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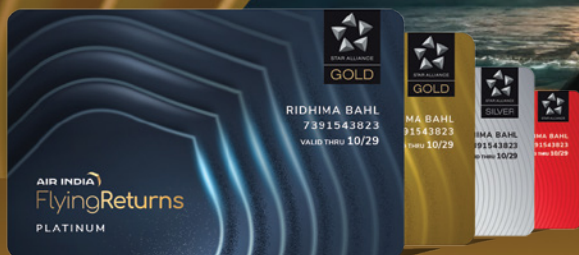


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EDITOR'S NOTE

It is that time of the year when the sun shines bright. When we want to escape to the hills... the beaches... and dive into the pool for respite. It's time for ice creams and *sharbats* and summer fruits that help us cool off.

One such fruit is the mango, *aam* in Hindi—a quintessentially Indian fruit that has been part of folklore, thrived in hundreds of traditional recipes for ages, and is now finding its rightful place in fusion delectables as well.

In this edition of *Namaste.ai*, we tell you how the 'Maharaja of Fruits' connects this diverse nation and its sweet taste manifests in some of the most lip-smacking Indian dishes. As you fly today, see the list of cities that we connect where you can experience the fruit, making your travels 'mangolicious'.

Speaking of connectivity, we've launched a new route, connecting Delhi to Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), Vietnam, a city where tradition is intertwined with modern charm. We then take you to Salzburg, Mozart's birthplace, immersing ourselves in its history. Finally, we find serenity in the temple city of Madurai, a haven for weary travellers.

This month, we entered the Climb phase of Vihaan.ai, the five-year transformation journey announced in 2022. In the last two years we've made many changes that will help us achieve our vision to create a world-class global airline. We will update you through *Namaste.ai* and seek your feedback to improve along the way.

Happy reading. Namaste!

— **Namaste.ai** Editorial Team

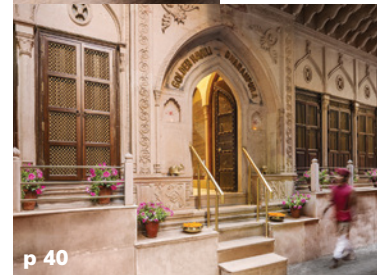


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EDITOR'S PICK OF THE MONTH
A curated fusion of the finest events, travels, exquisite cuisine, and enriching experiences, presenting a snapshot of life's vibrant mosaic.



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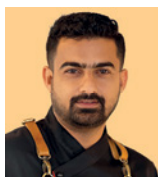


Neha Kirpal

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A freelance writer and editor based in New Delhi, she has worked for a decade in the print and online media in multinational companies. Neha is an avid traveller who writes on art, culture, music, theatre, and books.

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Dr Chef Avin Thaliath

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A baker and pastry chef, hospitality educator, and author with a bronze medal in Hotel Mngmt, Avin also has a PhD in oenology studies. He is an avid reader and a tabla player who enjoys swaying to his own music.



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A freelance writer based in Bengaluru, Rashmi writes on travel, food, architecture, design, and culture for several publications. When not exploring new places, cultures, and cuisines, you'll find her at flea markets.

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Punita Malhotra

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Punita geared from a career in entrepreneurship and publishing to pursue her passion of travel writing. Her quest for history, heritage, food, and fairy tales takes her to faraway lands. She writes for select travel publications out of her home base in Delhi.



Vernika Awal

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An independent journalist based out of New Delhi, Vernika writes regularly on food, culture, and travel. When not writing, she can be found buried in her books with her pup by her side or cooking up a storm in the kitchen.

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her visit to
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46 EVENTS

A list of the
must-attend
global festivals
this month

On the Cover

One of the towers of Meenakshi
Temple, Madurai, Tamil Nadu

Cover image courtesy

Getty Images/Keren Su

Map courtesy

Asia Media Design





THE MAHARAJA OF FRUITS

As summer sets in, we've put together
a curated itinerary so you can
discover the mighty mango—state-specific
varieties, GI-tagged specialities,
orchard stays plus secret recipes

words by **Vernika Awal**
additional inputs by **Namit Joshi**

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BEFORE SOCIAL MEDIA AND TELEVISION, COURT POETS SANG PAEANS TO THE KING OF FRUITS FOR AGES...

How far would you travel for the perfect mango? For many, the answer cannot be bound by miles on an aeroplane. Even trips down distant history tell us how the majestic mango has been a unifier for the great, diverse land that is India. Just like Air India, the mango, too, connects this vast nation and almost every nook and cranny boasts some variety of the juicy fruit.

Well before the advent of social media or TV, poets and mythologies have sung paeans to mangoes. The grand old Ekambeswarar Temple in Tamil Nadu's Kanchipuram is believed to have a 3,500-years-old mango tree just behind the sanctum. And it is believed that Goddess Parvati sat under a mango tree in worship of Lord

Shiva. Stories of Valmiki's Ramayana from around 300 BCE speak of mango orchards, while it is believed that Lord Buddha was gifted a mango orchard to rest in. The mango tree has been described as *Kalpavriksha* (wish-granting tree) in Indian mythology and in Hindu religion, mango leaves are used during auspicious occasions.

Poet Amir Khusrau deemed it to be *fakhr-e-gulshan* (pride of the garden), while Emperors Akbar and Jahangir were eloquent about it in their biographies. During his reign, Akbar got an orchard of 1,00,000 mango trees planted near Darbhanga (Bihar) and aptly named it Lakh Bagh. The *Ain-i-Akbari*, an encyclopaedia written during his reign, contains a lengthy account of

the mango. The fruit is also said to find mention in the travelogues of ancient travellers like Hsüan-tsang, Ibn Haukal, and Ibn Battuta.

Today, the craze around mangoes begins just as spring starts receding—from the mango orchards of the Doaba region in Punjab and Malihabad in Uttar Pradesh to Malda in West Bengal.

But these aren't all—iconic mango belts span Ratnagiri in Maharashtra and the Tondaimandalam region in Tamil Nadu, an area lying between Pennar river of Nellore and the Pennar river of Cuddalore. This gives us one of India's most exciting tourist trails that will take you to little-known corners of the country for a taste of best and well-known mango varieties.

Reigning supreme in India's ecosystem since time immemorial, mango is intricately woven into the nation's heritage, culture, and cuisine



ON A MANGO HUNT

There are almost 1,500 varieties of mangoes across India, so wherever you are, there'll be a mango trail to discover

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

The sweetness comes from its scent and colour; Alphonso being put to the aroma test at Mumbai's APMC market; Tiny mango fruit sprouts; Fans love its rich, velvety texture.



📍 Maharashtra

🍌 ALPHONSO

Ratnagiri is a scenic five-hour drive from Goa International Airport and home to some of the best beaches in the Konkan region. It's also where the famous Alphonso is from, named after Afonso de Albuquerque, the Portuguese soldier and conqueror of Goa. The Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg regions grow this variety and it signals the advent of summer, arriving in mid-April and lasting till end of June.

📍 West Bengal

🍌 HIMSAGAR AND FAZLI

Your next trip to the City of Joy, or any other part of West Bengal, cannot be complete without savouring what is claimed to be one of the best varieties—the Himsagar. This impeccably-sweet mango, along with Fazli, is grown in the orchards of Malda (and Murshidabad and Hooghly districts), which in itself is worth a visit. Take a road trip to Malda from Bagdogra Airport as a part of your Bengal itinerary. The *aam sondesh* is a must-try when in West Bengal.

📍 Karnataka

🍌 TOTAPURI

Bengaluru may seem to be a fairly sharp change of scenario from Kolkata but this young, bustling city is also home to one of the less common variants of mangoes—the Totapuri. This rather aromatic variant is a very interesting and somewhat differently-flavourful variant, so, keep it as a must-try on your next visit to Bengaluru. You will also find it in Telangana, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh.

📍 Gujarat

🍌 GIR KESAR

Less than four hours from Rajkot International Airport lies Gir, where you can embark on an exciting safari to see the majestic lions. Gir also gives you an opportunity to savour the state's aromatic Kesar mango. It was believed to have first been grown in Junagadh in Gujarat in the early 1930s and was named by the Nawab of Junagadh, Muhammad Mahabat Khan III. Grown in the foothills of Girnar, its largest market is in Talala Gir.



📍 Bihar

🥭 CHAUNSA

The minute you enter the capital of Bihar, Patna, you immediately get access to some of the best mangoes you can find across the northern belt. One of them is the Chaunsa, a variant lined up in several shops, from where you can break out into multiple tourist trails. Visit orchards in Bhagalpur, Muzaffarpur, Purnia or Darbhanga where you will also find other varieties like Dudhiya Malda. While visiting, do not miss the famous *litti chokha*.

📍 Uttar Pradesh

🥭 DASHERI AND LANGRA

The mango season does not commence

in the households of the purists of north India till Dasheris floods the market.

According to folklore, it has its origins in Kakori in Lucknow and was grafted by Baba-e-Amba, aka Abdul Hameed Khan Kandhari. The village of Dasheris in Uttar Pradesh has conserved the mother plant that gave birth to this variety. If in Lucknow, sample the famous *gilouti* kebab and check out *chikankari* fabric, ideal for the summer months. Should you make a trip to Varanasi, you can witness the famous *aarti*, buy gorgeous Banarasi sarees, and try the Langra.

📍 Andhra Pradesh

🥭 BANGANAPALLE

If you are visiting Visakhapatnam this

Rare GI-tagged mangoes

A GI tag is an intellectual property label; it can help put the spotlight on a state.

APPEMIDI

Used for pickling, its sub-varieties include Kanchappa and Karnakundala.

📍 **Where to find:** Karnataka

JARDALU

Grown in an organic set-up, these mangoes from Bhagalpur have a light-yellow hue.

📍 **Where to find:** Bihar

EDAYUR CHILLI AND KUTTIATTOOR

The Edayur Chilli is pungent while the Kuttiattoor is known for its orange-gold hue.

📍 **Where to find:** Kerala

LET US KNOW

Do tag and tell Air India about other lesser-known or regional mango varieties that also deserve a mention.

The joyous harvest of nature's treasure—ripe mangoes

year—a unique experience where you will see rolling hills meeting pristine beaches—make your stay richer by cashing in on the mango season. Deriving its name from the Banganapalli village, this variety is obliquely oval in shape, with a meaty texture and unparalleled sweetness.

📍 Tamil Nadu

🍌 NEELAM

A trip to Chennai or Madurai would be incomplete without savouring the rare Neelam mango. It is not a variety that you'd usually spot in north India. See our detailed story on Madurai, in this very issue, for an enriching trip.

📍 Goa

🍌 MANKURAD

There's hardly any convincing needed when it's a trip to Goa but in the summer, the beach town is quiet and serene, making it ideal for a relaxing getaway. When you're there, try any of their approximately 80 local variants—each of which are gems to savour and grown across the state. Of all of these, Mankurad is, by far, a standout and also easily available.

Upcoming Mango Festivals

JO CHAAHE MANGO 20th - 21st April 2024

📍 Airspace, Nexus Seawoods Mall, Navi Mumbai, MH

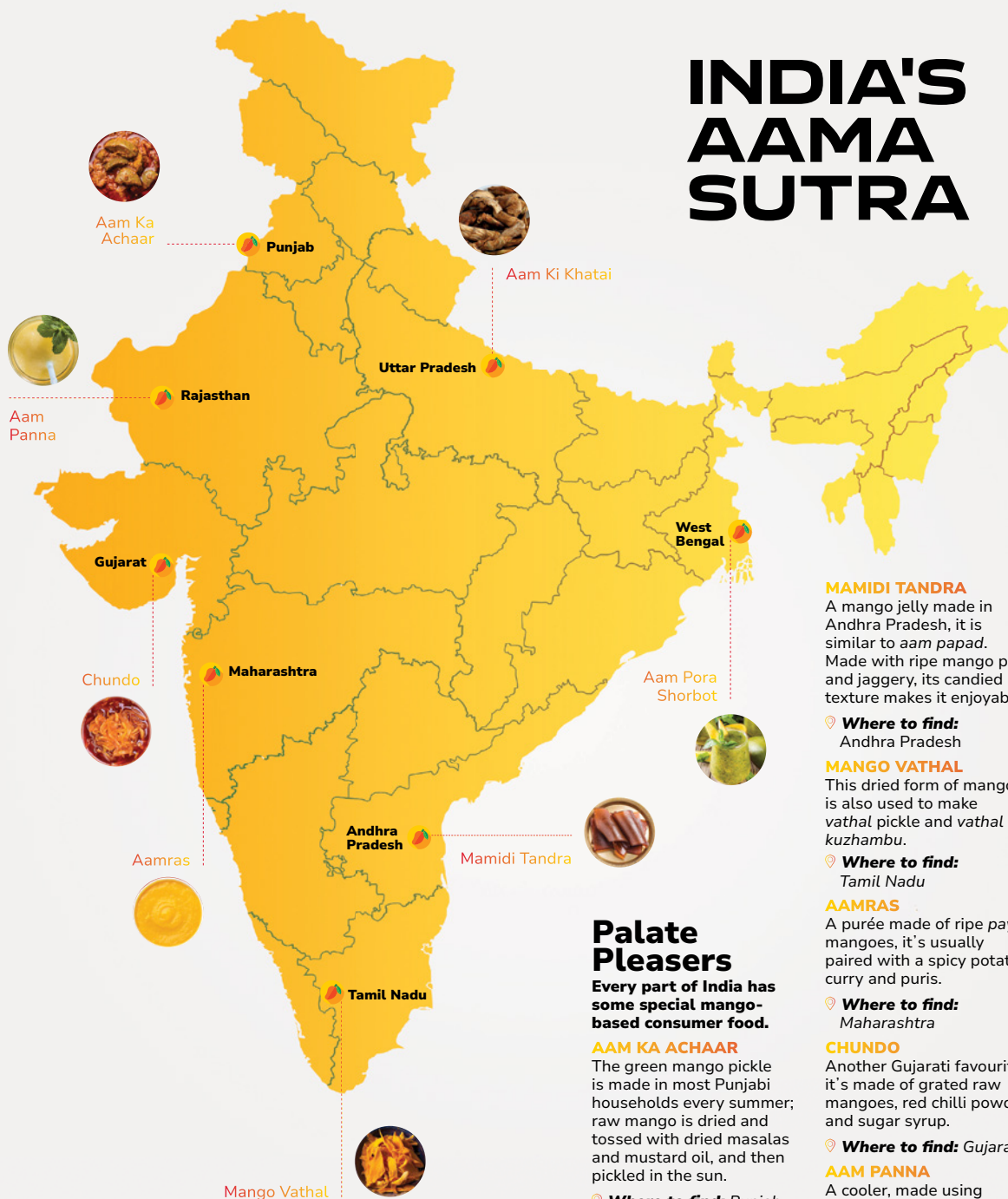
INTERNATIONAL MANGO FESTIVAL 2024 Mid-June - July 2024

📍 Dilli Haat, New Delhi, DELHI
(dates to be announced soon)

THE GREAT MANGO FESTIVAL 2024 June 2024

📍 Hanu Reddy Raghava Farms, Othivakkam, TN

INDIA'S AAMA SUTRA



MAMIDI TANDRA

A mango jelly made in Andhra Pradesh, it is similar to *aam papad*. Made with ripe mango pulp and jaggery, its candied texture makes it enjoyable.

📍 **Where to find:**
Andhra Pradesh

MANGO VATHAL

This dried form of mango is also used to make *vathal* pickle and *vathal kuzhambu*.

📍 **Where to find:**
Tamil Nadu

AAMRAS

A purée made of ripe *payri* mangoes, it's usually paired with a spicy potato curry and puris.

📍 **Where to find:**
Maharashtra

CHUNDO

Another Gujarati favourite, it's made of grated raw mangoes, red chilli powder, and sugar syrup.

📍 **Where to find:** Gujarat

AAM PANNA

A cooler, made using the pulp of boiled unripe mangoes, is mixed with cumin powder, sugar, and cool water. *Aam panna* is closely linked with the *aam pora shorbot* from West Bengal.

📍 **Where to find:**
Rajasthan

Palate Pleasers

Every part of India has some special mango-based consumer food.

AAM KA ACHAAR

The green mango pickle is made in most Punjabi households every summer; raw mango is dried and tossed with dried masalas and mustard oil, and then pickled in the sun.

📍 **Where to find:** Punjab

AAM PORA SHORBOT

Unripe mangoes are charred and turned into a smoky concoction with toasted cumin powder. Serve this cooler chilled.

📍 **Where to find:**
West Bengal



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Map for illustrative purposes only; Not to scale.

**CLOCKWISE
FROM LEFT**

The mango pulissery is prepared with Chandrakaran mangoes simmered in a coconut-yoghurt gravy; Kulfi is a sought-after frozen treat; Prawn mango curry is a Konkan favourite; To-die-for, sweet mango halwa.



THE FOOD TOURISM TRAIL

Mangoes are an integral part of cuisines in most Indian states, bringing a unique sweet-and-tangy flavour to dishes



Every summer, Indian households and commercial kitchens celebrate mangoes with gusto. Not only do mangoes offer numerous health benefits, being rich in fibre, vitamins and minerals but also add a unique flavour to regional dishes that cannot be substituted. Here are some select dishes from across India that celebrate the mangoes' versatility in its diverse platter of cuisines.

MANGO PULISSERY

Also called *mambazha pulissery*, it is made of curd mixed with freshly-ground coconut, ripened Chandrakaran mangoes, and spices. Chef Marina Balakrishnan points out that making this dish is an art, where the sweet, sour, and spicy flavours have to come together. Pair it with steamed rice.

Where to find: Kerala

MANGO HALWA

Also called mango *kesari*, this sweet dish is prepared with semolina and ripe mangoes. Most people use Alphonso for it and offer it as *naivedyam* (an offering to God) during celebrations. If you're flying anywhere in Tamil Nadu or Karnataka, stop at a local joint for this.

Where to find: Tamil Nadu, Karnataka

MANGO KULFI

Featuring condensed milk, cream, and mango pulp, it's a common dessert in north India in the summer. One of the most interesting varieties can be had at Kuremal Kulfi in Old Delhi, where the kulfi is stuffed inside whole mangoes and frozen, and then sliced and served.

Where to find: Punjab, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh

MANGO PRAWN CURRY

It's quite popular in the Konkan belt—in Karnataka and Kerala. Raw mango is used in this curry, simmered with prawns and fresh coconut milk, making a sweet and sour gravy. Serve it with steamed rice and poppadoms.

Where to find: Goa, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala



Home chefs' star dishes

A glimpse into the kitchens of some of India's most celebrated home chefs.

AAM'ER LUCHI BY RHEA MITRA-DALAL

A Bengali recipe that Mitra-Dalal learnt from the book *Amish O Niramish Ahar*, it has mango pulp and coconut milk added to flour; the dough is used to make saffron-tinged puffy *luchis*.

AAM KI SUBZI BY SURABHI BHANDARI

Made in the Marwari households of Jodhpur, it uses Alphonsos, ghee, curd, onion purée, and dry spices. The peels are dried and used to make curries year round.

AAMBYA KOL BY SWAPNEEL PRABHU

Charred Raiwal mangoes are used for this curry from the Saraswat households of coastal Karnataka. Prabhu roasts some mangoes, while some are peeled and muddled to extract their juice, and then mixed with spices; it's then cooked down to a syrupy consistency.

PAKKA KERI MA GOS BY KURUSH F DALAL

This Parsi mutton dish (with ripe, sweet mangoes) is a seasonal specialty brought back into the limelight by Parsi caterer and cookbook author, Dr Katy Dalal.

FAJETO BY SHITAL KAKAD

Made in Gujarati households, *fajeto* is a sweet-and-sour *kadhi* made using the pulp of ripe mangoes, curd, and spices. Best paired with steamed rice.

GREEN STAYS

Try a different kind of farm holiday, this year, by visiting a mango orchard



📍📌 MANGO MULCH

📍 Talakadu, Karnataka

This quaint little destination is right at par with the best luxury resorts when it comes to themed stays. Mango Mulch is set on an 8-acre orchard with around 100 mango trees. It has an ancient temple in its midst plus three rustic but very aesthetic cottages to stay in. The entire destination looks like the perfect place to fly to for a digital detox, where you can spend a few days in utmost serenity. It even offers yoga camps.

📍📌 MANGO VILLAGE

📍 Palakkad, Kerala

Started by a family with humble beginnings way back in the 1980s, Mango Village in Palakkad offers a unique, one-of-a-kind experience where you get to visit their orchard and pick their produce. With a robust produce and a range of adventure activities, this makes for a great family vacation destination—especially when the fruit is ripe. It is an ideal holiday site within India this season.

📍📌 BIKRAM BAGH

📍 Nahan, Himachal Pradesh

Established by Col. Bir Bikram Singh, Bikram Bagh is a 120-year-old resort that houses over 3,000 trees in its orchards. The resort is serene, located right beside the River Markanda. A luxurious and feel-good vacation destination, especially for those who like a quiet getaway. The 12 rooms and 2 villas are accompanied by vast balconies to experience the outdoors—and for lovers of the fruit, the heady aroma of ripe mangoes comes right in.

🕒 When to Visit?

The best time to visit India's mango orchards is between **April and August**, when the fruit is ready for harvest. This truly makes for a one-of-a-kind experience.

THE PEOPLE

20 INSPIRING INDIA 23 GUEST COLUMN

Harmanpreet Kaur
enjoys a moment
with a koala at
Sydney's Taronga Zoo
during the ICC 2020
Women's Twenty20
World Cup



SPREADING WINGS WIDE

Delve into the untold journey of triumph and leadership behind India's women cricket team's captain

hk

ALL HAIL THE CAPTAIN

words by **Shrabasti Anindita Mallik**

A skipper par excellence, **Harmanpreet Kaur**, who holds the Women T20 Matches record for 'Most Matches as Captain', is confident of leading her team to victory at the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2024 ➔

HOW DID CRICKET HAPPEN FOR YOU?

Everyone called me a born athlete when I was growing up. I would never stay indoors. Even during school hours, I would look outside the window, waiting for the lunch breaks so that I could run to the playground. After school, I would accompany my father or fellow mates to the ground and play all kinds of sport—be it cricket, football, basketball or hockey. My father would regularly receive advice to put me under professional training for any one sport. We had even decided to try hockey training but my heart was just not in it. I remember telling my father that I would not play a sport that does not involve my heart. He asked me what I wanted and very spontaneously, I told him that I wanted to become

a cricketer and be on TV one day. He was not very convinced due to the lack of awareness about women's cricket back then. But my intention was resolute; I wanted to represent India—be it in the men's team or women's. My father never questioned me again.

YOU BECAME THE FIRST INDIAN CRICKETER TO SIGN A BIG BASH LEAGUE CONTRACT WITH SYDNEY THUNDER. HOW DID THAT TRANSPIRE?

It came as a surprise when I was picked up in the WBBL. I was initially a little hesitant to share the dressing room with international players as I was neither fluent in English nor did I enjoy any cuisine except Indian. But then I recalled the times when I felt their dominance in the sport and



Kaur shares a light moment with one of her pets

the way they constantly won several titles for their country. It struck me so hard that I decided to seize that opportunity to see their conduct on and off the field. I imbibed the insights and observations, and shared them with my team. The most important one being 'communication is the key to success'.

HOW DID THE TATA WOMEN'S PREMIER LEAGUE (WPL) BOLSTER MORE WOMEN CRICKETERS?

I believe it has grown tenfold ever since WPL was introduced. The amount of love and engagement that we received across platforms has heralded a new wave of change for women cricketers in the country. The involvement of big franchises and brands helped elevate this to a new level. Life seemed unreal during that first week of the WPL 2023. As a cricket fanatic, I looked at it from the outside and observed how one platform can change everything overnight, and it was heartening.

HOW ARE THE PREPARATIONS GOING FOR THE ICC WOMEN'S T20 WORLD CUP 2024?

Hopes are high and, this time, all we know is that a win is long due. If those two weeks are done right, the cheers will resound for a lifetime. I always walk out there with this feeling and my request to all my fellow Indian cricket lovers is to bestow unconditional support throughout the tournament. All that we have learnt from our hard work has to be shown. We will train for three months for this big challenge, once again. The team is well prepared and I'm sure we will excel together.

YOU REPRESENT THE NEW-AGE INDIAN WOMAN. HOW DO YOU LEVERAGE THIS ROLE TO ADVOCATE A CHANGE?

It's my social responsibility to give back to the young women who dare to dream. They may not be aspirational about cricket but if they believe in their dreams,



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Playing a shot during an ICC Women's T20 World Cup match between India and Pakistan at Cape Town in 2023; Also the skipper of Mumbai Indians (WPL), Kaur poses with the winning trophy in 2023; Arriving for a match at Emerald Headingley Stadium in England (2021).



we should all support them to take that one bold step towards following those dreams. I feel proud of the parents who wholeheartedly support their daughters to follow their passion. A lot has changed in our society for good and if we continue to transform the society this way, we are halfway forward already.

WHAT'S YOUR DEFINITION OF NEW INDIA?

It starts with I—I am the change, I am the one. Every change starts with self-assurance and self-motivation to do the right thing.

WHEN NOT TRAINING...

I spend time with my dogs—Jelly and Furry.

"A LOT HAS CHANGED IN OUR SOCIETY FOR GOOD... WE ARE HALFWAY FORWARD ALREADY."



Dr Chef Avin
Thaliath,
Co-Founder
& Director,
Lavonne
Hospitality
Pvt. Ltd.

THROUGH THE AGES

A multifaceted gastronomic journey of the humble mango through time and tradition

words by **Dr Chef Avin Thaliath**

Mango is like a flavour delight, bursting in

all sorts of delicious ways! Chefs adore it because it's the ultimate culinary chameleon. While Alphonso mangoes from India are famous for their creamy sweetness, the Indian subcontinent has a myriad of diverse types: Kesar has a tangy aroma, Langra is a sweet-sour blend, Totapuri has a chewy sweetness to it, and Dasheri is known for its pulpy tanginess. Telangana's Banganapalli and Punjab, Pakistan's Chaunsa mangoes bring unique twists to dishes, inspiring chefs for culinary experiments.

Our humble mango is no newcomer. Legend has it that mangoes have delighted taste buds since ancient times. A look at some interesting facts; around 300-400 AD, traders spread mango seeds from Asia to the middle East, east Africa, and south America. In 1498, the Portuguese introduced mango cultivation to India, igniting a mango revolution. Interestingly, legends claim that Mughal emperor Akbar planted 1,00,000 mango trees in Darbhanga, Bihar, and Alauddin Khilji hosted lavish mango feasts in the Sivama Fort. Today, extravagant mango festivals celebrate the fruit's glory, continuing a tradition of showcasing prized mangoes at grand gatherings held by farmers of olden times.

Recipes for mangoes have been passed down through



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
Coconut ice-cream with mango chia and mint salsa by Thaliath showcases modern plating; Raw mango is a tasty roadside snack; A ripe, yellow mango being sliced to savour.



generations, from royal to home kitchens. In the south, there is *mango vellam pachadi*, and in the north and west, there is *aamras*. Both are pulpy treats enjoyed standalone or as sides. Raw mango rice, or *mavinakayi chitranna* (in Kannada), is a tangy and spicy game changer, perfect for using up leftover rice.

Gully (Hindi for alley) food is the heartbeat of India! The real fusion of flavours is found in the narrow lanes of cities or towns. The *tapris* or the *thelas* toss up the most delicious *bhel puri* with *kacchi kairi* (raw mango). Or simply cut the raw mangoes and season it with chaat masala and red chilli

powder, making a delectable snack for any hour.

Some international inspirations have found their way into modern Indian menus. Popular desserts like Thai mango sticky rice and mango float have gained popularity. Mango sticky rice is a simple yet flavourful one-pot winning combination.

Beyond the juicy indulgence lies a treasure trove of usability in every part of the fruit. Seeds, usually tossed aside, are powerhouses of potential! You can turn them into treats, like mango seed tea, packed with antioxidants, or mango seed butter, for nourishing your skin. And there's mango seed chutney, adding much

flavour to food!

Meanwhile, peels find their purpose too. Transformed into mango peel jam and marmalade, they offer a delightful tanginess that complements the fruit's sweetness. Modern chefs today take a sustainable approach and experiment with peels and seeds in creative food décor so nothing goes to waste. This celebrates the fruit's versatility and teaches us mindful consumption.

In today's modern kitchens, mango is taken to different heights. From dessert to savoury items, pickles to dips, salsa to sorbet, and garnish to cream, mango has come a long way indeed!

"BEYOND THE JUICY INDULGENCE LIES A TREASURE TROVE OF USABILITY IN EVERY PART OF THE FRUIT."

THE CHECKLIST

26 ➔ NOW TRENDING 32 ➔ BOOKS 34 ➔ BEVERAGES 40 ➔ HOTELS 46 ➔ EVENTS

With an eclectic menu, Gold by Ice Cream Works officially opens its doors in Bandra, Mumbai

SAVOURING THE SWEET SCOOPS

Indulge in the latest trends and chic launches



↑ LAVONNE NOW IN DELHI

Bengaluru's renowned Lavonne Café opens in Delhi, with Lavonne Academy of Baking Science and Pastry Arts, India's first specialised international institution dedicated to the art and science of baking. **Where:** Defence Colony, New Delhi **Highlights:** *Croissanwich, Hazelnut Caramel Basque Cheesecake, Tiramisu*



ALL IN VOGUE

The latest launches, openings, and must-haves



HUES OF SPRING

Celebrate nature with trueBrowns' latest collection, *Malang*. The designs are crafted in cotton and viscose, and boast dobby textures.



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URBAN CHIC

Inspired by tribal motifs and embroideries, the eclectic ensembles from Anamika Khanna's SS '24 collection are worthy wardrobe additions.



↑ GOLD BY ICE CREAM WORKS STORE OPENING

Why: Unique donut-shaped ice creams, Japanese snow desserts, and environment-conscious packaging.

Where: Bandra, Mumbai **Recommended:** *Biscoff Lotus Toasty Sundae, Spaghetti Ice Cream*



TWICE THE FUN

RAKTDA's new tourism campaign, *See Double*, lets travellers discover the wonders of Ras Al Khaimah, UAE, and Musandam, Oman, in a single trip.



↑ RAMZAN-SPECIAL FOOD FESTIVAL

Why: One of MasterChef India 2016's top contenders, Chef Sadaf Hussain is curating a Ramzan-special pop-up, 'Mandi Se Mez Tak', till 12th April, bringing flavours of Bihar, Bengal, Awadh, Delhi, and Lahore.

Where: The GT Road, Connaught Place, New Delhi **Recommended:** *Bhatti Ananas, Mutton Guler Kabab*



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Scan to Experience

EXPLORING INDIA'S CULTURAL HERITAGE

Geographical Indications help to protect a country's unique regional products, ensuring the continuity of its traditions and heritage.

A Geographical Indication (GI) is an indication that identifies a good as originating from a particular place, where a given quality, reputation, or other characteristics of the good are essentially attributable to its geographical origin and lend that good its distinctive quality. As a norm, the GI tags are accorded to a collective or a community.

India currently has about 547 registered Geographical Indications (GIs) dedicated to protecting unique regional products. Obtaining a GI tag grants authorised producers and manufacturers exclusive rights to market goods under that name. It prohibits unauthorised parties from free riding on the reputation of GI products by selling identical items with the same indicia. Thus, GI acts as a method to preserve and ensure the continuity of our traditions and heritage. While cultural preservation is important, it is also crucial to make GI-tagged products commercially viable.

Taking Jaipur's exquisite blue pottery as a prime example, we can see how GI protection can effectively preserve and promote our cultural heritage. **Blue pottery of Jaipur** is instantly recognisable by the predominance of the blue colour on them. This hue, created from cobalt oxide, is striking and forms the foundation of the pottery's visual allure.

This striking shade forms the foundation

of the pottery's visual allure, with touches of yellow, green, and other colours subtly enhancing the traditional blue-and-white palette. The art has Persian origins and received royal patronage earlier, which declined in successive years. To preserve and promote the art, a GI status was accorded to the same.

In certain cases, like that of the **Mysore Sandalwood Oil**, protecting geographical distinctiveness through GIs has helped curb illegal logging, spurred innovation in the industry, and increased job opportunities for many. Renowned for its exceptional quality, Mysore Sandalwood Oil is a hallmark of India. Prized as 'Liquid Gold' by the Government of Karnataka, it's also known as the 'Fragrant Ambassador' for its consistent purity and unique aroma, which has earned it a GI status.

Thriving in the ideal climate of Mysore and Shivamogga, the sandalwood trees yield a bountiful harvest of oil. This oil boasts a distinctive woody-sweet fragrance with remarkable longevity, making it a highly sought-after ingredient in perfumery. Its exceptional fixative properties enhance the depth and longevity of heavy and oriental perfumes, solidifying its place as a treasured fragrance component.

Similarly, the **Kashmir Saffron** has a unique origin and has been cultivated by Kashmiri farmers for over 2,500 years. It is known for its vibrant colour and distinctive aroma. Post-harvesting, it undergoes a meticulous and





labour-intensive process, which renders it one of the costliest spices in the world.

While Iran, Spain, and Greece grow saffron, the Kashmir variety stands apart for its exceptional quality attributed to the region's unique terroir. Grown at high altitudes between 1,600-1,800m in the Kashmir Valley, the distinctive climate, snow-fed waters, and soil composition create ideal conditions for saffron cultivation unmatched elsewhere. This exceptional geography lends Kashmir saffron its superior aroma, colour intensity, and medicinal properties, distinguishing it from other global varieties. Kashmir saffron's rich dark red colour, bittersweet taste, high crocin content, and exquisite fragrance earned it the coveted GI status. Kashmir's centuries-old saffron heritage and suitable high-altitude ecology produce a saffron widely regarded as the world's best—far superior to varieties from Iran, Spain, and Greece.

The GI tag for **Naga Mircha** or King Chilli protects the variety from being imitated and helps farmers in Nagaland receive fair compensation for their unique produce. It has specific geographical requirements and can only grow when certain climatic conditions are met. It thrives in temperatures ranging from 60°C to 360°C. The temperature in Nagaland is within this range. The rainfall required for its cultivation ranges from 1,200 to 4,050mm per annum. The average annual rainfall in the state is 200mm. Thus, its hallmark pungency is a result of the

specific soil and climatic conditions.

For authorised GI collectives, registration preserves traditional knowledge and legitimises artisanal skills honed over generations. It ensures suitable economic returns by adding premium value to their heritage wares. GI tags empower producers to sustain culinary marvels and craftsmanship.

For the Government of India, robust GI protection supports local communities, promotes sustainability, and strengthens India's global brand equity. GI products showcase the nation's unique strengths. Their promotion aligns with strategic priorities to empower consumers, catalyse grassroots innovation, and harness cultural legacy for inclusive growth.

A robust GI ecosystem holds the potential to unlock significant economic and cultural advantage, boosting India's soft power. Empowering local communities and promoting traditional skills could contribute to addressing challenges like limited income opportunities for skilled workers, underrepresentation of women in the workforce, and rural-urban migration through concerted efforts of all the stakeholders involved.

Your journey with Air India is just the prologue. The real adventure lies beyond the horizon, waiting to be unraveled. So, pack your curiosity, fuel your spirit, and let the magic of India guide your way. Until we meet again, Namaste!

BUY AUTHENTIC, BUY GI

A GI certification signifies more than just authenticity and purity. It acknowledges the intricate interplay between a product's quality, reputation, and its specific origin. It also ensures that consumers receive authentic products with specific qualities attributable to the region's unique soil, climate, and traditional knowledge.

The government has developed a legislative framework to facilitate and regulate the GI ecosystem: The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act of 1999 and The Geographical Indications Rules of 2003.

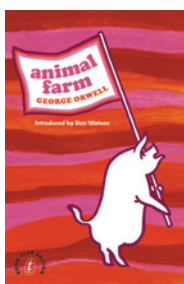
The list of authentic users of GI products can be accessed on www.ipindia.gov.in or on the following link:

https://www.ipindia.gov.in/IPIndiaAdmin/writereaddata/Portal/Images/pdf/Details_of_GI_Authorised_User_Applications_Registered_as_on_January_31_2024_new_One.pdf



TOP FIVE READS

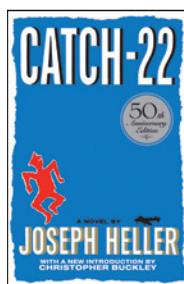
Author and screenwriter
Anand Neelakantan shares his
all-time favourite titles



ANIMAL FARM
(George Orwell)

A political fable with animals as characters, this book is dystopian yet relatable. The narrative inspired me to write *Mahi*, with an Indian spin.

Text Publishing; ₹703



CATCH-22
(Joseph Heller)

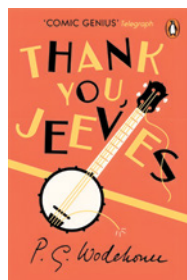
Set in Italy in the backdrop of WWII, I consider this literary masterpiece as the best anti-war book written after the Mahabharata.

Simon & Schuster; ₹2,490

TOP TRAVEL READ
BYRON: A LIFE IN TEN LETTERS
(Andrew Stauffer)

A biography, it explores Lord Byron's life through some of his best works.

Cambridge University Press; ₹1,992



THANK YOU, JEEVES
(PG Wodehouse)

A fun read, peppered with wit and subtle humour. Wodehouse wrote great escapist literature and I love all his works.

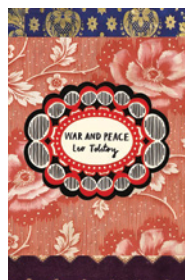
Arrow; ₹880



THE KITE RUNNER
(Khaled Hosseini)

A heart-touching and profound narrative of redemption, it also talks about friendship and family.

Bloomsbury Paperbacks ₹399

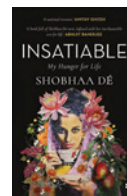


WAR AND PEACE
(Leo Tolstoy)

Great characters, astounding volume, fantastic narration, a timeless classic—what's not to love?

Vintage Classic Russians Series; ₹2,158

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INSATIABLE: MY HUNGER FOR LIFE
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The author recounts her journey, talking about how food connects people in unexpected places and delightful ways.

HarperCollins Publishers India; ₹599



THE ANTIQUE HUNTER'S GUIDE TO MURDER
(C.L. Miller)

Join Freya as she embarks on a treasure hunt with her aunt Carole, to unravel the mysterious death of her mentor.

Macmillan; ₹750



THE MUSICAL MAVERICK
(Ashis Ghatak)

This authorised biography captures the multifaceted Mahadevan: singer, musician, composer, family man.

Rupa Publications; ₹550

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FUN FACT

The oldest mention of *sharbat* is found in a Persian book of 12th century, *Zakhireye Khwarazmshahi*



BEAT THE HEAT

Energise yourself with some refreshing traditional Indian beverages that combine nutrition and taste

words by **Pallavi Singh**

1/ CHABEEL

A refreshing rose-flavoured beverage, it offers respite from summer's scorching heat. Also referred to as *kachhi lassi*, it is prepared with milk, rose syrup, and chilled water (sometimes ice cubes are also added). Chabeel is prepared in an 8:2 water-to-milk ratio. The cooling properties of this drink help control body temperature during hot days, keep stomach burns at bay, and provide energy and hydration. Members of the Sikh community serve this drink to passers-by during summer months.

📍 **TRY THIS AT:** Any Gurdwara



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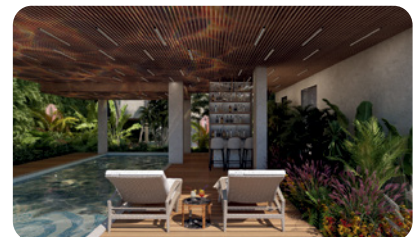
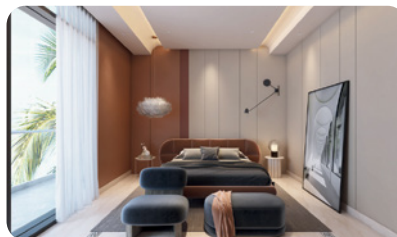
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2/ SATTU SHARBAT

The latest entrant into the vegan food list, this cooling *sharbat* is made using Bengal gram powder, water, black salt, roasted cumin powder, green chilli, lemon juice, coriander, and mint leaves. A superfood that's an excellent source of nutrition and energy, it aids in digestion, acts as a detoxifying agent, and keeps the body hydrated. With a low glycemic index, its high fibre content helps tackle diabetes, high cholesterol issues, and aids in weight management. Called *tsampa* in Tibet, it was a staple for travelling monks.

📍 **TRY THIS AT:** *Sattuz Cafe, Patliputra Colony, Patna, Bihar*



3/ NANNARI

The root of swallowroot (scientific name *Decalepis hamiltonii*), an endangered shrub native to India, is the source of this beverage. Popular in South India, the beverage is called *nannari*, *sugandha pala* or *sarsaparilla*, and is revered for its medicinal and cooling properties. Steam-distilled into extract, it is mixed with citric acid, water, and sugar to form the syrup. To this, water, lemon juice, honey, and black salt is added to make the drink. A digestive aid, it also tackles inflammation, wheezing, and rheumatoid arthritis.

📍 **TRY THIS AT:** *Sri Ramavilas Nannari Shop, Girivalam Rd, Tiruvannamalai, TN*

4/ BELA PANA

Ripe *bel* or stone apple is often transformed into *sharbats*, nectars or candies, boasting a blend of musky, sweet, and tangy flavours. In Bengal, *bel'er shorbot* combines *bel* pulp with milk, sugar, and ice, while Odisha's *bela panna* mixes the pulp with lemon juice, black pepper, mint leaves, and ice water. During Maha Vishuba Sankranti, or the Odia New Year, *bel* is laced with cottage cheese, jaggery, banana, and pomegranates. An antidote to indigestion and hyperacidity, modern variations use *bel* in yoghurt, almond milk or ice cream.

📍 **TRY THIS AT:** *Mayfair Hotels & Resorts, Bhubaneswar, Odisha*





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5/ IMLI KA AMLANA

Tracing its roots to the Mewar kitchens of Rajasthan, this concoction of tamarind pulp, jaggery powder, pepper powder, cardamom, black salt, and roasted ground cumin, is a tangy and refreshing summer drink. Tamarind's antioxidants and anti-inflammatory properties make it a natural coolant for the body. Packed with vital vitamins, including vitamins C and A, niacin, and thiamin, it helps you stay hydrated and beat the scorching heat.

📍 **TRY THIS AT:** Rawat Misthan Bhandar, Hotel Neelam, Lalpura Colony, Sindhi Camp, Jaipur, Rajasthan



6/ PANAKAM

Panakam, also known as *panagam* or *panaka*, is specially prepared during Ram Navami and Narasimha Jayanthi but remains a staple in households across Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka during the summer. Made with jaggery, water, dry ginger, and cardamom, its variations contain crushed peppercorns or edible camphor. Historically, *panakam* served as an Oral Rehydration Solution (ORS) in South India. Jaggery, rich in electrolytes and raw carbs, is a remedy for dehydration, while ginger is rich in antioxidants.

📍 **TRY THIS AT:** Thaligai Restaurant, Krishnapuram, Mylapore, Chennai, Tamil Nadu



7/ SOLKADHI

An enticing appetiser, *solkadhi* is made of freshly-grated coconut milk and *kokum*, peppered with garlic, coriander, green chilli, and mint, and diluted with water to taste. With a perfect balance of sweet, sour, and spice (of varying levels), *solkadhi* features in Gaud Saraswat Brahmin, Malvani and Konkani cuisines. *Kokum* fruit contains bioactive compounds that exhibit antioxidant, anti-fungal, -bacterial and -inflammatory properties making *solkadhi* ideal for weight loss, gut health, body cooling, and immunity.

📍 **TRY THIS AT:** Soul Fry, Bandra West, Mumbai, Maharashtra



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TIME TRAVEL

Relive history in a 20th-century haveli in the heart of Old Delhi,
now restored to its former glory

words by **Sayanti Halder**



TOP AND BOTTOM
Mughal murals at the Golden Haveli transport you to a bygone era; Post-restoration, the Haveli bears a contemporary look yet pays homage to its historical roots.



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Step into a realm where time folds upon itself, ushering you into the embrace of history's elegance. Beyond the cusp-arched gateway nestled in the heart of Old Delhi (Delhi 6), lies a serene sanctuary, a testament to Mughal opulence—Haveli Dharampura, an architectural marvel. Here, amidst the labyrinthine lanes of Chandni Chowk, one is transported to an era steeped in architectural splendour, where every brick whispers tales of yore. Recognised by UNESCO's Asia Pacific Award for Cultural Heritage Conservation, this restored gem stands as a bridge between past reverie and future promises.

A mere stone's throw away lies its kindred spirit—

the Golden Haveli, a radiant jewel adorning the Delhi 6 skyline. Born in 1887 from the legacy of a Jain family, it embodies a harmonious blend of antiquity and modernity, a living ode to Delhi's rich heritage. The properties' Director Vidyun Goel reminisces about her father's vision, a labour of love spanning six years to revive the dilapidated splendour of both the havelis. During restoration, top priority was given to retaining the original character and maintaining its essence.

ELEGANT SANCTUARIES

Within its ornate galleries, the Golden Haveli reveals a haven of tranquillity, each suite a testament to timeless grandeur. Named after luminaries of bygone eras, the Jahan Ara Rooms exude intimacy and grace, while the Mumtaz Mahal Suites offer a glimpse into regal indulgences. With antique furnishings and meticulous attention to detail, these urban abodes cocoon guests in luxury. The Gandhi Suite stands as a homage to simplicity and serenity, echoing the ethos of the great man who once graced its halls.

TOP TO BOTTOM
Once reflective of grandeur and royalty, the havelis were reduced to ordinary run-down buildings with unrecognisable spaces; The repairs all followed traditional methods of indenting, ensuring the preservation of their historical essence.



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www.dsu.edu.in/dsat/



TOP TO BOTTOM
Sate your palette with Old Delhi delicacies at the on-premise restaurant, Lakhori; To taste the real Delhi 6 flavours, the Dariba Phirni is a must-try; Golden Haveli is just 50m from Haveli Dharampura on the same lane.



ENRICHING MOMENTS

Embraced by iconic landmarks—Red Fort, Sri Digambar Jain Lal Mandir, Jama Masjid, and Gurdwara Sis Ganj Sahib—the Golden Haveli emerges as the pulsating heart of Old Delhi's cultural mosaic. From its rooftop, guests can revel in the spectacle of colourful kites dancing against an azure sky while indulging in a three-course high tea. Or they can marvel at the flocks of pigeons circling the air, offering a picturesque tableau. Witness the art of pigeon-whispering using just a whistle, stick, and a bag of seeds. As twilight descends upon the bustling streets, the Haveli comes alive with the strains of music—flutes, *sarangi*, tabla—reverberating through its walls. In this timeless haven, you will relive the grandeur and luxury of a different era in the heart of Old Delhi.

SAVOUR OLD DELHI'S FLAVOURS

All meals for guests staying at either of the havelis are served at Lakhori, the restaurant at Haveli Dharampura.

Kacche Kele Ki Gilouti Kabab

The vegan rendition of the traditional *gilouti*, where green bananas are infused with aromatic spices, promises a burst of flavours and umami.

Broken Wheat Kachori

Indulge in the delightful savoury *kachori*, crafted from cracked wheat and accompanied by a spicy potato curry and fragrant *methi* chutney.

Rarha Gosht

This slow-cooked masterpiece blends minced meat and succulent mutton with vibrant Punjabi flavours.

Dariba Phirni

This velvety-smooth rice pudding is infused with the exquisite essence of Kashmiri saffron—a decadent finale to your culinary journey.

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TWO OCEANS MARATHON

Cape Town, South Africa

13th – 14th April

Gear up for Africa's biggest running event (also said to be the world's most picturesque). This annual race brings together local legends, out-of-towners, and athletes from across the world to participate in the 56km Ultra Marathon and 21.1km Half Marathon along some of Cape Town's most scenic routes.

 twooceansmarathon.org.za




MUSICAL EXTRAVAGANZA

NEW ORLEANS JAZZ & HERITAGE FESTIVAL

New Orleans, US

25th April – 5th May

One of the biggest events of its kind, it celebrates New Orleans and Louisiana's indigenous music and culture, from blues, R&B, gospel, Cajun, and Afro-Caribbean to folk, Latin, rock, country, and more. This year's line-up features such legends as The Rolling Stones, The Beach Boys, Neil Young & Crazy Horse, Jeffrey Osborne, Bonnie Raitt, and Queen Latifah among others. On the sidelines, explore the festival's culture pavilion and crafts area.  nojazzfest.com



NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS


SONGKRAN

Across Thailand

13th – 15th April

A traditional New Year festival, UNESCO has declared it as an Intangible Cultural Heritage. During the celebrations, food is offered to monks

and water is splashed on friends and family. Pouring water is a significant act in Songkran as it symbolises reverence and good fortune. There are cultural performances, games, feasting, and more. While festivities are held across Thailand, cities like Bangkok and Chiang Mai host large-scale events.

 tourismthailand.org



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BIRD AND NATURE FESTIVAL

Somme Bay, France

20th – 28th April

Choose from over 400 guided nature tours, enjoy film screenings, photo exhibitions, and more.

festival-oiseau-nature.com



THE LONDON COFFEE FESTIVAL

The Truman Brewery, UK

11th – 14th April

Features over 250 artisan coffee brands, tastings, workshops, and more. londoncoffeefestival.com



TONAMI TULIP FAIR

Tonami, Japan

23rd April – 5th May

See nearly 3 million tulips of 300 varieties in full bloom, including the 4-m-high 'Flower Otani'.

fair.tulipfair.or.jp



PERFORMING ARTS

MUDRA DANCE FESTIVAL 2024

NCPA, Mumbai

25th – 29th April

This annual festival showcases theme-based performances and this year it will explore one of Indian classical dance's key elements, Aharya—the jewellery, textiles and make-up used in classical dance styles across India. Artistes who will perform this year include Aditi Mangaldas (Kathak), Sujata Mohapatra (Odissi), and Sridevi Nrithyalaya & Troupe (Bharatanatyam) among others. There will also be workshops and panel discussions by industry veterans.

ncpamumbai.com



CULTURAL POTPOURRI

APRIL FAIR

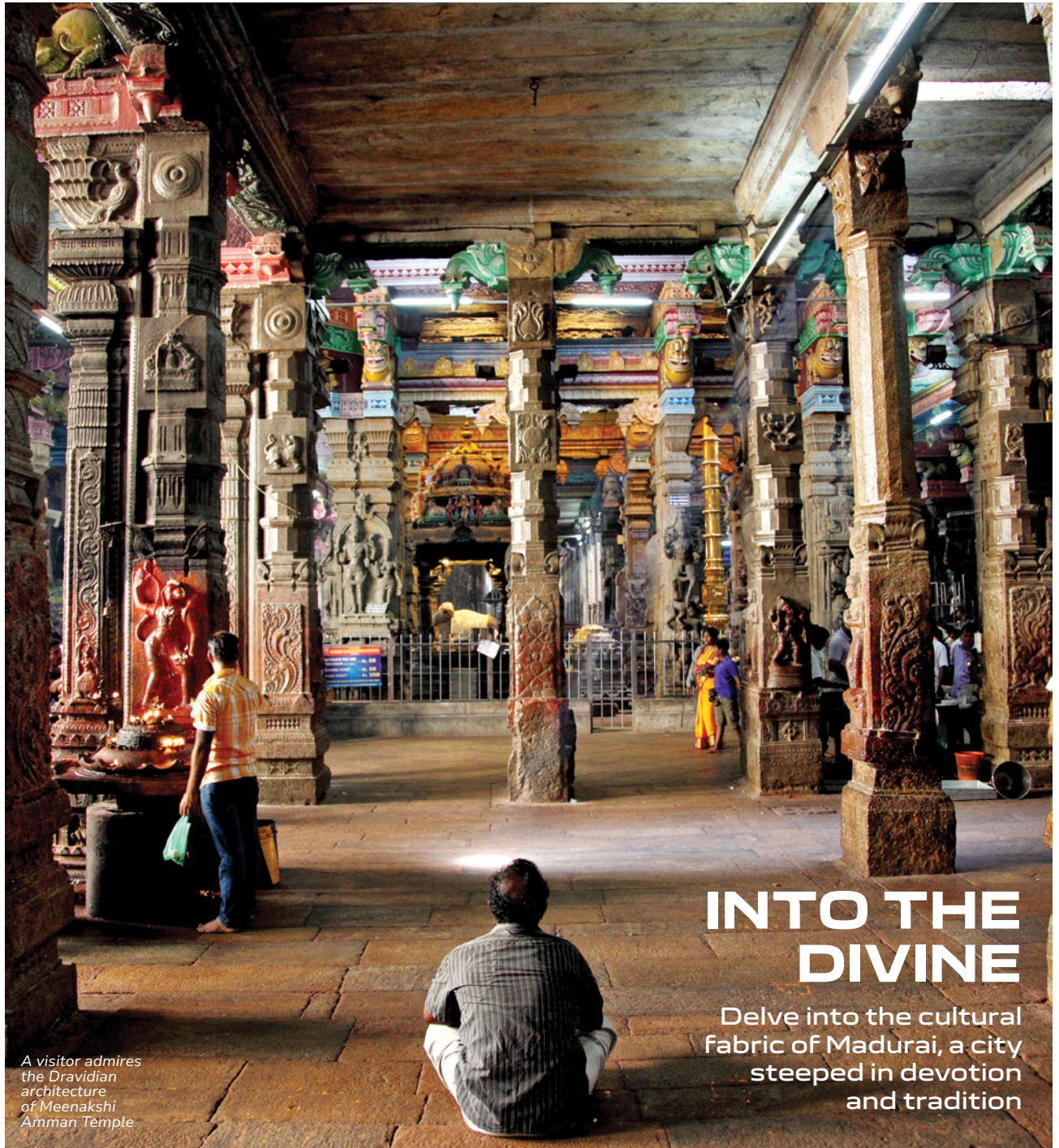
Seville, Spain

14th – 20th April

One of Seville's most international and popular fairs, this week-long fiesta was started in 1847 as a cattle fair. It features music, food and wine, dancing (sevillanas—the local version of the flamenco), horse and carriage parades, fireworks, and more. The locals don traditional Andalusian attire—farm worker garbs by men and flamenco or gypsy dresses by women. The fair concludes with a spectacular firework display. spain.info

THE PLACES

50 ➔ TRULY INDIA 56 ➔ HO CHI MINH CITY 66 ➔ ON THE CLOCK



A visitor admires the Dravidian architecture of Meenakshi Amman Temple

INTO THE DIVINE

Delve into the cultural fabric of Madurai, a city steeped in devotion and tradition



MADURAI MYSTIQUE

From Sangam-age relics to vibrant *gopurams* and from pulsating festivals to tantalising cuisine, this pilgrimage hub in Tamil Nadu has its own brand of timeless charm

words by **Punita Malhotra**

The cab driver navigates the busy markets of Tamil Nadu's

third-largest and oldest city. We drift past signboards advertising Sungudi cotton sarees, see the locals sipping their filter coffee, and pass by women selling jasmine garlands on the streets. I try to imagine the silhouette of the ancient city of Madurai, as described in ancient Tamil classics. A gigantic central temple and the surrounding streets shaped like a lotus with blossomed petals. According to legend, the city was planned around the revered temple, which was built by Pandyan king Kulasekara, and once flourished as a centre of literature, music, and dance. Poets, artists, and scholars, including the Greek historian Megasthenes, visited from far and wide, lured by its

fame and splendour. I can't wait to find out why.

ENCOUNTER THE DIVINE

First things first. I start with the Meenakshi Amman Temple, dedicated to Goddess Meenakshi (literally meaning fish-eyed), an incarnation of the Hindu Goddess Parvati, and her consort, Sundareshwar, a form of Lord Shiva. The gigantic Dravidian-style temple is a work of art with lofty *gopurams* (towers) and four main entrances facing the cardinal directions. Thousands of vibrantly-painted stone statues depicting animals, gods, and demons line the walls of 14 towers, the tallest of which soars to 170 feet. Jaw dropping continues at the Aayiram Kaal Mandapam or '1000-pillar hall', which also functions as a museum. My guide informs me that the



LEFT AND RIGHT
The city of Madurai was built around the Meenakshi Temple; The Thirumalai Nayak Palace, the royal residence of the last ruling dynasty.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT
The gentle giants of Meenakshi Amman Temple; A red painted pottery, unearthed from Keeladi's archaeological site; Fresh flowers at the flower market.



original temple from the 4th century CE was destroyed by foreign conquerors and rebuilt in the 16th century. I couldn't spot the difference... it's perfect. Hours pass as I admire the sculptures and decode the legends painted in kaleidoscopic colours.

I am advised to wait till nightfall to witness a mesmeric ancient ritual of devotion. I use that time to visit the Thirumalai Nayak Palace, a 17th-century royal residence of the last dynasty that ruled Madurai. When I return after an eye-popping interlude, the atmosphere changes dramatically. Amid flaming torches, pealing bells, and floating incense, a queue of chanting priests appear. It is a procession carrying the idol of Lord Shiva on a palanquin to the inner sanctum, where

He is to be reunited with Meenakshi. I follow the elaborate celebration of the divine union, amazed to know that it has been practised for centuries. A pulsating rhythm of faith, celebration, and community is in the air. Curiously, I feel an all-pervading calm.

SEEK FESTIVE THRILLS

Deeply rooted in Tamil culture, the Jallikattu festival is a spectacle of courage and strength, where young men attempt to grab hold of a bull's hump and hang on for dear life. The atmosphere in the arena is electrifying. I am ushered to join an excited crowd, whistling and cheering the participants on. Heavy doses of adrenaline? No, deep-rooted traditions. The hysteria seems to fade as I realise that this is no



Do not miss

One of the most spectacular celebrations of Madurai, the annual Chithirai Festival is held in the Tamil month of **Chithirai (April/May)**. According to legend, Lord Vishnu, as Alagar, rode on a golden horse to Madurai to attend the **wedding of Goddess Meenakshi with Lord Sundareswarar (Lord Shiva)**.

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ordinary sporting event. It reflects the human-animal bond and symbolises reverence for the bull, the lifeline of the agrarian community at large.

DIG INTO THE PAST

That afternoon, I head to the tiny hamlet of Keeladi, located along the Vaigai river. The Keeladi excavations are leftovers of the Sangam-era civilisation that thrived here from 300 BCE to 300 CE. I wander along remnants of brick houses, terracotta drainage systems, roofing tiles, and finger-pressed grooves used to drain rainwater, marvelling at the well-planned urban landscape. I pore over 15,000 artefacts at the nearby Keeladi Heritage Museum. There are beads, iron tools, terracotta figurines, gold ornaments, copper articles, earthenware shells, a punch-marked silver coin, and clay pots inscribed with Tamil Brahmi script!

GORGE ON DELICACIES

A visit to Madurai would be incomplete without sampling its bold flavours. The Madurai idli, a soft and fluffy rice cake, is almost mandatory. At Visalam coffee shop in Chinna Chokkikulam, I indulge myself with a robust, aromatic filter *kaapi* (South Indian coffee), pairing it with a crisp *vadai*. On another occasion, I savour a delicious crab omelette at Muniyandi Vilas. The combination of fresh crab meat, eggs, and spices creates a satisfying dish. Seafood lovers should try the local favourite, Ayirai Meen (fish curry), at Amma Mess. Also, try *jigarthanda*, a refreshing summer drink made with milk, almond gum, sugar, and ice cream.

As the day ends, I reflect on the city's culture steeped in tradition yet alive with vitality. The fulfilling journey has established a strange connection that may pull me back again.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
Traditional filter coffee in a brass set; The crab omelette is a unique and satisfying offering; Crisp medu vada with chutney.

HOTELS TO CHECK

Heritage Madurai

Designed by Geoffrey Bawa, and nestled in 17 acres of gardens, it incorporates elements from local temple architecture. heritagemadurai.com

The Gateway Hotel Pasumalai, Madurai

This modern hotel has great views of the temple. Plus, the 62-acre estate has a Nature Trail. tajhotels.com

Courtyard by Marriott Madurai

A short distance from local attractions, this five-star hotel offers richly-decorated rooms and elegant dining options. marriott.com



GETTING THERE

Air India flies non-stop to Madurai from Chennai.



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words by **Neha Kirpal**





L

ocated in the south of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC), formerly known as Saigon, is the country's commercial epicentre and most developed city. While driving to my hotel from the airport, I get a sense of the city's cosmopolitan feel, passing skyscrapers such as the **Bitexco Financial Tower**, one of the country's tallest buildings. At the same time, it's hard to miss a distinct French influence from the colonial period that is strongly resonant till today. As if almost on cue, the next landmark that catches my attention is **Notre Dame Cathedral**, perhaps the only one in the world outside Paris. Built over a century ago, this peaceful edifice is a perfect example of ancient French architectural splendour. Later as I venture out for a meal, I am not surprised to see French food items in most menus like baguettes and egg coffee, which was invented during the French War owing to milk shortage.

HCMC is steeped in history and I decide to plunge right into it. I am told that the **War Remnants Museum** in **District 3** is the best spot to start. Attracting about half a million visitors annually, it consists of themed rooms



Notre Dame Cathedral Basilica of Saigon, officially Cathedral Basilica of Our Lady of The Immaculate Conception, perhaps the only one in the world outside Paris

Getty Images

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with some of the most fascinating exhibits relating to the First Indochina War and the Vietnam War. From here, I walk about a kilometre to reach the **Independence Palace**, where I marvel at the former residence and office of Nguyen Van Thieu, the former President of the Second Republic of Vietnam. About half a kilometre later, I arrive at the **National Museum of History**, that preserves 2,00,000 objects and materials of Vietnamese cultural history, among which there are nearly 1,10,000 antiques and 20 national treasures from prehistory to 1945. Those with young kids can visit the **Saigon Zoo & Botanical Gardens**, the country's largest zoo and garden, that houses over a hundred species of mammals, reptiles, and birds as well as many rare, colourful orchids and ornamental plants.

One of the highlights for me, however, is **Cu Chi Tunnels**, which I explore the next day. Situated about an hour and a half away from the city, these 250-km-long tunnels were built by the locals to hide from American and South Vietnamese forces during the Vietnam War. The first thing I do when I get there is watch a black-and-white film that recounts the turbulent history of the period. It's intriguing to learn how a tiny village having shaded rubber trees soon transformed into an underground city—complete with kitchens, bedrooms, schools, martial facilities, weapon factories, field hospitals, and command centres—where the locals lived for several years.

I also gain a first-hand understanding of dangerous bamboo traps, bunkers,

Best time to visit

Ho Chi Minh City has two main seasons: dry (December to April) and wet (May to November). The weather is most favourable from **December to March**, when many festivities also take place.



TOP TO BOTTOM
A hippopotamus at the Saigon Zoo & Botanical Gardens; The Cu Chi tunnels are a labyrinth of tunnels under the city; Đồng Khởi street decorated during the Tết holidays.



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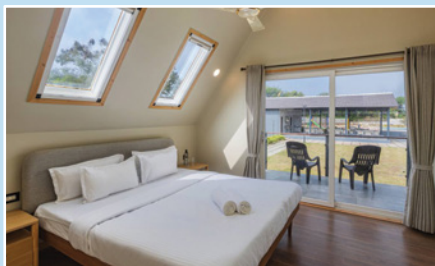
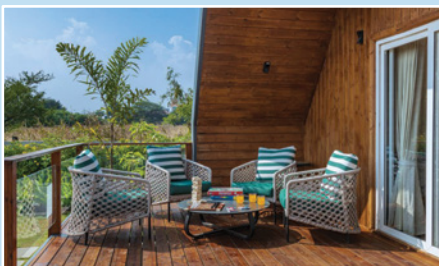
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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT
The famous Vietnamese iced coffee with condensed milk; The Bánh Mì is literally Vietnam's national sandwich; Vietnamese pho with rice noodles, coriander, bean sprouts, spring onions, and lime.



and tactics of guerrilla warfare involving indigenous weapons that became a part of people's daily lives during this time. Like other curious tourists, I squeeze down one of the eerie narrow tunnels to get a feel of it myself. The more adventurous of us even fire bullets at the shooting range, adding a touch of drama to the experience.

While HCMC is comparable to any global metropolitan, I discover its more offbeat, rural side. Being a nature lover, I can't resist a tour of the **Mekong River Delta**, which I sign up for the following day. It starts about 70km away from the city, a road journey that passes through lush green paddy fields. A scenic boat ride with picturesque views of stilt houses, natural canals, water coconut trees, and fishing villages gets me to a set of beautiful islands. **Coconut Island**, as locally called, is particularly memorable, mostly for its bee farm and tortoise islet.

I am struck by the region's biodiversity—filled with abundant crocodile, snake, and fish farms—and I even get a chance to hold a python in my hand! Needless to say, coconuts are plenty here, as are jackfruits. Honey tea and coconut ice cream are especially worth trying, and I also pick up some royal jelly, a nutrient known to have many health benefits. An interesting memory of the island is attending a coconut candy workshop, where I observe the different stages of its elaborate making.



GETTING THERE
Air India is set to fly non-stop to Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) from Delhi.

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Programs To Join



A busy roundabout in HCMC at night

Later at **Mỹ Tho**, I visit the celebrated **Vinh Trang Pagoda**, a Buddhist temple with Chinese and French colonial-style architecture. The central idol here is of Bodhidharma, the leader of modern Buddhism. Like most pagodas in Vietnam, this one too depicts its four revered holy animals—the dragon, signifying power; the phoenix, symbolising nobility; the unicorn, denoting peace; and the turtle, connoting longevity.

I keep the next day to shop, and **Vincom Center** turns out to be great for deals on big brands under one roof. I spend a lazy afternoon at **Saigon Square**'s little stall-like shops housing a plethora of affordable brands selling everything from clothes

stitched in cotton, silk, and linen to bags, stoles, lanterns, bamboo hats and other souvenirs. Indulging in some much needed bargaining, I buy a hand embroidered painting and some lacquerware artefacts.

And how can I not talk about the delectable food? One of my favourite eateries is **Bún Chả 145** on **Bùi Viện Street**. A cosy restaurant, its kebab rice noodles is a must try. The next evening, I head to **The Deck Saigon** in District 2, a sophisticated diner with a stunning view of the riverfront and delicious Asian fusion cuisine. Furthermore, **District 4** has many seafood and snail joints. Also try pho, a soup with rice noodles, herbs, meat or chicken—available everywhere.

HOTELS TO STAY AT

Sheraton Saigon Hotel

& Towers

Located on the famed Đồng Khởi Street, this hotel has stylish rooms and suites, and is a short walk from popular sightseeing attractions, restaurants, corporate offices, shopping, and entertainment avenues.

Le Méridien Saigon

Situated in District 1, this is the first Le Méridien hotel in Vietnam. With views of the Saigon river, its rooms have rainforest showers and deep soaking tubs.

Somerset Ho Chi Minh City

A refreshing alternative to a hotel, this resort-style retreat in the city centre offers elegant private serviced apartments.



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Mozartplatz is a square in the historic Old Town in Salzburg, with a statue of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in the centre

SALZBURG SONATA

Mozart's hometown offers a soulful rendition of art, architecture, and more
words by **Rashmi Gopal Rao**

🕒 07:30AM

Sample local fare

📍 Café Tomaselli

Enjoy an authentic breakfast at the oldest coffee house in Austria. Savour home-made brioche, poppy seed buns, gateaux, strudels, and coffee here, once frequented by Mozart himself. From waitresses in pristine pinafores and crystal chandeliers to linen napkins used to wrap the bread basket—it's all old-world charm.

🕒 09:00AM

Enjoy spring vibes

📍 Mirabell Gardens

Touted as one of Europe's most beautiful baroque gardens, it is replete with fountains, statues of Greek gods and Roman sculptures, and is a riot of colour in spring. Don't miss the 'Grand Parterre', Pegasus Fountain, and Dwarf Garden. The Do-Re-Mi steps, arguably one of the most famous visuals from the movie *The Sound of Music*, is near the Garden. This entire complex is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

🕒 10:30AM

Tryst with Mozart

📍 Hagenauer Haus

The birthplace of Salzburg's most famous resident, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, is located at No. 9 Getreidegasse. It was here that the legendary composer was born in 1756. Take an insightful hour-long tour through the rooms housing memorabilia like certificates, documents, portraits, and letters of the musical genius.

🕒 12:00PM

Soak in musical history

📍 Mozart Residence

Visit the eight-bedroom apartment where Mozart lived until he left Salzburg for good in 1781. Take a stroll along the rooms which house a treasure trove of information on Mozart's life, including his family history, original compositions, information on his concerts and performances, and his musical instruments. Buy a combination ticket for Mozart house and the museum to avail discounted prices.

A man in a blue pinstripe suit and red tie stands on the left, with his hand on the shoulder of another man sitting on a brown leather tufted sofa. The seated man is also in a blue pinstripe suit and red tie. They are in a room with shelves of fabric bolts in the background.




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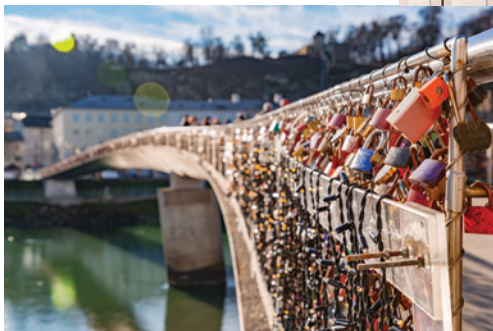
A-6 Rajouri Garden, New Delhi. 011-41181324/25/26/27

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the places on the clock

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
Salzburg's Cathedral and Franciscan Church; The traditional Salzburger Nockerl is an airy, light soufflé; The Marko-Feingold-Steg bridge on the Salzach river is popularly known as the 'love lock bridge'.



GETTING THERE

Air India flies non-stop to Vienna from Delhi. Guests can now visit Salzburg from Vienna with Air India's intermodal partner Rail Europe.

STYLISH STAYS

1/ Hôtel Bristol Salzburg combines contemporary luxury with traditional charm, and is right next to Mirabell Gardens and Salzburg State Theatre.

2/ Hotel Sacher Salzburg has a distinctive royal atmosphere; it has imperial rooms, and world-class restaurants and bars.

3/ Hotel Schloss Mönchstein offers a traditional castle-like ambience, perfect for a romantic holiday or a fairy-tale wedding.

🕒 02:00PM

Date with history

📍 St. Peter's Abbey

Visit the 7th-century St. Peter's Abbey, one of the oldest monasteries in the region. Apart from the main organ of the church, admire elements of Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, and Rococo architecture. The adjoining cemetery complex has graves adorned with intricate stone and filigree work.

🕒 03:30PM

Step back in time

📍 Residenzplatz

Also called Residence Square, this large public square is the subject of several Salzburg postcards. The complex, surrounded by the New Residence with its carillon, the Cathedral, the Old Residence, and numerous townhouses, exudes mediaeval feels with its horse-drawn carriages and baroque architecture. Take a picture alongside the city's beautiful Residenz Fountain, which appeared in *The Sound of Music*.

🕒 05:00PM

Walk amidst nature

📍 Marko-Feingold-Steg bridge

Take a stroll along this bridge across the Salzach river. Reserved for pedestrians and cyclists, it is popularly known as the 'love lock bridge' that offers stunning views of the Salzburg Cathedral and the Hohensalzburg Fortress. In the mood to do something touristy? Add a padlock to the bridge's railing.

🕒 06:00PM

Unravel hidden gems

📍 Old Town

Springing a surprise at literally every nook and cranny, the narrow bylanes of Steingasse, Getreidegasse, and Goldgasse offer loads of eclectic charm. While Goldgasse was the erstwhile hub for artisans and goldsmiths, Getreidegasse is known for its through-houses (doors on either side open onto different streets), beautiful doorways, and shop signs that sport ornamental designs and intricate guild work.

YOUR AIR INDIA



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p 74 

PARTNERS

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p 78 

NEWS

We keep you abreast of our latest news and updates, so you never miss a beat

p 80 



PREPARING TO ASCEND

In 2022, Air India had launched its five-year transformation programme, Vihaan.AI. *Vihaan* means “Dawn of a New Era” in Sanskrit and heralds a new beginning for Air India and Indian aviation. After fixing the basics in the initial Taxi phase, Air India entered the Take-off phase in April 2023 looking to consolidate on the foundation laid initially. In 2024, Air India is all set to achieve new milestones and is optimistic in transcending to even greater heights.

The mission is to become the absolute best-in-class in customer service, technology, product, reliability, and hospitality.

Air India CEO and MD, Campbell Wilson, along with the senior management, unveiled the Vihaan.AI plan with milestones focussing on growing Air India’s network and fleet, and developing a completely revamped customer proposition. The transformation roadmap is built around five key pillars—exceptional customer experience, robust operations, industry-best talent, industry leadership, alongside commercial efficiency and profitability. The Take-off phase focusses on building tools, systems, and capabilities needed to support Air India’s future scale. There is a strong momentum as Air India is all set to climb upwards from the Q2 of 2024.

“April of 2024 marked the transition from the Take-Off phase of Vihaan.AI to Climb, where we put the foundations and capabilities we’ve built over the last 18 months to work towards accelerating and growing our ambition of being a world-class, global airline with an Indian heart.”

– CAMPBELL WILSON
AIR INDIA CEO AND MD

THE JOURNEY SO FAR

- Placed record-setting order for 470 aircraft
 - Leased 36 additional aircraft for immediate expansion
- Successfully integrated AirAsia India into Air India Express, forming a unified low-cost carrier
 - Inducted India's first A350-900 aircraft
- Added 5 domestic and 11 international routes; inaugurated 5 new international stations
- Introduced new commercial tools and products, including revenue management system
- Deployed new global brand identities and aircraft liveries for Air India and Air India Express
 - Revealed new uniforms for cabin and cockpit crew designed by Manish Malhotra
 - Onboarded new service providers for catering, ground handling, and more
 - Launched airline industry's first AI-powered virtual travel assistant, AI.g
 - Introduced Premium Economy on select North America routes
- Announced a 6,00,000sq ft aviation training academy, the largest in South Asia, in Gurugram
- Established new facilities, including Operations Control Centre and Emergency Response Centre
 - Architected a new IT infrastructure across the organisation
 - Successfully migrated entirely to the cloud to enhance digital infrastructure
- Welcomed 9,000+ new colleagues—1,000+ cockpit crew, 5,000+ cabin crew, and more
- Adopted TaxiBot operations, automated aircraft cleaning, and minimised single-use plastic usage
- Became first and only Indian airline to offer self check-in and baggage drop services for US-bound passengers from India.

Air India also offers this facility for all domestic flights from Bengaluru Airport
- Signed a 12-year agreement with SIA Engineering for A320 component and on-wing engine support
- Launched a revamped Flying Returns loyalty programme with a simplified structure, customer-friendly features, renamed tiers, and an updated identity
 - Strengthened customer feedback mechanism and made improvements in airports, F&B, etc.
 - Enhanced lounge coverage across the global network
 - Introduced a new organisation structure, new staff policies, and benefits

Phase 1: March 2023

Phase 2: April 2023 – March 2024

Phase 3: April 2024 – March 2027

TAXI



Fix the basics

TAKE-OFF



Build for excellence

CLIMB



Scale and grow

OUR 2027 ASPIRATIONS

- **Scale** To grow fleet size 3x and expand global network
- **Market share*** Capture >30% of the domestic and international market
- **Brand identity** Identify as a global airline with an Indian heart, driven by technology
- **Industry leadership** Most technologically advanced, socially responsible, and innovative airline
- **Employee experience** Become India's most preferred employer in the travel industry

*Group airlines combined share

PROUD WINGS

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



← 03
A350-900
Length 66.80m



← 08
A319
33.84m

04
A321neo
44.51m



← 13
A321ceo
44.50m

08
B777-200LR
63.70m



← 41
A320neo
37.57m

27
B787-8
56.72m



← 09
A320ceo
37.57m

19
B777-300ER
73.9m



*Total fleet number as on 23rd March 2024

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in India
(PHARMACY
CATEGORY)

Band
100-150 in India
(ENGINEERING CATEGORY)

By NIRF Ranking 2023



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Government of India

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Grade A++
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TOP 40 PRIVATE
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TOP 20
NORTH INDIA
B-SCHOOLS

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TOP 50 B-SCHOOLS
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- Biological & Life Sciences

- Biomedical Sciences
- Clinical Healthcare
- Forensic Science
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- Nursing
- Liberal Education
- Media and Communications Studies
- Law

- Agriculture
- Basic Sciences
- Finance & Commerce
- Pharmacy
- Allied Health Sciences
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- Aviation
- Logistics
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- Polytechnic
- Vocational Education

**VIKSIT
BHARAT @2047**



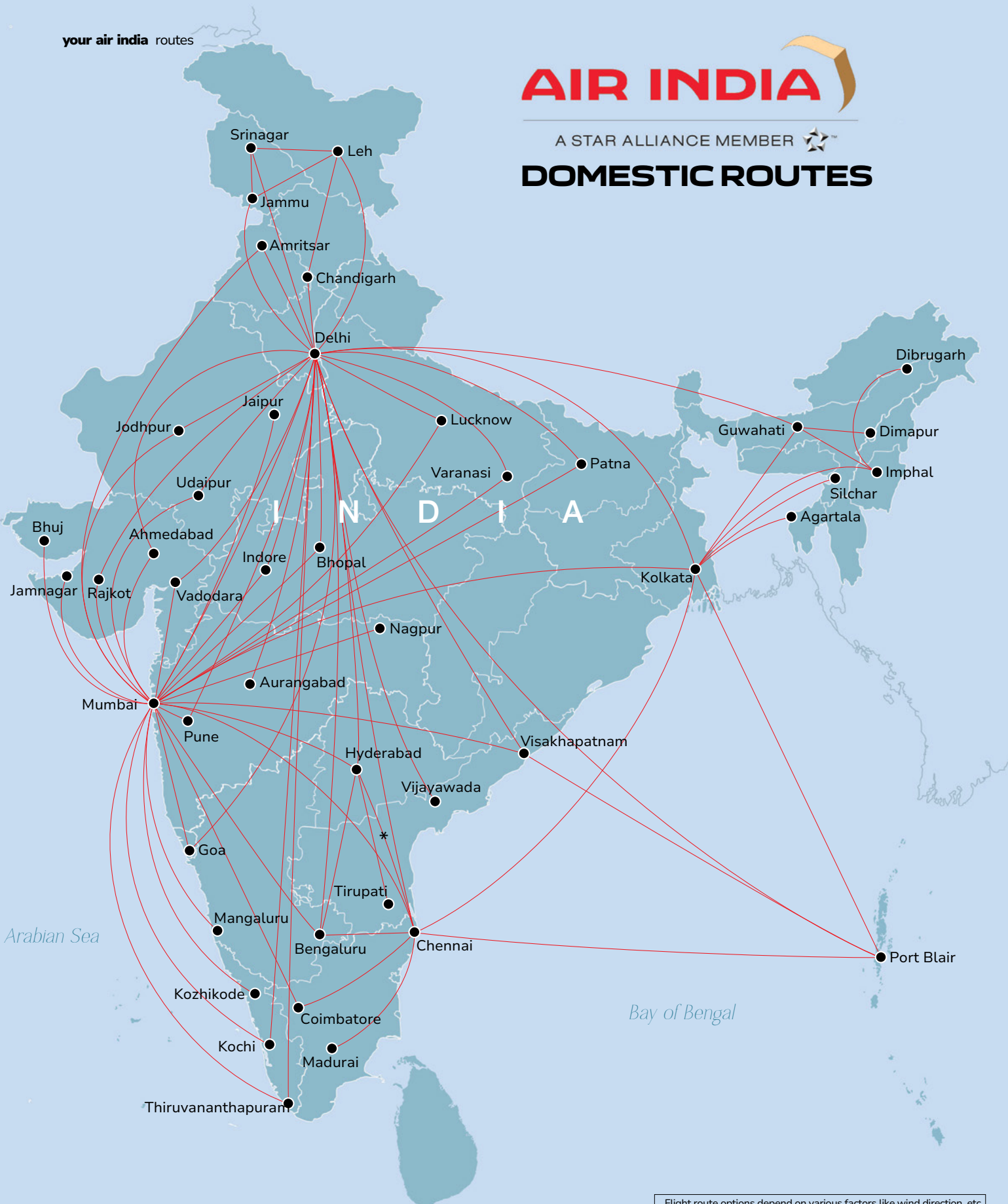
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A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER



DOMESTIC ROUTES



Flight route options depend on various factors like wind direction, etc.
Map not to scale. The depiction and use of routes and boundaries are for informative purposes only.

* Temporary operations with A350-900

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ROUTES**



Flight route options depend on various factors like wind direction, etc. Map not to scale. The depiction and use of routes and boundaries are for informative purposes only.

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Avianca	Croatia Airlines	EgyptAir	Ethiopian Airlines
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INTERLINE

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

*Both Codeshare and Interline Partners

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with our tailored itinerary,
designed with our
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*DEL, BOM



✈️ Fly non-stop
to Bangkok,
Thailand, with
Air India

*BKK



✈️ Fly non-stop
to Siem Reap,
Cambodia, with
our Interline
Partner Bangkok
Airways

*SAI



✈️ Take a taxi
from the airport



**ANGKOR WAT, SIEM
REAP, CAMBODIA**

***DEL:** Indra Gandhi International Airport
(Delhi Airport), New Delhi, Delhi;
BOM: Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj
International Airport Mumbai, Maharashtra;
BKK: Suvarnabhumi Airport, Samut
Prakan Province, Thailand; **SAI:** Siem Reap
International Airport, Siem Reap, Cambodia



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**Centre of Excellence for
Andragogical and Pedagogical
Sciences (CEAPS)**

Placement Highlights

89%

Placement
Success Rate

32 LPA

Highest
Package Offered

200+

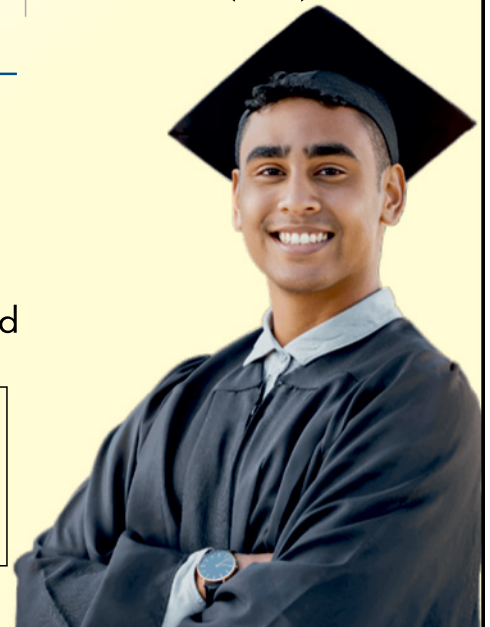
Total
Companies Visited

UNDERGRADUATE, POSTGRADUATE, & Ph.D. COURSES OFFERED

Engineering and Technology | Law | Mass Comm. & Media Technology | Science
Hotel & Tourism Management | Commerce & Management | Agricultural Sciences
Education | Fashion & Design | Nursing | Physiotherapy | Allied Health Sciences
Pharmacy | Behavioural & Social Sciences | Dental Sciences | Medicine and Health Sciences

— Indian Medical System | Naturopathy & Yogic Sciences —

Recognitions and Approvals



National Medical
Commission



Dental Council
of India



Indian Nursing
Council



UGC 12-B



Pharmacy Council
of India



National Commission for
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Universities



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for Physiotherapy



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Teacher Education



NABH



NABL



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ISO Certification



QS i-Gauge
Diamond



LEFT AND BELOW
Air India is the only Indian airline to offer automated Self-Service Check-in and Self Baggage Drop facilities for US-bound passengers; On International Women's Day (March 8), Air India operated 15 all-women crew flights.

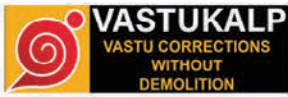
↑ MAKING TRAVEL SIMPLE

Air India now offers Self-Service Check-in and Self Baggage Drop facilities for its passengers travelling to San Francisco from the Kempegowda International Airport, Bengaluru. The facility is already available for Air India's domestic flights from Bengaluru, making Air India the only airline in India to offer this facility to its guests. The automated initiative will offer a smooth and seamless check-in experience to a large number of the airlines' guests, including the tech-savvy segment, travelling from Bengaluru, the Silicon Valley of India, to U.S.A's Silicon Valley.



SHE HAS THE POWER

Air India recently operated 15 all-women crew flights in its domestic and international sectors to mark International Women's Day and reiterate its commitment to uphold gender equality. The Air India group also organised a week-long programme comprising webinars and live sessions with experts in various fields to inspire women employees across the network.



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Internationally Renowned Vastu Expert Vimal Jhahharia, along with his son Vikas Jhahharia, has created a revolution in the field of Vastu Shastra. Their expertise in providing 'Vastu Remedies without Demolition' has earned them the faith and praise of millions of people in more than 40 countries across the globe.

Vimal Jhahharia and Vikas Jhahharia (MBA from Australia) have delivered many lectures, conducted workshops, seminars and have widely travelled and provided consultancy on major projects already in operation without any changes or modifications. They are currently providing consultancy in the USA, UK, Australia, Canada, China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Thailand, South Africa, UAE, and South America, among others.

Both of them have been felicitated several times for their outstanding knowledge on Vastu & have also won several awards of national and international repute.



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What exactly is your famous Vastu Shankha Yantra and how cost effective is it?

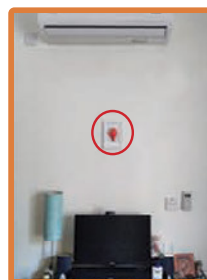
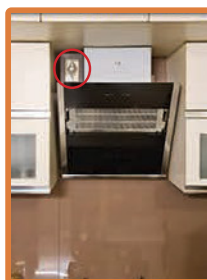
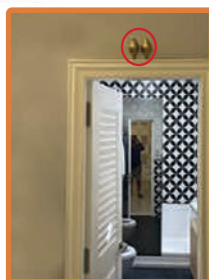
Based on the principles of Vastu, the Vastu Shankha Yantra is an original conch shell used to potentially rectify any kind of land, Vastu or energy defects without making any modifications. It can potentially save a lot of time & money as it is used to create positive energy in places having major Vastu defects without changing the looks and beauty of the place.



Vimal Jhahharia along with his son Vikas Jhahharia



Vastu is protection against unforeseen circumstances. It is used to increase personal energy in health, wealth and relationships of a person



Does the Vastu Shankha Yantra really work for prosperity in factories and industries?

Yes, we have a big list of successful clients including businessmen, entrepreneurs, doctors, scientists, professionals, architects, interior designers, etc giving testimonials on our website.

Endorsing the Vastu Shankha Yantra is industrialist Sushil from New Delhi. He says, "My son and I are running a factory but were not getting the desired results. We came to know about Vimalji and Vikasji through one of their articles in inflight magazines. Upon showing them the factory, we immediately realised our north was blocked and all the heavy machinery was placed along the north wall. We then got the Vastu Shankha yantras placed at certain places on Jhahharia ji's recommendation. Now, every new factory of ours is made under their able guidance and we also recommend them to all our friends and relatives"

Can Vastu Shankha Yantra also help in selling a property?

Yes, we do a lot of Vastu correction for builders and developers and also individuals whose properties have been stuck for a long time and which are not getting sold because of some or the other Vastu defect. Vouching for success is Satish from Bangalore who was trying to

When we saw the property, we saw it had multiple corners & it was not a proper rectangle or a square. We then positively charged this property by placing our Vastu Shankha Yantras in various corners to help correct the magnetic field of the property and hence creating positive energy in the atmosphere.

DO YOU KNOW?



- Mr. Vikas Jhahharia, is a 3rd Generation Vastu Expert
- Mr. Vikas Jhahharia is an MBA from Australia
- Vastukalp has been doing Vastu corrections since 40+ years
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WHY YOU MUST 'INVEST' IN AIRLINE LOYALTY?

As a frequent traveller, I break down the concept of an airline loyalty programme and why you should be attached to one

words by **Riaan Jacob George**

About the author:

Riaan is a **digital creator and journalist** based in Mumbai and Colombo. He writes extensively on aviation, automobiles, travel, luxury, trends and gadgets. He runs a digital agency specialising in social media content for hospitality brands.

When I talk about 'investing' in a frequent flyer programme instead of just signing up, I also wish to talk about all the cool perks you get. Let me quickly break it down for you.

It's as simple as this, when you pay for a ticket on a particular airline—for example, your flight today on Air India—you put it into a bank of points. To save it for a rainy day? Absolutely. As you invest in more tickets on the airline of your choice, your bank of points becomes larger. The simple reward at the end of the rainbow is that you can redeem these miles for a free ticket or an upgrade to a premium cabin against these points. Now as you go along, taking more flights, you move higher on the tiers—in this case, you start at Red followed by Silver, Gold, and finally, Platinum. Each tier comes with a host of perks that you can enjoy ranging from excess baggage allowance to priority boarding and even lounge access. All you need to do is check the list of tiers and the perks attached to them, and then start investing in that airline's programme.

But that's not all. Airlines usually have partnerships with other airlines, and in many cases, you can reap perks and rewards on these airlines too. For example, Air India is a part of Star Alliance, which is the world's largest



airline alliance. Now if you have Gold or Platinum Tier status on Air India Flying Returns, you can enjoy Star Alliance Gold Tier benefits on 25 other international airlines. So, you could access the Lufthansa Business Class lounge in Frankfurt, for example, or the Singapore Airlines Business Class lounge in Singapore Changi Airport, whether you fly with Air India or any of these airlines.

Today, the best frequent flyer programmes have evolved from being a miles-based program to a spend-based model where your points are credited basis the money you spent on buying a ticket rather than the distance you fly, thus delivering more value for the money you spent. For e.g.: if you fly from Delhi to JFK, then you accumulate points based on the money you spent rather than the miles of distance. Also, a few programs allow you to accumulate points basis the number of flights you take. So, if you are a frequent flyer travelling from Delhi to Udaipur it does not mean that you won't be able to achieve top tiers because you are not spending much on your ticket value, because the number of flights you are taking will allow you to qualify for the same. And here Air India Flying Returns programme allows you to achieve higher tiers basis both the money you spend on tickets as well as the number of flights you take, which is a double delight for a frequent flyer.



FLYING RETURNS FOR ME

As of today, I find myself on the Silver tier of Air India's Flying Returns, one step up from the entry-level Red and two more to go for the top Platinum status. To attain Silver, I had to either accumulate 15,000 tier points (based on my spending) or take 30 flights with Air India. As a frequent flyer, the highlight for me is the fact that my points are 'evergreen', eliminating the stress I used to have about unused points and their expiry. With my Silver status, I earn 33 per cent more reward points every

time I book an Air India flight, and when I am subsequently upgraded to Gold and Platinum, I will enjoy 50 and 67 per cent reward points, respectively.

Another major change that I love, is the redeem points with no blackout date feature, which allows me to use my points without worrying about any peak season seat availability, such as New Year, Diwali, or any long weekends. Also, the new feature of combining cash and points to buy tickets now lets me redeem my points even when

I don't have enough of them by partly paying for the ticket in cash.

However, besides all the innovative propositions a loyalty programme might offer, it can only delight its customers when it is easy to use and takes personalised care of its members. With Air India's new improvements in technology and its Flying Returns' priority customer service for members of Silver tier and above, I am looking forward to upgrading my tiers in this new programme and unlocking new, hand-picked privileges.



YOUR ATTENTION, PLEASE

DIGIYATRA

नागर विमानन मंत्रालय द्वारा 13 एयरपोर्ट्स—दिल्ली, बेंगलुरु, वाराणसी, पुणे, कोलकाता, विजयवाड़ा, हैदराबाद, अहमदाबाद, मुंबई, जयपुर, लखनऊ, गुवाहाटी और कोचीन के लिए डीजी यात्रा की सुविधा का शुभारंभ किया गया है। डीजी यात्रा ऐप को डाउनलोड करके खुद को नामांकित करें और इन एयरपोर्ट्स पर निर्बाध और बाधा रहित यात्रा का अनुभव करें।

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

MISSION LIFE

पर्यावरण के प्रति जागरूक जीवन शैली को अपनाने

की दिशा में व्यवहारिक परिवर्तनों को प्रेरित करने के लिए, प्रधान मंत्री श्री नरेंद्र मोदी ने मिशन लाइफ—लाइफस्टाइल फॉर एनवायरनमेंट शुरू किया है, जो की भारत के नेतृत्व वाला वैश्विक जन आंदोलन है। आइए हम सभी प्रो-प्लैनेट एक्शन लेने का संकल्प लें, जैसे ऊर्जा की बचत, पानी का संरक्षण, पेड़ों का पोषण और पर्यावरण के अनुकूल अपशिष्ट निपटान।

Mission LiFE—Lifestyle for Environment is an India-led global mass movement launched by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi for inducing behavioural changes towards adopting environmentally-conscious lifestyles. Let us all pledge to take Pro-Planet actions like saving energy, conserving water, nurturing trees, and eco-friendly waste disposal.

AIR SEVA

नागर विमानन मंत्रालय ने विमान सेवा पोर्टल को अपग्रेड किया है, जो इंटरैक्टिव वेब पोर्टल और मोबाइल ऐप के ज़रिए सुलभ है। इस नए संस्करण में:

(क) सोशल मीडिया के साथ सुरक्षित साइन अप और लॉग इन

(ख) अतिथियों की सहायता के लिए, चैट बॉक्स

(ग) सोशल मीडिया शिकायत सहित, परिष्कृत प्रबंधन

(घ) रियल टाइम उड़ान स्टेटस और विस्तृत उड़ान संबंधी जानकारी शामिल है

सेवा संबंधी किसी और जानकारी के लिए आप airsewa.gov.in पर लॉग इन कर सकते हैं।

The Ministry of Civil Aviation has upgraded its Air Sewa portal, which is accessible through an interactive web portal and a mobile app. The new version includes:

a) Secure sign-up and log-in with social media

b) Chat box for traveller's support

c) Improved grievance management, including social media grievance

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Air Sewa is available at airsewa.gov.in.



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A TRAVELLER'S TALE



SERENE HAVEN

Actor and chef
Maria Goretti
recounts her cherished
experiences in Australia's
Hayman Island

MY LOCAL EXPERIENCE

Around 2015, I went to Hobart in Tasmania on the invitation of the High Commission of Australia and Tourism Australia to attend the 'Invite the World to Dinner' event. I visited Hayman Island during that trip, and that slice of haven has my heart.

AN UNFORGETTABLE MEMORY

The view of the sea from the chopper en route to Hayman Island—it was emerald, aquamarine, neon green... all the hues of blue and green I've ever seen. With just a picnic basket in hand, I spent my time swimming and relaxing.

CLOSE TO MY HEART

Snorkelling in the azure waters and getting up close with a sea turtle, my first ever! I was coming up when the turtle came right in front of me, moving slowly. And I gently touched its back. I will never forget that feeling.

I RECOMMEND...

Visiting Tasmania's local markets. Look for handmade and locally-made products and objects. More than the big city lights, it's the little things that truly bring me joy.



Clockwise from top left: Getty Images; Maria Goretti; Shutterstock; Getty Images

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