lanterns, which we often decorate our home with.

**Master Chocolatier class in Kilchberg, Zürich, Switzerland**

Zürich is heaven for chocolate lovers. My most recent trip took me to the much-talked about nine-metre-high chocolate fountain at the Lindt Home of Chocolates at Kilchberg. But what really made my visit memorable was the masterclass where I made rum balls with a Swiss Master Chocolatier. Eight participants from different nationalities were provided with moulds, ganache, sugar, chocolate syrup, and more. Conversations flowed, cultural exchange melted boundaries, and the process calmed us, leading to the creation of the most amazing rum balls.

**Jewellery making in Ibiza, Spain**

The thought of Ibiza immediately transports me to the white beaches, gorgeous musical hideouts, and the

fascinating jewellery shops where I learned to transform metal into pieces of geometrical, sculptural, and artistic jewellery, under the guidance of a local designer. Dalt Vila, the fortified town, is where you find charming cobbled streets, boutique bars, terrace restaurants, fashion bars, and jewellery stores. And in one such space, a designer really ignited the creative spark in me. I was really impressed by how she created eco-friendly accessories using earth elements. I spent a few hours with her to learn some of the techniques for creating the twirls and twists in a variety of materials. For ceramic pendants, we made our own designs and baked them. Crafting the earrings was difficult since it involved a lot of hand tools like wire cutters, chain nose pliers, and round nose pliers. For bracelets, we used



**DARK.  
A LITTLE  
MORE  
DELICIOUS.**

**Amul  
CHOCOLATE**





A batik-making workshop involves tracing designs onto cotton fabric

letter metal stamps and a hammer. With this workshop, I not only brought back a little bit of Ibiza but also learned about different techniques, colours, textures, folds, and ‘secrets’ of metal.

**Batik printing in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia**

Batik enjoys the stature of national heritage art in Malaysia. While exploring Kota Kinabalu, the capital of Sabah state, I remember walking into a café-cum-art attic that had a lovely collection of batik products. Impulsively, I signed up for their batik art workshop. While I enjoyed tracing designs onto cotton fabric, I also loved the modern interpretations of traditional batik and the insights into the history, designs, patterns, and the various techniques. Our instructor provided us with designs, cloth, wax, and dyes, and took us through a step-by-step process. She

also introduced us to a drawing tool called ‘canting’ that holds wax and is used to make batik designs. Dedicating half a day to learn this vibrant Malay art—using floral motifs, unique styles, vibrant colours, and bold designs—meant a few creative hours spent to acquire a lifelong talent.

**Sapao making and leaf hammering in Chiang Saen, Thailand**

This is a brilliant way to incorporate nature into art. *Sapao* is a small boat used to send prayers and edibles to deceased souls. It may also be used for wish fulfilment and to invite luck. Creating a *sapao* from scratch is not easy as it has many intricate details. Our instructor numbered the banana stems of different sizes and the sequencing helped us to put them together. With a bit of science and engineering, we made perfect boats.

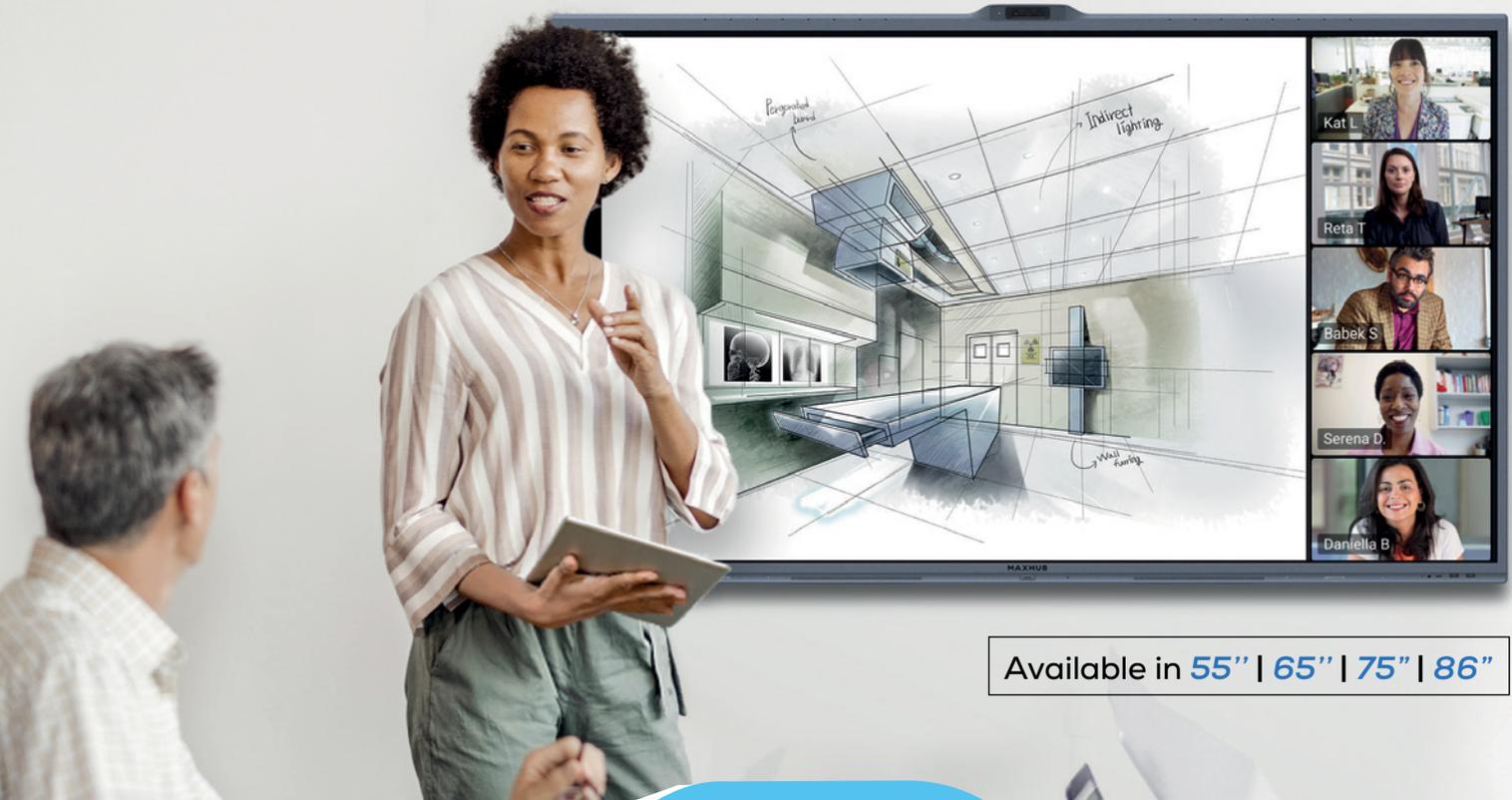
We wrote our messages and floated the *sapao* in the Mekong river. This was followed by another activity where we hammered leaves on a cotton fabric and created a naturally-printed handkerchief. Back home, I taught my niece and together, we have created quite a few printed objects.

**Momo making in Panauti, Nepal**

A few years ago, when Nepal was still healing from the devastating earthquake, I visited the country as part of a media delegation to explore some of its not-so-popular hidden gems. This led me to a small community village called Panauti, where the homestays are run by village women. Spending a night with one of the locals not only gave me a peek into their lifestyle, culture, and tradition, but also the chance to learn the recipe of a much-loved Nepalese dish, *momo*, whose

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**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT**

A fragrance the author created; The immersive perfume blending workshop that she attended with a master perfumer in Mcely, the Czech Republic; Making momos in Nepal gave her a peek into the local culture.



stuffing includes all kinds of meat, carrot, cabbage, onions, and spices. The mother-daughter duo of my homestay helped me master the nuances. From the preparation of the chicken filling and wrapping the dough to steaming it just right—I returned with a skill that I have fond memories of.

**Perfumery in the Central Bohemian region, the Czech Republic**

Have you had a chance to look at the art of perfume making closely? Ever been intrigued by the layered notes? Or what makes you like a fragrance more than others? My curiosity led me to sign up for a never-done-before experience of natural perfume blending in the picturesque Central Bohemian village of Mcely. Our perfumer acquainted the group with the history of perfumes and we dived into understanding the important notes of a perfume. In the two-hour workshop, we smelled more than 50 natural and essential oils and created our own combination.

**GOOD TO KNOW**

A little preparation ahead of your trip goes a long way for a truly immersive experience. So, research well, ask locally or rely on word of mouth to add these invaluable expeditions to your next sojourn. Some workshops should be booked ahead of your trip but impromptu ones you can join on the spot, have their own charm.

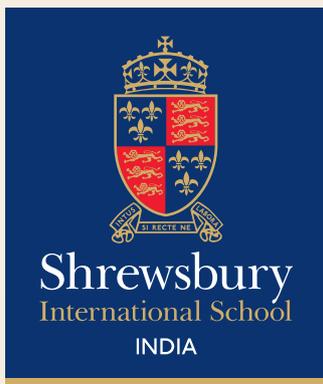
**Batheeth making in Sharjah, the UAE**

Batheeth is a traditional Emirati dessert that I had not heard of it until my guide signed me up for a surprise workshop. This no-bake cookie made with fresh dates, wheat flour, spices, and nuts turned out to be an absolute delight. It is usually served in the form of a ball or in the crumb style and locals love

to savour it with traditional Gahwa or Arabic coffee.

**DIY bag painting in Puli Township, Nantou, Taiwan**

Taiwan is a creative and colourful paradise. Whenever I entered an art gallery there and saw young kids' paintings, I was tempted. This opportunity came in Nantou's Puli Township where my resort had an art shop that conducted workshops. The guests were provided with canvas bags, local leaves, stones, stickers, brushes, and colours. We were left to use those materials creatively to design our bags. It was a refreshing way to introduce us to the DIY culture of Taiwan. In Nantou, there is Goang Xing Paper Mill where visitors can indulge in workshops like hand-made paper making, handprint fan making, flower lamp set creation, and more. One can even dabble in a Miso-making workshop, carton crafting, and calligraphy, among other engaging activities.



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# HOME IS A FEELING

In writing my latest novel, I journeyed through the past and the present, into the future of all things that shape our loneliness and being

words by **Kiran Desai**

Kiran Desai spent her early years in India, before moving to the US



It has been, by now, a life lived in many places, although I have to say that it is New York where I have lived pretty steadily. Of course, I have travelled a lot, but I have spent the longest number of years here. And even though the city has been the centre, my base for most of my life now, what is interesting is how India still has a hold on my imagination.

With my latest novel, *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* (2025), I have strongly swerved back to my Indian roots. I did not expect it to be so. One would have thought that my life would have led me to at least set my work more in the United States, and yes, the book is half set in the US, but the emotional hold that India has on me is interesting.

Much of it, I feel, has to do with the fact that I am a writer who has set her work very firmly in the diaspora. It plays a big role in shaping my being—from the 1980s up until now. Not just in my role as a writer but as an individual. My life in India—growing up with Indian politics and then living here in the US—the ideas of belonging are, therefore, somewhere in between.

Because, you see, the ideas of home change all the time. What is happening politically here in the US right now makes me suddenly



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feel a lot less at home. At the same time, of course, India is no longer home and it is a completely different country now. But there are so many places that have really held me, and each place has continued to live so vividly in my imagination.

I call myself a Delhi girl, even though I have some very happy memories of Bombay (present-day Mumbai) and Chandigarh, where I was born. But Delhi is a very transformed city now, and my Delhi is really gone. Some of my most precious memories are the Delhi summers when we

used to go to the mountains and those landscapes have always found their way into my work. In this book, it is more Mussoorie and Landour, where my mother was born and where we would visit during the summer. In my last book, *The Inheritance of Loss*, it was Kalimpong.

Another memory from Delhi that I hold close is that of my mother's bookshelves. I grew up in a literary household and it was fascinating having a wealth of reading material around. She and I would go from library to library, bookshop to bookshop, collecting books.

We would visit the Delhi Public Library near Jor Bagh, and, of course, the British Council Library and the American Center New Delhi.

Here in New York too, I come back to her house and I see her surrounded by piles of books. She reads every newspaper and every literary journal, so she knows what is going on in the book world much more than I do.

But home for me, in a way I feel, is most certainly, now in my work, my desk. That is where I feel most at home. As a writer, I take my manuscript with me everywhere I go. And since

**LEFT AND RIGHT**  
*Desai remembers being surrounded by books as a child; Her love for books stems from her mother, Padma Bhushan recipient, author Anita Desai.*

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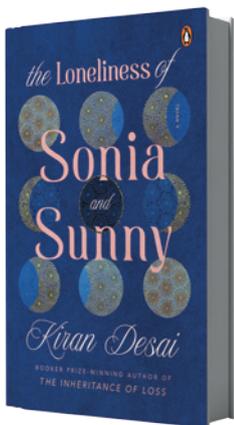
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**WITH MY LATEST NOVEL, I HAVE STRONGLY SWERVED BACK TO MY INDIAN ROOTS. I DID NOT EXPECT IT TO BE SO.**



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** Desai at her desk; The author feels people have a completely different experience when they travel solo; Her latest novel was shortlisted for The Booker Prize 2025.

I write longhand a lot, my book is my carry-on luggage. It is too terrifying to think it might get lost, so I pack it all up in the suitcase and lug it around everywhere I go. For years, this book has been my companion. I took it to India a lot and I wrote some bits in Goa, as well as in my father's home in Hauz Khas, New Delhi, and in Mexico. Come to think of the weight; I obviously could never buy anything from these places and my whole luggage was just stacks of papers.

That is how it is when you travel solo, which is the case with me. I am so much on my own now when I am

travelling, and I feel people have a different experience when they are on their own. It is as if you are more in contact with the place you are seeing. It is your own personal response to every architectural site, every museum. You're forced to interact with the place in some way, and at the same time, it can also get very lonely travelling on your own.

But you must, because you have to be responsible for yourself. You have to make sure you get the train on time, figure things out on your own, make your meals on your own, and so on. But what is beautiful is that we

are the first generation of women who can do this. We are here, managing everything on our own—working, flying, and earning our income.

Of course, it also can get very lonely travelling on your own, and I have tried to capture that sentiment in my book too. When you travel, you get to pretend to be someone completely different. And maybe in the process, you discover that you have been living a wrong version of yourself all along—that is what travel can reveal to you.

— As told to **Arunima Mazumdar**

Clockwise from top left: Kiran Desai; Getty Images; India Hamish Hamilton (imprint of Penguin Random House India)



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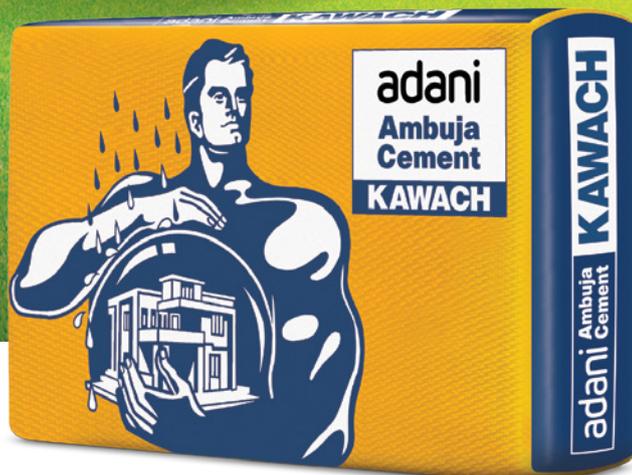
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# GOING VEGAN IN SINGAPORE

Looking for options that cater to your lifestyle choice? The island city can deliver

words by  
**Riddhi Doshi**

**LEFT AND RIGHT**  
*Din Tai Fung's range of dumplings includes vegan options; Singapore is a vegan-friendly tourist hub.*

It's a dietary practice that seeks to exclude all forms of exploitation and cruelty, which is what makes veganism an attractive way of life to many people. But for its strict adherents, finding restaurants that offer vegan options can sometimes pose a challenge. You would think that Singapore might be one of those destinations, but, surprisingly, this tourist hub is fairly vegan-friendly, and the reason is embedded in its history.

The homes of many first-generation migrants of Singapore—from India, Malaysia, Indonesia, China, and other countries—very

often didn't have kitchens, says Eiktha Khemlani of VegThisCity, a company that organises food and cultural tours across this city-state. She says people from different communities would cook together in shared, open spaces. While doing so, they would add or remove ingredients from traditional dishes or adjust the spice levels to appeal to different food preferences. This community cooking tradition gave birth to newer dishes, including non-vegetarian, vegetarian, and vegan options, which is now recognised as Singapore's unique cuisine.

Also, over the last six years, the vegan food movement has gained momentum on the island. From huge food stall complexes to Changi airport, from malls to luxury restaurants, a variety of vegan dishes across Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Peranakan, Indonesian, and traditional Singaporean fare are now the highlight of most menus. Mock meats made from tofu, mushroom, and jackfruit are big too.

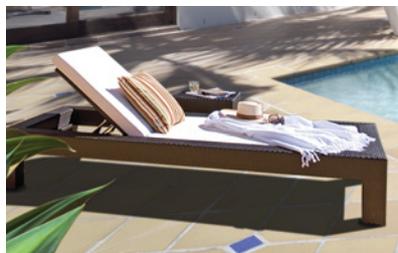
In fact, Singapore has been on a mission to reduce its consumption of meat and protect the climate under its Singapore Green Plan 2030



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mind gourmet stop

or the Green Plan movement. It launched a national campaign in 2021, and aims to produce 30 per cent of its nutritional needs locally and sustainably by 2030. “Moreover, the growing awareness about the advantages of plant-based foods has compelled many chefs to make top-quality vegan food in Singapore,” says Khemlani.

Here are some interesting vegan dishes to try when in the city:

#### POPIAH

A traditional Singaporean dish, this beloved snack is a spring roll made with a soft, thin, crepe-like wheat flour skin that is filled with a mix of stir-fried turnips, carrots, bean sprouts, lettuce, and cucumber. Try it at this 1958 family-owned establishment which takes pride of place in the coveted Michelin Guide. [Ann Chin Handmade](#)

*Popiah, Chinatown Complex; [annchinpopiah.com.sg](#)*

#### CHWEE KUEH

Ever had a ‘water cake’? These freshly-steamed rice cakes are topped with preserved radish and often fried with garlic and seasonings. Bedok is a stall known for its water cakes because of their soft, pudding-like texture. The famous eatery also features in the Michelin Guide.

*Bedok Chwee Kueh, #01-19 Bedok Interchange Hawker Centre*

#### VEGAN OMAKASE

Deriving its inspiration from seasonal produce, the vegan *omakase* can include anything from a wide range of fermented delights—*kombucha*, milk kefir, and natural yeast bread to sauerkraut, miso, tempeh and *amasake*. And at this 160sqft eatery, you can also try the



## VEGAN DESSERTS

### KUEH LAPIS

A delicious and light steamed cake made from rice flour and coconut milk. Ondeh-Ondeh is another steamed cake to try. Have them at this 1945 bakery. *Kim Choo Kueh Chang, At 60 Joo Chiat Place and at 111 East Coast Road; [www.kimchoo.com](#)*

### ALMOND BRITTLE FUDGE

Savour this delicious plant-based ice cream and try some of the other flavours like Black Forest, Oat Mocha, and Saffron Pistachio. *Kind Kones, Forum Shopping Mall, The Paragon, Westgate, Suntec City; [kindkones.com](#)*

artisanal sake cocktails. *Wakamama, 218 Pasir Panjan Road; [wakamama.com](#)*

### STEAMED YAM BUNS

Filled with a sweet and savoury yam paste, these fluffy buns are a hit. Also try their stir-fried *Nai Bai*, and Red Dates with Glutinous Rice. This global chain is known for its noodles and dumplings, and has multiple outlets all over the city. *Din Tai Fung, Raffles City Shopping Centre, Marina Bay Sands, Suntec City, Northpoint City, Jewel Changi airport; [dintaifung.com.sg](#)*

**LEFT AND RIGHT**  
*The dessert trays at Violet Oon Singapore can be customised to include vegan options; A fruit platter at Whole Earth.*

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**LEFT AND RIGHT**  
Greendot Plus at Jewel Changi Airport does a vegan Lo Hei; A spread from LingZhi Vegetarian.

**MONKEY HEAD MUSHROOM**

The Enchanted Forest (monkey head mushroom and broccoli with a specially-blended sauce of angelica root and wolfberries) is a standout dish, as is the Nonya Curry, made with shiitake mushrooms and potatoes, served with a thick, piquant sauce. Both are at this plant-based Peranakan-Thai restaurant, which finds a spot in the Michelin Guide. *Whole Earth, 76 Peck Seah Street; wholeearth.com.sg*

**SMOKY BBQ BURGER**

A bestseller, the Smoky BBQ

burger (GMO-free soy patty, BBQ sauce, tomato, lettuce, and more), is a winner. The Chikn' Buffalo has a soy patty too, along with Buffalo sauce, slaw, and in-house pickle. Also try Shrooms Burg, loaded with button mushrooms, and Teriyaki Burg that boasts a soy patty along with a pan-grilled pineapple slice. Veganburg claims to be the world's first, 100 per cent plant-based burger eatery.

*Veganburg, 44 Jalan Eunus; veganburg.com*

**TAU HU GORENG**

With fried bean curd, cucumber, bean sprout, and peanut sauce, this is a great vegan option. Also try the Kueh Beng Kah, a tapioca cake. Featuring dishes inspired by Nyonya, Malay, Chinese, and Indian kitchens, this eatery has a special plant-based menu.

*Violet Oon Singapore, at 7 Dempsey Road and at ION Orchard; violetoon.com*



**MENU SNEAK PEAK**

Air India offers wholesome, nutrient-rich plant foods and vegan-friendly alternatives on its flights. Guests can pre-select meals online using the Air India app that carries chef's notes, allergen information, and customisation options.

**BRAISED IPOH HOR FUN**

Silky smooth flat rice noodles are topped with a gravy, all created from plant options. Also try other mains like Rendang Lion Mane Mushroom Wrap and Gu Lou Yok Brown Rice Set, alongside bento meals. An Asian fusion outlet that is completely meat free, it also offers vegan desserts and beverages.

*Greendot Plus, Jewel Changi Airport; greendot.sg*

**ALOE VERA AND LEMONGRASS JELLY**

The jelly, topped with Lime Sorbet, is delectable. Also

try the Braised Yam and Vermicelli with Fermented Beancurd Sauce, and Satay served in Pineapple.

*LingZhi Vegetarian, Liat Towers; lingzhivegetarian.com*

**VEGAN LAKSA CHARCOAL HOTPOT**

As the name suggests, this is a vegan version with all the flavours minus the meat. Also try Vegan Ikan Bilis with Peanuts and Mee Siam (Nyonya-style rice vermicelli).

*Gokul-Raas, 19 Upper Dickson Road; gokulraasvegetarian.com.sg*



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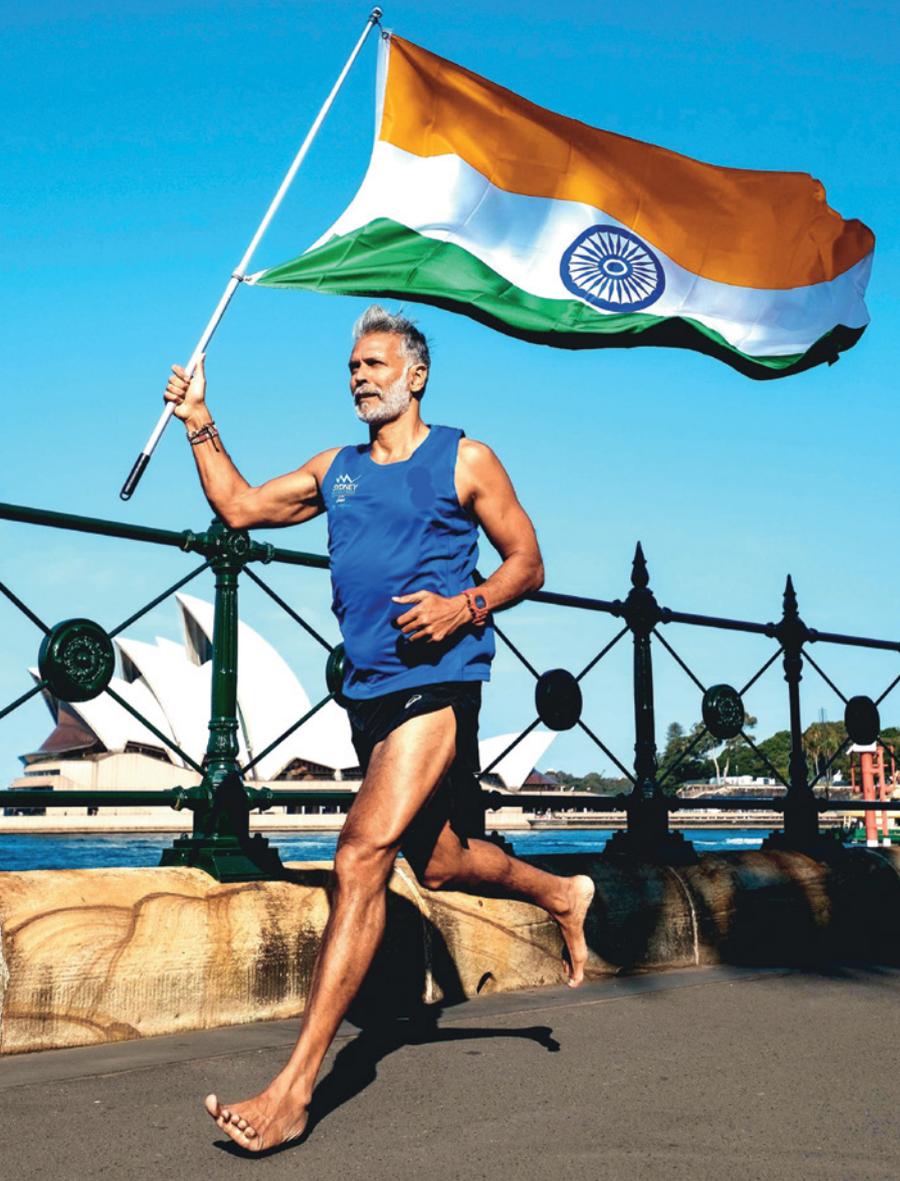
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# WHY I RUN

It makes you feel alive, empowers you mentally, and helps you push the boundaries of what is possible

words by **Milind Soman**



**G**rowing up, I did not like running. My sport was swimming and I competed nationally in it. I was, however, always fascinated by the ancient Greek legend of the runner Pheidippides who ran from the battleground of Marathon to Athens, a distance of about 40km, to bring news of a major victory of the Greeks over the Persians. The first time I decided to run was when the Mumbai marathon was announced in 2003. I felt I should run at least one marathon. So, though I was almost 40 and people discouraged me, I registered for the 21km half marathon.

I trained for a few months on a treadmill and no one was more surprised than me when I completed it comfortably. It was a revelation. Something I thought about with trepidation, turned out to be so easy. Encouraged with this success, I went on to run a 25-km distance, then 30km, then the full marathon, followed by a run from Ahmedabad to Mumbai and one 1,500km from Delhi to Mumbai. There has been no looking back since.

Why do I run? I run for the joy of it. Every time you test your body and mind, you just feel so alive. Our minds and bodies are naturally designed for challenge. Even though we crave comfort, it is challenge that makes us grow strong and happy. Running is not really about physical achievement.

The main mental benefit is the realisation that you are actually capable of doing anything if you believe you can. Running long distances made me realise that I had not fully understood the power of my body because of the weakness of my mind. When you do something that empowers you mentally and pushes your boundaries, it liberates you. Pushing boundaries, in every sphere, becomes second nature. You become happier and really begin to feel the power of your mind and body and see more fully, the beauty of life.

Running is tied to the human primal instinct for survival. It is something that humans have evolved to do; we are the best endurance runners on the planet.

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**LEFT AND RIGHT**  
Soman took up running when he was almost 40; Both he and his wife, Ankita Konwar, completed the Ironman Triathlon this year.



**WHEN IT COMES TO MOTIVATION, I HAVE THIS TO SAY: IT IS DIFFICULT TO START BUT ONCE YOU START, IT IS EASIER TO FINISH.**

Running is deeply rooted in our physical being and psyche, something we have forgotten over the centuries as human civilisation transitioned to our technology-driven lives. Maybe, because of all these things, running puts you in an elevated state of mind. The feeling that people describe as ‘a runner’s high’ is real and the worldwide running community is rediscovering this now. Endurance running is the fastest-growing sport in history. More surprisingly, India has the fastest growing running population in the world. It can be taken up at any age. Fauja Singh, the oldest marathoner in the world, started in his 80s.

The legendary Pinkathon ambassador Man Kaur started running at 93.

When it comes to motivation, I have this to say: It is difficult to start but once you start, it is easier to finish. You have to really push yourself to make that initial effort. I admit that even I hate waking up early. I do it for events, but it is my one bad habit. Since I do not have a workout routine that I do in a gym, I start exercising while I am still in bed, doing leg raises and Russian twists for a few minutes. During the day, I exercise in short bursts whenever I have a chance, totalling 10 to 12 minutes every day. This is the key to starting; begin by challenging yourself slowly.

Start with half a minute or a minute of any movement, see how you feel—physically and mentally—increase the duration gradually over time. Consistency is the most important thing when forming better habits. I would like to run daily but due to my travel schedule, I don’t always find the time.

But I try not to have more than a 10-day gap between

runs. I usually manage to fit it in two to four times a week. Since I am not on a corporate clock, I run any day of the week that I can. Even though I say that, there are corporates who run more regularly than I do.

Once you begin, you will find that you might even inspire friends and family to join you. I first completed the Ironman Triathlon when I was 50, to mark the milestone. This year, my wife completed it and I chose to do it with her, at 60. My sister runs the full marathon and my 86-year-old mom is still hiking, doing yoga... she exercises more than I do. Even our family vacations are activity-led; I have run the marathon while holidaying in Paris and gone hiking in the Alps after an Ironman. Recently, in the Maldives for my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, we spent all our time swimming, snorkelling, and diving.

So, make that initial effort to get off the fence. You will soon find that there is no limit to what you can achieve.

— As told to  
**Mignonne Dsouza**



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# SUSPENDED IN TIME

Flotation tank therapy can deliver many wellness benefits and can be deeply liberating

words by **Lulu Aspinall**

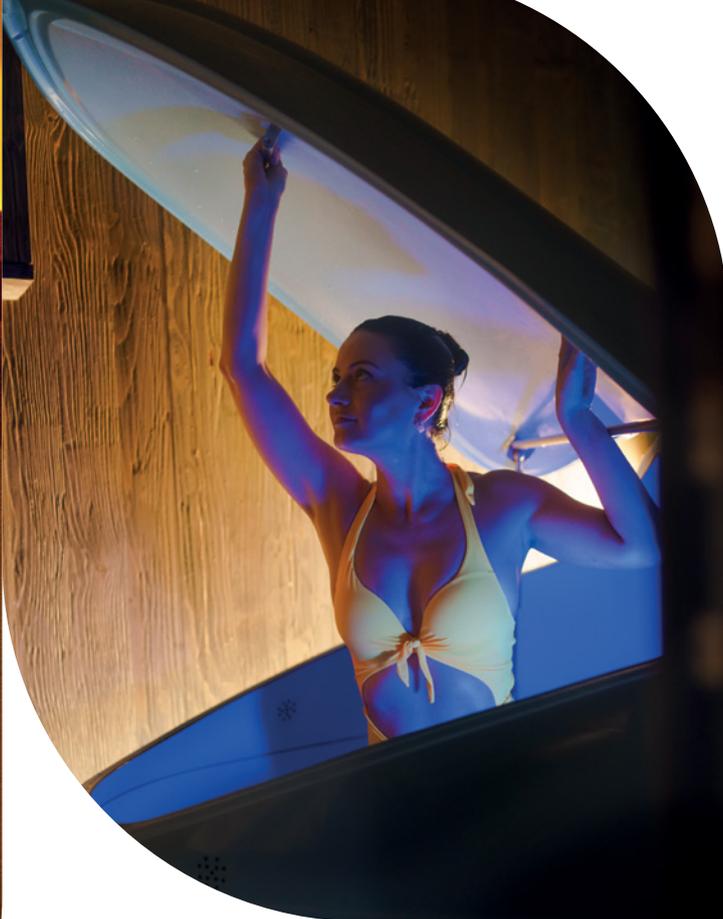
**O**riginally developed in the 1950s by Dr John C Lilly, an American neuroscientist, psychoanalyst, philosopher, writer, and inventor, the flotation tank was born out of a deep curiosity to explore the nature of consciousness. Since then, it has made its way into mainstream wellness, sports recovery, and mind health practices, becoming a sanctuary for those seeking rest

and renewal. In Sweden, flotation therapy has become so popular that the country reportedly has more such tanks per person than anywhere else in the world.

My first encounter with this wellness practice was in the 1990s, at a wellness centre in London. The tanks then were basic—no LED mood lighting or calming binaural beats, just a heavy lid, water warmed to skin temperature, and complete darkness and silence. Yet the experience was

profoundly transformative. I was invited into stillness and presence, enveloped in weightlessness, and felt a deep relaxation unlike anything else. One hour of floating felt like a thousand deep rests condensed into a single session. Later, I slept better than I had in months.

That is why, over the years, I have returned time and again to flotation therapy, for the restorative sleep I am always in need of. It has also been a respite for my restless brain, and,



**LEFT AND RIGHT**  
*A flotation therapy session underway at The Unity Centre in Lewes, England, which involves being suspended in a tank filled with water and Epsom salts; Users report feeling a deep sense of relaxation after a 'float'.*

cocooned in this space feels safe. As you surrender to gravity, your muscles release tension, your spine gently decompresses, and your worries seem far away. It is just you and your thoughts, with nowhere to go and nothing to do.

### **Benefits of the therapy**

In our busy lives, flotation therapy offers something radical yet entirely achievable—a chance to pause and step away from the endless demands life throws at us, even if just for a while. Slowing down allows you to experience it fully as a sensory journey. With soft lighting and soothing music, I often find myself drifting into a meditative state that feels like pure bliss.

Flotation therapy fits naturally into the growing

frankly, been an hour where no one can ask anything of me; a time where I am momentarily free from the constant pressure to be productive.

### **Understanding a float**

You can experience a float in a tank, a pod or even in an open pool at The Unity Centre in Lewes, England. The latter provides all the benefits of tank flotation but with more space to stretch and fully immerse yourself as you drift off.

A traditional float tank is filled with around 10 to 12 inches of water, heated precisely to skin temperature, about 34.5°C, and contains roughly 500kg of Epsom salts (magnesium sulphate). This high salt concentration makes the body effortlessly buoyant, allowing a person to float weightlessly.

As you settle into the water, your body and mind begin to adjust to this new environment within just a few minutes. Being

## THERAPY CENTRES

### INDIA

#### Salt World, Bengaluru

Bringing state-of-the-art float tanks to southern India. [saltworld.in](http://saltworld.in)

### ASIA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

#### Bangkok Float Center, Thailand

This centre offers special rates for couples.

[bangkokfloatcenter.com](http://bangkokfloatcenter.com)

#### I-Beauty Medispa, Singapore

Here, you are offered meals after each session.

[ibeautymedispa.com.sg](http://ibeautymedispa.com.sg)

#### Simple Float, Dubai, the UAE

Refers to the pods as 'sensory deprivation tanks'.

[simplefloat.org](http://simplefloat.org)

### EUROPE AND THE UK

#### Floatworks, London

Known for premium pods, including the British-made i-sopod, this has two locations across London.

[floatworks.com](http://floatworks.com)

#### The Unity Centre, Lewes, England

Offers a unique experience in a

spacious, open pool. [being-in-unity.com](http://being-in-unity.com)

#### Float Spa, Hove, the UK

This also offers yoga and other holistic treatments.

[thefloatspa.co.uk](http://thefloatspa.co.uk)

#### Göteborgs Floating Center, Gothenburg, Sweden

Apart from the pods, it offers infrared light therapy and microneedling too. [goteborgsfloatingcenter.se](http://goteborgsfloatingcenter.se)

#### Meisō, Paris and Lyon, France

They refer to themselves as 'flotation and introspection centres'.

[meiso.fr](http://meiso.fr)

#### Cocoon Milano, Milan, Italy

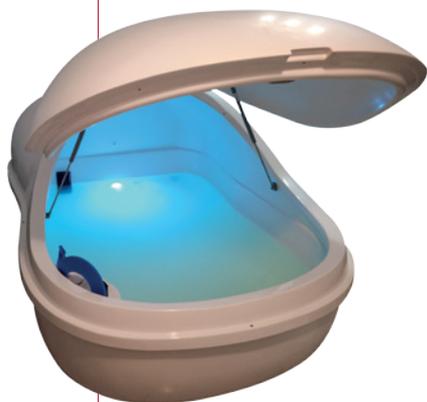
A salt-water tank where sensory stimulation is eliminated. [cocoonmilano.it](http://cocoonmilano.it)

### USA

#### Vessel Floats, New York City

'Experience nothing' as you reset. [vesselfloats.com](http://vesselfloats.com)

*\*Price ranges from US\$30-95 around the world (for a one-hour, single session)*



Beyond relaxation, many floaters report heightened clarity and bursts of creativity

biohacking movement, a blend of simple lifestyle tweaks and self-discovery aimed at helping us feel and perform better. The benefits are wide-ranging—floating helps lower stress and promotes deep relaxation.

#### The science behind it

The high concentration of Epsom salt plays a key role. Magnesium, a mineral essential to over 300 enzymatic processes in the body, supports muscle and nerve function, reduces inflammation, and boosts immune health. Many people with skin conditions like eczema and psoriasis, also report relief thanks to magnesium sulphate's anti-inflammatory properties.

Flotation therapy also provides significant benefits for mental well-being.

By eliminating external stimulation, it reduces cortisol, the brain's stress hormone, while boosting dopamine and endorphins, natural mood enhancers.

This can help relieve symptoms of stress,

anxiety, and insomnia. Unlike meditation, which some people find difficult, floating promotes mental calmness effortlessly, even for first-timers.

Beyond relaxation, many people report heightened clarity and bursts of creativity. With distractions stripped away, the mind is free to approach problems from a fresh perspective. It is not uncommon to leave a session feeling a natural high. Perhaps the most valuable aspect of flotation therapy is the space it creates for emotional processing and mindfulness. In the solitude of this experience, the demands of modern life slip away. There is time to pause, to listen inward, to observe, to feel, and to reflect.

#### The art of rest

What I love most about flotation therapy is that it is a rare opportunity to listen to your breath, body, and your being. It truly offers the space to fully reconnect with ourselves.



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*Air India cabin crew in Manila; Air India operates 7x weekly non-stop flights between Delhi and Manila.*

## FLEET

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**p 114** 

## ROUTES

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**p 115** 

## PARTNERS

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**p 124** 



# DELICIOUS EATS AT 35,000FT

Await exciting culinary surprises as Air India rolls out its refreshed global menu



## KEY MENU HIGHLIGHTS

Japanese Teppanyaki Bowl, Oriental Napa Cabbage and Tofu Rollmops (First Class); Awadhi Paneer Anjeer Pasanda (First and Business Class); Seoul-flamed Prawns, Chicken Bibimbap; Matcha Delice (Business Class); Homestyle Masala Dal Khichdi (Business Class).



## TOP AND BOTTOM

A sumptuous South Indian breakfast of Idli, Vada, Sambhar, and Vermicelli Upma; Chicken Roulade filled with Caramelised Onion and Goat Cheese.

**D**rawing inspiration from India's diverse culinary tapestry, Air India has introduced a reimagined global menu. From the royal kitchens of Awadh to the coastal flavours of southern India, the menu incorporates influences from several global cuisines.

"We are reimagining the inflight dining experience that resonates with the tastes and preferences of global travellers. We endeavour to master the art of menu design and presentation to ensure every inflight meal goes beyond

taste into serving care and culinary excellence," says Rajesh Dogra, Chief Customer Experience Officer, Air India.

The new menu has been curated by award-winning Chef Sandeep Kalra, and the cabin crew have also undergone specialised training to enhance customer satisfaction. Air India will offer over 18 special meal options, and guests can pre-select meals online using the Air India app.

Responsible sourcing, packaging, and waste reduction have been kept top of mind, and the menu uses locally-

sourced seasonal food in order to support local farmers and keep food miles down.

The new menu has been introduced on most international ex-India routes, including flights from Delhi to London Heathrow, New York, Melbourne, Sydney, Toronto, and Dubai; from Mumbai and Bengaluru to San Francisco; and from Mumbai to New York, to name a few. It will be progressively rolled out across all international sectors as well as on domestic routes.



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Visitors can find delightful knick-knacks at Delhi's annual Christmas markets

# CRAFT SOME CHEER

Head to these Christmas markets across the Capital for delicious food, handmade gifts, and a large dash of festive spirit

words by **Chaitali Verma**

## **CHRISTMAS EARTH MELA**

Hosted and curated by 23:23 Designs, in collaboration with the Embassy of Italy in India, this fair champions sustainable, slow-made, and Make in India brands. From handcrafted textiles to mindful home décor, it will feature approximately 115 sellers, with most being women-led ventures.

The mela will have meaningful participation from NGOs like Lady Bamford, Inside Me, and Muskaan. A Kids Zone with guided activities makes it family-friendly, while caricature and reflexology booths are run by Blind School students—

one of the most touching aspects of the event. The food court fare ranges from Pan-Asian by Guppy to Parsi dishes by Bombay Club. Expect live performances as well. *13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> December; Embassy of Italy, Chanakyapuri*

## **TAMANA WINTER CARNIVAL**

This is less a market and more a celebration of community and creativity. Set within the lawns of the British High Commissioner's residence, it brings together over 150 exhibitors, including designers, artisans, NGOs, and home-based entrepreneurs. Highlights are

the stalls run by Tamana's own neurodivergent students, offering handmade jewellery, baked treats, bags, and small gifts—a wholesome reflection of joy, skill, and pride. The atmosphere is festive and heartfelt, with dance and choir performances, carol singing, and a lively Christmas parade. And there is no shortage of indulgence either—Cohoma Coffee, Kylin, Cecelia Pizzeria, and Bengali Sweet House are just some of the food stalls.

*13<sup>th</sup> December; British High Commissioner's Residence, 2 Rajaji Marg, Teen Murti Marg area*

# 10<sup>th</sup> EDITION SERENDIPITY ARTS FESTIVAL



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**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT**  
Games at the German Christmas Market; Adorable festive decorations at Miracles by 32<sup>nd</sup>; Wreath making at the latter.



international cuisines. Children can look forward to Santa visits, live music, a painting competition, a magic show, craft corners, and more, making it a festive day out for all ages.

*13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> December; PSOI Lawns, Vinay Marg, Chanakyapuri*

### GERMAN CHRISTMAS MARKET

This returns for its 26<sup>th</sup> edition, organised by the Indo-German Chamber of Commerce and supported by the German Embassy New Delhi. The much-loved fair blends German festive traditions with Indian craftsmanship, bringing together over 100 exhibitors offering Christmas décor, artisanal gifts, toys, apparel, and homeware. The market also upholds a commitment to community, with NGOs like Salaam Baalak Trust and HOPE foundation showcasing handcrafted pieces that carry purpose and care. Expect *lebkuchen*, *bretzel*, *stollen*, and other classic treats, alongside

### THE SORBET SOIREE

Held in the gardens of Sunder Nursery, this brings together the city's vibrant community of indie designers and food entrepreneurs. This year's edition will feature nearly 85 homegrown labels, offering woven accessories, festive décor, artisanal chocolates by Paul & Mike, fresh farm produce by Krishi Cress, and more. One of the most joyful corners of the fair is the Kidpreneurs showcase, where young entrepreneurs set up their own small businesses.

There is a thoughtful mix of activities throughout the day, including fitness sessions, though the real joy is in wandering about with an eggnog in hand or

savouring big sips of warm spiced mulled wine. From ornament-making workshops and storytelling circles to Christmas games, this is one of the most family-friendly winter gatherings in the city.

*19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> December; Sunder Nursery, Nizamuddin*

### MIRACLES BY 32ND

The beloved 32<sup>nd</sup> Avenue turns into a cosy Christmas village in the days leading up to the holiday—gold twinkling lights, a towering festive tree, and a warm, strolling-through-the-evening atmosphere. About 30-35 pop-up stalls will line the open walkways, offering festive gifts, artisanal bakes, and seasonal treats. Many of the restaurants in the hub will also feature special Christmas menus, along with delicious hot cocoa and fresh gingerbread. Workshops and craft corners will keep the children engaged, letting the adults browse to their heart's desire.

*20<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>–25<sup>th</sup> December; Sector 15, Gurugram*

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# OUR WINGS

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

**Airbus A319**

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**Boeing 777-300ER**

 **19**

**Airbus A320neo**

 **94**

**Boeing 777-200LR**

 **03**

**Airbus A320ceo**

 **04**

**Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner**

 **06**

**Airbus A321ceo**

 **13**

**Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner**

 **26**

**Airbus A321neo**

 **10**

**Airbus A350-900**

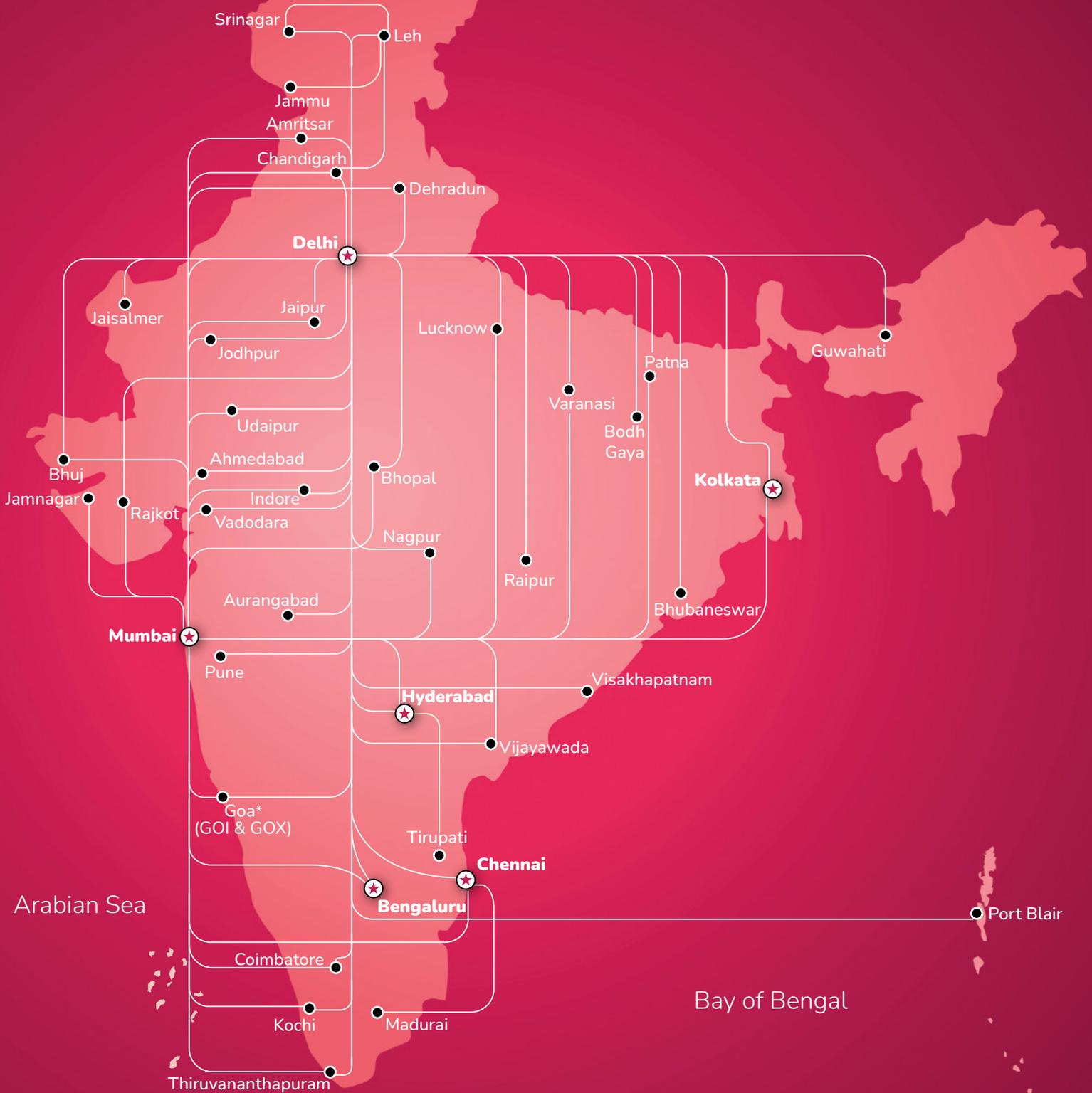
**06**

**FLEET  
STRENGTH  
187**

\*Total number as on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2025;  
This fleet count is exclusive of Air India Express  
(Air India Group's low-cost carrier)



## DOMESTIC CONNECTIVITY



\*Mumbai-Goa is operational via GOI; Ahmedabad-Goa is operational via GOX; Delhi-Goa is operational via GOI and GOX

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 11<sup>th</sup> November 2025

# INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIVITY

Air India flies non-stop to 39 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
Vienna (VIE)	←-----→	DEL
Zurich (ZRH)	←-----→	DEL
Tel Aviv (TLV)**	←-----→	DEL

## UK



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

## North America



Chicago (ORD)	←-----→	DEL
Newark (EWR)	←-----→	DEL BOM
New York (JFK)	←-----→	DEL BOM
San Francisco (SFO)	←-----→	DEL BOM BLR
Toronto (YYZ)	←-----→	DEL
Vancouver (YVR)	←-----→	DEL

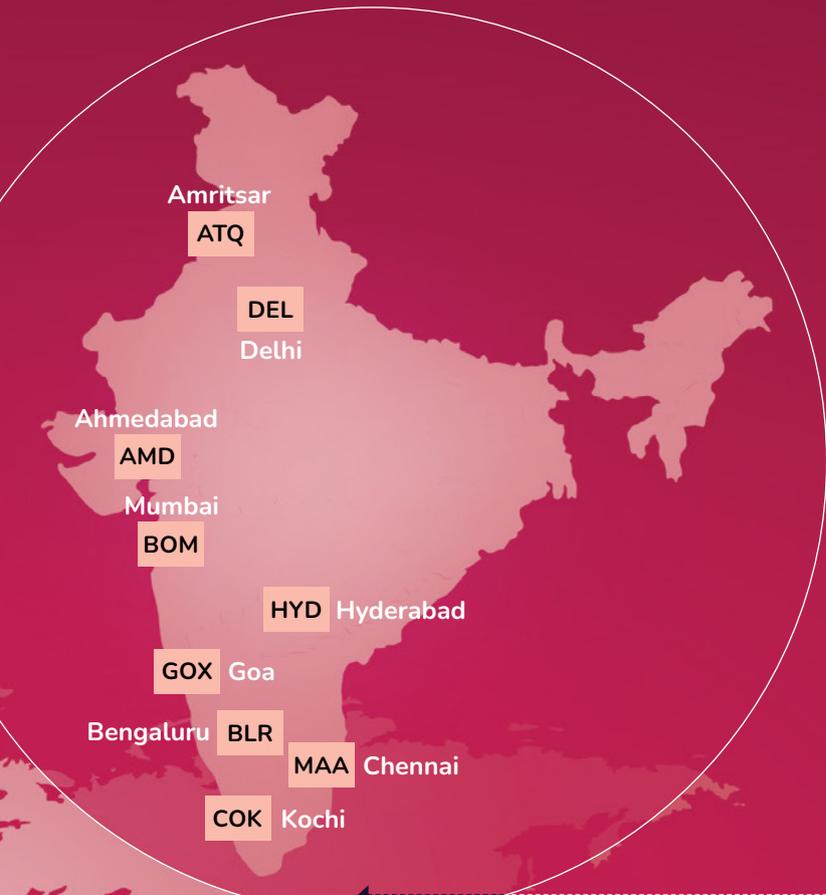
## Middle East



Dammam (DMM)	←-----→	BOM
Doha (DOH)	←-----→	DEL BOM
Dubai (DXB)	←-----→	DEL BOM COK HYD MAA
Jeddah (JED)	←-----→	DEL BOM
Riyadh (RUH)	←-----→	DEL BOM

Connect beyond Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru to over 50 Indian destinations with Air India and Air India Express. Please turn to page 119 to see domestic route connectivity via Air India Express.

\*Flights to London Gatwick (from Goa, Mopa) are temporarily suspended  
 \*\*Flights to Tel Aviv are temporarily suspended, but will resume from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2026  
 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 11<sup>th</sup> November 2025



 **Far East**

- Hong Kong (HKG) <-----> DEL
- Seoul (ICN) <-----> DEL
- Tokyo (HND) <-----> DEL

 **South East Asia**

- Bali (DPS) <-----> DEL
- Bangkok (BKK) <-----> DEL BOM
- Ho Chi Minh City (SGN) <-----> DEL
- Kuala Lumpur (KUL) <-----> DEL
- Phuket (HKT) <-----> DEL
- Singapore (SIN) <-----> DEL BOM MAA
- Manila (MNL) <-----> DEL

 **Australia**

- Melbourne (MEL) <-----> DEL
- Sydney (SYD) <-----> DEL

**Indian Subcontinent**

- Colombo (CMB) <-----> DEL BOM MAA
- Dhaka (DAC) <-----> DEL BOM
- Kathmandu (KTM) <-----> DEL
- Malé (MLE) <-----> DEL
- Yangon (RGN) <-----> DEL

 **Africa**

- Mauritius (MRU) <-----> BOM



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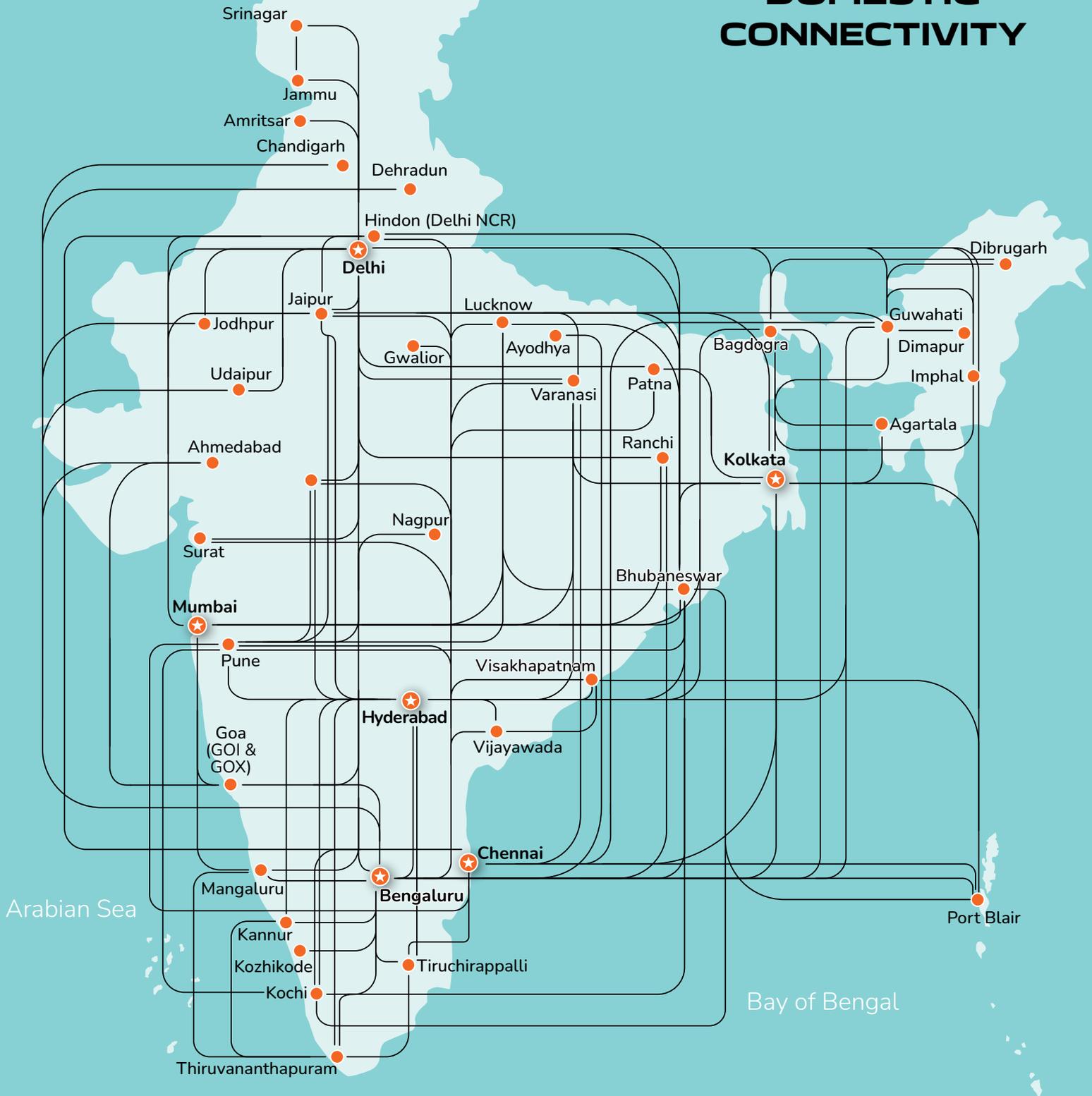
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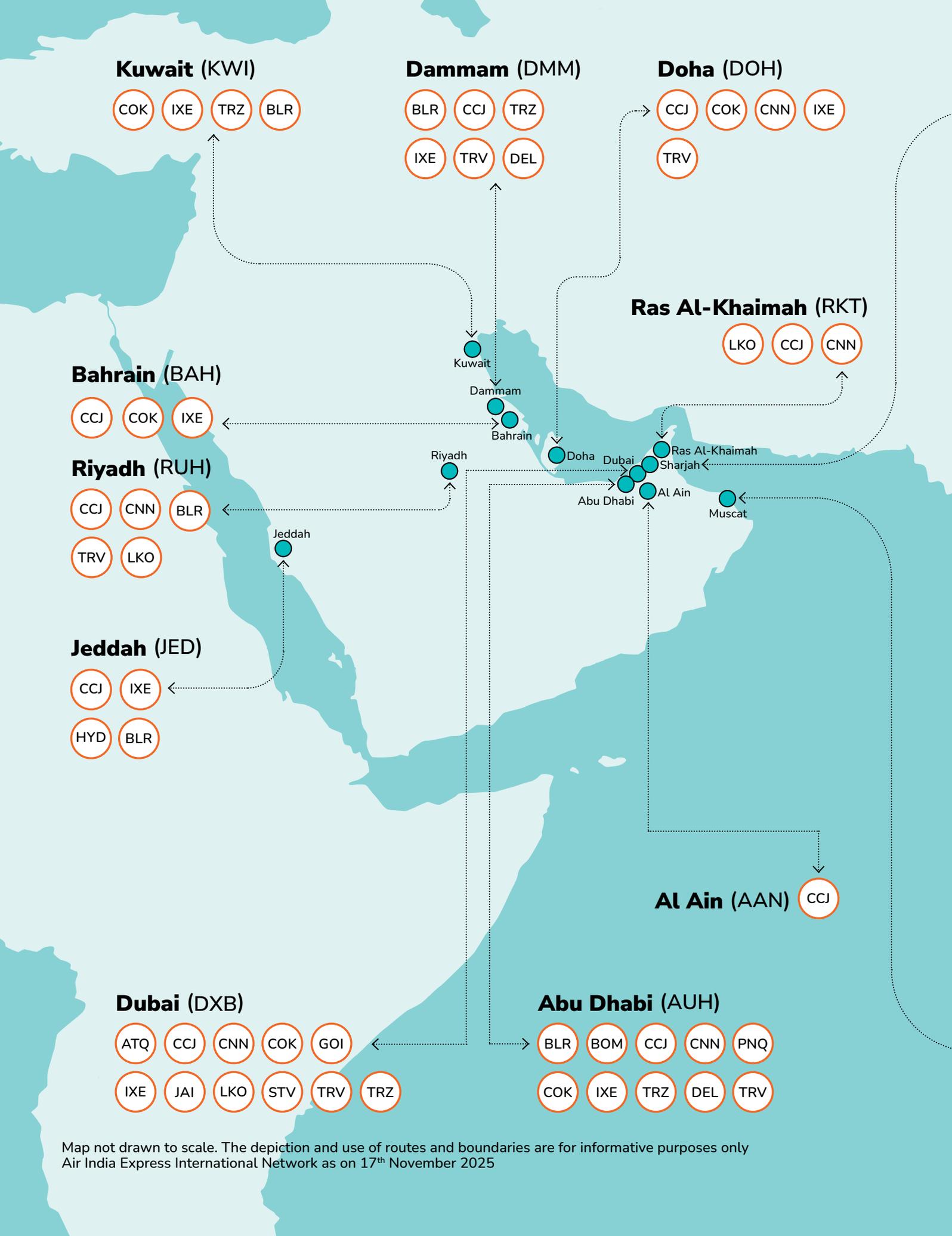


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- TRZ
- BLR

**Dammam (DMM)**

- BLR
- CCJ
- TRZ
- IXE
- TRV
- DEL

**Doha (DOH)**

- CCJ
- COK
- CNN
- IXE
- TRV

**Ras Al-Khaimah (RKT)**

- LKO
- CCJ
- CNN

**Bahrain (BAH)**

- CCJ
- COK
- IXE

**Riyadh (RUH)**

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- CNN
- BLR
- TRV
- LKO

**Jeddah (JED)**

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- IXE
- HYD
- BLR

**Dubai (DXB)**

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- CCJ
- CNN
- COK
- GOI
- IXE
- JAI
- LKO
- STV
- TRV
- TRZ

**Abu Dhabi (AUH)**

- BLR
- BOM
- CCJ
- CNN
- PNQ
- COK
- IXE
- TRZ
- DEL
- TRV

**Al Ain (AAN)**

- CCJ

Map not drawn to scale. The depiction and use of routes and boundaries are for informative purposes only  
 Air India Express International Network as on 17<sup>th</sup> November 2025

# AIR INDIA express

## INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIVITY

### Sharjah (SHJ)

- ATQ BOM CCJ CNN
- COK DEL IDR STV
- TRV TRZ VGA VNS

### Kathmandu (KTM)

BLR

### Bangkok (BKK)

- PNQ STV BLR

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### Muscat (MCT)

- BOM CCJ CNN COK DEL
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Air Seychelles  
Air Tanzania  
Alaska Airlines  
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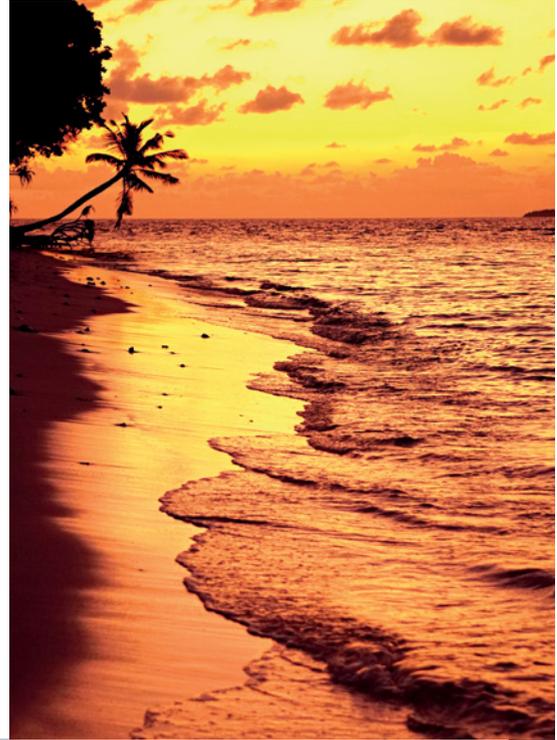
# PLAN A SNORKELLING TRIP TO HANIFARU BAY



Fly non-stop to Malé, the Maldives, from Delhi with Air India



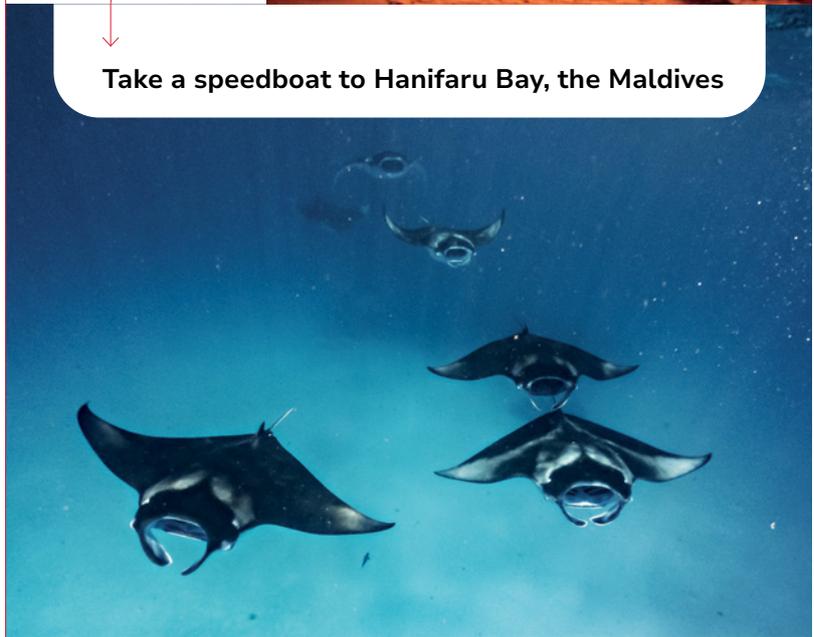
Take a connecting flight to Dharavandhoo island in the Baa Atoll, with our Interline Partner, Maldivian



## ABOUT THE ATTRACTION:

Located on the eastern edge of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve of Baa Atoll, Hanifaru Bay is a unique snorkelling site, famous for its spectacular congregation of manta rays. Supervised excursions are led by certified tour guides and experts, where you can swim alongside manta rays and even whale sharks. While you can book your own snorkelling session, the property you stay at can also arrange one for you, on request.

Take a speedboat to Hanifaru Bay, the Maldives



# YOUR ATTENTION, PLEASE

## REGULATORY INFORMATION FOR ALL INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS LANDING INTO INDIA

विदेश से कोई भी सैटेलाइट फोन भारत में लाने की अनुमति नहीं है।

Carrying any satellite phone from abroad to India is not permitted.

## MISSION LIFE

मिशन लाइफ़, जिसे माननीय प्रधान मंत्री श्री नरेंद्र मोदी द्वारा शुरू किया गया है, पर्यावरण की सुरक्षा और संरक्षण के लिए लोगों को प्रेरित करने वाला एक वैश्विक जन आंदोलन है। इसका मकसद लोगों को पर्यावरण के प्रति जागरूक करना और उन्हें पर्यावरण की रक्षा के लिए कदम उठाने के लिए प्रेरित करना है।

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

नागर विमानन मंत्रालय ने अपने एयर-सेवा पोर्टल को अपग्रेड किया है जो उपयोगकर्ताओं को ऑनलाइन शिकायतें जमा करने, ट्रैक करने और भारत में हवाई यात्रा के बारे में जानकारी प्राप्त करने की अनुमति देता है। सेवा संबंधी किसी और जानकारी के लिए, आप [airsewa.gov.in](http://airsewa.gov.in) पर लॉगिन कर सकते हैं। 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](http://airsewa.gov.in)

## DIGI YATRA

नागर विमानन मंत्रालय द्वारा प्रमुख हवाई अड्डों जैसे दिल्ली, बेंगलुरु, वाराणसी, पुणे, कोलकाता, विजयवाड़ा, हैदराबाद, अहमदाबाद, मुंबई, जयपुर, लखनऊ, गुवाहाटी, कोची और अन्य के लिए, डिजी यात्रा की सुविधा शुरू की गई है। डिजी यात्रा ऐप डाउनलोड करके खुद को नामांकित करें, और इन हवाई अड्डों पर बिना रकावट के यात्रा का अनुभव करें।

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.

## PROHIBITION OF AERIAL/ GROUND PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEOGRAPHY, AND CARRIAGE OF SENSORY EQUIPMENT – SECURITY GUIDELINES AT DEFENCE AIRFIELDS (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 अड्डे के आसपास के क्षेत्रों सहित विभिन्न स्थानों पर लागू होता है, जैसे की:

- टर्मिनल के अंदर; • विमान तक, या विमान से दूर जाने वाले वाहनों 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।

Please be informed that aerial or ground photography and videography are strictly prohibited at all times during a passenger's travel, including when he or she is inside the terminal; in vehicles en route to or from the aircraft; outside the aircraft; during

landing; at the airport; during pushback, taxiing, take-off, and while the aircraft is flying below 10,000 feet.

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

भारत सरकार द्वारा भारतीय पासपोर्ट एवं ओसीआई कार्ड धारकों के लिए ट्रस्टेड ट्रेवलर प्रोग्राम शुरू किया गया है। अब आप [ftittp.mha.gov.in](http://ftittp.mha.gov.in) पर केवल 30 सेकंड में निशुल्क पंजीकरण करके स्वचालित ई-गेट से तेजी से इमिग्रेशन प्रक्रिया पूरी कर सकते हैं। We are pleased to inform you about the Government of India's Trusted Traveller Programme for Indian passport and OCI card holders. You can now complete your immigration quickly through automated e-gates by registering at [ftittp.mha.gov.in](http://ftittp.mha.gov.in) – it's free and takes just 30 seconds.

## 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 अंकों वाली आंतरिक उड़ान, जिनके नंबर 'AI 1500 से 1999' के बीच हैं, टर्मिनल 2 से संचालित होंगी। 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 26<sup>th</sup> 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.

# SEAMLESS TRAVEL

India recently introduced the 'Fast Track Immigration-Trusted Traveller Programme (FTI-TTP)' to speed up Immigration Clearance for international travellers. The objective behind this implementation is to promote international mobility by developing world-class immigration facilities. The programme will be executed in two phases, with the first one (already in action) covering Indian nationals and OCI card holders. In the second phase, foreign travellers would be covered.

Currently, this facility is available at the following airports: Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kochi, and Ahmedabad. Subsequently, it will be implemented at other major airports, namely Lucknow, Kozhikode, Thiruvananthapuram, Navi Mumbai, Mopa, Jaipur, and Mangaluru.

## HOW TO REGISTER



**Applicant will apply online for Trusted Traveller Programme (TTP) Service ([www.ftittp.mha.gov.in](http://www.ftittp.mha.gov.in))**



**Processing of Application by Bureau of Immigration (BoI)**



**Biometrics enrolment of the approved applicants**



**Applicant is registered under TTP**



**Passengers are fast tracked through e-gates**



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Effective 26<sup>th</sup> October, 2025

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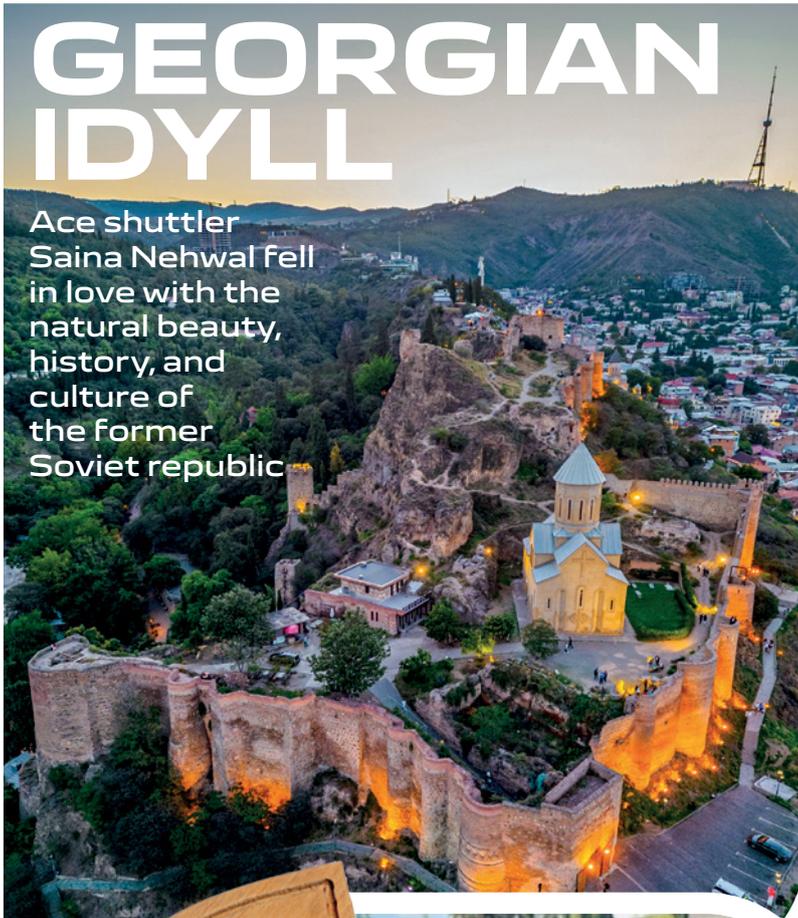
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# A TRAVELLER'S TALE

## GEORGIAN IDYLL

Ace shuttler Saina Nehwal fell in love with the natural beauty, history, and culture of the former Soviet republic



### AN UNFORGETTABLE MEMORY

In October, my family and I travelled to Georgia. I wanted to explore a place that was not overly crowded, yet full of history and natural beauty. Georgia felt like that perfect blend—it gave me a chance to unwind, explore, and connect with a new culture.

### MY LOCAL EXPERIENCE

The Old Town, Narikala Fortress, and the Bridge of Peace are a must see in Tbilisi, the capital city, as they truly capture its charm. The Abanotubani sulphur baths are also worth visiting for their unique atmosphere. In Batumi, don't miss the Batumi Boulevard, Alphabet Tower, and the seaside promenade. If you love nature, the Mount Kazbegi area is spectacular.

### A FARE TO REMEMBER

*Khachapuri* (the famous cheese bread) and *khinkali* (dumplings) were both delicious. I also loved the fresh local fruit, especially the pomegranates and grapes. For restaurants, I'd definitely recommend Culinarium Khasheria in Tbilisi—great food, warm ambience, and they have a few vegetarian-friendly options too.

### I RECOMMEND

The most memorable part of my trip was the drive from Tbilisi to Batumi—the vineyards, the snow-capped peaks, and the Black Sea coast were breathtaking. Walking around the Old Town of Tbilisi, which had such a soulful energy, was also lovely. I picked up handmade magnets, traditional scarves, local honey, and ceramic art pieces.

— As told to **Garima Verma**

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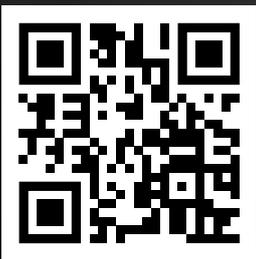


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