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EDITOR'S NOTE



Prague is often called the 'City of a Hundred Spires'

In the quiet moments that surround us, one often reflects about going beyond the familiar and pursuing one's passion. This passion can beckon from distant horizons and uncharted paths. With our promise of limitless possibilities, we encourage you to expand your vistas and embrace your creative dreams.

You can take inspiration from our Cover Story, which highlights Rome's gastronomic neighbourhoods, showcases Prague through an artist's sketching sojourn, and introduces you to Amsterdam's local festivals so you can immerse in its inclusive culture. And while you are at it, do not forget to check out the #NamasteEurope contest (*page 12*). In fact, the multi-hyphenate Gul Panag feels that passion is like oxygen that recharges you. An avid traveller, she finds time to juggle her many interests, ranging from biking and flying to camping. Actor Shweta Tripathi agrees. An adventure sports lover, she has tried everything from skydiving and rappelling in waterfalls to 'mermaiding' and kayaking. The key, she says, is to find the magic in every adventure.

A sense of adventure is what led author Rishad Saam Mehta to go off the beaten path and explore the rugged Eastern Sierra in California. If the softer aspect of nature draws you, set off on a cherry blossom trail in Japan, in bloom over the next few months. Should running be your passion, you can check out some of the most iconic marathons in our Body section.

But before you fly out, do experience our brand-new Maharaja Lounge at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport (T3). Designed for luxury, it pampers and makes you feel truly special. The first among many such lounges, it is a shining beacon of our endeavour to provide you with a world-class experience filled with Indian warmth.

Happy Reading!

– **Namaste.ai** Editorial Team

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Amsterdam has an inclusive vibe that welcomes one and all

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A traveller embraces the joy of adventure in Rome, with the St. Peter's Basilica in the background

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An engineer, author, motorcyclist, and TEDx speaker, Rishad has four books to his name, including *The Long Drive Home*. He largely writes about food, cars, and road trips. He chronicles his road trip along California's eastern edge, inspired by the book *Legends & Lore Along California's Highway 395* by Brian Clune. **page 64**



Gargi Guha
@guha.gargi
From marketing communications, Gargi transitioned into lifestyle writing, with her work spanning travel, wine, food, craft spirits, hospitality, and wellness. She is also the author of *When Wish Is a Wildflower*, a collection of poetry. She writes about her gastronomic journey through Rome's neighbourhoods. **page 20**



Shweta Tripathi
@battatawada
An actor, Shweta is known for her bold, unconventional choices and layered portrayals. Growing up, her parents encouraged her to try new experiences, and she has led her life by this philosophy. She recounts the adventures and thrills she chases the world over.
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Gul Panag
@gulpanag
An aviatrix, actor-producer, automobile and fitness enthusiast, biker, adventurer, and traveller who loves road trips and camping with her family—Gul wears many hats. She is also an entrepreneur. Here, she writes about why nurturing a passion is crucial for rejuvenation.
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Ryan Fernando
@ryan_nutrition_coach
Mumbai-based Ryan is a celebrity nutritionist, counsellor, speaker, author, and founder of QUA Nutrition Clinics. A British Commonwealth Scholar with two MSc degrees, he is a certified performance nutrition expert. Ryan has advised over 1,000 CEOs, athletes, and celebrities, including Virat Kohli, Pankaj Advani, Aamir Khan, and Abhishek Bachchan. He offers an easy-to-follow guide to choosing healthy options during travel.
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Shifting Perspectives

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The author astride her Royal Enfield Himalayan



Panag got her Private Pilot's Licence exactly 10 years ago

"I AM UNSTOPPABLE"

Pursuing a passion is like a recharge that allows you to be the best version of yourself

words by **Gul Panag**

I realised pretty early in life that I was capable of doing many things well. Humans are fundamentally polymaths who can be competent at several things and chase a degree of excellence in them. So, I have several passions that I pursue and the reason I do this is because it fuels me to be able to operate at every level—as a mother, wife, daughter, daughter-in-law, a professional, and more. As women, we are so conditioned to putting everyone else's needs first that we are constantly stressed, operating in fight-or-flight mode. So, I always say, pursuing a passion is like putting on an oxygen mask. You have to put on your own first before you can help anyone else. Like in the morning, I do not engage with the world until I have had my cup of tea. That is me putting on my mask.

Earlier, I was constantly juggling tasks, and when you appear to be competent, people think it is easy. It is never

Gul Panag



The author in a cockpit



Baralacha La is a mountain pass on the Leh-Manali Highway

PURSUING A PASSION IS LIKE PUTTING ON AN OXYGEN MASK. YOU HAVE TO PUT ON YOUR OWN FIRST BEFORE YOU CAN HELP ANYONE ELSE.

easy. Everyone has a struggle. It took me some time to figure this out but now I know, my passions are like oxygen. They recharge me and allow me to be the best version of myself.

One of my earliest passions has been riding a bike. When I was 18 and in college in Patiala, I got my cousin—who was in the Army—to teach me. I was already riding a conventional two-wheeler but the moment I got on that Royal Enfield Bullet 350 and got my hands on the handlebars, I felt an unparalleled sense of empowerment. Though my first ride was just some 300m, the power of the bike blew me away. I have done a few long, organised rides since, but instead of a group, we have a biking gang within the family, so we plan our own rides. If, for example, we are going to Leh, we flatbed the bikes to Manali and our ride actually starts from there. One of my most memorable rides was to Wan, a high-altitude village in Chamoli (Uttarakhand). I am a leisure rider and I like to take in the sights and sounds.

But more than that, riding a bike is part of my everyday life—on weekends I like to ride to the gym or to pick up groceries or to meet friends in cafés. I own three bikes: a Jawa, a Triumph Bonneville T120, and a Royal Enfield Himalayan. Riding, for me, is literally like refuelling myself every single time.

Flying, on the other hand, is a much more difficult passion to pursue and sustain. My curiosity for flying was piqued way back in 1996-1998, in my college years, when I used to pass the Patiala Aviation Club every day. But it is a very expensive passion to pursue and since I knew I did not

Left: Gul Panag; Right: Shutterstock



The author with her son on a camping trip



Taking in the sights in Wan

want to do it professionally, I never expressed this desire to my parents. I only took it up years later, in fact, it will be 10 years this year. But getting your Private Pilot's Licence (PPL) is tough. You are required to clear several criteria, put in the flying hours, and pass the exams. My aim was to fly once a month, but to fly regularly, you need what is called 'currency', which means you have to fly every 21 days. And once the instructor gives you a go-ahead on the sortie, you get the permission to do a solo. Up until Covid, I managed to maintain it, but overall, the ecosystem is not conducive for hobby flying in India, and I only manage once a quarter now. But it is still worth it because for me it is like capacity building. It requires a lot of skill and concentration, and it rejuvenates me in a way that I am able to be the best at everything I do.

—As told to ***Geetika Sasan Bhandari***

BREAK OUT OF THE RUT

- **Pause before you need to:** If you need to pause, it means you have allowed your cup to run over. So take a moment, reflect, look back, and see how far you have come, and be conscious of the arc. And, have gratitude. I need these moments of reflection to tell myself 'I am unstoppable', and then I am back on track.

- **A physical nudge helps:** For me, exercise or just getting out helps a lot, even if it is just to pick up groceries or walk the dogs. Because when you pack in too much and it gets too hectic or you are stressed, panic begins to build and then it is a self-destructive loop. It is important to take a break at this point and do something for yourself.

- **Get out of town:** Annually, we do about 10 trips and at least two camping trips as a family. It is a challenge but we plan in advance, keeping in mind that we have a school-going child. Incidentally, there are so many people who think our son is home-schooled! But we make use of long weekends and do road trips. Camping helps us spend quality time as it is usually with no devices/ no network. The idea is to step back, pause, and appreciate. And it really helps to have a partner who is on the same page as you. Sometimes, if I do not feel like going on a trip, he will push me to go, and once I go, I always realise that the value of that recharge is amazing.

Top: Gul Panag; Bottom: Shutterstock

EATING MY WAY THROUGH ROME

Several visits ignited my passion for Italy's cuisine, culminating in a purpose-driven trip to savour the Eternal City's gourmet delights

words by **Gargi Guha**



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In Rome, choose to eat pizza by the slice, so that you can sample a variety of options; (inset) Hand-rolled pasta is tender, with a delicate texture.

It's my first time in Rome. I step out of Roma Termini station and breathe in the delicious aroma of fried *suppli* (a local snack). It instantly reminds of my mission to visit—food!

I've been frequenting Italy for a few years now, to learn about its wines. But I've always dreamt of the food scene in Italy's capital. Rome has been living in my imagination far longer than on my itineraries. This sojourn, then, will be all about street food, delicious dining, market jaunts, and, above all, seasonal produce. I want to eat Rome the way Romans do; standing at the bar with crumbs on my fingers, lingering over *aperitivo* in the honey-gold light and wandering through the *mercatos* (markets).

The ritual of eating well

Long before the Slow Food movement started in 1986, Rome was already living the philosophy at the table. The Eternal City has always eaten with the seasons, respected provenance, and treated food as a social ritual, as I find out.

The only place a Roman food trail may start at is at Testaccio, one of the most authentic food neighbourhoods, famed for the trattorias lining the streets, but most famous for the Testaccio market, a throbbing, pulsating hub of produce, people, and flavours. I dive straight in for a motley platter of pizza slices. Rome's well-known *pizza al taglio*, which translates to pizza by the slice, is very appealing, just because one can sample such a varied range; starting from arugula and pecorino to pumpkin, artichokes, olives, baby potatoes, fennel with orange, and prosciutto. Here, it is usually cut with scissors and sold by weight; simple, functional, and simply delicious.

The art of 'mantecatura'

I know that carbonara is a Roman touchstone, but I tend to favour the simpler *cacio e pepe* and leave some room to enjoy this at the famous Felice a Testaccio, a revered temple of Roman cuisine since 1936. Felice's *cacio e pepe* is a house specialty, rendered even more special with the art of table side *mantecatura*, an Italian culinary method of beating a pasta, off-heat. This ritual of blending in the pecorino cheese into the



TOP AND BOTTOM
The neighbourhood of Trastevere in Rome is packed with trattorias and bars; Carciofi alla giudia *is a popular, seasonal dish of deep-fried artichokes.*

folds of a waiting pasta, as you watch with anticipation, is a sacred act. And, it is in these little crafts that Italy's cuisine gets its well-deserved glory.

In December 2025, Italian cuisine earned the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage status. Not for a dish, but for a way of life. The honour celebrates the social ritual of cooking—hands rolling dough, guarded sauce secrets, and families gathering to connect. In Rome, food is inseparable from memory, language, and inheritance.

I dedicate my next day to Trastevere, the cheery neighbourhood renowned for its classic fare. I know that artichokes are a springtime ritual, and I bite into the crunchy, gold flowers (crisp outside but tender within) in a dish called *carciofi alla giudia*. The best time to enjoy artichokes is from early spring until May, when the tender Carciofo Romanesco (Roman artichoke) is in season. This again, is another appeal of the cuisine: seasonality.

Street food trail

I then head east to Quarticciolo, on the city's fringes. This old quarter is scattered with traditional trattorias famed for quail, a classic ingredient rooted in ancient Roman cooking. Roasted in a wood-fired oven and paired with mushrooms or peas, it's a dish that speaks of the area's rustic culinary heritage or *cucina povera*.

A close cousin of the famous *arancini* is the Roman *supplì* or fried rice balls. With molten mozzarella at its heart, these deep-fried delights are a sinful snack. *Supplì* are made with tomato-flavoured risotto while *arancini* are made with

WHERE TO STAY

The St. Regis Rome

In November 2018, the hotel unveiled a meticulous multi-million-euro restoration helmed by designer Pierre-Yves Rochon, seamlessly marrying contemporary glamour with the hotel's 1894 heritage.

Palazzo Ripetta

Once a 17th-century convent, this stands as a historic treasure in the heart of Rome.

Nerva Boutique Hotel

This stylish retreat at a central location is thoughtfully designed; the rooms pair minimalist furnishings with deep blue walls, creating a striking aesthetic.

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LEFT AND RIGHT
Maritozzo *are two brioche halves stuffed with cream; Tortellini is one of the many shapes of pasta found in Italy.*

saffron risotto, mixed with *ragù* and peas.

The four great Roman pastas share a common base with subtle shifts. *Cacio e Pepe* is the simplest—pasta water, Pecorino Romano, and black pepper emulsified into a creamy sauce. *Gricia* adds crisp *guanciale* (cured meat). Carbonara brings in eggs for a rich, silky finish. *Amatriciana* builds on *gricia* with tomato (sometimes onion or garlic) for a brighter, deeper profile, and is my personal favourite.

In search of a husband

In Rome, few treats rival the *maritozzo*—two brioche halves stuffed with a cloud of cream. I once doubted its excess but found it light, airy, and irresistible. Panificio Bonci is renowned for its fantastic *maritozzo*. The name comes from *marito* or husband in Italian. In medieval Rome, during Lent, men gifted their fiancées sweet buns studded with raisins, honey, and pine nuts, often hiding a ring inside. Over time, the iconic cream-filled classic became a symbol of the Lazio region's sweetness.

A memorable *Eat Pray Love* moment shows Julia Roberts in Rome, blissfully eating, while declaring, "I'm in love. I'm having a relationship with my pizza." On this hedonistic food-cation in Rome, I can safely say the same.

FOOD SOUVENIRS TO BRING BACK

- **Frascati is the crisp, easy-drinking white wine from the Castelli Romani hills just outside Rome. Look for Frascati Superiore DOCG for the finest expression of this classic. Find it at Trimani Enoteca, a historic wine shop that also sells artisanal olive oils and pastas.**
- **No Roman food memory is complete without Pecorino Romano. Always check for the DOP seal and the sheep's head emblem. Antica Caciara Trasteverina in Trastevere is one of the city's best cheese shops.**
- **If you're bringing home pasta, choose shapes that carry Roman sauces beautifully. For an excellent variety, head to Volpetti Salumeria in Testaccio.**

GETTING THERE

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*Effective 25th March

ENIT

SEEKING MAGIC IN EVERY ESCAPADE

From the ocean's depths to the skies above, I have always been passionate about living myriad experiences

words by
Shweta Tripathi

The author on a jungle swing in Bali



Tripathi has gone skydiving in New Zealand (pictured here) and Switzerland

Emerging from the waters after my first dive in Lakshadweep, I felt like Hrithik Roshan in *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara*. It was a whole new world down there—the sea life, the colours, nature at its most pristine. It fascinated me. I was 25 then, and that single experience changed my entire perspective. I didn't know it at the time, but I would return a couple of years later to the Andamans just to get my scuba diving certification.

I have always been a water baby. Being a Cancerian might have something to do with it, but it certainly helped that my father was posted in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands during my childhood. From snorkelling to driving water scooters—I did it all.

If I have gathered so many memorable experiences till now, I have my parents to thank. They never held me back from embarking on an adventure, whether it was paragliding in Mussoorie or skydiving in Switzerland. I remember heading to London for a work trip with my father's advice ringing in my ears: "Spend on experiences. When everything else fades away, those are what stay with you."

Many of my cherished memories involve water. I remember 10 magical days in Puducherry, surfing and riding the waves. It is a 'sweet pain'—the kind of exhaustion you feel after



The actress, who refers to herself as a 'water baby', in the Maldives

Shweta Tripathi



Tripathi 'mermaiding' in New Zealand, which, she says, involves a lot of technique and entails swimming with a costume tail



The author and her husband Chaitanya before a dive in the Maldives

trekking to a high peak. That is when the magic happens.

In Maharashtra, I once went waterfall rappelling in the middle of a downpour. The locals prepared a meal for us, and we ate while it poured. It remains one of the tastiest meals of my life.

That is not to say I do not get nervous. Before a shipwreck dive in the Andamans, I could not sleep. Having watched one too many animated films, I was terrified of being eaten alive by sharks. But once I surrendered to the experience, I was rewarded with the sight of sharks swimming gracefully around me. They are truly beautiful creatures, and by the end, all my fear had vanished.

Recently, my husband Cheeta [Chaitanya] and I went diving in the Maldives during a family holiday. The colours and sea life there are incredible—much like the Andamans.

However, if there is one thing I have learned, it is the importance of respecting nature. The world is not something to fear; it is a place where beautiful creatures coexist with us. By spending time in nature, you begin to understand them, and in the process, you understand yourself better, too. You realise why

Shweta Tripathi



Trekking in Mahabaleshwar with Mallika Dua (second from left) and other friends



Tripathi enjoying the view of the city from the Melbourne Skydeck

NEXT ON MY BUCKET LIST

▶ South Africa: Chaitanya and I love going on safaris but we have only done them in India so far.
▶ Norway: I want to see the Northern Lights.
▶ South America: I want to explore its landscapes and the experiences it offers.

maintaining an ecological balance is so vital.

While my heart lies in the ocean and the calm that engulfs me underwater, the skies are equally fascinating. I have had the time of my life skydiving in Switzerland and New Zealand. It is a different kind of thrill—pure adrenaline.

These adventures would be incomplete without the right companions. I have found mine in my husband. With him, every holiday is an exploration. I also love travelling with my close friend, Mallika Dua, though our trips together are more about rejuvenation—visiting libraries, watching plays or browsing bookstores in Bali, for example. I am not big on traditional shopping, but I love thrift shops because I deeply believe in sustainability.

And, of course, there is the food. It nourishes my body and soul. On vacation, I am all about exploring the local flavours—seeing how spices are used differently or how certain cultures master the balance of sweet and savoury. It fascinates me that there are still so many ingredients in the world I have yet to taste.

At the end of the day, whether I am exploring a shipwreck, browsing in a thrift store or tasting a new spice, I am chasing that feeling of wonder. Travel has taught me that the world is vast, but it is also fragile. I will keep diving, keep exploring, and keep collecting those experiences my father spoke of—the ones that never fade, and the ones that remind me exactly who I am.

—As told to
Deepali Dhingra

“TRAVEL HAS TAUGHT ME THAT THE WORLD IS VAST, BUT IT IS ALSO FRAGILE.



PAINTING THROUGH PRAGUE

My love for sketching took me to the Prague Pleinair festival, where I experienced the city more intimately as an observer, not a tourist

words by
Shikha Shah



Shikha Shah

The author's sketch of Charles Bridge, one of Prague's most iconic structures

Europe has an undeniable charm—especially for romantics and artistic souls. It never fails to inspire. As a passionate watercolour illustrator who documents her journeys through art, Prague—the storybook capital of Czechia—had long been on my wish list.

So when I discovered that my visit would coincide with Prague Pleinair—an annual four-day celebration in which the city itself transforms into an open-air studio—I was thrilled.

Plein-air painting involves creating art on location, capturing the scene's fleeting light, atmosphere, and movement through direct observation, often in a single sitting. Popularised by the Impressionists in the 19th century, the practice values spontaneity to preserve a moment in time.



TRY IT OUT

This four-day festival brings together artists of all skill levels to paint at some of the city's most inspiring locations. Participants receive an art-supply goodie bag and access to artist demos, sponsor giveaways, and more.

24th-27th June 2026
praguepleinair.com



Sketching a path

Skautský Institut, the event hub, is tucked inside a historic building beside the Astronomical Clock (that has been ticking faithfully for over 600 years) on one of Old Town's cobblestone alleys. One of the smaller community spaces was dedicated to the festival. There, we picked up goodie bags filled with art supplies, attended indoor demonstrations, shared a Czech beer, and regrouped between sketching sessions.

With my Prague Pleinair badge doubling as my event pass, I was ready to kick off my sketching adventure at Duplex, one of the city's iconic rooftop bars. Drinks in hand, we settled in to capture the view of Wenceslas Square. Red rooftops, domed turrets, bustling shops and cafés, and the red trams offered endless visual details to translate onto paper. As I finished the linework and added washes of colour, it struck me: this was the perfect start—a sip-and-paint session, friendly conversation with kindred spirits, and the skyline glowing in warm hues.

Open-air adventures

The following morning, we gathered to paint in and around Staroměstské náměstí (Old Town Square), Prague's oldest, dating back to the 12th century. With its Roman, Gothic, and Baroque architecture, and the commanding statue of Czech reformer Jan Hus, the square has witnessed royal proclamations and several other historic events. I claimed a spot on a bench, directly facing the Church of Our Lady before Týn. Few buildings capture the essence of Prague as powerfully as this Gothic masterpiece of worship. It felt only fitting to render it on paper.

Fineliner in hand, I began appreciating the intricate stonework. A curious local peering into my artwork shared that the church's construction began in the mid-14th century and spanned over a hundred

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
A sketch of Wenceslas Square; Artists of all skill levels can enrol in the festival; The author at a night painting session in the Old Town Square.



Clockwise from top left: Shikha Shah; Prague Pleinair; Shikha Shah



The Church of Our Lady before Týn, rendered in paint by the author

Shikha Shah

years. Working in muted neutrals and browns, I exchanged quiet smiles with fellow artists—one from Peru, another from Mexico.

By midday, hunger nudged me toward Havelské (or Havelský) Market, dating back to 1232. Stalls brim with fresh produce, flowers, handcrafted jewellery, wooden toys, ceramics, and Czech souvenirs—from postcards and magnets to bags and artwork. Post-lunch hours were spent hopping between art and stationery shops.

As night fell, we met in Staroměstské náměstí for a twilight session. Low light makes *plein-air* painting challenging, but perfection was never the goal—connection with the place was. With easels, stools, and sketchbooks on knees, we quietly became part of the square's rhythm.

A picnic to love

On my final day, I set off on foot toward Park Cihelná in Malá Strana (Lesser Town), where locals gather to picnic, feed swans or lose themselves in a book. From here, I could savour uninterrupted views of the Charles Bridge, the green-domed Church of St Francis Seraph, and the spires of Prague Castle and St. Vitus Cathedral. Drawing the Bridge from afar made clear why it has captivated artists, photographers, and travellers for generations.

For the wrap-up party, we gathered in a cosy pub, raising glasses to days well spent. We lingered over each other's work—finding inspiration in the way each artist infused the same subject with their own personality.

We assume travel experiences are meant to be shared with those closest to us. Prague challenged that. Sometimes, strangers with a shared passion can elevate your experience in a way even loved ones can't. I gained a community bound by curiosity and creativity, and a reminder that the way you engage with a place determines what it gives back. Rather than moving from landmark to landmark, I slowed down long enough to see Prague as a collection of lived moments, not a checklist of sights.

WHERE TO STAY

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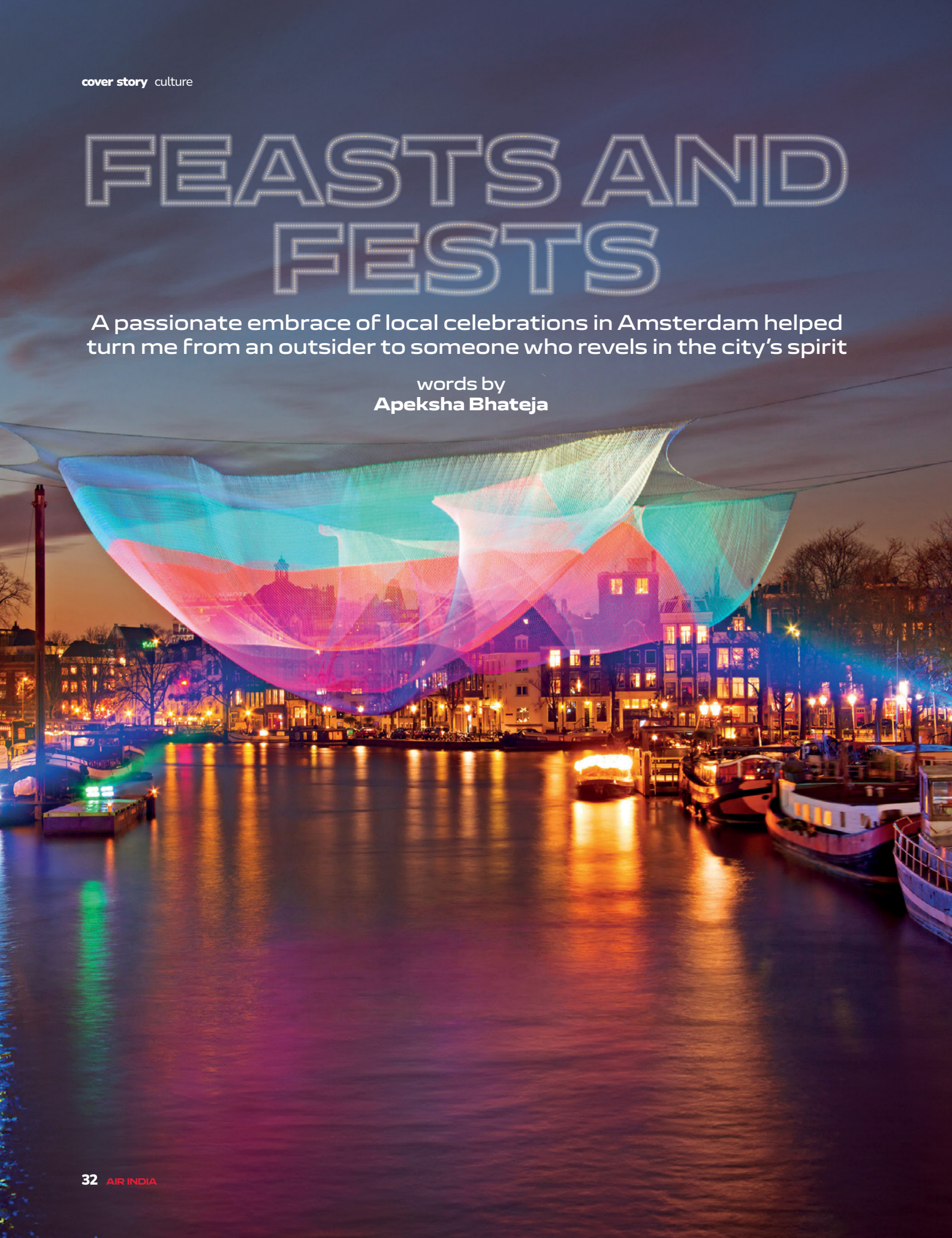
GETTING THERE

Fly to Prague with Air India's Codeshare Partner, Lufthansa.

FEASTS AND FESTS

A passionate embrace of local celebrations in Amsterdam helped turn me from an outsider to someone who revels in the city's spirit

words by
Apeksha Bhateja





The King's Day celebrations transform the canals into a sea of orange

FACING PAGE
The Amsterdam Light Festival seeks to connect people through art

When I first moved to Amsterdam in 2024, I was sure that I wouldn't stay for long. I loved the beauty of the canals flanked by the iconic homes, but the city felt overwhelming and lonely. It turned out, though, that there was a secret to becoming integrated into the city's vibe.

On any day, Amsterdam is a dazzling experience for locals and travellers alike. But at certain times, when its indomitable spirit goes on display, the city transfixes everyone. And those events happen more often than you think. Through the year, a succession of festivals reminds residents to celebrate life. And once you join in with the same degree of passion, you'll find yourself dazzled by the city's spirit.

Street celebrations

The prime example of this is King's Day (*see* 'About the Events' *on next page*) when the streets swell with crowds. Held in April every year, this is a colourful holiday when the Dutch wear their finest orange garments and get ready to whoop it up. Last year, I joined impromptu dance parties with a sea of strangers and watched boats with revellers blanket the canals. For a little breather from the crowds, I strolled through Westerperk and picked up treats from various food stalls in the neighbourhood of Jordaan.

Another event that drew me in was the International Documentary Film Festival, which offers a chance to explore historic cinemas in the city and discover new documentaries from around the world. Last year, I attended four screenings in a week and as I sat in the theatres, I realised that this event is all about camaraderie—a

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LEFT AND RIGHT
Museumnacht often includes access to temporary and permanent exhibitions; Rollende Keukens serves up crêpes, pizza, fresh soup, fish dishes, smoothies, and more.

room full of people having a cross-cultural exchange. Also in November last year, I made an itinerary for one night—spray painting graffiti at STRAAT museum, dancing to electronic music at a church, and learning calligraphy in a mosque. The occasion was Museumnacht, when museums, cultural institutions, and religious centres stay open after hours to encourage genuine interaction.

However, my favourite event is the Amsterdam Light Festival. Even as the winters turn wet, dreary, and endless, the city gets a makeover with light installations. For a unique perspective, I booked a boat tour on the last day of the festival and watched the stories of artists unfold from the water.

A sense of community

While participating in all these events, what I have also come to appreciate about the city is that art is not dependent on buildings and institutions—it's part of everyday life. That was illustrated most vividly one weekend when I stumbled into a live performance while strolling through a neighbourhood. Another time, I discovered a massive food truck festival, Rollende Keukens, on my usual walking route at Westerpark. There were more than a hundred stalls at this open-air kitchen, and I spent hours sampling dumplings, crêpes, and ice cream. Every weekend, the various flea markets in the city, where one can sample different cheeses and pick up fresh tulips, also offer many moments to experience cultural immersion. My favourite is the 400-year-old Noordermarkt, which is full of life every Saturday and Monday.

Joyous immersion

Culture is not hidden behind ticketed venues or reserved for a few occasions. It spills onto the streets and invites everyone to participate, no matter your ethnicity, nationality, or sexuality. Amsterdam runs on tolerance, not just bicycles. The city reintroduced me to collective joy—and even as an outsider, I now feel included.

ABOUT THE EVENTS

King's Day (27th April 2026)
This marks the birthday of King Alexander (from the royal house of Orange), which is why revellers are encouraged to dress up in the vibrant colour.
royal-house.nl

International Documentary Film Festival (12th–22nd November 2026)
The event supports the work of storytellers and champions a thriving and inclusive documentary culture.
documentary.org

Museumnacht (7th November 2026)
Organised by the Amsterdam Museum Night Foundation to connect young people with the museums in their city.
museumnacht.amsterdam

Rollende Keukens (13th–17th May 2026)
'Rolling Kitchens' from all over the country offer gourmet treats, accompanied by live music performances.
rollendekeukens.amsterdam

GETTING THERE

Air India flies non-stop to Amsterdam from Delhi.

Left: Apeksha Bhateja; Right: Shutterstock

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A RAINBOW OF SENSATIONAL OFFERINGS AT PURPLE MARTINI

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



SAARTHAK GUPTA
CEO/Founder, Purple Martini

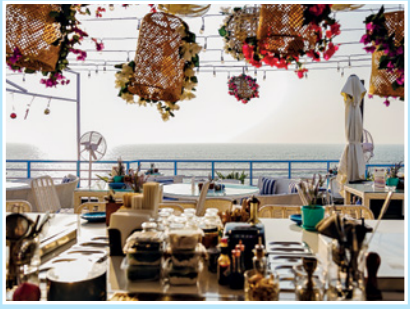


A beacon of culinary excellence, Purple Martini is a much-loved destination among locals, tourists, and celebrities. Founded by Saarthak Gupta, the restaurant began as a passion project and has since ascended to the pinnacle of Goa's dining scene. Purple Martini is not merely a dining experience, it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

DELICIOUS BLISS

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

But it's not just the drinks that make Purple Martini a must-visit spot in Goa. The kitchen also offers a delectable cuisine selection that blends Indian and international flavours. From appetisers like Peri-Peri Chicken Skewers and Recheado Prawns to entrées like Banana Wrapped Snapper with fiery chillies and tamarind, the menu has something that tantalises every taste-bud.



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

ABOUT THE FOUNDER

Saarthak Gupta, an alumnus of The Doon School and the University of Leeds, has been recognised as a leading entrepreneur in the hospitality industry. With his passion for hospitality, astute leadership, marketing prowess, and an eye for detail, he has transformed Purple Martini into one of the most popular restobars in Goa. His commitment to excellence has been recognised by various institutions, and he has received several prestigious awards for his contributions to the hospitality industry, as well as being named amongst the Times 50 Most Influential Personalities.

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

Disclaimer: Connectivity details are subject to change. Please visit *airindia.com* for the latest flight schedules.
@purplemartinigoa; For reservations, call or WhatsApp: +91 8793242210

CHECKLIST



Getty Images

Everything worth checking out

38 IN FOCUS
42 FOOD
50 EVENTS
54 ON THE CLOCK
58 BOOKS
62 NOW TRENDING



ART ACCESS

Air India's formidable art collection, built over decades, is now on display in Delhi

words by **Abhilasha Ojha**

TOP AND BOTTOM
A view of one of the sections of the exhibition, Wings of Modernity, *displaying paintings and sculptures by some of the leading modern masters of Indian art; A bronze sculpture, titled* Jhelum, *by Satish Gujral.*

A one-of-its-kind immersive exhibition, showcasing Air India's rich art collection, is on display at NGMA's newest gallery in the precincts of the Red Fort in Delhi. Spread across two sections (Barrack One and Barrack Two, built to house officials and troops of the British Army post the Revolt of 1857), the exhibition is culturally significant. It reflects Air India's commitment to supporting art while also showing viewers how it became one of the earliest companies to build an unmatchable and dedicated art collection under the guidance of JRD Tata in the 1920s. The exhibition also highlights how the company, through its dedicated curatorial team, commissioned some of the rising stars of Indian modern art in the 1950s to create various murals, paintings, and sculptures for its airport offices and lounges worldwide.

A case in point: Shanti Dave, one of the most important modernists in India (the nonagenarian continues to live in



Top and bottom: NGMA Delhi; Abhilasha Ojha

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
An equine painting by B Vithal; This ceramic work by Badri Narayan is part of a 10-tile set; An oil on canvas titled Raag Todi, *inspired by* ragmala, *a genre of Indian miniature painting;* Holi on Sea Face, *an oil on canvas by KH Ara.*

New Delhi), who created murals for Air India offices and lounges in New York, Frankfurt, Sydney, Perth, and London. Dave's paintings, along with those of several other modernists of repute, have been displayed as part of this exhibition titled *Wings of Modernity: Expanding the Horizon of a New Modern Era*. MF Husain's horses, VS Gaitonde's abstracts, and SH Raza's *bindu* works headline the display, alongside figurative paintings by B Prabha and KH Ara. Sculptures and paintings by Achuthan Kudallur, SG Vasudev and S Nandagopal further enrich the display, complemented by works from several other artists and sculptors.

The companion exhibition, *Anta Asti Prarambha: The End is the New Beginning*, focuses on miniature paintings, *pichwais*, textile art, Air India posters (both originals and digitised prints), stone sculptures, and wooden panels inspired by South Indian temple architecture, in addition to oversized utensils, sculptures, and urns reflecting the workmanship of India's artisans.

Showcasing over 500 works of art (there are over 9,000 works in the collection, which became part of the NGMA in 2022), the exhibition is not to be missed, for it shows how Air India put Indian art and artists on the world map. To access both galleries, visitors will need to buy a ticket to the Red Fort complex.

Till October 2027 (works will rotate periodically)

Abhilasha Ojha

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PHỞ

Few dishes have travelled as far as *phở*, Vietnam's most enduring culinary emblem. In Hanoi, believed to be its birthplace, the soup is defined by a clear, bone-rich broth simmered for hours, aromatic yet never heavy, with star anise, cinnamon, and ginger held in gentle balance. A bowl of *phở* pairs fragrant beef or chicken with silky rice noodles in a broth so precise, it needs no embellishment, revealing how familiar dishes can feel new at their source.

Where to try it: Phở Gia Truyền, 49 Bát Đàn

8 dishes TO TRY IN HANOI

Vietnamese cuisine reflects a history of influence and adaptation, woven into local ingredients with thoughtful simplicity

words by **Riyanka Roy**

Shutterstock



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Air India/March 26



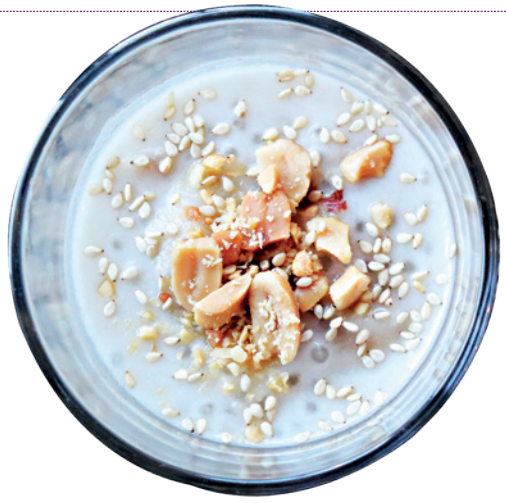
BÚN CHẢ

Centred on a light, gently sweet-and-savoury broth, this dish is served warm with pork patties and charcoal-grilled meatballs, made to order. Pickled daikon and carrot add brightness, while rice noodles, lettuce, herbs, and bean sprouts are served separately for diners to assemble. *Bún chả* entered the global spotlight when Chef Anthony Bourdain shared it with former US President Barack Obama.
Where to try it: Bún Chả Hương Liên, 24 P. Lê Văn Hưu, Phan Chu Trinh



BÁNH MÌ

Introduced during the colonial era, the baguette was gradually adapted with local ingredients. A crisp, airy loaf is filled with silky pâté, a soft omelette, cucumber, fresh coriander, and a choice of meats. Today, *bánh mì* is even served in vegan versions that preserve the balance of flavour and texture.
Where to try it: Banh Mi 25, No 25 Hang Ca Street, Hoan Kiem District



CHÈ CHUỐI

Ripe bananas are simmered in creamy coconut milk until soft and fragrant, with chewy tapioca pearls adding texture and pandan leaves lending a subtle aroma. Served warm, this treat captures the quiet pleasure of Vietnamese home-style desserts.
Where to try it: Chè Lộc Tài, 76 Hang Dieu Street



RAU MUỐNG XÀO TỎI

Simple yet deeply satisfying, it celebrates the quiet brilliance of fresh produce. Crisp water spinach is flash-cooked in a hot wok with fragrant garlic and light seasoning, allowing its natural sweetness and bite to shine. The result is aromatic, vibrant, and comforting in its restraint. A staple on Hanoi tables, this humble stir-fry is rarely eaten alone, instead playing the perfect supporting role alongside richer dishes.
Where to try it: Bancông, 2 Đinh Liệt, Hàng Bạc

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BÚN RIÊU

This soup is built on a gently-tangy tomato broth, enriched with the natural sweetness of freshwater crab. Small paddy crabs are traditionally pounded and strained (their liquid forming the base), while the solids become soft crab cakes that rise to the surface. Finished with vermicelli and fresh herbs, the result is delicate, aromatic, and refreshing. Especially loved in the warmer months, *bún riêu* reflects the subtlety and balance of everyday Hanoi cooking.
Where to try it: Bún riêu Ngà, 6 Ng. Đình Đại, Cầu Dền





CHẢ CÁ LÃ VỌNG

This local delicacy, dating back more than 130 years, is said to have been invented by the Doan family, who served this special preparation to troops during the French colonial period. Traditionally cooked with *cá lăng* (catfish), the fish is marinated in turmeric, *galangal*, and fermented rice, then grilled and served sizzling with scallions and dill. Eaten with *bún* noodles, herbs, peanuts, and pungent shrimp paste, it is bold yet balanced. Rarely found elsewhere, this iconic dish remains deeply tied to Hanoi's identity.
Where to try it: Chả Cá Lã Vọng, 14 Hang Son Street, Hanoi Old Quarter



GETTING THERE

Fly to Hanoi with Air India's Codeshare Partner, Singapore Airlines.

CÀ PHÊ SỮA ĐÁ

No Hanoi food list is complete without its signature coffee. Strong, dark-roasted beans are brewed slowly through a metal *phin*, condensed milk is added for sweetness, and the concoction is poured over ice for a cooling finish. Beyond this classic, Hanoi is also famed for *cà phê trứng*, or egg coffee, a velvety speciality that is often called 'liquid tiramisu'.
Where to try it: Cộng Càphê and Phê La (multiple locations)

Top to bottom: Shutterstock; Getty Images; Shutterstock

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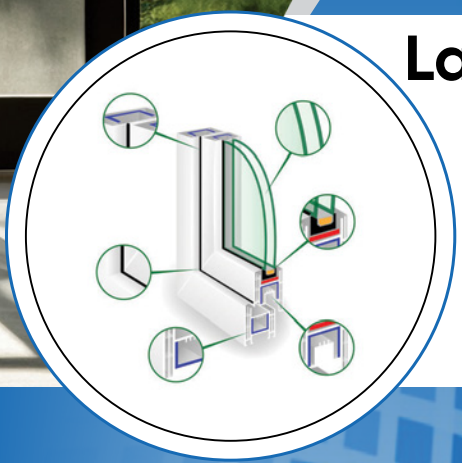

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From Grand Prix to cultural celebrations, it is all happening this month



SPEED FEST

AUSTRALIAN GRAND PRIX

Melbourne, Australia

8th March

Held around Albert Park, the race offers an opportunity for fans to soak in all the action of F1, plus enjoy the city's diverse culture and gourmet scene.

formula1.com



BOTERO IN SINGAPORE

Singapore

Till 15th May

This will feature 130 original works by Colombian artist and sculptor Fernando Botero, including paintings, drawings and indoor sculptures, as well as monumental outdoor sculptures displayed at IMBA Theatre and at the Silver Garden of Gardens by the Bay.

gardensbythebay.com

MR FLOWER FANTASTIC'S CONCRETE JUNGLE

New York, USA

Till 26th April

Designer and New Yorker native, Mr Flower Fantastic has transformed the Enid A. Haupt Conservatory into a breathtaking orchid tribute to the spirit, style, and streetscape of the city.

nybg.org



Clockwise from top left: Getty Images; IMBA; New York Botanical Garden
All dates are correct at the time of going to press







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Amul BEVERAGES





daCunha/AK/03-26_01/Eng



VINTERFESTUKA

Narvik, Norway

13th - 22nd March

The 70th edition of this cultural festival will feature musical performances by Hekla Stålstrenga, puzzle trails, and an exhibit showcasing the artwork of local children.

vinterfestuka.no

MEN'S T20 WORLD CUP

India and Sri Lanka

Till 8th March

The 10th edition will play out across eight venues as 20 teams battle it out to win the championship.

icc-cricket.com



ON THE RADAR



ST. PATRICK'S FESTIVAL

Dublin, Ireland

14th - 17th March

A four-day celebration in honour of the patron saint of the country brings together artists, visitors, and communities.

stpatricksfestival.ie



INTERNATIONAL YOGA FESTIVAL

Rishikesh, Uttarakhand

9th - 15th March

Held by the banks of the Ganga, it offers yoga classes and discussions with several spiritual leaders.

internationalyogafestival.org



NH7 WEEKENDER

Pune, Maharashtra

13th - 15th March

To be held at the Mahalakshmi Lawns, it has a stacked line-up including Prateek Kuhad and Talwiinder, among others.

nh7.in



TYEB MEHTA: BEARING WEIGHT (WITH THE LIGHTNESS OF BEING)

New Delhi

Till 30th June

At KNMA Saket, this comprehensive retrospective features over 120 works.

knma.org

Clockwise from top left: Josu-Media_Vinterfestuka; Getty Images; KNMA Saket/Tyeb Mehta; NH7 Weekender; Getty Images; Shutterstock

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SHANGHAI CALLING

Spend an exciting day in this dynamic city in the People's Republic of China

words by **Bacon Zhan**



The Oriental Pearl Tower dominates the skyline

06:00AM
Green start
Century Park

Located in the Pudong New Area, this is the largest urban park in the city (around 140 hectares) and boasts an open-air music square and one of the largest artificial lakes in Shanghai. Watch early-morning joggers go around the central lake at sunrise and pause by the musical fountain—one of the Park's attractions.

08:00AM
Breakfast halt
Qiao Ai Lai Lai Xiao Long

Soup dumplings are said to have originated in the Jiangnan region of China. So, it is no surprise that the country's most-populous city, Shanghai, is famous for them. Try it at this little shop in a busy alley (it is a Michelin Bib Gourmand so expect a long queue), known for dumplings where the outer layer is so delicate and thin, it can be broken by just a gentle touch.

10:00AM
River retreat
Qiantan

This rapidly-developing area is commonly referred to as the 'New Bund' and is home to several five-star hotels and restaurants like The Cheesecake Factory. Sports enthusiasts can often be seen kayaking along the Huangpu river on weekends. Also check out the Taikoo Li Qiantan retail complex here.

12:00PM
Midday outing
Meet the Bund SKYLINE

Perched 100m above the city, this restaurant is located in the north Bund area. The dishes derive from modern-style Fujian cuisine, especially the seafood. It also has a gallery where you can view a collection of traditional Chinese crafts. The award-winning chain, which has two other locations in Shanghai, has won many food awards.

Getty Images

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EAT LIKE A LOCAL

In Shanghai, where a significant proportion of the population comprises migrants, the earliest original residents mostly live in suburban areas. Their lifestyle is unique, and one of their customs is to get up around 4am to eat mutton dishes and drink rice wine. Head to the Zhoupu area of the city to witness (or try) this unique cultural experience.



STYLISH STAYS

1/ Shanghai Qiantan Waldorf Astoria: The hotel draws its design inspiration from modern cruise ships, perfectly blending the classic aesthetics of the legendary brand with the unique urban temperament of the city.

2/ The PuLi Shanghai: As one of the first luxury hotels to introduce the 'urban oasis' concept to Shanghai, this property offers guests a refined luxury experience.

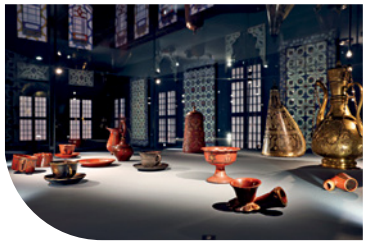
2/ The St. Regis on the Bund: This is a peaceful haven in the bustling city. While paying tribute to the Art Deco style, the hotel perfectly combines artistic charm with an elegant cultural experience.

GETTING THERE

Air India flies non-stop to Shanghai from Delhi.







CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT
The Bund is Shanghai's historic area; The 1000 Trees is an architectural masterpiece located on the banks of the Suzhou river; An exhibit at MAP; A crab dish at Meet the Bund SKYLINE.

02:00PM
Water views
Suzhou River Water Bus

There are more than 10 different routes for the Suzhou River cruise, each with different themes and corresponding boarding and alighting stops along the river. This is a good way to see the city from a different perspective as you pass by neighbourhoods and can admire their unique architectural styles.

04:00PM
Artistic influence
Museum of Art Pudong (MAP)

Instead of a permanent collection, MAP features art collaborations and exchanges with institutions around the world—part of its mission to foster international exchange. Currently on display: *The Wonder of Patterns: Masterpieces from India, Iran and the Ottoman World from the Musée du Louvre*.

06:00PM
Retail therapy
GATE M West Bund Dream Center

This complex has an interesting history: it was a cement factory earlier and has a century-old architectural heritage. Nestled along the Huangpu river, it offers a waterfront shopping experience, alongside cafés, dessert shops, skateboarding, and rock climbing.

08:30PM
Italian dinner
8½ Otto e Mezzo BOMBANA Shanghai

As the first Italian restaurant outside Italy to receive three Michelin stars (the Shanghai outlet boasts two stars), this is a legend. The new executive chef, Nicoló Rotella, has integrated Asian flavours into the dishes. Finish the night at Spago Shanghai, located on the rooftop of the St. Regis on the Bund hotel.

Clockwise from top: Shutterstock; Shutterstock; Getty Images; Meet the Bund SKYLINE

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CREATIVE VOICE



Children's author, poet, and voice-over artiste, **Shobha Tharoor Srinivasan** moves fluidly between the written and spoken word

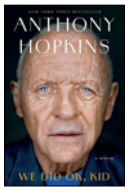
How do you adapt your voice and narrative for young readers?
Children possess an instinctive curiosity and imagination that adults often lose over time. They are not yet jaded, and when we tap into that sense of wonder, they respond immediately. I have loved words since childhood—their sound, rhythm, and musicality when spoken aloud—and that relationship with language shapes my work. Whether I am writing or using my voice, the essence is communication. As a voice-over artiste, honesty and integrity are essential—if you don't believe in what you're saying, the audience won't either. The same applies to writing for children. If your engagement with words is genuine, they sense it instantly. Excitement, after all, is infectious.

Your body of work spans picture books, poetry, prose, and activity-based formats. How do you see this range?
Children's literature offers remarkable freedom. I work with visually-driven picture books as well as text-based formats that include poetry, prose, games, and wordplay. One of my recent books invites children to use words with kindness, curiosity, and creativity. Words can inform, educate, entertain, and shape how we understand the world.

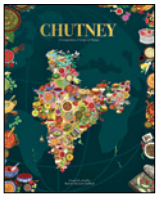
Have interactions with young readers stayed with you?
Very much so. It is a privilege to work in this space. I have met children who travelled long distances just to attend a book signing, and others who discovered a love for poetry through a single workshop. Moments like these are affirming and remind me why this work matters.

—*As told to* ***Shrabasti A Mallik***

NEW ON THE SHELF



WE DID OK, KID: A MEMOIR
(Anthony Hopkins)
The Academy Award-winning actor delves into his childhood, and his illustrious film and theatre career, in this honest, and moving memoir.
Simon & Schuster; ₹599



CHUTNEY
(Rushina Munshaw-Ghildiyal)
A testament to India's culinary traditions, it features heirloom recipes and stories from over 120 food lovers and chroniclers.
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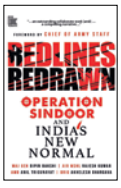

REDLINES REDRAWN
(Maj Gen Bipin Bakshi, Air Mshl Rajesh Kumar, Amb Anil Trigunayat, Brig Akhelesh Bhargava)
Four experts dissect the build-up, execution, and ramifications of Operation Sindoor.
Konark Publishers; ₹738

Author's image: Shobha Tharoor Srinivasan; The author was a speaker at the Dehradun Literature Festival 2025; Rest: Courtesy respective publishers; Prices stated as is, at the time of going to press

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SPRING / SUMMER FASHION EDIT
In a nod to the 1970s but reimagined with contemporary lightness, Sandro Paris' SS 2026 collection features menswear (in a muted palette), including fluid trousers offset by sharply tailored leather coats.



FOLLOW YOUR SCENT
Fragrance discovery platform Fraghill has entered the market with a personality-led approach to buying perfume online. At its core is a quick digital quiz that maps your mood, lifestyle, and preferences to pick a curated set of scents, steering shoppers towards fragrances that feel personal rather than trend-driven. The aim is to blend technology with intuition and make online perfume shopping simpler, smarter, and more tailored.

A DISNEY CRUISE FROM SINGAPORE
The inaugural voyage of the Disney Adventure, starting 10th March, marks the beginning of three- to four-night cruises departing from Marina Bay Cruise Centre. These 'magic at sea' voyages focus on onboard experiences rather than port stops, allowing guests to explore seven uniquely themed areas inspired by iconic Disney stories.





CANTINA OPENS IN MUMBAI
Why: For a lively celebration of Italian-American cuisine prepared by globally-acclaimed Chef Anthony Burd. **Where:** *BKC*
Recommendations: *Mozzarella Sticks, Salmon Tartar Toast, Avocado Pizzette, Mushroom Bolognese, Deep-Fried Apple Pie, Pistachio Crème Brûlée*

All images courtesy respective brands

SOUL



Stories that inspire and enrich

64 → ROAD TRIP
70 → FRAME BY FRAME
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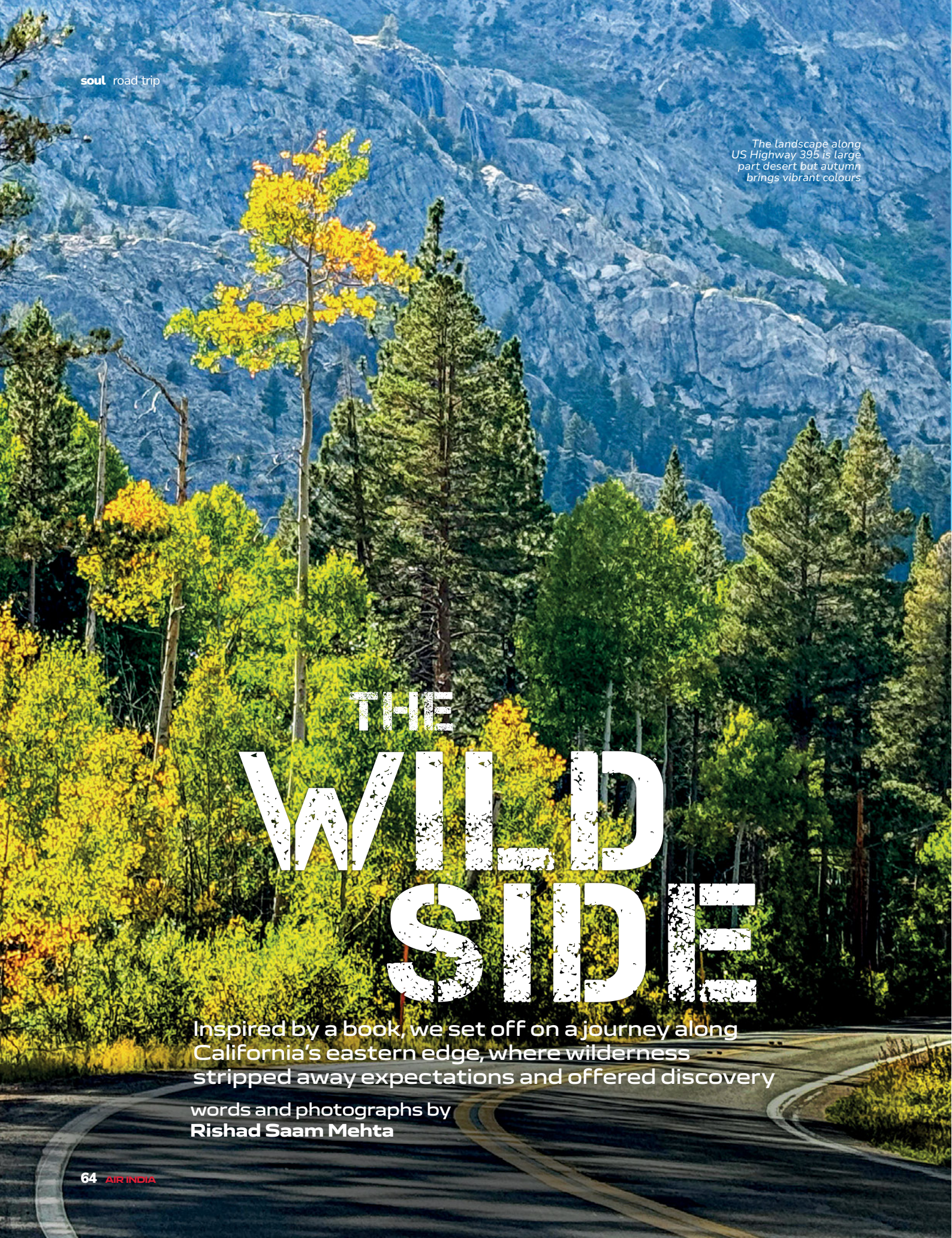


The landscape along US Highway 395 is large part desert but autumn brings vibrant colours

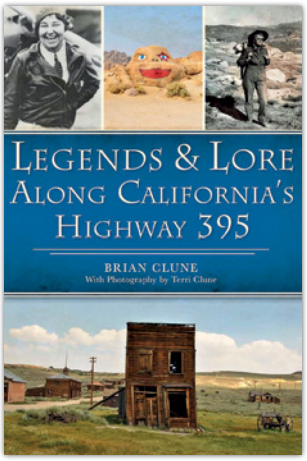
THE WILD SIDE

Inspired by a book, we set off on a journey along California's eastern edge, where wilderness stripped away expectations and offered discovery

words and photographs by
Rishad Saam Mehta



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT
A bald eagle sighting near June Lake, proof of Sierra Nevada's rich wildlife; The 2022 book that prompted the journey; The author at Lake Mary, where sapphire waters mirror the sky and silence feels like a sanctuary.





Over my previous visits to California, I had ticked off its greatest hits. The Pacific Coast Highway (top down in a convertible), Hollywood's Walk of Fame, wine tasting in the Napa vineyards, and outdoor adventures at Yosemite National Park, Mount Shasta, and the Redwood National and State Parks. All delightful but after a while, the 'Golden State' began to feel like a glossy postcard: scenic, predictable, and lacking the adventure that comes tinged with trepidation.

And then I discovered US Highway 395. I first read about it in *Legends & Lore Along California's Highway 395* by Brian Clune. The book promises a mystical frontier road guarded by ancient peaks and dotted with glacial lakes. Months later, with a few unscheduled days after a business trip in Los Angeles, we decided to see if the lore matched the land.

The road to the ancients

El Camino Sierra, as the locals call it, runs along California's eastern edge. We joined it at Lone Pine—about 330km from Los Angeles and a comfortable 3.5-hour drive away—a quirky town watched over by Mount Whitney. A stop at Mt. Whitney Restaurant—fresh trout grilled to perfection and a bison burger that spoke of the region's wild character—set the tone: hearty and unpretentious. Seventy-two kilometres north, near Big Pine, we chose our Robert Frost moment: a right turn toward the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest.

The climb into the White Mountains was steady, with the air thinning with every switchback until the forest closed around us. And there they were: the bristlecone pines. Gnarled, twisted, and silvered by millennia of storms, it seemed like they were shaped by an artist with infinite patience and a deep distrust of straight lines.

Some of these trees are more than 4,000 years old, which means they were already standing when Stonehenge was still under construction and folks in the Indus Valley were doing impressive things with beads and plumbing. Methuselah, the grand old elder among them, is believed to be over 4,789 years old. Its exact location is a closely guarded secret and understandably so in these times of rabid hunger for social media views and validation.

To stand among these ancient sentinels is to feel history compress. Through their lives, civilisations have risen and crumbled, wars have raged



Electric cargo bikes made exploring Twin Lakes effortless and eco-friendly

and faded, and languages have been born and forgotten. Legend has it that long before the Europeans arrived, the Paiute and Shoshone peoples, native to this land, considered these trees sacred symbols of resilience, believing them to be absorbers of energy through millennia. These trees have endured, shrugging off time like mild weather. In their presence, perspective swiftly arrives with startling clarity: our lives are shorter than a yawn in theirs.

And then, because nature loves theatrical timing, snow began to fall. The flakes arrived gently at first, swirling like lace, then thickened, smudging sky and earth into white. The road seemed to dissolve. I gripped the steering wheel of my Defender like a rosary, whispering words of encouragement to both man and machine.

Into the snow

Silver Canyon Road awaited. This road is steep and peppered with rocky descents and is notorious among the region's off-roading community. Driving is not recommended in foul weather. Which is exactly what it was right then, but we had no choice. It was either sit out the night in the wilderness or get back to the main highway. Ardently hoping the spirits of the land, believed in by the First People, would shepherd us, we soldiered on.

Trepidation surged as we crawled downward. Every jolt rattled spine and self-assurance; every stream crossing demanded a small supplication. By now, the snow was coming down in sheets, turning the world into shifting monochrome. There were moments when the road simply disappeared and

GOOD TO KNOW

- Pack layers, sturdy boots, and a jacket—weather shifts quickly.
- The middle of May to early October is the best time. This is when the snow is melting, up until the autumn colours are in full bloom.
- Lone Pine is the best base for Whitney; Bishop for bristlecones; Mammoth Lakes for alpine treks.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An hour north from Lake Mammoth, just off US Highway 395, lies Virginia Lakes

instinct replaced visibility. I questioned my judgement. I questioned my sanity. And then fear gave way to exhilaration when we finally rolled out into Bishop and rejoined US Highway 395. The relief was indescribable. Triumph tasted like metal and adrenaline. I felt more alive than I had in years.

Lakes that mirror the sky

The next morning brought us to the Mammoth Lakes Basin—a hidden amphitheatre where glacier-carved lakes sit like precious gemstones below jagged peaks. Twin Lakes, Lake Mamie, Lake Mary, and nearby Convict Lake and Crowley Lake are just a few of them. All shimmering in aquamarine and sapphire, each a new pocket of serenity.

Pine-lined shores whispered in the breeze. Water so still it felt like the world had paused. Here, exploration involved wandering from lake to lake, walking around one, kayaking or swimming in the next, and having a picnic lunch after a spot of paddleboarding on the banks of another. Each one and its surroundings were a reminder of what glacial ice, gravity, and tectonic forces can create, given a few million years.

Over three days, we hiked through valleys and around lakes, walked to viewpoints, explored forest trails on e-bikes, and rode to waterfalls on horseback. The latter, especially, with the rhythm of hooves, the scent of leather, and the mountains burning with early autumn gold, felt like time travel. It was as if we were riding alongside the adventurers who once traversed these valleys.

The food we ate along the way felt like part of the healing. There was joy in the oversized margarita that made us laugh out loud, in the smoky ribs layered with spice and sweetness, and in the rich, saucy enchiladas bursting with vegetables and warmth. Each meal was more than sustenance. It was comfort, celebration, and connection.

The whisper that lingers

Eventually, real life called us back. We brought back the quiet joy of having glimpsed a California we never knew existed—one of hidden forests, snow-dusted ancients, and lakes carved into sanctuaries of calm.

It was a journey that did more than show us new landscapes. The Sierra Nevada mountains rejuvenated us like a holistic spa. The air sharpened our minds. The solitude lightened our bodies. The beauty nourished our souls. Off the tourist trail, in places where silence reigns, we found not just scenery but a deeper sense of balance. It was a joy that lingered long after we had plugged back into the grid.

GETTING THERE

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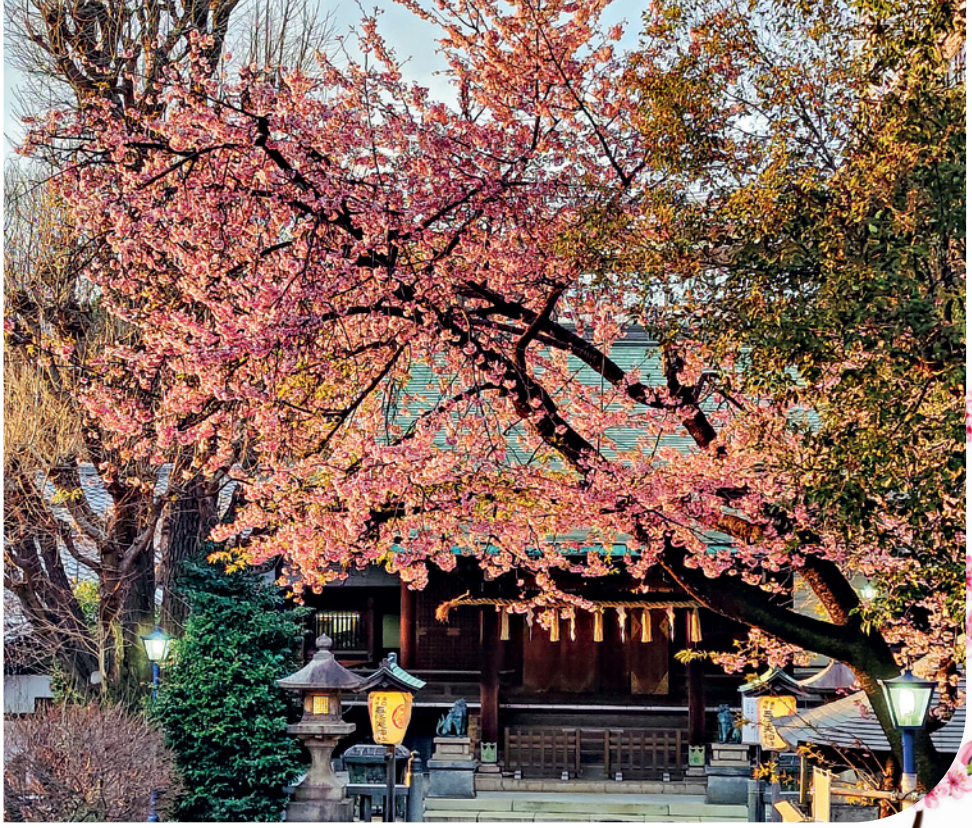
SAKURA CHARM

The cherry blossom season, which has deep roots in Japan's culture, is seen as symbolic of life and the transient nature of being

photographs by **Capt Mike A Johnsingh**







About the photographer:

Capt Mike A Johnsingh is an Air India captain who loves to explore and photograph our planet.

TOP TO BOTTOM
A spectacular sight at Ueno Park, Tokyo; Along the Meguro river in Tokyo; Cherry blossoms seen against the backdrop of the Hiroshima Memorial Peace Museum in Hiroshima.

FACING PAGE
(top and bottom) Pretty sakura *at Ueno Park in Tokyo (for 2026, forecasts indicate that the flowers are expected to bloom in Tokyo and Osaka in late March); The iconic Todai-ji temple in Nara, enveloped with cherry blossoms (if you miss it this month, you can always catch* sakura *in bloom in Sapporo in late April).*





GETTING THERE

Air India flies non-stop to Tokyo (Haneda) from Delhi.

STATE SECRETS

If you love the sights and sounds of the natural world, Odisha is waiting to be explored

words by **Tejashee Kashyap**



A purple heron stands poised on the grassy banks in Mangalajodi; (inset) A Grey-headed Swamphen wades through the lush landscape.

When most people think of Odisha, their minds leap to the grandeur of the Jagannath Temple in Puri, the stunning beaches or the architectural marvel of the Sun Temple at Konark. But beyond temple spires and coastal sands, the state harbours another identity, one of untamed wilderness, and diverse animal and bird life. The best part? These pockets of natural beauty are surprisingly close to Bhubaneswar and offer several delights to enthusiastic visitors.

I witnessed this, first hand, during a quiet winter in February. As the golden rays of sunset fell over the Mangalajodi wetlands (just two hours from Bhubaneswar), I marvelled as the lake glowed in hues of amber and gold. Light shimmered across the still waters as our wooden boat glided forward, the oars carving gentle ripples before pausing midstream. What makes Mangalajodi truly remarkable is the intimacy of the experience—few places in India allow you to see birds from such proximity. While Chilika Lake is celebrated as a birding paradise, its quieter cousin, this freshwater wetland remains relatively lesser known. With its marshes, *reedbeds*, shallow waters, and patches of firm ground, it forms the northern edge of Chilika.

Breathtaking sights

The wetlands lured me with the promise of fantastic sightings. “Keep a lookout for birds and stay still,” said Soumya Mukherji of Svanir Wilderness Ecostay in Dalua, as he guided me through the wild jungle trails. The winter visitor birds from Europe and Asia were unfazed by the boats. “Many international photographers flock here, cameras and lenses at the ready, while local enthusiasts are only just beginning to discover this hidden paradise,” added Mukherji.

Around us, black-winged stilts, sandpipers, purple moorhens, and flocks of black-headed ibis basked in the fading light. I could only grasp the depth of the dense shrubs along the banks when I spotted an adult ruddy shelduck tucked within, its white head peeking out. At other times, you might catch birds breaking into sudden fights over prey, wings beating furiously, and water spraying in their wake.

Four hours away from Bhubaneswar is another water paradise, Bhitarkanika, India’s second-largest mangrove ecosystem, which is thrilling in their rawness. Fed by the waters of the Brahmani, Baitarani, Dhamra, and Patasala rivers, it boasts a labyrinth of tidal creeks, mudflats, and dense green canopies. The true monarch of this ecosystem is the saltwater crocodile. Believed to be nearly hunted to extinction during the days when Kanika kings roamed Bhitarkanika for game, the species was revived through

Tejashee Kashyap

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
A spotted deer in Chandaka-Damapara Wildlife Sanctuary; Olive Ridley turtles come to Odisha, annually, to lay eggs at Rushikulya and Gahirmatha beaches; A saltwater crocodile in Bhitarkanika.

WHERE TO STAY

Mayfair Lagoon, Bhubaneswar
This offers a range of stay options as well as a spa, indoor games, a pool, and a fitness centre.

Svanir Wilderness Ecostay
An eco-friendly homestay, it boasts four cottages with a sit-out constructed from local materials and offers home-cooked meals.

Vivanta Bhubaneswar, DN Square
This pet-friendly stay has 136 rooms and suites, with an all-day diner, bar, patisserie, and rooftop pool.

a conservation programme launched in the 1970s. Today, dozens of these mammoth reptiles can be seen basking on riverbanks or silently lurking along forest paths.

As I drifted along on a quiet boat ride, my eyes stayed sharp for a glimpse of the apex predator. Every splash or rustle on the river made me crane my neck farther. Once my ears tuned into the song of the habitat, the wetland came alive with a symphony of sounds and the splish-splash of fish and frogs in the water. For most visitors, spotting the saltwater crocodile tops the list, and there is no shortage of them here. Yet, the water monitor lizards, notorious predators of crocodile eggs, are just as fascinating to watch.

My guide informed me that the key to getting the most out of a mangrove is keeping your ears alert to the life around you. As I floated along, the riverbanks revealed their tiny secrets, becoming a treasure trove for any wildlife enthusiast. One time, I saw pale ghost crabs scuttling and burrowing into the mud. Another time, mudskippers hopped across the banks with surprising agility. These are tiny fish adapted to life on soft, muddy soil.

Natural wonders

At ground level, beneath the tangled maze of branches, I watched a miniature forest of aerial roots appear and vanish with the rhythm of the tides. In that moment, I was utterly mesmerised and truly humbled by the grandeur of the mangroves. Bhitarkanika has much to offer, and while there are a few walking trails, the best way to explore the mangroves is on a boat safari. For the adventurous ones, the trails provide glimpses of life on foot—spotted deer and *sambar* grazing quietly, wild boars rooting through the undergrowth, and a host of colourful birds flitting across the branches.

Odisha's coastal wilderness is a hidden niche for wildlife lovers. Take Bichitrapur mangrove sanctuary, for instance, where Olive Ridley turtles find their nesting grounds, or Satpada, a quaint village on the south-eastern part of the Chilika lagoon, where I went to watch playful Irrawaddy dolphins. I sailed quietly for hours, camera ready but heart even more so, marvelling as they surfaced gracefully to breathe, then vanished again into the vast expanse of water.

A little further away, I found myself in the green forests of Chandaka-Damapara Wildlife Sanctuary, and was greeted by the unmistakable calls of peacocks. "Look, there is a purple swamphen," Mukherji whispered, pointing ahead as Chandaka revealed yet another layer of its charm. Beyond the deer and wild dogs, the sanctuary opens up as a birdwatcher's paradise. Chandaka is famed for its elephants, and it stretches across rolling hills and *sal* forests, dotted with watchtowers that rise above the lush greenery.

For the traveller, Odisha is a lesson in patience and observation.

GETTING THERE

Air India flies non-stop to Bhubaneswar from Delhi.

Clockwise from top left: Saikiran Bhagavatula; Prabin Kumar Pattnayak; Anup Mukerji

BODY



Two Oceans Marathon

The harmony of movement and balance

76 → FITNESS
82 → EXPERT SPEAK





TOP AND BOTTOM
Runners at the Angkor Empire Marathon; The Two Oceans Marathon is Africa's biggest running event.

MILES WITH A VIEW

From scenic roads and iconic city streets to rugged mountain trails, these world-famous marathons will inspire you

words by **Shrabasti Anindita Mallik**

Marathons today are more than just an endurance sport. For some, they are about a ticking clock and a finish line. For others, it is about where the road leads. City marathons move through notable landmarks and picturesque neighbourhoods, animated by noise and spectators. Trail and scenic marathons, by contrast, slip away from the cacophony—into forests, mountains, and stunning stretches. The pursuit of fitness never changes; the experience, however, does—offering participants a choice between the thrum of a city and the calm of an open trail.

Here are some of the world's most famous marathons—city, scenic, and trails—that also double as perfect reasons to plan a holiday around.

Scenic

Totalsports Two Oceans Ultra Marathon (South Africa)
Now in its 56th edition, this road race is often cited as one of the world's most scenic. The iconic 56-km route follows a breathtaking course around the Cape Peninsula, passing through Muizenberg, St James, Kalk Bay, Hout Bay, Noordhoek, and Constantia, with sweeping coastal and mountain views throughout. The defining stretch is Chapman's Peak, widely regarded as one of the most spectacular coastal drives in the world.

Good to know: **The race begins from Main Road, Newlands; the first batch is scheduled to start at 5.15am (tentative)**
Date: **11th April 2026**

Angkor Empire Marathon (Cambodia)
One of the few scenic races held within a UNESCO World Heritage Site, it runs through the Angkor Archaeological Park. Runners pass some of the site's most striking landmarks, including Bayon Temple and Ta Prohm, with stretches of jungle and river along the way. The historic setting of Siem Reap lends the race an unmatched backdrop.

Good to know: **The race begins at Angkor Wat at 4.30am**
Date: **2nd August 2026**

Top and bottom: Getty Images; Two Oceans Marathon
Dates correct at the time of going to press

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TOP AND BOTTOM
The Paris Marathon winds past many of the city's landmarks; Runners on the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge in Staten Island, New York.

City

Schneider Electric Marathon de Paris (France)

This race takes runners through some of the French capital's most famous avenues and plazas. The classic 42.195-km route passes numerous iconic landmarks, including the Place de la Concorde, Champs Elysées, Rue de Rivoli, Opéra Garnier, and Place de la Bastille, offering gorgeous views of Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Paris and the Eiffel Tower. Last year, it set a new participation record, with 56,950 runners.

Good to know: **The race begins at the foot of the Arc de Triomphe at 8am***
Date: **12th April 2026**



TCS New York City Marathon (USA)

What began in 1970 as four laps around Central Park with 127 participants, has grown into one of the world's largest marathons. Not only did it expand to all five boroughs in 1976 but over the years, has been run by celebrities like Ryan Reynolds, Ashton Kutcher, and Kevin Hart. The course winds through the neighbourhoods of Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx, before ending in Manhattan.

Good to know: **The race starts at Staten Island, at the foot of the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge; time to be confirmed**
Date: **1st November 2026**

ABBOTT WORLD MARATHON MAJORS

This is a series of the world's most renowned marathons: Tokyo, Boston, London, Berlin, Sydney, Chicago, and New York. While each race can be run independently, what sets this apart is the Six Star Medal, introduced in 2016 to honour runners who complete the original six Major Marathons (all except Sydney, which joined the series as the seventh Major in 2024). Runners earn a star for every Major they finish, and those who complete six original Majors are inducted into the Six Star Hall of Fame. There is no time limit—one can complete the Majors at one's own pace.

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TOP AND BOTTOM
Ultra Trail du Mont Blanc traverses three European countries; The SRT Ultra marathon winds past historic Maratha forts.

Trail

Ultra-Trail du Mont Blanc (France, Italy, Switzerland)
Spanning three countries, with sweeping views of the Mont Blanc massif throughout, it is widely regarded as a landmark in the world of trail running. What makes this so undeniably attractive are the peaks (over 4,000m), glaciers, rivers, and valleys that dot this alpine trail. Runners pass through Courmayeur (Italy), and Orsières and Martigny-Combe (both Switzerland). At approximately 170km, it is a formidable test of endurance.

Good to know: **The race starts in Chamonix, France, at 5.45pm**
Date: **28th August 2026**

SRT Ultra (India)
This trail run comes with a generous dose of history. This unique mountain route connects four iconic forts tucked away in the heart of Maharashtra's Western Ghats—Sinhagad, Rajgad, Torna, and Lingana. With no loops along the course, every step unveils new sights—from evergreen mountains to dense forests with abundant flora and fauna. It is best suited for seasoned runners as it involves mountain running with significant ascents and descents.



Good to know:
The race starts in Pune, India; time to be confirmed
Date: **13th December 2026**

DID YOU KNOW?

The original marathon distance was around 40km. The length, however, was standardised at 42.195km during the 1908 London Olympic Games, after the British royal family apparently asked for the race to finish in front of the royal box.

CHASE THE DATE

A global round-up of marathons that enthusiasts can plan for

Seoul Marathon (South Korea)
15th March 2026

Snow Marathon Lahaul (Himachal Pradesh, India)
22nd March 2026

Boston Marathon (USA)
20th April 2026

TCS London Marathon (UK)
26th April 2026

TCS Sydney Marathon (Australia)
30th August 2026

Ladakh Marathon (Ladakh, India)
13th September 2026

Sarmang Dehradun Marathon (Uttarakhand, India)
4th October 2026

Bank of America Chicago Marathon (USA)
11th October 2026

SKF Goa River Marathon (Vasco Da Gama, India)
13th December 2026

Egyptian Marathon (Luxor, Egypt)
8th January 2027

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THE SMART BITE

Astute planning can help you make the right food choices at the airport, ensuring travel is stress-free and enjoyable

words by **Ryan Fernando**

Airports can be daunting with a plethora of food choices, but not all may be the healthiest, so a little planning is crucial

Eating well while travelling is one of the hardest things my clients struggle with. Airports are designed for convenience, speed, and indulgence, not necessarily for nutrition.

Over the years, after guiding athletes, actors, and travellers, I have realised that airport eating does not need to throw your entire routine off track. It just needs planning, awareness and a few smart habits.

Below is a friendly, realistic, India-specific guide you can actually follow the next time you walk into any airport in the world.

Understand your hunger before you enter

Most travellers begin eating at airports out of boredom or stress. Before you cross Security, pause and ask yourself a simple question: "Am I truly hungry or just passing time?" This one moment of clarity can save you from impulsive eating.

If you know you have a long flight or you are leaving home without breakfast or lunch, then you should plan a meal. If you are eating just because the aroma from the food court hit you, take a few minutes. Sometimes, drinking water or taking a short walk can reset your cravings.

Carry a backup snack

The healthiest airport meal is the one you bring yourself. I always advise clients to carry at least one small snack. It saves you money, prevents overeating, and gives you nutritional consistency. Keep it simple and airport–friendly.

Good options include:

- A small box with 15

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LEFT AND RIGHT
Fresh foods like salads are easier to digest when travelling; Carrying a small box of dry fruits is a good idea.

almonds, 15 pistachios, and 2 walnuts
- A fruit like an apple, a pear or a banana
- Homemade *chilla*, idli or a dry sandwich
- A protein bar with minimal added sugar
- Roasted *makhana* or *chana*

When you have something wholesome in your bag, you are less tempted by deep-fried snacks or pastries.

Scan before you sit

Airports offer a mix of international chains, Indian restaurants, and snack kiosks. Instead of choosing the first thing you see, take two minutes to walk around. Most Indian airports now have healthier counters hidden between popular fast-food outlets. You will always find at least one place serving dal-rice, idli-sambar, dosa, roti-sabzi or even *keema* with eggs. When you scan the options first, you get clarity instead of choosing under pressure.

Choose a meal that resembles home food

Your stomach digests familiar foods easily, especially during travel, when stress levels are higher. When possible, select a meal that resembles your home-style plate.

Safer choices include:
- Idli, dosa or *uttapam* with sambar
- *Rajma* or dal with rice
- Plain roti with a dry sabzi
- *Khichdi*
- Grilled or tandoori chicken and salad

Avoid dishes dripping with oil, excessive cream or heavy gravies. They slow

Food and drink items	1 hour before flight	3 hours before flight	6 hours before flight	8 hours before flight	12 hours before flight
Alcohol	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Protein shake	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
Energy bar	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Juice	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
Whole fruit	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Nuts & seeds	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Meal (home-packed)	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗

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LEFT AND RIGHT
Start drinking water even before you reach the airport; Try to eat something close to home-cooked food like rajma chawal.

digestion and will only make you feel sluggish.

Smart hydration Is your secret weapon

Most travellers confuse thirst for hunger. Airports and flights are dehydrating environments. Sip water regularly but avoid drinking too much right before boarding the aircraft; you do not want any discomfort during take-off.

Limit sugary drinks, cold coffees, energy drinks, and packaged juices. Plain water, coconut water or lime water is more than enough.

Stay away from caffeine

India runs on chai and coffee, but too much caffeine before travel can make you jittery or disrupt your sleep cycle, especially at night. One cup is fine. Two cups are manageable. Anything more affects hydration and digestion.

Think twice before drinking alcohol

A beer or a drink before a flight feels relaxing, but alcohol dehydrates you quickly and magnifies jet lag. If you choose to drink, pair it with a proper meal and hydrate well.

Give your gut some support

If you are prone to acidity, bloating or discomfort during travel, a few habits can help:

- Eat two hours before your flight
- Avoid spicy food
- Walk around the airport after eating
- Have a cup of warm water or herbal tea
- Carry a small bottle of jeera or *saunf* to chew on

Make peace with imperfection

You will not find a perfect meal every time. If you do your best 70 per cent of the time, that is already a win. One imperfect meal does not destroy your health goals. What matters is consistency during the rest of your week.

A simple mantra for every traveller

If you remember only one thing, let it be this: eat light, hydrate well, and stay conscious of your choices. Travel should be enjoyable, not stressful. When you nourish yourself well, you arrive feeling fresher, more focused and far more ready for whatever your day holds.

Healthy eating while travelling is possible. You only need the right strategy to achieve it.

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HEALTHY IN-FLIGHT MEALS

Air India offers over 18 special meals onboard, accommodating modern travellers' lifestyles and dietary preferences. Guests can choose home-made comfort food, including homestyle masala dal *khichdi* and homestyle stuffed *paranthas*, in Business Class. There are also plant-band special dietary options like a dedicated vegan, gluten-free, and allergen-conscious menu.

The views expressed in the article are that of the author



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LOUNGE IN LUXURY

The Maharaja Lounge at Delhi's Terminal 3 lays out the red carpet, promising a regal experience

words by
Geetika Sasan Bhandari



Airports, in their very essence, are liminal spaces, characterised by uncertainty and flux. But if you have a beautiful lounge to sit back in and enjoy your transit time, travel could end up becoming soothing. Air India's brand new The Maharaja Lounge at the international pier at Terminal 3 of Indira Gandhi International Airport in Delhi, achieves just that. Could you forget you're at an airport and miss your flight? Absolutely!

Spread across a massive 16,000sqft, the Lounge builds on the airline's new design narrative, using the same warm reds and soft creams to ensure a seamless colour palette from the ground into the air. Global design studio Hirsch Bedner Associates has incorporated elements from the brand logo, like the Vista and the *jaali*, and used it subtly enough to ensure brand recall without it feeling like an imposition. Dispensing with harsh blue lights, the Lounge uses warm tones and natural materials like wood to infuse the space with elegance. Art and craft items from across India depict the brand's legacy and showcase our heritage.

Divided into two distinct areas—the expansive Business Class section and an exclusive First Class section—the lounge can accommodate around 300 guests. You may be tempted to head straight to the Business Class' very attractive, nostalgia-driven The Aviator's Bar. The design draws inspiration from founder JRD Tata's



CLOCKWISE FROM FACING PAGE
Brown and cream hues impart a warm vibe; The buffet counter has a selection of Indian and international options; A quieter zone allows you to relax; The bespoke crockery in the First Class section is embossed with the Maharaja.

historic 1932 flight from Karachi to Bombay, with the wooden slats on the ceiling replicating the propeller of his Puss Moth aircraft. The bar seats are also reminiscent of the aircraft seats, and the brown wall panels carry sepia-toned photographs of JRD Tata, India's first civilian pilot. The cocktails pay homage to different regions, blending local ingredients with premium liquor. I tried the Maharaja Manhattan, infused with black pepper, bourbon, and sweet vermouth—a delightful take on the signature drink. A unique 'Beverage on Wheels' service lets you enjoy bespoke cocktails at your seat while fridges filled with quick bites create snack zones all across the Lounge.

The buffet section has been guided by the philosophy of taking India to the world and bringing the world to India. Thus, it offers an impressive Indian and international selection, including live cooking stations. The cold platters looked particularly tempting and I tried the BBQ Chicken Sausage Salad and the Prawn Salad, both zesty and delicious. From a revolving ice-cream machine to desserts like Gulab Jamun Cheesecake and Kulhad Phirni, this is paradise for someone with a sweet tooth. To digest your meal, you can move to the quieter zone, where there's a lovely tea trolley offering a selection of teas from the Tata stable. Tuck in your cabin baggage into a designated space near the seat and just relax. There's a Serenity area too, with nine recliners, thoughtfully designed to let you catch some shut-eye.

My favourite spot though, was The Globetrotter's Study, ideal if you need to work or just want to get an espresso and read. Designed like a library, it has several titles to browse through, with ample power outlets and high-speed connectivity. A quirky piece of art caught my eye—it's been created with the electric switchboards of 747s.

The First Class section, to the right







CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
With a speakeasy vibe, The Aviator's Bar has a well-curated cellar of wines and whiskeys, and its cocktails like Limitless and Pancha Taara use ingredients sourced from different corners of the country; Serving champagnes and signature cocktails, the Crystal Bar in the First Class Lounge is the perfect spot to wind down before catching your flight; The enclosure in the circular Crystal Bar imparts a shimmering effect and is the cynosure of all eyes.

of the entrance, is a study in luxury, and seats around 30 guests. You'll be met by a striking Crystal Bar, its shimmering effect created from 1,500 pieces of crystal. For your meal, expect a white-gloved à la carte experience, served in tableware embossed with the Maharaja—a touch that is sure to make you smile. Sleep suites and cordoned-off pods with comfortable seats and footstools let you get some rest but the real show-stopper here is the tarmac view—you can watch planes landing and taking off. An AvGeek's delight.

The same thoughtfulness that reflects in the new Boeing 787-9 is on display here too. Washrooms for the specially-abled and a separate nursing room make the space inclusive and welcoming for all. This is the flagship, the first among other such modern lounges set to open around the world.

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explore more



TOP AND BOTTOM
Air India recently received delivery of the first made-for-Air India Boeing 787-9, and three more are expected this year; Business Class offers a fully-flat bed and luxurious amenities to make the flight comfortable.

BESPOKE COMFORT

The first made-for-Air India Boeing 787-9 made a stylish touchdown in India

words by **Geetika Sasan Bhandari**



The excitement in the air was palpable as we made our way to the first Boeing 787-9 (made to Air India's specifications) on its maiden flight from Delhi to Hyderabad's Begumpet airport. This was a special moment: the change that Air India has been talking about was finally visible, with the airline showcasing what it means when it says it aims to be a 'world-class airline with an Indian heart'.

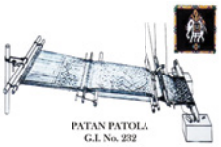
Seamless design narrative

As soon as you step inside, Air India's famed hospitality meets you as the crew directs you to your seat and you can't help but steal a glance at all the swanky new cabin classes. Taking a



PATOLA

BY NIRMAL SALVI



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Delhi - 110024
+91 9824884884

Mumbai

Shop no 1 B, GF, Hormuz Mansion
72-Bhulabhai Desai Road,
Near Breach Candy Hospital,
Mumbai - 400026
+91 9819928299

Hyderabad

Ground Floor, Road No. 36,
Aditya Enclave, OPPOSITE CROMA,
Jubilee Hills, Hyderabad - 500033.
+91 9099043043

patola_bynirmalsalvi





TOP AND BOTTOM
One of the lavish meal options in Business Class; Rose Petal Chevre Delight with Bartlett pears, feta, aged balsamic caviar, and walnuts.

cue from the logo, the interiors use the same colour palette of vibrant reds, warm golds, and rich purples. Premium tactile materials inspired by natural textures are used for the seats, weaving all three cabin classes seamlessly into a cogent design narrative. Other elements from the logo also lend themselves to facets inside the aircraft: the Vista and the India-inspired *jaali* design permeate the aesthetic, appearing subtly on the ceiling, the wall laminates, the pillows, the crockery, and so on. Bespoke is the epitome of luxury and everything has been created keeping comfort and experience in mind.

Take, for example, the chakra-inspired lighting system with 10 settings for night or day. This makes long-haul flying particularly restful. Or the window shades, with five settings, so you can rest or see the clouds outside. Another standout: the 4K QLED HDR touchscreen displays across all cabin classes. I don't think I've ever experienced this kind of interface on a flight. You also have the option to connect your own headset via Bluetooth or use the headphones provided.

Special attention

The 30 luxurious Business Class suites have direct aisle access and convert to a 79" fully-flat bed. Soft surfaces complement well-thought-out additions like a storage compartment with a tilted mirror so you don't need to crane your neck. Meals onboard include options that nod to the destination you're flying to and are complemented by a variety of premium drinks. I began with the Rose Petal Chevre Delight that had Bartlett pears, feta, aged balsamic caviar, and walnuts, and rose petals for a flourish; I loved the contrast of textures. For the main course, I picked Chicken Roulade with goat cheese, Parmesan polenta *galette*, *haricots verts*, and vine baby tomatoes. In one word: wow! A Lotus Biscoff Cheesecake was the perfect end.

The Premium Economy section offers 28 seats with a 7" recline and has individually adjustable calf and leg rests—blissful after navigating massive terminals. A dedicated bottle holder, charging points (Type A and C), and a six-way adjustable headrest make Premium Economy a great option.

Economy gets a bump up too—each of the 238 ergonomic seats has a five-way adjustable headrest and a built-in neck support. The B787-9 isn't just a comfortable flight—it's a taste of luxury at 35,000ft.

JUST FOR YOU

Thoughtful touches exude quiet luxury and elevate the flying experience



Coat hooks
Every seat in Premium Economy and Economy gets one. Business travel just became so much more convenient.



Luxurious amenities
A Forest Essentials kit awaits you in Business Class. Apart from body milk and lip balm, it also boasts a Nidra Tranquil Sleep Spray.



Feature lamp
Light filters gently through this signature *jaali* design feature lamp in Business Class, which comes with adjustable settings.

STAR ALLIANCE

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T&C apply

OUR WINGS

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

Airbus A319
06

Airbus A320neo
94

Airbus A320ceo
04

Airbus A321ceo
13

Airbus A321neo
10

Airbus A350-900
06

Boeing 777-300ER
19

Boeing 777-200LR
01

Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner
07

Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner
26

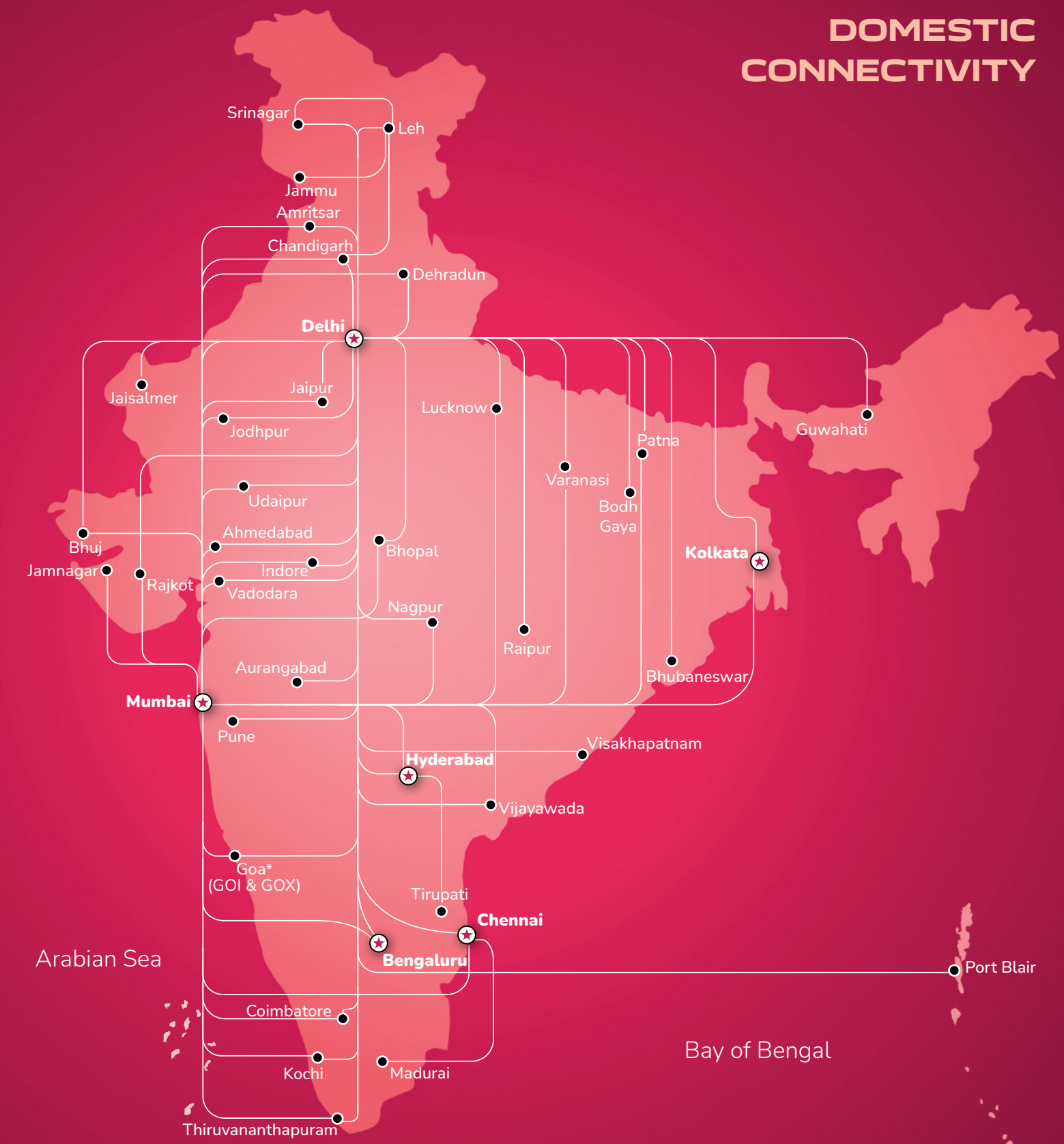
FLEET STRENGTH
186



*Total number as on 13th February 2026;
This fleet count is exclusive of Air India Express
(Air India Group's low-cost carrier)

AIR INDIA

DOMESTIC CONNECTIVITY



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

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

This route map pertains only to destinations served by Air India

Route map as on 13th February 2026

AIR INDIA

INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIVITY

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

Europe

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

UK

Birmingham (BHX)	DEL, ATQ

London

Heathrow (LHR)	DEL, BOM, BLR
Gatwick (LGW)	ATQ, AMD



North America

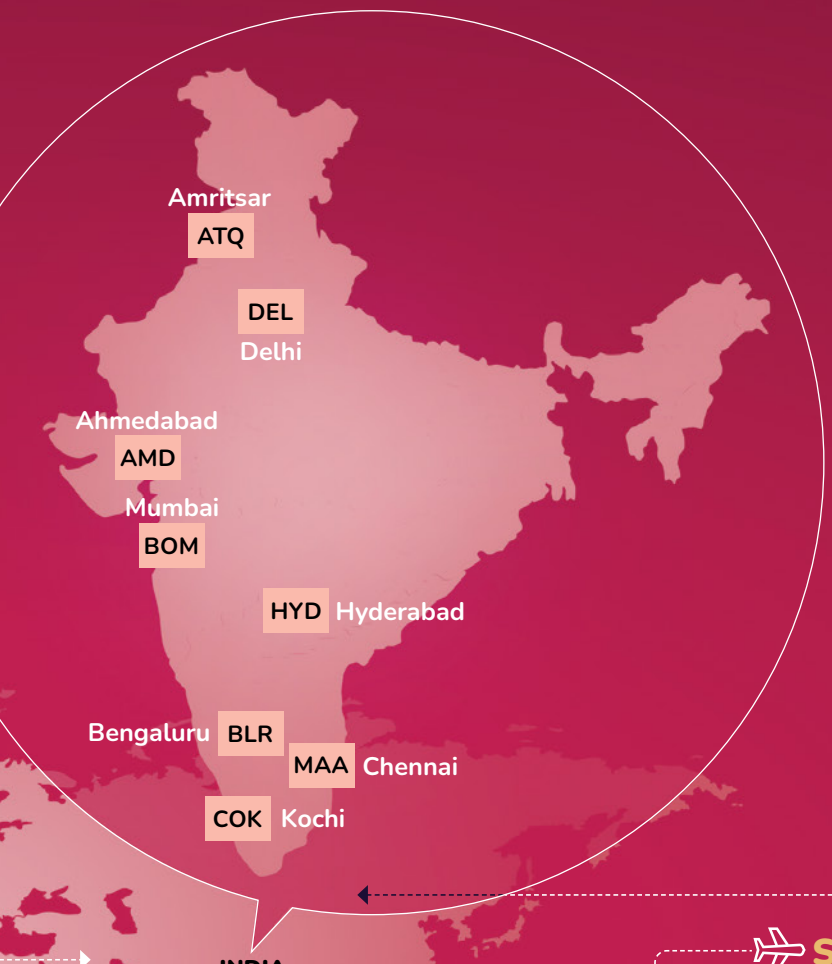
Chicago (ORD)	DEL
Newark (EWR)	DEL, BOM
New York (JFK)	DEL, BOM
San Francisco (SFO)	DEL
Toronto (YYZ)	DEL
Vancouver (YVR)	DEL

Middle East

Dammam (DMM)	BOM
Doha (DOH)	DEL, BOM
Dubai (DXB)	DEL, BOM, COK, HYD, MAA
Jeddah (JED)	DEL, BOM
Riyadh (RUH)	DEL, BOM
Tel Aviv (TLV)	DEL

Connect beyond Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru to over 50 Indian destinations with Air India and Air India Express. Please turn to page 103 to see domestic route connectivity via Air India Express.

Map not to scale. The depiction and use of routes and boundaries are for informative purposes only
This route map pertains only to destinations served by Air India
Route map as on 13th February 2026
*Effective 25th March 2026



Far East

- Hong Kong (HKG) ⟷ DEL
- Seoul (ICN) ⟷ DEL
- Shanghai (PVG) ⟷ DEL
- Tokyo (HND) ⟷ DEL

South East Asia

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

Australia

- Melbourne (MEL) ⟷ DEL
- Sydney (SYD) ⟷ DEL

Indian Subcontinent

- Colombo (CMB) ⟷ DEL, BOM
- Dhaka (DAC) ⟷ DEL, BOM
- Kathmandu (KTM) ⟷ DEL
- Malé (MLE) ⟷ DEL
- Yangon (RGN) ⟷ DEL

Africa

- Mauritius (MRU) ⟷ BOM

ABOARD AIX

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

Airbus A321neo

04

Airbus A320neo

12

Airbus A320ceo

11

FLEET STRENGTH
104

Boeing 737 NG

26

Boeing 737 Max

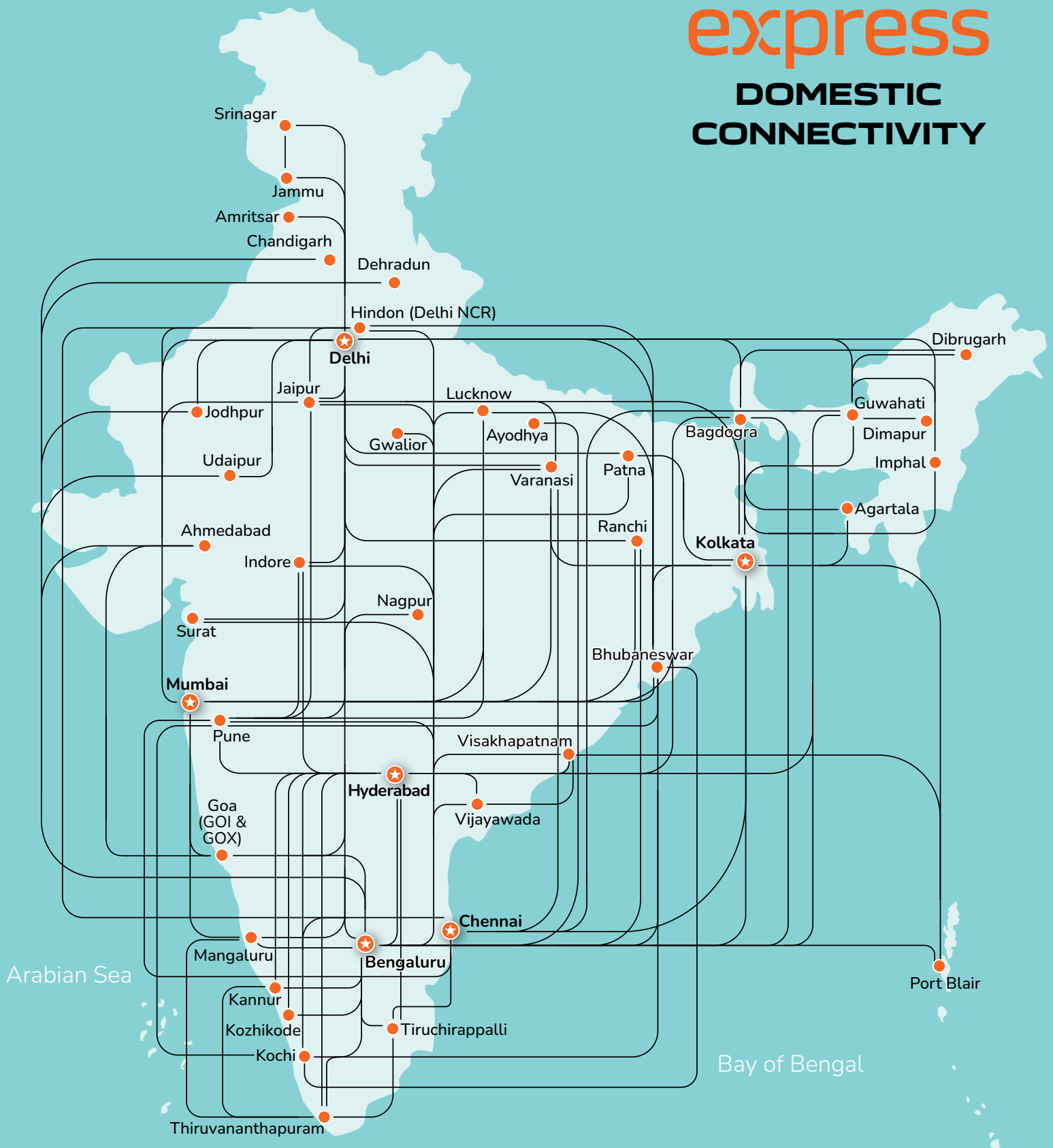
51



*Total number as on 17th February 2026

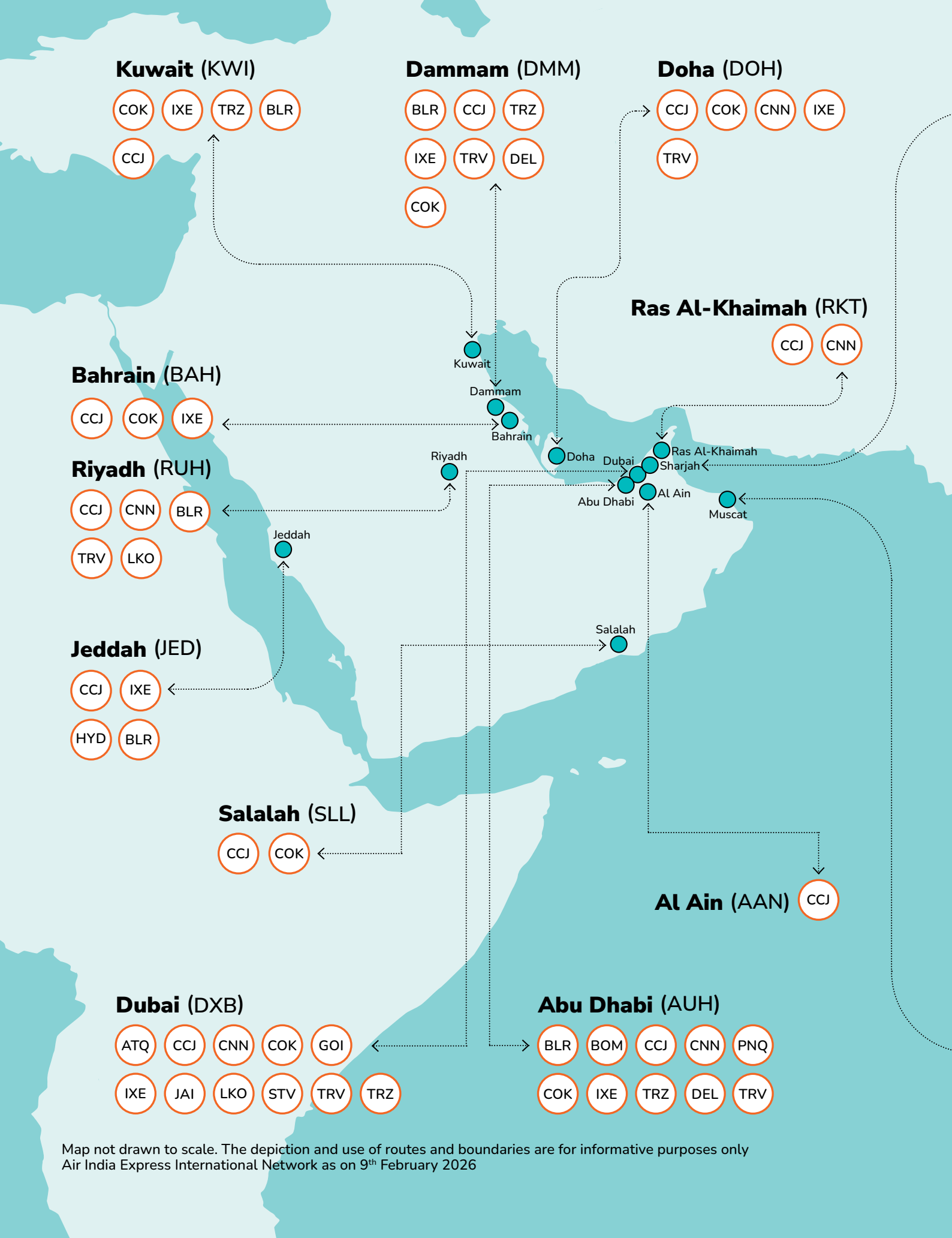
AIR INDIA express

DOMESTIC CONNECTIVITY

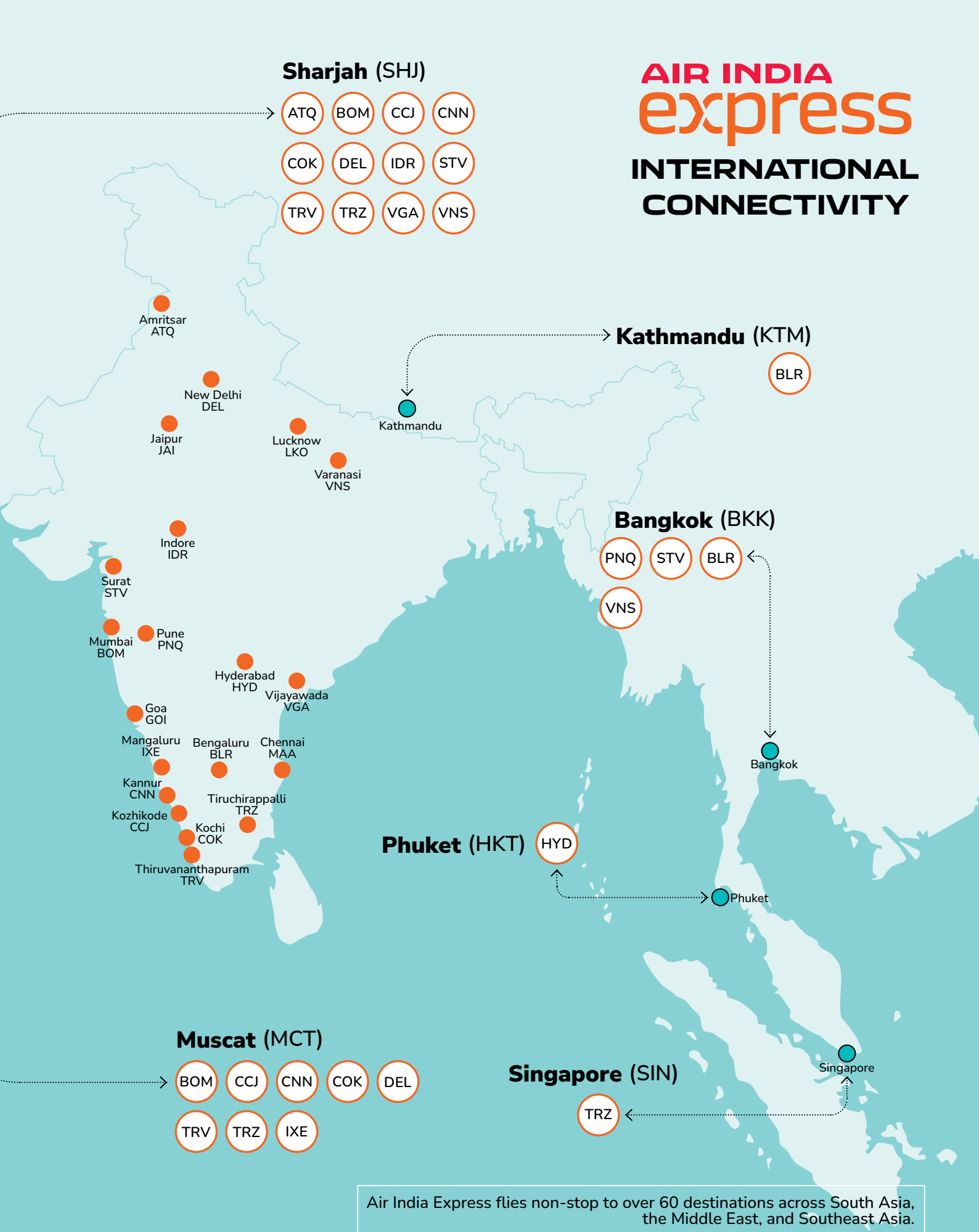


Air India Express is a Tata Enterprise and a subsidiary of Air India, operating over 500 daily flights, connecting 45 domestic and 16 international airports, with a fleet of 110 aircraft.

Map not to scale. The depiction and use of routes and boundaries are for informative purposes only
Route map as on 9th February 2026



Map not drawn to scale. The depiction and use of routes and boundaries are for informative purposes only
Air India Express International Network as on 9th February 2026


AIR INDIA express
INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIVITY
Sharjah (SHJ)
ATQ
BOM
CCJ
CNN
COK
DEL
IDR
STV
TRV
TRZ
VGA
VNS
Amritsar
ATQ
New Delhi
DEL
Jaipur
JAI
Lucknow
LKO
Varanasi
VNS
Kathmandu
Kathmandu (KTM)
BLR
Indore
IDR
Surat
STV
Mumbai
BOM
Pune
PNQ
Hyderabad
HYD
Vijayawada
VGA
Goa
GOI
Mangaluru
IXE
Bengaluru
BLR
Chennai
MAA
Kannur
CNN
Tiruchirappalli
TRZ
Kozhikode
CCJ
Kochi
COK
Thiruvananthapuram
TRV
Bangkok (BKK)
PNQ
STV
BLR
VNS
Bangkok
Phuket (HKT)
HYD
Phuket
Muscat (MCT)
BOM
CCJ
CNN
COK
DEL
TRV
TRZ
IXE
Singapore (SIN)
TRZ
Singapore
Air India Express flies non-stop to over 60 destinations across South Asia, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia.

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- Claim Maharaja Points for past flights

T&C apply. Image for representation purpose only.

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Explore more ways to earn with our expanding partner network

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Magnify | pnb ...the name you can BANK upon! | RBL BANK apno ka bank | standard chartered (UAE)

SOUTH INDIAN Bank EXPERIENCE NEXT-GEN BANKING | यूनियन बैंक Union Bank of India Good people to bank with | YES BANK | (Co-Branded Card) SBI card

Star Alliance Partner Airlines

AIR CANADA | Lufthansa | SINGAPORE AIRLINES | SWISS | UNITED

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CULTURAL TAKE-OFF

Air India Express turned the tarmac at Wings India 2026 into a celebration of music, heritage, and connection





TOP TO BOTTOM
Padma Bhushan awardee Usha Uthup regaled the audience at Wings India 2026 against the backdrop of Air India Express' first factory line-fit Boeing 737-8, VT-RNT; Artistes from across the country were part of the musical line-up; Multi-genre band Thaikkudam Bridge took to the stage.

On the third day of Wings India 2026, the mood at Begumpet Airport in Hyderabad moved well beyond business.

Air India Express turned the tarmac into a vibrant cultural stage, with Padma Bhushan awardee Usha Uthup delivering a rousing live performance against the backdrop of the airline's first factory line-fit Boeing 737-8, VT-RNT.

The VT-RNT, dressed in livery inspired by Parsi Gara embroidery, stood as a visual extension of the airline's 'Tales of India' initiative, which showcases art forms across its fleet.

Thaikkudam Bridge, the pan-India band, joined Uthup, making it a true collaborative and spirited performance on stage. The band brought together a curated experience for Air India Express, featuring musicians from Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Assam, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Punjab, and Kashmir. The showcase reflected the airline's belief that travel is not just about mobility but about enabling cultural immersion and shared human experiences.

The airline's Domestic Connectivity award at the event underscored the larger narrative: expansion is not only about new aircraft and routes, but about strengthening bonds between communities.

AIR INDIA

VISTA STREAM | 1,300+ HOURS OF ENTERTAINMENT

Stream from Bollywood blockbusters to Hollywood hits and more on your personal device. Scan to watch now.

- Turn on airplane mode
- Connect to the 'Vista' network
- Scan the QR code or visit **https://byod.airindia.com**



TROUBLESHOOTING

If unable to connect

- Switch the Wi-Fi off and then on again.
- Restart your device and repeat the steps.

If unable to access content

- Close and restart your browser, then type **https://byod.airindia.com.**
- If this does not work, try an alternative browser and type **https://byod.airindia.com.**
- Power your device off and on, then repeat the steps.

SCAN TO STREAM

Vista Stream is available on select widebody aircraft and begins once the seat belt sign is switched off. Service excludes newly inducted B777 and A350 aircraft. Content availability may vary.

900+ DESTINATIONS AND COUNTING

Access an extended worldwide network with Air India's Codeshare and Interline partners

CODESHARE*

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Lufthansa
SriLankan Airlines
avianca
air astana
EVA AIR
SINGAPORE AIRLINES
SWISS
TAP AIR PORTUGAL
Kenya Airways
CROATIA AIRLINES
AIR MAURITIUS
Virgin australia
AIR NEW ZEALAND
Austrian
airBaltic
Saudia
ICELANDAIR

INTERLINE

Access Rail
Aegean Airlines
Aeroflot
Air Cambodia
Air China
Air Europa
Air France
Air Seychelles
Air Tanzania
Alaska Airlines
Avianca Costa Rica
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Azerbaijan Airlines
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China Airlines
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Emirates
Etihad Airways
Fiji Airways
Finnair
FlexFlight World Ticket
Flydubai
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Hong Kong Airlines
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ITA Airways
Japan Airlines
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JetBlue
JetStar Australia
Juneyao Airlines
Kam Air
KLM
KM Malta Airlines
Korean Air
Kuwait Airways
Lufthansa City Airlines
Malaysia Airlines
Maldivian
MIAT Mongolian
Myanmar Airways
Nepal Airlines
Oman Air
Philippine Airlines
Qantas
Qatar Airways
Royal Brunei Airlines
Royal Jordanian
Rwand Air
Scandinavian Airlines
Scoot
Shenzhen Airlines
South African Airways
Starlux Airlines
Thai Airways
Turkish Airlines
Uganda Airlines
United
Uzbekistan Airways
Vietnam Airlines
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*Both Codeshare and Interline Partners
Codeshare and Interline partnerships as on 20th February 2026



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Take a connecting flight to Taif, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, with our Codeshare Partner, Saudia





Take a taxi to Mishaal Al-Sufyani Rose Farm, Taif, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



ABOUT THE ATTRACTION:

Rose farms in this city cultivate the legendary Taif rose, celebrated for its heady fragrance and precious essential oils. Among them, the family-run Mishaal Al-Sufyani Rose Farm stands apart for its centuries-old distillation techniques, rolling rose fields, and warm hospitality. In spring, guests can watch rosewater being made, wander through the fields in full bloom, and take home bottles of rose oil and perfume.

Shutterstock

YOUR ATTENTION, PLEASE



REGULATORY INFORMATION FOR ALL INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS LANDING INTO INDIA

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

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

MISSION LIFE

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

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

AIR-SEWA

नागर विमानन मंत्रालय ने अपने एयर-सेवा पोर्टल को अपग्रेड किया है जो उपयोगकर्ताओं को ऑनलाइन शिकायतें जमा करने, ट्रैक करने और भारत में हवाई यात्रा के बारे में जानकारी प्राप्त करने की अनुमती 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 प्रमुख हवाई अड्डों जैसे दिल्ली, बेंगलुरु, वाराणसी, पुणे, कोलकाता, विजयवाड़ा, हैदराबाद, अहमदाबाद, मुंबई, जयपुर, लखनऊ, गुवाहाटी, कोची और अन्य के लिए, डिजी यात्रा की सुविधा शुरू की गई है। डिजी यात्रा ऐप डाउनलोड करके खुद को नामांकित करें, और इन हवाई अड्डों पर बिना रुकावट के यात्रा का अनुभव करें।

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

PROHIBITION OF AERIAL/ GROUND PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEOGRAPHY, AND CARRIAGE OF SENSORY EQUIPMENT – SECURITY GUIDELINES AT DEFENCE AIRFIELDS

(IAF JUAs - Joint User Airfields)

हवाई अड्डों पर और उड़ान संचालन के दौरान, विशेष रूप से 10,000 फीट से नीचे हवाई और ज़मीनी फोटोग्राफी और वीडियोग्राफी पर प्रतिबंध है। यह प्रतिबंध टर्मिनलों, विमानों और हवाई अड्डे के आसपास के क्षेत्रों सहित विभिन्न स्थानों पर लागू होता है, जैसे की:

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

Please be informed that aerial or ground photography and videography are strictly prohibited at all times during a passenger's travel, including when he or she is inside the terminal; in vehicles en route to or from the aircraft; outside the aircraft; during landing; at the airport; during pushback, taxiing, take-off, and while the aircraft is flying below 10,000 feet.

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We are pleased to inform you about the Government of India's Trusted Traveller Programme for Indian passport and OCI card holders. You can now complete your immigration quickly through automated e-gates by registering at *ftittp.mha.gov.in* – it's free and takes just 30 seconds.

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

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

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

SEAMLESS TRAVEL

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

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

HOW TO REGISTER

Applicant will apply online for Trusted Traveller Programme (TTP) Service (*www.ftittp.mha.gov.in*)

Processing of Application by Bureau of Immigration (BoI)

Biometrics enrolment of the approved applicants

Applicant is registered under TTP

Passengers are fast tracked through e-gates

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A TRAVELLER'S TALE





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Fashion designer **Kunal Rawal** loves exploring new facets of one of his favourite cities—London









MEMORIES FOR LIFE

I have studied and lived in London and it's my place of comfort. There's a lot of nostalgia attached to the nooks and crannies of the city. It's an ever-evolving global metropolitan zone, so there's always something new to explore. I love outdoor time—walking and discovering new places. Last December, when I went back for New Year's, we even got snow!

MY LOCAL EXPERIENCE

Stores and boutiques in Soho are great for clothes, art, and collectibles. Brick Lane market is another bustling shopper's paradise. For apparel, one can head to Dover Street Market. I like buying headgear from A Child of the Jago and Goorin Bros.

I RECOMMEND

With London having a great pub culture, bar hopping in Soho is always fun. The Victoria & Albert Museum is a must-see if you are someone who gets excited by all things creative. Finally, drive to the Cotswolds and stay in the area for a weekend at one of the beautiful manors and boutique hotels.

—As told to ***Deepali Dhingra***

Kunal Rawal: Self; Rest: Shutterstock

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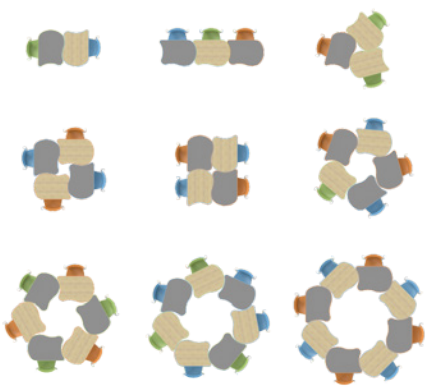

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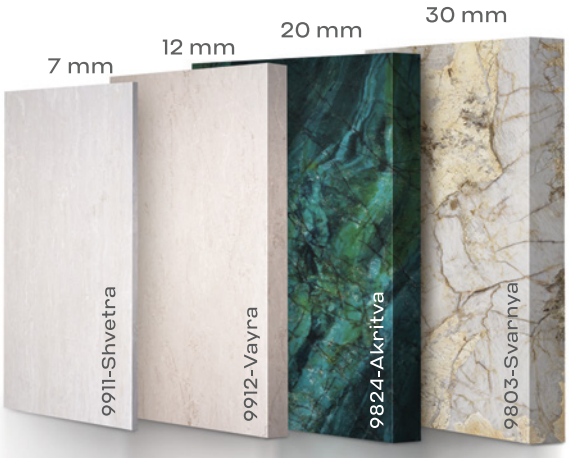

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