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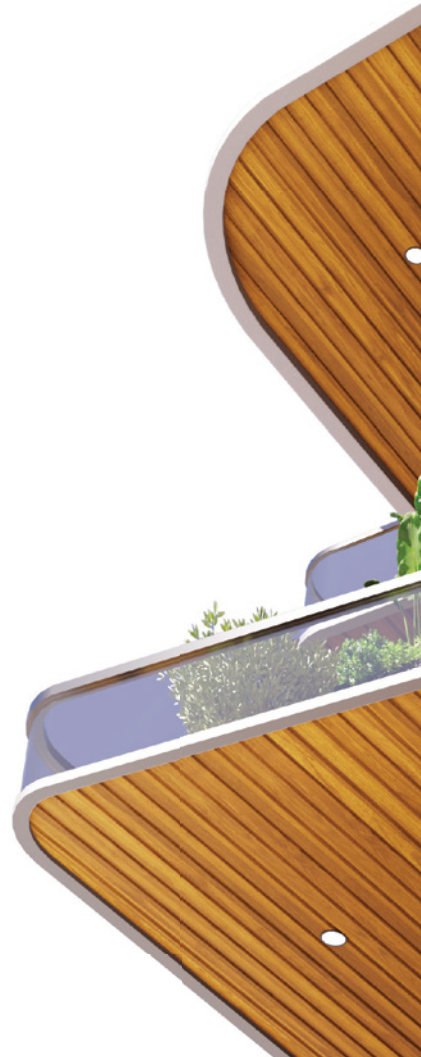
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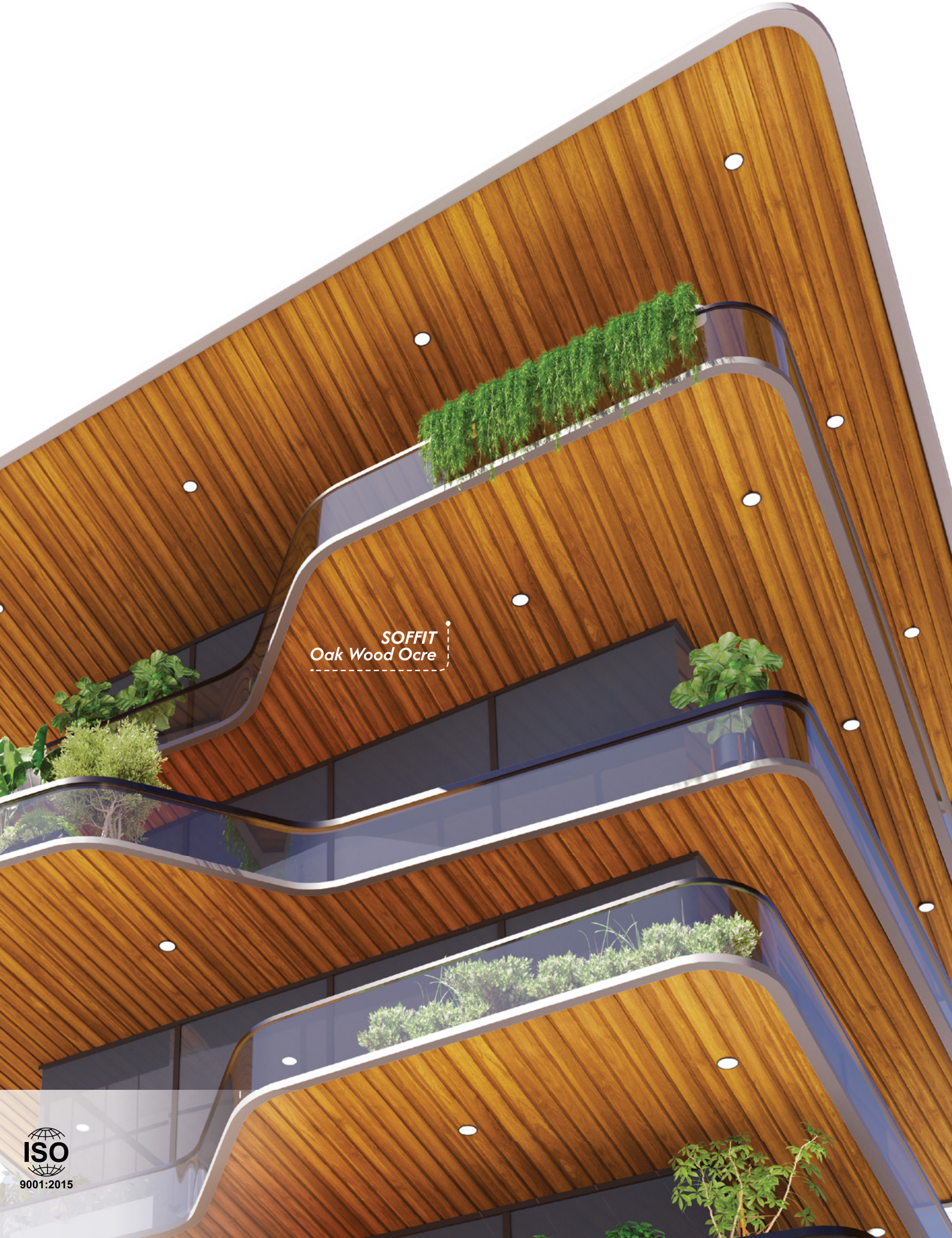


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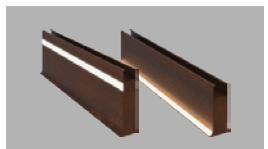
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EDITOR'S NOTE

An all in one, nature is a balm for the soul, rejuvenation for the body, and therapy for the mind. Just a few minutes outdoors can begin the healing process, gently detoxifying us of the grit and grime of city life.

While we see nature through naked eyes, photographers have a more intimate relationship, seeing nature up-close in vivid, myriad hues. In our Cover Story, we go behind the lens with five camerapersons and bring you stunning shots from locations as varied as Iceland, the Philippines, Greenland, Kashmir, Kerala, and Himachal Pradesh. They not only tell us about their most challenging shoot but also show us the kind of rigour and discipline it takes to get that perfect frame. Elsewhere, we chat with Wildlife Trust of India ambassador, Dia Mirza, whose campaigns against plastic pollution, biodiversity loss, and climate change have had significant impact. Attempts such as hers, to protect the natural world, allow us to enjoy wildflowers in bloom, as you can see in our photo feature, Frame by Frame.

In other stories, we give you a glimpse of Melbourne through a unique sport played there, called *trugo*. We show you how to maximise 12 hours in buzzy Bangkok. Closer home, the buzz is at Prayagraj, to which we have started daily flights from both Delhi and Mumbai till 28th February. Devotees from all over the world throng the once-in-a-lifetime Maha Kumbh Mela—an experience six writers have penned for us.

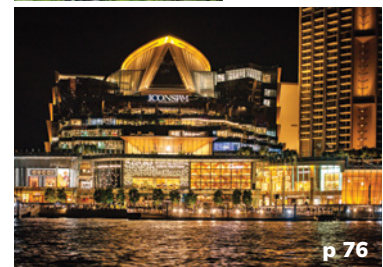
From finding strength in divinity to seeking solace in nature, inspiration is everywhere. Just look!

Happy reading and Namaste!

– **Namaste.ai** Editorial Team



EDITOR'S PICK OF THE MONTH
A curated fusion of the finest events, travels, exquisite cuisine, and enriching experiences, presenting a snapshot of life's vibrant mosaic.



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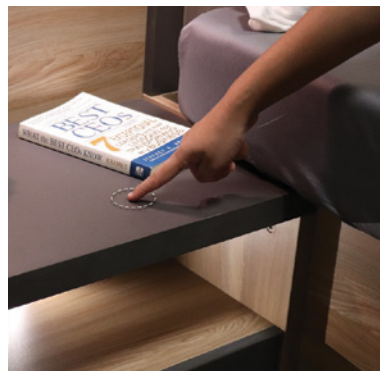
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Shilpi Madan

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A lifestyle journalist based in Mumbai, Shilpi is a passionate travel writer, who is always in search of new adventures with her words and loves to tell stories from around the world. She enjoys thumbing through her old passports and indulging in luxury experiences.

↓ **page 80**



Jitendra Soni

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Jitendra is a Jaipur-based tech journalist. His passion for technology helped him trade spreadsheets for gadgets, igniting a decade-long journey at the forefront of tech journalism in India.



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Originally from London, James has been living in Los Angeles since 2004. As a travel/lifestyle journalist and historian, he has written for the Los Angeles Times, National Geographic Traveler, BBC, and Los Angeles Daily News, among others. His true crime book *The Alaskan Blonde* was nominated for an Anthony Award.

↓ **page 68**



Abhilasha Ojha

[@abhilashaajha](#)

She's worked as a journalist with leading dailies and was a production editor (consultant) with DAG, a reputed art gallery based in New Delhi, Mumbai, and New York.

↓ **page 48**

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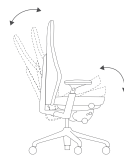
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An aerial shot of Loktak Lake, Manipur

Cover image courtesy
Ashik Aseem

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CHASING THAT PERFECT SHOT



Nature serves as the primary inspiration for these five photographers who go to any lengths for that one frame—we get a glimpse into their fascinating world as they tell us about their most challenging shoots

A vortex created by a school of sardines, shot in Moalboal, the Philippines

MARINE LIFE

ROLLING IN THE DEEP

From capturing a Guinness World Record being created under ice to shooting whale sharks, underwater photographer **Benjamin Yavar** leaves no stone unturned

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

Yavar's most challenging shot, it captures Yasuko Ozeki as she makes a Guinness record in Japan in 2024; A vortex of sardines and the serenity of a freediver, shot at Panglao, the Philippines; The photographer frames a whale shark near a school of sardines in Moalboal, the Philippines.





About the photographer:

Benjamin Yavar (@ben.freedom) is a 37-year-old Chilean freediver and award-winning underwater photographer, based in the Philippines. Winner of the 'Professional Nature Photographer of the Year 2024', he captures breathtaking wildlife and underwater scenes, blending artistry and adventure to inspire. His work reflects a deep passion for the ocean and storytelling.

CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR TOUGHEST SHOT?

The one I took of Yasuko Ozeki ice freediving, as she made it to the Guinness World Record for 'Longest swim under ice with breath held' (at 126m) on 22nd February 2024, in Shiretoko, Japan. This required pushing both my physical and mental limits as the water temperature was just around 1°C.

Moreover, the dive site had only a small entrance and exit cut through the thick ice, which required precise planning and execution. The set-up and planning for each shot was extensive, as every second mattered. It took multiple dives to perfect the composition, battling the cold and ensuring safety at every step. Making sure my camera gear functioned in freezing temperatures and adjusting to the lighting conditions were critical

challenges. The photograph captures the raw beauty of the icy underwater world but also symbolises resilience and the rewards of venturing into the unknown.

WALK US THROUGH THE BEHIND THE SCENES OF A TYPICAL SHOOT.

Panglao, in the Philippines, has been my home for four years, and its vibrant marine life provide endless inspiration. On a typical shoot day, preparation begins at home, ensuring the batteries are charged and memory cards have ample storage. On the way, I soak in the tropical weather and brainstorm compositions. Sunny days bring vibrant colours, while overcast days lend themselves to moody, dramatic shots. At the dive site, I spend some time on the surface, observing the water and the life below. In a typical one-hour session,

I'll make over 60 dives, capturing images with every breath hold.

ONE PRO TIP FOR AMATEUR PHOTOGRAPHERS?

Take a freediving course or a scuba safety training session before diving into underwater photography. Understanding how to move efficiently underwater, control your buoyancy, and hold your breath (if freediving) will not only improve your ability to capture stunning shots but also ensure your safety in an unpredictable environment.

WHICH DESTINATIONS INSPIRE YOU TO TRAVEL?

Mexico, specifically Baja California, for wildlife photography. Additionally, the cenotes in Mexico are also high on my list.

— As told to
Shrabasti A Mallik

NATURAL PHENOMENA

TRACKING THE LAVA

Volcanic eruptions in Iceland are constant, and nature photographer **Jeroen Van Nieuwenhove** is right there, gas mask and all, shooting them in real time





LEFT AND RIGHT

This shot of the Northern Lights above an eruption is rare and very tough to get; Van Nieuwenhove has been documenting eruptions for four years.

FACING PAGE

This shot of lava fountaining out of a volcanic event in 2021 has won Van Nieuwenhove several awards



About the photographer:

Jeroen Van Nieuwenhove (@jvn.photo) is a full-time Belgian Icelandic photographer, working out of Iceland. He has largely dedicated his photography to documenting the Arctic, with a special focus on volcanic eruptions and the Icelandic Highlands. Jeroen also teaches photography and is a self-published author.

CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR TOUGHEST SHOT?

That would be a single exposure of the Northern Lights above an eruption, taken in 2021. I've been documenting eruptions for four years now and it is incredibly rare to capture both these natural phenomena in one image.

One night in mid-April, I was near the eruption around 10pm; it was cold, windy and hailing. I was on my way back to the car when the Northern Lights started to show. I raced back, framed the shot, and waited for a further hour so that the Lights showed above the eruption. It was a very difficult photo to take.

WALK US THROUGH THE BEHIND THE SCENES OF A TYPICAL SHOOT.

It is very important to be conscious of safety around an eruption. Last year, Iceland experienced six such events and forced

a village to evacuate. To document some eruptions, one needs permission from the government. I also wear a helmet, gas mask, and fluorescent vest, and carry a radio with GPS and a gas meter. I also use drones when it's not possible to approach an eruption safely.

I shoot both in the day and at night. But the best time is probably sunset and blue hour (twilight), when one can still see details of the solidified parts and the glow of the lava.

AN ANECDOTE YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE.

In 2021, one memorable eruption lasted six months. One night, I noticed on the webcam that the largest crater had begun flowing continuously in great volumes, which was unusual. I drove out there as fast as I could, and began flying my drone to photograph what was happening. Just 10

minutes after my first flight, the fountaining stopped completely.

ONE PRO TIP FOR AMATEURS?

For the last year and a half, there have been no tourist eruptions (volcanic events that are safe to approach). However, it is possible to do a helicopter tour. These allow visitors to see something unique—a new landscape being created in front of you. So my tip is to remember to view this through one's eyes also, and not just the camera.

WHICH DESTINATIONS INSPIRE YOU TO TRAVEL?

I am interested in isolated locations like the Arctic and the Antarctic. I also visit Greenland every year. These destinations make one feel like an explorer, where you are humbled by the grandeur of the landscape.

— As told to **Mignonne Dsouza**



BIRDING

IN HOT PURSUIT

Aarzoo Khurana once trekked for four days to get close-up shots of Uttarakhand's state bird

TOP

The Himalayan monal shoot required Khurana to trek for 3 to 5km every day

FACING PAGE

(top and bottom) The photographer enjoyed watching and shooting great hornbills performing their mating rituals at Nelliampathy, Kerala; She is proud of this tiger shot taken in Corbett National Park, Uttarakhand.

CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR TOUGHEST BIRDING SHOT?

That would be photographing the Himalayan monal, a pheasant bird found in the area around Chopta in Uttarakhand. I had planned this as a four-day trip, and to reach the bird's habitat, we had to trek 3 to 5km every day. It was very cold and extremely exhausting

because not only was I carrying all my gear, I had also packed food and water for the entire day.

I also wanted a particular close-up shot of the monal, so I found myself scrambling over the terrain for four days, braving snowfall, hail, and rain, trying not to spook the birds and get close enough. Finally, on the fourth day, I succeeded in landing the shot.

WALK US THROUGH THE BEHIND THE SCENES OF A TYPICAL SHOOT.

That really depends on the destination, so there is no typical shoot as such. A lot of planning goes into deciding what gear to carry. For instance, for the monal shoot, I used a 600mm lens and a tele converter (a device that goes between the lens and the camera and acts as a



magnifying glass). Then, there's batteries, power banks, tripod, monopod, plus food and water. When I blog on a shoot, I also carry a gimbal plus GoPro. And in cold weather, I am usually wearing a lot of layers as well.

Sometimes, although you make all your plans, all of it comes to naught. This really came true when I tried to shoot a tigress and her cubs in Dudhwa National Park in Uttar Pradesh. I waited for hours but the tigress and cubs came out literally a few minutes after I gave up and left the location to eat breakfast. It was a disappointing moment.

AN ANECDOTE YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE.

That would be this tiger shot I took in the early morning hours at Corbett National Park, Uttarakhand. For this frame, all elements had to fall in place—the early morning mist, the location (by the river), the lighting, and, of course, the tiger. I was parked near the river, when I heard the warning call of a monkey, and though the tiger crossed the river soon after, the mist hid him from me. Also, the focus kept on changing. Then finally, just as the tiger was about to step on land, I switched to manual and got the shot.

ONE PRO TIP FOR AMATEUR PHOTOGRAPHERS?

I would really like to tell people to stop running behind birds when they want



About the photographer:

Aarzo Khurana (@aarzo_khurana) is a seasoned wildlife photographer and videographer. She is the first person to cover all 55 tiger reserves in India, completing a monumental journey spanning 37,000km. Combining her legal expertise, creative talent, and commitment to conservation, she contributes to the world of wildlife and inspire others to protect and cherish nature.

to shoot them. It just makes them fly away. Instead, go to the location where the bird is present and wait for them to come to you.

WHICH DESTINATIONS INSPIRE YOU TO TRAVEL?

Name a forest and I would love to go there. But the last time I was excited to be in a destination was Nelliampathy, Kerala. This is where the great hornbills mate and I was fortunate enough to witness the entire mating ritual up close. It was very beautiful to see.

— As told to **Mignonne Souza**

GETTING THERE

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





WILDLIFE

PROTECT AND PRESERVE

Be it photographing elusive snow leopards or endangered red pandas, lensman **Dhritiman Mukherjee** goes the extra mile

TOP

The Greenland shark Mukherjee photographed in early 2024 is over 300 years old

FACING PAGE

(top to bottom) The photographer shot the snow leopard in Spiti, Himachal Pradesh; The Himalayan brown bear was snapped in the Kargil area; In 2017, he photographed an endangered red panda in Singalila National Park, West Bengal.

CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR TOUGHEST SHOT?

A shot being tough or challenging is a matter of perspective. So, I prefer to describe a situation rather than state a feeling. It was around March or April last year when I deep dived in a frozen sea to photograph a Greenland shark, one of the longest-living vertebrates in the world. They are said to live over 500 years and the one I framed was nearly 300

years old. It was a seven-day shoot; a 1.5-m-wide hole was cut on the frozen surface for entry and exit. Instead of calling this project difficult, I would say that the temperate outside was -11°C and -3°C under water.

WALK US THROUGH THE BEHIND THE SCENES OF A TYPICAL SHOOT.

In 27 years, I've worked in all Indian states and over 52 countries; therefore, I

know that every shot is different; every situation is different. One day, you might be working on a project surrounding frogs in the Western Ghats and the next moment it can be a primate or a shark. So, every topography or setting is different. Less than a year ago, I was diving in a frozen sea and right now, I am in Kashmir's Baramulla district, documenting the near-threatened *markhor* (said to



About the photographer:

Dhritiman Mukherjee (@dhritiman_mukherjee) has received numerous honours, including the RBS Earth Hero award, Carl Zeiss Wildlife Conservation Award, and the Kirloskar Vasundhara Mitra for his contribution to conservation, besides being an acclaimed photographer. He is the co-author of *Magical Biodiversity of India* and *The Land of Mosaic*.



be the world's largest goat) in the Kazinag sanctuary. Shooting is a heterogenous process to me; there is no pattern to it. In fact, the more diverse your work, the more patterns you break.

ONE PRO TIP FOR AMATEUR PHOTOGRAPHERS?

There should be a purpose behind our images. What do we do with photographs? We connect with people. This connection can be of various kinds—emotional, scientific or even a means to create awareness.

Our objective as photographers, therefore, should be to connect the disconnected. Our work should aim to connect with those who are not associated with the natural world. Only then will we be able to understand, appreciate, and truly protect Mother Nature and all her children.

WHICH DESTINATIONS INSPIRE YOU TO TRAVEL?

Along with being a photographer, I also focus on conservation. So, most of my travel plans are dependent either on vulnerable species or unexplored habitats that are untapped. For example, in 2021, I shot a documentary on the largest cavefish in Meghalaya, for which I had to rappel down a 500-ft cave (approximately). Conservation work inspires me... the destination is an added delight.

— As told to **Shrabasti A Mallik**

GETTING THERE

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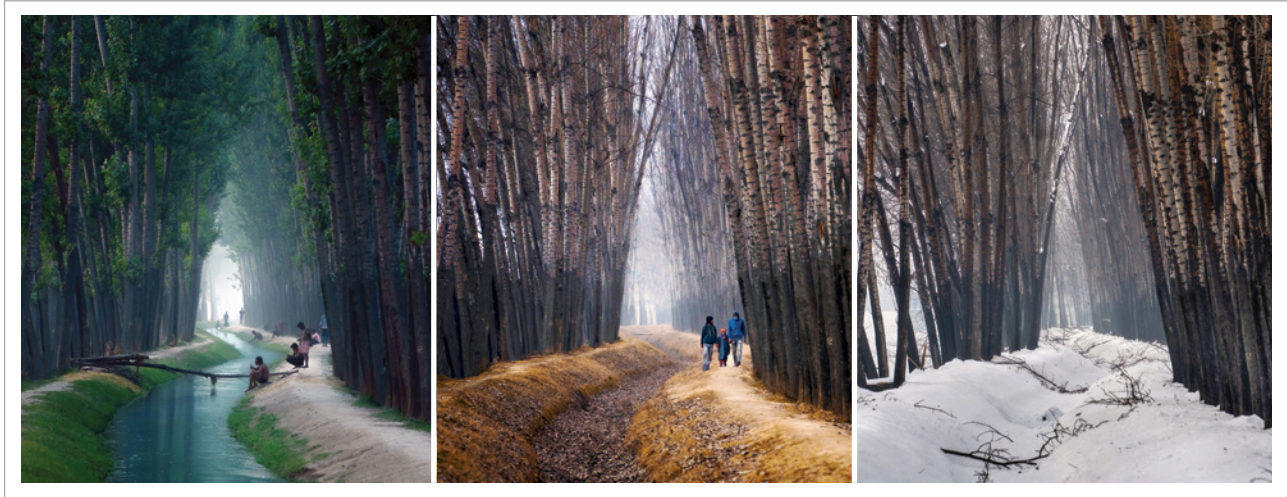


LANDSCAPES

IN FULL GLORY

Criss-crossing the country on his bike during the lockdown to capture shots or visiting the same spot three years in a row for a series—landscape photographer **Ashik Aseem** gives it his all

Aseem took this shot of a valley in Shego village, Himachal Pradesh, with a phone camera at midnight, using the light from his bike to illuminate the valley



CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR TOUGHEST SHOT?

It's a series of three photographs that I took of the Pampore Canal in Kashmir in three different seasons—first summer (2021), then autumn (2022), and finally, winter (2023). Shooting this as a series was not planned. I clicked the summer photo first and loved the frame, and thought how visually appealing that spot would be during the other seasons. So, I travelled back to the same location for two consecutive years to shoot. And it's been a rewarding experience.

WALK US THROUGH THE BEHIND THE SCENES OF A TYPICAL SHOOT.

Most of the time, I just set off and make my way, often venturing off onto the paths less travelled. And then when a sight or vista presents itself, my lens gets to work. But there are some destinations or locations that I decide beforehand, like the series I shot in Kashmir.

TOP TO BOTTOM

Through a series of three images, the artist captured Kashmir's Pampore canal in three different seasons; A drone shot of Munnar's tea plantation over a layer of fog in January 2021; Aseem photographed lupine flowers in full bloom in June at Gulmarg valley, Kashmir.

AN ANECDOTE YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE.

It was in 2021, during the lockdown, when I had undertaken a bike trip from my home in Kozhikode, Kerala, and reached Gulmarg valley. Funny thing is, in none of the state borders that I crossed, was I stopped or sent back. I just had my camera and a backpack, and was almost always covered in dust from all the riding. I did not even look like a photographer.

Every policeman that I came across, exclaimed, "What are you doing travelling at this time? Take care, be safe," and let me go ahead. And the officers in Gulmarg were no different. They even let me access the Valley; never before had I seen that expanse of green



GETTING THERE

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



so deserted, with only a few horses. No surprises that I shot to my heart's content.

ONE PRO TIP FOR AMATEUR PHOTOGRAPHERS?

When taking photos of people, I don't do it immediately. I spend some time with them and let them get comfortable in my presence. Only then do I click a photo. I find that this way, we can capture the most natural expressions. And when I photograph landscapes, I stay around the place and try to visit the location at different times on different days. This way, I understand at what time the landscape looks its best.

WHICH DESTINATIONS INSPIRE YOU TO TRAVEL?

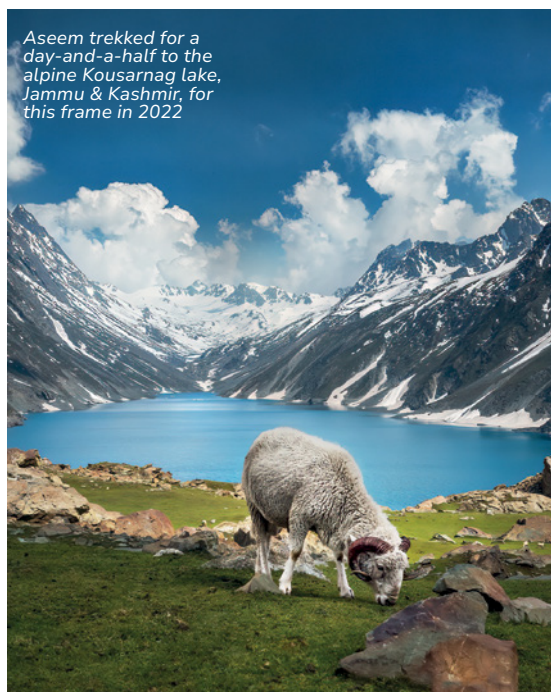
Mountains and hills will always be my favourites. As someone who grew up and is settled in a humid, tropical area [Kozhikode], I love to travel to cold climates. Be it Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh or Ladakh, the natural spectacles of Meghalaya and other north-eastern states or the tea plantations of Munnar [Kerala].

— As told to

Shrabasti A Mallik



A shot of the route from Kaza to Mudh village, Himachal Pradesh, with the dirt road parallel to the Pin river



Aseem trekked for a day-and-a-half to the alpine Kousarnag lake, Jammu & Kashmir, for this frame in 2022



About the photographer:

Ashik Aseem (@ashikaseem) is an award-winning travel and landscape photographer, content creator, and TEDx speaker based in Kerala. Named Travel Photographer of the Year, he was one of three Indian photographers chosen by Google to create a curated collection of Indian wallpapers. Aseem is renowned for his unique approach to photography, which includes hand-delivering printed photos to the individuals he captures during his travels.

THE PEOPLE

30 ➔ Q&A 36 ➔ EXPERT SPEAK

MAESTRO OF THE SITAR

This last disciple of Pt. Ravi Shankar is going places—including the White House. Meet Rishab Rikhiram Sharma



Sharma is the United Nations' first musician advocate for mental health

Rishab Rikhiram Sharma

“I DIDN'T CHOOSE THE SITAR, IT CHOSE ME”

At 26, Rishab Rikhiram Sharma is not only taking forward his musical legacy but also working with the UN as an advocate for mental health

words by **Shrabasti Anindita Mallik**

CONGRATULATIONS ON BEING NAMED THE UN'S FIRST MUSICIAN ADVOCATE FOR MENTAL HEALTH. TELL US ABOUT THE ASSOCIATION.

It is an honour to have been working with 'Sitar for Mental Health' and going places to spread the word about Indian classical music while opening a dialogue about mental health. I believe in doing actual groundwork and I feel blessed to have been received with such warmth not just in India but globally, including at the White House.

WHEN DID YOUR INITIATIVE, 'SITAR FOR MENTAL HEALTH', GERMINATE?

In 2020, after my grandfather's passing, I was heartbroken and it hit me very bad. I gave up music for some time and wouldn't come out of my room. Anxiety and depression had kicked in, and then the pandemic happened. I tried talking my heart out on Clubhouse [a social audio app] and grew a community there, which advised therapy. And since I wanted a holistic approach to mental health, a doctor asked me to take up music again. And I did... I picked up the sitar and I was like, 'Where were you?' It was so peaceful, like healing. I just looked at it differently from there. Soon, I started playing on the platform and the community kept growing, with listeners sharing their stories of loss and healing. Around 2021, I started naming those sessions 'Sitar for Mental Health', and everything snowballed from there.

Rishab Rikhiram Sharma during a concert

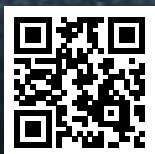


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Sharma believes music has the power to heal, and he proves this time and again during his 'Sitar for Mental Health' events



I WANT TO BRING SITAR TO THE MAINSTREAM. IF I DO THAT IN THIS LIFETIME, MY LIFE'S PURPOSE WOULD BE FULFILLED.

Most of the sitars that the artiste plays are made by his father



HOW DID YOU FIND YOUR CALLING IN THE SITAR?

I first learnt to play the guitar to impress my female fans (*laughs*) and also because, initially, Papa wouldn't let me touch a sitar. "You have to build respect for it," he would say. But I grew up around sitars as I belong to a family of illustrious luthiers [those who build or repair string instruments] and the first time I played was on a broken one that had come back from a shipment Papa had sent to Switzerland. He was surprised when he heard me play; I told him it is very similar to the guitar. Lessons started the next day and I haven't looked back since. I believe I didn't choose the sitar, it chose me.

YOU ARE BHARAT RATNA PANDIT RAVI SHANKAR'S YOUNGEST AND LAST DISCIPLE. HOW DID YOU BECOME HIS STUDENT?

See, the Ravi Shankar that I know now versus when I was young is very different. I knew Gurujji like a household member. In fact, I held his fingers and started walking. My father used to make Gurujji's sitars since 1994 and would take my brother and I to meet him whenever he came to India for his concerts. Gurujji had seen a video of me playing and had immediately called my father to confirm whether it's me because he had no idea that I was playing the sitar. He asked to see me when he came to India next. It was in the winter months



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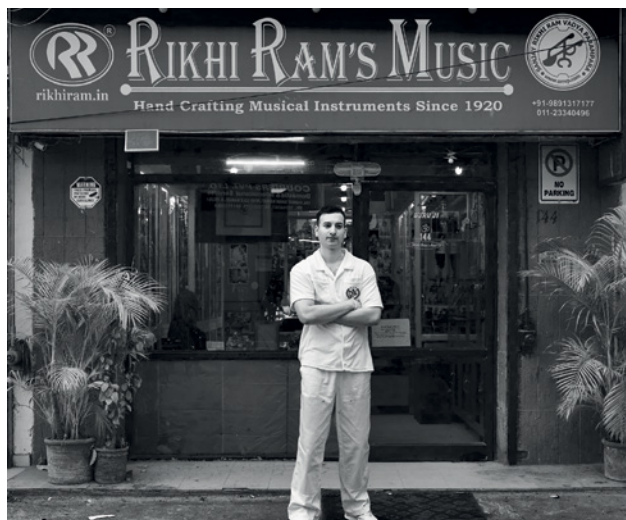


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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Rishab was 10 years old when he became Pandit Ravi Shankar's youngest disciple in 2010; In 2022, the sitarist became the first Indian musician to play at the White House; The young artiste being felicitated by sarod maestro Ustad Amjad Ali Khan; Whenever he is in India, Rishab spends time at his ancestral music shop near New Delhi's Gole Market.



of 2010 when I met him, and my life changed forever as he had prepared for my *ganda bandhan* [a traditional ceremony that marks the acceptance of a disciple by a guru]. I saw my parent's jaw drop to the floor when Guruji said, "I don't have many years left but for however long I'm alive, I would like to take Rishab as my disciple."

PLEASE SHARE SOME ANECDOTES OF PANDIT RAVI SHANKAR THAT NOT MANY WOULD KNOW.

He was a very strict teacher. If I did something wrong, he would scold me; he didn't hold back at all. But the moment he kept the sitar down, he was the nicest person on the planet. He would crack jokes. At the dinner table, he would teach me how to double and triple the speed of a beat. It was

as if knowledge was flowing out of his body. He would say, "Imbibe everything that you can; I'm not here for a very long time. You're the youngest and you have to take it forward. I know that you have it in you and that's why I'm pushing you."

DURING YOUR SHOWS, YOU USUALLY SPORT HENNA ON YOUR HANDS. HOW COME?

Kind of breaks the stereotype, right? *(laughs)* See, I design costumes [he was the brand ambassador for Aldo's campaign for two

years]. So, I used to often think that when I am playing, my hands are on display and wondered how I could dress them up. I thought of tattoos but soon realised that I don't want to be married to one design. That led to a search for temporary tattoos which ended in henna. Plus, I want to break that notion that only women can wear mehendi.

WHO HAVE BEEN YOUR MUSICAL INSPIRATIONS?

Apart from Guruji and Indian classical artistes like Pandit Bhimsen Joshi and Ustad

Zakir Hussain, it would be my mom; she is a singer and my biggest supporter. She's the one who taught me *Shiv Kailash ke Vasi*, which is going viral now. But I had other influences too, like deadmau5 and Kanye West; I like Playboi Carti as well.

YOU'VE OFTEN SAID YOU WANT TO ENSURE EVERY PERSON LISTENS TO A SITAR AT LEAST ONCE IN THEIR LIFETIME.

I want to bring sitar to the mainstream. If I do that in this lifetime, my life's purpose would be fulfilled.



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AT ONE WITH NATURE

From sustainable practices to biodiversity protection, Dia Mirza has always championed causes to make the earth a better place for future generations

words by **Deepali Dhingra**

YOU ARE ASSOCIATED WITH MANY INITIATIVES TO CONSERVE THE ENVIRONMENT, WILDLIFE, AND NATURAL RESOURCES. WAS THERE A PARTICULAR MOMENT THAT YOU FELT COMPELLED TO START?

I have often traced back my close affinity with nature to my upbringing in Hyderabad. Very early, we were taught about the impact of our consumption habits on the environment. But it was while shooting *Ganga-The Soul of India* that I was compelled to do something about the vast amounts of plastic strewn in the pristine Himalayan terrain.

Working with Bittu Sehgal [editor of *Sanctuary Asia* and the founder of Sanctuary Nature Foundation] also gave me a clear idea about the work I wanted to do in the public domain. My role as the UN Environment Goodwill Ambassador and the United Nations Secretary-General Advocate for Sustainable Development Goals has also led me towards powerful campaigns against plastic pollution, biodiversity loss, and climate change. As an ambassador for the Wildlife Trust of India, I am fortunate to learn from and engage with our heroes working on the frontlines of climate change.

AS THE GOODWILL AMBASSADOR FOR THE UN ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME, WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHANGES YOU HAVE WITNESSED?

All around the world, young people are leading the conversations around climate change. I meet so many bright minds



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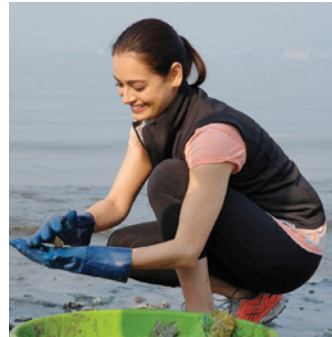
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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
The activist attending an event of the Sanctuary Nature Foundation and the Kids for Tigers programme; The actor gets hands-on during a beach clean up; Mirza with Alec Baldwin at the 2019 Champions of the Earth Awards in NYC, USA.



IT IS VERY REWARDING WHEN KIDS I HAVE WORKED WITH BECOME DEFENDERS OF TIGER HABITATS.

and get to see the work being done to endorse sustainable practices, green circularity, clean energy, and biodiversity restoration. It is very rewarding when kids I have worked with grow up to be passionate defenders of tiger habitats and the environment. And it is equally fulfilling to see a positive behavioural shift in response to the campaigns I have led against single-use plastics and air pollution. Finally, it feels like a personal win when I see people carrying their

own metal bottles, a practice I started over 10 years ago.

YOU ARE AN AMBASSADOR FOR THE WILDLIFE TRUST OF INDIA (WTI). HOW DO THEIR INITIATIVES IMPACT OUR NATURAL HERITAGE?

I have personally witnessed the impact we make in biodiversity protection through WTI's wildlife rescues and rehabilitation programmes. Thousands of forest rangers benefit from the training and ex-gratia programme started for families who have lost their loved ones in the line of duty, even if they happen to be daily wage labourers working in the forest. The WTI Club Nature programme that I am a founder member of, has helped inform many CEOs in India on the linkages between biodiversity protection and human health, progress, and growth.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE WAYS IN WHICH PEOPLE CAN TRAVEL IN AN ECO-FRIENDLY MANNER?

Carrying a travelling water bottle, your own cutlery, shopping bags,

and a sustainable travel kit are small ways to travel responsibly. It is also important to be a responsible tourist, not litter or pollute a place, and respect local cultures. I also look for eco-sensitive resorts and take part in restoration drives, if any, that are striving to counter the ill-effects of hyper tourism.

IS THERE ANY DESTINATION YOU HAVE TRAVELLED TO WHICH YOU THOUGHT WAS DOING A GREAT JOB AT BEING SUSTAINABLE?

I find that waste disposal and management remain a huge challenge in our country. And despite Extended Producer Responsibility being implemented, our villages, towns, rivers, and fields are choking with plastic pollution. There are parts of Meghalaya that have succeeded in implementing strict regulations that result in a cleaner environment. Indore in Madhya Pradesh is a great example of a city that has been declared the cleanest in India for seven years in a row, till 2024. The Taj group of hotels is really making strides in

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
The artiste with forest rangers and other officials; Mirza says her son Avyaan has a deep-rooted love for nature; Photography is a passion and a tool for conservation.

ensuring their properties are single-use plastics free.

WHAT IS IT THAT PEOPLE FIND REALLY CHALLENGING ABOUT BEING ECO-FRIENDLY?

I guess, when we discuss issues like climate change, we tend to get lost in its enormity and scale. It is true that we need far more accountability from world leaders and policy makers to reach the long-term goal of limiting global warming well below 2°C, but all of us can play a part in making the planet healthier with our choices. Something as small as refusing single-use plastics in our daily life can make a difference.

HOW ARE YOU ENSURING THAT YOUR SON GROWS UP TO BE ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSCIOUS?

Children learn naturally from the environment they grow up

in. Avyaan has always been surrounded by people who have a deep-rooted love for nature. He responds very organically to birds, butterflies, and trees, and treats them like members of our extended family. I also grew up in the same way, watching my mother nurture her garden where so much biodiversity thrived under her care.

Avyaan has already learnt to be grateful to the earth for the food he eats. He hugs trees and says 'thank you' to them, and knows the joy of walking on grass. He feels instinctively that the forest is a sacred place and lowers his voice. So yes, he is growing up into a person who cares deeply for the environment.

FOR HIS RECENT BIRTHDAY, YOU USED A NUMBER OF SUSTAINABLE MEASURES FOR THE CELEBRATIONS. CAN YOU TELL US

ABOUT SOME OF THEM?

One simple way to make any celebration sustainable is to cut out single-use plastics completely. This was a zero-waste celebration with upcycled cloth banners and buntings, sustainable napkins, reusable cups made from crop waste, bamboo cutlery and bagasse [material left over after extracting sugarcane] plates, and water dispensers with filtered water. The party favours for the kids were local and sustainable, and trees were also planted in their names in Uttarakhand.

FINALLY, WHAT IS IN THE CAREER PIPELINE FOR YOU IN 2025?

As an artiste, it is always my endeavour to represent empowered women on screen. So, 2025 promises to be yet another year where purpose and passion will guide my choices.

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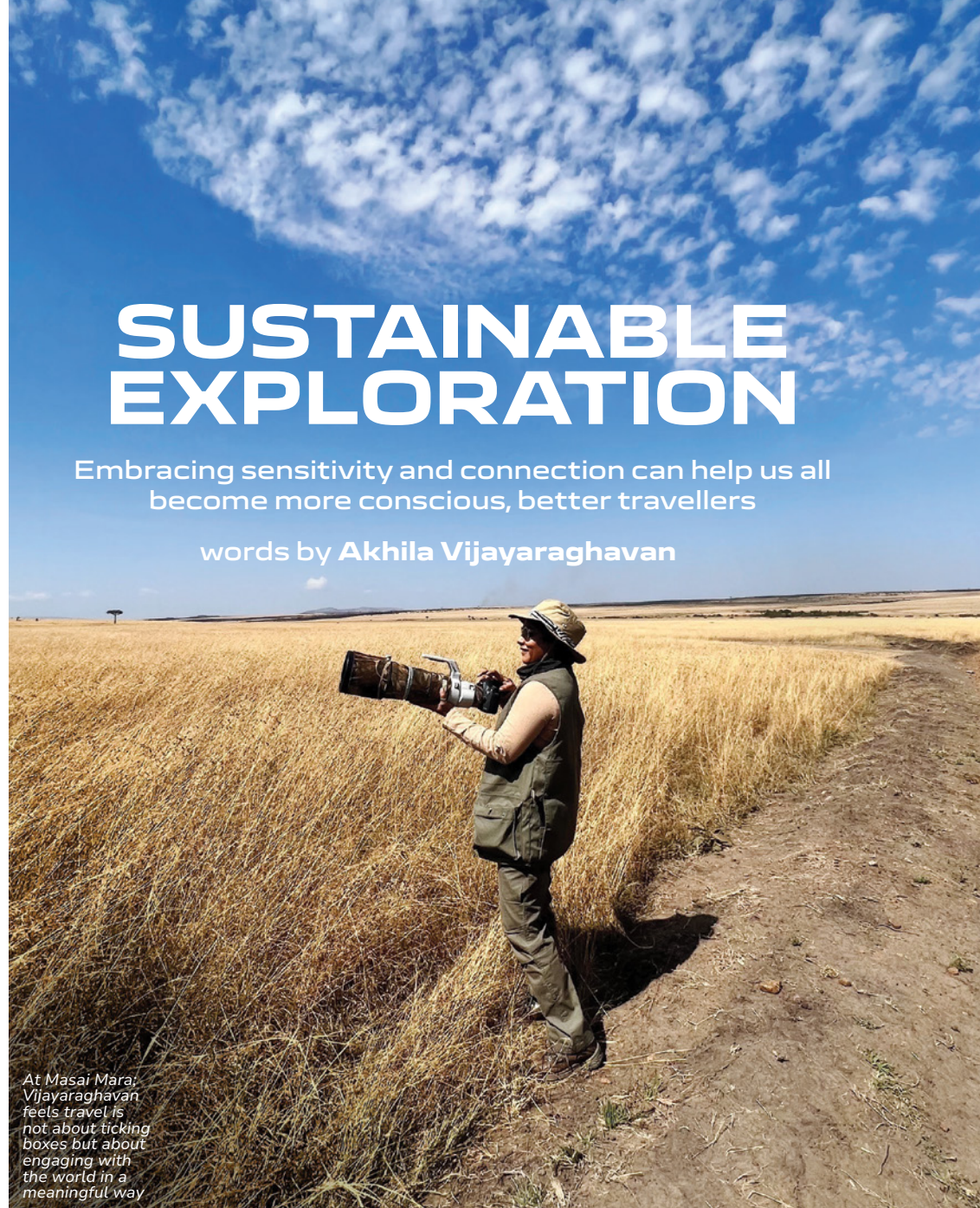


VR Store

Travel, for me, has always been an exploration of the senses. Over time, my travel style has evolved into something slower, more intentional, and focused on immersing in the experience. While I still aim to tick at least one item off my bucket list each year, I no longer chase whirlwind itineraries. Instead, I prioritise more meaningful getaways.

Every journey has the potential to shape us and the world around us. Travelling sustainably—whether by supporting local businesses, minimising waste or fostering genuine connections—ensures our adventures leave a positive impact. Travel is not just about ticking boxes but about creating lasting memories and engaging with the world in a meaningful, respectful way. It's not where you go but how you go that matters.

My destinations are as varied as my interests: admiring Renaissance architecture in Europe, exploring the remote jungles of Arunachal Pradesh, trekking through Sikkim's mountains, road-tripping across Tamil Nadu, going on wildlife safaris or diving into the Maldives' crystal waters. The world offers so much and approaching travel with wonder, curiosity, and



At Masai Mara, Vijayaraghavan feels travel is not about ticking boxes but about engaging with the world in a meaningful way

SUSTAINABLE EXPLORATION

Embracing sensitivity and connection can help us all become more conscious, better travellers

words by Akhila Vijayaraghavan

sensible caution reminds me of how incredible this spinning blue marble truly is.

CULTIVATING A TRAVEL SENSIBILITY

Work has shaped my travel and now, the reverse is true. After over a decade in environmental consultancy, I transitioned to running a hydroponic farm and creating a food brand. A

tribute to South India's heritage recipes, the brand is inspired by my travels and fascination with local ingredients and food history.

Over the years, I've developed a keen sense of travel sensibility. Ethical wildlife tourism is non-negotiable—any tour promising guaranteed animal sightings is a red flag. I also engage with



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LEFT AND RIGHT
Masai men demonstrate to Vijayaraghavan how they traditionally start a fire with sticks; The author in Puducherry.

locals and fellow travellers about their culture, history, and cuisine. These conversations often reveal hidden gems far beyond guidebooks. Nature-focused trips always draw me in—these moments aren't just about escape, they're about connection, awe, and affirmation that fuel both my work and life.

BECOMING A CONSCIOUS TRAVELLER

Travel is more than just about the places we visit, it is about how we engage with them. My approach is rooted in sustainability and sensitivity.

Respect wildlife and local communities: Be mindful of local customs, religious sensitivities, and dress codes. Dispose of waste responsibly as much



of it ends up in the ocean, harming ecosystems. When interacting with wildlife, support operators that respect animal welfare.

Support local culture and cuisine: Take a cooking class, visit a market or explore neighbourhood shops. Bring home local spices or unique souvenirs, and support artists and businesses. If you enjoy a particular activity, find a club and join a session. Learn about the history of your destination or read a book related to the place to spark conversations there.

Journal, plan, ignore the FOMO: Plan with intention but allow room for spontaneity. Even if you're not into journaling, take time to jot down thoughts or sketch your surroundings. Remember that social media

often showcases unrealistic expectations. Embrace your own unique experiences and savour the moments that matter to you.

Be an ambassador for your country: This mindset starts the moment you board the plane. Learn about your country and its culture to represent it with pride and accuracy. Through kindness, respect, and positive actions, you challenge misconceptions and present India in a welcoming light.

Deal with setbacks better: Travel, like life, doesn't always go as planned. Sometimes, an unfavourable circumstance can set you back but they can be opportunities for unexpected experiences and deeper connections. These moments often lead to the best memories and stories.



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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 for the latest flight schedules.

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LET'S SAMBA

From the Rio Carnival and an international wine fest to an event dedicated to David Bowie, there's much to explore

BUCKET LIST

A curation of the most exciting events around the world to bookmark and visit



MOVIE TIME
BERLINALE 2025

Berlin, Germany
13th-23rd February

The 75th Berlin International Film Festival will be spread across 15 venues, with German director Tom Tykwer opening the event for the third time with *Das Licht* (*The Light*). Other stalwarts showcasing new films this year include filmmakers Denis Côté (Canada), Michel Gondry (France), and Ira Sachs (USA). Scottish actor Tilda Swinton will be receiving the Honorary Golden Bear this year for lifetime achievement.

berlinale.de



BERGEN INTERNATIONAL LITERARY FESTIVAL

Bergen, Norway
5th-9th February

The five-day event prides itself on featuring both non-fiction and fiction authors. The theme this year is 'Truth' and the programme boasts film screenings, seminars, city walks, and eight poets coming together for a 'Poetic Punk Gala'.

litfestbergen.no



CULTURAL FIESTA
RIO CARNIVAL

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
28th February-8th March

The entire city turns into Party Central as it kicks off the season of Lent with a rocking fiesta. The parades at the Sambadrome are the main attraction of the entire celebration, as is the ball this year at the Copacabana Palace.

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ON THE RADAR



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udaipurworldmusicfestival.com



SURAJKUND INTERNATIONAL CRAFTS MELA

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7th-23rd February

The 38th edition will showcase textiles, culture, and handicrafts from India and other countries.
surajkundmela.co.in



BRAHMAPUTRA CARNIVAL

Guwahati, Assam
Till 15th March

Experience glamping, water sports, live concerts, and handicrafts at this event.
brahmaputracarnival.com



RETRO MOMENT

DUBLIN BOWIE FESTIVAL

Dublin, Ireland
26th February-2nd March

Dedicated to celebrating musician David Bowie's life and legacy, this event features a wide range of artistes from various disciplines and attracts attendees from across Ireland and beyond. The 10th edition will feature the RTÉ Concert Orchestra conducted by David Brophy, who will return for a special performance of Songs of David Bowie at the 3Arena on 2nd March.

dublinbowiefestival.ie



TOAST TO THIS

VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL WINE FESTIVAL

Vancouver, Canada
22nd February-2nd March

One of the biggest and oldest of its kind in the world, the theme for 2025 is 'West Coast U.S. Wines'. Spread over eight days, there are tastings, a gala dinner, and wine seminars. At the heart of the festival is the International Festival Tastings at the Vancouver Convention Centre, where each winery pours four to five wines for the public. All wines served at the fest are available for purchase.

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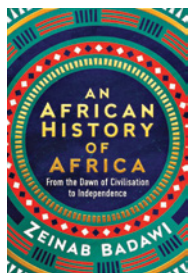
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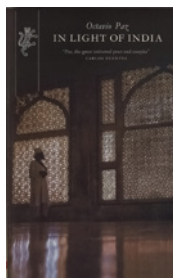
Poet, editor, and artist **Abhay K** reveals why these books are his favourites



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(Zeinab Badawi)

It is a deep dive into the continent's history from the very origins of our species.

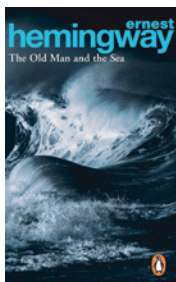
WH Allen; ₹2,641



IN LIGHT OF INDIA
(Octavio Paz)

This book helps one to understand India and its culture and civilisation deeply.

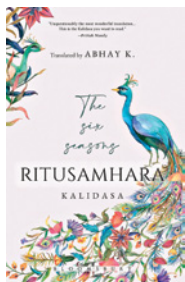
Vintage Digital; ₹1,506



THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA
(Ernest Hemingway)

It tells us that man can be destroyed but not defeated.

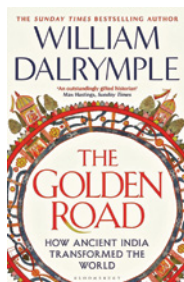
Vintage Classics; ₹150



RITUSAMHARA
(Kalidasa)

This classic makes one aware of the bliss that every season brings.

Bloomsbury Publishing India; ₹399



THE GOLDEN ROAD
(William Dalrymple)

The author's latest work is a paean to ancient India.

Bloomsbury Publishing India; ₹999

NEW ON THE SHELF



WILD FICTIONS
(Amitav Ghosh)

An inspiring read on healing our relationship with, and restoring our delicate balance with the landscape we belong to.

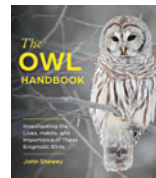
HarperCollins Publishers India; ₹799



IRON HOPE
(James Lawrence)

The ultimate, point-by-point guide to mental toughness by this three-time Guinness record holder and triathlon athlete from Canada.

Pan Macmillan India; ₹660



THE OWL HANDBOOK
(John Shewey)

A thoughtfully-researched guide to these captivating creatures, including an exploration of owls' cultural impact as seen in folklore and mythology.

Hachette Book Group; ₹2,162



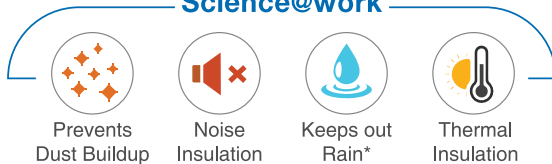
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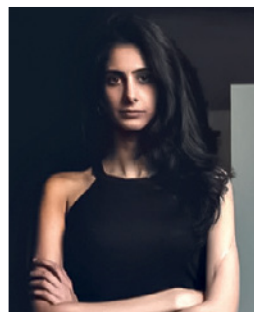
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WATCH OUT FOR THESE 8 ARTISTS

India Art Fair's 16th edition in 2025 will see the participation of over 118 exhibitors, promising to be bigger and better than before

words by **Abhilasha Ojha**

This year's Fair lays emphasis on not just paintings and sculptures but also textile art, photography, innovative installations, performing arts, and other artistic practices. In conversation with Jaya Asokan, Fair Director, India Art Fair, we bring you a list of not-to-be missed.



➔ **AYESHA SINGH**

Contemporary artist Ayesha Singh, co-founder of Art Chain India, is designing this year's main façade. Titled *Skewed Histories and Site Lines*, it engages with Singh's research—women's

contribution as architects from 1000 AD to their work during the modernist era. Challenging their erasure in history, this new work honours their stories, shifting long-perpetuated perspectives towards reimagining collective horizons.

➔ **UMESH S**

Recipient of India Art Fair's artist-in-residence programme, Umesh's art revisits his connection with his village in Bihar, drawing on memories of his childhood as he captures his agrarian roots through drawings, photographs, videos, and installations. He combines vernacular text and poetry in wooden panels and on forgotten agricultural tools as a reminder of the changing rural landscape.



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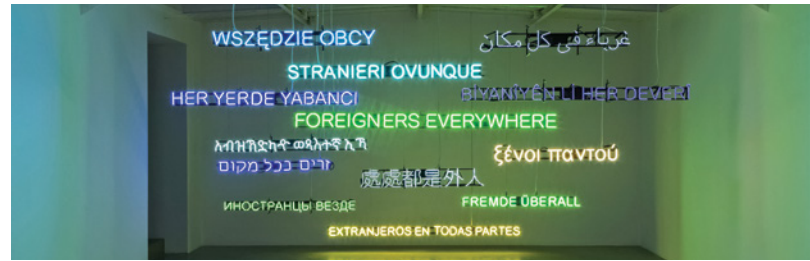
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↑ CLAIRE FONTAINE

This is a feminist conceptual artist collective founded by Fulvia Carnevale and James Thornhill in Paris in 2004. The collective comes to India Art Fair with *Foreigners*

Everywhere / Stranieri Ovunque, a project that began in 2004 as a series of neon sign sculptures spanning multiple languages, capturing the nuanced meanings of texts embedded throughout site-

specific LED installations. This year, Claire Fontaine presents a new set of installations drawing from India's languages, influences, and culture. The project will also have multiple installations across New Delhi.



↑ ASIM WAQIF

Delhi-based Waqif's art practice attempts a crossover between architecture, art, and design, with a contextual reference to contemporary urban design and the politics of occupying public spaces. This year, Waqif brings forth his concern for ecological management, especially with respect to water, waste, and architecture. His work, *Make-Shift*, uses a second-hand cement truck from a chassis fabricator and metal scrap to show both the temporariness and the rigidity of various materials.

↓ HUMA BHABHA

Bhabha's artistic practice encompasses sculpture, drawings, and photography with references from science fiction, horror films, and a unique understanding of urban life. Her large sculptural works like *Maybe Nothing Maybe Everything* (2024) in this year's edition highlights the Pakistani-American artist's strong practice that combines grotesque, figurative forms, using everyday materials in her sculptures.



All images courtesy respective artists

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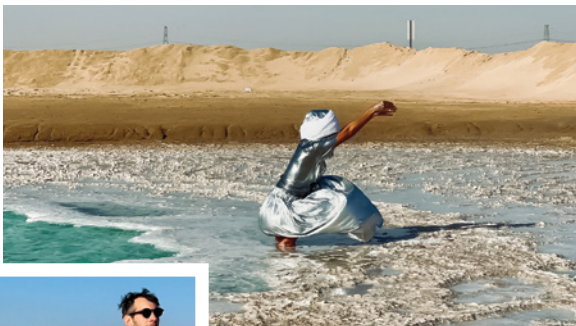
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← **HIMALI SINGH SOIN**

This writer and artist based between London and Delhi, uses metaphors from outer space and the natural environment to construct imaginary cosmologies to understand human psychology, focusing on ideas of nostalgia, love, and loss.

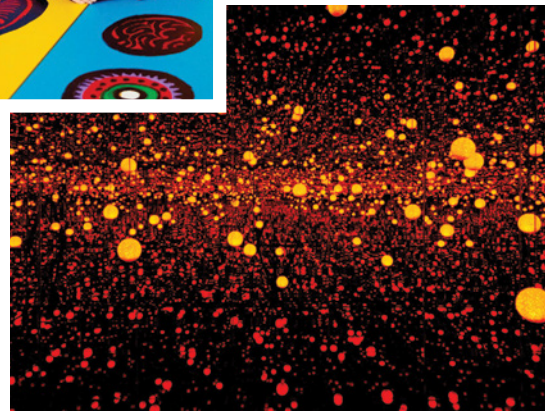
Engaging audiences through audio-visual commentary in immersive environments, Soin, currently writer-in-residence at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, brings *Hylozoic/Desires: The Hedge of Halomancy*, a multimedia showcase that combines performance, moving images, and music, to tell viewers about a forgotten border, the Inland Customs Line, while exploring themes of colonialism and nationalism.

↓ **YAYOI KUSAMA**

The Japanese artist's work has transcended two of the most important art movements of the second half of the 20th century: Pop Art and Minimalism. Her highly influential career encompasses paintings, performances, installations, literary works, films, fashion, design, and much more.



This year's India Art Fair showcases Kusama's various works, including *My Evanescent Dream Within a Dream* (2022) made with mirror boxes and LED lights.



All images courtesy respective artists

→ **YOGESH BARVE**

Yogesh Barve, a contemporary artist from Mumbai, employs found objects related to technology in his multimedia installations. His work examines social and cultural experiences of equality and inequality, and how it feels to be both an outsider and insider. *I Am Not Your Dalit*, an installation he brings to this year's edition, questions societal stereotypes by reimagining objects like LED tickers from railway stations. The work highlights issues of access to education, technology, and marginalised histories.



At NSIC Exhibition Grounds, Okhla, Delhi, from 6th-9th February



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TAKE OFF

Aero India, Asia's largest air show, is a unique convention for the aerospace sector

The much-awaited Aero India 2025, a biennial air show and aviation exhibition, is here. Over 700 exhibitors are expected at the convention, and both military and civilian aircraft will be on display. Aerial displays are always a prominent part of the show and visitors can expect to see performances by the IAF's Sukhoi fighters, the Surya Kiran Aerobatic Team, and the Sarang Helicopter Display Team. Ahead of the 15th edition, the Aero India 2025 mobile app has been launched. It provides updates on day-to-day events and exhibitors, along with information on seminars, theme-based pavilions, and aircraft participating in the displays. Aero India 2025 will be open to the public on the last two days.

At Yelahanka Air Force Station, Bengaluru, from 10th-14th February

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words by **Jitendra Soni**

↑ DJI NEO DRONE

This gadget is so tiny that it can take off and land right on your palm. The best part is that this drone can be controlled using gestures or an app on your phone—making aerial photography as simple as taking a selfie. It also allows you to capture creative cinematic 4K videos and photos. While it has multiple image and video modes—Cine, Normal, Sport, Manual, and Follow—it has a fly time of about 18 minutes. So, for uninterrupted aerial artistry, make sure you pick up the Fly More combo.

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↔ ASUS ZENBOOK S14

This exemplifies how AI can seamlessly integrate into a laptop. It features a Microsoft Pluton security processor, which uses AI to provide hardware-based defences against cyber threats. Its Adaptive Lock automatically locks the screen when you step away from the gadget. The device can also predict usage patterns, thanks to AI-driven power management.

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→ TIMEKETTLE W4 PRO

This looks like a pair of wireless earbuds but transforms into your personal universal translator. It supports 40 languages and 93 accents. The advanced AI algorithms translate text and voice interpretations in real time, while learning from your usage pattern to improve accuracy over time. These open-ear earbuds also offer noise cancellation with the help of AI-powered triple array mics.

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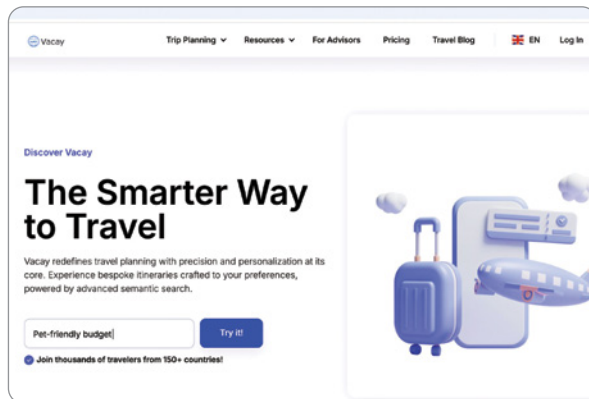
From capturing life's moments with unparalleled clarity to making daily tasks more efficient, this smartphone pushes the boundaries of what users can expect in the AI era. Features like AI Clarity Enhancer, AI Unblur, AILivePhoto or AI Reflection Remover, and others ensure you capture the perfect moment. The AI Summary automatically generates summaries, notes, and transcripts of recordings.

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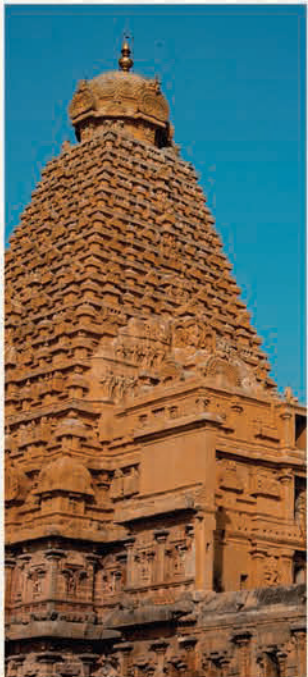
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← ↑ NEW BOUTIQUE IN HYDERABAD

The Delhi-based multi-designer store Carma unveils a new chapter at 10, Banjara Hills. This boutique will stock a wide range of bridal couture pieces, formal ensembles, and sleek everyday wear.



↑ CELEBRATE LOVE

Why: In a nod to Valentine's Day (14th February), Loya pays tribute to the ability of culinary excellence to express love. **Where:** Taj West End, Bengaluru.

Recommended: *Burni ka Jhinga* (sigdi cooked prawns), *Cha Gosht* (boneless mutton in a gram flour gravy), *Rose Kulfi*



↑ GET SOME KICKS

New Balance, the international sports brand, unveils its curated assortment of top-tier sporting footwear, featuring its disruptive Fresh Foam X and FuelCell technologies. The brand has recently launched its *Made* collection in India.



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↑ **DIG IN, IN DELHI**

Why: A creative mix of global cuisines, with influences from European, Italian, and Mexican flavours. They also serve a range of gluten-free dishes. **Where:** La Isla, N block, Greater Kailash 1. **Recommended:** Avocado Tacos, Paella, Burrata Pomodoro Linguini



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A panorama of the city overlooking the Royal Botanic Gardens

A GILDED PAST

The chance discovery of a sport led to a lifetime of trips exploring the history, art, food, and culture of Melbourne

words by **James Bartlett**





Parliament House offers guided tours of the architecture and gardens, and also houses restaurants

Australia's first steam-powered trains puffed along the rails in Melbourne and in the 1880s, construction

began on a huge tram network. On my first visit to Melbourne in 2016, I took a free ride on a No. 35, one of the vintage 'rattler' trams that loop around the CBD (Central Business District). I saw a modern population and contemporary buildings, but also the grand architecture of buildings like the **Parliament House** and the **Old Treasury Building**, where gold was taken for safekeeping.

Years later, on my umpteenth trip since that first one, I get off the tram at **Flinders Street Station**, an unmissable landmark and a good place to start your explorations. Right opposite is **Federation Square**, with its compact but diverse collection of museums. The first multimedia presentation using moving pictures happened in Australia in 1900, and shorts and slides from *Soldiers of the Cross* feature in **ACMI**, the national museum of film culture, which follows Aussie films up to present-day blockbusters. There is also the **Ian Potter Centre**, home of the Australian collection of the National Gallery of Victoria, and the **Koorie Heritage Trust**, which aims to nurture, honour, and celebrate the Aboriginal culture of south-eastern Australia: their delicate, colourful feather flowers alone are worth going to see.

Earlier, I had done an online search about Melbourne and discovered a strange game called *trugo*, which is played by about 10 local teams, but nowhere else in the world. So, from Flinders Street I board a train to **Yarraville**, a suburb some 25 minutes outside the city. Apparently invented by a bored Yarraville railway worker in the late 1920s using only what he had at hand—mallets and the rubber rings used as buffers—it was a kind



TOP AND BOTTOM
Melbourne boasts the world's largest operational tram network; The National Gallery of Victoria hosts exhibitions of contemporary art, including Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama.

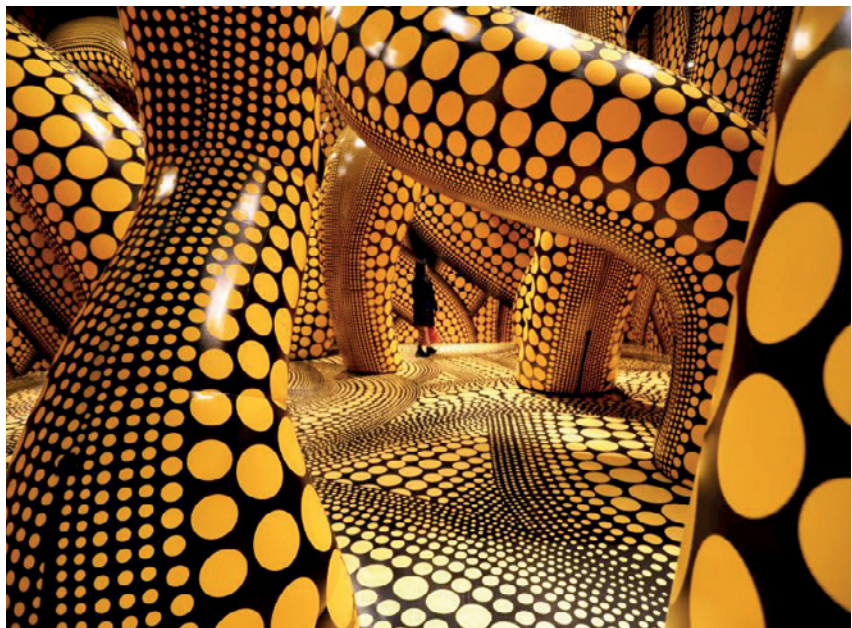
Best time to visit

Unlike other parts of Australia, the summer weather in Melbourne is often pleasant. The ideal months are between **March and May**.

of bizarre, reverse croquet. Now, over 90 years later, I was going to visit the Yarraville Club for one of their afternoon training sessions. Their star player and captain, 85-year-old John McMahon, met me at their neatly mown grass pitch, which had a grey wooden clubhouse alongside.

Trugo was brought into public parks by railway retirees and as John selected a wooden mallet for me, he explained that it takes a minute to learn but a lifetime to master. I was instantly addicted and have been the only international member of the Victorian Trugo Association ever since. Meeting my teammates has been the first thing I arrange on every trip since.

Travelling back on the tram, I make a list of the best places to sample the



local fare. For gourmet chocolates, it's the 110-year-old **Haigh's** inside the Art Deco **Block Arcade**, one of the several markets that feature domes, stained glass, mosaics, and marble friezes; for the best steamed dumplings and dim sum it's **Shark Fin Inn** in Chinatown; **Punch Lane** is great for lamb and duck.

Whenever I visit a new city, I also try to find out what the locals like to do. I quickly learned that Melburnians all

shared one thing: an addiction to coffee. The flat white (espresso with steamed milk) became popular in Australia back in the 1980s, though that was long after it had been a favourite of Melbourne's Italian immigrants. Despite being an avowed tea-drinker, I became very fond of the flat white, especially from **Pellegrini's**, a neon-lit coffee bar, some 70 years old. The Italian brothers that opened it were said to have bought






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TOP AND BOTTOM
A diverse collection of museums can be found in Federation Square; The 19th-century Coop's Shot Tower is an iconic facet of the city's past.

HOTELS TO STAY AT

Sofitel Melbourne on Collins

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Mercure Melbourne Southbank

Good for families as it is located near the SEA LIFE Melbourne Aquarium and the historic three-masted barque, Polly Woodside.

Treasury on Collins

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the first espresso machine to Australia. Even small corner bodegas offer good brews, as do high-end restaurants like **Cumulus Inc.**

It's worth looking down every alley and side street, too. Melbourne is famous for its street art, which ranges from celebrating Aussie rock band AC/DC to towering and elaborate murals, with the **Upper West Side Street Art Precinct** an official starting point.

Also, I have always been told it's best to go early to the 17-acre **Queen Victoria Market**, to see produce you've



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FESTIVALS TO CATCH

Lunar New Year

It features lion dances, t'ai chi classes, a variety of Asian food, and the iconic Millennium Dragon parade. 2nd February; whatson.melbourne.vic.gov.au

Moomba

The country's longest-running, largest free-community festival is family friendly and features everything from fireworks displays and live music to water sports. In March; moomba.melbourne.vic.gov.au

Melbourne Food & Wine Festival 2025

This hosts talks by winemakers, pop-ups by internationally-acclaimed restaurants, and ticketed lunches by iconic chefs. 21st-30th March; melbournefoodandwine.com.au

probably never seen, and artisan goods, including kangaroo meat. There is an array of savouries too—from doughnuts and savoury Ottoman pies known as *böreks* to Korean spiral-cut potatoes, fried and served on a stick, and more.

Finally, if *trugo* isn't for you, check out another of Melbourne's quirks, the **Coop's Shot Tower**. Built in 1889, this 50-m-high thin brick tower (with a flanking lead pipe and shot factory building) made bullets until 1960 and the tower stands under a cone-shaped glass roof in the **Melbourne Central Shopping Mall**. However, if you do decide to give *trugo* a shot, head to Yarraville—you won't be disappointed.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

Don't forget to appreciate the street art in Melbourne; Restaurants like Cumulus Inc. feature seasonal produce as well as great coffee; The author practices his *trugo* stance.



GETTING THERE

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Bangkok's Lumpini Park is where residents gather for activities as diverse as t'ai chi and ballroom dancing

EVERGREEN BANGKOK

The city's attractions never pale, making it an always-popular destination

words by **Vaishali Kolpe**

🕒 07:00AM

Green zone

📍 Lumpini Park

Get a refreshing start with an early morning walk at Bangkok's 'green lung' (and first public park), its tranquil walkways buzzing with a medley of birdsong. You might just run into a waddle of ducks or an occasional monitor lizard basking in the sun.

🕒 8:00AM

Toast of the town

📍 Baan 2459

This café set inside a heritage building, whips up fluffy Thai omelettes stuffed with meat or veggies of choice. These are accompanied by bowls of sticky rice with a hint of coconut. Spring rolls paired with Thai-style coffee or tea ensure this is possibly one of the most unique breakfasts you'll have.

🕒 9:00AM

Special rendezvous

📍 Wat Pho and The Grand Palace

Bangkok's cherished landmarks located 500m apart along the Chao Phraya river offer a deep dive into its history. Wat Pho boasts a 46-m-long Reclining Buddha. The Grand Palace impresses with its opulent halls, ornate designs, and tall spires.

🕒 12:00PM

Stress relief

📍 The Away Spa

A gentle aroma of essential oils beckons you into this award-winning spa where skilled therapists use their expertise to melt away any stress in your body. Try their signature 'Diamonds are Forever' treatment that uses diamond dust to revitalise the body and soothe the soul.

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CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT
 Wat Arun is an iconic landmark; The dinner cruise serves both Thai and international cuisine; Asiatique The Riverfront's attractions include a carousel and mystery mansion.



GETTING THERE

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

STYLISH STAYS

- 1/ Mandarin Oriental Bangkok** is an iconic heritage hotel steeped in history. Its award-winning restaurants and riverside location make it one of the city's most sought-after hotels.
- 2/ Shangri-La Bangkok** is an elegant riverside oasis that blends Thai charm with luxury. The signature Salathip Thai restaurant provides unbeatable views of the illuminated skyline.
- 3/ Lebua at State Tower** is an all-suite hotel. The Sirocco restaurant and Sky Bar on the 64th floor offer spectacular views.

🕒 01:30PM
Retail haven
 📍 SookSiam and ICONSIAM

An eclectic blend of dining and shopping under one roof. Indulge in the popular pad thai or satay skewers with mango sticky rice at SookSiam's bustling stalls. Then, move to ICONSIAM for some retail therapy, with a plethora of high street and international luxury brands.

🕒 05:00PM
Golden hour
 📍 Eagle Nest rooftop bar

Grab early seats here for a ringside view of the most gorgeous sunset in the Thai capital. Enjoy the Arun Sunset Spritz or the Thai pineapple mojito paired with crispy calamari or batter-fried prawns as you watch the mosaic-clustered spires of the Wat Arun temple sparkle like millions of stars, while the setting sun paints the sky in vibrant hues of orange and purple.

🕒 06:30PM
Grand feast
 📍 Chao Phraya Dinner Cruise

Soak in the city's night vibe and views as you sail along the scenic river. Feast on a delicious Thai and international buffet, as live music bands entertain you. Indulge in grilled lobster, crab or salmon with *beurre blanc* and creamy coconut pudding for dessert, and wash it all down with a glass of champagne.

🕒 08:30PM
Curtain call
 📍 Asiatique The Riverfront

Grab a ferry or tuk-tuk to this vibrant night market offering a great blend of boutique shopping, entertainment, and local specialities. Check out the calypso show and Muay Thai demos or explore a wide range of aromatic products from the Scent of Thailand before ending your day with panoramic views of the river and the city on the Asiatique Sky Ferris wheel.

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THE JOY OF GOING SOLO

Her attempt to get the family to go on holiday didn't work out, so this actor made the trip alone—with surprising results

words by **Shefali Shah**

Putting aside all moral dilemmas, this International Emmy Award nominee decided to take a trip to Rishikesh

I was very excited and looking forward to the trip. We had been planning it at the end of last year. But figuring a particular date that suits the entire family isn't exactly easy because everyone has their individual work schedules. To align dates of four people living in the same house, under the same surname is probably as difficult as achieving celestial harmony, where Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn align.

After going through a long list of destinations, my son suddenly announced he no longer wanted to go. The rest of the family fell in line, wanting to "chill at home together". Was I crushed at this sudden turnaround? I was as upset as anybody whose trip gets cancelled would. I don't know at what exact point I decided to go, irrespective of anyone coming or not.

THE FLOW

A decision like this does not come without its moral dilemmas—I went from doubt (should I go?), to guilt (how can I go alone without my family?), to major guilt (how can I spend so much





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
The aarti attracts a number of devotees; Rafting all the way up to Rishikesh; Shah attended the evening aarti by the riverbank.

BY THE RIVER

Anand Kashi is at an unbeatable location, and the team's warm service and fabulous food left me overwhelmed. I like eating local food wherever I travel and the chef prepared a delicious, traditional Kumaoni thali for me. I'm not a huge fan of massages but I did take a couple—they certainly did away with the knots in my shoulders. I was happy by myself, reading, on Christmas, but the team sweetly gave me a stocking loaded with goodies.

on myself?). I'm thankful to my parents for giving me middle-class values but these values often undervalue me. Anything besides food on our plates, a roof over our heads, and clothes on our body is seen as an exorbitant indulgence, especially for a woman. I told my agent to book before I changed my mind.

Rishikesh was one of the destinations we had been contemplating because it's serene and beautiful. It has a sense of calm, with the majestic mountains and the voluptuous, gushing river. I could be right in the middle of nature, doing nothing. If I wanted adventure, I could go rafting. I love adventure, so riding the rapids is something I would happily do as opposed to going on roller coaster rides.

The hotel I wanted wasn't available on our earlier dates but since I was going on my own, I preponed my trip and got the reservation. Everything got done in one evening: tickets, stay, travel, plan of action. I didn't declare my intent to my family. I don't really recall any reaction per se, but I think they were surprised.

For my part, I was so excited and wanted to leave as soon as the bookings were done. After I had made my decision, all my anger and irritation vanished. I was too excited to be upset. I understood they couldn't come; they had their reasons and it was fine. My going alone was an entirely different chapter, and it's

TOP AND BOTTOM
Shah chose Rishikesh for its sense of calm, the majestic mountains, and the Ganga; A quiet moment of reflection.



even richer as an experience when I keep it independent of why I went.

The trip wasn't done to prove a point, so even when I reached, my reaction was the same as anyone looking forward to a trip—excited, thrilled, happy. I landed in Dehradun and, after an hour-and-a-half's drive, reached my hotel—Anand Kashi by the Ganges. As I entered, besides the warm welcome and *tika*, the first thing that hit me was the sound of the gushing river. I didn't even check in, instead I sat on the deck, drinking my masala chai. Much later, I went to the room, dumped my stuff, and rushed back out because I didn't want to miss a single daylight

moment. Later, I attended the *aarti* the hotel staff conducted on the banks of the magnificent Ganga.

I called Vipul (my husband) when I reached, to show him the place, but he was in a meeting, so I sent him pictures. I would've loved to share this experience with my family, but though they weren't there, a calmness had settled within me and I was unaffected. I wasn't thinking, I was just being. A place like this demands to be surrendered to. I would've been a fool if I hadn't.

THE PEACE

It was so serene and quiet, barring the constant roar of the Ganges. I was content,





Shah sipping masala chai by the river, savouring feelings of contentment and calm, fully immersed in the experience



GETTING THERE

Air India flies non-stop to Dehradun from Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru.



lost in nature, completely immersed in the moment. The day I'd planned to go rafting turned out to be overcast and windy. The temperature had dropped because there was rain and snowfall in the mountains. I knew I'd freeze to death but that wasn't really a concern. The best part was that I was the only guest with the women's national rafting team (in Rishikesh for a marathon) leading the

THE POWER OF SILENCE

"Silence is golden, barring the sounds of nature (The Ganga is neither tame nor docile. She does not whisper, she roars). In silence, all other sensory experiences are heightened, including enjoying the local food. When you travel alone, the quietude is addictive. It lets 'You do you'."

raft. Originally, the rafting stretch was from the hotel till Shivpuri but when I reached that point, I wanted to do more, so I went all the way to Rishikesh. The rafting between Shivpuri and Rishikesh is level 4-4.5. It is an unbeatable experience surging with the Ganges, with the rush of water filling your being. You have to experience it. I'd do it again in a heartbeat. This wasn't my first time rafting, but this is where I did it for the first time and it had been on my to-do list since.

THE LEARNINGS

An experience like this hasn't left me fulfilled. It has left me craving for more. Every bit of this trip is so memorable, I wouldn't change anything about it. And it ended beautifully too. On my way to the airport, I saw a puppy by the road, so I sat on the footpath and played with him till it was time for my flight.

My biggest learning is that I can do it alone—I must and I will. I wasn't sure I would be comfortable on my own but now I get that being alone is not synonymous with being lonely. I would love it if my family or friends could join

me but if they can't—I'm good enough on my own. Secondly, not being selfless does not mean being selfish. There is an in-between path where everyone is equally important and everyone is entitled to the same choice, freedom, dreams, and happiness. There is ample space for everyone; if there isn't, nudge your way and make your space. You deserve it. Thirdly, as children, we were taught to sacrifice, to let go. I don't want my kids to sacrifice and let go of things they rightfully deserve. I saw my parents be selfless but it can't work in today's world.

Lastly, remember the bucket list you made as a kid? Don't rubbish it no matter how crazy it sounds. Dig it out; when you find yourself alone or empty, you won't have a better partner than yourself to open it and pursue it. You may not be able to climb Mount Everest as you had imagined but you can go to a place from where you can see it and be inspired to paint it. Whatever it is, do it. Because there truly are miles to go before we sleep.

— As told to **Shilpi Madan**

THE HEART OF OLD DELHI

Whether you are a resident or a transit traveller in the capital, Chandni Chowk is a satisfying sensorial experience, not to be missed

words by **Geetika Sasan Bhandari**



TOP AND BOTTOM
The 17th-century Jama Masjid is said to have once been the highest point of Old Delhi; The delectable jalebis at Old Famous Jalebi Wala, established in 1884.



As far as I can remember, I have never started my morning with a jalebi. But when you're in Chandni Chowk, no rules apply. You step off the Delhi Metro, take a deep breath, and get ready to embrace the beautiful chaos that is this market. As we meet Anoushka Jain, a postgraduate in history and the founder of Enroute Indian History, who is taking us on a curated walk, we realise immediately that you cannot have an agenda here. So, when the **Old Famous Jalebi Wala** shop comes first, you start with a bite of the most delicious, freshly-fried jalebi that isn't saccharine sweet.

Jain starts by telling us a little about the **Sri Digambar Jain Lal Mandir**, the starting point of the walk, after we step inside for a quick *darshan*. With fluted columns, copper plated ceilings, and inlay work, it offers an interesting insight into India's past—one that has amalgamated many cultures, art, and architecture styles. It also operates a charitable bird hospital within its premises.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
Gurudwara Sisganj Sahib; Embroidered pottlis in vibrant hues; The delectable parathas are a big draw.

Air India offers travellers from North America and Europe convenient one-stop connections to destinations in Australia and Southeast Asia via its hub in Delhi.

Interestingly, Chandni Chowk also houses the **Gurudwara Sisganj Sahib, Gauri Shankar temple, Central Baptist Church, and Jama Masjid**, all of which nod to India's secular fabric. The Jama Masjid, built on a natural hill, stands tall in red sandstone and white marble. From the top of the southern minaret, you can get a bird's-eye view of the entire Chowk. We enter from the North gate, after

walking through **Kinari bazaar** (laces, borders, rivets, sequins for outfits, embroidered *pottlis*, and gift bags); the South gate is where all the delectable kebab restaurants are; the West has **Chawri bazaar** (brass, copper, and paper in wholesale) while the East gate looks straight at **Lal Qila** or the Red Fort. In yesteryears, people would sit at the Masjid's entrance steps, as acrobats would regale them and *dastangoi* recitals would take place; the market had *kehwa khanas* (tea shops) and tall trees, with the Yamuna flowing through—a bygone era.

We stroll through **Dariba Kalan**, checking out silver, and admire the carved doors at **Naughar** (nine houses), a cul-de-sac where the facades are as they were.

We buy sesame *barfis* and savoury delicacies from **Sharma Namkeen Bhandar**, and finally hit **Paranthe Wali Gali** for parathas at **Pt. Gaya Prasad Shiv Charan**. Try the bitter gourd, lemon or green chilli versions; they also have a banana paratha. For *choley bhature* (chickpeas and fried flatbread), head to **Kanwarji Raj Kumar Bhatara Junction**. For dessert, go to one of the oldest establishments, **Ghantewala Confectioners** (1790) for the Pista Lauj (pistachio dessert) and White Carrot Halwa. Also try *palak patte ki chaat* (spinach chaat).

The day has been rich with history and anecdotes, street food, and shopping, but in Chandni Chowk, *yeh dil maange more*.

ONCE IN A LIFETIME

High on energy and faith, the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj is an emotional and uplifting experience, drawing people from all corners of the world. Six authors share their reflections of the world's largest public gathering



Divine-Grand-Digital
Mahakumbh of Unity

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उत्तर प्रदेश दर्शन

Mahakumbh 2025- Bathing Dates

13.01.2025	Monday	Paush Purnima
14.01.2025	Tuesday	Makar Sankranti - Amrit Snan
29.01.2025	Wednesday	Mauni Amavasya - Amrit Snan
03.02.2025	Monday	Basant Panchami - Amrit Snan
12.02.2025	Wednesday	Magh Purnima
26.02.2025	Wednesday	Shri Mahashivratri

Uttar Pradesh Darshan Mandapam spans over an area of 2 lakh square feet : Situated in sector-7, it showcases **12 tourism circuits** of Uttar Pradesh, featuring a 15,000-square-foot map highlighting important landmarks across the state. Special attractions include a **handicrafts market**, a **variety of cuisines** from different states, three stages for cultural programs, and selfie points. Additionally, a **digital exhibition pavilion** has been set up in Sector-1.

The details on the range of facilities at the Mahakumbh 2025 can be accessed through the website: www.upstdc.co.in

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MUSICAL WATER LASER SHOW
Kali Ghat near Boat Club
along the Yamuna River
Timings: Daily, 7 PM and 9 PM
Duration: 45 minutes
FREE

Tourist information centres have been set up at bus stands, railway station, and airport and at various sectors of the Mahakumbh city



Kumbh Mela Location



Kumbh Administration



Emergency Assistance



Hotel and Food



Achievements of UP



Maha Kumbh Tent Booking



Maha Kumbh Mela App



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“Covered in rudraksha beads, he sat with glistening red eyes scanning the passers-by. Among them were our agnostic selves, cameras in hand and belief systems up our sleeves. A polite approach broke the silence and conversation flowed. As it turns out, different sadhus hold contrasting views on the Mela. One question he asked lingers in our minds: “*Darshan ke liye aaye ho ya pradarshan ke liye?*” (Have you come for blessings or the spectacle?).” — **Kunal Bhatia and Shuvajit Payne**

“I chanced upon a female sadhu with dreadlocks and forehead sandal paste in place, but also with a smartphone and earphones, whose wire was dangling, entangled with her rudraksha chain. I thought it was a perfect example of how spirituality is evolving to make sense for a new generation.” — **Bindu Gopal Rao**



GETTING THERE

Air India is operating non-stop flights to Prayagraj from Delhi and Mumbai till 28th February.



“The atmosphere was incredible. We were at the Maha Kumbh on Paush Purnima/Makar Sankranti [13th-14th January], surrounded by millions of fellow pilgrims. Swimming in a sea of devotion, we somehow managed to get to the Sangam around 2am. Such joy, gratitude, and anticipation. We were some of the last to take a *snan* (dip) before the crowds from the *akhadas* (monasteries) began arriving with all their energy and focus. They were thrilled to be reaching the Triveni Sangam at such an auspicious time. We then walked back for hours and hours, but we were glowing inside and out. The sensation after taking a *snan* was just incredible. This was the greatest gathering of people ever. It really is a once-in-a-lifetime experience.”

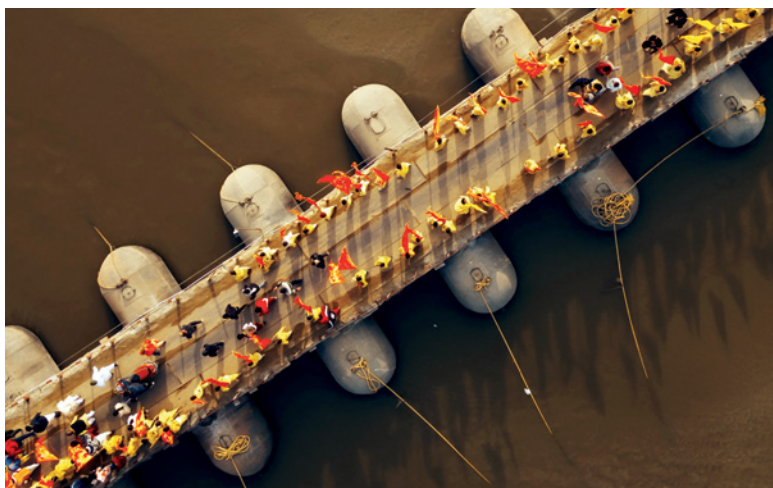
— **Nick Booker**



“The most serene moment was when we reached the Sangam. Away from the ghats, the holy waters almost invite devotees into their cleansing embrace. All around, pandits are performing pujas and hustling for donations, but if you ignore the noise, literally and figuratively, it leaves you with an inimitable sense of calm. I’ve carried back some *gangajal* and that sense of peace in my heart.” — **Shibani Bawa**



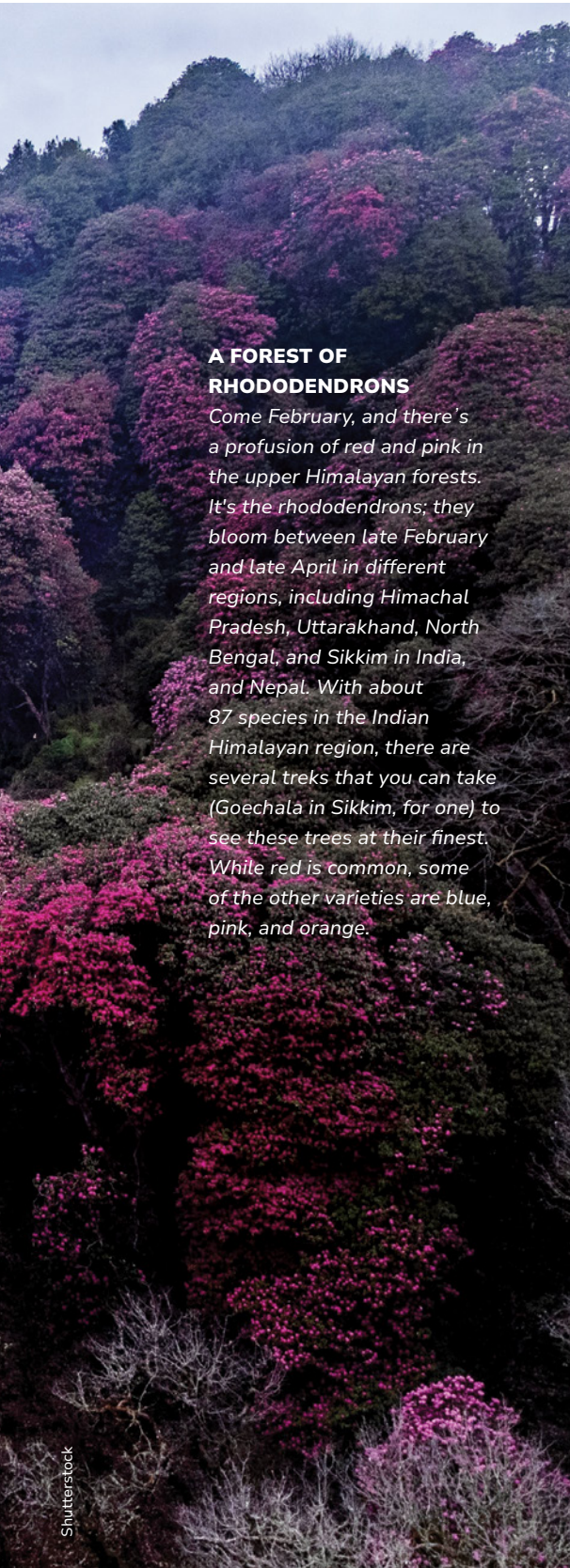
“The Ganga aarti at Triveni Sangam is the spiritual heartbeat of the Maha Kumbh. Much has been said about the event’s inclusive nature and I caught a glimpse of it first-hand. Most *aartis* I’ve attended have been performed by male priests but this time, I saw a few women, draped in brocade silk sarees with their hair neatly tied in a bun with *gajra*, as equal participants in the spiritual act. It was an uplifting experience that will always stay with me.” — **Geetika Sachdev**



Clockwise from top right: Getty Images; Geetika Sachdev; Kunal Kapoor

FLORAL PARADE

Travelling to watch wildflowers bloom is a rising trend. Here are some locations around the world where one can see such panoramas unfold



A FOREST OF RHODODENDRONS

Come February, and there's a profusion of red and pink in the upper Himalayan forests. It's the rhododendrons; they bloom between late February and late April in different regions, including Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, North Bengal, and Sikkim in India, and Nepal. With about 87 species in the Indian Himalayan region, there are several treks that you can take (Goechala in Sikkim, for one) to see these trees at their finest. While red is common, some of the other varieties are blue, pink, and orange.



▲ A PLATEAU OF SMITHIA

A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Kaas Pathar, also known as Kaas Plateau, in Maharashtra, India, is home to some rare endemic flowers and becomes a riot of colour between August and October when the many species of wildflowers bloom. Some of the varieties include Topli karvi, Drosera indica, and Smithia hirsuta, commonly known as the 'Mickey Mouse' flower. Spread across 1,000 hectares, this is a floral wonderland.



▲ **ROWS OF CHERRY BLOSSOMS**

The hanami (flower viewing) season of the sakura heralds an air of festivity in Japan, and is considered a time to socialise under the cherry trees. While the earliest blooms are reported around late March, the season goes on almost till May, with the last blossoms appearing in Hokkaido. Japan's most famous cherry blossom destination is Yoshino, where thousands of sakura trees cover the Kii Mountains. Significantly, the bloom's short duration is seen as symbolic of life, death, renewal, and the transient nature of being.



▼ **A CARPET OF BLUEBONNET AND INDIAN PAINTBRUSH**

With views as perfect as a painting, Central Texas is known for its abundance of wildflowers. Bluebonnets, evening primrose, winecup, red yucca, Carolina larkspur, Indian paintbrush, Mexican poppy, horsemint, and verbena—you'll find them all claiming their own space yet melding together in a beautiful tapestry. Home to hundreds of species of native Texas plants, a good place to view them is at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center or on a drive along the Willow City Loop near Fredericksburg.



Cherry blossom: Captain Mike A. Johnsingh/Air India; Rest: Shutterstock



◀ **FIELDS OF POPPIES**

The enchanting plains of Castelluccio di Norcia in Italy's Umbria region bloom mid-year as daisies, violets, poppies, cornflowers, lentils, narcissus, gentians, and other species carpet the plains, making them come alive. In order to preserve the fields and not to use pesticides, the farmers allow other plants to thrive, facilitating this annual floral spectacle. The star flower is the lentil, a small white bloom with purple hues.



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p 98 ↑

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p 101 ↑

PARTNERS

Through our codeshare and interline partnerships, we try to bring the world closer

p 104 ↑



WORLD-CLASS AIRLINE WITH AN INDIAN HEART

In 2022, Air India launched its five-year transformation programme, Vihaan.AI, embarking on its journey to become a world-class airline with an Indian heart—the absolute best-in-class in customer service, technology, product, reliability, and hospitality.

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Phase 2: April 2023 – March 2024
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CLIMB



Phase 3: April 2024 – March 2027
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- Powered by technology
- Values-driven cultural transformation

THE JOURNEY OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS

- Launched **new brand identities** of Air India and Air India Express, including the new livery



- Topped its previous landmark order to purchase **470** aircraft with an additional order of **100** aircraft from Airbus, taking the total count to **570**

- Rolled out the **new Air India experience** aboard A350 flights: world-class cabins along with new tableware, bedding, and amenity kits by Ferragamo and TUMI



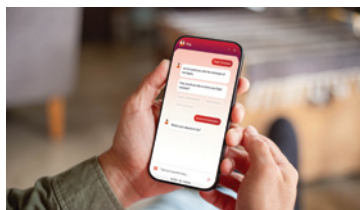
- Started adding new **A320neo** aircraft in three-class cabin configuration, including **Premium Economy**

- Combined the best of both Club Vistara and Flying Returns to introduce **Maharaja Club**, Air India's loyalty programme in a new avatar



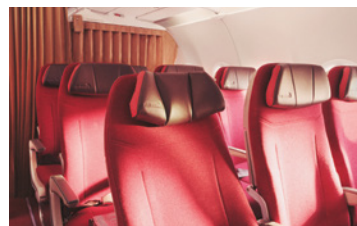
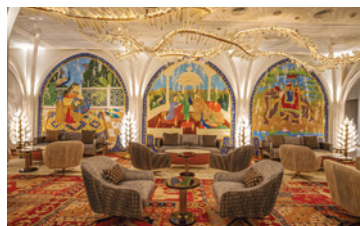
- Launched **Vista Stream** on narrowbody and legacy widebody fleet, enabling customers to access digital entertainment on their devices

- Unveiled refreshed website and mobile app, including the industry's first **Generative AI chatbot, AI.g**



- **Augmented customer care** with five new contact centres globally, serving in nine Indian languages

- Opened an **exclusive lounge** at Terminal 2 Bengaluru International Airport; redesign of the lounges at Delhi and New York JFK airports is underway



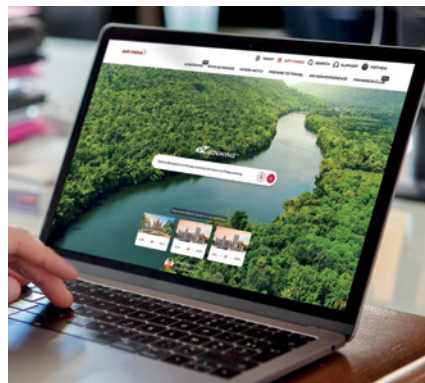
- Commenced **refit programme** for legacy aircraft; 3-4 aircraft per month will undergo retrofit with the full narrowbody fleet upgraded by 2025



The Wi-Fi service is being offered on a complimentary basis for an introductory period

FASTER RESERVATIONS WITH 'EZ BOOKING'

Air India has rolled out an Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven feature 'eZ Booking' whereby customers can complete their reservation on the website by simply texting or talking to the AI Agent about their detailed travel itinerary.



↑ STAY CONNECTED

Air India has rolled out Wi-Fi internet services on board domestic and international flights operated by Airbus A350, Boeing 787-9, and select Airbus A321neo aircraft.

This makes Air India the first to offer inflight Wi-Fi internet on flights within India. Wi-Fi is being offered on a complimentary basis for an introductory period. Air India will progressively roll out the service on other aircraft in its fleet over time. Accessible on Wi-Fi-enabled devices with iOS or Android operating systems, the inflight Wi-Fi will also allow guests to connect multiple devices simultaneously.



FLIGHTS TO MAHA KUMBH MELA

Air India will temporarily be operating daily flights (till 28th February) to Prayagraj from Delhi and Mumbai during the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, the world's largest spiritual gathering.

PROUD WINGS

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

Airbus A319

 **06**

Airbus A320ceo

 **07**

Airbus A320neo

 **95**

Airbus A321ceo

 **13**

Airbus A321neo

 **14**

Boeing 777-300ER

 **19**

Boeing 777-200LR

 **08**

**Boeing 787-9
Dreamliner**

 **07**

**Boeing 787-8
Dreamliner**

 **27**

Airbus A350-900

06

**FLEET
STRENGTH
202**

*Total number as on 15th January 2025;
This fleet count is exclusive of Air India Express
(Air India Group's low-cost carrier)



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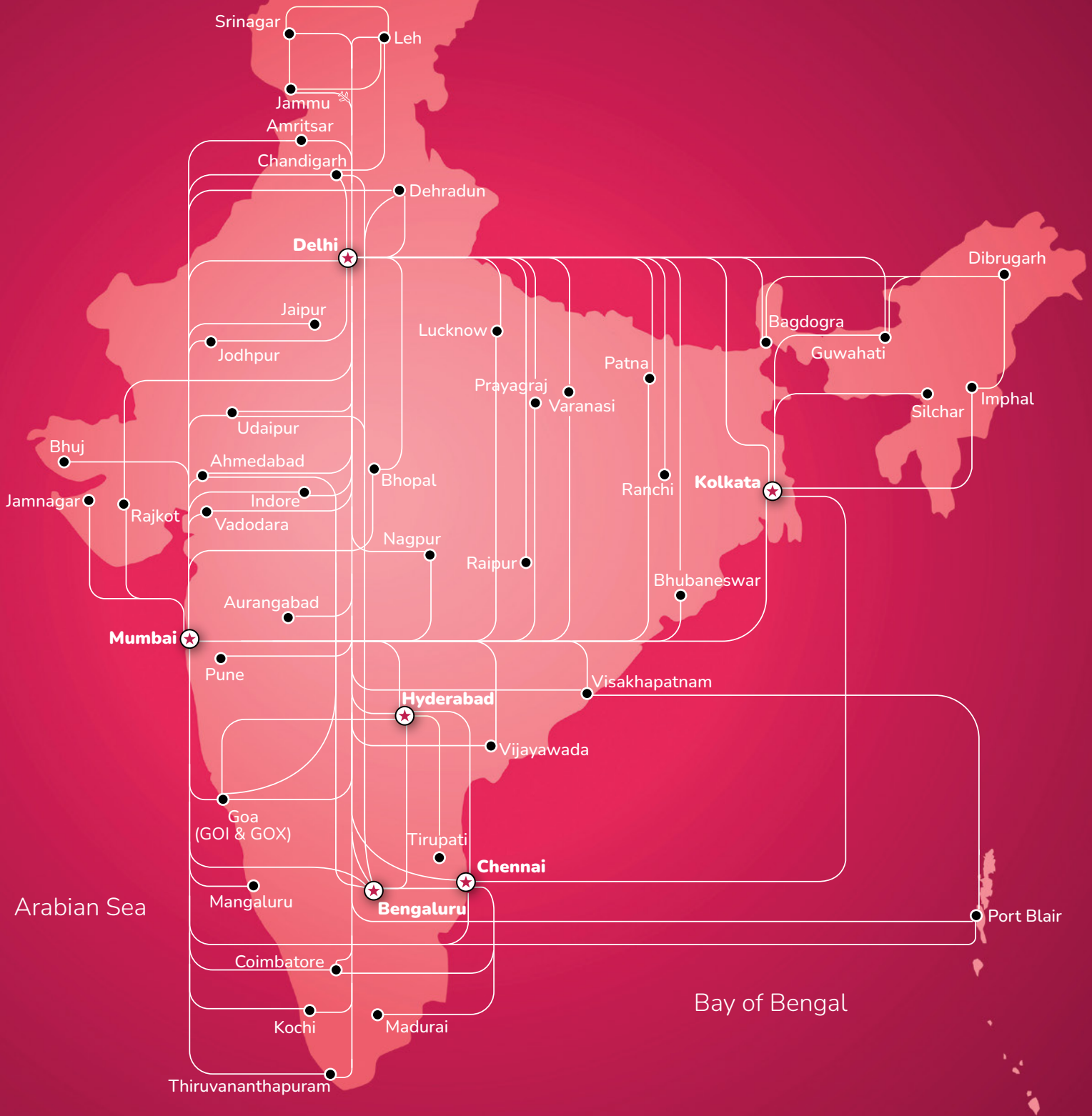
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*Subject to further progressive network calibration and operational constraints.
*Air India will continue to operate certain widebody flights between Delhi and Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Hyderabad using its Boeing 777, 787 or Airbus A350 aircraft, which will have 'AI'-prefixed three-digit flight numbers.

DOMESTIC CONNECTIVITY



✂ Air India operates Jammu to Delhi flights on Sundays and does not operate Delhi to Jammu flights.

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

*Route map as on 23rd January 2025



INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIVITY

Air India flies non-stop to 42 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

UK



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

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		
Washington (IAD)	←-----→	DEL		

Middle East



Abu Dhabi (AUH)	←-----→	BOM				
Dammam (DMM)	←-----→	BOM				
Doha (DOH)	←-----→	DEL	BOM	COK		
Dubai (DXB)	←-----→	DEL	BOM	COK	HYD	MAA
Jeddah (JED)	←-----→	DEL	BOM			
Muscat (MCT)	←-----→	BOM				
Riyadh (RUH)	←-----→	DEL	BOM			
Tel Aviv (TLV)	←-----→	DEL				

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

Flights to Tel Aviv will restart effective 2nd March 2025

*Route map as on 23rd January 2025



 **Far East**

- Hong Kong (HKG) <-----> DEL
- Seoul (ICN) <-----> DEL
- Tokyo (NRT) <-----> 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 BLR MAA PNQ

Indian Subcontinent

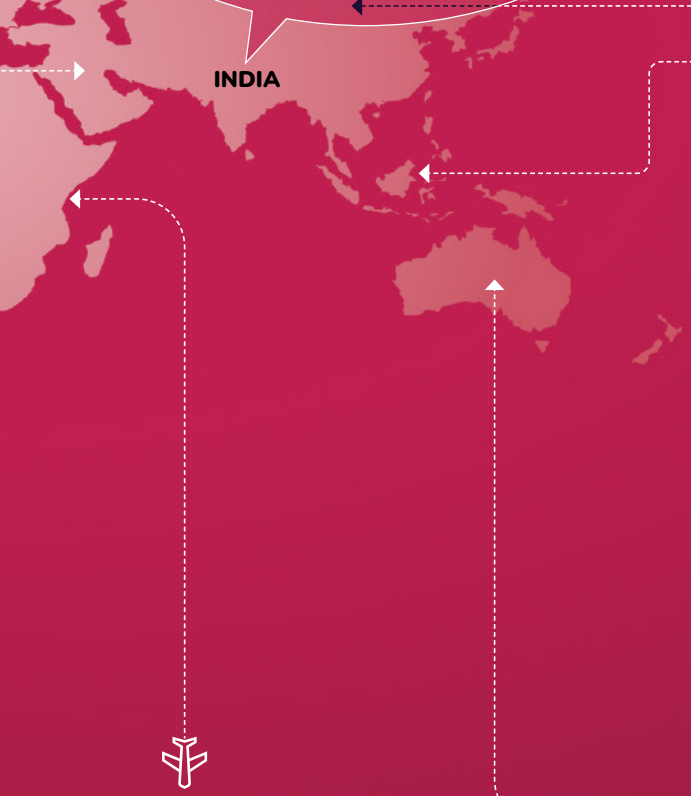
- Colombo (CMB) <-----> DEL BOM MAA
- Dhaka (DAC) <-----> DEL BOM
- Kathmandu (KTM) <-----> DEL
- Malé (MLE) <-----> DEL BOM
- Yangon (RGN) <-----> DEL

 **Africa**

- Mauritius (MRU) <-----> BOM
- Nairobi (NBO) <-----> DEL

 **Australia**

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



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Air Europa	Air France	Air Macau	Air Malta
Air New Zealand	Air Niugini	Air Seychelles	Air Tanzania
Alaska Airlines	American Airlines	Austrian Airlines	Azerbaijan Airlines
British Airways	Bangkok Airways	Biman Bangladesh Airlines	Brussels Airlines
Cathay Pacific	Caribbean Airlines	China Airlines	China Eastern Airlines
China Southern Airlines	Condor	Copa Airlines	Delta Air Lines
El Al	Emirates	Etihad Airways	Fiji Airways
Finnair	German Rail	Gulf Air	Hahn Air
Hainan Airlines	Hong Kong Airlines	Iberia	Icelandair
ITA Airways	Japan Airlines	JetBlue	Jetstar
JetStar Asia	Juneyao Airlines	Kam Air	Kenya Airways
KLM Royal Dutch Airlines	Korean Air	Kuwait Airways	Madagascar Airlines
Malaysia Airlines	MIAT Mongolian Airlines	Middle East Airlines	Myanmar Airways International
Nepal Airlines	Oman Air	Philippine Airlines	Qantas
Qatar Airways	Royal Air Maroc	Royal Brunei Airlines	Royal Jordanian
RwandAir	Saudia	Scandinavian Airlines	Shandong Airlines
Shanghai Airlines	Shenzhen Airlines	South African Airways	Thai Airways
Turkish Airlines	United Airlines	Uzbekistan Airways	Vietnam Airlines
Virgin Atlantic			

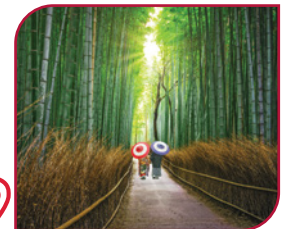


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Codeshare and Interline partnerships as on 15th January 2025

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REGULATORY INFORMATION FOR ALL INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS LANDING INTO INDIA

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

BROADCAST REGARDING INDIAN CONSTITUTION

नवंबर 26, 1949 को भारतीय संविधान ऐतिहासिक रूप से अपनाया गया, जो 26 जनवरी, 1950 को लागू हुआ। यह सभी भारतीयों के लिए लोकतंत्र, समानता, और न्याय का प्रतीक है।

November 26, 1949, marks the historic adoption of the Constitution of India, which came into effect on 26th January 1950. It is a cornerstone of democracy, equality, and justice for all Indians.

150TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF SHRI BIRSA MUNDA

भारतीय आदिवासी स्वतंत्रता सेनानी, श्री बिरसा मुंडा की 150वीं जयंती के अवसर पर, हम उनके साहस और राष्ट्र के प्रति सेवा के लिए उनका सम्मान करते हैं।

On the 150th birth anniversary of the iconic tribal freedom fighter from India, Shri Birsa Munda, we express our respect for his unwavering courage and service to the nation.

MISSION LIFE

मिशन लाइफ़, जिसे प्रधान मंत्री श्री नरेन्द्र 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 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 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

DIGI YATRA

नागर विमानन मंत्रालय द्वारा 13 airports - दिल्ली, बंगलूरु, वाराणसी, पुणे, कोलकाता, विजयवाड़ा, हैदराबाद, अहमदाबाद, मुंबई, जयपुर, लखनऊ, गुवाहाटी और कोचीन के लिए, डिजी यात्रा की सुविधा का शुभारंभ किया गया है। डिजी यात्रा ऐप को डाउनलोड करके खुद को नामांकित करें, और इन एयरपोर्ट्स पर बिना रुकावट के, यात्रा का अनुभव करें।

The Ministry of Civil Aviation has launched Digi Yatra facilities at 13 airports, namely Delhi, Bengaluru, Varanasi, Pune, Kolkata, Vijayawada, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Jaipur, Lucknow, Guwahati, and Cochin. You can avail of it yourself and have a hassle-free experience at these airports. To avail the facility, download Digi Yatra app and register yourself on it.

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A TRAVELLER'S TALE



ALL BY MYSELF IN PARIS

Celebrity fitness trainer
Yasmin Karachiwala
on her many trysts with the
'City of Love'

THE OLD AND THE NEW

Paris is one of my favourite cities in the world. I love visiting in February-March, wearing a jacket and boots, walking down the Champs-Élysées, up to the Arc de Triomphe, soaking up the old and the new. My most recent visit to the city was also my debut solo one and I absolutely loved it. I feel the city always brings out the romance in every person.

GOURMET INDULGENCES

I can spend hours sitting alone at kerbside cafés, watching people on the streets while relishing the chocolate crêpes with fresh strawberries or bananas. My musts in Paris include the *pain au chocolat* at La Parisienne. Even though I don't endorse sugar, I indulge in Paris. The hot chocolate (*chocolat chaud*) and éclairs at Angelina are pure sin and top my list each time I'm in the city.

GETTING AROUND

Each time I am in Paris, I must walk past the Eiffel Tower and take a photograph against it. I love walking through the *arrondissements* and using maps to guide me to locations. And I loved the Segway tour that I went on with my children a couple of years ago. It is one of the most stunning ways to experience the city.

DO NOT MISS

A special location is Pont des Arts, where lovers used to tie a lock to commemorate their passion for each other. It is still a dreamy and intimate spot.



— As told to **Shilpi Madan**



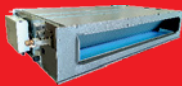
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