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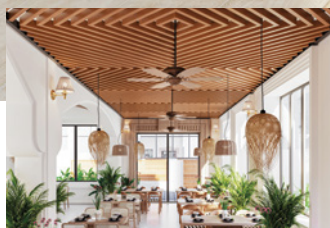
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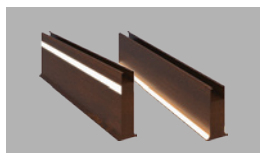
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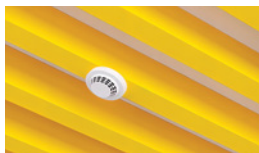
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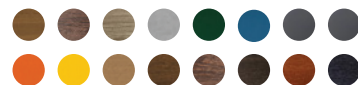


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# EDITOR'S NOTE



To begin with, we are overwhelmed by the love we have been receiving for *Namaste.ai* on social media. Your positive feedback, when we re-imagined the magazine with a new cover design and new sections—Mind, Body, and Soul—has been encouraging.

With this inspiration, we delve into the theme of this month—Hideaways. In a relentless world that's constantly on the move, finding stillness can feel like a luxury, and the chance to pause and reflect can be quite transformative. This is why our Cover Story invites you to explore soulful spots designed to help you reconnect with what truly matters—the essence of ourselves. At Hydra, an island that doesn't allow wheels, you can truly disengage; amidst the apple orchards in Fagu, each moment unfolds at its own unhurried pace. In a log cabin nestled in the woods of Norway, you can appreciate how being amidst nature is so restorative, and in Pulau Ubin, just a short boat ride from Singapore, you can spend the day cycling lazily as you shake off your urban stresses.

In Mind this month, actor-author Manav Kaul writes on how his travels spark his creativity, often guiding his pen. Finding balance between ourselves and our environment is key, and in Body, wildlife photographer Aarzoo Khurana recounts her tale of pushing herself beyond her limits in trying to capture the snow leopard.

Whether you're looking to go off the grid or chase your passion, let us be the wings that fuel your wanderlust.

Hope you keep flying with us and reading *Namaste.ai*!

— **Namaste.ai** Editorial Team

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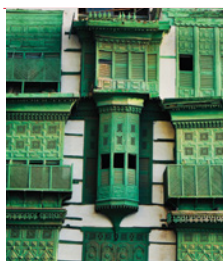
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Manish Malhotra on his  
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Jeddah is a visitor's delight

### On The Cover

A treetop cabin in Norway

### Cover image courtesy

Andreas Kokkvoll/ Visitnorway.com

\*All pages marked as Special Feature are paid advertorials

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# CONTRIBUTORS

## → Manav Kaul

@manavkaul

A popular face in theatre, films, and web series, Manav is also a filmmaker. But it is writing—plays, poetry, and stories—that gives him most joy. That, and escaping to the mountains every now and then. He enjoys reading as much as writing, with over a dozen books to his name.

*(Manav writes on his recent trip to Europe)*

**page 58**



## ← David Bowden

David is a photojournalist specialising in travel, wine, trains, and the environment. While Australian, he has lived in Asia for three decades and has written numerous travel articles and books. Eating and dining out are integral to his global travels, especially in his adopted home of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

*(David offers a guide to eight must-try delicacies of Kuala Lumpur)* **page 28**



## ← Aarzoo Khurana

@aarzoo\_khurana

A Delhi-based wildlife photographer and videographer, Aarzoo has spent 12 years capturing the wonders of nature. She is the first person to cover all 55 tiger reserves in India.

*(Aarzoo documents the challenges of capturing Himalayan wildlife, including the snow leopard)* **page 84**



## → Shahnaz Bakshi

@shahbak12

Shahnaz is a seasoned writer and editor with extensive experience in print and digital media. Based in Delhi-NCR, she enjoys crafting compelling stories on travel, lifestyle, and hospitality.

*(Shahnaz writes on sleep therapy treatments at wellness properties)*

**page 88**



## ← Pradeep Sangwan

@pradeep\_sangwan\_

The founder of Healing Himalayas Foundation, Pradeep is an environmentalist dedicated to tackling plastic pollution and climate change in the mountains. Since 2016, his initiative has led over 1,000 clean-up drives and removed more than 1,633 tonnes of waste.

*(Pradeep tells us how one can be a responsible visitor when travelling to the hills)* **page 74**





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# CHECKLIST

Everything worth checking out

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# A LIVING HERITAGE

Jeddah, affectionately known as the “bride of the Red Sea”, is a city in Saudi Arabia that marries its vibrant present with a storied past

words by **Nivedita Jayaram Pawar**

*Situated by the Red Sea, Jeddah has been a major port in the region for centuries*

🕒 08:00AM

## **Historic stop**

📍 Al-Balad

This UNESCO World Heritage Site's antique residences are decked out with ornate wooden windows or *rawashin*, that provided ventilation and also privacy. The area hums with souks and museums. Head to the Al Roshan Café for Arabic coffee.

🕒 11:15AM

## **Relics of the past**

📍 Tayebat Museum

For a fascinating peek into Jeddah's 2,500-year-old history, visit this museum. It houses well-curated artefacts, including a miniature recreation of the pilgrimage to Makkah, exquisite art, weapons, and ancient pottery. The building is designed in the traditional Hijazi architectural style.

🕒 01:00PM

## **A gourmet stop**

📍 Lunch at Al Basali Seafood Restaurant

Head to this family-owned restaurant in Bab Makkah Souq that has been serving fresh fish since 1949. Do try the grouper and *hareed* (parrotfish) served with fragrant *sayadiah* rice, *dakous* (tamarind sauce) and tahini.

🕒 03:00PM

## **Souvenir shopping**

📍 Souq Qabil

The shops of this souk, which date back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, are filled with gold, spices, tea sets, frankincense, handicrafts, and other traditional goods. Named after a wealthy merchant, this is also home to the remarkable Akkash Mosque, which offers breathtaking views of the market.



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checklist on the clock

## MEALS AND MEMORIES

For an authentic Saudi meal with a side of history, book a private dining experience with Abir AbuSulayman, Saudi Arabia's first female tour guide. The meal starts with coffee, followed by a spread of tabbouleh, kababs, *bukhari* rice, and date cake.

## GETTING THERE

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

## STYLISH STAYS

### 1/ Shangri-La Jeddah

Located on the new Jeddah Waterfront, this offers a luxe stay for both business and leisure travellers.

### 2/ Shirvan Hotel City Yard

Nestled in the residential Ar Rawdah neighbourhood, this design-centric hotel has excellent F&B options.

### 3/ Jeddah Homes Boutique Hotel

Located in the Um Al-Summaq neighbourhood, this property offers 32 suites.

## CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

The cuisine in Jeddah shows the influence of several cultures, reflecting its history as an active port; The Tayebat Museum; The unique architecture of Al-Balad.

🕒 04:30PM

### Family thrills

📍 Al Shallal Theme Park

From high adrenaline roller coasters to kid-friendly rides, they've got all the bases covered, making it a perfect family outing. The park also offers a high-altitude skating rink, an Amazon Forest-themed area, a zero-gravity ride that mimics floating, fun electronic games, and restaurants.

🕒 07:00PM

### Sunset interlude

📍 Jeddah Waterfront

For a slice of local life with the side of a stunning sunset, head to this promenade. The cafés, bakeries, and ice-cream parlours offer outdoor seating with mesmerising views of the Red Sea. The area is also dotted with fountains, gardens, and play parks. Watch out for extraordinary works by such legendary artists as Henry Moore, Jean Miró, and others.

🕒 08:00PM

### Spiritual pause

📍 Al Rahma Floating Mosque

Situated at the edge of the Waterfront, this offers a stunning illusion. It is the world's first mosque built on the sea's surface, so, when the tide is high, it seems to drift on the Red Sea. It is constructed in the form of a turquoise-domed structure with a white minaret and boasts 52 outer domes.

🕒 09:00PM

### Arabian flavours

📍 Al-Sadah

Plan a delicious finale with a lovely meal at this local gem on Nahdat At Talif road. Choose from floor seating or private rooms with dining tables. Rice and chicken dishes are the heroes here, particularly *kabsa*, a fragrant rice dish, and *madghout*, a dish where the meat is slow-cooked in a pit. What elevates this experience is the signature green sauce and the fried onions.



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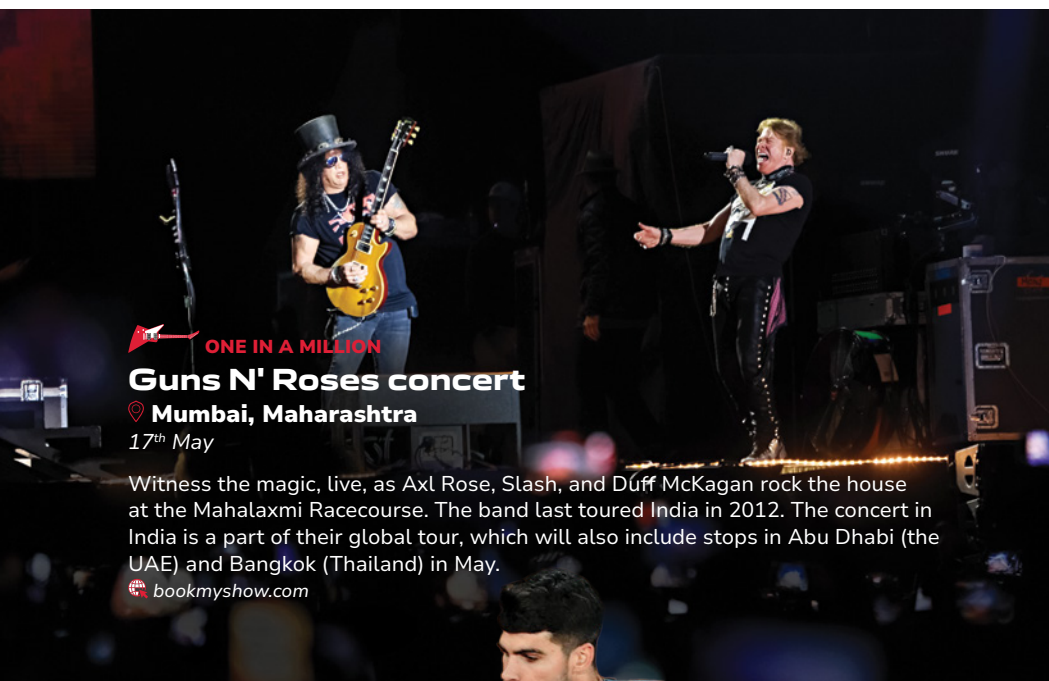
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# GET GOING

Attend a rock concert, watch a Grand Slam, and enjoy a festival of lights and music



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## Guns N' Roses concert

📍 Mumbai, Maharashtra

17<sup>th</sup> May

Witness the magic, live, as Axl Rose, Slash, and Duff McKagan rock the house at the Mahalaxmi Racecourse. The band last toured India in 2012. The concert in India is a part of their global tour, which will also include stops in Abu Dhabi (the UAE) and Bangkok (Thailand) in May.

🎟️ [bookmyshow.com](https://bookmyshow.com)



## JARDINS JARDIN

📍 Paris, France

21<sup>st</sup>–25<sup>th</sup> May

For the 20<sup>th</sup> edition of this event, Chanel is once again unveiling its garden at Villa Windsor Park, dedicated to fragrances.

[jardinsjardin.com](https://jardinsjardin.com)



## VIVID SYDNEY

📍 Sydney, Australia

23<sup>rd</sup> May–14<sup>th</sup> June

Billed as an "annual celebration of creativity, innovation and technology", this will feature art installations and 3D light projections, along with music shows, food stalls, and engaging events.

[vividssydney.com](https://vividssydney.com)



## A GAME OF ACES

## French Open

📍 Paris, France

25<sup>th</sup> May–8<sup>th</sup> June

Head to the Stade Roland-Garros to catch all the action of the only Grand Slam tournament played on clay courts. The 22-year-old Carlos Alcaraz will seek to defend this title, as will 2024 women's champion Iga Świątek.

🎟️ [rolandgarros.com](https://rolandgarros.com)





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# GO DOWN MEMORY LANE

Bath, in England, celebrates the 250<sup>th</sup> birthday of famed novelist Jane Austen this year

## CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

The next Jane Austen Festival Regency Costumed Promenade will take place in September; No.1 Royal Crescent will host a new temporary exhibition in honour of the festivities (July–November); Several events in 2025 will allow visitors to dress up in heritage costumes.



## GETTING THERE

Air India flies non-stop to London Heathrow from Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru and to London Gatwick from Ahmedabad, Goa (Mopa), and Amritsar.

**A** UNESCO World Heritage Site and a location particularly linked to the Regency era, the town of Bath is marking the 250<sup>th</sup> birthday of renowned novelist Jane Austen with a host of celebrations all through 2025.

Austen's associations with the area are many—she lived there from 1801 to 1806, all six of her novels mention Bath, and two of them (*Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey*) are based in the city.

To really immerse in the spirit of the festivities, visitors can explore

the Austen-themed exhibition and events at Bath Abbey and catch *The Complete Works of Jane Austen, Abridged* at The Mission Theatre on 15<sup>th</sup> May.

Another must-attend event is the session with acclaimed historian Lucy Worsley at The Forum on 27<sup>th</sup> May. Don't miss the Persuasion Nautical-Themed Summer Ball at The Guildhall on 31<sup>st</sup> May, where guests have to be dressed in the style of the Regency or wear 18<sup>th</sup> Century costumes.

All through 2025; [visitbath.co.uk](http://visitbath.co.uk)





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# HOLDING FORT(H)

An open-air sculpture exhibition, set in the environs of a historic Rajput citadel, is a striking fusion of history and contemporary art

words by **Shrabasti A Mallik**



**A**n enormous stainless steel geometric piece, resembling the sun, greets visitors at the entrance corridor of Jaipur's Jaigarh Fort. Named *SOL* and inspired by the Jantar Mantar, it is a site-specific installation created by Vishal Dhar for the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of The Sculpture Park, now on display at this ancient fortress.

This unique exhibit is special; beginning with the fact that the multimedia displays are hosted at Vijay Garhi, a courtyard inside the Fort that has been opened to visitors after 120 years. It is also for the first time that the event has moved from the courtyard of the Madhavendra Palace in Nahargarh Fort. Furthermore, there are 16 installations on view by celebrated artists, including two never-before-seen works by Subodh Gupta (*Kingdom of Earth* and *Cosmic*

*Calm*), another site-specific piece by Afra Al Dhaheer (*A line for the eye to wander*), and a geometric piece by Ashiesh Shah (*White Metal Patra Stambh*).

Meticulously curated by renowned gallerist Peter Nagy, this edition is a collaborative initiative by The Saat Saath Arts Foundation and Jaipur Centre for Art (co-founded by Maharaja Sawai Padmanabh Singh of Jaipur), under the aegis of the Jaigarh Public Charitable Trust.

Ongoing till 15<sup>th</sup> October 2025



## GETTING THERE

Air India flies non-stop to Jaipur from Mumbai.



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT**  
*Superposition* by Alicia Kawde; *Cosmic Calm* by Subodh Gupta; *White Metal Patra Stambh* by Ashiesh Shah; *SOL* by Vishal Dhar.





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# FUTURE CALLING

These concept smartphones and innovations stole the show at the recent Mobile World Congress in Barcelona

words by **Roobina Mongia**

## ← XIAOMI 15 ULTRA

This is the new zoom photography king, packing in a Leica-engineered camera system with three 50MP sensors and a massive 200MP telephoto lens that lets you zoom all the way up to 120x. But that's not all—when you zoom beyond 20x, an AI-powered zoom enhancer kicks in to deliver sharper, more detailed shots.

**Why buy:** Superlative camera quality, ultra-long battery life  
US\$1,155

## → REALME ULTRA CONCEPT

Imagine carrying lenses for your smartphone instead of a bulky DSLR. This device is designed to take smartphone photography to a whole new level. It features a revolutionary lens mounting system that allows you to attach professional lenses directly onto the phone—just like a DSLR. But don't worry, the phone still has its own dual-camera setup for everyday shots, so you won't need to attach a lens for day-to-day photography.

**Why buy:** This phone will redefine what's possible in mobile photography, and it could change the game when (and if) it becomes a reality.







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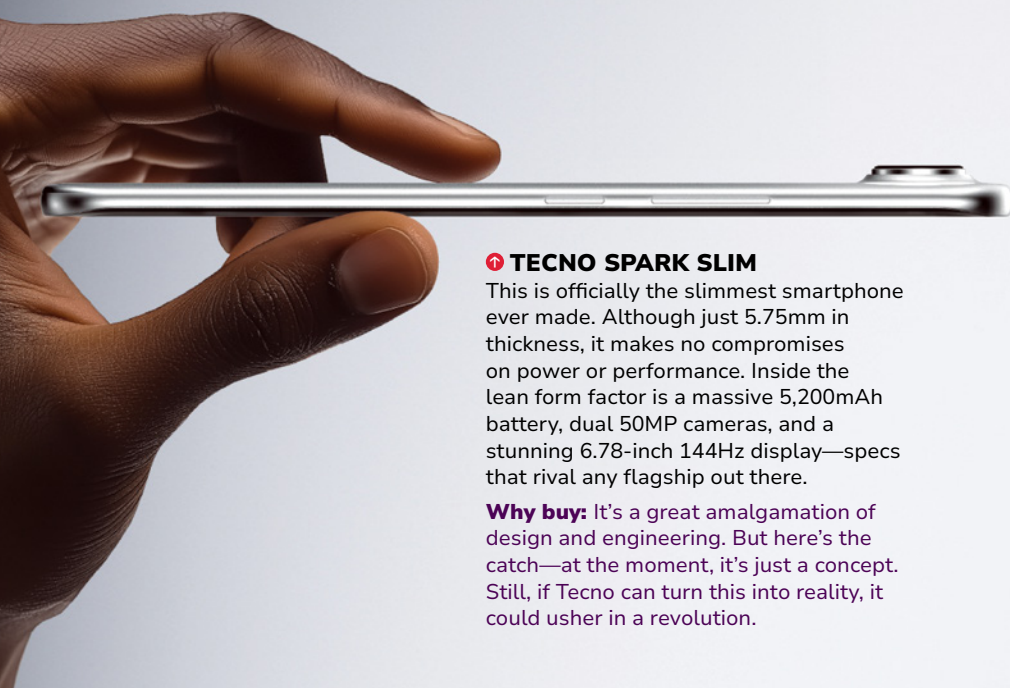
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#### ↑ TECNO SPARK SLIM

This is officially the slimmest smartphone ever made. Although just 5.75mm in thickness, it makes no compromises on power or performance. Inside the lean form factor is a massive 5,200mAh battery, dual 50MP cameras, and a stunning 6.78-inch 144Hz display—specs that rival any flagship out there.

**Why buy:** It's a great amalgamation of design and engineering. But here's the catch—at the moment, it's just a concept. Still, if Tecno can turn this into reality, it could usher in a revolution.

## LENOVO THINKBOOK FLIP AI PC

*This concept device, with an 18.1-inch display, bends and flips into five modes—vertical, compact, share, tablet, and a distraction-free reading mode. It is powered by an Intel Core Ultra 7.*



#### → NOTHING (3A) PRO

In today's 'smartphone sea of sameness', nothing—read Nothing (3a) Pro—stands out. With the Glyph Interface on the back, it boasts a 5,000mAh battery and three cameras, including a periscope one. Powered by Snapdragon 7s Gen 3, and 8GB RAM, it's built for gaming and heavy multitasking.

**Why buy:** Clean UI, AI-powered Essential Space, Unique Transparent Design  
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# MAGIC OF HER WORDS

Author **Shalaka Kulkarni**  
on how she found her calling  
in literature

## From journalism and corporate communications to writing...

I have been scribbling poems in school notebooks, spinning yarns from overheard conversations, and crafting editorial essays that felt like whispers from the world, since I was eight. Journalism, corporate communications, and neuromarketing were vital pit stops that gave me structure, rigour, and the ability to truly see through people and hold space.

## Writing for me is...

I write, rest of the times, I am wrong (that's my social media bio). I believe writing is the only rebellion soft enough to stay. For

me, it is nature. It's where language tilts its head and meaning is allowed to wander. From poetry, flash fiction, tech blogs to VC newsletters, I have explored varied genres. As I say, *main aasmaan likhungi, aap ishq samajhna* (I shall write the limitless skies; you may read it as love).

## My latest book *Tadow* is...

It's a love letter to the everyday extraordinaires—a collection of 67 flash fiction stories. All the stories are born out of a creative experiment where I asked people to share five random words as prompts. The word *Tadow*, inspired by the FKJ and Masego song, carries the essence of “expressing the inexplicable synchronicity of life and moments of subjectivity and wonder”.

## Authors who have inspired me

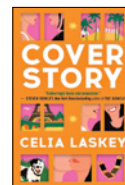
I could fill a library with just gratitude. I'm fond of Sudha Murty, Ruskin Bond, Gulzaar saab, Namita Gokhale, Janice Pariat, and Meghna Pant, among other Indian authors. And my mother, Varsha Kulkarni, who inspires me to live boldly, feel deeply, and write unapologetically.

— As told to **Shrabasti A Mallik**



67 Vivid Echoes of Modern India: *Tadow*

## NEW ON THE SHELF



### COVER STORY (Celia Laskey)

Join Ali, a publicist for Hollywood stars, as she grapples to hide a client's secret identity. Will she succeed or follow her heart?

Hachette Book Group; ₹1,615



### THE HOUSE OF HIDDEN MEANINGS: A MEMOIR (RuPaul)

From this legendary pop icon comes an unabashedly honest, yet tender account of discovery, value of a chosen family, and self-acceptance.

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# 8 DISHES TO TRY IN KL



Whether it's streetside stalls or atmospheric restaurants high above Kuala Lumpur, the food in this buzzing city is always top-notch

words by  
**David Bowden**

## ➔ BAK KUT TEH

Meaning 'meat bone tea', this is a popular Chinese-Malaysian dish. It originated as a medicinal tonic and comfort food for Chinese labourers working in KL. Pork bones are cooked in a fragrant broth of herbs and spices, and it comes in two variants—the herbal Klang style and the peppery Teochew version. It is best enjoyed with rice, *youtiao* (fried dough), and a side of braised tofu or mushrooms. It is available in outlets closer to the city centre.

**Where to try it:** Sun Fong Bak Kut Teh, 43a Jalan Medan Imbi

## ➔ ROTI CANAI

A flaky, fried flatbread, this is an affordable Malaysian breakfast staple rooted in Indo-Muslim heritage. It's served plain or with fillings like egg (*roti telur*), banana or sardines. Traditionally enjoyed with *dhal*, chicken curry or sambal, it is relished for its crispy edges and soft, chewy centre. The dough, made from flour, water, and ghee, is expertly flipped and stretched by chefs, much to the enjoyment of first-time diners.

Teh Tarik, strong, sweet tea prepared with condensed milk, is the perfect accompaniment.

**Where to try it:** Valentine Roti, Jalan Semarak





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## SATAY

This is a Malaysian street food favourite featuring skewered, grilled meats, including chicken, marinated in spices and served with a rich, spicy, and thick peanut-based sauce. Sticks of satay are barbecued over flaming charcoal to impart its distinctive flavour. Accompaniments include *ketupat* (rice cakes), sliced cucumber, and onions. Believed to have originated in Java, and now embraced across Southeast Asia, satay was introduced to Malaysia by Indonesian traders and adapted for local palates.

**Where to try it:** Satay Station, 55 Jalan A, Jalan Kampung Pandan



## CENDOL

A sweet treat—and the perfect way to cool down in the tropics. It is made with shaved ice (often shaved on ancient manually-operated machines), jade-green *pandan* jelly noodles, creamy coconut milk, and *gulu melaka* (palm sugar syrup). Add-ons could include red beans, glutinous rice, ice cream or durian (when in season). ABC (*ais kacang*) is another Malaysian dessert to try; also based on shaved ice, it is often sold alongside *cendol*.

**Where to try it:** Ah Keong's ABC and Cendol, 21A Jalan Padang Belia, Brickfields



## HAINANESE CHICKEN RICE

It is an iconic Malaysian dish that traces its roots to Chinese immigrants from Hainan. Poached chicken is accompanied with aromatic rice cooked in chicken broth and sides of chilli, ginger, and soy sauces. Cucumber slices and clear soup complete the meal. This hawker-stall standard has gone upmarket and creative interpretations also appear on fine dining menus. Chicken rice (*nasi ayam*) is a general term referring to various cooking styles, including roasted, barbecued, and fried chicken.

**Where to try it:** Nam Heong Chicken Rice, 56 Jalan Sultan



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### ➔ BANANA LEAF CURRY

This is a South Indian culinary tradition, introduced by Tamil migrants but is now deeply rooted in Malaysia's multicultural food landscape. Served on a banana leaf, the meal can be enjoyed vegetarian-style, with white rice, assorted vegetable curries, pickles, and poppadoms, or with various meats, fish, and seafood. Purists argue it's best eaten with hands, although cutlery is always available.

**Where to try it:** Maya@Bangsar, 21 Jalan Telawi 3, Bangsar



### ⬇ LAKSA

This dish is served in several variations—from the sour, fish-based Penang *asam laksa* to the rich, coconut-laden curry laksa—with each variant telling a regional story. Malaysians are most animated when discussing their favourite style, be it *nyonya laksa*, a Peranakan dish that blends Malay and Chinese influences, or *Sarawak laksa* from the island of Borneo. Common ingredients include rice noodles, soup, tofu, fish or chicken, and boiled egg. My favourite is *Sarawak laksa* with rice vermicelli topped with steamed prawns. The late Chef Anthony Bourdain suggested *Sarawak laksa* was the 'breakfast of the gods'.

**Where to try it:** Ah Cheng Laksa, LG16 Nu Sentral, Kuala Lumpur Sentral



### ➔ NASI KANDAR

This originated in Penang among Tamil Muslim hawkers who sold rice and curry from containers balanced on their shoulders (*kandar* is said to have been derived from *kandha*, Hindi for shoulders). The hearty dish of steamed rice is topped with an array of curries, chicken, rendang, vegetables, and eggs. Variants include squid sambal and mutton *kurma*. A possibility is *banjir* style: drenching the plate in mixed gravies for a bold, spicy kick.

**Where to try it:** Nasi Kandar Pelita, 113 Jalan Ampang

### GETTING THERE

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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*

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!



**SAARTHAK GUPTA**  
CEO/Founder, Purple Martini



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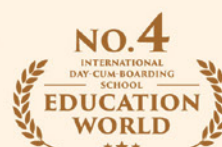
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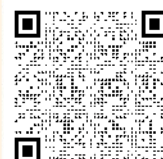
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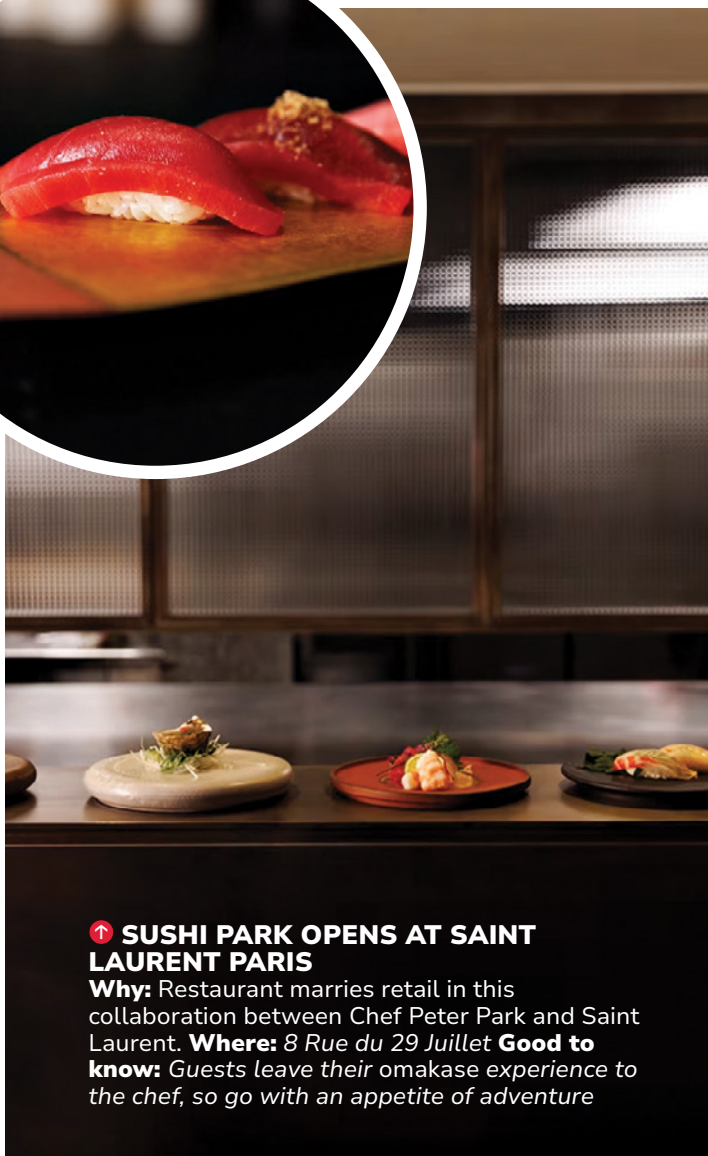
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## ➔ RIDHI MEHRA'S LATEST COLLECTION

**Why:** Named *In The Folds*, this couture line features pre-stitched sarees, lehengas, and statement blouses that blend elegance with glamour. **Where to buy:** [ridhimehra.com](http://ridhimehra.com)

**Recommended:** Tissue sarees; Net lehenga with organza dupatta set; Peplum anarkali with gharara set



## ⬆ SUSHI PARK OPENS AT SAINT LAURENT PARIS

**Why:** Restaurant marries retail in this collaboration between Chef Peter Park and Saint Laurent. **Where:** 8 Rue du 29 Juillet **Good to know:** Guests leave their omakase experience to the chef, so go with an appetite of adventure



## ⬆ CASA OMA OPENS IN DELHI

**Why:** This new one-stop flagship store for an uber-luxury lifestyle offers products from over 90 global high-end brands from around the world. **Where:** Khan Market, Delhi **Highlights:** One-of-a-kind glass sculptures from Alfier; home décor objects from Assouline; luxury furnishings from Ginger Brown; stunning lighting fixture designs from Cinabre

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## ➔ FAIRMONT COMES TO MUMBAI

**Why:** It's the first property of the hospitality chain in the city. The hotel draws inspiration from Art Deco opulence and seamlessly intertwines historic architectural grandeur with unmatched warmth. **Where:** Vile Parle, Mumbai **Highlights:** Five speciality restaurants; Infinity Ballroom; Cryotherapy chamber in the spa; Tiny Town Kids Club



## ↔ COOKING IN STYLE

The Italian brand of modular kitchens, Scavolini, has a swanky new collection. At Dash Square outlets in Bengaluru, Mumbai, Hyderabad, and Coimbatore.



## ➔ TRUE TO OUR HERITAGE

Drape these traditional and pure gold-silver zari handloom sarees from House of Vaarasa. The brand-new collection, *Rakhumai*, is a revival of traditional Banarasi Shalu that is blended with Maharashtrian sensibilities.



## ⬆ ALL THE RIGHT STEPS

Strut in confidence with footwear brand ECCO's SS'25 collection. Adding that touch of glamour is American actress Chloë Sevigny, the face of the brand's latest campaign *Icons That Last*.

## ↔ FASHION FORWARD

The SS'25 line, *Dreams*, from premium designer label Genes Lecoanet Hemant features breezy kaftans, linen jumpsuits, Giza cotton shirts, twill shorts, and more.





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### ← CELEBRATE FINE JEWELS

Designer house Aulerth has collaborated with couturier Suneet Varma to launch its latest collection, *Mehr*. It merges the grandeur of Mughal architecture with Indian craftsmanship.



### ↑ JOLENE BY THE SEA

**Why:** A new restaurant with a menu inspired by world travels, a beachside setting, and curated cocktails. **Where:** Anjuna, Goa **Recommended:** Kochi Lobster Cornettos; Tunisian Aubergine Caviar; Not a Picante; The Baklava Gimlet



### → THE HOLLAND HOUSE

**Why:** To experience luxury in this 2.5-acre chateau-style mansion, owned by India's first and only Master of Wine, Sonal Holland, and operated by IHCL.

**Where:** Nashik, Maharashtra

**Recommended:** Five opulent rooms; a conservatory-style tasting room; immersive wine experience; stunning vineyard and mountain views; gourmet meals



### ← ROOTED IN SIMPLICITY

Designer Anavila Misra has debuted her homeware line, *House&Home*, that draws inspiration from Jharkhand's Birhor Tribe and their harmonious connection with nature. The table and bed linen boast an earthy and muted colour palette.



# Down

Stories that inspire and enrich

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# LIVE IN THE MOMENT

The Greek island of Hydra, where no wheels are allowed, is the perfect place to just be

words by **Riddhi Doshi**





Hydra's many charms have lured a number of creative souls, including Leonard Cohen and Pink Floyd's David Gilmour

**O**n a recent solo trip to Athens, I was exhausted by always being tethered to my phone. Even while I was eating. There was just so much to research: what to see, how to get there, where to eat, the last metro to a particular destination, the best walking tour, etc. It seemed like I was on a demanding work assignment, rather than a holiday, constantly chasing 'what's next'.

In response to my complaint, an Athenian archaeologist suggested I go to the Saronic island of Hydra for a break from the overwhelming 'must-do' lists. Yet, I instinctively asked her what there was to do on the island. "Nothing," she replied, and since that greatly appealed to my overworked brain, I decided to head there.

The next day, I took a 90-minute ferry ride to the island, where no wheels are allowed. No cars, no bikes. Not even bicycles. This rule was made in the 1950s to preserve the natural beauty and architecture, a fact of which I was glad. The rule is followed even today, with a few exceptions of garbage vans and cycles for kids under 12, but only in the winter months.

Hydra is a picture-perfect island, shaped like a huge amphitheatre. The mountains overlook the azure waters of the Aegean Sea and its winding, cobbled streets are dotted with white houses and brightly-coloured doors, draped in bougainvillea.

As soon as my ferry pulled into the island's harbour, droves of donkeys queued up, waiting to be loaded with bags of cement, groceries, clothes, and other things the 3,000-plus residents, and tourists, need. These animals also ferry tourists to monasteries perched on the island's cliffs.

But I decided to walk. Where else, if not on a gorgeous island that has no traffic? It's pure bliss. You can lie down on the road, roll on it if you like, and no one will bother you. I did just that. My plan was to experience the wonders of meandering around. After crossing the semicircular harbour,



## WHERE TO STAY

### Orloff

This historic hotel, named after a Russian nobleman, is housed in a building of significant cultural importance. It features classic Greek blue-and-white décor that creates an elegant yet intimate atmosphere.

### Cotommatae 1810 Boutique Hotel

The hotel is a restored bungalow, known for its old-world charm. The wooden floor and azure tiles will take you back in time.

### Upper Accommodation Hydra

For those who prefer modern and contemporary hotels, this one is a good bet. The rooms are quaint and equipped with minimal furniture and modern amenities.



**LEFT AND RIGHT**  
*The Boy on a Dolphin is an iconic statue in Hydra; Donkeys are used for transportation on the island.*

lined with small shops and cafés, the only road circling the island led to an unending silent zone with the most beautiful views of the sea. Moreover, there is hardly any internet connectivity here, which means no rings and beeps from one's phone either.

The only audible sounds are those of the waves crashing on the shore, donkeys braying, and cicadas singing. It was so peaceful and calming that I found my shoulders relaxing and the tension being released from my neck and back. I found a bench under a canopy of palm trees and dozed off, only to be woken up by a purring cat. It was perched on the wall opposite me, stretching in the sun.

I stared at its black fur, green eyes, twirled tail, and majestic whiskers, realising for the first time ever how

graceful cats are. Before this, I had never had the time to do nothing but stare at a cat. I moved towards her slowly, to ensure she didn't mind me getting closer. She didn't. In fact, when I petted her, she began to snore gently.

Just then a little beagle came running towards me, off the leash. To my surprise, he didn't chase the cat away. "In the Greek islands, no one messes with the cats, not even the dogs," the dog's owner and Hydra resident Maria, told me.

I realised that in Hydra, you can let kids run freely because of the lack of vehicles, making it a perfect family-friendly destination. The island is also a magnet for dog owners and the ferries have dedicated areas for them. In many shops and restaurants, you will see posters appealing to people to donate money for





providing food, vaccinations, and medical care to stray cats. These initiatives are run collectively by the island residents. Lovely, isn't it?

I also donated to the cause and then settled down for lunch at a small tavern. I was the only diner, yet the tavern was buzzing with conversation and laughter, all courtesy the owner Michael's friends who kept coming by to chat with him. "Everybody knows everyone on the island," Michael said with a smile.

After lunch, I hit the road again, walking uphill to see the view from the top and explore the other side of the harbour. En route, I spotted American artist Jeff Koons'

art installation *Apollo Wind Spinner*, a golden sundial overlooking the sea and spinning like a weathervane. It's at DESTE Foundation, a slaughterhouse-turned-art space.

Hydra has always been a hot spot for creative souls. Canadian poet, songwriter, and novelist Leonard Cohen lived here in the 1960s. American novelist Henry Miller, Greek Nobel Prize-winning poet George Seferis, Canada-born

author Rachel Cusk, and British novelist, poet, and playwright Deborah Levy also made the island their home. Even Pink Floyd's David Gilmour owns a house here.

The attraction? To my mind, it was the absolute sense of calm that lets you truly connect with yourself. It's that sense of serenity that stayed with me even as I boarded the ferry to Athens, wishing that I did not have to leave.

#### TOP AND BOTTOM

Hydra's cobbled streets are dotted with white houses sporting brightly-painted doors; Look out for Jeff Koons' *Apollo Wind Spinner* sculpture on the island.



#### GETTING THERE

Fly to Athens with Air India's Interline Partners, Lufthansa and Air France.





# REST AND REWIND

Pulau Ubin, an island off the north-eastern coast of Singapore, is full of hidden delights

words by **Kunal Bhatia**  
and **Shuvajit Payne**





“**T**ake cash, it’s old-school out there,” our Singaporean friend exclaims as we set off to explore a rare slice of this nation’s pre-industrial past. A short boat ride from the mainland, Pulau Ubin—Malay for ‘Granite Island’—was once home to quarries, farms, and fishing villages. With the

last quarries shutting down in the 1970s, residents started moving out and only a few dozen remain today. The rustic charm of this island-off-the-island has been consciously preserved from urban development, making it quite the hidden getaway right within the Lion City. Hopping on a bumboat, we sail away from the

soaring skyline towards calmer shores. The moment the wooden hull thuds against the jetty, it feels like time has rolled back several decades. There are country-style signboards, tin-roofed houses in *kampongs* (traditional Malay villages), and a kind of silence that city dwellers aren’t quite used to. Bicycles are the best way

*On approaching the island, there’s an immediate sense of leaving the big city behind*

**FACING PAGE**  
*Pulau Ubin has the largest mangrove cover in Singapore*





**LEFT AND RIGHT**  
Cycling is the easiest way to get around; The Wei Tuo Fa Gong Temple enshrines spirits and gods.

#### WHERE TO STAY

##### **The Warehouse Hotel**

Housed in a quaint 130-year-old godown by the banks of the Singapore river, this boutique property oozes an industrial-chic vibe with exposed-brick walls, sleek trusses, and in-room libraries.

##### **Artyzen Singapore**

This architecturally-distinctive property, a tower hotel in the heart of the city, boasts sky villas with elevated and lush gardens, and a rooftop infinity pool.

##### **Amara Sanctuary Sentosa**

The verandah suites are perfect to curl up with a book. Nibbles at the Sanctuary Tearoom are reminiscent of Singapore's bygone colonial era.

#### MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR DAY

- To reach Pulau Ubin, take a bumboat from Changi Point Ferry Terminal. Boats operate daily from 6am to 7pm.
- Bring cash, as there are no ATMs on the island.
- Bicycles, helmets, and accessories are available for rent near the jetty.
- Food and beverage options are basic; you can carry snacks and treats.
- To camp overnight, apply for a permit in advance through the National Parks Board ([nparks.gov.sg/pulau-ubin](http://nparks.gov.sg/pulau-ubin)).

to move around here, and a couple of rental shops are clustered near the jetty. We pick out a tandem bike, plot our path, and pedal off. Only minutes away, we come upon the Fo Shan Ting Da Bo Gong Temple, marked by its red-and-gold roof tiles and bright dragon motifs. Dedicated to Tua Pek Kong, the patron of seafarers, this temple is said to protect the island and its people. We wander in to find flickering candles, the heady aroma of burning incense, and a few locals reverently offering prayers.

We then follow a mapped route named 'Sensory Trail', cycling past fruit trees, herb plants, and vegetable patches. Piquing our interest are the uniquely-shaped soursop fruit, used for local desserts, and breadfruit, used in baking. The trail leads us to Teck Seng's Place\*, a restored *kampong* house once home to a local shop owner. The building is furnished just as it would have been a half-century ago, with rattan furniture, tin cans, family portraits, enamel mugs, and wall calendars frozen in time.

It feels less like a museum and more like stepping into a relative's ancestral home, overflowing with personal stories and fond memories.

Chek Jawa Wetlands, one of the island's ecological gems, beckons next. As we ride along the gravel path flanked by coastal forests, the sounds of cicadas and monkeys keep us company. We arrive at a boardwalk weaving through a thriving mangrove forest, where the roots of trees rise above the brackish water like stilts. The biodiversity here is remarkable—spotted





**LEFT AND RIGHT**  
The jetty on the island; The fascinating Jejawi Tower.

mudskippers, fiddler crabs, and monitor lizards can all be seen on a lucky day.

The seven-storeyed Jejawi Tower soars above the dense tree canopy. From the top, the views are a breathtaking mosaic of forests and wetlands. With patience, one may spot oriental pied hornbills, white-bellied sea eagles or any of the numerous avian species that call this area home.

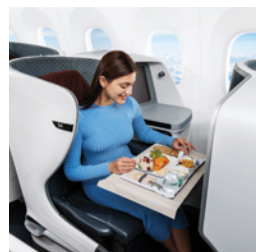
On our way back towards the main village, we pass the former Petai Quarry, now a calm, emerald-green lake. Herons perch silently on the rocks and the steep cliffs reflect perfectly in the still water. Nature has reclaimed all of yesteryears' quarries here—as if time runs backwards on Pulau Ubin when compared to the rest of Singapore.

Sun-drenched, we are ready for lunch. Across from the jetty, we find a few casual eateries with benches and handwritten menus. We seat ourselves at one serving *nasi lemak*

(rice cooked in coconut milk and *pandan* leaf), cold lime juice, and fried *bee hoon* (thin rice vermicelli). The dishes are simple and homely yet taste heavenly.

An elderly man in a straw hat urges us to visit the Wei Tuo Fa Gong Temple on the western side. Draped in prayer flags and filled with a curious mix of statues and spinning prayer wheels, it has a whimsical, hand-built charm. We spend time examining the Buddhist, Taoist, and Dato deities, surrounded by eclectic offerings of fruits, flowers, and yes, even some cans of Tiger Beer.

By evening, we make our way back to the jetty. Along the route is the Jelutong Campsite. The thought of spending a night under the stars lingers in our minds, but alas, we must leave. It's only a 15-minute ride back to the mainland but it feels like crossing decades. No wonder, then, that Pulau Ubin is often described as "the last *kampong*"; an escape into a different time that Singapore keeps tucked away.



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# LOST IN THE FOG OF TIME

Unpretentious  
Fagu offers  
a serene  
hideaway,  
set amidst  
breathtaking  
mountain views  
and apple  
orchards

words by **Gustasp** and  
**Jeroo Irani**





## TAKE YOUR PICK

During the apple harvest season (July to October), visitors can pluck apples under expert guidance:

- **Khadu Café** can arrange apple-picking forays in orchards in Matiana (about an hour away from Fagu) and Kotgarh

- **At The Bagh** in Kufri, guests may opt for an apple-plucking excursion that includes a tour of the orchard and an insight into the industry

- **Grandma Stokes Orchard Retreat**, located amidst 240 acres of apple and cherry orchards in Thanedar, is owned and run by Satyanand Stokes' great grandson and his wife. In-house guests can pluck apples during harvest time

*A quiet hamlet in Himachal Pradesh, Fagu is ideal for a peaceful getaway, and is famous for its apple orchards*

In Fagu, you can't go far without hearing various versions of the apple story. Samuel Evan Stokes, the scion of a wealthy Philadelphia family, came to India in 1904, brimming with missionary zeal, to work in a home for lepers in Solan. By a strange twist of fate, he stumbled upon Thanedar (about two hours from Fagu), fell in love with a local girl, whom he married, and decided to settle there. Subsequently, Stokes brought a few apple saplings from the USA and planted them in his orchard in Kotgarh, close to Thanedar. The Red and Golden Delicious variety of apples bore fruit and snared the taste buds of an entire nation. Local farmers in the Shimla hills in the western Himalayas, too, started planting them, and Stokes advised the rookie planters on apple





*Tanni Jubbar Lake reflects the Nag Devta temple and the surrounding cedar forest*

growing. Interestingly, Stokes later converted to Hinduism, changed his name to Satyanand, and actively participated in the country's freedom struggle.

We learnt this bit of history as we arrived one evening in the gossamer-mist-draped Himalayan hamlet of Fagu, as the setting sun scythed the low-hanging mist and clouds, and daubed a serene world with soft post-sunset colours. From afar, we witnessed the apple orchards clad in white netting to protect the fruit.

At approximately 2,450m above sea level, Fagu is a rustic hideaway, accessed

via the Hindustan-Tibetan Road, which twists around barrel-shaped mountains. Scattered on the slopes of the lower Himalayas, it has a lofty luminescent beauty and the romantic aura of a Monet canvas. Legend has it that the game-rich forests were the happy hunting grounds of the British, who found its deep forested gorges perpetually wrapped in mist. The rubicund hunters banded around the word "foggy" to describe the dark wooded slopes; the word was later corrupted to 'Fagu', and an obscure settlement got its name.

Overshadowed till now by its more swaggering cousins,

including Shimla, Kufri, and Narkanda, Fagu—beloved of Himalayan cognoscenti and adventurous trekkers—is trapped in a blessed time warp. It's a typical Himalayan market town with narrow hill roads, studded with a few shops, cafés, and homestays that teeter on mountain slopes. Wherever you stay, you will find jewel-bright vistas of cedar-clad slopes, and apple and cherry orchards. We played hide and seek with the sun as it emerged from pearly overhanging mists to dapple an apple orchard here and a cedar clad slope there.

We hiked one early morning on a nature trail





Intricate carving  
adorns the  
Hatu temple

#### WHERE TO STAY

The only luxury retreat in Fagu, **dusitD2's** signature Thai-inspired hospitality melds with balcony views of dreamy mountainscapes and apple orchards. Dig into a flavoursome Himachali thali at **Dusit Gourmet**, featuring the abundant bounty of the state. Our picks: Pahari Murg, Cha Gosht, Pahari Masala Chaas, and Apple Honey Cups.

#### WHERE TO SHOP

Handcrafted by local women, products from

**Himira** include tongue-searing green chilli pickles, tart lemon and *amla* pickles, plus apple jams that carry the taste of a grandma's love. Check out **Kotgarh Fruit Bageecha** for boutique jams and preserves.

#### WHERE TO EAT

**Khadu Cafe** in Matiana, en route to Hatu Peak, offers healthy fare spiked with home-cooked zesty flavours. Try *siddu* (steamed fermented flour cakes), in a sweet and savoury version, served with ghee and green chutney, and their rustic *rajma* with red rice.

where the sole soundtrack was of twittering birds. Another time, we meditated on a hilltop while a rising sun warmed our skin with its honeyed rays.

One morning, we drove to Hatu Peak, about an hour and a half away, past dense forests, inhabited, we felt, by other-worldly beings. Closer to the summit, the ravine-hugging road narrowed and we got out of our car

and clambered to the top where the Pahadi-style Hatu temple rises in tiered glory. Enfolded in an aura of magic and tranquillity, the temple seemed divorced from everything worldly. In the distance, the snow-cuddled Himalayas were smudged with clouds and mist; we were suddenly aware of our own insignificance in nature's vast canvas.

About 14km from Hatu

Peak lies Tanni Jubbar Lake, reflecting in its clear depths a charming Nag Devta temple and the forest that borders it. Near the lake, we sat lost in the contemplation of the beauty of our surrounds.

No wonder they call this land "Dev Bhoomi". This is truly the Abode of the Gods where peace, as evanescent as a bird's wing elsewhere, is yours for the asking.

#### GETTING THERE

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



# A DATE WITH PEACE

Staying in a mountain cabin, nestled in the woods of Norway, is an immersive experience

words by **Rameshinder Singh Sandhu**







I woke up at 5am, feeling fresh, without an alarm, after a long time. I was surprised by the rich sleep I had enjoyed, considering I hadn't woken up in a luxury hotel room but a wood cabin in the mountains of Veggli, about two hours from Oslo.

In an adjoining room, my cousin, his wife, and their two daughters, were still asleep. Busy professionals, they had booked this cabin so I could experience the quintessential Norwegian ritual of heading to a mountain cabin for a break, and a chance to be amidst regenerative nature.

When I planned this trip, my cousin had mentioned that they go to a mountain cabin or one along the sea at least five to six times a year. But there are also people who head to such cabins every weekend. This initiative was spearheaded by the Norwegian Trekking Association, founded in 1868. Today, it has more than 550 cabins across Norway, according to the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History.

We reached Veggli, a little village by the Numedalslågen river, around noon. As we settled into the living room, which also had a kitchen, we noticed the large windows, ostensibly to take the outdoors in, the silence on offer, and the calming energy the place exuded. Later, we noticed the touches that made the cabin special—pictures of the region, a vintage telephone,



The landscape, dotted with cabins, offers surreal views

## BOOK IT

Norway has all kinds of cabins, perfect for a single traveller or a big family. Guests can choose from very basic options to those filled with modern conveniences like a washing machine, a full-service kitchen, and internet access.

Cabins can be booked through [finno.no](http://finno.no) or [airbnb.co.in](http://airbnb.co.in). The Norwegian Trekking Association is also pretty helpful and guides travellers on trekking routes that can be accessed around the cabins: [dnt.no](http://dnt.no)

and a beautiful glass frame of pine cones. The traditional fireplace also caught our attention.

We then headed to the village to buy salad bowls and bread rolls. After savouring our meal by the river, we returned to our cabin's cosy comfort. I decided to wander around, taking advantage of the setting sun.

I walked along a muddy path by the side of a stream, the silence enhancing its musicality. Besides cabins, I saw farmhouses and, just like that, spotted two

deer behind a bush. A few minutes later, a woman passed by and told me not to forget to stargaze as the sky was very clear. I followed her advice that night—it was like meditation; very soothing.

At bedtime, I didn't play any of the sleep-themed music I usually do. The all-encompassing silence was enough to lull me to sleep.

On waking up, the stunning morning views prompted me to go for another walk. I found myself at a nearby church, where I learnt that most residents

live to be over a hundred years. My eyes lingered on a plaque that read: "We need much less than we think."

When I returned, my fellow travellers were making sandwiches with ingredients from the kitchen garden. Over coffee, our conversation revolved around the serenity of our location. We discussed the quality of sleep and how just being there had given us a sense of healing. Upon reflection, I felt it is so easy to reconnect with our inner selves—I guess that's what made this trip truly special.

## CABIN CULTURE

*"Norwegians cherish their cabin life—be it summer or winter—the peaceful essence of this tradition is always alive. The feeling of being closer to nature is very dear to us."*

—May Elin-Stener  
Ambassador of Norway  
to India, Sri Lanka, and  
Bhutan

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*Kaul enjoys a hot cuppa in Paris, with the historic Notre-Dame Cathedral in the backdrop*





# IN PURSUIT OF A STORY

My visits to Europe have seen me walk the same streets as those of some of my favourite writers

words by **Manav Kaul**



*The author strikes a pose in front of Ostaria Pizzeria, his favourite eatery in Florence, Italy*

“I am all the writers that I have read, all the people that I have met, all the women that I have loved; all the cities I have visited.”

Poet and writer Jorge Luis Borges wrote these lines and I resonate deeply with them. I find myself chasing writers when I travel. If I am excited about visiting some country, it is because I have read and loved the works of some writers from that country. Their writing becomes a part of me. When I visit the places they lived in or frequented, their past becomes my past.

Travel and I have not always been the best companions, especially in my youth. It was only after I received a princely sum of ₹70,000, after winning an award at a theatre festival, that I dared to venture on a solo trip to Mcleodganj. I would have spent that one month cooped up inside my hotel room but for a chance encounter with an Iranian girl who encouraged me to step out, walk around, and meet





The artiste placed his book at Franz Kafka's grave in Prague

people. For the next few days, I walked everywhere; I even befriended a local boy from a pastry shop and sold pastries with him in the evening. I'll forever be grateful to that Iranian girl for opening my eyes to this experience.

I realised, perhaps much later in life, that travel cannot be an escape. When you travel to escape your reality, your mind carries that reality with you. And it does not matter how beautiful the place is—you are never at peace. It led me to realise that everything else—whether it is my travels, my writing or theatre—is a by-product of how I live and so, I live lightly now. I don't take trouble, neither do I give any. Travelling is not something else that I do; it is a way of life for me.

When I travel out of the country—especially to Europe, which I have visited four times—everything, from the food to the visuals to the language, changes. I sit in small cafés and write, asking for the occasional coffee or wine. Nobody knows me there; no one comes to talk. It enriches my writing because I am speaking only to my writing. My relationship with words then becomes really strong.

When I visited Europe again in December last year, I would frequent the Alighiero Ristoro pub in Florence, order two glasses of wine and sit to write. The owner was a friendly guy who became interested



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**TRAVELLING IS NOT SOMETHING ELSE  
THAT I DO; IT IS A WAY OF LIFE FOR ME.**



*The artiste in the town  
of Bardonecchia, Italy*

in what I was writing. He would come over with my second glass—which he started giving me for free—and ask how much I had accomplished that day. “Not much writing today,” I would say at times, to which he would respond, “Damn, tomorrow you will write.” So now, I had two people who were worried about my writing—me and him. And I find it so beautiful that I found a stranger in a foreign country who cared about my writing as much as I did.

Then I went to Budapest so that I could touch Amrita Sher-Gil’s birthplace. I placed my new book at Franz Kafka’s grave in Prague. I stood for a long time watching young people pay their respects there. An artiste transcends everything and becomes everyone’s. I experienced Naples through the eyes of Elena Ferrante and her books. Walking on those streets, I felt a familiarity with the place. It felt as if I was walking in my own village after many years. This was my home once. This was my own past. I was Elena once.

In Paris, I stayed at Rue Dauphine. Looking for my first coffee in the cold, I ventured into the back streets and the first place I saw was the Paul café. It was from this same Paul





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Seeing the world  
from a different  
perspective in front  
of the Louvre in Paris

café in London that the book *Bahot Door, Kitna Door Hota Hai* began. I ventured ahead, looking for a local café and came across Café de Flore. Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone De Beauvoir used to come here. Hemingway and Capote frequented it in the 1940s. It occurred to me that if Sartre came here so often, he must have lived nearby. I found his old

house on the other side of the street and gazed at it for a long time. I had directed his play *No Exit*. Turning back, I reached Theatre Du Vieux Colombier, where his play *Huis Clos (No Exit)* was performed for the first time on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1944. This was my first morning in Paris and I was filled to the brim. To work on a single philosophy for a long time,

to grapple with it, to solve it, to understand it. What a time that was. Those who have read Sartre and De Beauvoir can understand that for me, walking there, at that moment, was no less than walking in paradise.

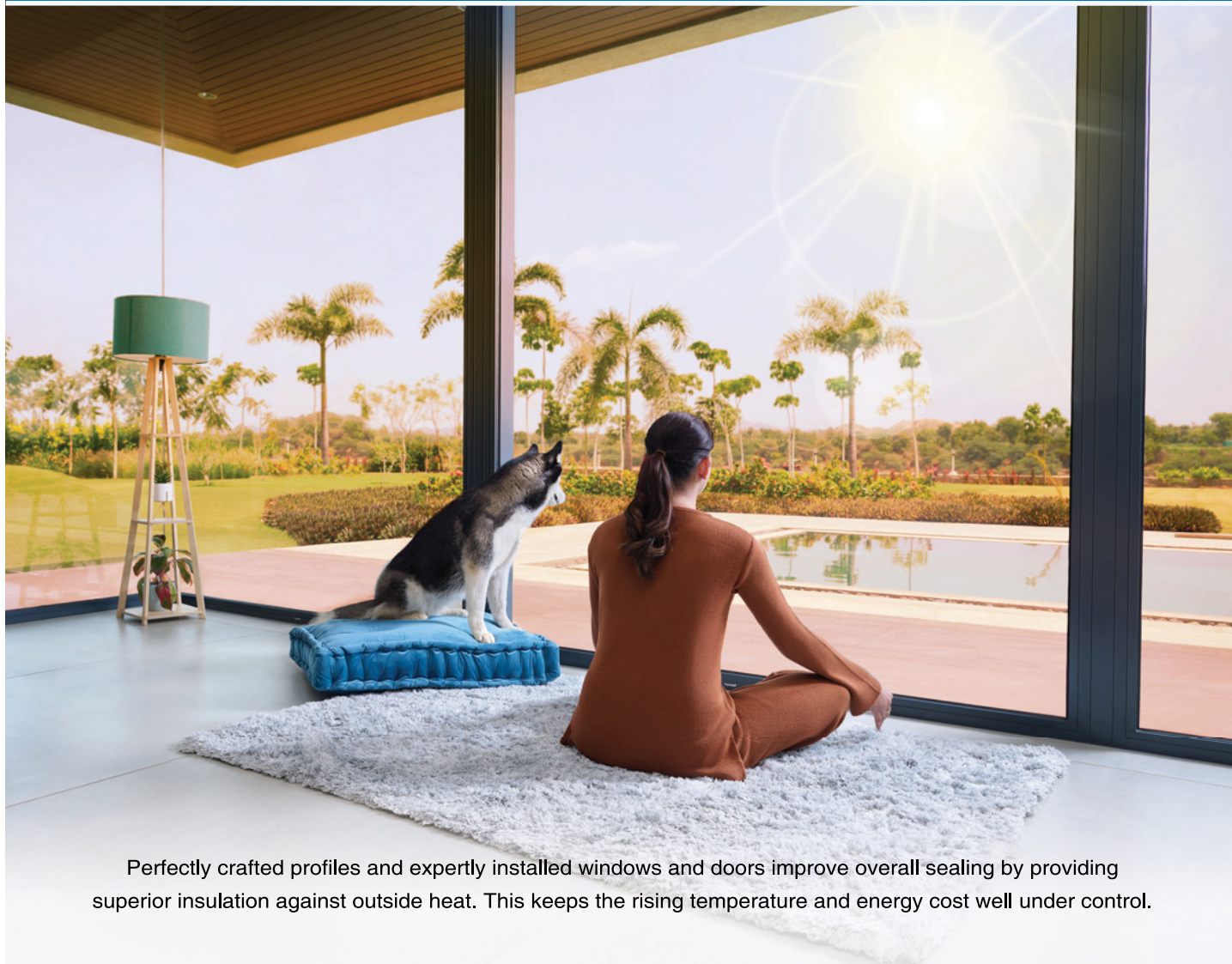
I was content... if there was any thirst, it was just for one more coffee.

— As told to  
**Deepali Dhingra**





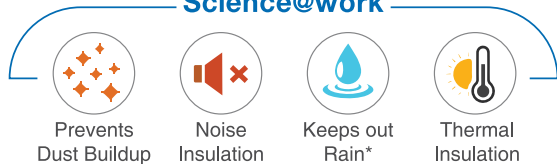
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The greater adjutant stork is one of the largest and most rare storks



# CONSERVATION IS ABOUT CHANGING HEARTS AND MINDS

Award-winning wildlife biologist, Dr Purnima Devi Barman, has changed the perception of the *hargila* from a scavenger to a beloved cultural icon

words by **Punita Malhotra**

## What shaped your perception of the *hargila*?

I had a childhood fascination with the *hargila* (greater adjutant stork) thanks to my grandmother who linked the bird to sacred stories of Lord Krishna and Radha. We had a massive cotton tree at our home in Assam, where the storks nested. I played beneath it, enchanted by

the soft cotton seeds that carpeted the ground. That was my first perception of *hargila*—woven with warmth, wonder, and a sense of divine presence. One day, I returned from school to find that my uncle had cut down the tree because he felt the storks made our home unhygienic. I couldn't understand how something so beautiful

could be seen as a problem. That moment stayed with me.

Later, during my Master's programme, I learned that the *hargila* was endangered. But the turning point was when I saw a man cutting down a nesting tree. Nine nests fell to the ground, baby birds struggling helplessly. When I held one of them, I could feel



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**NOW WHEN I WALK THROUGH VILLAGES, I HEAR PEOPLE SAY, 'HARGILA IS OUR DAUGHTER. WE MUST PROTECT HER.' THAT'S THE BIGGEST SUCCESS.**

Dr Barman made it to TIME magazine's Women of the Year 2025 list

its heartbeat. Something ignited within me. How could such innocent creatures be a curse? I had to act.

**How did you challenge the negative perceptions of the bird?**

I realised I couldn't do it alone. So, in 2007, I started the Hargila Army, enlisting women. I knew if people didn't feel emotionally connected, they wouldn't commit to protecting it. The solution was to make the bird a part of our tradition and identity.

Slowly, I encouraged them to see the bird as something to be celebrated, not feared. Often feasting on garbage piles, the *hargila*, meaning "bone-swallower", was considered a bad omen. So, it wasn't easy. Slowly, through awareness campaigns and cultural integration, the *hargila* became a symbol of pride. Once a bird of misfortune, it is now honoured in temples, sung about in festivals, and protected with a fervour once reserved for rhinos.

**Why did you focus on women as key change-makers?**

Women are the backbone of every household. They shape traditions, pass down stories, and educate the next generation. I also felt safer working with them, and found they were open to new ideas. Once they connected with the *hargila's* story, they became its most passionate protectors. They started teaching their children and convinced their families not to cut down nesting trees. By empowering them, we empowered the community.

**How did cultural celebrations help bring about a change?**

When I first invited women to meetings, they wouldn't come.



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## BACK FROM THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION

In 2007, the *hargila* (one of the rarest species of storks in the world) faced imminent extinction in Assam, with fewer than 450 remaining. But thanks to the groundbreaking conservation effort of Dr Barman and her Hargila Army, the number crossed 1,800 in 2023, prompting the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to reclassify the bird from 'Endangered' to 'Near Threatened' in December 2023. This earned Dr Barman the Whitley Gold Award in 2024, also known as the Green Oscar.



Women of the Hargila Army dancing after a hargila baby shower

That's when I thought about our tradition of celebrating Bihu with *pithas* and laddoos. I started organising *pitha*-making competitions. Women came for the food but stayed for the conversation. We talked about the *hargila* and its role in protecting nature. I introduced the "Web of Life" game, helping them understand how every species plays

a role in the ecosystem. They did not see themselves as conservationists but realised they already were.

### How has the mindset changed?

I started inviting women to temples to offer *horai* (*prasad*) for the bird and created wedding songs to sing during its breeding season. One of the most powerful moments was when I introduced *hargila* baby

showers. While we celebrate a mother-to-be, in the animal world, the mother *hargila* suffered as people cut the trees, destroying their eggs. When I proposed the idea, women laughed but soon, something changed. They saw the *hargila* as a mother, like them. Now, the bird has found its way into weddings, school competitions, and even government initiatives.








## SCULPTORS OF SEAMLESS PERFECTION

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# HEALING THE HILLS

As most travellers head to the mountains in summer, it is imperative to be responsible to preserve the area's fragile ecology

words by **Pradeep Sangwan**

**M**ountains cover approximately 24 per cent of the world's land

surface, encompassing eco-systems ranging from deserts to polar ice caps. These regions are home to around 12 per cent of the global population, with another 14 per cent living nearby and relying on such resources for their livelihood. Mountain communities, often rural and living under challenging conditions, have developed unique identities, knowledge systems, and sustainable practices deeply connected to their surroundings. However, while tourism can serve as a powerful tool for economic growth and cultural preservation, its mismanagement threatens the ecological and social balance of these fragile landscapes.

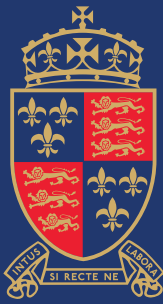
## **A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD**

Tourism, when poorly regulated, accelerates environmental degradation, disrupts indigenous cultures, and overburdens ecosystems. Nowhere is this impact more visible than in the Indian Himalayas, particularly in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. From trekkers to pilgrims, the influx of visitors has led to mounting concerns.

## **GROWING CONSEQUENCES**

Unchecked tourism in such areas is leading to plastic pollution and waste accumulation. Trekking trails, riversides, and sacred sites get littered with plastic bottles, food wrappers, and disposable raincoats.





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These high-altitude areas also lack proper waste management infrastructure, leading to open burning of waste, which leads to toxic emissions or slow decomposition that contaminates soil and water.

While clean-up drives help, the sheer volume remains overwhelming. The rapid growth of tourism has also triggered unregulated construction of hotels, resorts, and restaurants, leading to deforestation and soil erosion. Towns like Manali and McLeodganj have seen excessive tree felling and water scarcity due to the expanding hospitality industry. Moreover, trekking routes are widening to accommodate more tourists, destroying vegetation and wildlife habitats. This disrupts ecological corridors, pushing species like the Himalayan black bear and snow leopard closer to human settlements, increasing the chances of animal-human conflict.

Finally, wildlife is highly sensitive to human presence. Large tourist groups create noise pollution, disturbing sensitive surroundings. Feeding wild animals alters their instincts, making them dependent on humans. Additionally, irresponsible camping and bonfires damage alpine meadows and release carbon emissions. Reckless bonfires contribute to deforestation as tourists cut trees for firewood, further aggravating climate change, which is already causing

rapid glacial retreat in the Himalayas.

### **HOW TO BE A RESPONSIBLE TRAVELLER**

Here's how tourists can make a difference:

#### **Minimise plastic waste:**

**waste:** Carry a reusable bottle, avoid single-use plastics, and dispose your waste responsibly.

#### **Respect local culture:**

Support indigenous artisans.

#### **Choose sustainable stays:**

Opt for homestays or eco-lodges and use shared transport or walk whenever it is possible.

#### **Stick to marked trails:**

Avoid off-trail trekking to protect flora and fauna.

#### **Be mindful of water usage:**

Take short showers; use biodegradable soaps.

#### **Travel off-peak:**

Avoid busy seasons to reduce pressure on local resources.

**Leave no trace:** Follow the golden rule—take only memories, leave only footprints.

What we lack today are community leaders—torchbearers who lead by example and drive change through action. In a world where cleanliness is no longer a shared pride but an ignored responsibility, our reluctance to act signals a path toward climate disaster. The normalisation of waste highlights a failure in basic civic education.

Our love for the nation, its rich heritage, and the spirit of healthy competition seems to be fading. When sacred pilgrimages become

dumping grounds, it raises urgent questions about our commitment to change and faith. True growth sometimes lies in conscious simplification and we must realise this before a crisis forces us to.

Tourism in India's mountain regions presents both opportunities and challenges. While it fuels economic growth and cultural exchange, unchecked expansion threatens the delicate balance of this area. By adopting responsible practices, we can protect these majestic landscapes for the generations to come. The future of India's mountains and its ecosystem depends on how wisely we travel today.



*According to the author, travellers should endeavour to minimise plastic waste and dispose of it responsibly*

### **SOLUTIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM**

-  Strengthening waste management and enforcing waste segregation at source
-  Expanding Material Recovery Facilities in high-altitude areas
-  Banning single-use plastics and educating visitors on responsible travel practices; setting strict penalties for littering and deforestation
-  Regulating tourist numbers and enforcing seasonal visitor limits; limiting commercial development
-  Sustainable construction using local materials; adopting renewable energy sources and water conservation techniques
-  Recruiting locals in tourism management and eco-initiatives



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# BUILT BY DESIGN

Explore the intricate architectural  
tapestry of Ahmedabad, a city where a  
passion for design runs deep

words by **Mignonne Dsouza**





The 1499-constructed Bai Harir ni Vav stepwell boasts geometric designs, brackets, and ornamentation



**W**hat do a 20<sup>th</sup>-century ashram, a Brutalist masterpiece, a stone stepwell, and a restored haveli have in common? They're all part of the rich fabric that make up the architectural heritage of Ahmedabad, a UNESCO World Heritage City, where a love of design runs like a common thread.

My interest in architecture is not a learned one but it is impossible to not be moved by the 15<sup>th</sup>-century Bai Harir ni Vav, a largely forgotten structure in the city. As I descended into the depths of this stepwell, I could not help but wonder why artisans bothered to fashion intricate geometric designs, brackets, and ornamentation on the walls of such a practical creation, when it must have been submerged most of the time. The answer is surely because there was a passion for design and the intent to create a space that refreshed the soul as well as a traveller's thirst.

That move to create a community space was also behind the commissioning of the Mill Owner's Association building in 1951. The noted Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier was tasked with building a Brutalist masterpiece that would blend offices, meeting rooms, and an auditorium for the mill owners who gave Ahmedabad its 'Manchester of the East'



### **SIDHPUR: FADING GLORY**

It's quite something to find an entire street of locked houses, but that is exactly the case in Sidhpur, a town around two-and-a-half hours out of Ahmedabad. Once home to the Dawoodi Bohra community, these three- to four-storeyed structures were built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> century. The elegant façades, in fading pastel tones, hint at the grandeur inside. These unique masterpieces deserve to be preserved.

title. Even today, when the space is in need of restoration, it is still a powerful statement, incongruously sandwiched amongst conventional buildings. Visitors can tour the space with prior permission; it is also used to host art exhibitions.

Community living was also celebrated, albeit in a less grandiose style, at the two ashrams founded by Mahatma Gandhi. The

Kochrab Ashram, set up in 1915, was the first experiment at creating a living arrangement that mandated manual labour and encouraged an ascetic mode of life. The Sabarmati Ashram, which came up two years later, was devoted to the same principles.

These minimalist buildings feature just the essentials, reflecting the focus of a person committed to defeating the mighty

### **GETTING THERE**

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#### WHERE TO STAY

##### **jüSTa Diwans Bungalow**

This 150-year-old property is the ancestral house of renowned architect IM Kadri and is now an eight-room boutique hotel.

##### **ITC Narmada**

With architecture inspired by the stepwells of Gujarat, this hotel also hosts a luxury spa as well as speciality restaurants.

##### **Taj Skyline, Ahmedabad**

Centrally located, the rooms here boast city views; there is also a kids' play area and an indoor swimming pool.



**TOP AND BOTTOM**  
*The Atal Bridge draws inspiration from the state's kite festival; The Charles Correa-designed Gandhi Memorial Museum at Sabarmati Ashram.*

British Empire, a crusade that left no room for any other frills.

The havelis of the old city, however, embrace a different domestic aesthetic. They feature inner courtyards, windows that promote cross-ventilation, and *jalīs* or louvres, all designed to mitigate Ahmedabad's climate. An increasing number are being repurposed as hotels. That's also the theme of colonial-era heritage bungalows, like the one that once housed the Diwan of Radhanpur and the iconic House of MG.

What is becoming a new popular attraction, though, is the sculptural Atal Bridge across the Sabarmati river. It's a reminder that even as Ahmedabad evolves, its love of design remains stronger than ever.



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# A TEST OF WILL

An expedition to the Spiti Valley to  
capture the snow leopard pushed me  
beyond my physical limits

words by **Aarzoo Khurana**







*Khurana and her team were snowed in; what began as a six-day trip became 11 days*

**B**eing a wildlife photographer is not a job for the faint-hearted.

Since much of the work is done in the wild, the job presents many physical challenges. Although there are rewards, there are also times when one gets pushed beyond the limit.

One such occasion was a recent personal trip I undertook to Chicham village in the Spiti Valley, Himachal Pradesh. This is near the Kibber Wildlife Sanctuary, an area known to be a snow leopard habitat in the Himalayas. I travelled to Chicham in the last week of February, a trip that was planned to last six days but which stretched to almost 11 due to adverse weather.

Capturing the snow leopard was always a priority because of its rarity and beauty. But it was a daunting proposition because I have a fear of heights and dislike extreme cold. I first realised I had a fear of heights when I was photographing the Western tragopan in Great Himalayan National Park and then the monal in Tungnath. I was on a steep incline and at one point, when I looked down, I got dizzy and my knees began to shake. That episode was so bad that I had to descend the slope in a sitting position. After that, I have usually avoided high altitudes but this time I had no choice if I wanted to capture the snow leopard.

My team and I planned the trip in two breaks (though three is ideal) to avoid Acute Mountain Sickness. We planned to not climb more than 500 to 600m in one go. On the third night, we reached Chicham village. The next 24 hours were earmarked for rest but then, villagers brought us news of a pair of snow leopards. So, we decided to push on. In retrospect, that was probably not the best decision I made.

Fuelled by adrenaline, I trekked to the site where I could take photos of the snow leopards. That involved going up and down inclines, in a quest to capture these splendid creatures on film—which was successful. I spent a full





**LEFT AND RIGHT**  
*Khurana managed to get a shot of this pair of snow leopards; She also photographed an ibex on this trip.*

day in the outdoors, keeping my eyes on the horizon and trying not to look down. But the real trouble began on the way back, when I started to feel sick. It was too late to reconsider my decision and led to a night of worry and fear.

The first indication I had of being unwell was a headache, plus an ache in my left arm. My smartwatch also began to indicate that my heartbeat was 150 and that my oxygen levels were low at 82. Since we were in an isolated village, there was no possibility of any medical help. I passed a sleepless night but was finally able to connect with a doctor who advised me to drink at least five litres of water daily and rest for the next two days. That advice proved easy to follow as it began snowing the next day. Soon, the area was buried in heavy snow drifts.

We were unable to move for three days but after that, we managed to trek

out in knee-deep snow and capture some images of the local wildlife—the red fox, ibex, and the *chakor* bird. Leaving the area was not possible—our car was trapped in snow and the roads had not been cleared.

Slowly, the continuous fall of snow changed our delight in the white landscape to trepidation. The electricity lines snapped, which meant we could run the generator only for an hour each day to charge our phones. No power meant no heaters or electric blankets and by the 10<sup>th</sup> day, we were down to our last stores of wood.

Living in such a remote village in icy conditions was a huge challenge. To stay warm, I found myself layering on multiple sets of clothing—a T-shirt followed by two sets of thermals, a fleece jacket, another jacket over that, and a double-layered jacket when I ventured outside to shoot. I wore double sets

of gloves—fleece gloves plus snow gloves—and three layers of socks. I also donned a mask and a neck warmer.

The sanitary arrangement was also another hurdle. We realised that burning wood meant a drop in the oxygen supply in the room. All in all, the few days that we spent in the village gave us a very real sense of life in such conditions and taught us to be grateful for small mercies.

As I reflected on all the privations I suffered, I realised both the weather and terrain made this an extremely challenging expedition. And going against the advice to rest, which allows the body to acclimatise, did not help either. Though I would not hesitate to go on another demanding expedition, I'll be sure to take more care, while still achieving my goals.

—As told to  
**Mignonne Dsouza**



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# Sleep, Heal, Repeat

words by **Shahnaaz Bakshi**

Discover how the world is embracing innovative therapies to fight fatigue and beat insomnia

*The Raag therapy at Six Senses Vana, in Uttarakhand, relaxes and calms the mind that leads to deeper rest*

It's time to turn in for the night. You slip into bed, get comfortable, and pick up your phone for some light scrolling or perhaps switch on the TV. It's late by the time you decide to get some shut eye. And then, you find yourself tossing and turning, your mind restless and possibly consumed with tasks. Throw in a couple of trips to the bathroom or tending to your kids and sleep becomes a pipe dream, ironically. Sound familiar?

You're not alone. A 2024 survey conducted by ResMed (a global leader in digital medical devices) revealed that 40 per cent (of 36,000 respondents across 17 markets) get no more than three nights of good sleep per week. And the Great Indian Sleep Scorecard (GISS) 2024 by Wakefit (a sleep and home-solutions provider) highlighted that 58 per cent of Indians went to bed after 11pm, with close to half of them waking up feeling fatigued. As quality sleep turns elusive, issues like insomnia and circadian rhythm disruptions become more prevalent.

Prioritising sleep is no longer a luxury but a necessity. Investing time and effort into improving sleep quality can yield profound benefits for the mind, body,





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**TOP AND BOTTOM**  
The Royal Sleep Experience at the Royal Champagne Hotel & Spa, in France, lets guests sleep in a soundproof room; Unwind with a drink at the property's terrace that offers stunning views.



## EAT RIGHT. SLEEP TIGHT

The way to a good night's sleep truly begins with the stomach, especially in the Indian context. Foods like warm milk with turmeric (*haldi doodh*), a handful of soaked almonds or a bowl of curd rice at dinner are known to calm the nervous system. Avoid spicy, oily or sugary foods late in the evening. Ensure your last meal is at least two to three hours before bedtime. As they say, go to bed light so you can sleep heavy.

and soul. And several wellness retreats and urban properties are now designing special sleep experiences centred around rest and relaxation. These programmes usually cater to specific requirements, with personalised consultations. Ranging from the traditional to the scientifically advanced, there's something for everyone.

## HOLISTIC TREASURES

Some of the most popular treatments are rooted in ancient healing practices,

including Ayurveda, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), herbal remedies, aromatherapy, and yoga. Widely offered in India and Asia, many of these treatments are also part of wellness programmes at resorts in the USA and Europe.

The Ayurvedic therapy, Shirodhara, where warm medicated oil is poured steadily onto the forehead, targeting the "third eye" area, is believed to calm the nervous system, reduce stress, and promote deep

sleep. Yoga Nidra (or yogic sleep) is a celebrated guided meditation practice that promotes deep relaxation. Practised lying down with a voice instructing body awareness and breath control, it can significantly improve sleep in individuals with chronic insomnia.

The "Mastering Sleep" package, also known as the Nidranasha Recovery Program, at Fazlani Nature's Nest—situated in a serene expanse of lush nature between Mumbai and Pune—is one such example of a holistic plan. The centre combines the aforementioned Ayurvedic therapies with Chakra meditation, Pranayama, herbal detox elixirs and supplements, curated meals, acupuncture, and even ecotherapy. The last form of treatment focuses on spending time amidst nature to provide a much-needed break to the over-



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A Shirodhara (Ayurvedic therapy) session at Atmantan Wellness Centre in Pune

### NIGHT-TIME RITUALS TO TRY

- Take a calming bath before turning in for the night
- Ensure the room is maintained at an optimal temperature. If required, use blackout curtains or soft night lights
- Avoid screen time at least one hour before bed; you can keep your phone in an adjoining room to minimise any sort of distraction
- Playing soothing sounds or listening to 'sleeping stories' can help relax the senses
- Several herbal infusions, including chamomile, lavender, and magnolia, can help you fall asleep

stimulated senses, and is akin to forest bathing.

### DREAMY AMALGAMATIONS

Today, many sleep-oriented programmes are packaging traditional therapies with modern approaches from around the globe to offer a more well-rounded scope of treatment. Located amidst the tranquil Sahyadri mountains near Pune, Atmantan Wellness Centre is renowned for integrating traditional healing practices (Trataka meditation, Shirodhara, acupuncture, and more) with modern wellness. Expressing a deep faith in the healing properties of water, their special Sleep Ritual Aromatherapy Bath

is a relaxation approach that utilises the therapeutic properties of such essential oils as lavender, neroli, chamomile, and sandalwood, combined with the soothing effect of warm water. The immersion of the body in this bath enhances blood circulation, eases muscle tension, and promotes the release of endorphins, contributing to a deep state of serenity.

Like water, heat plays an impactful role, too. The retreat also provides contemporary scientific therapies like light exposure therapy (designed to reset one's circadian rhythms) and infrared steam sessions, alongside *moxibustion*, a type of ancient Chinese heat practice that aids the flow

of Qi energy in the body.

Taking innovative sleep treatments to a new level, the Sleep Well Retreat at the Carillon Miami Wellness Resort in the USA presents an array of cutting-edge touchless therapies. Among these, their Somadome is the world's first technology-enabled meditation pod. Combining sensory elements like colour, sound, and vibrations, it creates a deeply meditative space that relaxes the body completely. Similarly, their V.E.M.I (VibroAcoustic, ElectroMagnetic and Infrared) therapy uses natural earth frequencies to detoxify the cells in the body, thereby aiding rejuvenation. These and other advanced techniques





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**LEFT AND RIGHT**  
*The Somadome at Carillon Miami Wellness Resort, USA, combines colour and sound therapies for deep meditation; Sound sleep is said to be essential for several vital functions of the body, including heart health and memory.*



are used in conjunction with traditional Indian and Chinese massage therapies, and more.

#### **SANCTUARY BLISS**

Sometimes, however, it's all about creating a cocoon, an environment where undisturbed slumber is assured through thoughtful physical comforts. These can take the form of an inviting bed with handmade mattresses, temperature-regulating pillows, soft cotton sheets, light-blocking curtains, and a range of pampering amenities. Nestled in the peaceful landscapes of Uttarakhand, the Six Senses Vana has given an enticing twist to its comprehensive sleep programme. In addition to a selection of Ayurvedic

treatments, yoga, massages, Tibetan healing therapies, and a sleep tracker device, they have converted their guestrooms into blissful escapes, with specially-designed orthopaedic mattresses along with moisture-wicking and hypoallergenic duvets that offer ideal thermal conditions for a good night's sleep. A sound therapy machine and a selection of snacks that aid sleep add that final touch.

The Royal Sleep Experience offered at the Royal Champagne Hotel & Spa in France's Champagne region is yet another programme that lives up to its name. On offer here is an opulent, soundproof room equipped with high-quality linen, double blackout

curtains, and a Royal Sleep kit that includes a fragrant sleep mist, melatonin-based supplement drops, and a satin sleep mask. A Morphée sound machine with inbuilt guided meditation sessions, homemade herbal tea, and a one-hour candle massage at their spa ensure a deep sleep is just a yawn away.

There's no doubt that the spectrum of treatments available today offers hope for every kind of sleeper. As awareness around the importance of quality sleep continues to grow, these diverse global therapies serve as powerful reminders that rest is not only a fundamental human need—it's a sacred ritual of renewal, deeply personal and profoundly healing.



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# WHEN RELAXATION IS KEY

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Bengaluru is wowing guests with its many unique features

words by **Erwin K Nath**

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#### LEFT AND RIGHT

The lounge has dedicated seats overlooking the tarmac; There are several nooks carved out for relaxation.

Stepping into Air India's brand-new Business Class Lounge felt like stepping into a space where tradition meets modern comfort. As someone who has visited lounges across India, this one felt special—not just because it's Air India's first such under the Tata Group, but because of the thought and finesse that has gone into crafting this experience.

#### FIT FOR THE MAHARAJA

Managed by Bangalore Airport Services Ltd (BASL), this lounge is located at the mezzanine level after the security checkpoint of the domestic concourse at Bengaluru Airport's Terminal 2. It accommodates about 60 to 70 guests, making it an intimate and peaceful retreat. The entrance itself sets the mood—the peacock-inspired chandeliers, grand archways, and intricate artwork instantly transported me to a world of royal elegance.

Seating is well thought out—lounge-

style for relaxation, restaurant-style seating for those who prefer a proper meal setting, and tall chairs for a casual drink. This space welcomes Business and First Class passengers and eligible members of the Air India Frequent Flyer programme—Maharaja Club.

#### A FRESH TAKE ON DINING

The lounge offers à la carte dining, a unique offering for domestic airport lounges. Instead of the usual buffet, guests can enjoy freshly-prepared dishes. While a few light bites are available at the counter, the real experience is ordering from a menu thoughtfully curated by celebrity Chef Ranveer Brar.

I opted for a chicken burger with fries and a Coca-Cola—simple yet satisfying. But the real winner? The signature Rose Petal Ice Cream. It was divine.

The lounge also offers a selection of beverages—complimentary soft drinks, as well as teas and coffees. Cocktails and alcoholic tipples are also available

at an additional charge. With my cappuccino, I was also served a jaggery sachet (as an option to sugar), an attentive nod to healthier choices.

#### PERFECT FOR AVIATION GEEKS

Aviation geeks are going to love the dedicated seats overlooking the tarmac, an apt vantage point for spotting magnificent aircraft. This was the highlight of the lounge for me.

#### TOWARDS THE FUTURE

The lounge currently offers an exclusive and relaxed atmosphere. A standout feature are the two unisex shower rooms, beautifully designed and equipped with all essential toiletries.

#### MY FINAL THOUGHTS

This lounge sets a benchmark for Business Class lounges in India. I'd highly recommend checking it out to experience true Maharaja hospitality. I look forward to seeing how this space grows along with Air India.



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# A Slice of History

If you are in Delhi for a short while, drop by any of these legendary cafés and iconic eateries that offer timeless flavours

words by **Pallavi Pasricha**



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## BUKHARA

At this establishment, don't be surprised to find a bib on your plate, sans cutlery—the idea is to eat with your hands. Since it opened in 1978, this icon for North West Frontier cuisine has not tampered with its menu. The legendary Dal Bukhara (black lentils), which is cooked overnight, and Naan Bukhara has fed everyone, from Bollywood and Hollywood stars to presidents of many countries. "It is probably the longest cooking dal in the world because we never take it off the fire," says JP Singh, Senior Chef Culinaire, Bukhara, ITC Maurya. The idea behind the massive 1.25kg Naan Bukhara was that a family can break bread together. Singh recalls that former British Prime Minister, David Cameron, once tried his hand at making the naan here. Another popular dish is the Sikandari Raan.

*ITC Maurya, Diplomatic Enclave*



## TOP AND BOTTOM

*The classy interiors of Kwaliti Restaurant; Kebabs at Havemore.*

Director of the United Group, whose grandfather set it up. The signature Tomato Fish, Gambo Ham and Chicken Steak, and the veg mezze platter, are must haves.  
*E-15, Connaught Place*

## UNITED COFFEE HOUSE

This colonial era eatery dates back to 1942, when it became the place to meet and chat over British club food like cutlets and club sandwiches. The menu boasts Mughlai, Continental, and Chinese fare. With its vintage décor, it remains a favourite spot for a nostalgia-inducing meal. "We still have about 100 legacy dishes, prepared exactly the way they were during my grandfather's time," says Akash Kalra, Managing

## THE EMBASSY

Want to dine at a restaurant that once hosted Lord Mountbatten? Established in 1948, this retains much of the Indian and Continental fare that it served decades ago. Among its most popular dishes are the massive samosa that comes with an option of three fillings—chickpeas, vegetables, and minced meat—and Chana Bhatara (spicy chickpeas and deep-fried bread). Some of their other specials include Fish Ajwaini Tikka, Dal Meat (lentils with meat), Tomato



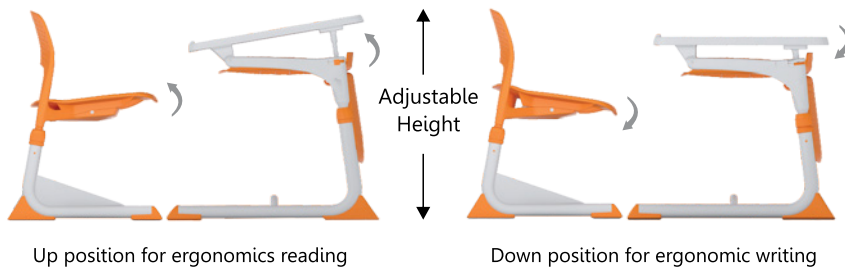
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Fish, and Murg Mussalam.  
11-D, Connaught Place

### KWALITY

It started as a hand-cranked ice cream store in 1940 with flavours like Sicilian Cassata and American Tutti-Frutti, sold mostly to American soldiers during World War II. It gradually added sandwiches, but today, among the English and Indian dishes on the menu, the most famous is Kwaliti Chana accompanied with a massive fluffy *bhatura*. They also have a high tea menu. Popular dishes include cheese balls, masala *chops*, and bread and butter pudding.

11-D, Connaught Place

### HAVEMORE

From a tea stall in 1959, it has grown into one of the city's most popular go-to restaurants for butter chicken. "My father experimented with the curry and it has evolved into what it is now," says owner Vaibhav Bajaj. Must-tries include the Paneer Makhni, the Dal Makhni, and the smoky Mutton Burra Kebab.

11-12, Pandara Road Market

### WENGER'S

Founded by a Swiss couple almost 100 years ago, this bakery introduced the city's largely British clientele to pastries and freshly-baked French bread. Today, customers make their way for French hearts, chicken



**TOP TO BOTTOM**  
Mocha Cake at Wenger's; The iconic Naan Bukhara at Bukhara; United Coffee House's Tomato Fish is a must-try.

sandwiches, and cakes. It offers a range of savouries like puffs, patties, breads, and kebabs.

A-16, Connaught Place

### MOTI MAHAL

Dal Makhni and Butter Chicken are must-orders at this iconic restaurant, which has dished out North Indian and Mughlai cuisine since 1947. The story goes that tandoori chicken was drying

out; to salvage it, the restaurant decided to immerse it in a curry of tomatoes, butter, cream, and aromatic spices, giving birth to the iconic Butter Chicken. Late Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, served its fare at state dinners and many dignitaries like late American President Richard Nixon have enjoyed Moti Mahal's food.

3703, Netaji Subhash Marg, Daryaganj



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# PROUD WINGS

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

**Airbus A319**

 **06**

**Boeing 777-300ER**

 **19**

**Airbus A320neo**

 **94**

**Boeing 777-200LR**

 **08**

**Airbus A320ceo**

 **04**

**Boeing 787-9  
Dreamliner**

 **07**

**Airbus A321ceo**

 **13**

**Boeing 787-8  
Dreamliner**

 **27**

**Airbus A321neo**

 **14**

**Airbus A350-900**

**06**

**FLEET  
STRENGTH  
198**

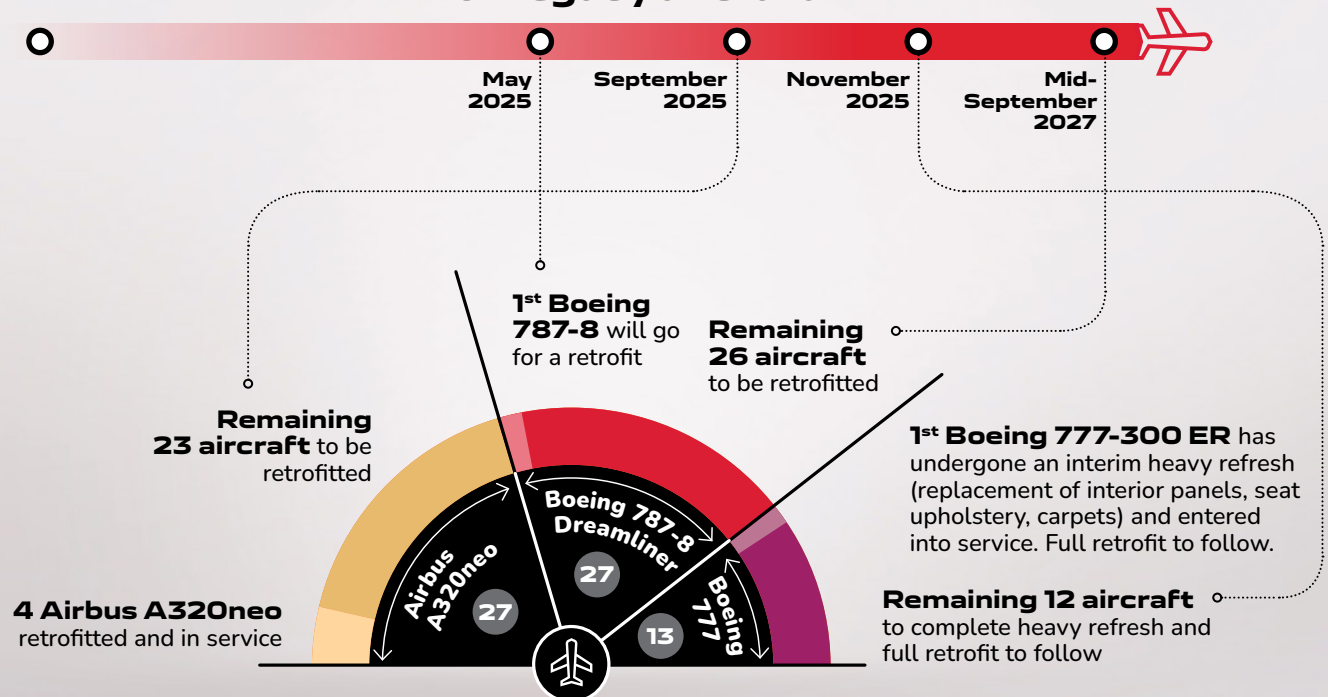




# Our fleet is getting a makeover

While we await new aircraft deliveries, our entire fleet of legacy single-aisle and twin-aisle aircraft is undergoing a comprehensive US\$400 million retrofit programme. What this means is refurbishing old aircraft in our fleet to install new seats in a three-class cabin configuration, carpets, curtains, lavatories, and more, along with a fresh coat of paint on the exteriors in the new Air India colours.

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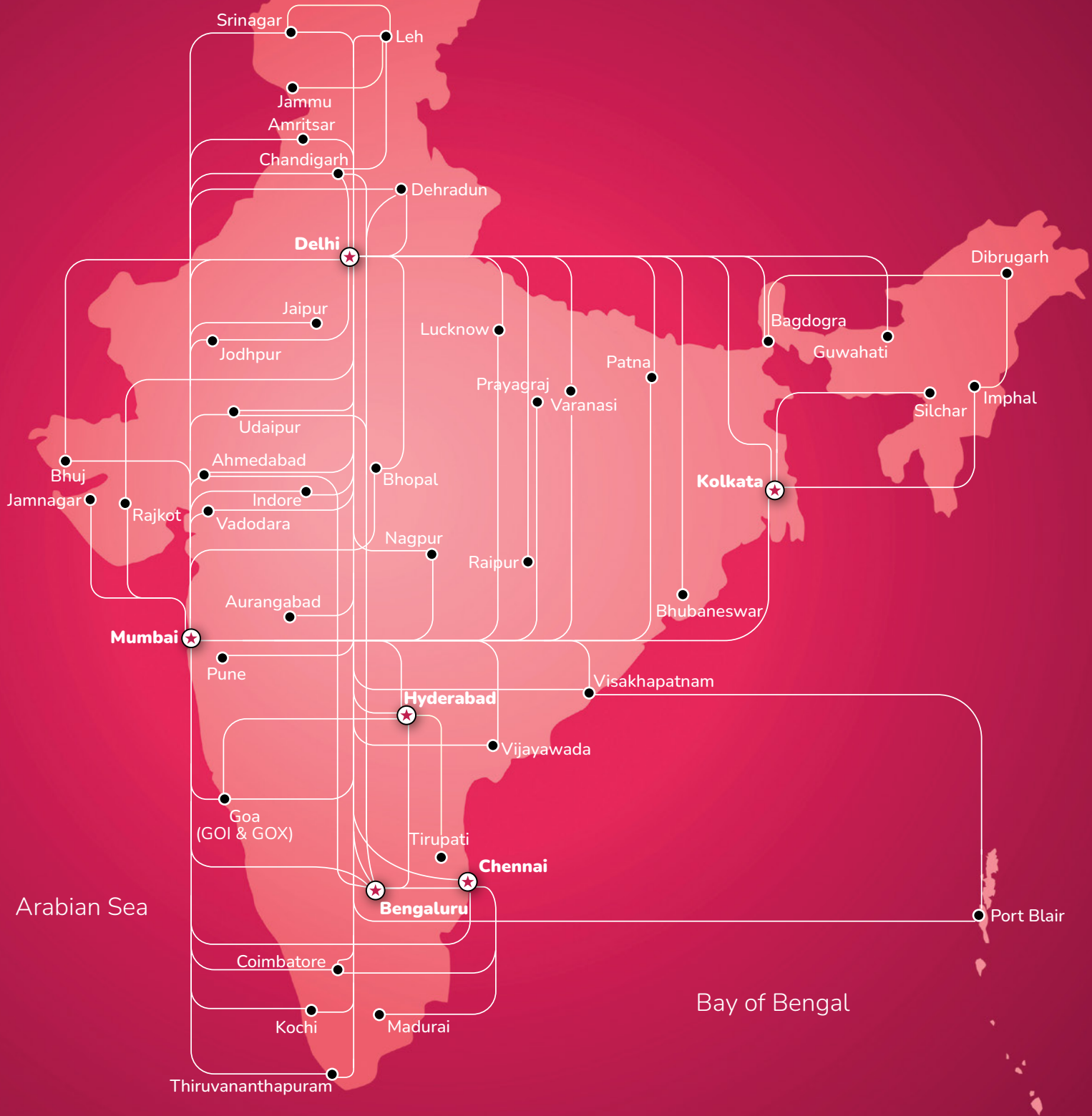


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# DOMESTIC CONNECTIVITY



\*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 14<sup>th</sup> April 2025.



# 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	
Vienna (VIE)	←————→	DEL	
Zurich (ZRH)	←————→	DEL	
Tel Aviv (TLV)	←————→	DEL	

## UK



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

## North America



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

## Middle East



Abu Dhabi (AUH)	←————→	BOM		
Dammam (DMM)	←————→	BOM		
Doha (DOH)	←————→	DEL	BOM	COK
Dubai (DXB)	←————→	DEL	BOM	COK
Jeddah (JED)	←————→	DEL	BOM	
Riyadh (RUH)	←————→	DEL	BOM	

\*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 14<sup>th</sup> April 2025





Amritsar

ATQ

DEL

Delhi

Ahmedabad

AMD

Mumbai

BOM

Pune PNQ

HYD

Hyderabad

GOX

Goa

Bengaluru

BLR

MAA

Chennai

COK

Kochi

INDIA



## Far East

Hong Kong (HKG) <-----> DEL

Seoul (ICN) <-----> DEL

Tokyo (HND) <-----> DEL



## South East Asia

Bali (DPS) <-----> DEL

Bangkok (BKK) <-----> DEL BOM

Ho Chi Minh City (SGN) <-----> DEL

Kuala Lumpur (KUL) <-----> DEL

Phuket (HKT) <-----> DEL

Singapore (SIN) <-----> DEL BOM BLR MAA PNQ

## Indian Subcontinent

Colombo (CMB) <-----> DEL BOM MAA

Dhaka (DAC) <-----> DEL BOM

Kathmandu (KTM) <-----> DEL

Malé (MLE) <-----> DEL

Yangon (RGN) <-----> DEL



## Africa

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

Nairobi (NBO) <-----> DEL



## Australia

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



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TAP AIR PORTUGAL

Kenya Airways  
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air mauritius

Virgin australia

## I N T E R L I N E



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Aegean Airlines  
Aeroflot  
Aerolineas Argentinas  
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Air Austral  
Air Canada  
Air China  
Air Europa  
Air France  
Air Macau  
Air Malta  
Air New Zealand  
Air Niugini  
Air Seychelles  
Air Tanzania  
Alaska Airlines  
American Airlines  
Austrian Airlines  
Azerbaijan Airlines  
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MIAT Mongolian Airlines  
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Qantas  
Qatar Airways  
Royal Air Maroc  
Royal Brunei Airlines  
Royal Jordanian  
RwandAir  
Saudia  
Scandinavian Airlines  
Shandong Airlines  
Shanghai Airlines  
Shenzhen Airlines  
South African Airways  
Thai Airways  
Turkish Airlines  
United Airlines  
Uzbekistan Airways  
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\*Both Codeshare and Interline Partners

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## ABOUT THE ATTRACTION:

This green expanse is one of the best spots in the city to take in the beautiful sights of the country's famed cherry blossoms. It boasts nearly 1,500 Sakura trees and the blooms last till early May here. The delicate flowers apart, the park also has a beautiful star-shaped moated fort and an observation tower.





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## BROADCAST REGARDING INDIAN CONSTITUTION

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

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

## 150<sup>TH</sup> BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF SHRI BIRSA MUNDA

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

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

## MISSION LIFE

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

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

## AIR-SEWA

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

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

## DIGI YATRA

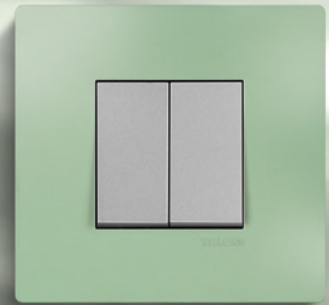
नागर विमानन मंत्रालय द्वारा 13 airports - दिल्ली, बेंगलूरु, वाराणसी, पुणे, कोलकाता, विजयवाड़ा, हैदराबाद, अहमदाबाद, मुंबई, जयपुर, लखनऊ, गुवाहाटी और कोचीन के लिए, डिजी यात्रा की सुविधा का शुभारंभ किया गया है। डिजी यात्रा ऐप को डाउनलोड करके खुद को नामांकित करें, और इन एयरपोर्ट्स पर बिना रुकावट के, यात्रा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

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





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### SECOND HOME

Dubai fills me with a sense of happiness and expansion. I've been visiting the emirate for 30 years and love its cosmopolitan style. That's why I opened my first international flagship store there.

### AMAZING VIBES

Dubai brings in a cool mix of work and indulgence. My two favourites are Zuma, offering great sushi, and Nammos at the Four Seasons Resort Dubai (Jumeirah Beach) for its unbeatable Middle Eastern vibe. I also like COYA Dubai for its comforting Peruvian fusion fare. Lately, I've been loving The Arts Club (members only)—chic, quiet, and a great place to be at.

### MUST DO

The Cheesecake Factory is my favourite guilty pleasure. The Burj Khalifa is always a surreal sight. I like to catch a show at the Dubai Opera. And no trip is complete without visiting the Dubai Mall. I can spend hours here.

— As told to **Shilpi Madan**



Clockwise from top left: Manish Malhotra; Nammos Dubai; Shutterstock; The Cheesecake Factory; COYA Dubai





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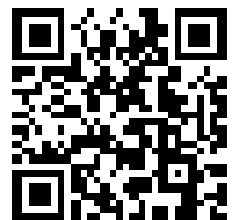


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