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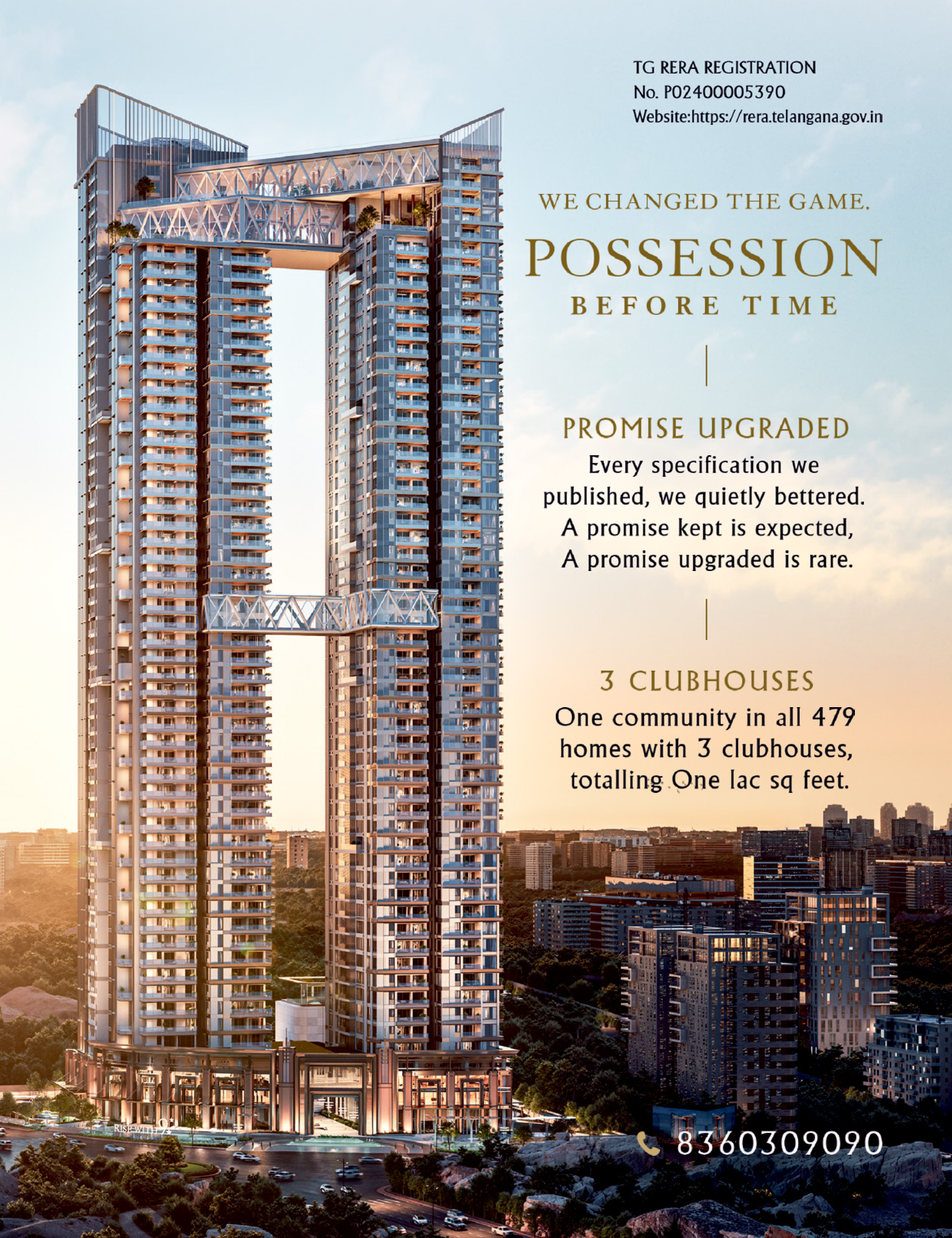
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EDITOR'S NOTE



Even as borders shrink and the world becomes more accessible, allowing us to roam far and wide, there is something inexplicable about the quiet joy of coming home.

That spirit is beautifully reflected in the theme of this issue—*Homecoming*. Whether it is returning to loved ones during the festive season, revisiting cherished traditions that have survived centuries or rediscovering flavours and memories that evoke a sense of belonging—homecoming is less about a destination and more about a feeling. As musician Shankar Mahadevan, who celebrates several multicultural festivals, tells us, “Homecoming is deeply connected to family, music, and those familiar experiences that transport you back in time.”

It is this search for connection and rediscovery that shapes the journeys we share in these pages. We take you to Varanasi, this time away from the ghats, to the craftspeople keeping traditions alive; in Goa we show you a totally different side of the coastal state, which may have earned the moniker of being a party place, but hides in its leafy fronds a rich local culture; in Bhopal, navigate a page in history through the unique *namak wali chai*; and if gastronomy is your passion, read our piece on Japan's layered cuisine where true luxury is found in restraint. Every story goes beyond the obvious to find real connection.

Carrying this forward, we bring you our onboard culinary innovation, the Cutting Chai, served at 35,000 feet so you can feel the warmth of home in a sip every time you fly Air India. It is just one small way of making your homecoming journey more personal.

It is a feeling that we have had the privilege of carrying across continents and generations. As we embark on the festive season, we hope the stories in these pages remind you of the many ways we all find our way home. Happy Reading!

— **Namaste.ai** Editorial Team

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Shankar Mahadevan reflects on the sounds, tastes, and memories that define the season of celebrations

Shankar Mahadevan

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The Qutab Minar, Delhi (the plane has been inserted for representational purposes only)

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For over 30 years, Karen has shaped how India eats through television, consultancy, and her gourmet food business. A TV host and author, she has received honours from the French government, including the Trophée de l'Esprit Alimentaire. She writes about the simple yet layered flavours of Japanese cuisine. **page 74**



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With 25 years of experience across print and digital media, Nasrin writes on food, travel, education, and culture. Curious by nature, she brings us stories about NRIs returning home to discover their roots and feel a sense of belonging.

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A New Delhi-based aviation enthusiast, Vinamra is Vice President at a global aviation asset management and technical consultancy firm. With a career spanning airlines, aviation law, and consultancy, he holds a deep understanding of the industry and harbours a passion for aviation. Vinamra writes about Maharaja Club benefits.

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Delhi-based food writer and culinary commentator, Ayandrali is rooted in her Bengali heritage. Her work explores West Bengal's food, culture, and history, among other stories. She takes us around Kolkata's lesser-known *bonedi bari* pujas. **page 20**

➔ Divya Jain

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A journalism graduate, Divya is an editor who has worked with several Indian media organisations in the news and entertainment space. When not editing, she reads, listens to true crime podcasts or plans her next trip. A coffeeholic like Lorelai Gilmore, she always needs 'coffee in an IV'. She chalks out a day-long itinerary in Christchurch, New Zealand.

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The Sound of coming Home

For Shankar Mahadevan, homecoming has a soundtrack—composed of celebratory drums, familiar melodies, family voices, and the unmistakable flavours of belonging

words by **Soumya Vajpayee**

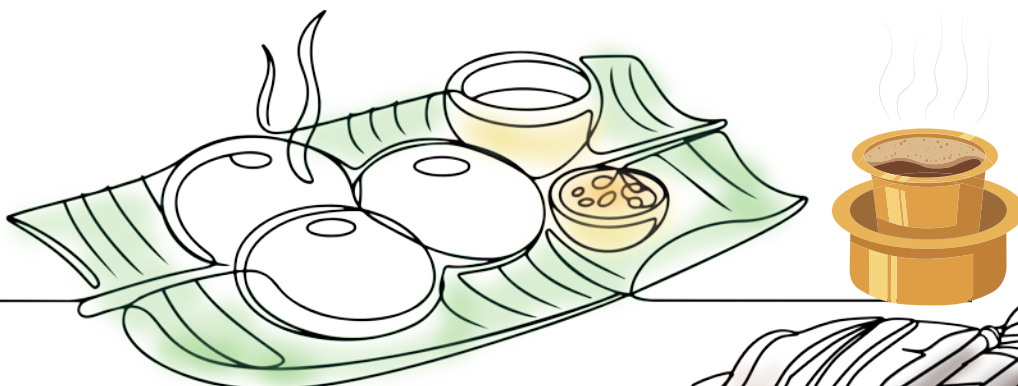
For a musician who has spent decades giving India some of its most recognisable sounds—from the exhilarating *Breathless* and the soulful strains of *Mitwa*, *Sajda*, and *Maa*, to the festive exuberance of songs like *Mourya re*—Shankar Mahadevan knows that music has an extraordinary ability to make us feel at home, wherever we are. A National Award-winning singer and composer, Padma Shri recipient, and Grammy-winning member of the band Shakti, he has taken Indian music to global stages, while remaining deeply rooted in the sounds, traditions, and memories of home.

Perhaps that is why his idea of homecoming is less about a destination and more about a feeling—one that can arrive with the first notes of a *shehnai*, the infectious rhythm of a *dhol*, the aroma of steaming idlis or the laughter of family after a long journey. As India enters its most vibrant festive season, Mahadevan reflects on the music, food, family, and memories that turn a physical journey into an emotional return.

A full-page photograph of the Indian singer Shankar Mahadevan performing on stage. He is shown from the chest up, angled towards the right. He has a beard and is wearing large, dark-rimmed sunglasses. He is holding a black microphone in his right hand, which also features a gold ring on the ring finger and a black smartwatch on the wrist. His left arm is raised high, with his palm facing forward. He is wearing a maroon long-sleeved shirt under a black vest with intricate silver embroidery. On his left wrist, he has two beaded bracelets, one orange and one purple. A blue in-ear monitor is visible in his left ear. The background is dark and out of focus, with some blue stage lighting visible. Faint, large, stylized musical notes are overlaid on the left side of the image.

*Born and brought up
in Mumbai,
Shankar Mahadevan
feels the cosmopolitan
nature of the city
ensures all traditions
and cultures are
celebrated*

Music has this extraordinary ability to connect you with a memory, and food does exactly the same thing. That is why festivals are so powerful. They bring together all these sensory experiences — the music, the food, the people, the rituals — and suddenly you are transported to a place that feels completely familiar.

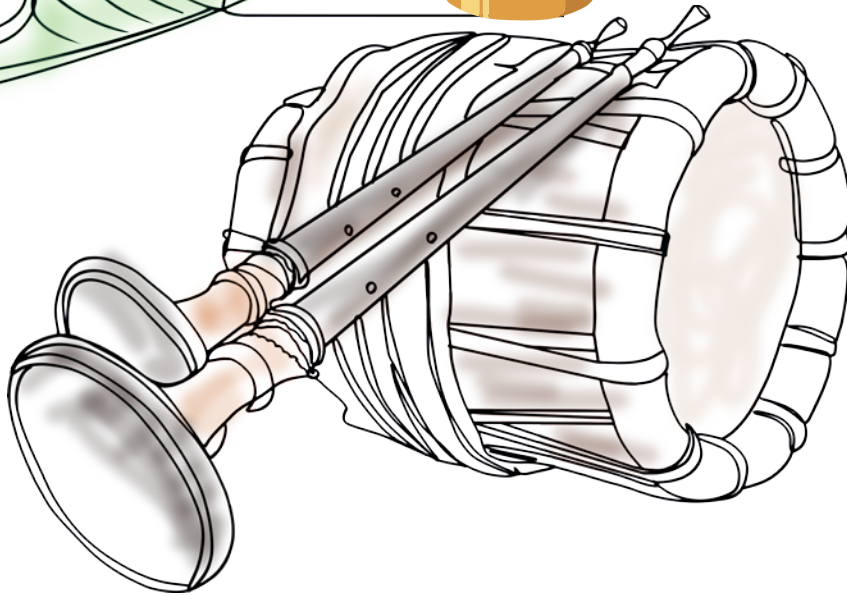


The festive season in India comes with its own unmistakable soundtrack—from dhol and shehnai to prayers and classical music. How do you translate this joyful, sometimes chaotic energy, into music?

I think the sound of the *shehnai* definitely, or the *nadaswaram*, embodies festivals and celebrations, and immediately gets you into a festive mood. You dive into the emotion of the festival. And Indian classical music also has that ability. Whenever you hear Ustad Zakir Hussain early in the morning, you can literally get the fragrance of the festival.

India is blessed to be a country with so many forms of festivals and celebrations for every single occasion associated with human beings—from the birth of a child to somebody getting married and going away, to the harvest of crops, and to our multiple mythological occasions like Ram Navami, Diwali, and Dussehra.

Each festival is celebrated with music, and the music is different for each. If it is Navratri, it is garba; if it is Lohri, it is



the musical traditions of Punjab. The essence, effect, and energy of festivals can, therefore, be very easily translated musically because these musical forms were defined hundreds, even thousands of years ago.

You grew up in Mumbai, one of the most culturally diverse cities in India.

What are the festive sounds that take you straight back to childhood?

I was born and brought up in Mumbai, and it is such a cosmopolitan city that

every single tradition and culture is celebrated here. Though I am a South Indian, I have always been surrounded by Maharashtrians, Gujaratis, and people who celebrate various cultural festivals. Those festivals have now become an integral part of our family celebrations. We celebrate every single festival in the country.

And imagine a festival without music. How would you describe the energy of a festival without music? It is just impossible. I remember from my



Pictured here with his family at the recently-concluded Ganesh Chaturthi celebrations at his house

childhood, the rhythms of the Ganpati processions or those Gujarati *dhol*s during garba in Navratri. These are things that are absolutely imprinted and embedded in our brains.

You have travelled the world and performed on some of the biggest stages. At this point of your life and career, what does 'homecoming' mean to you?

For me, homecoming is deeply connected to family, music, and those familiar experiences that transport you back in time. Food and music are two such important aspects of life that they can almost act like a time machine.

You listen to a piece of music and the nostalgia is so high that it transports you to a particular time or situation in your life—something that may have happened 20 or 30 years ago, when you were a kid. The same thing happens with food. When you smell or taste a particular food, it can take you back exactly to that same location and moment.

When I think of my childhood, I can never forget the smell of idlis steaming. When you open the steamer and get that smell of hot idli, combined with the aroma of sambar, and then the smell of filter coffee—that is something I remember quite vividly.

THE RHYTHM OF AIR INDIA

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



LEFT AND RIGHT

Mahadevan feels that if someone listens to Ustad Zakir Hussain early in the morning, one can undeniably feel the spirit of the festival; Performing with his sons.

**Touring with sons
Siddharth and Shivam**

Being on stage, performing, and having fun together is the greatest high. It gives us such an adrenaline rush that when we come back to our hotel room—whatever state we are in or whichever country—we cannot sleep. We [sons and musicians] come to the room, order good food, and chat and laugh. I feel really blessed to be on stage with both my sons. It is a rare phenomenon.

You composed Air India's brand track. What has it meant to you that it has become part of one's journeys home?

So many people have called me while sitting on the flight. Even musicians of great repute have called and appreciated the Air India theme so much. That really is a great feeling. I consider privileged and honoured that I was the one who got the chance to compose for our airline, which represents our country and its heritage.

Now the theme song has become synonymous with travelling on that airline. Everybody looks forward to that tune being played. It is so catchy that people start humming it while getting off the aircraft. People even record it from the aircraft and send it to me. It is very, very heart-warming.

For an Indian living away from home, why do music and food create such an immediate emotional shift from 'away' to 'home'?

Because they bypass everything

else. You do not need an explanation for nostalgia. A particular melody, a particular rhythm, a particular aroma can instantly take you somewhere. Music has this extraordinary ability to connect you with a memory, and food does exactly the same.

That is why festivals are so powerful. They bring together all these sensory experiences—music, food, people, rituals—and suddenly you are transported to a place that feels completely familiar.

Food is another powerful route to nostalgia, and you have channelled your love for South Indian food into Malgudi, your restaurant. When you come home after your travels, what is the festive comfort food you need waiting for you?

Maybe it is not exactly a festival delicacy, but I believe it is made during festivals. What I need is good, piping hot sambar with piping hot Indrayani rice, good-quality ghee, *aloo sabzi*, and papad.



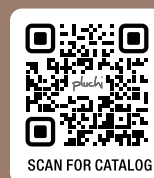
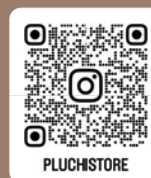
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CENTURIES OF *Faith*

Heritage walk curators take us through their top *bonedi bari* pujas in Kolkata, revealing the history and rituals of this ancient celebration

words by
Ayandrali Dutta

Long before elaborate community pandals became synonymous with Puja season, Durga Puja was celebrated within the courtyards of powerful zamindar and aristocratic families. Dating back to the late 16th and 17th centuries, these celebrations were as much about devotion as they were about status, patronage, and power. Centuries later, what survives is not just the grandeur, but the continuity.

While the word *bonedi* comes from the Persian *buniadi*, meaning foundational, *bari* translates to house. The term seems particularly apt for families that became a part of Bengal's cultural bedrock. From the grand courtyards of the Debs, Mallicks, and the Daws, to quieter family homes tucked into the city's older neighbourhoods—*bonedi bari* pujas offer an intimate way of experiencing the festival.

Unique rituals

"Ever since I started the *bonedi bari* walks, I found that each house has at least one ritual that they can call their own," says Navpreet Arora, founder of FunOnStreets.

Among the more unusual is *kada maati khyala* or playing with clay and mud, practised by the Basu Mallick family of Radhanath Mallick Lane. Male members of the family gather in the *thakurdalan* (puja area) and

smear the slushy mixture on each other.

Today, heritage walks and social media have brought these pujas into the public eye, helping younger members of *bonedi* families rediscover their own histories. "They are far prouder of their lineage and legacy, and are beginning to look at their puja not simply as an obligation that their ancestors performed, but as something that has a story worth knowing and preserving," Arora adds.

Most of these pujas are over two or three centuries old. Visiting these homes is then less about sightseeing and more about stepping briefly into another Kolkata—one of colonial-era mansions, shaded courtyards, heirloom utensils, and family rituals.

"In this age of Instagram reels and YouTube Shorts, some *baris* have been highlighted beyond imagination. These are magnificent but in the midst of so much visibility, the puja is sometimes lost," says Arora. She recommends looking beyond to spots like Haldar Bari in Baghbazar, Malapara Mullick Bari in Jorabagan, Kalidas Chandra Bari in Bowbazar, and Jagatram Mukherjee Sonar Durga Bari in Behala.

Some traditions are delightfully theatrical. Ramit Mitra, co-founder and chief explorer of DelhiByFoot Adventures and TheBrownTicket Expeditions, recalls the Bandukwala Daw Bari, where the end of the puja is traditionally marked



by the firing of a gun. The unusual ritual is linked to the family's old association with gun manufacturing, an example of how family history becomes embedded with religious practice.

He also remembers the *dhunuchi* dances at Badan Chandra Roy Bari, describing them as graceful and formal, and particularly beautiful when the house is illuminated in the evening. "For a moment, you almost forget that you are standing

Dhuno porano is a ritual where married women sit before the Goddess with burning clay pots filled with incense balanced on their heads and hands

FACING PAGE

Dhunuchi naach is an indispensable aspect of Durga Puja celebrations—irrespective of whether it is being held in a bonedi bari or neighbourhood pandals



A traditional Ashtami bhog includes (left to right) beguni (eggplant fritters), khichuri (rice and dal dish), labra (mixed vegetable), and tomato chutney

Good to know

- **Entry:** Open all day; avoid late nights when the idol may be curtained.
- **Best Days:** Ashtami (18th October) or Navami (19th October). Check the timings for *dhuno porano* or Kumari Puja to experience these special rituals.
- **Bhog:** Most of the houses do an elaborate Ashtami *bhog* of khichuri, labra, chutney, and sweets; open to visitors.
- **Location:** Many *bonedi bari* pujas are in North Kolkata. Begin near Sovabazar Rajbari; head to Pathuriaghata Khelat Ghosh Bari, then make your way to Jorasanko Shib Krishna Daw Bari, Posta Mallick Bari, Dutt Bari, and onward.

in the present day,” he says. “You suddenly feel transported back to the 1830s or 1870s.”

For Mitra, who has been making the annual five-day Durga Puja journey to Kolkata for several years, the experience is also visual. He remembers women dressed not simply in saris but in traditional Bengali silhouettes—old-style saris, rich silks, zari work, and distinctive blouses—while the men appeared in traditional attire. It is a reminder that at a *bonedi bari*, the ritual extends beyond the idol and into the entire household.

Evolving with time

Among the city’s most historically significant celebrations is the Durga Puja at Sovabazar Rajbari, founded by Raja Nabakrishna Deb and dating back to the 18th century. Elsewhere, families like the Dutts of Beadon Street and the Ram Gopal Saha family of

Bowbazar continue practices like *dhuno porano*, where married women sit before the Goddess with clay pots on their heads and hands, containing burning incense.

Not every tradition has survived unchanged. At Sovabazar, the family once released a *neelkontho* (the Indian roller), on Dashami—a symbolic gesture intended to carry news of Maa Durga’s departure to Lord Shiva. The practice was eventually discontinued in keeping with animal welfare regulations.

For those seeking a quieter experience, heritage walk curator Shankar Deb recommends the Jorasanko Shib Krishna Daw Bari, where Durga Puja has been celebrated since 1840. Its *thakurdalan* and inner courtyard retain an atmosphere of continuity, while the *daaker saaj*—the silver-and-zari ornamentation of the idol—adds another layer to its visual identity. Thanthania Dutta Bari (on Bidhan Sarani Road), too,

offers a more intimate experience centred on ritual rather than spectacle.

These *bonedi baris* are not frozen museums of a glorious past, but living traditions negotiating between inheritance and change. Their grandeur may be quieter, but their stories are often far more personal.

Between the sound of the *dhak*, the fragrance of incense, the glow of an old courtyard, and a family ritual repeated yet again—one understands that Kolkata’s Durga Puja heritage is all about the homes, families, memories, and generations that built a city’s relationship with Her—and continue to keep that connection alive.

GETTING THERE

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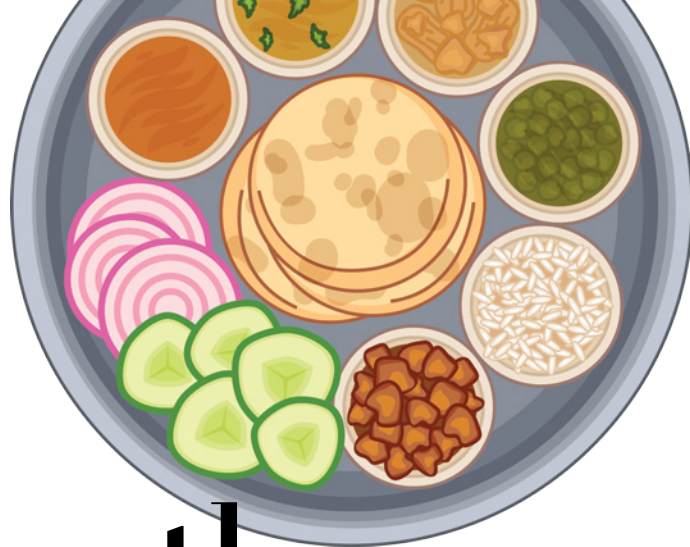
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Food for the Soul

Everyone craves a specific dish when they come home, either to visit or from a long trip abroad. **Veenu Singh** asked these on-the-move personalities to share their favourites



Suresh Raina, cricketer

“The first meal that I crave for when I come back home is my mother’s simple dal, chawal, and aloo sabzi, with a little *achaar* on the side. I have happily eaten it at odd hours, too, as after days or even months of travelling, nothing tastes quite like the comfort of home.”

“The first thing I crave for when I return to India is *ajwain* paratha with just a little *namak*, the way my grandmother made it in *desi* ghee on a cast-iron *tawa*. Slightly smoky, a little burnt and charred, yet soft, tender, and crisp all at once. For me, that is the taste of home.

Now my grandmother is not around, so whenever I land in Amritsar, our *didi* at home makes it for me. Else, in Delhi, my *bhabhi* Shelley Khanna prepares it. I can eat this paratha at any time I land in India.”



Vikas Khanna, chef



Adil Hussain, actor



"Every time I get home from travelling abroad, the food I crave the most is *khar rohu* [fish] and *dhekia saag* with chutney. The latter is made of fermented bamboo shoot, *bhut jolokia* [ghost pepper], black mustard seed, garlic, lemon, and salt, and is a staple in my house. I make this food myself every time and eat it with Joha rice [an aromatic Axomia rice variety]. I have made this meal at some very odd hours, most notably when I have arrived home early morning from a foreign land, specifically after a month."



Rahul Mishra, fashion designer

"Whenever I return to India, I crave my mother's *kadhi chawal*. She makes the most wonderful *kadhi*, and with rice, it is all I need to feel at home. *Aloo parathas* are another favourite. In fact, *kadhi chawal* carries a deeper meaning in our family as it is associated with auspicious, celebratory moments like Janmashtami, and family traditions. And beyond the festivities, it is simply one of those comforting, deeply familiar meals that I crave."





Ayaan Ali Bangash, musician

“As my work requires me to be constantly on the move, after long journeys, I always look forward to coming home to Indian food. My mother always cooks something for us on our return, which always tastes special. The food she cooks for us is usually biryani, mutton stew or chicken *korma*. And sometimes she gets into making individual favourites and mine is mutton *jungle*.

I believe that food is a combination of many things: ingredients, tradition, memory, and, most importantly, intention. Since our work is a craft rooted in vibrations, I feel that the intent with which food is cooked can make all the difference. Just like music, cooking is a creative art form; and when it comes from the heart, it carries a feeling that reaches far beyond the plate.”



“When I come back from my travels, I always want *ghar ka khana*, whether it is dal chawal with *aloo bhujia*, cooked in the Bihari style by my in-laws, with *chaas* or *sattu*. Or *kadhi chawal* and *rajma chawal*, whenever I am at my parents home in Delhi. Another food I always crave for is good South Indian fare, especially idli, and I am lucky to have really good friends who ensure that I am always well fed. And with any of these foods, chutney is a must.”



Shweta Tripathi, actor



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THE INHERITANCE OF

Memories

For NRIs, travelling back to their roots can be a way of discovering where their stories began

words by
Nasrin Modak-Siddiqi

What does it mean to visit a place you know only through family stories? For a growing number of travellers, the answer lies in going there: to the old neighbourhood, the ancestral home, the school, the street their parents remember. These journeys are less about nostalgia and more about seeing an inherited past with their own eyes.

The long road home

In January 2025, Bashaarit Ali Khan travelled from Cape Town to Mumbai, then 188km further to Jasvali in Raigad, Maharashtra, following a family journey that had begun generations earlier. The Konkan coast has long been a place of departure, its villages sending families across the Indian Ocean in search of work and opportunity. Khan's great-grandparents were among them.

Generations later, he was travelling in the opposite direction, accompanied by his mother and her cousins, to sort out the family's ancestral property. Google Earth helped him picture Jasvali before they arrived; the family also hired a local traveller in advance to map out the journey and pit stops. But, as Khan discovered, "a satellite view does not really prepare you for the real deal". Easily available cabs and other conveniences made the journey easier, but local family knowledge ultimately filled in the gaps.



The late Chef Floyd Cardoz's trip to India in 2019 with his son Peter, to touch base with his roots, started with a stay at The Taj Mahal Palace hotel near the Gateway of India in Mumbai





Before the trip, Jasvali was little more than “a name, a region, a vague sense of origin”. Khan did not know why his great-grandparents had left or what they had left behind. But once there, he found a village shaped by migration, much like his own family’s story. “Some parts felt familiar before I even arrived: the house where my grandfather stayed, the land, and the fact that people still knew the surname. The rest—the texture of

being there—was mine to discover: the food I was fed each night, the warmth of strangers who treated me as though I already belonged, and the sounds of the place. The story brought me to the door. Everything beyond it was new.”

Through his father’s eyes

In 2019, the late Chef Floyd Cardoz took his older son, Peter, to India, from the US, for more than a holiday: to show him the

Mumbai where he had built Hunger Inc (the hospitality company behind The Bombay Canteen, O Pedro, Bombay Sweet Shop, Veronica’s, and Papa’s), and the Goa his family hailed from. Of his earlier memories of India, Peter says he was, “always glued to my Game Boy and felt very uncomfortable because I did not know the language at all”.

This trip was different. In Mumbai, they stayed at The Taj Mahal Palace near the Gateway of India, “the equivalent of staying close to the Statue of Liberty”, before travelling to Goa. He noticed the Portuguese architecture, wandered through markets, shopped for food, and ate at restaurants by the sea. “It gave me a very different understanding of India,” he says, along with a more resonant appreciation of its culture and heritage.

Much of the journey, inevitably, was through food. “My dad was always planning his food trips before he planned anything else,” Peter laughs. But beneath the culinary itinerary was something more personal. Floyd wanted his son to experience India, “to understand what it is like to be an Indian going to India. As the years have gone on, the cultural gap has gotten smaller, making it easier to fit into the community.”

Now, the Lynn (Massachusetts)-based culinary consultant and entrepreneur wants to return to India next year and take his 95-year-old grandmother,

Beryl, to the Airport Centaur hotel, now Hotel Sahara Star, where she once worked. "She loves talking about those places," he says.

Finding her own India

New York-based Deanne Ferro and her sister Alyson were born in Mumbai and moved to the US as babies, returning to India most summers. They visited Mumbai, Goa, Ahmedabad, and Mussoorie, layered with stories of the places and lives their parents remembered. Yet, as she grew older, Deanne began to recognise a distance between their memories and her own. "I realised my experience of India was still very different from 'their' India."

While in high school, Deanne spent a month with a friend in a village near Mussoorie, helping teach English at a small school. They shared village meals and taught girls in third- and seventh-grade classes. She also took Hindi lessons, wanting to speak rather than observe. "For the first time, it felt like we were discovering India for ourselves."

That experience changed the way she travelled through India. A summer internship in Mumbai brought another kind of independence: rickshaw rides, tiffins, colleagues sharing lunch, and evenings spent with friends and cousins. Later came Jaipur and Agra, and her first glimpse of the iconic Taj Mahal.



"You can definitely inherit a relationship with a place you have never lived in," Ferro says, "not just through repeated visits or extended stays, but also through family and the heritage passed down in stories and pictures."

Living her mother's stories

For Dubai-based Namrata Mani, India was familiar long before it became her own. Her family made a trip to Tirunelveli some years ago to explore their roots; in 2025, they returned to Ahmedabad, the city her mother knew as a child. They travelled across Gujarat and Rajasthan, stopping at sites like famous temples that existed largely in family stories.

In Ahmedabad, Namrata's mother became their guide. They visited the houses she had lived in, her schools, Adalaj ni Vav (a 15th century stepwell), Amdavad ni Gufa, walked through Law Garden, met old friends, and returned to an ice-cream shop that had survived from back then.

Tender reminders of how much time had passed lingered. Her mother, Chandrakala, learnt that her old home was to be demolished to develop a sports village. "The thought that I would never see that house again was a little painful." Yet, across the road, the community hall where she had watched weddings from her balcony as a child was still standing.

For Namrata, these journeys transformed India from somewhere they returned to for family into somewhere they could discover for themselves. "The trips gave us a tangible experience of what had, until then, just been their memories, retold to us from their imagination."

And perhaps that is what roots tourism offers at its most intimate: not simply returning to where a family comes or hails from, but allowing the next generation to see those places with fresh eyes.

The Adalaj ni Vav stepwell was on the list of places to see when Dubai-based Namrata Mani visited Ahmedabad with her mother

FACING PAGE
*(top and bottom)
New York-based
Deanne Ferro felt her
understanding of India
improve after extended
stays in Mussoorie;
She also visited the
Taj Mahal.*

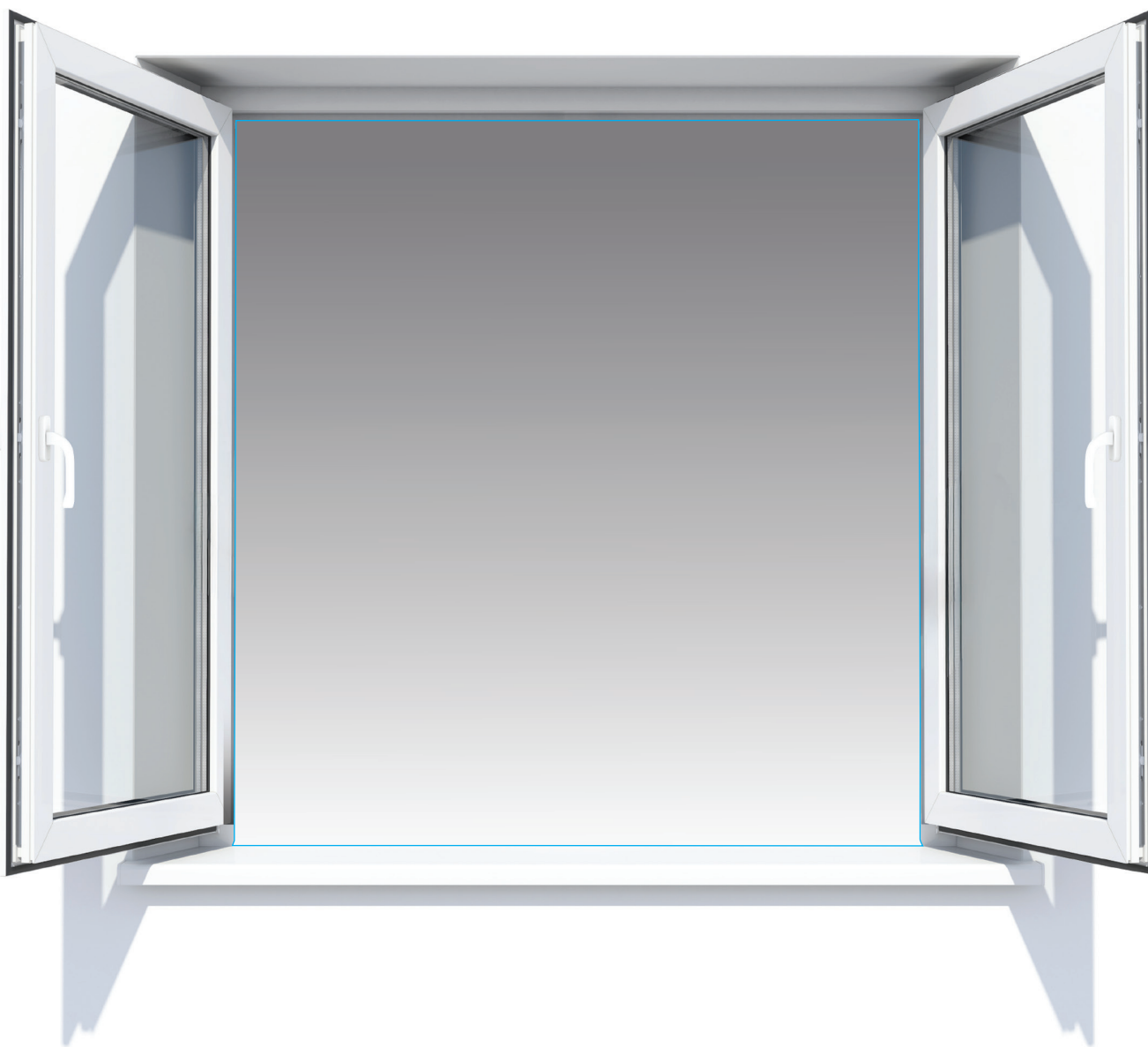
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- 44 ➔ EVENTS
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- 58 ➔ NOW TRENDING
- 62 ➔ BOOKS



BEYOND WORDS

Step inside Kolkata's new immersive museum celebrating the diversity and history of human expression

words by **Shrabasti Anindita Mallik**

The city of joy talks. It always has—in poetry, in opinion, and in unhurried *addas*. So, it is only apt that India's first museum devoted entirely to language has chosen this city as its home. Shabdalok, the Museum of Word, has opened inside the historic Belvedere House on the National Library campus—and for a city that has always turned language into art, it is a fitting tribute.

Spread across nine galleries, the museum traces the story of language from ancient rock art and oral traditions to the Public Library Act of 1954—a scope that spans millennia, stopping just short of the present. That gap is deliberate in a way; the museum allows its interactive screens, holograms, AI, and video games to carry the story into today's digital age instead.

The journey begins with 'From Silence to Sound', a gallery that explores how

language may have first emerged—the idea of sound and meaning being born out of primordial silence. Another, 'The First Word', traces the evolution of human speech—from early primates to *Homo erectus*, before following how scripts developed and spread through centres of learning like Nalanda. Other galleries map India's 380 indigenous languages and dialects, showing how they branched and blended over time, while celebrating oral traditions like poetry, song, and storytelling that carried language beyond the page.

Manuscripts, palm-leaf scrolls, coins, and handwritten books—some original, some replicas—fill in the rest. Shabdalok does not explain language. It celebrates it as something alive, something this city has always understood.

Tuesday to Sunday; 10am to 6pm
museumofword.org



TOP AND BOTTOM
A metal pillar bearing the names of the 22 languages (recognised by the Indian Constitution) in their respective scripts takes pride of place in the museum; A display mapping the groups, scripts, and languages of India.

GETTING THERE

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EASY DOES IT

With a distinctly English heritage, Christchurch offers natural beauty, cultural immersions, and a plethora of food experiences

words by **Divya Jain**

🕒 07:00AM

Breakfast of champions

📍 *Underground Coffee Roasters*

Start your day with locally-roasted coffee, followed by hand-rolled and freshly baked bagels at Downtown Bagels (they are only open until their stock runs out for the day) in Riverside Market. Their vegan menu is as noteworthy as the regular one.

🕒 09:45AM

Waka on Avon

📍 *Avon River*

Go for the 75-minute long Manaaki experience that begins with a *kaihoe haka* (traditional welcome) and a fun warm-up game. As you paddle the Ōtākaro Avon River, the guide shares *mātauranga* (Māori knowledge) and interesting stories about Māori history in Christchurch along the way. Take this time to slow down and connect with nature.

🕒 12:00PM

Lunch with a view

📍 *Miro*

Grab a seat at the riverside terrace and enjoy a delicious meal prepared with fresh ingredients paired with a cider brewed in-house. Mentioned in New Zealand's first Michelin Guide launched in 2026, this restaurant is the perfect place to enjoy a picturesque meal.

🕒 01:45PM

History lesson

📍 *Quake City*

Christchurch faced two devastating earthquakes, with 2011 bringing heartbreaking loss to the city. Quake City honours that chapter through moving survivor stories, heroic rescuer accounts, and hands-on exhibits on the science of the quakes. Discover treasured artefacts recovered from the rubble, each carrying its own story of struggle and hope.



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checklist on the clock

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
Narcissa, painted by Jacob Yikes, is said to be the tallest mural in New Zealand; Mushroom risotto at Miro; The heritage tram tours begin at Cathedral Junction; Riverside Market.

STYLISH STAYS

- 1/ Crowne Plaza Christchurch:** Located in the heart of the city's downtown, it is known for its warm hospitality.
- 2/ Fable Christchurch:** Alongside 171 luxury rooms and suites, it also boasts a relaxing sauna and a gym.
- 3/ The George:** This 5-star boutique property offers views of Hagley Park and the Avon River.



GETTING THERE

Fly to Christchurch from Sydney and Melbourne with Air India's Codeshare partner, Air New Zealand.



🕒 03:00PM

Tram tour

📍 Cathedral Junction

Get on one of the four restored heritage trams for a city tour with drivers sharing historical insights. The all-day, hop-on hop-off ticket lets you explore 18 major sites around the city centre, including the Riverside Market, Botanic Gardens, and the New Regent Street.

🕒 04:30PM

Mural walk

📍 Distinction Christchurch Hotel

The city is known as the 'street art and mural capital' of New Zealand, so take time out to see more than 50 beautiful murals. Start with *Narcissa*, touted as the tallest one in the country. For souvenirs, head to The Crossing. We recommend picking up Manuka honey, Kawakawa balm, and Pāua shell jewellery.

🕒 07:00PM

Fine dining

📍 Inati

This Michelin-star restaurant is all about sharing, offering seasonally-inspired tasting plates created with locally-sourced produce and ingredients. All dishes from their Earth menu are worth trying. The Pino Gris from their wine menu was my favourite.

🕒 08:45PM

Night cap

📍 Cashel Street

While most of the city calms down by 8pm, there are some after-hours places worth checking out. Head to King of Snake for a post-dinner drink and try their namesake cocktail. Follow it up with The Last Word, a whiskey and cocktail lounge located at the historic New Regent Street. End the night with ice cream at Rollickin Gelato Café.



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hampiartlabs.com

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theweeknd.com



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burppfest.com

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Jodhpur, Rajasthan

22nd-26th October

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jodhpurriff.org



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8 dishes **TO TRY IN** Muscat

Traditions, trade, and generous hospitality have shaped the culinary scene of Oman's laid-back capital

words by
Shuvajit Payne

➔ **BALALEET**

Vermicelli for breakfast is hardly unfamiliar for Indians, but this Gulf variant gives it a distinctly sweet-savoury twist. The fine strands are often lightly toasted first, then sweetened with sugar and perfumed with saffron, cardamom, and, sometimes, floral water. A thin, almost crêpe-like omelette goes on top. Its warm, golden-reddish hue has even been compared to the mellow glow of the morning sun, fitting for a dish commonly eaten at *sahoor* during the month of Ramadan and on Eid al-Fitr mornings.

Where to try it: Dukanah Cafe, Al Ghubrah South



➔ **SHUWA**

If Omanis voted for a national dish, this would be a front runner. Traditionally made for Eid, its preparation brings everyone together. Lamb or goat is rubbed with a spice blend that often varies from family to family, then wrapped in banana or palm leaves, packed into a palm-fibre sack, and lowered into a communal underground *tanoor*. The sealed pit slow-cooks the meat for 12 to 48 hours. Finally comes the opening—a celebration in itself—revealing meat that is smoky, deeply spiced, and melts in your mouth.

Where to try it: Rozna, Al Maardih Street



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➔ THAREED

A grand old dish from Arabia, this stew-with-bread is said to have Bedouin roots. Going by historical etiquette, *thareed* should be eaten from the sides, leaving the top for divine blessing. Strongly associated with Ramadan, especially *iftar*, it is made by soaking pieces of flatbread in a rich meat-and-vegetable stew. The bread absorbs the spiced broth, turning soft, savoury, and deeply comforting.

Where to try it:

Ramssa, Way 2241,
Building 2050



➔ MAJBOOS

A staple across the Gulf, this rice dish blends spices shaped by centuries of trade. The grains cook directly in meat or fish broth, soaking up the spices. Omanis use saffron, cardamom, cinnamon, and dried black lime, or *loomi*, which brings an earthy, slightly smoky citrus note that fresh lime cannot replicate. Once ready, *majboos* usually arrives on a generous platter made for sharing, with everyone gathered around.

Where to try it: Ubhar, Bareeq Al Shatti
Boulevard Boutique Mall, Shatti Al Quram



➔ LUQAIMAT

Meaning 'small bites' in Arabic, these tiny fritters find mention in ancient cookbooks. The batter (all purpose flour, cornstarch, sugar, baking powder, instant yeast, salt, and oil) is dropped into hot oil, turning into crisp little shells that stay soft and airy within. After frying, they are then sweetened with sugar syrup, honey or the Omani favourite, date syrup. At street stalls and during festivals, innovative versions come drizzled with condensed milk, caramel, and even chocolate.

Where to try it: Loqimat, Seeb





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➔ MISHKAK

In Muscat, the aroma of *mishkak* over charcoal defines an evening. Walk around the north-western Seeb suburb to find young street-food vendors serving it up from roadside grills. The preparation is similar to kebabs found across Iran, India, and East Africa, with cubes of meat skewered and grilled over charcoal. Omanis often marinate the meat in (or serve it with) tamarind sauce, adding a sharp tang to the smoky flavour.

Where to try it: One of the numerous roadside stalls along Al Seeb corniche

➔ OMANI HALWA

A Muscat welcome often arrives as a spoonful of halwa, served alongside dates and *qahwa*. And a box of this edible souvenir may well be how you say goodbye to Oman. A slow-cooked mix of sugar, starch, and ghee, this sweet is fragrant with saffron, cardamom, and rosewater, and packed with nuts. Hours of stirring in copper vessels turn it glossy and elastic. Modern versions have pushed the tradition further, with date and frankincense halwa.

Where to try it: Al Hosni Omani Sweets, Al Azaiba, Sultan Qaboos Street



⬇️ BAQEL

Muscat cuisine might not be known for its vegetarian selections, but this sits quietly on many tables. *Baqel* is prepared with fava beans along with onion and tomato, often mashed and spiced with roasted cumin. Served with a flatbread, this can be a breakfast by itself, accompany other mains or form part of a vegetarian spread alongside *dango*, an Omani chickpea curry.

Where to try it: Bait al Luban, Al Mina Street, Muttrah Corniche



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A UNIQUE BREW

Bhopal's *namak wali* chai traces its roots to the city's royal past, and is a unique, long-standing tradition

words by
Vanita Srivastava

It was 2006 when I first explored the labyrinthine lanes and corners of old Bhopal. As I navigated its serpentine routes, a crowd outside a modest shop caught my eye. Curiosity drew me closer.

Making my way through the patrons, I found a group of locals quietly sipping a steaming brew. At the centre of the gathering, a large, weathered copper vessel simmered softly, venting an aromatic steam. Nearby, the ingredients were neatly arranged—packets of tea leaves, sugar, fresh milk, and, surprisingly, a block of solid salt. Salt? In tea?

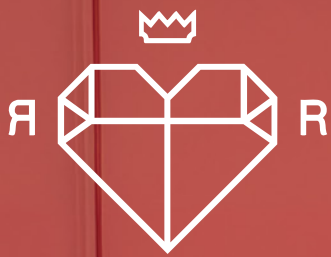
Intrigued, I leaned over the counter and asked the man at the stove, "What is the salt for?" He smiled warmly, pouring another steaming round, "This is Bhopal's famous *namak wali* chai."

Captivated, I stood and listened to the story of this unique sweet-salty blend—an unexpected culinary thread woven into the fabric of the city's heritage.

Heritage in a cup

According to local historian Sikander Malik, Bhopal's unique *namak wali* chai shares a fascinating kinship with Kashmiri noon chai—both served from a traditional kettle called *samovar*. But *namak wali* chai is believed to have originally emerged from the wisdom of Bhopali hakims (traditional physicians).

Bhopali chai is a must-try for anyone looking to savour the city's local flavours.



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LEFT AND RIGHT
A traditional samovar is used to store the sweet tea concentrate used to make Bhopali chai; This special concoction is said to have travelled from the royal kitchens to the city's street-side tea stalls.



Bhopal, he says, is a landscape of low-lying hills embraced by lakes. This distinct topography creates a microclimate where the hills heat up and cool down rapidly, creating abrupt atmospheric shifts that tend to trigger inflammation in the body. Because locals found drinking hot salted water unappealing, as a remedy hakims with tea makers innovated the idea of adding salted butter to the brew for transforming a medicinal cure into a comforting ritual. However, over the years it seems the butter got replaced with salt. Whether this actually happened or not needs further research.

"This is a multi-hued reflection of Bhopal. From royal beginnings to street stalls, it weaves together stories of art and heritage," says Mumtaz Khan, a Bhopal-based heritage expert and fashion designer.

According to SM Hussain, an architect and expert in the city's cultural heritage, "This tradition emerged from the royal kitchen. Most likely, it came to Bhopal through

traders, and gradually adapted to local tastes."

Some believe that the tea's origin is woven into the city's princely past. According to local lore, Sikandar Begum of Bhopal brought the recipe for salted tea from Türkiye. Several other tales surround its origins, but none have been documented. Over time, the unusual brew became part of Bhopal's Nawabi food culture. Today, it remains a distinctive part of Bhopal's culinary tradition.

Returning to a memory

In 2026, I was in Bhopal again, just as the monsoon came knocking. Longing for that distinct warmth, I drove into the winding heart of the old city at 5am, watching the silhouettes of the Moti Masjid against a dawn sky. The quiet streets of Chowk Bazaar echoed with centuries of history. Soon, I reached Laxmi Talkies area, a historic landmark.

The morning crowd had already gathered. And there he was—Arman, the man who had introduced me to the magic of this tea.

Brewed in tradition

In a corner, Arman's stove bore a large vessel simmering with a time-tested concoction: 10l of water, 300gm of tea leaves, 500gm of sugar, and 50gm of solid salt, all boiled together for 45 minutes. Once it had reduced by half, he carefully strained the rich concentrate through a cloth into a copper *samovar*.

The true artistry, however, lies in the final assembly. Unlike standard chai, the milk is boiled separately. When ordered, the two liquids are blended.

Bhopali chai is more than just a local element—it is the city in a cup. As I left, I realised that I was walking away from a lingering memory of a city that knows how to stir the soul.

WHERE TO TRY

- Patel Hotel
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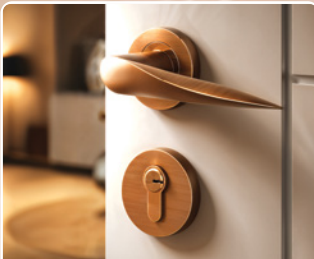
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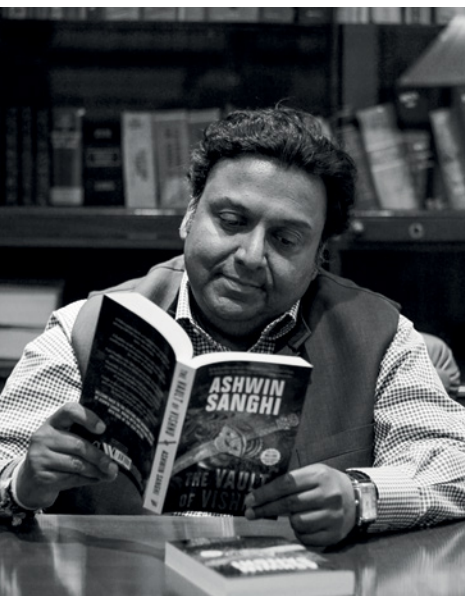
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ON FICTION'S EDGE

Author **Ashwin Sanghi** on his recent win, working with James Patterson, and more

Congratulations on becoming the first recipient of the JSW Prize in Literature at Bhutan's Drukyl's Literature and Arts Festival...

There is a particular weight to being the first recipient of an honour—you are not joining a list, you are helping to begin one. That is humbling. At this stage of my journey, when I have published 18 books, this recognition feels like an affirmation that the path I chose, of making popular fiction intellectually rich and culturally rooted, was worth walking.

You collaborated with James Patterson on *Private India*. What was your biggest takeaway?

Discipline of pace. JP is a master of momentum—of the short chapter, the propulsive hook, and the refusal to let a reader's attention drift for even a page. My instinct—coming from the world of dense, research-laden mysteries—was always to linger. Working within his framework taught me that you can carry all your depth and still keep the engine running hot. To this day, whenever a chapter of mine sags, I hear those words: "Cut, quicken, sharpen, heighten, propel."

Which book of yours would you recommend to a first-time Ashwin Sanghi reader?

The Krishna Key. It most completely distills what I try to do—a breakneck contemporary thriller braided with legend, history, science, culture, faith, and philosophy. If a new reader enjoys that interplay, they will know instantly if my particular kind of storytelling is for them.

You perfect day off looks like...

I am afraid I am a hopeless case—I never fully switch off, because for me, the 'off' hours are where the ideas are actually born. A perfect day off usually has a book in it; I love reading non-fiction, the sort that quietly plants the seed of a future story. I love documentaries—some of my best plot ideas have ambushed me halfway through one. And music is essential to the mix because it gets the creative juices flowing. So, the honest answer is that I do not consciously step away from the literary world—I have simply made peace with the fact that a writer is never entirely off duty, and I have learned to enjoy that rather than resent it.

—As told to **Shrabasti A Mallik**



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PURPLE MARTINI: WHERE GOA TURNS EVERY SUNSET INTO A CELEBRATION

Perched above the Arabian Sea in Anjuna, Purple Martini has become synonymous with the quintessential Goan sundowner—where panoramic ocean views, cocktails, music, food and celebration come together.



SAARTHAK GUPTA
CEO/Founder, Purple Martini



There are places you visit in Goa, and then there are places that become part of your memory—like Purple Martini. Perched above the Arabian Sea in Anjuna, it has become synonymous with the quintessential Goan sundowner—where panoramic ocean views, cocktails, music, food and an unmistakable sense of celebration come together. The afternoon begins on a more relaxed note, with long lunches, sea views, and cocktails. As golden hour approaches, the energy builds. Music gets louder, the crowd gets livelier, and the venue moves seamlessly from a laid-back seaside lounge into one of North Goa's most energetic nightlife destinations.

SIPS AND BITES

The menu brings together a broad selection of Continental, North Indian, Asian, Regional and other International-inspired offerings, making it equally suited to a leisurely afternoon meal, a pre-party dinner or a late-night bite. The bar has built its identity around creative cocktails designed to complement the setting—from refreshing Goan-inspired serves to more contemporary combinations.

And there lies Purple Martini's enduring appeal: guests do not need to choose

between a great meal, a spectacular sunset, and a great night out. They get all!

FOR GOA'S SWISH SET

Purple Martini attracts an eclectic, aspirational crowd, and has become a favourite among celebrities, cricketers, influencers, entrepreneurs, travellers, and Goa's social set. Its celebrity appeal is part of a larger phenomenon. Purple Martini has cultivated a brand that feels aspirational without losing the relaxed spirit that people come to Goa for. It is glamorous, but still distinctly Goan; sophisticated, but never overly formal.

THE FOUNDER'S STORY

What began as a passion venture in Goa for entrepreneur Saarthak Gupta has grown into one of the state's most recognisable hospitality brands. Saarthak built Purple Martini around a simple but powerful idea: create an experience rather than simply a restaurant. His approach has been focused on the intersection of hospitality, entertainment, branding, and experience. That vision has earned Saarthak and Purple Martini recognition from some of the most prominent names in the



hospitality and lifestyle industry, including the Travel + Leisure Dining Awards and Times Food & Nightlife Awards, as well as Saarthak's inclusion among the Times 50 Most Influential Personalities.

Among the brand's notable accolades are Sundowner Bar of the Year, Restaurant of the Year, and Nightlife Venue of the Year, while Saarthak has also been bestowed with the prestigious Restaurateur of the Year honour. Purple Martini has additionally been recognised as one of Goa's leading dining and nightlife destinations.

For Saarthak, however, the achievement is bigger than an awards list. It is the longevity of the brand and its ability to remain relevant in one of India's most competitive hospitality markets.

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QUIET, RESTRAINED, and DELICIOUS

Horse mackerel sushi was one of the many dishes on offer at Gion Loka, a restaurant within the Sowaka ryokan in Kyoto

With a deep respect for ingredients, and shaped by the seasons, Japanese cuisine is deeply layered but not over complicated, says **Karen Anand**



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Taka-An offers a contemporary interpretation of kaiseki

The food of Japan is a vast and deeply-layered subject that goes far beyond sushi, ramen, and convenience-store sandwiches. It is shaped by seasonality, regional identity, craftsmanship, and an extraordinary respect for ingredients. One of the first things that surprised me was that there is rarely a single restaurant serving everything. Most establishments specialise in one style of cooking—sushi, tempura, ramen, udon, *yakitori* or *teppanyaki*. A notable exception is Gonpachi Nishi-Azabu in Tokyo, which I loved for its broad menu. Visitors are also drawn for its association with the movie *Kill Bill*. It is one of the few places where you can enjoy tempura, sashimi, sushi, *yakitori*, and vegetarian fare in a single meal. Sharing food, which is not usually the norm in Japan, is also encouraged.

Equally important are the *izakayas*, often described as pubs but really closer to lively neighbourhood bistros. Sitting at the counter is best, as you

Omakase literally means “I leave it to you”, placing complete trust in the chef to create a meal from the best produce available that day.

can watch the cooks at work grilling *yakitori* skewers and serving them straight from the grill. Wash it all down with sake, *shochu* or beer. We visited Meat Man in Roppongi, recommended by an Indian chef friend who now lives in Tokyo. Reservations are essential almost everywhere in Japan, no matter how casual the establishment. Arrive late and your table may be gone. Meat Man was actually our fourth choice on a Sunday evening, but it turned out to be a great find, serving everything from grilled meats and curry cheese risotto to an unexpectedly delicious vanilla ice cream baguette.

Simple, yet unforgettable

We also had a simple yet memorable meal in the basement of the KITTE building opposite Tokyo Station. Ordering involved plenty of pointing, as everything was written in Japanese, but the meal was unforgettable—rice topped with bonito flakes, miso soup, pickles, and beautifully-grilled horse mackerel. The fish was seasoned with little more than soy sauce and *mirin*, yet the flavour was deeply savoury and perfectly balanced. The meal for two cost less than US\$25.

That restraint is what struck me most about Japanese food. Nothing is over-seasoned, over-complicated or hidden beneath heavy sauces. The chef has already decided exactly how the dish should taste and there is rarely any need for salt, pepper or condiments on the table.

Then there is the wonderful world of station bentos. At railway stations across Japan, I noticed people regularly picking up beautifully-prepared bento boxes before boarding trains. Talking

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LEFT AND RIGHT
A traditional Japanese bento; A kamameshi rice dish at Gion Loka.

to one of our drivers, a woman in her thirties, I realised that many people, particularly in cities, no longer cook elaborate meals at home every day. Traditional Japanese food can be surprisingly time-consuming to prepare. A complete meal often requires rice, grilled fish, soup, pickles, and several small side dishes. High-quality takeaway meals from stations and department store food halls like Isetan and Takashimaya provide a practical and healthy solution.

Leave it to the chef

At the pinnacle of Japanese dining is *kaiseki*, a seasonal multi-course meal celebrating the finest ingredients. It may be served as a set menu or an *omakase* meal. *Omakase* literally means “I leave it to you”, placing complete trust in the chef to create a meal from the best produce available that day. It is perhaps the purest expression of Japanese cuisine’s

devotion to seasonality, craftsmanship, and restraint.

Japan boasts several Michelin-starred restaurants, and most serve some form of *kaiseki*. I experienced two memorable examples in Kyoto, a city whose fine-dining scene features more than a hundred Michelin-starred establishments and many more Michelin-selected ones.

The first was Gion Loka, a hidden gem within Sowaka, the *ryokan* where we stayed. The atmosphere was more intimate and relaxed than many traditional *kaiseki* restaurants, yet the cooking was every bit as refined. The meal began with a series of small appetisers: smoked scallops, pressed horse mackerel sushi, canola flowers with dried mullet roe, and deep-fried salmon. This was followed by a *chawanmushi*—a silky steamed egg custard enriched with foie gras—that I particularly enjoyed. Beautiful sashimi came next, followed by grilled Spanish

mackerel. A cold dish of shrimp and abalone preceded a rich bisque-like soup, before the main course: local Omi Wagyu beef served *shabu-shabu* style in a delicate clam *dashi*.

Rice and soup arrived towards the end, as tradition dictates. There is a distinct nod to European fine dining throughout the menu. The Japanese have a long-standing affection for French cuisine and ingredients like truffle and foie gras appear throughout. Yet the overall experience remains unmistakably Japanese. The portions were perfectly judged—not too much, not too little. It was a sophisticated and highly enjoyable interpretation of modern Kyoto *kaiseki*.

The season is the real star

One major highlight of the trip was dinner at Aman Kyoto, set within a remarkable 32-hectare forest on the outskirts of the city. Nestled within this tranquil setting is Taka-An, a

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TOP AND BOTTOM

The author savoured yakitori at Meat Man in Roppongi, Tokyo; She also had lunch with Ama pearl divers in an Ama hut in Ise Shima on Japan's east coast.



contemporary restaurant that offers an invitation to experience Japanese hospitality at its highest level. At the helm is Shinichiro Takagi, an acclaimed chef whose dishes are as artistic as they are delicious.

Kaiseki menus change according to the season and available ingredients, so no two experiences are exactly alike. We began with squid and noble scallop dressed with white miso and green onion shoots, followed by a delicate sesame tofu and abalone soup. The sashimi course featured puffer fish, or *fugu*, something I had never tried before. Preparing *fugu* requires exceptional skill and licensing, and it was served alongside grilled

puffer fish *milt*—silky and delicate, almost like silken tofu. I was thrilled to have experienced it at this stage of my life, although it is not something I would necessarily like to try again. Next came steamed sushi with sea eel. I was already familiar with *unagi*, or freshwater eel, but sea eel is considered more refined and prized. This was followed by buckwheat noodles with sea urchin, another luxury ingredient in Japanese cuisine, served with steamed turnip and tilefish.

Luxury in restraint

The grilled course consisted of butterfish accompanied by mountain vegetables and beautifully char-grilled

Kyoto Wagyu beef. One of the things I learned during this trip is that exceptional Wagyu is not limited to Kobe. Every region takes pride in its own distinctive cattle breeds and beef traditions. The meal concluded, as all great Japanese meals do, with rice, miso soup, and an assortment of pickles. To accompany the meal, we enjoyed sparkling sake, although guests can also choose a sake pairing that progresses through sparkling and chilled to gently-warmed. Contrary to popular belief, premium sake is not served hot. That notion is largely a Western misconception; the finest are served chilled or only lightly warmed to showcase their aromas and complexity.

What struck me most about Japan was not any single dish but the country's extraordinary respect for ingredients and seasonality. Whether eating a humble station bento, grilled fish in a basement restaurant, yakitori in a bustling *izakaya* or a *kaiseki* meal, there is a shared philosophy: simplicity, precision, and a deep appreciation for the moment. In a world that often values excess, Japanese cuisine reminds us that true luxury can often be found in restraint.

GETTING THERE

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VIEW DESIGNS

The Mãe de Deus
Church in Saligao
was built in 1873

GO(A) BEYOND THE Beaches

Ditch the tourist tropes and discover
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coastal state

words by
Satarupa Paul



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Going on a village trail can reveal a different side of the state, away from the crowded, touristy beaches

It is not easy waking up early in Goa, especially after a night spent lingering over dinner or partying till the wee hours. So when a friend announced we would be leaving at 7am for a village walk in north Goa, I was less than thrilled. But somewhere along the drive, the mood began to shift. As the first rays of sunlight filtered through swaying coconut palms and sleepy villages stirred to life, Goa looked different. Quieter, gentler, almost untouched. By the time we reached Saligao, all annoyance had dissolved.

Standing before the striking white spires of the Mãe de Deus Church, one of Goa's finest examples of Neo-Gothic architecture, it was easy to see why it has become Saligao's most recognisable landmark. From here, our *passai*, led by a local storyteller, began to unfold. More than a leisurely stroll, a *passai* is a Goan tradition of sauntering and pausing to observe, talk about, and take in the character of a place.

We wandered through winding lanes lined with elegant Indo-Portuguese homes, their colourful façades, ornate balconies, and hand-painted *azulejo* tiles adorned with nautical motifs. We learned how, after Christian converts

were required to adopt the same Portuguese surnames, Saligao families began using nicknames to distinguish themselves—drawn variously from animals, occupations, personality traits, and even physical characteristics—like Bokdo (goat), Manko (frog), Saurac (bland curry), Kareem (dried fish), etc. At the Rakhandar Stone, we heard the story of the guardian spirit believed to patrol the village boundaries, fields, and paths at night, protecting its people from evil. Locals traditionally appease him with offerings of *feni*, *urrack*, cigarettes, and coconuts. By the end, Saligao had transformed from somewhere I had only driven through before to a place I felt I knew intimately.

A new kind of exploration

For centuries, Goa has reinvented itself. The Portuguese shaped its architecture, cuisine, and customs, and decades afterwards, its beaches, shacks, and nightlife came to define it in popular imagination. But for travellers who return to Goa time and again, the familiar eventually gives way to curiosity: what else is there to discover?

Increasingly, the answer lies in its forests and backwaters, heritage

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* Upcoming

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villages, farms, distilleries, and food traditions. These experiences offer a chance to explore a different Goa with friends and family, while creating memories that feel more personal.

I experienced this most memorably at Fazenda Cazulo, a century-old family-owned *feni* distillery in Cuelim, South Goa. The 'Floating Feni Experience' begins with a stroll through the verdant cashew plantation, followed by a walkthrough of the traditional *feni*-making process—from crushing the fruit to distillation in earthen pots buried in the ground.

It is an introduction to the spirit not as a fiery party drink, but as a product of Goa's landscape, agricultural traditions, and generations of craft. The experience culminates at a natural spring, where

I sat at a table with my feet immersed in the cool water. I tasted three expressions—cashew, coconut, and the unusual *dukshiri*, made from the roots of a rare plant—served neat with savouries, fruits, and sweets.

Goa's drinking culture, too, is evolving, with *feni*, *urrak*, and local ingredients being included in inventive cocktails. And for someone who has done the beach shacks and fancy bars scene, it was interesting to take part in a more immersive experience at The Passport Hotel in Assagao.

Here, I joined a masterclass where ingredients like *kokum*, coconut, Coorgi coffee, green cardamom, jaggery, and *thecha* salt were transformed into inventive drinks. The hotel's Mini Bar Passport takes the exploration beyond its own bar. Given to guests at check-in, the passport has pages dedicated to North Goa's popular bars, where you can drop in and collect a stamp. By the time you get through the pages, you would have created your own drinking



LEFT AND RIGHT
Cashew is used to make feni; Kayaking in the North Goa mangroves.

trail—an easy, playful way to discover Goa's evolving cocktail culture.

Baking a new memory

In Majorda, the 'Life of Pao' workshop (by Soul Travelling) took me inside a nearly century-old bakery, where I learnt to knead, shape, and bake *poe* in a traditional wood-fired oven with 80-year-old baker João Menino Godhino. As the dough slowly rose with *toddy* (a natural fermenting agent), stories unfolded of the state's *poder* culture—the traditional community of bakers who have long been integral to everyday life—and of the effort to keep this craft alive. We learnt to distinguish *poe* from *katre pao* and *undo*, before giving the freshly-baked *poe* an Italian twist by turning it into our own panino.

For a state synonymous with beaches, Goa offers surprisingly rich pickings for nature lovers. One of my favourites was a mangrove kayaking expedition with Beatroute Explorers

through the backwaters of Siolim and Chapora. As we paddled through narrow channels, our naturalists decoded the ecosystem, pointing out mudskippers, crabs, and birdlife while explaining how these intricate root systems act as a natural buffer against coastal erosion. Kayaking is gentle at first, but soon works the arms and core. By the end, my muscles were sore.

Together, these experiences reveal a Goa that is far richer than its postcard image—one best discovered slowly, curiously, and well beyond its beaches.



GETTING THERE

Air India flies non-stop to Goa (Dabolim) from Delhi and Mumbai.





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ASHDEEN'S DIVINE KINGDOM COMES ALIVE THIS FESTIVE SEASON

Ancient Persian mythology comes alive through exquisite contemporary Parsi craftsmanship



Alia Bhatt in a saree from the Ashdeen x Ekaya 'Parsi Khabar' collection



Hand-embroidered occasionwear for men and women from Ashdeen's 'Divine Kingdom' collection

Textile designer Ashdeen Lilaowala's eponymous Parsi revivalist label 'Ashdeen', specialising in handcrafted luxury, recently dropped its 'Divine Kingdom' collection, just in time for the festive and wedding seasons. The collection takes you back to the moment where it all began—the moment of creation. Before humanity, the Persian paradise was already alive with birds, beasts, and mythical creatures.

It is into this world that the first woman and man, Mashyana and Mashya, emerged

from a single seed. From this seed sprouted their unified body as a stem of a rhubarb-like plant (*rivās*). They slowly transformed into distinct male and female forms, complete with souls bestowed by the supreme creator Ahura Mazda.

Evoking this sacred moment, the collection celebrates Zoroastrian reverence for nature and the animal, bird, plant, and aquatic worlds as timeless guardians of creation. Together with the early human beings, this is the ultimate manifestation of the 'Divine Kingdom.'

The result is imagery informed by myth and symbolism with such sacred Persian elements as roosters, pomegranates, trees, fish, and heavenly bodies making an appearance.

The 'Divine Kingdom' shifts the focus from flora to fauna. Animals and birds have always held a special place in the Parsi Gara repertoire but here they become main characters, presented in all their glory and dynamism.

In one instance, the elaborate Shikargah saree rooted in the Indian royal





A 'Divine Kingdom' campaign image featuring a saree, gilded neckpiece, and topi—all hand-embroidered at the Ashdeen atelier



Genelia D'Souza in an Ashdeen saree with hand-embroidery and hand-tied bandhani dots



Bhumi Pednekar in an Ashdeen saree from the print series



Close up of a karigar working on a hand-embroidered saree at the Ashdeen studio

textile traditions, receives a Parsi Gara spin. In addition to sarees, the collection introduces new Indo-Western silhouettes for both men and women, infusing festive dressing with myth, meaning, and auspicious symbolism.

The 'Divine Kingdom' creates a beautiful canvas for the intricate Parsi Gara work embroidered flawlessly by hand at the brand's atelier. This genre of embroidery has managed to garner a growing fan following in India and overseas. "I am delighted that our customers today from cities like Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Kolkata, Singapore, London, New York, and others are textile enthusiasts, who are from both inside and outside the Parsi community. They are discerning collectors who are thoughtfully building their wardrobes with not just textiles but also stories of heritage and craft. Our

exhibitions and events around the country and overseas, supported by social media, have helped build a tactile familiarity and a growing community around the Parsi Gara," Lilaowala shares.

Celebrities have often been seen in creations from the label, especially when it comes to special occasions. Recently, actor Alia Bhatt wore a saree from the 'Parsi Khabar' collection—launched as a collaboration between Ashdeen and Ekaya featuring Parsi Gara motifs reimagined in Banarasi weaves. Actor Bhumi Pednekar also wore an Ashdeen saree from the label's print collection for a recent appearance and Nita Ambani chose a hand-embroidered Ashdeen saree for the opening of an art exhibition at the NMACC Mumbai.

HISTORY BEGINS WITH CURIOSITY

With his first children's book, Amish hopes to make India's past impossible to forget

words by
**Shrabasti Anindita
Mallik**

After 10 books, you have now turned to younger readers with *Dhruv and Tara: The Great Indian History Quiz*. What inspired this shift?

This is my first children's book, and it is a very difficult genre to write. Children are unforgiving. Adults are polite but kids tell you exactly what they think. If they are bored, they will walk away.

The idea grew out of conversations with my 17-year-old son. We often spoke about history and what he was learning at school. While some things have been decolonised, much of what he was learning still reflected a very British version of our history.

I thought we could either wait for the system to improve or as Mahatma Gandhi said, be the change we want to see. So why not write a children's book that teaches them the history they should have been taught, but through a fun, engaging story?

The other challenge was the writing itself. Children's books have to be crisp, tight, and fast moving. It is not just about knowing the historical facts but about presenting them in a way that keeps young readers engaged. So I read children's books to get into that mind frame, worked with younger writers, and shared the manuscript with children in our family for feedback.

Hailed as 'India's Tolkien' by the BBC, Amish has authored over 10 books for older readers before venturing into children's fiction with Dhruv and Tara: The Great Indian History Quiz



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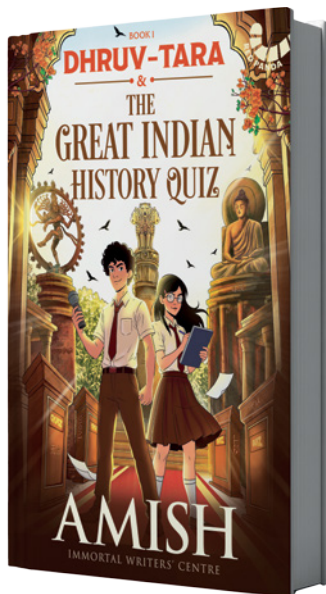


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Supporting what the author aimed for with his debut children's book—to make important information interesting—the book features numerous colourful illustrations depicting the journey of the two central characters, Dhruv and Tara, and how they prepared for a quiz on Indian history through fun and play

Which books did you read?

I went back to [Enid Blyton's] Secret Seven and Famous Five series. Not to get ideas but to get into a child's mind. I mainly read non-fiction, so I read fiction before writing to shift my thinking.

This book teaches history through fiction versus an academic approach. Do you believe children remember ideas better through stories?

One hundred per cent. One of my biggest gripes with established historians is that they have taken a subject that is fascinating and made it so boring that kids don't want to read it.

At my school events, I ask children, "How many of you think history is boring?" More than half raise their hands. The problem is not history, but the way it is written and taught.

Take math. Galileo called it "the language in which God wrote the universe." A thousand years ago, Bhaskaracharya wrote *Lilavati* for his daughter, who hated mathematics. He taught principles of the subject

through Sanskrit stories and poetry. I understood something important: if you want to teach children something deep and meaningful, make it interesting.

The narrative hints at a subtle distinction between being smart and being curious. Is curiosity a more valuable quality than intelligence?

There is a difference between being smart and thinking you are smart. The moment you think, 'I have nothing more to learn', you stop being curious.

Curiosity means not being afraid to ask questions. Most people do not ask because they fear, 'I will look stupid'. But how will you grow if you do not ask questions? There can be stupid answers, but no stupid questions.

We have traditionally thought of education as a transfer of knowledge. But this book seems to suggest that education is really the cultivation of curiosity.

Absolutely. Children do not learn by having information hammered into

them repeatedly. They learn by doing. That is how a curious mindset develops.

But education is about more than curiosity. Modern education has become about building a career and making money. It does not really teach you how to live your life—what your character should be like or the choices you should make. Our traditional education placed far greater emphasis on *charitra nirman* (character building).

That is something I have tried to bring into this book. When Dhruv [the central character] faces a setback, his father does not pretend winning and losing do not matter. The conversation is about how to deal with failure without letting it define you. That is where character building happens.

For parents, every conversation with their child is an opportunity for character building and the lesson has to come through stories and conversations, at the right moment. Ultimately, education is not just about helping children make a living. It is about teaching them how to live.

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TOP AND BOTTOM

Banarasi saris often feature floral patterns; They are one of Varanasi's most popular souvenirs.



PRIDE OF the city

Spiritual prowess aside, the vibrancy of Varanasi is equally reflected in its rich lineage of artisanry

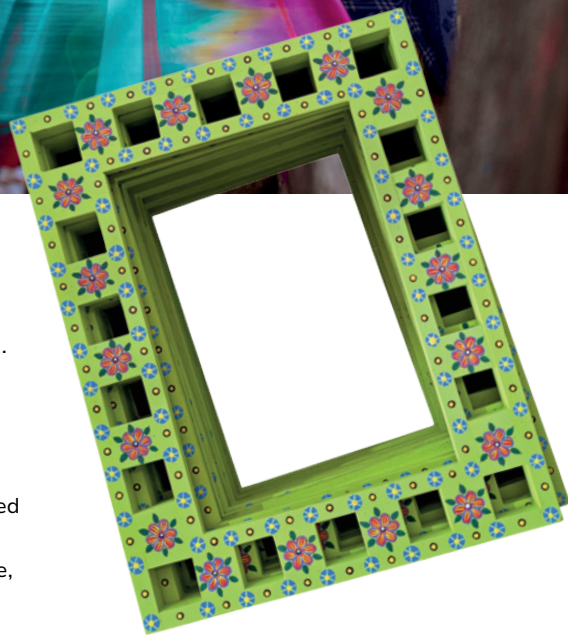
words by **Garima Verma**

The streets of Varanasi are full of distractions. While its ghats capture thought and vision—famously in the immaculate impressions of colonial-era painters like William Hodges and Thomas Daniell, and later in works by William Carpenter and Hiroshi Yoshida—it is the lanes, though, that define life.

From Persia to perfection

And it is in these lanes that the city's artistic heritage thrives. The art of *gulabi meenakari*, a form of enamelling, famous in Varanasi, finds its roots in Persia (present-day Iran). The Mughals brought it to India and it acquired an intricate form here. While Rajasthan takes the honours for being the hub for *meenakari* jewellery, Varanasi's Geographical Indication (GI)-certified craft stands out with its distinct pink tones. During the 2022 G-7 summit, PM Narendra Modi had gifted then US President Joe Biden and First Lady, Jill, *gulabi meenakari* cufflinks and a brooch.

"Rajasthan's work is mostly done on gold, Gujarat or Agra's *meenakari* work uses both gold and silver, and all three highlight colours like reds and greens.



We mostly use silver here,” national awardee Kunj Bihari Singh shares as he shows off trinkets, jewellery sets, artefacts, and more.

In his workshop, meanwhile, young artisans are focused on moulding the base, adding patterned cavities for enamel, adding colours, and then using controlled fire to let them fuse to the metal. The various shades of pinks, an ode to the *chaiti* rose from Kannauj, are achieved by using gold oxide.

Let it be bright

Compared to the hues of the enamel craft, the wooden lacquerware and toys of Kashmiri Ganj beam with bold shades. The wooden craft was a result of local artisans shifting from ivory carving (post it being banned) to vibrant toys featuring deities and animals, and, now, home décor products too. This is among the 30-plus GI-tagged products from the Varanasi region, making the chunk of Uttar Pradesh's GI list of 81.

A storied weave

All roads lead to Madanpura for the obvious but obligatory sari shopping. The click-clack of looms keep these narrow lanes alive till late.

Banaras' silk weaving flourished when Persian artisans' weaving techniques and floral patterns merged around the 14th century. It enjoyed royal status under Mughal patronage, especially during Akbar's rule—the golden age of zardozi (gold/silver thread). 'As fine as the filmy webs of spiders', was how Ralph Fitch, an English merchant-traveller, is believed to have described the fine textile. While power loom-made saris may momentarily tick most shoppers' boxes, it is the lustre of the traditional *katan* silk sari and the fluidity of a *chiniya* silk sari that define the area's handloom heritage.

“If the back of the sari looks too neat, it is not a handloom piece,” explains Aqib Ahmad, whose family and relatives have been helping the

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
Meenakari products make great keepsakes; A traditional loom in Varanasi; Hand-painted wooden lacquerware products are popular in the city.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
Wooden lacquerware toys can be found in the Kashmiri Ganj area; Many toys draw inspiration from animals; The craft is one of several in the Varanasi area that boasts a GI tag.

craft thrive for generations. "A handwoven sari will always have scattered threads and knots around the motifs, and where the colours or threads are changing."

Carved skills

The detailing of Varanasi's crafts continues in its soft stone. While the tradition of intricate stone carving goes back a few millennia in India, this GI-tagged, joint-free *jaali* (fretwork) is inspired by the lattice work that gained popularity in Indian forts and palaces.

"It has come a long way from



the chisel and hammer days of our forefathers," says Anil Arya, a fourth-generation craftsman, whose family first started making bowls

and incense holders after moving from Mahoba in 1857. Now, at his Vishwanath Murti Bhandar, the pieces range from, "A 3-mm elephant and the most popular elephant-inside-an-elephant, alongside aroma lamps that are in demand in Europe, and tall vases."

Varanasi's myriad stories of skills reflect in its various arts, handicrafts, music, and food. All you need to do is look beyond the proverbial.

STYLISH STAYS

Brijrama Palace Hotel

Overlooking the Ganga, history meets art meets luxury at this heritage property.

Avantika by the Ganges

With 43 rooms, this hotel is worth staying at for Dhanushkoti, its all-veg restaurant.

jüSta Luxé - Kashi Parampara, Varanasi

This century-old heritage stay is close to Assi Ghat and Kashi Vishwanath Temple.



GETTING THERE

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98 ➔ HIKING

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ON THE MOVE

Beyond the trams and skyscrapers lies a wilder Hong Kong Island—one best discovered on foot, trail by trail

words by **Devesh Sahai**



TOP AND BOTTOM

Hiking is one of the most exhilarating ways to explore Hong Kong Island; Dragon's Back is a beginner-friendly hiking route that ascends a forested hillside.



Most visitors picture Hong Kong Island as a blur of neon signs, towering skyscrapers, and world-class dim sum. And they are not wrong. But that iconic skyline accounts for roughly 30 per cent of the land. The remaining? Lush country parks, dense forests, dramatic ridgelines, and some of the best hiking trails in Asia.

There is no better way to truly understand a place than to move through it on foot. These trails do not just show you nature, they reframe everything you thought you knew about Hong Kong Island. Here are six worth lacing up for.

BEGINNER HIKE'S

Dragon's Back

Named after its rugged spinal ridge, this is arguably Hong Kong Island's most popular hike. The trail delivers sweeping views of Tai Tam Bay, the South China Sea, and Shek O village far below, finishing at a beach. It is the perfect introduction to hiking in the island. Manageable difficulty, spectacular scenery,



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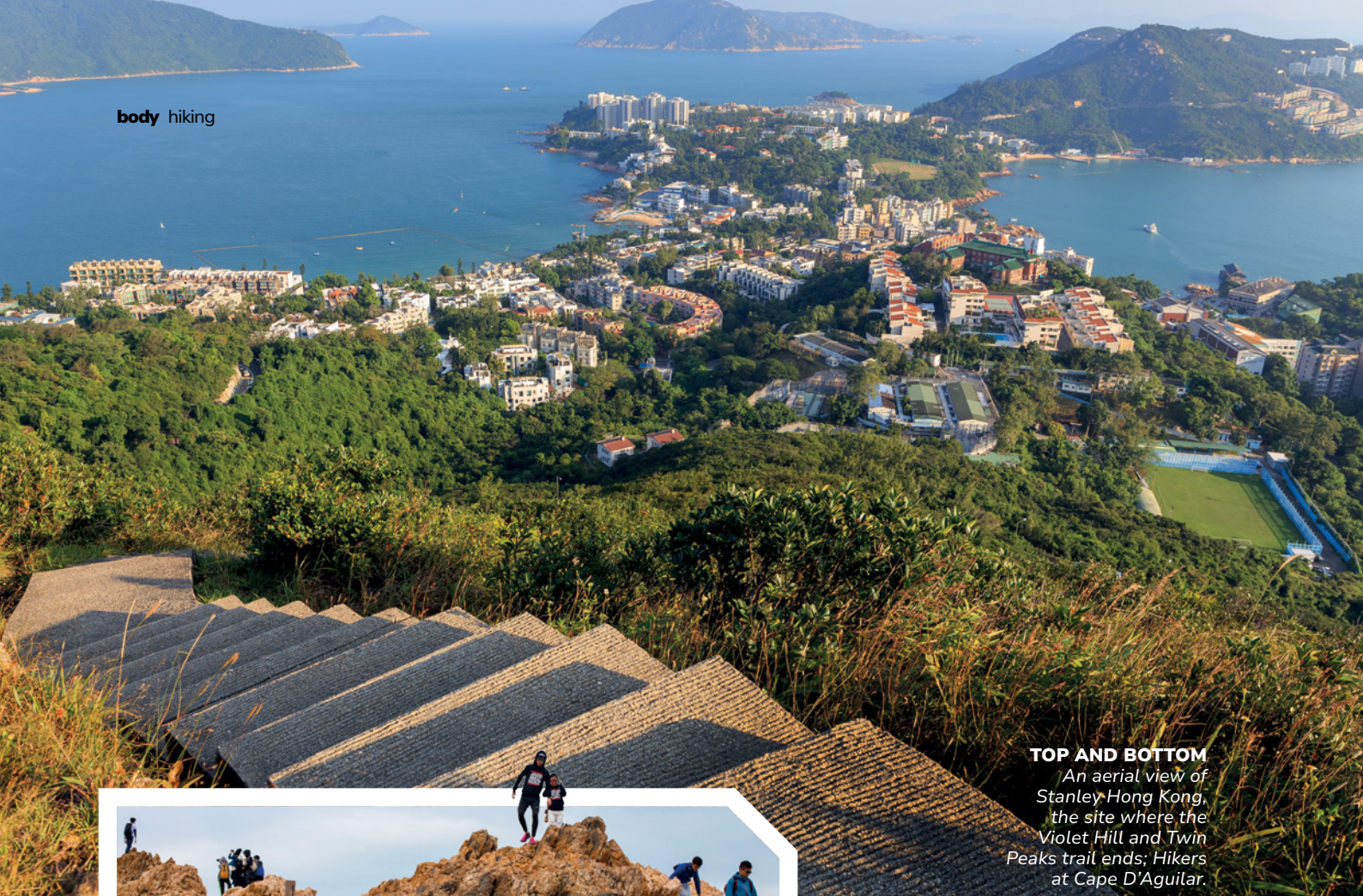
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**TOP AND BOTTOM**

An aerial view of Stanley-Hong Kong, the site where the Violet Hill and Twin Peaks trail ends; Hikers at Cape D'Aguilar.



and a beach at the finish line. The effort-to-reward ratio is hard to beat.

•**Start point:** To Tei Wan, Dragon's Back (take bus 9 from Shau Kei Wan MTR).

•**USP:** Go early for sunrise views or late afternoon, when the light turns golden.

Victoria Peak

At 552m, Victoria Peak (The Peak) is Hong Kong Island's highest point. Everyone visits The Peak, but almost nobody hikes up. Walking there adds an entirely different dimension to the experience. There are eight different trail options, ranging from 1.1 to 4.1 km.

The 3.5km-long Circular Walk on Lugard Road at the top offers the most phenomenal views of the skyline.

•**Start point:** The Central-Mid-Levels Escalator via Old Peak Road or from HKU via Lung Fu Shan Country Park.

•**USP:** Victoria Peak Garden, just below the summit, is one of the island's most underrated spots.

OFF-BEAT HIKE'S**Cape D'Aguilar**

This approximate 8-km paved round-trip leads to the Thunder Cave, the beautiful arch-shaped Crab Cave, Hong Kong's

oldest lighthouse (1875), and the WWII Cape D'Aguilar Battery, complete with gun emplacements and a tiny hidden beach. It is one of those rare places that packs history, geology, wildlife, and dramatic coastal scenery into a single, accessible outing. Easy enough for a casual day out; interesting enough to keep you occupied for hours.

•**Start point:** Take bus 9 from Shau Kei Wan MTR (confirm it goes via Cape D'Aguilar). Best enjoyed on a clear day.

•**USP:** Relatively easy coastal walk filled with historical sites, hidden beaches, and natural beauty.

Mount Davis

Less a hike, more an open-air history museum. The 45-minute walk up is entirely paved, but the top rewards you with five WWII gun emplacements, ammunition stores, tunnels, and headquarters ruins—all dramatically reclaimed by nature. The combination

SKIA

A MORE REFINED APPROACH TO EVERYDAY WELLNESS

SKIA looks past prescriptions toward prevention, self-care, and everyday health.

Wellness isn't just about treating illness anymore. It's the small stuff—eating a bit better, taking care of your skin, staying active, keeping stress in check, and reaching for products that actually support how you want to live.

That's the idea behind SKIA, a new premium destination bringing medicines, personal care, and wellness under one roof.

Walk into a SKIA store and you'll find more than a shelf of products. There's premium personal care and skincare, everyday wellness essentials, nutrition,

and a carefully chosen range of healthcare solutions, all picked with the modern consumer in mind. The goal is simple: help people find things that actually fit into their day, not just add to it.

SKIA also stocks quality generic medicines alongside its premium wellness range, so customers get an affordable option without compromising on quality. That combination is what makes it more than a pharmacy; it's a place that looks past prescriptions toward prevention, self-care, and everyday health.

The store experience matters just

as much. SKIA is designed to feel contemporary and welcoming, not clinical. Whether you're there to pick up a prescription, find a skincare essential or just browse for healthier alternatives—the idea is to make that visit feel easier and a little more personal. Because wellness was never about getting everything right. It's about showing up for the small choices, again and again.

SKIA brings those choices together in one place, where good healthcare and premium wellness meet, and everyday care starts to feel a bit more considered.

SKIA is designed to feel contemporary and welcoming, not clinical.





The view from the top of Jardine's Lookout

of WWII history, hidden staircases, jungle-consumed ruins, and harbour views makes it one of the most unique walks on Hong Kong Island.

•**Start point:** Begin from Mount Davis Path off Victoria Road. Go on a weekday morning and you will likely have the ruins entirely to yourself.

•**USP:** Easy urban hike that brings you to multiple abandoned relics from WWII.

SEASONED HIKE'S

Violet Hill and Twin Peaks

Perhaps the most challenging hike on Hong Kong Island. This approximate 4.8-km trail from Wong Nai Chung Reservoir to Stanley scales two hills, with 1,200 steps to the top of The Twins as the centrepiece. The payoff? Views of Deep Water Bay, Repulse Bay, Tai Tam Reservoir, and a stunning open ridge descent towards Stanley Bay.

Finishing in Stanley with views of the bay and a cold drink in hand feels well earned.

•**Start point:** From the gas station near Wong Nai Chung Reservoir on buses 6, 41A or 76. An early start is essential.

•**USP:** Between November and February, *enkiathus* and the fried-egg-looking *Polyspora axillaris* flowers bloom along the trail. It is a hike that genuinely tests you.

Jardine's Lookout and Mount Butler

This 6.5-km hike links two summits—Jardine's Lookout (433m, estimate) and Mount Butler (about 435m)—in just over two hours. Highlights include panoramic city and Kowloon views, a moving WWII memorial, an abandoned war tunnel, and frequent wild boar sightings on the descent. It is one of those rare hikes that delivers spectacular city views,

country park scenery, and WWII history in a single, manageable trail. One of my personal favourites on the island.

•**Start point:** From Parkview via Wong Nai Chung Gap Road on bus numbers 5, 6 or 41A.

•**USP:** Unbeatable views of both sides of Hong Kong Island—the bustling city with endless skyscrapers to the north, and the lush country parks and reservoirs to the south.

GETTING THERE

Air India flies non-stop to Hong Kong from Delhi.

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SCAN TO KNOW MORE



IN THE FLOW

Pilates expert Namrata Purohit explains why stretching both before and after a workout is essential

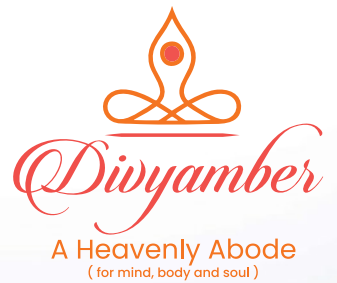
words by **Mignonne Dsouza**



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TOP AND BOTTOM
Stretching has to be customised to a person's body type; Namrata Purohit.

What is the importance of stretching before and after a workout?

Stretching before a workout basically warms up the muscles. It increases the blood flow and prepares your joints for the range of movement or motion that you are going to ask of them during the workout. So, skipping this could basically mean that you are going into a workout with cold muscles, which is where a lot of strains and injuries can happen. And that is why stretching before you start your exercise routine becomes really important.

Even the stretches or the kind of movements you do before is more dynamic. It would be mimicking the movements that you would eventually do during the workout. Afterwards, too, it is crucial to stretch because it helps bring your heart rate down gradually. Plus, it reduces muscle stiffness and improves flexibility. So, both the warm up and the cool down are extremely important.

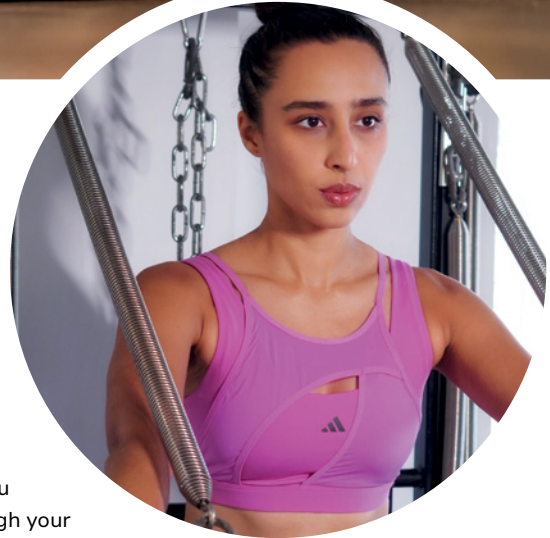
How prone can you be to an injury if you have not done your stretches properly before and after your workout?

Honestly, quite prone. Tight or unprepared or cold muscles are far more likely to get pulled, strained or even cramped during a workout. When you are nicely warmed up, you would be able to move through your exercises a lot better.

Not stretching can also lead to poor posture, reduced mobility, and repetitive strain injuries because your muscles stay short and tight instead of lengthening and recovering.

Active to passive, dynamic to static—there are different types of stretches. Please elaborate.

There is a wide variety of stretches that one can do. Active, where you are



using your own muscle strength or your own body to hold a certain stretch or position, like lifting your leg up and holding it there. A passive stretch could be when a partner or an external force helps you get deeper into the stretch.

A dynamic stretch would be more movement based, like leg swings or arm circles, and it is usually done before a workout that mimics the workout that



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LEFT AND RIGHT

An active stretch uses a person's own muscle strength or body; A passive stretch can be done with a partner or external force.

PILATES AND STRETCHING

Pilates does involve stretching. You are going to be doing quite a bit of dynamic stretching and while you are strengthening, you are lengthening. Almost every exercise combines strength with lengthening the muscle at the same time. So you are building flexibility and control simultaneously, rather than stretching as a separate add-on. That is why Pilates bodies really look long and lean rather than bulky.

you are going to do. And a static stretch would be more holding, like stretching in place for 20 to 30 seconds, and it is usually done after the muscles are already slightly warm.

Is there a certain pattern or routine of stretches one must follow?

There is no one-size-fits-all strategy when it comes to stretching. It has to be customised to a person's body type, goals, regime, etc. But in general, yes, you would want to normally begin with dynamic movements or stretches prior to your workout and follow up with static stretches after you are done. And you work through all the major muscle groups and focus on the deeper stretches.

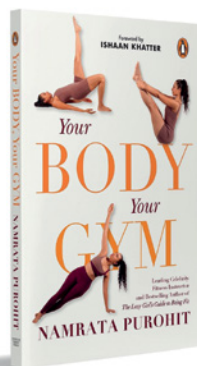
Having a flow ensures nothing gets skipped. So,

begin with dynamic, do your workout, and end with static.

Is it safe to do stretches when recovering from an injury?

This would honestly depend on the injury. You should ideally be guided by a physiotherapist or a trainer who knows the specifics of your injury, how to deal with it, and can help you navigate through the movements without causing more harm or making the injury worse. However, normally, gentle, pain-free, range-of-motion stretches can sometimes aid the recovery process. But pushing a stretch on an injured area can actually set you back further.

It all boils down to listening to your body and getting professional guidance in these cases rather than self diagnosing.



All views expressed in the article are that of the author

YOUR AIR INDIA



The Air India cabin crew inside the first made-for-Air India Boeing 787-9

FLEET

Take a look at our aircraft range that flies you across the world

p 116 

ROUTES

We present our latest global connectivity, offering you unparalleled access worldwide

p 117 

PARTNERS

Through our Codeshare and Interline partnerships, we try to bring the world closer

p 126 

WHEN LOYALTY IS MORE THAN A TWO-WAY TICKET

There is meaningful change across the board, especially with Maharaja Club, which has come a long way since it was renamed and relaunched

words by
Vinamra Longani

As a Platinum member of Air India's Maharaja Club loyalty programme, an aviation enthusiast (someone who works in the aviation industry), and, above all, a passionate admirer of India and JRD Tata, I have a fairly simple wish: I want Air India to be the best airline in the world, as it was in its heyday.

That may sound ambitious. But why should it not be? A nation of 1.4 billion people deserves a world-class full-service airline capable of connecting India confidently with the world, and the world with India.

Having flown Air India quite frequently over the past year, I have had plenty of opportunities to form an opinion or two about the airline. And, importantly, I have seen meaningful change.

The airport experience has vastly improved, as has the on-board service. The crew now consistently make an effort to recognise loyal customers. As a Platinum member, being specially welcomed by the cabin crew is a small gesture that makes a surprisingly big difference. For frequent flyers, recognition matters.



*The author with
the cabin crew*

Maharaja Club has also come a long way since it was renamed from the erstwhile 'Flying Returns' and relaunched in a new avatar. I observe that the redemption rates have become more attractive, particularly on key domestic routes in Business Class, making it easier to extract genuine value from accumulated points.

One of my favourite Platinum benefits is the flexibility to cancel or reschedule

a redemption booking, without a fee, up to two hours before departure. For frequent travellers, that kind of flexibility is a major factor that keeps a frequent traveller like me coming back.

I am equally impressed by the technology behind Maharaja Club. Maharaja Points are credited almost immediately after the boarding pass is scanned at the gate. It is the sort of seamless technology that frequent



flyers notice precisely because they do not have to think about it.

Travelling with family, I also particularly value the extension of Platinum privileges to companions. Frequent domestic travellers have also appreciated the reduced flight threshold for achieving status. Not everyone can fly internationally every month, and recognising domestic road warriors is a smart move.

Air India has a vast global network, and with its hub in my home city, Delhi, the airline takes me (almost) anywhere I want to get to in the world. If not directly on an Air India plane, then with a partner of Air India's (there are many leading global carriers in that list now), and I still earn Maharaja Points. It is also reassuring to know that I can now earn points on Air India Express, too, if and when I do end up flying with them.

There is, however, one development I am eagerly awaiting: Air India's first co-branded credit card with a bank

after its privatisation. Having held both IDFC and Axis Bank Vistara cards, I am naturally curious about what Air India will bring to the table. In the recent past, I have transferred points from my AXIS Bank cards to Maharaja Club, however, the no notice devaluation of the transfer programme by AXIS Bank has made this proposition unattractive.

I must add a special mention for the Platinum customer care team. They have consistently been excellent, efficient, courteous, and, importantly, conscious of a customer's status and loyalty when one calls.

Air India still has a long journey ahead. But the direction is encouraging. I want Air India to succeed and I have no doubt that it will, with the commitment of the Tata Group to restore JRD Tata's passion project to its former glory.

The views are those of the author. No compensation, in cash or kind, has been paid to author this

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
Unlock a host of benefits with Air India's Loyalty Programme, Maharaja Club; Platinum members get Lounge access, priority boarding, and extra baggage allowance, among other perks; Maharaja Club offers the extension of Platinum privileges to companions too.

Read all ABOUT IT

A literary festival for children prompts engagement and keeps the love of reading alive
words by **Mignonne Dsouza**



It is a free-to-all literary festival for kids that is dedicated to the joy of reading, and that is only one of the reasons why the Bookaroo Festival of Children's Literature has conducted over 50 editions across India, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia, since it began in 2008.

This year, the event kicks off in New Delhi at Sunder Nursery, and will host 54 speakers from 12 countries who will interact with kids over 58 sessions. The fest will then continue to Bhopal, Srinagar, and Vadodara over the next few months.

Visitors to Bookaroo can expect to find art and doodling workshops at the Doodle Wall, craft at the Workshop, storytelling under the Kahani Tree, book readings, day-long activity sessions, and a festival bookstore where children can have their books signed by authors and illustrators. The chance to interact directly with authors and speakers, and have books signed by them at the end of each session is, according to the organisers, a special moment both kids and parents savour.

It's a date!
New Delhi
(3rd-4th October)
Bhopal
(10th-11th October)
Srinagar
(1st November)
Vadodara
(12th-13th December)
bookaroo.in

FESTIVALS AROUND THE WORLD

London Children's Literature Festival:
londonkidslitfest.org

Brooklyn Book Festival:
brooklynbookfestival.org

Edinburgh International Book Festival:
edbookfest.co.uk

The National Book Festival (Washington, DC): loc.gov



A CUP OF CHEER

Air India's on-board Cutting Chai is already winning awards—and hearts

Across generations and geography, chai has quietly accompanied life's moments—both ordinary and extraordinary. It fuels early mornings, punctuates afternoon conversations, and often serves as the backdrop to stories, laughter, and reflection. In India, chai is not merely consumed. It is experienced.

Recognising the profound emotional connection Indians share with this beloved brew, and in its quest to

provide Indian warmth and a feeling of familiarity to its distinguished guests, Air India recently introduced Cutting Chai-Masala Flavour in First and Business Class on international flights. The rich and aromatic flavour served in a signature cutting chai style makes the offering twice as authentic and familiar for the Indian palate.

Air India believes that hospitality and innovation can be tastefully interwoven, and serving the chai at 35,000ft is part of the airline's commitment to elevating

the customer experience for guests. In fact, this culinary onboard innovation has already started receiving accolades—the Airline Passenger Experience Association (APEX) honoured Air India's Cutting Chai with the Best Onboard Beverage (Hot) award.

So, the next time a cup of chai is placed before you on-board, pause for a moment. Let its familiar aroma transport you to family gatherings, monsoon afternoons, and conversations that linger long after the last sip.

DRESSED TO EXPRESS

Air India Express unveils new uniforms inspired by India's rich textile traditions



Air India Express has a new look for the people who represent the airline every day. Its new uniforms bring a contemporary silhouette to cabin crew, airport services, aviation security, and flight operations teams, combining Indian design influences with the practical demands of frontline airline work.

Drawing from India's rich textile and craft traditions, the collection references Tamil Nadu's Kanjeevaram, Himachal Pradesh's Pattu, Gujarat's Patola, Assam's Gamosa, and Madhya Pradesh's Bagh. These influences are translated into modern outfits inspired by the traditional *kurti*, paired with tailored jackets, scarves, and pocket squares.

Xpress Blue, accented with Air India Express' signature Xpress Orange, gives the uniforms a distinctive visual identity while connecting them to the airline's wider brand.

There is also an in-house story behind the collection. Air India Express designer Pooja Krishnan led the design of the women's uniforms for cabin crew, airport services, aviation security, and flight operations. The men's cabin crew uniform was developed in collaboration with Trent Limited.

Made from banana crepe, the uniforms balance comfort, breathability, and durability with an elegant drape. The result is workwear designed for the demands of airline operations, while giving the people at the heart of the guest experience a fresh new identity.

It is a change of wardrobe, certainly—but also a new way for Air India Express to showcase its evolving identity.



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OUR WINGS

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

Airbus A319



03

Boeing 777-300ER



19

Airbus A320neo



84

Airbus A320ceo



04

**Boeing 787-9
Dreamliner**



10

Airbus A321ceo



08

**Boeing 787-8
Dreamliner**



26

Airbus A321neo



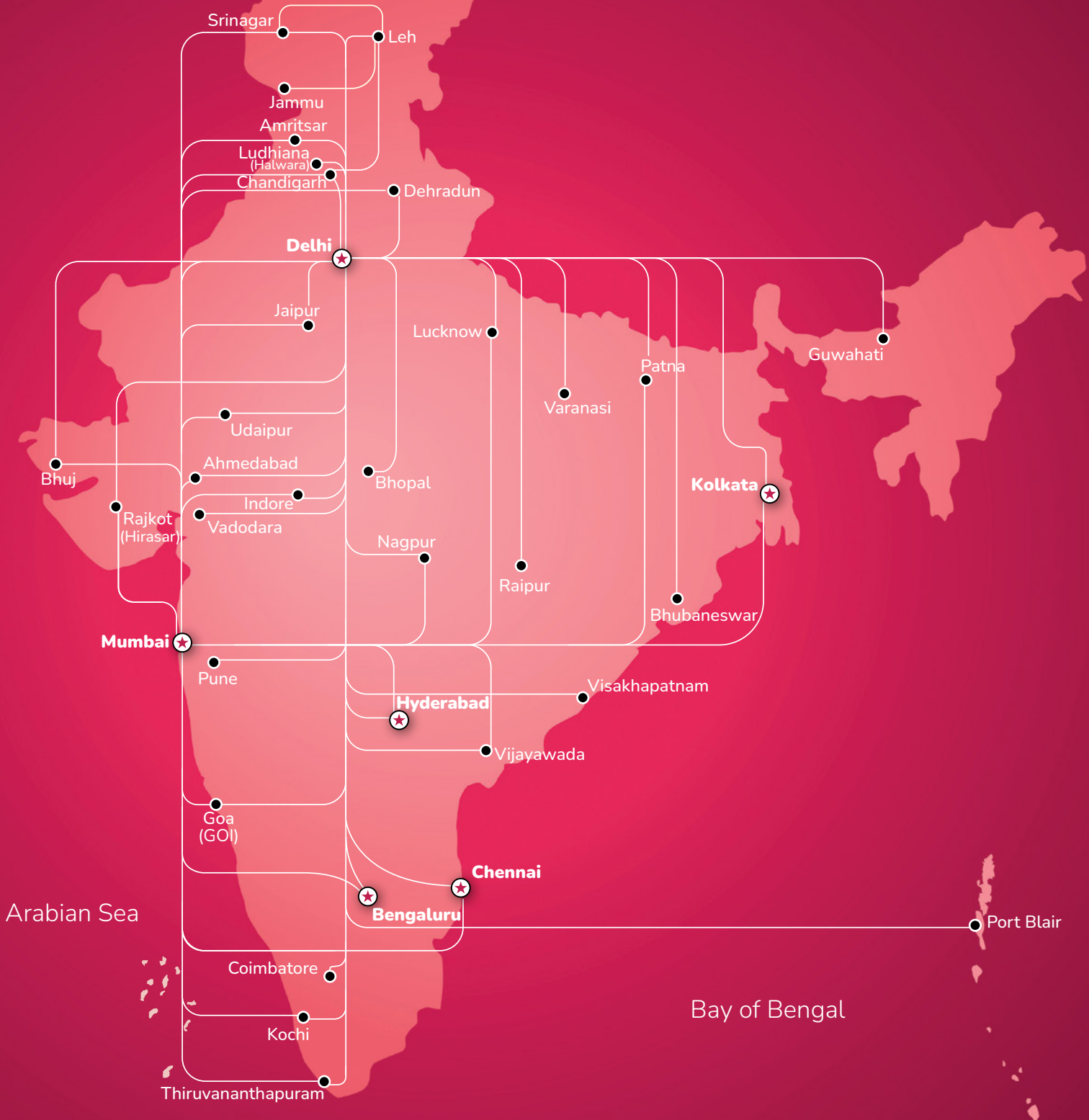
10

Airbus A350-900

06

**FLEET
STRENGTH
170**

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 15th September 2026

This route map is applicable till 24th October 2026

INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIVITY

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

Europe



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

UK



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

North America



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

Middle East



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

Connect beyond Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru
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Air India Express. Please turn to page 121 to see
domestic route connectivity via Air India Express.

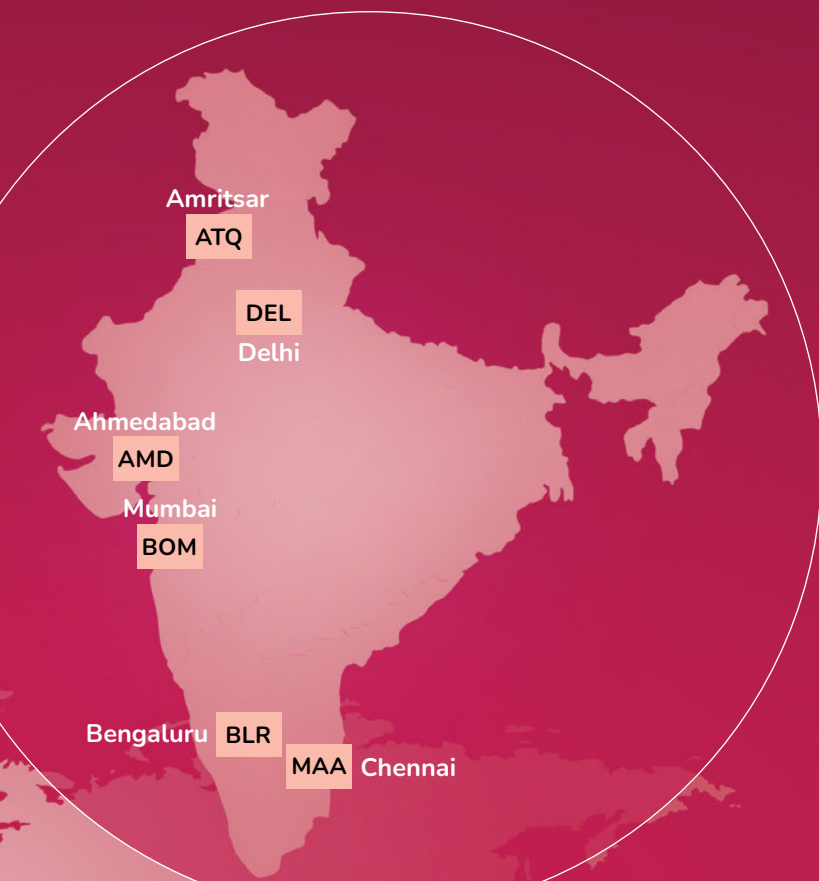
Map not to scale. The depiction and use of routes and boundaries are for informative purposes only

This route map pertains only to destinations served by Air India

Route map as on 15th September 2026

This route map is applicable till 24th October 2026

*Currently under temporary suspension



Far East

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



South East Asia

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



Australia

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



Africa

Mauritius (MRU)	↔	BOM
-----------------	---	-----

Indian Subcontinent

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

ABOARD AIX

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

 **Airbus A321neo**
04

 **Airbus A320neo**
18

 **Airbus A320ceo**
9

 **Boeing 737-800 NG**
24

 **Boeing 737-8**
53

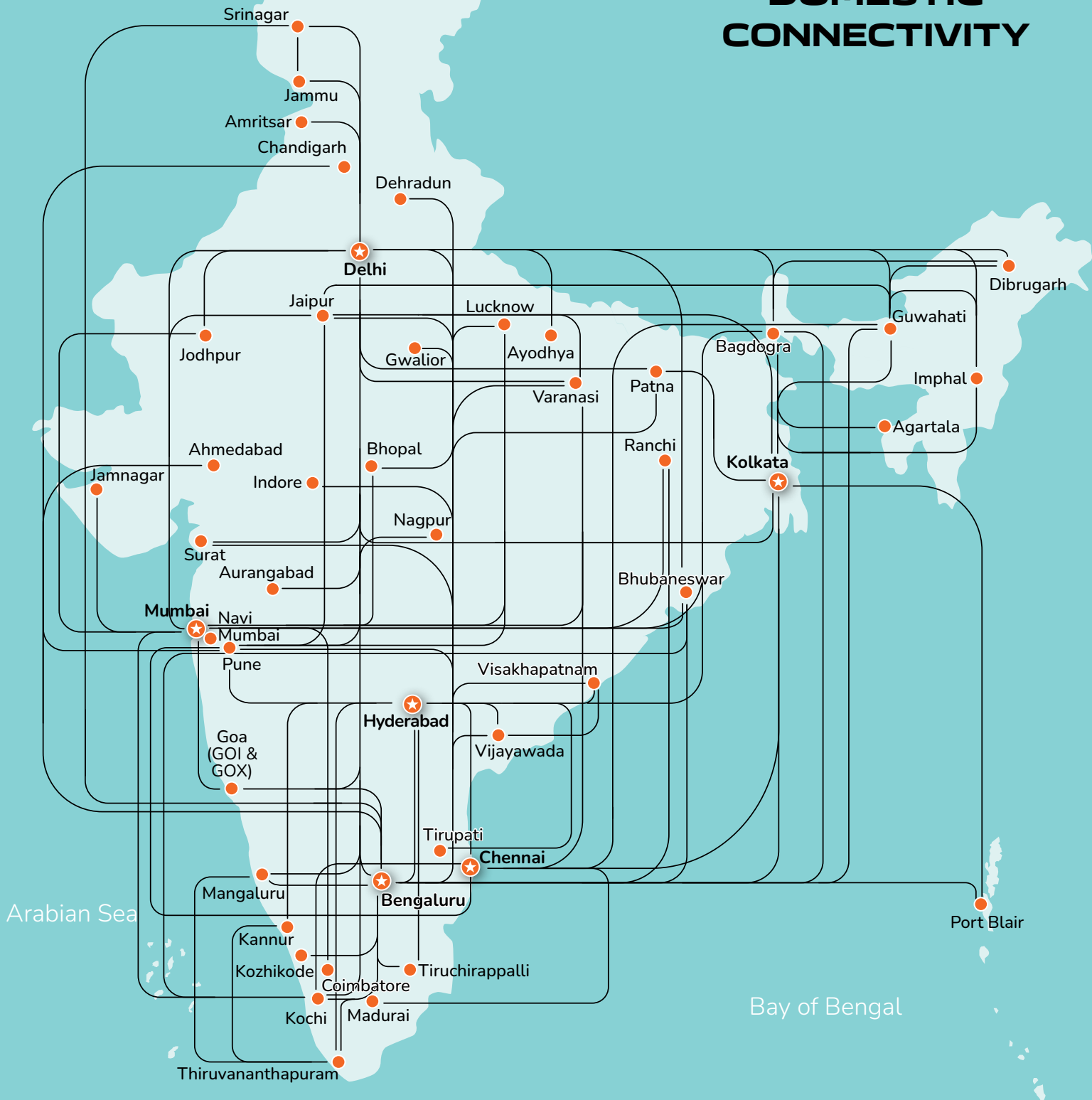
**FLEET
STRENGTH
108**



*Total number as on 16th September 2026

AIR INDIA express

DOMESTIC CONNECTIVITY

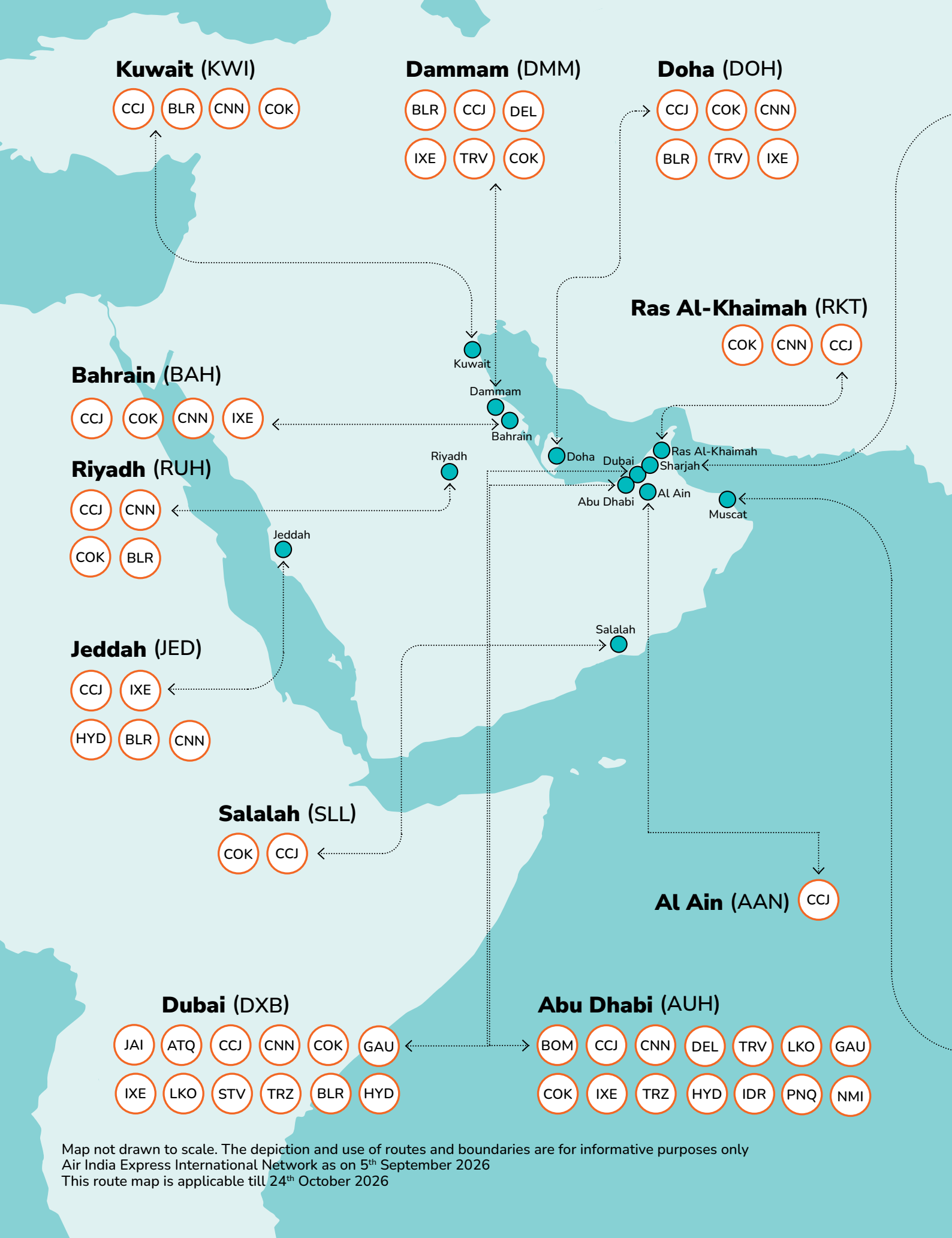


Air India Express is a Tata Enterprise and a subsidiary of Air India, operating over 500 daily flights, connecting 48 domestic and 16 international airports, with a fleet of over 100 aircraft.

Map not to scale. The depiction and use of routes and boundaries are for informative purposes only
Route map as on 5th September 2026

This route map is applicable till 24th October 2026

Indian Ocean



Map not drawn to scale. The depiction and use of routes and boundaries are for informative purposes only
Air India Express International Network as on 5th September 2026
This route map is applicable till 24th October 2026

AIR INDIA
express

**INTERNATIONAL
CONNECTIVITY**

Sharjah (SHJ)



Bangkok (BKK)



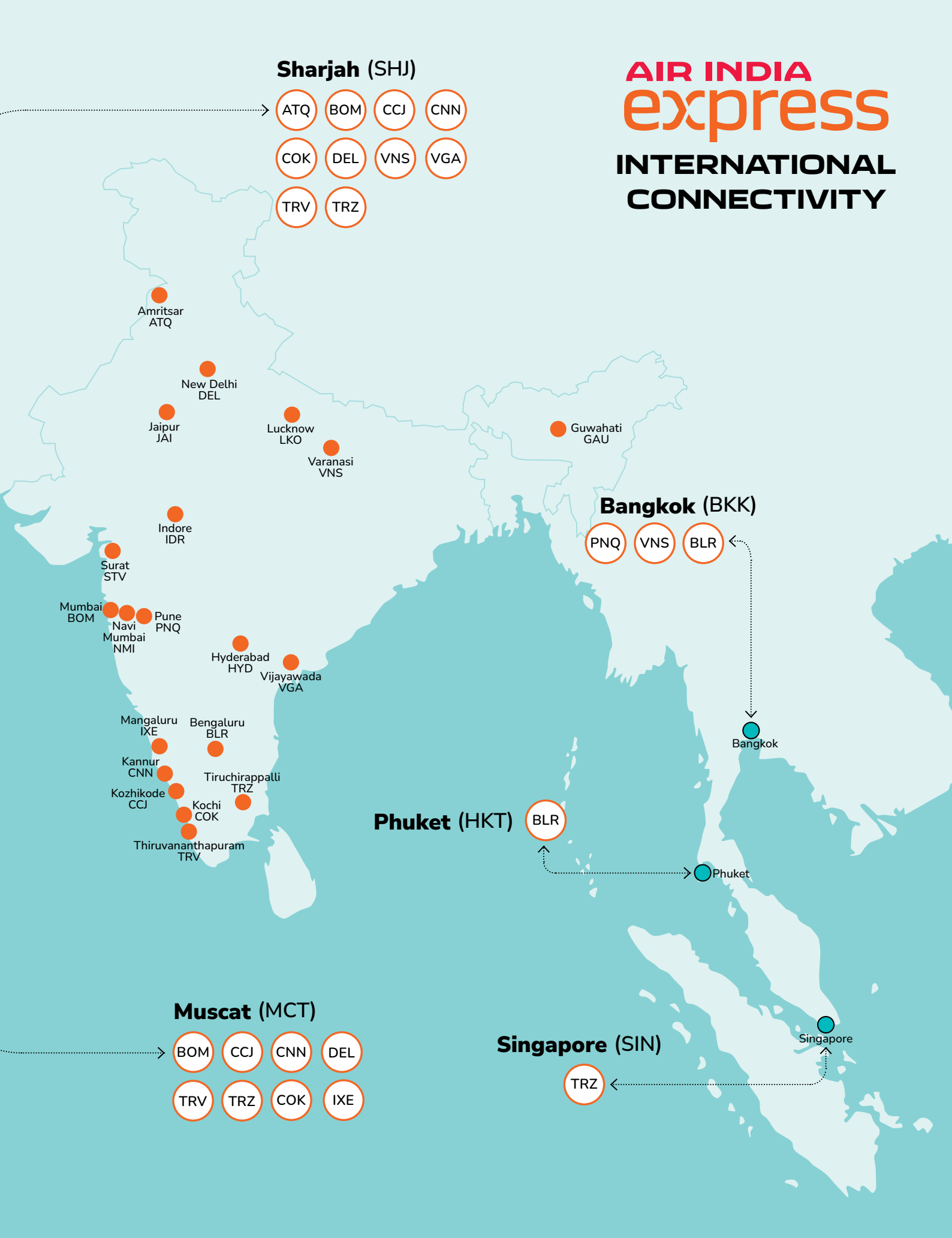
Phuket (HKT)



Muscat (MCT)



Singapore (SIN)





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CODESHARE*



INTERLINE

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Condor
Cyprus Airways
Finnair
Hahn Air
Iberia
ITA Airways
KLM
KM Malta Airlines
Lufthansa City Airlines
Luxair
Scandinavian Airlines
Turkish Airlines
Virgin Atlantic

AccessRail
Deutsche Bahn (Rail and Fly)

Asia

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

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

Middle East

El Al Israel
Emirates
Etihad Airways
Flydubai

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

North America

Alaska Airlines
American Airlines
Delta
JetBlue
United
Westjet

South America

Aerolíneas Argentinas
Avianca Group
Caribbean Airlines
Copa Airlines

LATAM Airlines Group
(includes LATAM Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay)

Africa

Air Austral
Air Madagascar
Air Seychelles
Air Tanzania
Royal Air Maroc
Rwand Air
South African Airways
Uganda Airlines

Australia and Oceania

Air Niugini Limited
Fiji Airways
JetStar
Qantas

*Both Codeshare and Interline Partners

Some airlines are represented under their respective group names
Codeshare and Interline partnerships as on 11th September 2026



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Vietnam Airlines

Take a taxi or a private car to Sunset
Town, Phu Quoc, Vietnam



WHY VISIT:

On Phu Quoc's southwest coast, Sunset Town is a Mediterranean-inspired escape where colourful European-style architecture meets tropical island scenery. Wander its winding streets and see more than 60 structures, including the Central Village Clock Tower, before catching the sunset from the iconic Kiss Bridge. After dark, the Symphony of the Sea brings the waterfront to life with jet-ski and flyboard performances, lasers, and fireworks. A white-sand beach, along with restaurants and cafés, offers plenty of reasons to linger.

YOUR ATTENTION, PLEASE

REGULATORY INFORMATION FOR ALL INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS LANDING INTO INDIA

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

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

MISSION LIFE

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

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

AIR-SEWA

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

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

DIGI YATRA

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

The Ministry of Civil Aviation has



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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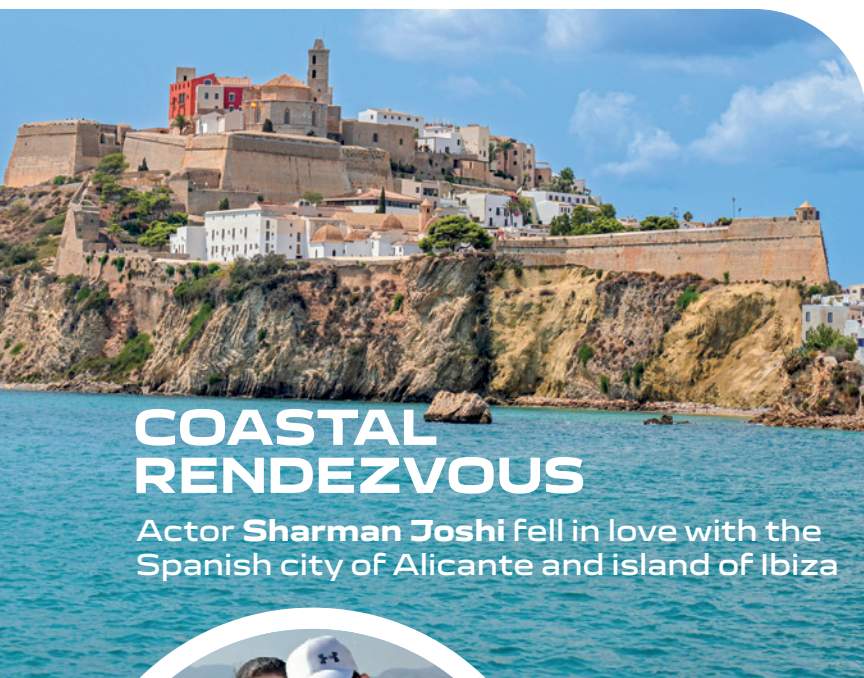
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A TRAVELLER'S TALE



COASTAL RENDEZVOUS

Actor **Sharman Joshi** fell in love with the Spanish city of Alicante and island of Ibiza



MEMORIES FOR LIFE

My wife and I visited Ibiza and Alicante together. What made the trip extra special was the contrast between the two locations. I went in expecting Ibiza—the party destination—to be a big part of the experience. But it surprised me how beautiful the other side (Alicante) is. We spent one evening here simply watching the sun set by the water, and that is probably the memory that has stayed with me.

MY LOCAL EXPERIENCE

The beaches, smaller coves, and the old town gave me a very different insight into Ibiza. Dalt Vila, the historic old town, has amazing, quaint, narrow lanes, little shops, and cafés. Alicante has a very easy, local energy to it. Going up to the Castillo de Santa Bárbara gave us spectacular views of the city and the ocean.

A FARE TO REMEMBER

I loved eating a lot of fresh seafood. My favourite was *bullit de peix* (a local fish dish) and tapas. I like that style of eating because you can order a few plates for the table and try a little bit of everything. Alicante is famous for a variety of rice dishes—must tries.

I RECOMMEND

Take a boat out and see Ibiza from the water. You can explore smaller coves or make a day trip to Formentera island. Tabarca island, too, is stunning. Alicante is one of those places where you can fit in great food, history, beaches, and a day out on the water without having to travel very far, which is what makes it such a great destination.

— As told to **Shilpi Madan**

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