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Burda Media India Private Limited Ambience Mall, 7th Floor (AWfis), Gate No - 04, Ambience Island, NH-8, Gurugram – 122002, Haryana

Burda Media India Private Limited is a company of The Hubert Burda Media Group

Hubert Burda Media India Chief Executive Officer BJÖRN RETTIG

Burda International Holding GmbH LEGAL ADDRESS Hubert Burda Platz 1, 77652 Offenburg, Germany POSTAGE ADDRESS Arabellastrasse 23, D-81925 Munich, Germany

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## EDITOR'S NOTE



### #EXPLORETHESKIES

#### Namaste!

For centuries, flying has been the ultimate goal, representing freedom, adventure, and ambition. The spirit of aviation embodies the essence of soaring high, reaching for the skies, and embracing the limitless joys of flight. One of the earliest attempts to reach the skies was through the art of kite flying. Kites dance in the breeze, symbolising the thrill of flight and connecting us to the wonders of aviation. The aspirations that drive both kites and aviation are always upward and beyond, capturing the human desire to explore and discover. Our Cover Story celebrates the joy of flight and takes you on a global journey through the many kite-flying festivals.

Continuing the theme of flying high, we shine a spotlight on a career that is a dream for many. In our interview with the erstwhile Princess of Tripura, she recounts her journey as a member of Air India's esteemed cabin crew. We also tell stories of people reaching for the sky in our feature on Guneet Monga, a visionary shaping narratives that reflect the dynamism and uniqueness of India, globally.

We have many more stories of travel, giving you even more reasons to pack your bags and fly. We wander through the enchanting city of Rome, savouring its rich assets. Beyond the dazzle of city lights, we also uncover the hidden wonders of Pench National Park, recently acclaimed as India's first Dark Sky Park. Join us as we embark on a journey of discovery, embracing the boundless joys of flight and the myriad wonders that await us.

Wishing you blue skies and endless horizons. Happy reading. Bon Voyage!

Sunil Suresh Editor-in-Chief



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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.





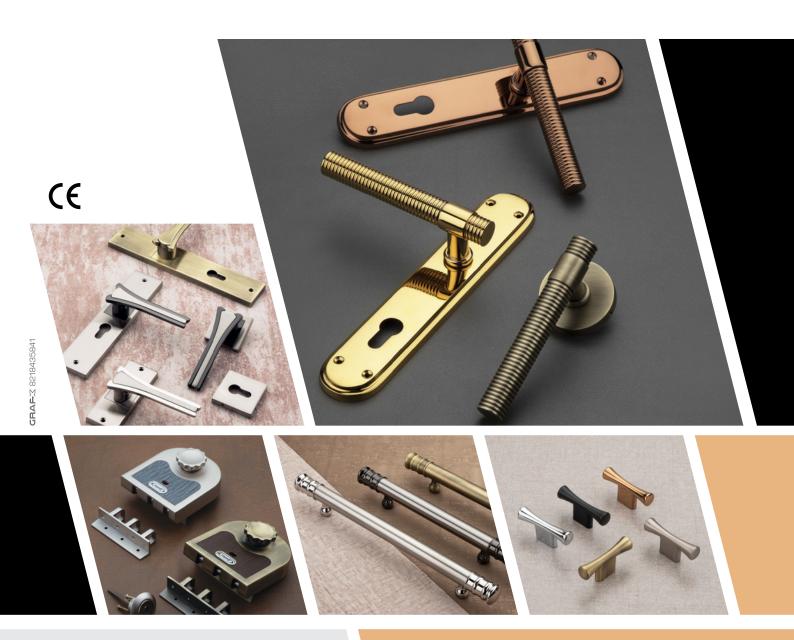


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## CONTRIBUTORS





Prachi is a Mumbai-based independent travel and food writer. When she's not writing, she can be found in a café sipping coffee, watching people, and perhaps plotting her next trip.

#### \rm 🕑 page 53



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the Sky Touches

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Nothing stirs Sushmita's heart like an impromptu trip! Based in Delhi, she harbours an innate passion for travelling, storytelling and even cooking.



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Environmental consultant by profession and a sustainable travel blogger by passion, Ketki is passionate about nature, wildlife. and heritage. She enjoys bringing places to life through her blogs to inspire readers to become responsible travellers.





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Founder of Kalinga Stories, a cuisine-related start-up, Madhulika is a food columnist who also writes on wellness, health, environment, etc. She has been on the expert panel of MasterChef India Season 4.

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Embark on a true Khasi adventure to explore the natural sights and savour traditional food in Cherrapunji (Sohra)—all in a day



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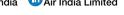




• 40 EVENTS International festivals to attend this month On the Cover At the annual Kite & Bike Festival in Franklin Park, Boston, U.S.A

> Cover image courtesy Getty Images/John Tlumacki Map courtesy Asia Media Design

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## ACROSS Explore kite festivals celebrating the sp THE words by Pallavi Singh and Samai Sin celebrating the spirit of flight

and Samai Singh

#### © DIEPPE INTERNATIONAL KITE FESTIVAL, FRANCE SEASIDE KITE REVELRY

Every two years, kite enthusiasts gather from across the globe to showcase their stunning creations against the picturesque backdrop of Dieppe's coastline. Vibrant kites, crafted with boundless imagination, adorn the heavens, painting a mesmerising tableau of colour and creativity. Amidst cultural performances and interactive workshops, attendees bask in the joyous atmosphere, forging connections and celebrating the universal allure of kite flying.

### GETTING THERE

Air India flies non-stop to Paris from Delhi. It takes an average of 3.5 hours to travel from Paris Airport to Dieppe by train.

## O ADELAIDE INTERNATIONAL KITE FESTIVAL, AUSTRALIA



#### **GETTING THERE**

Air India flies non-stop to Melbourne from Delhi and Mumbai. It takes an average of 8.5 hours to travel from Melbourne Airport to Adelaide by car.

Visitors enjoying giant vibrant kites, some even shaped as comic characters, at the Adelaide International Kite Festival at Semaphore Beach, Australia he Adelaide International Kite Festival, one of the largest in Australia, takes place annually at Semaphore over the long Easter weekend. Organised by the Adelaide Kite Flyers Association since 2012, the festival features captivating kite displays by both local and international enthusiasts. Those who want to join can bring their own kite or purchase one at the festival. The Semaphore Jetty offers the best vantage point to witness the colourful kites filling the sky with twists and turns. The festival also boasts a lively marketplace along the foreshore, providing interactive activities and diverse food stalls. Free entry and a family-friendly atmosphere make it an ideal Easter holiday destination. Join the festivities from 30<sup>th</sup> March to 1<sup>st</sup> April.





### PRETTY PRETTY PARETTY PAREADE

he 44<sup>th</sup> Artevento Cervia International Kite Festival will grace Pinarella Beach from 20<sup>th</sup> April to 1<sup>st</sup> May, celebrating the dynamic link between Cervia and the world of kites. This fair presents artists across continents, who benefit from the sea breeze to enchant spectators with acrobatic flights, dances, aerial battles, and record-breaking trials featuring various kite types. These include fighting kites, flying ones, celluloid kites, acrobatic ones, and gigantic 'soft kites' (3D kites without sticks). The programme features displays of artistic, ethnic, historical, and giant kites, acrobatic flights set to music, multidisciplinary performances, exhibitions, workshops, championships, installations, a market, and a food area.



TOP AND BOTTOM Aliens, cupid, and horses all take to the sky at the festival's 43<sup>rd</sup> edition; Sea anemones seem to be the inspiration behind these colourful set of kites ready to paint the sky in vivid hues.

## 

GETTING THERE Air India flies nonstop to Milan from Delhi. It takes an average of 4 hours to travel from Milan Airport to Pinarella Beach by car.



#### **◎ BALI KITE FESTIVAL, INDONESIA**

## IN THE BREEZE

**GETTING THERE** 

Balinese people are seen flying the Janggan (kites designed to resemble flying birds) during the kite festival in Mertasari Beach (2022)

Air India flies non-stop to Singapore from Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, and Bengaluru. From Singapore, fly with our Interline Partner Singapore Airlines to reach Bali. It takes an average of 35-40 minutes to travel from Bali Airport to Padang Galak by car.

eld annually in July and August (but sometimes up until October) to coincide with the island's windy season, the festival showcases Bali's unique culture. The beach in Padang Galak becomes a vibrant spectacle as locals and tourists compete in kite flying, creating a colourful display in the sky. Originating as a vibrant expression of gratitude to the gods for abundant harvests and fertility, it has evolved into one of Bali's most remarkable events. Set in Padang Galak, north of Sanur, the festival includes smallscale competitions and side events throughout the festive period. During the entire festival, the traditional music of Bali is performed by a gamelan orchestra. Prizes are awarded for the most distinct and creative kites.



## © FESTIVAL OF THE WINDS, SYDNEY COLOUR CANOPY

ondi Beach in Sydney comes alive with brilliant and bright kites in the first half of September every year as kite enthusiasts from the world over ascend their colourful creations into the skies. The Festival of the Winds is a much anticipated annual event. Besides watching professionals demonstrate their skills, visitors can participate in kite-making workshops and learn how to fly their hand-crafted kites. The beach fiesta also has plenty of food stalls serving delightful gourmet world cuisine to satiate your taste buds. While the main stage has diverse entertainment options, with shows being performed all day long, they haven't forgotten about the children who can get their faces painted, go on rides, or watch puppet shows, dances, and musical performances.



TOP AND BOTTOM The picturesque Bondi Beach in Sydney is the backdrop for the Festival of the Winds; A koala and super teddy-shaped kite are waiting in preparation for take-off



## © HAMAMATSU KITE FESTIVAL, JAPAN FLIGHT FIESTA





eld annually from  $3^{rd}$ - $5^{th}$  May in Hamamatsu City, Shizoku Prefecture, the Hamamatsu Kite Festival is one of the largest festivals in Japan attracting nearly 1.5 million visitors each year. Festival-goers can witness spectacular kite-flying battles on the Nakatajima sand dunes, while at night, the downtown area comes alive with a flamboyant float parade. The festival is said to date back nearly 400 years and legend has it that the Lord of Hikuma Castle flew a kite here to mark the birth of his son, and ever since, it has been customary to fly a kite to celebrate the birth of a child. The climate here is perfect for kite flying because the strong wild winds known as Enshu Karakaze blow, giving buoyancy to the kites to soar into the clear blue skies.

LEFT AND RIGHT This kite festival takes place every year in May; People flock to the festival to celebrate newborns in their families

#### GETTING THERE Air India flies non-stop to Tokyo from Delhi. It takes an average of 3.5 hours to travel

P

from Tokyo Airport to Hamamatsu by car.



#### **WEIFANG INTERNATIONAL KITE FESTIVAL, CHINA**

AERIAL JOY

**TOP AND BOTTOM** A lady gets ready to launch a kite at Weifang International Kite Festival; Is it a beanstalk, is it a giant pumpkin or peach? Creativity knows no bounds at this festival



**GETTING THERE** Air India flies non-stop to Hong Kong from Delhi. From Hong Kong, fly with our Interline Partner Hong Kong Airlines to reach Hangzhou. It takes an average of 9 hours to travel from Hangzhou Airport to Weifang by car.

rom polar bears and dragons to centipedes and the latest cartoon characters, the Weifang Kite Festival boasts the most spectacular kites in the sky. Generally held on the third Saturday of April and lasting for about a fortnight, the kite extravaganza has participants from over 60 countries. The region has a long history of kite-making; in fact, Weifang is known as the 'city of kites' and in 2006, the region's kitemaking technique was inscribed in China's national intangible cultural heritage list. The kites from the world's kite capital are also renowned for their exquisite craftsmanship. Last year, Weifang also hosted a slew of kite themed exhibitions and events from mid-April to mid-May.

## © INTERNATIONAL KITE FESTIVAL, GUJARAT, INDIA

This festival is accompanied by lots of cheer and a bit of healthy competition words by **Ketki Gadre** 



#### LEFT AND RIGHT

The Statue of Unity looks on as the skies swell with kites in Kevadia; From lizards and tigers to footballs, there are many displays from the grand show at Ahmedabad





he residents of Gujarat eagerly await January, anticipating a breezy atmosphere. After all, they need to hone their kite-flying skills before the D-day! Makar Sankranti, known as Uttarayan in Gujarat, is celebrated with much cheer, albeit a bit of competition to win the battle of the kites in the sky. Uttarayan is a celebration that transcends time and generations and is a vivid expression of the state's rich cultural heritage and the indomitable spirit of its people. As the kites dance in the sky, tethered by the dreams and aspirations of those who fly them, Uttarayan becomes a spectacle of joy, creating a vibrant atmosphere echoing with shouts of 'Kai po che' and 'Lapet.' The cheers add an extra layer of enthusiasm to the already-lively celebrations as the festivities continue the entire

day, starting from early morning and stretching late into the night.

Markets selling kites spring up everywhere and all major cities are mobbed with kite buyers and sellers during this time. They showcase themed kites of diverse sizes and shapes—from kites adorned with Bollywood stars' faces to those featuring slogans—and serve as dynamic canvases for skilled kite makers. Alongside the kites, vibrant pink manja (kite string), wound on a spool known as firki, along with whistle-blowing horns, hats, and firecrackers, dominate the market scene. Kite flying is nothing short of an art form, mastered with practise.

Over the past three decades, Gujarat has hosted The International Kite Festival, emerging as one of the state's grandest celebrations. The festival spans various locations—from



#### <u>Uttarayan's Rooftop</u> Delicacies

• Uttarayan is all about savouring the changing season and one dish is symbolic of it is **undhiyu**. It is a perfect mix of seasonal vegetables cooked with masala and eaten with puri. The meal is finished with crispy, saffron **jalebis** as dessert. Snacks served on rooftops during kite-flying sessions include **chikki** (jaggery and nuts), bite-sized **sugarcane**, and **til bugga** or **sesame ladoo**. the arid expanse of the Rann of Kutch in Dhordo to the historic havelis in the *pols* of Ahmedabad, and from the modern structures of Surat to the riverfront of the Statue of Unity in Kevadia. With widespread enthusiasm, this week-long festival, held in January every year, attracts kite masters and enthusiasts from around the globe. The event transforms Gujarat into a carnival of creativity, featuring exceptionally large kites adorned with innovative designs that not only reflect the country of origin but also showcase the mastery of the craft. From cheetahs and dragons to even alien-shaped kites, the festival mesmerises onlookers with its dazzling array of airborne artistry.

According to the Indian calendar, Makar Sankranti marks the transition from winter to summer and the belief around kite flying is to expose one's skin to the sun rays to prevent illnesses generally associated with winter. In Gujarat's expansive skies, these flights embody boundless spirit and unity.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Kite-flying on the Rann of Kutch; Undhiyu makes its appearance at this time; Til bugga is made with sesame seeds and is served during Makar Sankranti



## THE PEOPLE 21 ° NEW INDIA 26 ° Q&A

A powerhouse of talent, Guneet Monga is not only redefining Indian films but also empowering young women producers

### WEAVER OF YOUNG DREAMS

Her innovative vision reshapes Indian narratives for a global audience, infusing fresh perspectives



words by Shrabasti Anindita Mallik

There is more to **Guneet Monga** than her film productions. This two-time Oscar recipient is breaking industry stereotypes one project at a time—showcasing socially-relevant narratives with her new-age approach, empowering Indian women producers, and pushing creative boundaries through independent films **6** 



Actors Laksh Lalwani (extreme left) and Raghav Juyal (extreme right) with Monga at the premiere of the film Kill at the 2023 Toronto International Film Festival

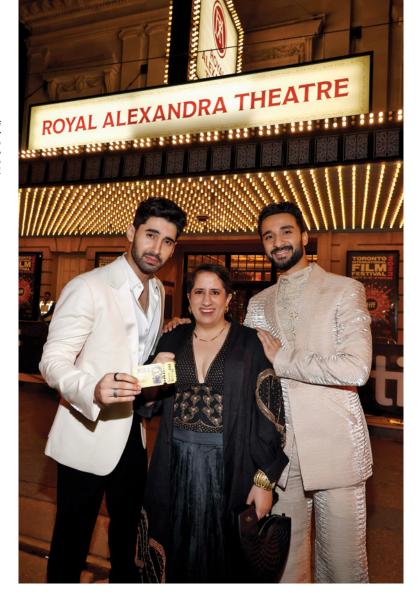
#### HOW HAS THE 2023 OSCAR WIN CHANGED THE WAY YOUR COMPANY, SIKHYA ENTERTAINMENT, PRODUCES PROJECTS?

I don't think it's changed our point of view. As a company, Sikhya Entertainment has always showcased Indian stories to the rest of the world and we have loved putting our country on the map through that. Be it *The Lunchbox* or *Masaan* or any other production—nothing much has changed. However, it did open a lot of doors for us to be able to do bigger projects and leave a more prominent and impactful footprint.

#### THE ELEPHANT WHISPERERS IS A DEPICTION OF MAN'S BOND WITH NATURE AND BRINGS THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABILITY INTO THE MAINSTREAM. HOW ELSE ARE YOU LOOKING TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABILITY IN CINEMA?

One is through real life, where we make our set sustainable, and the other is through on-screen depiction. It's a practice on my sets that the cast and crew do not use plastic and disposable glasses but carry refillable bottles. The other aspect is to show sustainability on screen, where maybe a character is disposing off garbage or engaging in environmentally-conscious activities. Films have the power to influence, so, when you see such acts on screen, it leaves a mark on the subconscious.

YOUR STORIES PROMOTE A 'NEW INDIA'—BE IT THE SLICE-OF-LIFE *THE LUNCHBOX* OR THE COMING-OF-AGE SHORTS *GUPT GYAAN*. WHAT DO YOU LOOK FOR IN A



#### STORY BEFORE YOU PRODUCE IT?

Years of hard work (laughs) and experience have taught me to understand the crux of a story. Now the process is very instinctive. When a story comes to me, I try to look at it from the angle of how I can add value to it and what more I can do to enhance the narrative. It is only when I'm able to add value to the journey of the film and expand its [and the filmmaker's] footprint, that I decide to get involved.

#### WHAT ROLE DOES INDEPENDENT CINEMA PLAY IN THE LARGER LANDSCAPE OF INDIAN FILMMAKING?

Unlike mainstream films, which are always a bit on the safe side,

"WHEN A STORY COMES TO ME, I TRY TO LOOK AT IT FROM THE ANGLE OF HOW I CAN ADD VALUE TO IT AND WHAT MORE I CAN DO TO ENHANCE THE NARRATIVE."



#### CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Monga (extreme right) with directo

right) with director Yashowardhan Mishra (seated) during the shooting of Kathal; When not working or reading scripts for her next project, the 40-year-old enjoys watching films, irrespective of language or country; Monga with Jordan-based Nadia Eliewat, co-producers of the film Yellow Bus.

#### independent cinema pushes boundaries. It goes into uncharted territories—you can explore different genres and cast newer actors. You can expand the market—there are more directors and actors coming in and an increasing number of technicians are willing to be adventurous. You can take chances and create something beautiful yet meaningful without the excess stress of a studio.

HOW HAS YOUR NEW APPROACH IN SELECTING AND MAKING FILMS CHANGED HOW THE GLOBAL AUDIENCE SEES INDIAN MOVIES? I've worked with a lot of first-time directors who come in with a lot of newness and that gives a chance to new talent. India is all-encompassing; it's a vast and beautiful nation, and there is so much to do and show here. I feel our work has spoken volumes of our skills to the rest of the world. Like the recent film *Kill*. Touted to be India's most violent action film, it has been bought by Lionsgate, which is the first-of-its-kind deal for any Indian film. This goes to show the fabric of our craft and how brilliant our actors, production, designs, music scores, HODs, and technicians are. And, of course, the stories. Nothing really begins without that. We are world class.

## **Q&A** Reeta Devi Varma

## "WE HAD TO DEBOARD LOOKING AS FRESH AS WHEN WE TOOK OFF"

The erstwhile Princess of Tripura and Padma Shri awardee recounts her fascinating journey working with Air India and meeting JRD Tata

words by Sayanti Halder

#### YOU CHOOSE AVIATION AT A TIME WHEN NOT MANY WOMEN VENTURED INTO IT. WHY?

Back in those days [1960s], seeing Indian women in aviation was like finding a needle in a haystack. But I had different plans and chased my dream of becoming an air hostess, as it was called back then. I had already started off with an international airline, but Air India seemed to promise the adventure I craved—that of spreading my wings and seeing the world.

#### HOW DID YOUR JOURNEY OF WORKING WITH AIR INDIA BEGIN?

My determination remained undeterred even when I was tested with the idea of hard work, less pay whilst applying for a job. During my job interview, I noticed a pencil lying on the floor, and, without hesitation, I retrieved it and placed it neatly on the table. This simple act spoke volumes and the interviewers promptly extended an offer asking me when I could start. And so, it was in 1963 that I embarked on my journey with Air India, venturing into the unknown in then Bombay without knowing a soul in the city.

#### WHEN DID YOU MEET THE LEGENDARY JRD TATA FOR THE FIRST TIME?

It was the very first day of my training at Air India and we were a bunch of eager recruits, buzzing with excitement at the airport. Suddenly, Mr. Tata appeared, his presence commanding attention and respect. With a warmth that put us at ease, he shared a powerful message: Air India's passengers weren't just clients; they were our esteemed quests, akin to gods. "We should be guilty that we are charging money from our gods," he said. He wished us luck and motivated us to give our best.

#### ANY EVERLASTING MEMORY FROM YOUR STINT WITH THE AIRLINE?

Winning the 1964 'Miss International Air Hostess' title in Surfer's Paradise, Australia. Female cabin crew members from various international airlines were present, representing their respective airlines. My bosses, in their own cheeky way, said, "If you don't bring that trophy home, don't bother coming back!" Can you imagine the pressure? But it was a huge motivation for me. And I won! It was the first time an Asian girl won that title.

### WHAT WAS IT LIKE WORKING WITH THE AIRLINE?

Air India was quite particular about how we presented ourselves. They ensured we stayed in tip-top shape—regular weigh-ins, and perfect pedicures and manicures were a must. We had to deboard looking as fresh as when we took off. There was even extra time allotted for touch-ups before deboarding! We always had a spare, freshly-laundered saree on hand. There was one particular shade of lipstick we had to wear—it was like our uniform.

#### ANY MEMORABLE ANECDOTES FROM THOSE DAYS?

I vividly recall Mr. Tata would fly

"AND I WON! IT WAS THE FIRST TIME AN ASIAN GIRL WON THAT TITLE."

Reeta Devi recalls how she got the Air India job and recounts her meetings with such luminaries as JRD Tata, Saint Teresa, and Gayatri Devi II

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Alexander A

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Economy and sit at the back of the plane so that people wouldn't notice him, but we would know and murmur "Jeh is here!" Also, he used to tape our announcements for scrutiny and trainings, so we were always alert. On duty, I had the honour of meeting then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi once and actress Elizabeth Taylor thrice.

#### YOU SHARED A VERY CLOSE BOND WITH SAINT TERESA, HOW DID THAT COME TO BE?

Our bond goes way back to when I was just 16, attending Loreto Convent School Entally where she was a teacher. After marriage, I found myself in then Calcutta, working alongside her and the Missionaries of Charity. I'll never forget promising myself to cut my hair once I got to work with

her-a dream fulfilled. Her sense of humour? Absolutely delightful; she always had the last laugh.

#### **GAYATRI DEVI AND YOU ARE RELATED. WHAT WAS SHE LIKE?**

We shared a close bond. Whenever critics questioned my career, she'd jokingly quip, "Finally, someone with brains in the family!" She used to tease me about my job, saying while she spent her life paying for flights and hotels, I was getting paid to travel. We'd share lighthearted banter, reminiscing about my modelling days. She'd laugh and say, "I never got paid for all the photos of me, but look at you!"

YOU HAD AN UNFORTUNATE FIRE **ENGULF YOUR HOUSE IN 2022.** WHAT DO YOU MISS LOSING THE MOST?

I miss my Padma Shri certificate, precious letters from Mother Teresa and my grandmother-in-law, and four sheets of paper with doodles drawn and gifted by Satyajit Ray. But you know what's strange? Amidst all that wreckage, my wooden Ganesh idol that's been with me for 40-50 years, survived unscathed; a miracle in the middle of all the chaos and destruction.

#### CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT

Reeta Devi with the two runners-up at the Miss International Air Hostess contest in 1964: She was the first Asian to bag the title whilst representing Air India; Then President, Pratibha Devisingh Patil presented the Padma Shri to Reeta Devi.



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Hold onto your seats, India! Exciting news awaits as lavish automobiles are making their debut in 2024

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The 2024 McLaren 750S is a cuttingedge sports car redefining performance

#### Ferrari Purosangue

#### **SUV? NOT AN SUV?** ₹5 crore (expected)

This is the Prancing Horse's first-ever 4-door, 4-seater, 4X4—and no, they don't want you to call it an SUV! Focus instead, on its 725 horsepower V12 engine!

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## **BEAR UP FOR LUXE**

1

These luxury cars will be launching in India in 2024; we dissect the specs and tell you why they are special. So, sit back and just drool!

words by Siddharth Vinayak Patankar

## Welcome to the world of Amul Cheese!



Marketrd by: Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation Ltd. Anand- 388001. email:- customercare@amul.coop



### Mercedes-Benz E-Class THE BESTSELLER IS BACK!

₹80-90 lakh (expected)

India will get it a bit later than others as it will be assembled locally. This 6<sup>th</sup>-Gen E-Class will boast a long wheelbase (LWB)—which adds to the delay because only India has a right-hand-drive LWB model. It boasts the first-ever new 'superscreen' setup (two 12.3-inch screens at two ends of the dash and a 17.7-inch central one).

**BUY IT FOR** The sheer luxury of space, tech, and power on offer **SURPRISE ELEMENT** It's the most tech-heavy E-Class ever built



#### McLaren 7505 THE FASTEST AND LIGHTEST EVER ₹5.91 crore

The British sports car brand has also begun the year with the arrival of its flagship supercar—the lightest and most powerful model—the 750S in India in January. Only 20 units of this 750 plus bhp car are allocated to India.

**BUY IT FOR** Exclusivity!Bragging rights! Need more reasons?

**SURPRISE ELEMENT** 0 to 100kmph takes just 2.8 seconds



#### Audi Q6 THE NEW GLOBAL FLAGSHIP ₹1 crore (expected)

The four-ringed Bavarian has plans to expand its electric portfolio in India—which has become the mainstay of its strategy. So expect the Q6 e-tron to also debut here. Designed to take on the likes of the Mercedes-Benz EQE SUV, the Q6 e-tron is also special—this is the first car on the new PPE platform (Premium Platform Electric) that will underpin all future larger Audi and Porsche electric vehicles.

**BUY IT FOR** The range (600 km) and the stable ride quality

**SURPRISE ELEMENT** Expect the powerful SQ6 to be launched too

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#### Lotus Emira

#### ENHANCED REAR-WHEEL DRIVE EXPERIENCE ₹3 crore (expected)

The last internal combustion engine powered car from Lotus, the Emira has a powerful supercharged V6 that makes over 400 horses. This would be Lotus' second model in India after the brand's debut in 2023 with the Eletre performance EV SUV. The design is heavily influenced by the Evija hypercar yet, the Emira is stunning; the cabin oozes luxury and sportiness.

**BUY IT FOR** The manual transmission it will be made available in **SURPRISE ELEMENT** The power that the AMG-sourced engine unleashes is like no other!



#### Skoda Enyaq SKODA'S FIRST EV FOR INDIA

₹60 lakh (expected)

This MEB (Modular Electric Drive matrix) platform-based mid-sized EV crossover has already been confirmed for India, and should give the likes of the Hyundai IONIQ 5 and Kia EV6 competition. It will most likely be available with a 77kWh battery pack with 260 bhp on offer. It will be an all-wheel drive version and will come to India in limited numbers.

**BUY IT FOR** Its expected range: 513km **SURPRISE ELEMENT** It will support fast charging through a 125 kW DC charger



LOOK OUT!

Watch out for a lot of action from these two players



#### PORSCHE PANAMERA

₹1.49 – 2.57 crore (expected) Porsche, on its part, is busy rolling out the new third generation of the Panamera worldwide. And the car will also come to India this year. The anticipation is around its new updated e-hybrid variant that promises luxury, performance, and efficiency. The e-hybrid variant is also the most powerful with a combined output of 676bhp and this makes it go from 0-100 kmph in 3.4 seconds.

Expected release date: H2 2024



#### VOLVO EX90

₹1.2 crore (expected) The new flagship for the Swedish brand is a large full-sized SUV that sports a driving range closer to 600km on the upper side. The EX90 uses many sustainable materials and brings a fresh approach to cabin design. The 14.5-inch touchscreen up front is 5G enabled and its instrument cluster features the Snapdragon Cockpit Platform by Qualcomm.

Expected release date: April 2024





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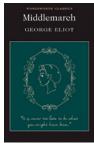
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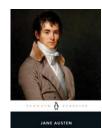
# TOP FIVE READS

Winner of the Commonwealth Prize for best first novel, **Manju Kapur** talks about her treasured reads



#### MIDDLEMARCH (George Eliot)

This book brings in the pathos that underlies human relations, the way in which your past catches up with you, and how an arrogant mistake can ruin your life. Wordsworth Editions Ltd; ₹268



PERSUASION

#### PERSUASION (Jane Austen)

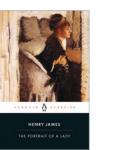
My favourite among all her novels. *Persuasion* is about the life of an older woman, and the social and emotional consequences of a decision she had made when young. *Penguin Classics*; ₹201

# A what of proceeding water and the state of the state of



A HOUSE FOR MR BISWAS (V.S. Naipaul)

Naipaul speaks of the joint family experience in an unusual way. This touching book is based on the life of the author's father. *Picador;* ₹427



THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY (Henry James)

In this novel, the author brilliantly captures the naivety as well as the dangers of idealism. *Penguin Classics*; ₹262



TOP

TRAVEL READ

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(Vinoo N. Mathur) Unveiling the

architectural history of Indian Railways,

this volume exhibits

over 400 nostalgic images of iconic

railway structures.

Catapult; ₹1,970

#### ANNA KARENINA (Leo Tolstoy)

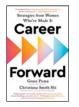
This explores themes of love, morality, and society through the tragic story of Anna's forbidden affair. One of the best books in the world. Fingerprint Publishing; ₹297





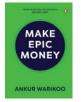
WHY WE REMEMBER: THE SCIENCE OF MEMORY AND HOW IT SHAPES US **(Dr Charan Ranganath)** From recalling faces and names

From recalling faces and names to trauma healing, a leading memory researcher unveils the powerful role of memory. Faber & Faber; ₹699



#### CAREER FORWARD (Grace Puma and Christiana Smith Shi)

Puma, former PepsiCo COO and Smith Shi, former Nike President of Consumer Direct, offer a guide for women to maximise their careers, build value, and have a full life. Simon & Schuster; ₹699



#### MAKE EPIC MONEY (Ankur Warikoo)

Drawing from a lifetime of financial experiences, the author offers a comprehensive personal finance blueprint. The book provides practical advice and empowers readers to unlock the secrets of financial well-being. Penguin Random House India; ₹399

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## WHERE ARTS COLLIDE

s the winter sun slowly lit up the sprawling lawns of Jaipur's Hotel Clarks Amer on 1<sup>st</sup> February, it marked the beginning of the Samsung Galaxy Tab S9 Series Jaipur Literature Festival (JLF). Air India was the proud official airline partner of this prestigious festival.

This year, the 17<sup>th</sup> edition, was themed 'Stories Unite Us'. According to Sanjoy K Roy, MD of Teamwork Arts (producer of JLF), JLF 2024 captivated the visitors "with its stellar performances, a line-up of 550 distinguished speakers and artistes." The event saw speakers from the fields of literature, economics, pop culture, academia, fashion, and more. Some of the speakers included 2023 Booker-Prize awardee Paul Lynch; former Governor of RBI Raghuram Rajan; British novelist Colin Thubron; Irish novelist John Boyne; CEO of Archie Comics Nancy Silberkleit; author, and diplomat Shashi Tharoor; designer Tarun Tahiliani; and film director Vishal Bhardwaj.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP (L to R) Marcus du Sautoy, Hernan Diaz, Vidya Shah, William Dalrymple, Mukesh Bansal, Kanan Gill and Albert Read in conversation with Sanjoy K Roy; A folk musician at the event; Air India's booth was a crowdpuller at JLF 2024; Numerous art installations livened up the venue.





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# DANCE FESTIVAL KHAJURAHO DANCE FESTIVAL Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh

20<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> February

The 50<sup>th</sup> edition of the annual classical Indian dance festival at a UNESCO World Heritage Site, will showcase diverse forms such as Odissi by Padma Shri Ranjana Gauhar and Arupa Gayatri Panda, kathak by Anuradha Singh, and the dance drama 'Meera' directed by Padma Vibhushan Dr. Sonal Mansingh. Kathak Kumbh, an enthralling group performance by more than 1,500 kathak dancers, will be a highlight.

🔍 khajurahodancefestival.com



Held near the Taj Mahal, the festival spans 10 days, highlighting the talents of artistes, craftspeople, culinary experts, and performers from across India. Organised by the Department of Tourism, this cultural extravaganza features a Mughal-style procession and showcases diverse folk performances, attracting artisans from across India to participate in this cultural carnival.

ୡ tajmahotsav.org



#### © MOVIES BERLIN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL Berlin, Germany 15<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> February

The Berlinale ranks among the world's

largest public film festivals. In its 74<sup>th</sup> edition, director Alonso Ruizpalacios, a two-time Silver Bear winner, returns with his English debut *La Cocina*. Filmmaker Andreas Dresen presents *From Hilde, With Love*. The competition will also include Victor Kossakovsky's *Architecton* and Mati Diop's *Dahomey*. *E berlinale.de* 



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#### ON THE RADAR



CHENNAI COMIC CON Chennai Trade Centre, Chennai 17<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> February

Chennai's debut edition has it all: priceless merchandise, comics, manga, anime, and pop culture. comicconindia.com



RIO CARNIVAL Rio de Janeiro, Brazil 9<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> February

The 'greatest show on Earth' pulsates with rhythm and features vibrant parades. The highlight is the Magic Ball at Copacabana Palace. *riocarnaval.org* 



TAIWAN LANTERN FESTIVAL
Tainan, Taiwan
3<sup>rd</sup> February – 10<sup>th</sup> March

Themed 'Glorious Tainan', the fest includes an 'Anping Display Zone' and a 'High-Speed Rail Display Zone'. *taiwan.net.tw* 



#### **MUSIC FEST NOISE POP** San Francisco, USA 22<sup>nd</sup> February – 3<sup>rd</sup> March

A venerable celebration of independent music and arts, the festival spans multiple venues across 10 days. Now in its 31st year, it has evolved from a onenight indie-rock showcase to a diverse, multi-genre spectacle. Highlights include Bone Thugs-N-Harmony's 30<sup>th</sup>-anniversary show at the Curran Theatre, DJ Tennis at Public Works, and an intimate performance by Kate Bollinger at Swedish American Hall. Catch rising stars like Snail Mail, The Mountain Goats (solo), Louis Cole, Suzanne Ciani, Cherry Glazerr, Dehd, Alice Glass. and more. 🔍 noisepopfest.com



#### **JAISALMER DESERT FESTIVAL** Jaisalmer, Rajasthan 22<sup>nd</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> February

A jubilant celebration with puppet shows, folk music, camel races, and polo matches, the festival has contests like longest moustache and turban tying. Participants in traditional attire showcase folk culture. *Gair* dance and folk fire dances enhance the cultural spectacle. The Maru Sri or Mr. Desert Pageant sees international participation. Stalls offer local knick-knacks and cuisine. *desertfestivaljaisalmer.com* 



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# SWEET LEGACY

Halwa, an ancient Indian dessert, traces its origins to centuries past, symbolising tradition and cultural richness

words by Madhulika Dash

#### 1/ SEB HALWA

A young entrant into the list, it is often considered a work of contemporary culinary fusion. Its origin is said to trace back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when British soldier Captain R.C. Scot introduced apples to the Kullu Valley, Himachal Pradesh. Grafted from sour apple species like Newton Pippin and Cox's Orange Pippin, the fruit had few takers except for the cooks who worked in the Mess. And it was here that the mushed version was created by one of the kitchen hands and served on a tart. Another story credits the 14<sup>th</sup> century horticulturist King of Kashmir, Shah Mir, with its genesis.

**TRY THIS AT:** Haji Abdul Shakoor Sweet Shop, Lucknow





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#### 2/ GUD AUR AATE KA HALWA

When the cooks in Suleiman the Magnificent's kitchen designed the halwa that would befit a warrior's soul, little did they fathom that their creation would not only help the Janissary win wars but also seed a version that'd bring communities together. "For the Ottomans, it was *Gaziler Helvasi*; for India, especially erstwhile Punjab, it was *gud aur aate ka* [jaggery and wheat flour] halwa," says Chef Vikas Seth. The 'joyful calm' that it exudes eventually became the reason for Gurdwaras to adopt it as their *prasad*.

TRY THIS AT: Visit any Gurdwara serving it as the Kada Prasad







#### **3/ CHANA DAL HALWA**

Folklore says, this has been a muchcelebrated lentil since the time of Chandragupta Maurya (he served it at his wedding) and Shah Jahan to the deposed Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, who is said to have asked for a supply of the lentil instead of his wives, chana dal's sweet journey has been equally fascinating. Be it its Udupi avatar of Hayagreeva Maddi, the *sheherwali* version or the popular Lucknowi style that turned the simple fare into a winter treat (the dal is mashed before cooked in a brass pot with milk), this halwa definitely has a firm spot on the list.

TRY THIS AT: Ramesh Mithai, Surat

# Clockwise from top left: Embassy Leisure/Chef Vikas Seth; Shutterstock; Getty Images

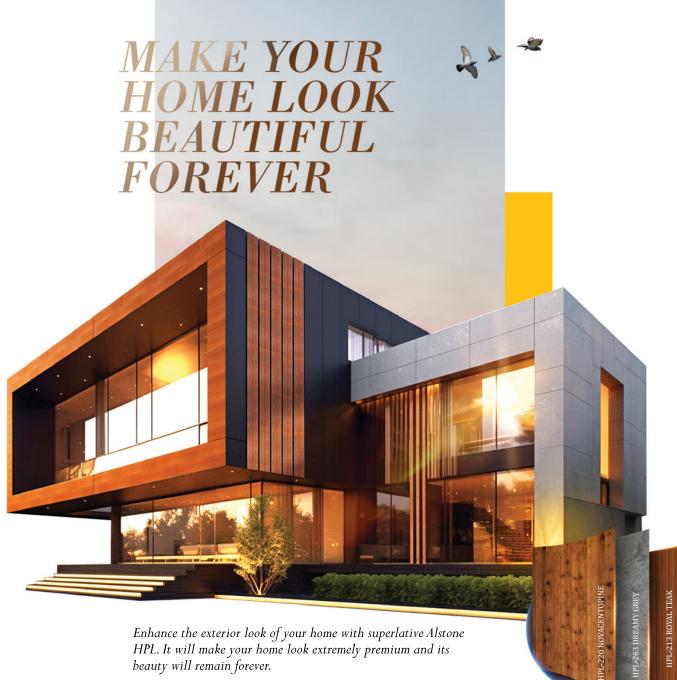
#### 4/ MOONG DAL HALWA

Legend has it, the first *vaid* to use sweets (ladoos) as medicine was Sushruta, the father of Indian Surgery and Medicine. And he advocated moong. Known for its cooling and medicinal properties, moong found its prime spot in many kitchens including foreigners' who settled as emperors. Yet, when it came to the halwa derivative, it was the kitchens of Marwar, Rajasthan that turned it into an equal of the Turkish delight. The first iteration of this velvetlike rich treat is said to be the *hare moong ka halwa* in Heera Bai's house that later featured in Emperor Jahangir's Diwali celebration.

TRY THIS AT: LMB Sweets, Jaipur







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#### **5/ BEETROOT HALWA**

For a tuber that had existed for nearly 2,000 years, one would think that the halwa would be a handiwork of either the Deccan kings or the muse of Emperor Shah Jahan. Or, the curation of the royal cooks of the Begum of Bhopal, where beetroot has a grand presence on the table. Yet, it is said that its first mention comes from Rampur where it is called Chukandar-E-Afroz. Made by simmering grated beet in milk and finished with sunflower seeds and *khoya*, it is both a treat and an antidote to winter mornings. **TRY THIS AT:** Noruk's, Coimbatore





#### **6/ ANJEER HALWA**

Stories go like that Muhammad bin Tughlaq first got fresh figs to grow in Daulatabad, and thanks to Peshwa Baji Rao, figs then travelled to Purandar. Yet, neither the Sultanate nor the Peshwa kitchens claim to have curated the halwa that bears semblance to the original Middle Eastern version made with date paste and milk. While the modern iteration is far more evolved than the original, food researchers like Chef Nimish Bhatia believe it could be a result of the *jugalbandi* of the Nawabs and the royals of Rampur. It can also be credited to the Nizams who designed *khubani ka meetha*.

TRY THIS AT: Suleman Usman Mithaiwala, Mumbai



#### 7/ KAALI GAJAR KA HALWA

Even though black carrot or kaali gajar was the original form of carrot, globally, it wasn't till the Nawabs of Lucknow reached their golden years that it became a bonafide 'winter treat' thanks to the Pathani halwai successors in the bylanes of Awadh. It was here that the carrot was cooked to appeal to Lucknowites who were smitten by the cloying sweetness of this version versus the gajrela that had found its way into the Mughal court from the kingdom of Punjab. Denser than its foreign 'red' kin, the slow cooking and the sweetness made it perfect for the palate.

**TRY THIS AT:** Radheylal Sweets, Lucknow

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#### MANISH MALHOTRA'S DUBAI STORE

Why: The couturier's recently-opened flagship store at the prestigious Fashion Avenue of Dubai Mall marks a milestone in Indian fashion's journey on the global map. **Highlights:** The chikankari of Mijwan, the artisanal threads of Kashmir, and Malhotra's signature sequin

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The latest launches, openings, and must-haves



RAISE A TOAST Wine lovers, rejoice. Award-winning brand Chandon India has arrived with its first homegrown still red wine called Chandon Aurva. It will be available across NCR.



#### **WIRI OPENS FOR MORE DELIGHTS**

Why: For an elaborate fare of authentic Goan cuisine, juxtaposed with a spectrum of global flavours. Also, for the stunning indoor-outdoor seating design and views.Where: The St. Regis Goa Resort Recommended: Goan Rice Porridge, Ross Omelette, Zucchini Fettuccini



ONE FOR THE BOOKS Bibliophiles will cherish these silver-crafted bookends recently launched by Frazer & Haws. These decorative pieces will also make for stylish additions to your home or office.







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ALL IN THE STARS Culinary Culture Ultimate Restaurant Ratings, India's first stars rating system (for restaurants), will soon set standards for culinary excellence in the country.



#### **O** THE GRIFFIN BAR

Why: For a taste of mixology aficionado Varun Sudhakar's signature cocktails. The establishment seamlessly transitions from a daytime coffee haven to a chic evening bar. Where: JW Marriott Hotel Kolkata Recommended: Taxi Queen, Tanqueray Griffin Kiss, Oh! My Ghee, The Living Thai



53 SROME 68 TRULY INDIA 74 ON THE CLOCK



From the big hits to the offbeat, this is Rome like you have never seen

1999

П

words by **Prachi Joshi** 





eams have been written about Romeits heady mix of ancient ruins, stunning art, and vibrant streets. Millions of people visit the Italian capital every year and yet, every time I return, I find it busier than before. Visitors stand enthralled in front of the Colosseum, no doubt imagining thrilling gladiatorial conquests, while the sprawling ruins of the Roman Forum inspire awe. St. Peter's Basilica looms large over the city, and all the treasures in the Vatican Museums pale in comparison to Michelangelo's ceiling frescoes in the Sistine Chapel. The flamboyant Trevi Fountain is rarely without throngs of tourists and the more-than-2,000year-old Pantheon, the best preserved of Rome's ancient monuments, is still stunning (albeit no longer free to enter). And, did I mention the food? The holy trinity of pizza, pasta, and gelato, of course, but cucina romana (Roman cuisine) is so much more. Here's how to get the true taste of Rome.

As impressive as it appears during daytime, the **Colosseum** by night is a surreal sight. There are fewer people and you get access to the underground maze of tunnels and passages where the gladiators awaited their turn. Standing in the arena, I imagine them



You can visit the Domus Aurea (the Golden House of Emperor Nero) by buying tickets; after many years of restoration, parts of the Palace are now open to the public via guided tours



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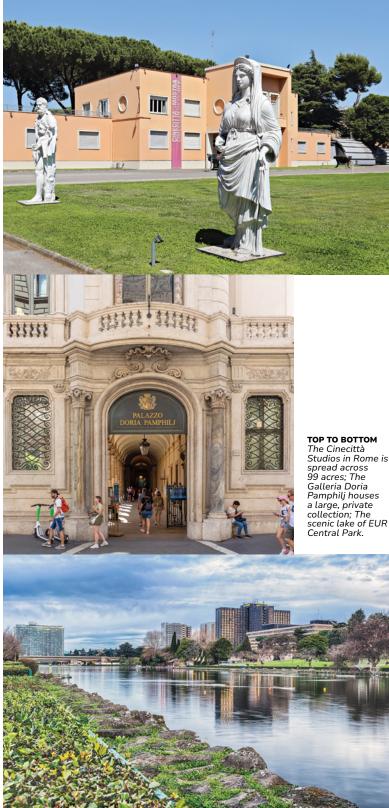
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walking towards their destiny, the snarling, hungry animals that await them, and the roars of the 50,000 spectators-it's enough to send shivers down my spine. The Baths of Caracalla. a short distance from the Colosseum, are not on the classic Rome itinerary, but this massive 3rdcentury complex of Roman baths is worth a visit. While you can admire its sheer scale and architecture by simply wandering around, a few additional Euros will get you virtual reality (VR) goggles and a unique immersive experience of one of the biggest and most impressive thermae (bathing facility) in ancient Rome. Also close to the Colosseum is Domus Aurea, the lavish residence built by Emperor Nero around the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Its spectacular ruins are a live archaeological site that have recently been opened to visitors, complete with multimedia installations and VR experiences.

Deciding which museum in Rome to visit is quite a task, given the sheer number of excellent options. Of course, the Vatican Museums and Galleria Borghese are both unmissable, but you must try to fit in one or two of the smaller private galleries that abound in the city. Inside the 15<sup>th</sup>-century Galleria Doria Pamphilj, I find one of Rome's largest private collections of paintings, sculptures, and frescoes, all spread over four wings. But it's the Hall of Mirrors that's most arresting with its profusion of gold-framed Venetian mirrors and antique statues. Nearby, Galleria Colonna is another Baroque gem with exquisite artworks scattered across its lavishly decorated rooms. If

#### Best time to visit

There's no bad time to visit Rome but summer (June-September) can be especially busy and scorching hot. Despite the odds of a rainy day, late spring (April-May) and autumn (October-November) are ideal to enjoy Rome the way it should be.



Top and middle: Shutterstock; Bottom: Getty Images



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glaze over, head to MAXXI, the Zaha Hadid-designed national museum of contemporary art and architecture. It's some distance from the city centre but the eye-catching building and excellent curation are well worth the trip. Not all art in Rome is confined to

all that classical art makes your eyes

museums and galleries—you might just stumble upon a Caravaggio painting (in Chiesa di San Luigi dei Francesi) or a Michelangelo sculpture (statue of Christ the Redeemer inside Santa Maria sopra Minerva) in one of the more than 900 churches that dot the city. Inside Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore, I cannot take my eyes off its gilded ceiling and stunning Roman mosaics, or the Byzantine mosaics in the nearby Basilica di Santa Prassede. There's more Michelangelo-spotting in the Basilica of San Pietro in Vincoli where a larger-than-life statue of Moses forms the centrepiece. Apart from great artworks, Rome's churches also house relics of many saints, like St. Valentine's skull in Basilica di Santa Maria in **Cosmedin**, the (purported) head of St. John the Baptist in San Silvestro in Capite, and St. Victoria's wax-enhanced skeletal remains, which lie preserved in a glass case in the Church of Santa Maria della Vittoria.

Rome can be busy almost throughout the year, so if you need a break from the crowds, it helps to get out of the historical city centre. One fine day, I go looking for the Aventine Keyhole, a not-so-secret peephole that offers a spectacular sight. I arrive at Piazza dei Cavalieri di Malta to find a small queue of people in front of a nondescript green door. When it's my turn, I look through the keyhole to see the dome of St Peter's in the centre, framed by the landscaped hedges in the garden of the Priory of the Knights of Malta. The perfectly-aligned view encompasses one country (Italy) and two nation-states (Vatican City and the Grand Priory, both holding an extraterritorial status).



#### "Pioneers of Heart Health: SIMS Hospital Chennai Sets the Pace in Cardiac Care"

The Institute of Cardiothoracic and Aortic Disease (ICAD) at SIMS Hospital is a cutting-edge treatment clinic with extensive experience treating aortic disorders. ICAD is dedicated to guiding patients through their cardiac wellness journey, from diagnosis to tailored treatment options.

#### **Risk Factors and Awareness**

Key to Prevention Aortic diseases can have genetic roots or be influenced by factors such as age, cholesterol, blood pressure, and lifestyle choices. Understanding the causes, symptoms, and impact of these conditions is the first step towards transforming lives. Regular check-ups, healthy living, and stress management are pivotal in prevention.

#### Aneurysm

Silent Threats and Early Detection Aortic aneurysms often lurk without symptoms, making early detection crucial. ICAD employs state-of-the-art diagnostic tools like CT scans and echocardiography to identify and tailor treatment plans. From routine check-ups to innovative catheter-based techniques, ICAD provides comprehensive solutions.

#### **Pectus Deformities**

Transforming Lives, One Chest at a Time Beyond cardiac conditions, ICAD also specialises in treating complex pectus deformities. Pectus Excavatum and Pectus Carinatum, affecting chest walls, can lead to self-consciousness and reduced confidence. ICAD offers noninvasive bracing options and surgical corrections like the Modified Nuss and Sandwich procedures.

#### Posture and Psychological Impact

Addressing the Whole Picture Poor posture exacerbates challenges associated with pectus deformities, impacting breathing, cardiovascular health, and psychological well-being. ICAD emphasises exercises, bracing, and surgical corrections to address these challenges comprehensively. Surgical corrections like the Modified Nuss Procedure and Sandwich Procedure boast high success rates in achieving both physical and psychological improvements. Patients often report increased self-confidence, reduced discomfort, and enhanced lung function, making total chest wall correction a pivotal part of their transformation.

#### Success Stories and Life-Altering Transformations

In a remarkable stride forward for cardiac and aortic surgery, SIMS Hospitals' Institute of Cardiac & Aortic Disorders (ICAD) team has unveiled a groundbreaking approach to the treatment of tumours in elderly patients. Their mastery of Video-Assisted Thoracoscopic Surgery (VATS) has revolutionised the management of complex thoracic diseases, offering new hope and a pathway to recovery without the burden of invasive procedures.

Through the implementation of VATS, the ICAD team has set a new standard in patient care, transcending traditional surgical practices and embracing a less intrusive approach. This revolutionary technique allows for access to the chest cavity through small incisions, minimising trauma, pain, and potential complications.

#### Dr. Ravi Pachamuthu, Chairman, SRM Group

#### Message from the Chairman

#### Dear Readers,

I am excited to share the essence of SIMS Hospitals, Chennai, through the lens of our commitment to exceptional multi-specialty healthcare. Our state-ofthe-art facility, boasting 345 beds, stands as a testament to our dedication to providing a comprehensive range of medical services.

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Institute Of Cardiac And Aortic Disorders (ICAD) SIMS Hospitals #1, Jawaharlal Nehru Salai, Vadapaani, Chennai 26. Contact no - 044 2000 2001/ 2000 2020 www.simshospitals.com





For an architectural geek like me, Rome's ancient monuments and historical palazzos are a treat to behold. However, in the southern district of EUR, I stumble upon a completely different style of architecture. Originally conceived in the 1930s by Mussolini as the site of the 1942 Esposizione Universale di Roma (hence EUR), it was abandoned when WWII broke out. It was revived when the Fascistera rationalist-style buildings and boulevards were completed. The Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana (also known as the Square Colosseum because of its symmetrical rows of 216 arches) is a must-see; the various monuments honouring the Fascists are rather Orwellian though. Mussolini also built Cinecittà, a film studio on the outskirts of the city, ostensibly to produce propaganda films. After the fall of Fascism, the sprawling studio became the hub of the Italian film industry. Today, it's transformed into a theme park of sorts, with a museum, original film sets, live shows.

Another oddity I come across while traipsing around the **Testaccio** rione (district) is the Pyramid of Cestius, constructed of brick and cement and covered in white marble. The pyramid dates between 18<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century BC and was built for a wealthy Roman magistrate. It stands at a busy junction near the Porta San Paolo Railway Station. After admiring the pyramid, I explore a cemetery nearby, which is full of ornate tombstones, including the striking Angel of Grief by American sculptor and poet William Wetmore Story, who created it as the gravestone for his wife. But more notably, the cemetery is the final resting place of the two English Romantic poets Keats and Shelley. In accordance to his wish, Keats' tombstone has no name or date, and only bears the inscription "Here lies One Whose Name was writ in Water."

But there's more to Testaccio than these offbeat sights—it is also considered to be the place where *cucina romana* was born. I begin at **Pasticceria Barberini** with the traditional Italian



TOP AND BOTTOM Rome's renowned pizzaiolo Gabriele Bonci's Pizzarium has an almost fanatical following; The focaccia panini is the Italian answer to sandwich.





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LEFT AND RIGHT If you're looking for a serene sojourn, Donna Camilla Savelli is your go-to; For all the Italian feels, try Corso 281 Luxury Suites, an 18<sup>th</sup> century mansion

breakfast of espresso and cornetto (croissant). Next door at Salumeria Volpetti, I'm gobsmacked to see their huge collection of cheese and cured meats, but particularly the range of balsamic vinegars aged between 5 and 50 years! Later, I wander over to the bustling 100-year-old Testaccio Market with stalls piled high with seasonal produce. The market is built on the location of a 2,000-yearold warehouse and you can see its excavated remains in the middle of the market, complete with shards of amphorae (porcelain containers). For lunch, I have reservations at Flavio al Velavevodetto, which is just outside the market. This old-school osteria is the place for the three classic Roman

pastas—cacio e pepe, carbonara, and amatriciana. After a hearty meal, I waddle over to the gelateria **Giolitti** (on Via Amerigo Vespucci, about 10 minutes' walk) where I get my favourite combination of pistachio and dark chocolate gelatos.

Of course, Rome's historic centre is full of restaurants and cafés, but being a very touristy area, it's surprisingly easy to have an indifferent (and even a bad) meal. I find myself returning to Armando al Pantheon (reservations required), which serves possibly the best cacio e pepe in town. It's amazing how just two ingredients-cacio (cheese) and pepe (pepper)-can result in such deliciousness! Nearby, Fiocco di neve has fantastic gelato, including vegan options. My other favourite gelateria is Otaleg!, across the River Tiber in **Trastevere**; they do some offbeat flavours and even a few savoury gelatos. Trastevere is another foodie paradise with excellent street food like supplì (deep-fried rice balls stuffed with meat sauce and cheese) at

#### TOP 3 HOTELS TO STAY AT

#### Hotel de la Ville

Located near the Spanish Steps, this luxury design hotel is housed in an 18<sup>th</sup>-century palazzo. Expect contemporary styling and sumptuous accents, plus a Sicilianinspired spa and a rooftop bar with sweeping city views.

#### Donna Camilla Savelli

Set in a 17<sup>th</sup>-century Baroque monastery, this 4-star hotel is a quiet retreat amidst the bustle of Trastevere, complete with lavish architecture, classical furnishings with draped silks and velvets, and a Renaissance-style lush courtyard overlooking Roman rooftops.

#### **Corso 281**

Well-situated on the bustling Via del Corso, this all-suite boutique hotel is housed in an 18<sup>th</sup>-century mansion and offers Rome's major attractions at your doorstep. It's quiet luxury with minimalist décor, high-end amenities, and tailored concierge services.

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Supplì Roma and trapizzino (triangular sandwich made with pizza dough and stuffed with varied ingredients like artichoke, roast vegetables, oxtail stew or tripe) at the eponymous Trapizzino. There's also excellent. rather inventive pizzas, to be had at Seu Pizza Illuminati near Trastevere. If you're hungry after visiting Vatican City, hit up celebrated chef Gabriele Bonci's Pizzarium just beyond the walls for fabulous (and organic) pizza al taglio or pizza-by-the-slice. For classic pizzas, I go to Antico Forno Roscioli near Campo de' Fiori, one of Rome's oldest food market, and end with a maritozzo (ricotta-stuffed bun) at Roscioli Caffè Pasticceria just down the road.

When it comes to drinks, my days in Rome are fuelled by coffee, usually had standing at the bar of any café, but I do make the exception at **Canova Tadolini** (in **Via del Babuino** street). This elegant café is located in the former studio of neoclassical sculptor Antonio Canova and his protégé Adamo Tadolini. I linger over my coffee while seated amidst larger-than-life sculptures—what can be a more Roman experience? Another Italian tradition that I can absolutely get behind is *aperitivo*. Since Italians traditionally dine late, the evening cocktail is accompanied by some finger food. The clinking of glasses and the aroma of *bruschetta* fill the air. The glamorous rooftop Cielo above **Hotel de la Ville** is perfect for an Aperol Spritz with a view, as is **Terrazza Borromini** atop **Eitch Borromini**, overlooking **Baroque Piazza Navona** with its Bernini fountains.

On my last morning in Rome, I go on a pre-breakfast run. It's 7 am and the city is just about waking up. Looping around the Pantheon, I stop at **Sant'Eustachio il Caffè** for an espresso and *bombolone* (custard-filled doughnut). I make my way to **Trevi Fountain** where the tourist hordes are yet to descend. As clichéd as it may sound, I toss a coin into the fountain after all, I want to ensure my return to the Eternal City. Visitors and locals bask in the Italian sun in front of a food market in Campo de' Fiori square

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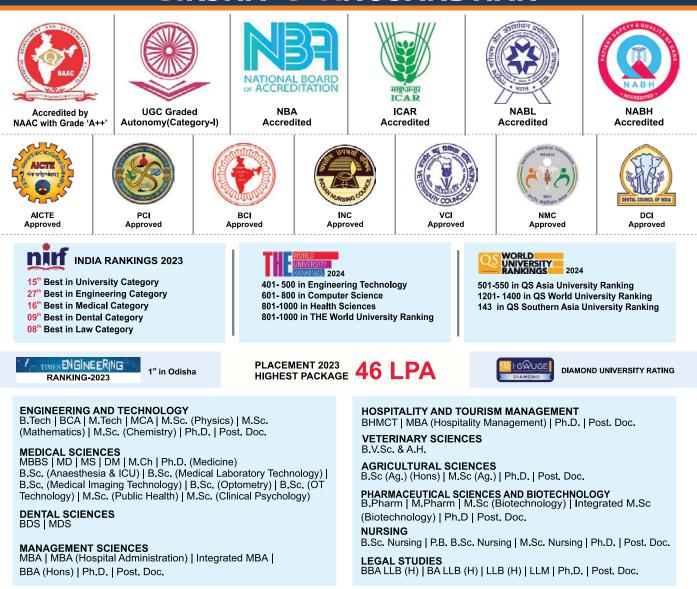
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# PRISTINE WILDERNESS

From night-time game drives and guided nature trails with experts to backwater safaris, Pench has much to offer than just the thrill of chasing the big cats

words by **Sushmita Srivastav** 





#### **CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT** A pair of Malabar pied hornbills perched on a branch; The Indian eagle-owl is a majestic inhabitant of the Park; Amidst the dense foliage, the silent guardians of the wilderness, the Indian wolves, navigate their

ancient domain with stealth.





he sky is murky and there is a thin drizzle. The jungle is mostly quiet, with just the occasional chirping of crickets and hooting of an owl breaking the deafening silence. The cold wind makes the trees sway in a rhythmic motion, their shadows rather eerie in the pitch dark. I look around to take it all in—the light shower, the silence, the sounds, the darkness. Suddenly, my eyes fall on a little flicker in the thick grass next to my feet. One close look and I can see a firefly stuck in the bush. I gently place my hand over the grass, and the little guy quickly crawls up. As soon as I get back up, it flies away into the darkness, flickering. I smile as I wave it goodbye.

Watching me, already so moved by the majestic forest, Imran, our resident naturalist at Saj in the Forest—the boutique resort I'm staying at—switches off the headlights of our SUV. My eyes get accustomed to the darkness in no time, and I look up only to find the night sky filled with twinkling stars and a whole swarm of fireflies glowing magnificently in the dark!

#### THE REAL-LIFE SETTING OF THE JUNGLE BOOK

I'm in the very heart of India, exploring a certain part of Pench National Park and Tiger Reserve on a night safari. Nestled in the southern portion of Madhya Pradesh, bordering Maharashtra, the woodlands of this popular park had inspired Rudyard Kipling to write **The Jungle Book**. An eponymous river cuts through, making Pench resplendent in endless teak wood, abundant wildlife, and



numerous watering holes that draw out wild boars, jackals, deer, leopards, and, of course, the Bengal tiger.

There are over 30 tigers scattered across the approximately 758-sq-km Pench. The park is famous for the Collarwali tigress, who passed away last year. However, sighting a solitary big cat that doesn't mind traversing long distances in search of prey, is a slow game and requires you to be absolutely discreet in your movement. During our morning game drive in the Khawasa buffer zone earlier that morning, I had locked gaze with a huge sambar, was smitten over by a family of four-horned antelopes, got our jeep chased by a wild boar, saw a majestic bison peacefully sunbathing, and spotted a gorgeous

black-winged kite soaring in the sky. But, despite several alarm calls by monkeys and deer, sadly, there was no tiger sighting.

#### **BEYOND THE BIG CATS**

While early-morning safaris are thrilling, it is when you shift your focus from the big cats and open yourself up to the other exhilarating experiences on offer, that the jungle truly takes you in and blesses you with rare encounters that may otherwise be missed. In Pench, where the striped cat sits atop the food chain, birds, prey species, bugs, and butterflies perform magnificent feats mostly overlooked by humans.

Take the night safari, for instance. Other than the flickering spectacle that the fireflies put on for us,

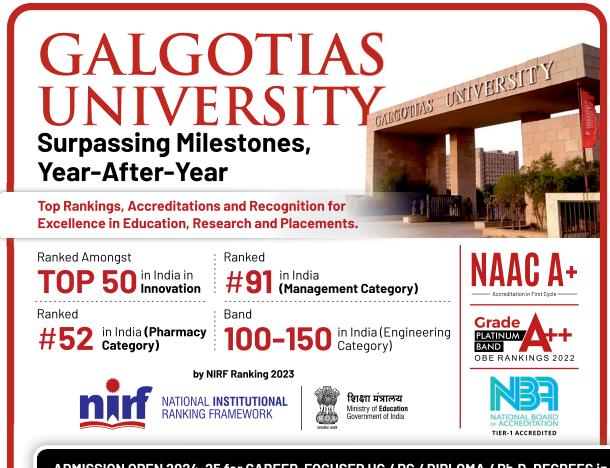


#### тор то воттом

Pench has various watering holes like this lake, which draws out the animals; A mesmerising sight in the heart of the wilderness is the Indian roller; Members of the Gond tribe dressed to perform a folk dance to celebrate



<u>How to reach?</u> The easiest way to reach Pench is to **fly to Nagpur** and then drive about two hours to the respective hotel or lodge; most of them organise pick-ups at the airport.



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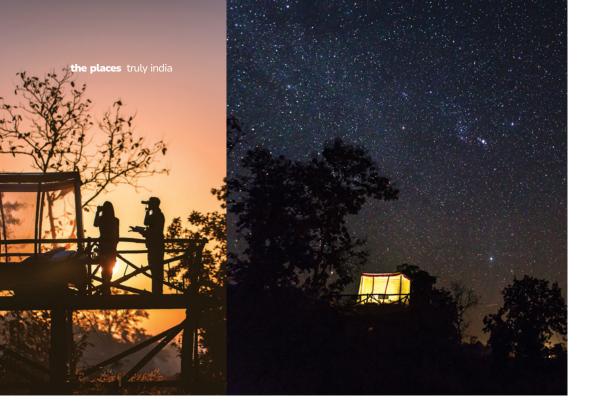


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celestial wonders under starry nights unfolded right before our eyes. No wonder, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has declared Pench the country's first-ever Dark Sky Park! I also witnessed a barn owl hunting down a rat for dinner, a giant wood spider lingering on its web's edges, and a pack of Indian wolves feasting on the carcass of a fresh kill. If you aren't exactly the adventurous kind that enjoys the company of night-time creepy crawlies, go on a guided nature walk during the day instead.

### THE BEST-KEPT SECRETS

Before I left, Imran made sure we got out of our beds at the crack of dawn, and took us around the neighbouring Kohka village, which is mostly inhabited by the Gond tribe. The village visit soon turned into a bird-watching session, as we spotted everything from an ashy drongo, white-throated kingfisher, Indian white-eye (formerly called the Oriental white-eye), to rufous treepie and wagtail. Pench has over 285 species of migratory and local birds, along with around 170 recorded types of butterflies. On our way back, we spotted three rare Malabar pied hornbills basking in the sun atop a white cherry tree.

I saved my last evening for a backwater safari in the pristine Bawanthadi river in a chappu boat. Local cheliya fish bounced in and out of the water, a group of egrets rested by the bank, and a group of langurs made the warning call again for an elusive big cat that might be lurking in the bushes not far. But I decided to save tiger spotting for next time. For now, I found my peace in sitting back, floating on the riverbed with a cup of hot coffee, watching the golden sun melt into the blue at a distance. Bliss!

## A New Book PRUDYARD KIPLING FUDYARD KIPLING KIPLINGIE BOOK Published by TPL CENTURY CO.



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** Jamtara's Star Bed concept gives you a chance to experience the forest just like the villagers have for years; The night sky is magical with the silence only punctuated by the sounds of animals; Rudyard Kipling's iconic book is said to be set in Pench; Saj Resorts' rooms offer families adjoining suites, allowing them to experience the forest as one.

GETTING THERE Air India flies to Nagpur from Mumbai. Pench is an approximate two-hour drive from

Nagpur airport.

### JUNGLE HOME

STYLISH STAYS

Saj in the Forest Base yourself here to experience uber luxury amidst wilderness. Adjoining the forest, over 32 acres of undulating land, the boutique resort offers 19 tastefully-decorated rooms and suites. Expect delectable cuisines at its flagship restaurant, rejuvenating spa therapies, and more. sajresort.com

#### <u>Jamtara</u> Wilderness Camp

Alternatively, you can pick Jamtara if you wish to spend a night in the fields on *machans* just like local villagers, keeping a watchful eye on the animals and gazing at the star-studded night sky. *jamtarawildernesscamp. com* 

#### IDEAL TIME

The best months to visit Pench are between November and March. Park timings change depending on the time of year.



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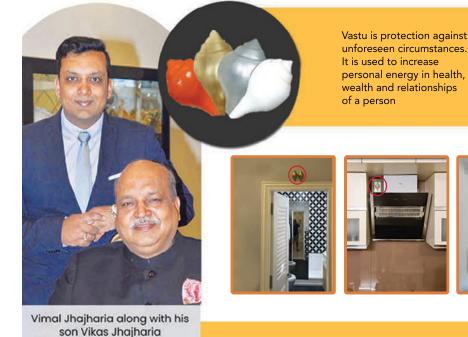
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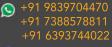
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# RAINFOREST ODYSSEY

A two-hour drive from Shillong, Cherrapunji (Sohra) immerses you in an all-natural, Khasi adventure encompassing lush rainforests, cascading waterfalls, and deep caves

words by Aparna Pednekar

### ⑦ 7:30AM

Start the day, the Khasi way Sohra House

Fuel up for an exciting itinerary with Naga Chilli Toast and scrambled eggs from the breakfast buffet at Sohra House. The high-ceilinged fine dining restaurant at Polo Orchid Resort offers a breathtaking view of the Seven Sisters Falls from its courtyard. If you're returning for dinner, remember to pig out on their Smoke-Dried Pork.

## 9:00AM Plunge into fables Noh Ka Likai

India's tallest plunge waterfall cascades from approx. 1,000 feet into a glorious turquoise pool. Named after a tragic local legend, Noh Ka Likai (where Likai jumped) pays homage to a mother who plunged into the valley in horror after being fed her own child in a curry cooked by her jealous husband. Although clear sightings are not always a guarantee owing to the misty weather, adventurers can embark on a thrilling trek.

# 10:00AM Spelunk into nature Mawsmai Cave

Mawsmai may well be the gentlest start to your spelunking (cave walking) expeditions in Meghalaya. A pleasant forest walk brings you to the mouth of the limestone caves, from where you'll have to bend, crawl and squeeze through a fascinating labyrinth of underground passages with stalactites, stalagmites, pools, fossils and incredible natural light formations.

## 11:30AM Rekindle the faith Nongsawlia Church

On 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1941, Rev. Thomas Jones and his wife arrived at Sohra, via erstwhile Calcutta. Despite a cold reception and incessant rainfall, he learnt the language, founded the Khasi script, opened three schools in the region, and built the Nongsawlia Presbyterian Church, one of the first in northeast India. About 10 minutes from Mawsmai, the church is a great site to observe locals doff their hats to Sohra's history.



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TOP AND BOTTOM Noh Ka Likai Falls is the tallest plunge waterfall in India; U Mawdohnud, a heart-shaped natural carving on a rock face, is very popular at the Garden of Caves.



Air India flies to Guwahati from Delhi, Kolkata, Imphal, and Dimapur. Cherrapunji is an approximate 4.5hour drive from Guwahati Airport.

### STYLISH STAYS

1/ Cafe Cherrapunjee Resort, a colonial era dak bungalow-turned-hotel, offers the quaint charm of an English countryside inn.

2/ A suite with a balcony and Jacuzzi at the **Jiva Resort** places you inthe heart of Sohra.

**3**/ **Polo Orchid Resort** boasts of chic log huts, multiple restaurants, and an infinity pool and spa.

# ひ 1:00PM Zip over the mountains Ø Mawkdok-Dympep Valley

Book a zip-lining slot at Mawkdok with Pioneer Adventure Tours. Four well-manned lines send you swinging 1,200 feet above misty mountaintops, lush forests and waterfalls. After the adrenaline rush, chow down dishes like *jadoh* (staple meat and rice dish) and *dohkhleh* (pork and onion salad) at Cafe Cherrapunjee.

# 2:00PM Walk across a living legend

© Umkar river

An alternative to the famous trek to Umshiang Double-Decker Root Bridge is the 54ft (approx.) single-tier bridge over Umkar river in Siej village that can be accessed via 2.9km hike from Laitkynsew village. **Bio-engineering marvels** that date back over 250 years, Meghalaya's living suspension bridges were created out of the secondary aerial roots of the rubber fig tree by the Khasi villagers.

### () 4:00PM Stroll in a

magical garden © Laitmawsiang

Tucked into the dense emerald foliages in the hamlet of Laitmawsiang—one of Meghalaya's best kept secrets—is Garden of Caves, acres of prehistoric natural wonderland. Take the bamboo trail to marvel at waterfalls, ponds, freshwater streams, and caves.

# ● 6:30PM Raise a toast to Cherrapunji Ø Jiva Grill

A minute's walk from then Sohra Golf Range (ask any local), Jiva Grill offers scenic valley views accompanied by an array of meat and vegetables skewers sizzling right at your table, fine wine and occasional live music. Along with classic North Indian kebabs and mains, the steamed fish wrapped in banana leaf and pork chops are particularly delectable.

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# PREPARING TO ASCEND

**"THE FIRST SIX MONTHS OF OUR** JOURNEY HAS ENGAGED AND UNITED AIR INDIANS BEHIND A COMMON CAUSE, AND MADE GREAT STRIDES IN TACKLING MANY ISSUES THAT HAD BUILT UP OVER THE YEARS. WE HAVE ALSO COME A LONG WAY IN ESTABLISHING OUR FOUNDATIONS. OUR RECORD-SETTING AIRCRAFT ORDER, THE COMMITMENT OF US\$400 MILLION FOR REFURBISHING EXISTING WIDE-BODY AIRCRAFT, AND INVESTMENT OF **US\$200 MILLION IN NEW INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ARE BUT A FEW OF THE** SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENTS BEING MADE TO RESTORE AIR INDIA TO THE UPPER ECHELONS OF GLOBAL AVIATION. ALL **AIR INDIANS ARE GRATEFUL TO OUR** PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS AS WE CONTINUE THIS JOURNEY."

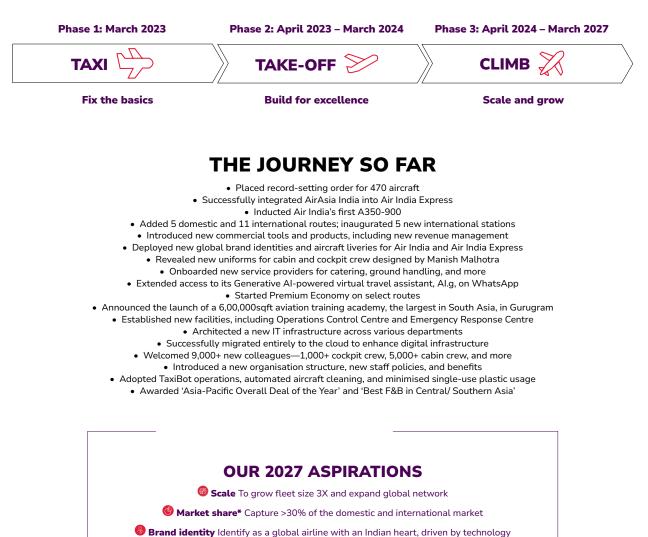
> - MR. CAMPBELL WILSON AIR INDIA CEO AND MD

n 2022, Air India had launched its five-year transformation programme, Vihaan.Al, with a vision to become a 'World-Class Global Airline with an Indian Heart'. *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 looking forward to achieving 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, Mr. Campbell Wilson, along with the senior management, unveiled the Vihaan.AI plan with milestones focussing on dramatically growing Air India's network and fleet, and developing a completely revamped customer proposition. The transformation roadmap is built around five key pillarsexceptional 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 after the Q1 of 2024.

# TRANSFORMATION AGENDA



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Employee experience Become India's most preferred employer in the travel industry

\*Group airlines combined share

# LOVE IS IN THE AIR

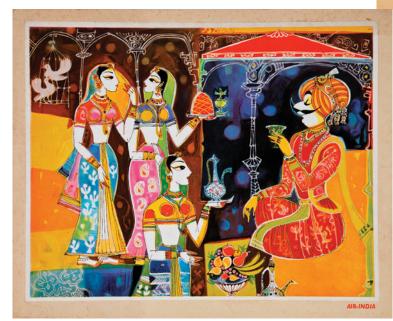
The Maharaja captivated hearts worldwide, sharing love and joy through new-found connections





he iconic Maharaja transcended boundaries, captivating hearts aross the world with his charm and charisma. Adored by all from everywhere, he became a symbol of affection and hospitality. With Air India's new route connectivity, The Maharaja embarked on a mission to spread love and warmth, uniting cultures and bridging continents. From bustling cities to serene landscapes, his presence brought smiles and a sense of connection, making Air India not just an airline but a carrier of love and friendship across the skies.







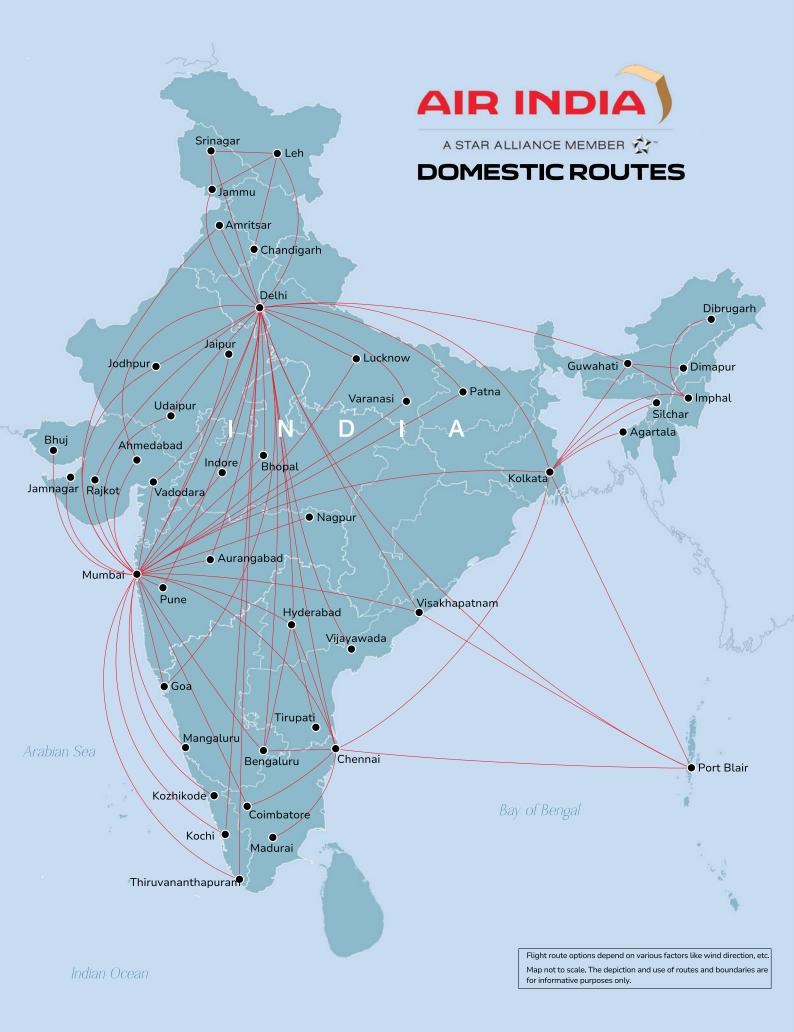
# **PROUD WINGS**

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





\*Total fleet number as on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2024







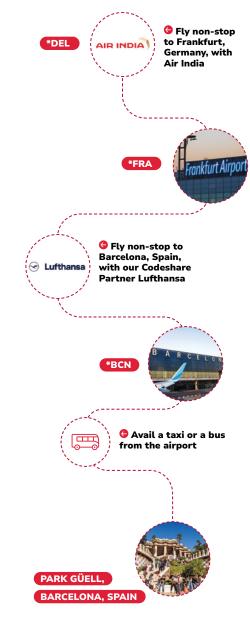
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\*DEL: Indira Gandhi International Airport (Delhi Airport), Delhi; FRA: Flughafen Frankfurt Main (Frankfurt Airport), Germany; **BCN**: Josep Tarradellas Barcelona-El Prat Airport, Spain.

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Croatia Airlines

SWISS

LOT Polish Airlines

Qatar Airways

Oantas

Royal Air Maroc



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Guests, including aviation and travel vlogger, Sam Chui, at Air India's first Airbus A350's inaugural flight from Mumbai to Chennai and Chennai to Bengaluru; Air India's 6,00,000-sg ft training academy in Gurugram will train over 50,000 aviation professionals.



### **FUTURE READY**

Air India recently announced the launch of a 6,00,000-sq ft integrated aviation training academy, the largest in South Asia, in Gurugram, India. The academy is another significant step in Air India's ongoing transformation and will power the growth of India's aviation ecosystem over the coming years. The announcement was made last month at the Wings India 2024.

# WELCOME

On 22<sup>nd</sup> January, Air India operated three commercial flights (Bengaluru-Mumbai, Chennai-Bengaluru, and Mumbai-Chennai) with India's first Airbus A350-900-also the first aircraft in the new bold Air India livery. The aircraft, featuring three-class cabin configuration with 316 seats, was on static display at the recently-held Wings India Global Aviation Summit 2024 in Hyderabad for visitors to tour. Here is a glimpse... 🕏



#### AIR INDIA EXTENDS SERVICES ON WHATSAPP

Air India has extended access to its Generative AI-powered virtual travel assistant, AI.g, on WhatsApp. The multilingual (Hindi, English, French, and German) chatbot's accessibility allows guests to question on 1,300+ travel-related topics and access numerous features, including real-time flight status, e-boarding pass, and seat selection. Guests can chat with Al.g at +91 96670 34444.

# WINGS INDIA 2024









**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** Air India CEO and MD, Mr. Campbell Wilson (left) with Minister of Civil Aviation, Mr. Jyotiraditya Scindia (right), who unveiled the first A350 at the Wings India 2024; Visitors discovering assets of the new branding at the Air India Chalet & Experience Centre; Mr Wilson greeting Minister of State for Civil Aviation, Gen. (Dr.) V. K. Singh (Retd.) at the event; Classy interiors of the new aircraft; The seats in the new Airbus A350 offer more lar craft; The seats in the new Airbus A350 offer more leg space; Air India cabin crew members, donning the airline's new uniform, welcome visitors on the Airbus A350-900.







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### YOUR ATTENTION, PLEASE

### DIGIYATRA

नागर विमानन मंत्रालय द्वारा 13 एयरपोर्टस्—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 एयरपोर्टस् पर र्निबाध और बाधारहित यात्रा का अनुभव करे।

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 शूरू किया है, जो की भारत के नेतृत्व वाला वैश्विक जन आंदोलन है। आइए हम सभी प्रो-प्लैनेट एक्शन लेने का संकल्प ले, 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 हैं 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
d) Real-time flight status and detailed flight schedule.
Air Sewa is available at

airsewa.gov.in.



### AN ARTIST'S ABODE

Fashion designer **Anupamaa Dayal** on learning about local crafts in Gaziantep, Turkey



### **MY LOCAL EXPERIENCE**

Nature and crafts fascinate me, and Gaziantep is a haven for the latter. Artisans here make the most beautiful handicrafts out of copper. The place is also rich in textile and leather crafts, and it's a food lover's paradise too, sure to delight foodies.

### AN UNFORGETTABLE MEMORY

Trying my hand at copper craft and learning how to make *katmer*, a Turkish sweet treat. I also gained insight into *kilims*, traditional hand-woven carpets. What touched me most, however, were the people, and their affectionate and welcoming nature.

### A FARE TO REMEMBER

Gaziantep is known for pistachios, so savouring a baklava there was a given. But my favourite has to be the Ali Nazik kebab delicious, juicy kebab served on a bed of eggplant; have it at Halil Usta.

### I RECOMMEND

Don't miss the local bazaars for their vibrancy and the range of products on offer; pick up some souvenirs here. The pistachio coffee is a must-have when in Gaziantep.



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