

NEXT DESTINATION

Volume 1 | Issue 1
July 2025
INR 250



Monsoon Magic
Season's Best Getaways

OTA vs Direct
The Real Booking Battle

Hot List 2025:
20 Destinations That
Deserve a Spot on
Your Radar

 Great Zimbabwe

Experience 
ZIMBABWE

Our Grand Heritage

www.zimbabwetourism.net



CHILLARU

SPA & RESORT



For reservations

call 9218611101 | 01792-298933

CONTENTS



09

Global vision, local impact
Sanjeev Mehra on what's next for SKAL International

16

Second cities rising : The quiet revolution of
India's emerging travel hotspots

19

Monsoon mood board : Offbeat escapes for the soul

21

Everything you need to know about
Shipki La Pass

23

Coastal calm and mountain zen : Thailand's new
travel map

27

July's Summer Passport : Must-attend experiences
and what's ahead in August

30

Chase the magic: 20 incredible places to
explore this year

43

What the world is posting
A scroll through the global feed

45

Talk like a traveller : When in Japan

Next Destination Team

Publisher and Editor-in-Chief
Ayushi Anand

Editor
Veenu Anand

Editorial Team
Daisy Saxena
Ami Shah
Shafika Sengupta

Design
Jiyaur Rehman

Sales & Marketing
Sunil Anand
Anuj Kumar
Rajni Malhotra

Head Office
B-23 Gulmohar Park,
New Delhi - 110049
RNI/DLENG/25/AO249

Material appearing in the magazine cannot be reproduced in whole or in part(s) without prior permission.

The publisher assumes no responsibility for material lost or damaged in transit.

Printed by : Avyukta Print 'n' Pack
Basement, C-38, Okhla Industrial area
Phase -I, Delhi- 110020

Published by: Ayushi Anand on behalf of Ayushi Anand,
Printed at New Delhi and published at B-23 Gulmohar Park.

Letter from the

Editor-in-Chief

Next Destination is your passport to places, people and possibilities that spark the spirit of discovery. This magazine was born on a boarding pass and brewed over conversations in airport lounges, mountain cafés and midnight tuk-tuk rides. It's for the curious heart, the carry-on dreamer and anyone who believes the best stories begin with a map and an open mind.

In our debut issue, we focus on the second cities quietly stealing the show, explore monsoon escapes that feel like secrets and take you inside the suitcase of a spirits connoisseur who lives half his life in airport terminals.

You'll find untranslatable words, mood boards made from real-time digital wanderlust and the global festivals lighting up the calendar. And don't miss 'Talk like a traveller', our monthly love letter to untranslatable words from around the world because sometimes, a single phrase can say more than a whole itinerary.

What to look forward to? Honest travel. That's our promise. No over-filtered sunsets. Just global perspective and stories that make you want to book a ticket. We bring you the real, the soulful, the offbeat and the unforgettable.

So wherever you're headed, even if it's just a mental vacation between meetings, flip a page. We'll meet you at your next destination!
Safe travels.

Ayushi Anand

Ayushi Anand

#NextDestinationGoals on

  @nextdestinationmagazine

 www.nextdestination.co





OTA vs direct bookings

What's working?

Ayushi Anand

Margins, discoverability and conversion strategies in 2025's ever-evolving travel landscape.

The big booking question

The tug-of-war between OTAs (Online Travel Agencies) and direct bookings isn't new—but in 2025, it's more nuanced than ever. Travel has surged back, consumers are smarter and tech is easier to use than before. But for every property, airline or DMC, the question remains: where is the most value being booked and at what cost?

Is direct really better for margins? Do OTAs still rule discoverability? And how do travellers decide when to click 'Book

Now?'

We asked hoteliers, agents, platform leaders and marketing strategists and the verdict is layered.

Margins vs marketing muscle

Let's be clear: direct bookings deliver better margins. Every OTA commission—ranging from 12–25 per cent comes straight out of the seller's profit. But it's also OTAs that bring in volume, exposure and trust—especially for independent properties or niche tour operators.

"While OTA platforms provide valuable reach and volume, they come at the cost

of high commission rates typically ranging from 12 to 18 per cent, and a more limited engagement with guests, as the communication is handled indirectly. Furthermore, third-party promotional offers—such as those provided by banks or card partners—may dilute brand loyalty as the guest is retained through external benefits rather than our own offerings," said Anuj Soin, General Manager, Radisson Blu Hotel, New Delhi, Pachim Vihar.

In 2025, most travel businesses are now using a hybrid strategy:

- Relying on OTAs for visibility and last-minute inventory clearance.



- Using loyalty offers and CRM tools to push returning guests toward direct.

2025 Snapshot: Who books where?

According to navan.com (A business travel and expense management platform) and Skift Analysis below is how the travellers are booking.

- **Budget travellers:** 70 per cent OTA.
- **Luxury travellers:** 55 per cent direct (influenced by concierge services and perks).
- **Solo millennials:** OTA or aggregator apps (Ixigo, Hopper, etc.).
- **Gen Z:** Increasing use of social-first links (IG DMs, WhatsApp, Telegram channels).

For businesses, the math is shifting

- If OTA brings volume but low retention = use as 'top-of-funnel'.
- If direct brings repeat guests = invest in service, post-sale engagement and perks.

Stressing on complimentary room upgrades (subject to availability), inclusive buffet breakfast packages, early check-in and late check-out flexibility, airport transfers and dining discounts, exclusive access to loyalty points and member-only rates, Soin said, "These



Anuj Soin

“ Direct bookings still remains the most profitable business for the hotel. 48 per cent of the business is from direct bookings. Our endeavour and the marketing efforts are to enhance the conversion for direct booking though we cannot ignore the presence of the online market and we leverage this by having competitive deals across all the portals including the brand website. We ensure we neither miss the visibility or volume coming from the third party partners as we continue growing our direct share. ”

value-adds are most effective when communicated through our direct booking channels, such as the brand website, loyalty app and in-house reservations team. Not only do they drive conversions, but they also allow for personalised guest communication, which contributes to higher satisfaction and retention.”

Discoverability: Still the OTA edge

OTAs still dominate when it comes to first- time discoverability.

They have:

- High SEO and SEM spend.
- Price comparison tools.
- Verified reviews.
- Filters that help travellers narrow down based on mood, amenities and price.

Platforms like Booking.com, MakeMyTrip and Agoda continue to be default for travellers who don't know what they want—yet.



The Insider Edit

But this is also where meta-search engines (like Google Travel, Trivago and Kayak) and social platforms are slowly eroding OTA monopoly. Many users now search on Google and head straight to the hotel's website.

"Face to a relationship is always a big plus. OTAs make you feel in command to take your own decisions with technology and thus have big volumes. The problems arise with schedule changes or during refunds. Then people often refer to their old friendly travel agent," said Anil Kalsi, Vice President, TAFI.

Conversion: Where direct wins

Once a traveller has shortlisted a property or tour:

- 65 per cent will visit the brand's website.
- 40 per cent will check Google Reviews and Instagram.
- Only 35 per cent will book on the OTA if the brand site offers value.

Direct conversions improve when:

- Site is fast and mobile-friendly.
- Price parity (or a minor edge) is maintained.
- Perks are offered (free breakfast, room upgrade, flexible cancellation).

B2B breakdown: Strategy by sector

For hotels

- Use OTAs for filling unsold rooms during off-peak days or shoulder seasons.
- Drive direct through loyalty clubs, QR-code based rebooking and post

stay email offers.

Tools to consider:

- STAAH, Djubo and eZee for inventory syncing and auto-responders.
- Revinate or HubSpot for direct marketing and retention.

Airline

- Direct bookings dominate here due to app stickiness (IndiGo, Air India, AirAsia have strong native apps).
- However, multi-airline itineraries still get booked via aggregators like Ixigo and Cleartrip.

Tours and activities

- Here, direct is winning—especially for niche, experience-led operators.
- Travellers often find them via Instagram, Airbnb Experiences or curated blogs.

What's working in direct strategy (and what isn't)

- WhatsApp-based booking journeys (quote, payment, ticket).
- Personalised email funnels post-OTA stay.
- Clickable Instagram Shops with booking links.
- Google Business integration for instant booking buttons.

Not working:

- Clunky booking engines on brand websites.
- Requiring email IDs just to see prices.
- No UPI payment options.

- 'Call us for booking' in 2025—think again?

Think like a funnel, not a fight

It's no longer OTA vs direct. Its OTA and direct—used at different stages of the booking journey.

Start with discoverability through OTAs. Move to conversion and retention through your own channels. Layer with social proof and personalisation. And most of all, track the data.

"We used to see OTAs as competition. Now we see them as partners in lead generation," says Rehan Desai, founder of a mid-size outbound travel firm in Mumbai.

In a digital-first world, the smartest travel sellers aren't picking a side—they're optimising both.



Anil Kalsi

“ The outbound travel demand is huge and enough to give business to OTAs and travel consultants and agents. Everyone gets their share and the business is fine according to the market segment and the size of operation. ”



Global vision, local impact

Sanjeev Mehra

on what's next for SKÅL International

Ayushi Anand



Sanjeev Mehra

With over 12,000 members in 80+ countries, SKAL International has long championed the spirit of global friendship and collaboration in tourism. At its core is a mission to connect industry professionals across borders - from travel agents to hoteliers, tour operators to tourism boards. Leading this legacy into a new era is Sanjeev Mehra, the first Vice-President of SKAL International.

As the travel industry navigates rapid change, we discuss with Mehra, SKAL's evolving role, his strategic priorities and how the organisation is staying relevant in a world where community, sustainability and innovation matter more than ever.

SKÅL is one of the oldest global tourism networks. Under your leadership, how is

the organisation evolving to remain relevant in today's fast-changing travel landscape?

We're expanding strategically with one club in every state and Union Territory, ensuring leadership engagement. By embracing sustainability, digital relevance and youth leadership, we're staying future-ready.

How does SKÅL International foster collaboration between its members across different countries and sectors, especially post-pandemic, when recovery strategies vary globally?

We are strengthening cross-border collaboration through hybrid networking, knowledge exchange and active participation in global forums like the Skål Asia Congress. Our unity defines our resilience.

One of SKÅL's core pillars is 'Doing business among friends.' How do you balance this friendly ethos with the growing need for structured, results-driven partnerships in travel and tourism?

Trust-based friendships drive real business outcomes. We're professionalising our approach with strategic alliances while preserving the warmth that makes Skål unique.

With sustainability becoming central to tourism, what steps is SKÅL taking to support or recognise sustainable travel initiatives among its members?

We champion green travel, net-zero initiatives and responsible tourism. Our Sustainable Tourism Awards and local projects amplify these values across all clubs.

Young professionals are reshaping travel.

What is SKÅL doing to attract and retain next-gen tourism leaders within the organisation?

We're aggressively onboarding Young Skål, mentoring them and integrating them into leadership pipelines. They're the force behind our continued evolution.

How does SKÅL leverage its vast network to influence tourism policy at a governmental or international level?

We work closely with state and central tourism bodies, offering grassroots insights. Our collective voice supports inclusive policy shaping.

What role can SKÅL play in promoting lesser-known destinations and second cities?

We promote local tourism through every club, supporting sustainability. Our aim is to boost local economies while easing pressure on hotspots.

With AI and digital tools transforming travel, how is SKÅL adapting its networking education, or member engagement models?

We're digitising engagement through virtual meets, knowledge platforms and AI-powered collaboration tools.

How important is SKÅL's role in bridging public-private sector gaps in tourism?

We play a pivotal role in connecting government with industry through tourism conclaves and policy forums.

Looking ahead, what are your top priorities for SKÅL in the next two years?

We aim to remain the world's largest National Committee with a club in every state/UT. Hosting the Skål International India Congress in Mumbai will define our strategic movement.



Jamaica Tourism launches

'70 Days of Jamaica Love'

to celebrate 70 years



Donovan White

Celebrating 70 years of excellence in tourism, The Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB) has launched '70 Days of Jamaica Love' campaign.

The campaign lasts all summer offering travellers exclusive deals on hotels, experiences, dining and attractions

aiming to boost arrivals and tourism spending.

"The 70 Days of Jamaica Love campaign is our way of thanking travellers and industry partners who have been part of this incredible journey. By creating these attractive offers, we aim to make summer travel more rewarding while showcasing the very best of Jamaican hospitality" said Donovan White, Director of Tourism, Jamaica.

The campaign promises special discounts for more than 50 hotels, along with deals at popular attractions, restaurants and even on transport and tours, making it a great value for both first-time and repeat visitors.

Jamaica witnessed an increase of 33.6 per cent in Caribbean arrivals in the first quarter, receiving approximately 1.58 million visitors between January and

April, with projections indicating sustained growth through the summer and winter periods. Tourism earnings are expected to surpass 4.5 million, supported by group travel, cruise tourism and increasing interest from non-traditional markets by the end of the year.

Further strengthening its tourism product, Jamaica is also developing a national entertainment policy to position music, festivals and creative industries as the main pillars of its tourism economy. This new policy will seek to connect these experiences more strategically with the tourism product, ensuring consistent quality, safety and promotional reach. Events such as Reggae Sumfest, Dream Weekend and Carnival in Jamaica will now benefit from greater investment, regulation and global promotion.

MICEverse appointed India representative for JA Resorts & Hotels



Ralph Porciani

In a significant move to strengthen its footprint in the Indian outbound market, JA Resorts & Hotels, a leading hospitality brand based in the UAE, has appointed MICEverse, the specialist MICE vertical of One Rep Global, as its exclusive India representative. The collaboration is poised to drive weddings, incentives and group travel experiences from India to JA's portfolio across the UAE and the Maldives.

As the demand continues to surge across destination weddings, MICE events and luxury leisure group travel from India, this partnership underscores JA's strategic commitment to tapping into one of the world's most high-potential outbound markets. MICEverse will lead brand development and representation efforts through a targeted 360-degree approach—building top-of-mind awareness among India's wedding planners, corporate decision-makers and premium travel designers.

Founded in 1981 and named after the iconic Jebel Ali Beach Hotel, JA Resorts & Hotels has grown into a distinctive collection of seven properties spanning beach escapes, mountain resorts, urban stays and a private island retreat in the Maldives.

UAE Portfolio Highlights:

JA The Resort, Jebel Ali: Featuring three unique experiences- JA Beach Hotel, JA Palm Tree Court (all-suite) and JA Lake View Hotel, which also houses Kinara by Vikas Khanna, a favourite among Indian wedding and celebration planners.

JA Ocean View Hotel: Located along the vibrant JBR promenade with uninterrupted views of the Arabian Gulf.

JA Hatta Fort Hotel: A mountain resort ideal for nature-based group retreats and wellness experiences.

The Manor by JA: A contemporary business hotel near the Jebel Ali Free Zone and key logistics hubs.

The upcoming JA Sports & Shooting Club, located within JA The Resort, will further elevate the brand's appeal among sports and incentive groups. This first-of-its-kind facility includes floodlit football fields, world-class cricket pitches and an indoor shooting range.

Maldives offering:

JA Manafaru: A secluded private island in the Haa Alifu Atoll, ideal for honeymoons, full-island buyouts or high-end leisure travellers seeking privacy and barefoot luxury.

Ralph Porciani, CEO of JA Resorts & Hotels, said, "India is a market of immense strategic importance. With MICEverse's expertise, we are confident



Hemant Mediratta

of engaging more deeply with Indian travellers who value immersive, personalised experiences. Our properties offer the ideal settings for celebrations, corporate getaways and family holidays—just a short flight away."

Hemant Mediratta, Founder & CEO, One Rep Global, added: "JA Resorts & Hotels is a perfect fit for Indian groups seeking unforgettable moments. MICEverse is committed to delivering unmatched access and visibility for the brand within India's fast-growing outbound sector."

The partnership is timely as JA gears up for growth, supported by GHA Discovery loyalty benefits, the revival of Palm Jebel Ali and the development surrounding Al Maktoum International Airport—making Jebel Ali one of Dubai's most promising upcoming destinations.



JA Hatta Fort Hotel

FLY91 launches direct flights from Sindhudurg to Hyderabad and Bengaluru; new coach service boosts connectivity to Goa



FLY91 continues to expand its regional reach with the launch of direct flights from Sindhudurg to Hyderabad and Bengaluru.

Operating four times a week, these new routes complement the existing Sindhudurg–Pune service, significantly enhancing air access to South Maharashtra and nearby North Goa.

To support seamless travel for passengers heading to Goa, Sindhudurg Airport has introduced a complimentary air-conditioned coach service exclusively for FLY91 passengers. The initiative, backed by FLY91, connects the airport directly to Panaji, offering a convenient

surface transfer for both domestic tourists and business travellers.

Designed to improve last-mile connectivity, the 20-seater coach will operate daily, taking passengers through the picturesque Konkan landscape. It's aimed at easing travel for flyers from Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Pune who are headed to Goa—a major leisure hub located within easy reach of the Sindhudurg terminal.

Captain Jai Singh Sadana, Chief Adviser and Head – Sindhudurg Airport, said, “This premium coach service closes the gap between Sindhudurg and Goa. We're addressing a key challenge in regional

aviation—accessibility beyond the airport. The service will initially be free of charge, with nominal pricing introduced later.”

Commenting on the airline's broader vision, Manoj Chacko, MD and CEO of FLY91, added “Our mission is to connect the unconnected by making regional air travel seamless right through to the last mile. These new routes and services are a step toward unlocking the full potential of India's tier-2 and tier-3 destinations.”

With competitive launch fares and improved multimodal access, Sindhudurg is fast emerging as a strategic gateway for travellers exploring the Konkan coast and beyond.

Saudia records 34 per cent brand growth, climbs global rankings



Khaled Tash

Saudia, the national carrier of Saudi Arabia, has recorded a major leap in its global brand valuation, reaching \$1.1 billion—a 34 per cent increase compared to the previous year. The milestone highlights the airline's successful transformation journey and strategic positioning within the international aviation landscape.

According to Brand Finance's 2025 Airline Brand Valuation Report, Saudia now ranks #32 among the world's top airline brands. The independent consultancy evaluated brand strength based on a combination of financial performance, strategic initiatives, customer perception and market influence.

The growth is credited to several high-impact developments, including Saudia Group's recent mega-order for 105 Airbus aircraft, which marks one of the region's largest fleet expansion efforts. Additional factors contributing to the rise include the airline's Skytrax recognition as the 'World's Most Improved Airline (2024)', consistently high 'On-Time Performance' (OTP) and multiple global accolades for



service and guest experience.

Among its standout marketing initiatives is the BLVD Runway, an immersive aviation-themed attraction launched in Riyadh, which has generated unprecedented consumer engagement and brand visibility across the Kingdom.

"Crossing the \$1 billion mark in brand value is more than a number—it reflects the trust our guests place in us and the ambition we bring to every facet of our business," said Khaled Tash, Chief Marketing Officer, Saudia Group. "We're driving innovation not just in operations, but in how aviation connects people,

culture and experiences.

"Saudia made its debut in the Brand Finance Top 50 Airline Brands list in 2021 with a valuation of \$506 million. In just four years, the brand has more than doubled its value, signalling sustained momentum and robust market confidence in the airline's direction.

For travel trade stakeholders, Saudia's continued ascent represents new opportunities across MICE, leisure and religious tourism segments—especially as Saudi Arabia positions itself as a major global travel hub under its Vision 2030 agenda.



Ethiopian Airlines strengthens it's network in India with the launch of Hyderabad route



Mesfin Tasew

Ethiopian Airlines has launched a new passenger service to Hyderabad, India, on June 16, 2025. The thrice-weekly flights were inaugurated with a vibrant ceremony at Addis Ababa Bole International Airport, attended by senior government officials, ambassadors, distinguished guests and members of the aviation community. This new route underscores the airline's commitment to strengthening connectivity between Africa and India and beyond offering passengers more convenient travel options.

The new flight will operate three days a week as per the schedule below.

ET 682 Addis Ababa (ADD) to Hyderabad (HYD) – Mon, Wed, Sat

ET 683 Hyderabad (HYD) to Addis Ababa (ADD) – Tue, Thu, Sat

While officially launching the new route, Mesfin Tasew, Group CEO of Ethiopian Airlines, remarked, "We are pleased to



commence this new passenger service to Hyderabad, the sixth destination Ethiopian operates in India. We believe that beyond providing air transportation service, this new flight will play a pivotal role in strengthening trade and tourism ties between the two regions."

Tasew further stated, "This route offers convenient passenger transport services and Ethiopian will continue exploring new opportunities to expand its network

in India and the region. As the continent's top carrier with wide connectivity and world-class service, we remain dedicated to meeting the growing demand and fostering stronger partnerships across borders."

Ethiopian Airlines is currently providing over fifty weekly dedicated passenger and cargo flight services to five Indian cities; Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Ahmedabad and Chennai.





#uttarakhandhomestay



An escape for
Nature Lovers



For Reservation

Call +91 98100 60180

www.nivritisummitview.com



Second cities rising

The quiet revolution of India's emerging travel hotspots

Ami Shah

For years, Indian travel narratives have revolved around the familiar - the street food of Delhi, the glamour of Mumbai, the beaches of Goa and the backwaters of Kerala.

But as travel becomes more democratised and infrastructure spreads its wings beyond the metros, a quieter, compelling shift is underway. India's second cities—once viewed as transit points or business hubs—are fast becoming destinations in their own right.

From Indore's street food culture to Kochi's art renaissance and Nagpur's tiger trail junctions to Bhubaneswar's smart

city charm, the new wave of Indian travel is being defined by cities that are thriving just under the spotlight.

What's fuelling the rise?

Infrastructure and accessibility

The UDAN scheme, regional airport upgrades, better highways and improved rail networks have unlocked easier access to tier-2 cities. Direct flights to Surat, Vadodara, Ranchi and Coimbatore are now regular, with low-cost carriers targeting these routes aggressively.

Digital discoverability

Instagram, YouTube and travel vlogging

have become powerful equalisers. A well-shot reel from Cuttack's silver filigree lanes or Pondicherry's Tamil quarter cafés can now draw as much attention as a sunset in Santorini. OTA platforms are also algorithmically surfacing these lesser-known destinations more frequently.

New traveller mindsets

Millennials and Gen Z aren't looking for the overdone. They crave authenticity, novelty and affordability. A long weekend in Madurai or Shillong now competes directly with traditional beach getaways. Even honeymooners and solo travellers

**Sarafa Bazaar**

are veering toward second cities for more offbeat, customisable experiences.

City spotlights: India's rising travel destinations

Indore, Madhya Pradesh

Once a sleepy business city, Indore is emerging as a culinary and cultural magnet. India's cleanest city (for six years running) boasts a vibrant street food scene at Sarafa and Chappan, colonial architecture and its proximity to Mandu and Maheshwar. With Indigo and AirAsia

increasing connections, the city is primed for growth.

Kochi, Kerala

Beyond Fort Kochi's charm lies a thriving contemporary art and design scene. With events like the Kochi-Muziris Biennale and a network of concept cafés, galleries and boutique stays, Kochi is transitioning into South India's creative capital.

Nagpur, Maharashtra

Known as India's orange city, Nagpur is becoming a base for tiger tourism, given

**Saurabh Srivastava**

“Religious tourism is on the rise and is also one of prime reasons for travellers to visit these cities. “The tourism in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh are on the rise due to the Jyotirlingas. Another city which is gaining popularity is Orchha which is near Jhansi. It is mostly visited for the Ram Raja Temple especially by the foreigners,” said Saurabh Srivastava, Founder, Parul Travels, a travel agency based in Madhya Pradesh.”

**Rajwada Palace**



Gandhi Hall

its proximity to Pench, Tadoba and Kanha reserves. Upcoming safari lodges, craft tours and airport expansion are driving travel trade interest here.

Bhubaneswar, Odisha



Once a purely spiritual stop, Odisha's capital is now a smart city with growing urban appeal. Clean, green and rich in culture, it's drawing both pilgrims and culture vultures. Plus, it's the perfect base to explore Puri, Konark and the lesser-known Chilika islands.

What does this mean for tourism?

New demand, new inventory

Small operators and DMCs are quickly creating new packages tailored to the cultural and nature-based experiences in

these cities. Demand for boutique stays, heritage walks, food tours and art trails is rising.

State tourism push

States like Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat are investing in domestic tourism campaigns targeting young Indians and small-town explorers. There's an opportunity here for OTAs, influencers and experience designers to co-create.

Incentive and bleisure travel

With many of these second cities also being industrial or IT hubs, the line between business and leisure is blurring.

The Future: Hyperlocal and sustainable

The growth of second cities aligns well with the broader push for sustainable travel. Smaller crowds, local economies and slower travel rhythms make these destinations ideal for long-term, low-impact tourism models. Homestays, walking tours, regional crafts and local cuisines take centre stage.

The next big things are the quiet ones

India's tourism narrative is no longer just

about grandeur. It's about discovery and discovery thrives in the quiet corners, in places that surprise you with their depth, flavour and hospitality.

In the rise of second cities, we're not just witnessing a new travel trend—we're seeing the reshaping of India's tourism geography. And for those who get in early—be it travellers, operators or investors—the rewards are already unfolding.

Challenges to watch

While the potential is rich, these rising destinations face limitations:

Limited luxury options in smaller cities.

Lack of brand recall in international travel circles.

Skilled guide shortages in non-touristy towns.

Fragmented tourism infrastructure.

But therein lies the opportunity—for investors, entrepreneurs and storytellers.

Monsoon

mood board :

Offbeat escapes for the soul

Ami Shah

When the monsoon rains sweep across India, painting the landscape in shades of green and draping the skies in dramatic grey, most travellers either retreat indoors or head to the usual hill stations. But for those seeking something more soulful, serene and far from the crowd, July offers a unique opportunity to explore offbeat corners of the country that truly come alive with the rains.

Here's a journey through lesser-known monsoon getaways across India—perfect for a quiet retreat, a nature-soaked adventure or simply a refreshing change of scenery.

Tirthan Valley, Himachal Pradesh

For nature lovers and slow travellers

While Manali and Shimla are buzzing even in July, Tirthan Valley, nestled in the Kullu region, remains a quiet haven. Home to the Great Himalayan National Park (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), this valley is a dream for those who love misty trails, forest hikes and trout fishing.

The rains here add to the romanticism of the landscape, and the river Tirthan gushes in full force. Cozy homestays in villages like Gushaini and Jibhi offer

the perfect monsoon detox.

What to do: Hike to waterfalls, explore the Jalori Pass or just read a book by the river with a cup of Himachali tea.

Amboli, Maharashtra

For lush forests and mystical vibes

Often referred to as the 'Cherrapunji of Maharashtra', Amboli in the Western Ghats transforms into a verdant paradise in July. The dense forests, hidden waterfalls and low-hanging clouds make it feel like a world suspended in time.

Located near Goa but far removed from its beachy buzz, Amboli is also a biodiversity hotspot. If you're lucky, you might spot rare amphibians or bioluminescent fungi during night trails.

What to do: Visit Amboli Falls, explore the forest trails and make time for Kavlesaad Point—the mist-covered valley view is unforgettable.

Mawlyngot, Meghalaya

For tea trails and monsoon mist

Tucked away just 40 km from Shillong, Mawlyngot is a quaint village known for its organic tea gardens and

sweeping mountain views. The rain in July turns the entire region into a lush carpet of green, with silvery clouds flowing like rivers over the hills.

Mawlyngot is still relatively unknown, making it ideal for travellers seeking quietude and community-led experiences. Stay with local Khasi families, learn about tea farming and go on easy treks through the hills.

What to do: Sample locally grown orthodox tea, explore Nongkhylllem Wildlife Sanctuary nearby or simply walk through the misty village trails.

Wayanad, Kerala

For waterfalls and spice-scented air

While Munnar and Alleppey get the lion's share of attention, Wayanad in the north of Kerala is a monsoon gem. Covered in coffee and spice plantations, Wayanad comes alive in July with its waterfalls in full flow—Soochipara, Meenmutty and Kanthanpara to name a few.

Wayanad is also home to tribal communities, ancient caves like Edakkal and peaceful forest lodges. The monsoon here isn't just a season—it's an immersive experience.

Travel Goals



What to do: Take Ayurvedic treatments designed for the monsoon, explore tea estates or visit the Banasura Sagar Dam during overflow.

Agumbe, Karnataka

For monsoon trekking and wildlife spotting

Agumbe is part of the Western Ghats and receives some of the heaviest rainfall in India. A biodiversity hotspot, it's

weather) and try local Malnad cuisine.

Majuli, Assam

For river island charm and cultural immersion

July brings the monsoon swelling of the Brahmaputra and with it, a dramatic change in the landscape of Majuli, the world's largest river island. While parts of it face the challenge of erosion, the rains also highlight the resilience and rhythm

of life on the island.

It's a unique time to witness the satras (Vaishnavite monasteries), local dance traditions and the floating fields of rice. The island is best explored by bicycle or boat, as motor roads often get waterlogged.

What to do: Interact with the monks at Kamalabari Satra, watch traditional mask-making and explore the island's wetlands.

Travel tips for monsoon getaways:

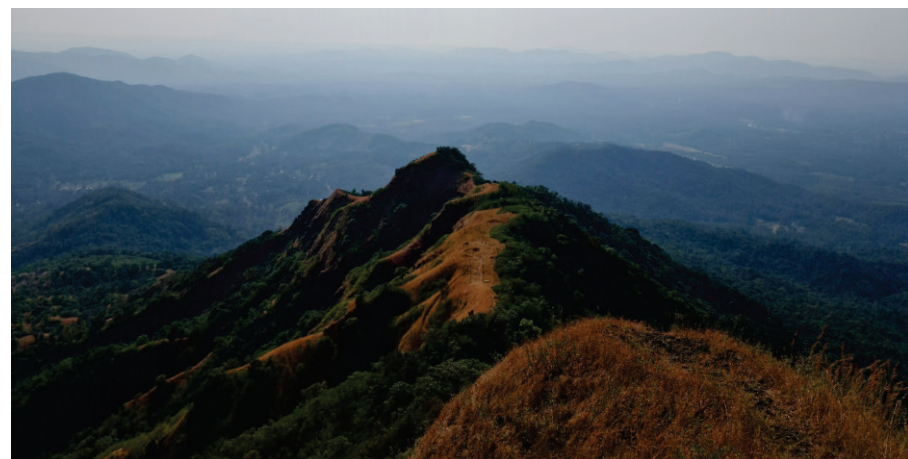
Pack smart

Waterproof bags, sturdy shoes and insect repellent are must-haves.

Travel slow: Roads can be slippery or blocked. Always check weather and road updates.

Support local: Choose homestays or eco-lodges run by locals for authentic and responsible travel.

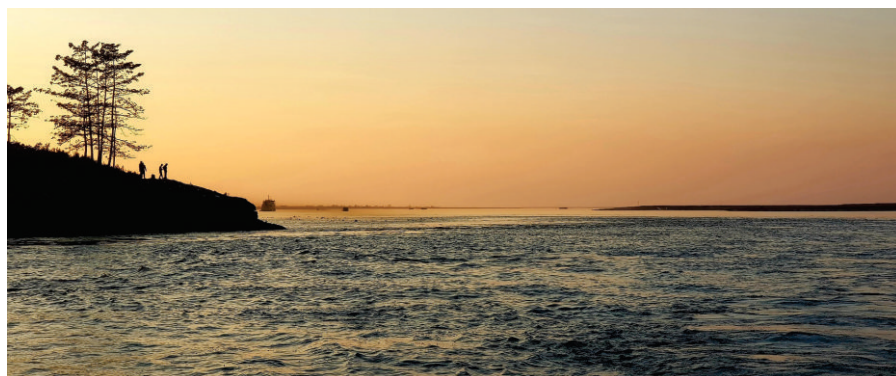
Expect delays: Monsoon travel isn't always predictable—embrace the slow pace.



Amboli

especially loved by herpetologists (snake enthusiasts) as it's the home of the elusive King Cobra. But, even for the regular traveller, Agumbe in the rains is a revelation—trek through rain-soaked forests, chase waterfalls and stay in eco-lodges that blend into the wilderness.

What to do: Take a guided rainforest walk, visit the sunset point (if lucky with



Majuli

Everything you need to know about

Shipki La Pass

Daisy Saxena

Perched at the meeting point of India and Tibet, Shipki La (3,930m) is a rugged high-altitude pass on India's National Highway NH 5. It marks where the mighty Sutlej River plunges into India from Tibet—a dramatic doorway through the Himalaya that's rich in history, commerce and potential.

Border post: Located in Kinnaur (Himachal Pradesh, India) and Ngari Prefecture (Tibet, China), Shipki La is one of three official India–Tibet trading gateways, alongside Nathu La and Lipulekh.

Spur road: A little spur west of the pass rises to 4,720 m—briefly causing confusion as the 'world's highest motorable road' before corrections clarified Shipki La's true altitude.

Treacherous approach: Historic travellers like Captain Robert Hammond described the journey as perilous, winding on cliffside paths carved into sheer rock faces above roaring rapids—fit only for porters or sure-footed goats.



Travel Goals

Traditional trade routes

Silk Road legacy: Shipki La was once a flourishing Silk Road artery, where Tibetan traders exchanged wool, salt, spices, livestock and artisan goods for Indian grain and blankets.

Parity-based ledger: Trade statistics show peaks—INR 25 lakh in 1994, INR 1.4 crore in 2012, INR 9.72 crore in 2015—driven by imports like cashmere and exports of Indian textiles.

Bilateral freeze: A fragile shutdown began in 1962, resumed in 1993, then halted again by COVID in 2020.

Border Tourism: A new dawn

In June 2025, Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, Chief Minister, Himachal Pradesh, launched border tourism at Shipki La, allowing Indian tourists to visit with Aadhaar IDs - a historic pivot toward welcoming outsiders.

Pilgrimage plans: There's burgeoning interest in expanding the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra through this corridor—a more accessible route than Lipulekh or other high passes.

Geopolitical significance

Border skirmishes history: In the mid-1950s, Chinese patrols ventured south of the pass, triggering diplomatic protests from Delhi anchored in the 1954 Panchsheel Agreement.

Strategic relevance: The pass continues to be a thinly veiled flashpoint—its revitalisation for trade or tourism needs to balance local aspirations, strategic safeguards and diplomatic calculations.

Why it matters today?

Economic revival: Restoring trade could inject vital income into Kinnaur's villages—opening doors for barter, tourism



Shipkila

and local enterprise.

New travel narrative: As more tourists explore the India–China border, Shipki La becomes a canvas of natural beauty alongside lessons in trans-Himalayan heritage.

Cultural connectivity: From yaks to yakha, from temples to plateau towns—Shipki La holds the promise of revived Indo-Tibetan cultural interaction.

Shipki La is not just a geographic landmark—it's a threshold between eras. Its cliffs have borne centuries of trade caravans, pilgrims and armies. Now, with carefully balanced tourism and renewed trade interest, it may reawaken as a vibrant corridor—steeped in mountain majesty, historical memory and possibilities.



The people of Kinnaur

If you're planning a journey here in 2025, prepare for:

Permits and logistics: Coordinate through Kinnaur officials; bring Aadhaar and secure passes.

Seasonal timing: Aim for June–November—before winter's snowfall shuts the gateway.

Respect and awareness: Camera restrictions are real; embrace the experience beyond selfies.

Shipki La is more than a drive—it's a journey through time, culture and geopolitics. And in 2025, it may finally step into the traveller's spotlight, offering a rare Himalayan tale—untamed, elevated and unforgotten. Would you like to add this experience to your bucket list?

Coastal calm and mountain zen

Thailand's

new travel map

Ayushi Anand

Fewer crowds, more soul—from the quiet islands of the south to the lush mountain towns in the north, Thailand's lesser-known gems are having their moment.

When you think of Thailand, chances are that your mind jumps to a familiar loop: Bangkok's tuk-tuks, Phuket's beach clubs and the golden triangle of Indian tourism which includes floating markets, shopping hauls and full moon parties. But step just a few hours off those beaten paths and you'll find a quieter, more soulful Thailand—still affordable and delicious, but infinitely more rewarding.

For Indian travellers who've done the touristy version of Thailand, the country is now revealing a slower, more curated side. With extended visa policies for Indians, increased UPI acceptance and growing interest in nature, sustainability and authentic experiences, offbeat Thailand is emerging not just as a Plan B—but as the Plan A for the smart traveller.

Koh Lanta: the quiet island dream

Skip over the loud shores of Phuket and the tourist-thick strips of Krabi and hop a ferry to Koh Lanta, a blissfully underdeveloped island in the Andaman Sea. Here, it's all about long, uncrowded beaches, eco-lodges tucked into jungled hillsides and conversations over sunset beers instead of thumping bass.

Top picks in Koh Lanta:

Long Beach (Phra Ae) for golden hour swims.

Khlong Chak Waterfall Trail for a forested trek.

Time for Lime cooking school for Thai food with ocean views.

Pro tip: Rent a scooter and ride the coastal loop around the island. It's incredibly scenic and there's little traffic.

How to reach: Fly into Phuket or Krabi and take a speed boat.



Lanta Old Town Community



Travel Goals

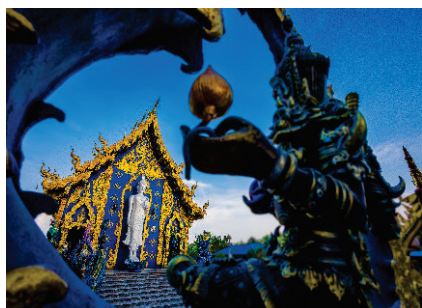


Doi Tung Mae Fah Luang Garden

Pai and Chiang Rai: Northern Thailand's soulful corners

Up in the north, beyond the temples of Chiang Mai, lies Pai - a sleepy valley town popular with backpackers and creatives. Think morning yoga, river dips, organic cafés and mountains that roll on for miles.

If Pai is chill, then Chiang Rai is poetic. It's home to the White Temple (Wat Rong Khun), one of Thailand's most surreal artistic landmarks, as well as thriving night markets, slow-paced biking trails and the Blue Temple (Wat Rong Suea Ten), which feels like stepping inside a sapphire dream.



Wat Rong Suea Ten

What makes these towns so perfect for Indian travellers?

Cooler climates during the summer.

Vegetarian - friendly food culture.

Affordable boutique hotels and guesthouses (INR 1,500–INR 3,000 per night approximately).

The ability to truly disconnect.

How to reach: Fly into Chiang Mai, then drive or take the bus. The journeys are part of the experience.

Ethical wildlife and eco-tourism over animal shows

Thailand's elephant tourism industry is finally evolving and so are the travellers. Instead of riding or bathing elephants, more conscious Indian tourists are choosing ethical sanctuaries like:

Elephant Nature Park (Chiang Mai) – rehabilitation and observation.

Phang Nga Elephant Park – family run, visitor education focused.

Boon Lott's Elephant Sanctuary (Sukhothai) - limited guests, no gimmicks.

You won't be taking selfies a top elephants, but you'll leave with something more valuable-respect for the animal and the land.

Goodbye forex cards, hello UPI

One of the biggest game-changers for Indian travellers this year? UPI in Thailand. Through cross-border payment alliances, Indians can now pay at select outlets using UPI-based apps like PhonePe or BHIM via QR codes. It's being rolled out in tourist zones and Chiang Mai, Pattaya and parts of Bangkok have early adoption.

Result? Fewer card fees, no awkward cash crunches and a much smoother travel experience.

Getting there, getting around

Airlines: IndiGo, AirAsia, Thai Smile, and VietJet offer frequent connections from India to Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phuket and Krabi.

Internal travel: Use budget airlines like Nok Air or Thai Lion Air for quick hops. In the north, buses are cheap and scenic; in the south, ferries link most islands easily.

Best time to visit: November to February for cool weather, or July–August if you like moody, green monsoon beauty (fewer crowds, better deals!).



Khun Chae National Park, Doi Langka Luang

Why it works for Indian travellers now?

Visa ease: Indians can stay up to 60 days under the new visa policy (subject to change; check before travel).

Budget-friendly: Even boutique stays and private transfers are often cheaper than mid-range Europe or Dubai trips.

Cultural comfort: Thai hospitality feels familiar; food has overlap with Indian palates; and now, digital ease (from payments to language tools) has made Thailand even more accessible.

If you've done Thailand before—or just thought you had—this is your cue to return. But not for the neon signs or mega-malls.

Go for the sound of cicadas in Chiang Rai, the warm banana pancakes in Pai, the empty beaches of Koh Lanta. Go, not for escape, but for connection. And for a version of Thailand that's been waiting, quietly for travellers like you.



Wat Rong Khun

Great Zimbabwe

A monument of strength and resilience

Deep in the heart of Southern Africa lies Great Zimbabwe, the second-highest stone monument south of the Sahara after the Egyptian pyramids. This site is a testament to the ingenuity and craftsmanship of the ancient Bantu people. The Shona language, spoken in Zimbabwe, shares a common heritage with languages spoken in Uganda, such as Luganda, reflecting the great Bantu migration that shaped Africa's linguistic landscape. This monumental migration from Africa's Great Lakes region saw people moving southward, reshaping the continent's demographic landscape.

Beginning around 800 AD, this epic migration saw various groups, including the Tonga and Tavara, settle in the Zambezi Valley, while the Karanga people made their home in present-day Masvingo Province. The Karanga built the magnificent stone structure known as Great Zimbabwe between 1100 and 1450 AD, extending over almost 800 hectares. This marvel of engineering became the capital of the Kingdom of

Munhumutapa. The layout of Great Zimbabwe's structures suggests that the design was not for fortification or defence but rather a tribute to the power and authority of the rulers of the time. The grandeur of Great Zimbabwe sparked much controversy over its origins, with claims that it was built by the Phoenicians or was the lost city of Ophir, attracting treasure seekers in search of gold.

One of its most prominent features is the walls, some of which are over five meters high and constructed without mortar. These walls are divided into three groups: the Hill Ruins, the Great Enclosure, and the Valley Ruins.

Perched on a granite cliff, the hill complex of Great Zimbabwe overlooks the Great Enclosure, believed to be the royal wives' quarters, and the Valley Complex, where lesser dignitaries resided. The ruins have yielded a treasure trove of archaeological riches, including pottery, jewelry, and ornaments

crafted from gold, copper, ivory and soft stone.

As you explore the site, you'll uncover the secrets of a bygone era, discovering the history and mythology of this ancient civilization. The intricate Chevron pattern, a hallmark of the site, adorns many of the structures, while the towering stone walls, crafted from nearly a million granite blocks, stand as a testament to the architectural prowess of the ancient builders. The Zimbabwe Bird, an African fish eagle found in Great Zimbabwe, is a national symbol of ancestral guarding and guiding and is imprinted on the national flag and other national paraphernalia.

Religion played a significant role in the preservation of the political system. All the rulers, kings, chiefs, and clan leaders believed in the divine power of "Mwari," the Supreme God, and Great Zimbabwe was the religious centre. The religion gave spiritual legitimacy to the state. "Mwari" had power over rainmaking,

Travel Goals

agriculture, fertility, and illness. Even after the demise of Great Zimbabwe, the strong religious fabric created then continues to influence the everyday way of life of most Zimbabweans. Today, Zimbabwe is a peace-loving country because the majority of Zimbabweans are religious, either through traditional beliefs or Christian beliefs.

At its peak, Great Zimbabwe supported a thriving population of around 30,000 people. However, the site's eventual abandonment was likely triggered by environmental pressures, including water scarcity and overgrazing. Notably, one of the sons of the illustrious Munhumutapa Kapararidze travelled to India in the 15th century, became a revered Zimbabwean missionary, and was christened Reverend Father Miguel in the Catholic faith. Reverend Father Miguel served as the vicar of the Church of St. Barbara in Goa from 1700 to 1726. His mortal remains are buried at St. Barbara Church in Goa.

With such an imposing presence and majestic grandeur, it comes as no surprise that the name of the country was derived from this single feature. Zimbabwe means “Big house of stone” in the Shona Karanga language; ‘Zi’ is a prefix for something large, “mba” means house, and “bwe” is stone, hence the full name Zimbabwe. Standing against the

test of time and weathered by centuries of storms and intense heat, Great Zimbabwe is a direct mirror image of the Zimbabwean people's strength and resilience.

Because of its tremendous contributions to world civilization, the Great Zimbabwe National Monument was recognized as a World Heritage Site by the United Nations in 1986 and inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The Great Zimbabwe National Monument currently hosts approximately 100,000 tourists every year.

When visiting Great Zimbabwe, it is advisable to consider important factors such as weather, peak tourist season, and personal preferences.

From May to October, Zimbabwe experiences its dry season, which is generally considered the best time to visit Great Zimbabwe. Temperatures hover between 16 and 28 degrees Celsius, making it perfect for outdoor exploration. However, it's a delight to visit Zimbabwe at any time as the country boasts one of the most beautiful climates in the world.

Journeying to Great Zimbabwe by road offers stunning visual sightseeing treats. Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe, stands

300 km northeast of the monument, and a drive on the A4 and A9 highways takes approximately four hours.

Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second-largest city, lies about 300 km west and takes five to six hours on the A6 highway. Should one prefer a self-drive, reputable car rental companies are easily accessible in all major cities. The icing on the cake is that Indian nationals get a visa on arrival in Zimbabwe.

Today, Great Zimbabwe exudes an otherworldly aura, a lingering essence of its former life as a sacred citadel. Visitors often depart with a newfound sense of contemplation, their footsteps a little quieter, their hearts a little more reflective, as if the ancient energy of the site has awakened something deep within.

Great Zimbabwe has since become a cultural World Heritage Site, and its massive curving walls, constructed from millions of granite blocks fitted together without mortar, remain the most fascinating man-made structure of architectural genius in Southern Africa. As the Indian traveller's footprint expands across the globe, Great Zimbabwe offers a unique opportunity to walk in the footsteps of history shrouded in mystery and return home with a heart full of wonder.



July's summer passport *must-attend experiences and what's ahead in August*

Shafika Sengupta



Bastille Day

As July unfolds, summer around the globe bursts into full bloom—festivals roar, cultural traditions spark and landscapes beckon. From the turquoise shores of the Mediterranean to the storied plazas of Latin America, this month heralds an unforgettable tapestry of travel opportunities.

Here's your curated guide to what you absolutely must see this month, along with a sneak peek at what August has in store.

What not to miss in July!

Calgary Stampede (Alberta, Canada)

When : July 4–13

The world's wildest rodeo, the Stampede brings cowboys, chuckwagons, pancake breakfasts and nightly grandstand shows. **Highlight:** the wild horse race, where riders chase and break untamed Mustangs along a 2.5-mile track.

Bonus: Alberta's lakes and Icefields Parkway await just outside the city.

San Fermin (Pamplona, Spain)

When : 6 to 14 July

Every July, the cobblestoned streets of Pamplona throb with adrenaline during the San Fermín festival. Beyond the iconic 'Running of the Bulls,' the city hums with global visitors clad in white and red, nightly fireworks, giant papier-mâché figures and Basque choirs. Even if the bull run isn't your pace, the music, pintxos bars and folk dances are the essence of Pamplona soul.

Bastille Day (France)

When: 14 July

Bastille Day celebrations blend military parades with fireworks in Paris, jazz in Bordeaux and light shows in Lyon. In Paris, the Champs-Élysées parade and Eiffel Tower fireworks are unmatched. Elsewhere, local markets overflow with pâté, fromage and rosé under tables draped in red, white and blue.

Festival d'Avignon (Avignon, France)

When : 4 to 24 July

Held within the ancient walls of the Palais des Papes, this avant-garde theatre and performance carnival draws artists and audiences from over 100 countries.



Naadam Festival

From intimate street theatre to large-scale dance productions, Avignon's festival is a golden opportunity to immerse yourself in cutting-edge European arts surrounded by medieval architecture. Book in advance—shows sell out fast!

Naadam Festival (Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia)

When: mid-July

Called the 'Three Manly Games'—wrestling, horse racing and archery—Naadam offers a glimpse into Mongolia's heartland traditions. In nearby fields you'll see mounted warriors thunder by in vibrant deel (traditional robes) or enjoy yak-butter tea under a ger yurt. For a deeper dive, local tours to Gobi camps and Kazakh eagle-hunting demonstrations can be arranged. Just be

In the Moment



Try paella in Spain

sure to bring earplugs—Mongolian throat singing can be powerful!

Montreux Jazz Festival (Montreux, Switzerland)

When : June 27 to July 12

While the festival closes mid-July, it's still a hot ticket: lakeside stages between Chillon Castle and Vevey host jazz legends and crossover acts against a breathtaking Alpine backdrop. After sunset, food trucks serve Swiss fondue, local wine flows like a river and crowds dance on the beach. Plan a post-concert boat ride for a magical Swiss summer evening.

Obon Festivals (Japan)

When : Mid to late July

Obon is a nationwide Buddhist festival honouring ancestral spirits, with dates varying by region. Visit Kyoto for floating lanterns on the Okazaki Canal or the Shonan coast for bon-odori (dance circles) on the beach. Expect somber lantern ceremonies and lively public dances—Obon offers a beautiful, contemplative break from Tokyo's neon rush.

Running of the Witches (Hogsback, South Africa)

When: 20 to 22 July

Hidden in the Eastern Cape, Hogsback hosts the quirky 'Running of the Witches,' a fantasy-themed event celebrating

magic, folklore, literature and art. Expect costumed parades, artisan markets, forest workshops and bush poets. It's a nature-soaked alternative to mainstream festivals.

Ready to plan ahead?

August brings spectacular events worth marking. Map your festival calendar now!

Edinburgh Festival Fringe (Scotland)

When: 2 to 26 August

The world's largest arts festival explodes across Edinburgh for the entire month. Think thousands of shows—comedy, drama, music, spoken word—performed in

intimate venues and public spaces. Grab a kilt, find a basement bar and prepare to be unraveled (in a good way).

La Tomatina (Buñol, Spain)

When: 27 August

This iconic tomato-throwing fiesta fills the streets of Buñol with red pulp and hilarity. Early registration is essential—tickets sell out fast. Wear goggles, old clothes and bring a waterproof phone pouch. Afterwards, locals host paella dinners and street concerts nearby.

Obon in Okinawa (Japan)

When: 13 to 15 August

While mainland Japan marks Obon in July, Okinawa celebrates in August with Eisa dancing in the streets of Naha. Expect colourful drums, folk songs and lanterns floating in the harbour. It's a regional distinction worth noting.



Obon in Okinawa



La Tomatina



Puglia

Notte della Taranta (Puglia, Italy)

When: 23 to 25 August

A vibrant folk music festival in Salento, celebrating pizzica, a trance-inducing dance originally used to heal spider bites. Expect mass dance gatherings, tarot-like healing rituals and sunset concerts in olive groves.

Onbashira Festival (Nagano, Japan)



Pamplona



Running of the bulls festival

When: late August

Held only once every six years, this festival sees communities cutting and riding giant logs down mountain slopes to rebuild Shinto shrine pillars. The next one due is in, August 2025 in Suwa. This festival is a rare, once-in-a-lifetime visual spectacle.

Plan your summer itinerary :

Book early, travel lightly: July festivals are magnet events—flights, accommodations and trains fill fast. Try budget hotels or local inns (for example, Japanese ryokan for Obon) for immersive experiences.

Pack regionally smart: Hungary, Slovakia, Germany and France are worth adding en route from Pamplona or Avignon. In August, light layers are key in Scotland, while Spain and Italy demand breathable linens and sunscreen.

Blend culture with 'unplug' time

After Calgary or Montreux, head into the Rockies or Swiss Alps. After Obon in Japan, retreat to a mountain onsen. After Edinburgh, relax in a Highland loch.

Go with the flow—but book marquee events:

You can wander through Edinburgh without tickets, but La Tomatina and Onbashira festivals are capacity-limited. Measure your spontaneity against the draw of rare festivals.

July into August: The ultimate summer duo

July's global tapestry—bull chases in Spain, ancient rites in Mongolia, cowboy fever in Canada—pairs beautifully with August's kaleidoscope from oyster festivals in Scotland to log-rolling pilgrimages in Nagano. Between sunny rooftops, neon canals, desert blooms and misty moors, your summer itinerary could be both classic and utterly original.

In July and August, the world stages the greatest summer performance. Are you ready to take your front-row seat?

Chase the magic 20 incredible places to explore this year

Every year, new destinations rise to the top of travellers' lists, driven by global trends, infrastructure upgrades, cultural moments and a hunger for something different. For 2025, the spotlight is on places that promise more than just a vacation—they offer stories, transformations and unique perspectives.

Daisy Saxena



In the Moment

Here's our curated list of 20 places to visit in 2025 and what makes them worth the detour.

Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Rising from the ashes of war, Sarajevo is stepping into the limelight with a new cultural confidence. Its Ottoman-meets-Austro-Hungarian architecture, bustling bazaars and powerful museums are now complemented by emerging wine bars, boutique stays, and nature trails into the Dinaric Alps.

Red Sea Coast, Saudi Arabia



Red Sea Coast

The introduction of high-concept resorts under the Red Sea and Amaala projects is transforming this coastline into the Middle East's most ambitious luxury and eco-tourism hub. Think coral reefs, futuristic designs and cultural showcases on untouched islands.

Tasmania, Australia

Known for its rugged beauty, Tasmania is finally shaking off its remote image. With new wellness lodges, food trails and dark sky reserves, it's an eco-adventure destination wrapped in sophistication.



Bwindi Impenetrable Forest

Slovenia

Tucked between Italy and Austria, Slovenia is a green marvel. With Ljubljana's eco-awards, Lake Bled's postcard charm and lesser-known wine valleys, it's Europe's rising slow travel star.

Quebec City, Canada

2025 marks 420 years since Quebec's founding. Expect a year of festivals, winter carnivals and culinary celebrations in this French-speaking hub that balances old-world charm with contemporary verve.

La Paz, Bolivia

With its edgy food scene, cable car public transit system and high-altitude allure, La Paz is becoming Latin America's most unexpected city escape. Add a side trip to Salar de Uyuni, and make your trip and unforgettable one!

Uganda's Bwindi Impenetrable Forest

With upgraded lodges and new conservation efforts, Uganda is fast becoming the go-to for ethical gorilla trekking—offering experiences that are raw, immersive and deeply moving.



La Paz



Tasmania

In the Moment



Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

As Vietnam reflects on 50 years since the end of the war, Ho Chi Minh City is rebranding itself through design hotels, indie cafes, craft breweries and bold new architecture.

Stockholm Archipelago, Sweden

A new 270 km island-hopping trail across 20 islands is set to lure hikers, kayakers and curious travellers alike. This is Sweden at its summer best—wild, beautiful and blissfully uncrowded.



Le Marche, Italy

Overshadowed by Tuscany, Le Marche's rolling hills, quiet beaches and hilltop towns are gaining traction. Expect truffle festivals, coastal hikes and a slower, richer slice of Italy.

Malawi

Dubbed 'the warm heart of Africa' Malawi is coming into its own with stylish lakeside lodges, community-led safaris

and conservation-first travel that feels good and does good.

Moorea, French Polynesia

While Bora Bora basks in honeymoon fame, Moorea is the underrated jewel. With whale-watching seasons, mountain hikes and authentic Polynesian culture, it's nature and serenity at its finest.

Hokkaido, Japan

Japan's northernmost island is a haven of hot springs, fresh seafood and alpine adventures. With new rail connections and lesser crowds, Hokkaido is a smart pick for those craving nature and Narnia-esque winters.

Ahr Valley, Germany

Devastated by floods in 2021, the Ahr Valley has bounced back beautifully. Vineyards are reblooming and wine tourism is thriving again—making it a symbol of resilience and rural charm.

Belize

Where Caribbean vibes meet Mayan heritage, Belize is on the up. Expect reef snorkelling, jungle lodges and easy English-speaking travel with a side of unfiltered adventure.



Moorea



Tbilisi, Georgia

Tbilisi is turning heads with its bohemian vibes, wine cellars and design hotels.

Combine that with snow-capped Caucasus mountains and thermal spas and Georgia becomes 2025's soulful

secret.

Albania

Move over Croatia—Albania's wild beaches, Ottoman towns and generous prices are making waves. The new international airport in Vlorë opens up

the Albanian Riviera to the world.

Chile's Atacama Desert

Home to the clearest skies on Earth, Atacama is where travellers are heading for stargazing lodges, lunar landscapes and astronomical tourism tied to science and wonder.

Cuba

With eased travel restrictions and a creative renaissance underway, Cuba is reclaiming its place on the map. New art districts, jazz bars and curated walking tours offer a modern twist on a timeless classic.

Croatia's inland regions

Beyond Dubrovnik's crowds, inland Croatia is booming. Plitvice Lakes, medieval fortresses and wine trails are pulling in savvy travellers looking for substance over selfie spots.

2025 is all about thoughtful travel. Destinations that combine sustainability, cultural depth and lesser-trodden paths are dominating the conversation. Whether it's a rebounding region, a place with purpose, or a destination on the brink of global discovery, the trend is clear: travellers want more than a postcard—they want a connection.



Quebec City

NEXT DESTINATION

NEXT DESTINATION

- The new Thai wellness: Forest temples, salt farms and digits detoxes.

- Is this the most beautiful train ride in Southeast Asia?

- From temple feasts to midnight markets: How Thailand eats through the day.

Thailand

NEXT DESTINATION

- Walking through time in Český Krumlov

- Prague by Instinct: A city walk with no plan

- The Czech castles you can actually sleep in

Czechia

For advertising contact



info@nextdestination.co

A taste of the
Extraordinary
The world's most exclusive
luxury experiences

Shafika Sengupta

In a world where travel knows no bounds, luxury tourism has taken on new heights, offering experiences that go beyond the ordinary. For those with the means to indulge, these top-tier experiences are as much about exclusivity as they are about extravagance. This handpicked selection of the top 20 experiences across the globe offers a glimpse into the world's most aspirational and unattainable getaways, where opulence meets adventure in unforgettable ways.

Private yacht charter to the Galápagos Islands

Sail through the pristine waters of the Galápagos aboard a private super yacht. With a personal crew, a marine biologist and a world-class chef, this bespoke journey allows you to explore the biodiversity of the islands in complete privacy.





Private yacht charter to the Galápagos Islands

Space tourism with Virgin Galactic

Space tourism has moved from science fiction to reality with Virgin Galactic. At an astronomical price, travellers can experience weightlessness and take in views of the Earth from the edge of space. This is a luxury that only a few can claim.



Rent a private island in the Maldives

Rent a private island in the Maldives

Velaa Private Island in the Maldives offers the ultimate seclusion. Accessible only by private seaplane, guests can enjoy world-class dining, spa treatments and underwater adventures, all while having the entire island to themselves.

Around-the-world trip by private jet

The travel company Abercrombie & Kent offers an extraordinary 24-day journey around the world by private jet, visiting UNESCO World Heritage sites and staying in the finest hotels. With destinations ranging from Easter Island to the Taj Mahal, this is luxury travel at its zenith.

Royal Suite at The Plaza, New York

For an unparalleled city experience, the Royal Suite at The Plaza Hotel in New

York City offers a three-bedroom apartment complete with butler service, private chef and exquisite views of Central Park. It is truly the epitome of urban lavishness.

Antarctica Cruise on the scenic eclipse

For those seeking adventure with a side of elegance, the Scenic Eclipse offers a magnificent expedition to Antarctica. This ultra-luxury mega-yacht includes a helicopter and submarine for exploring the untouched wilderness, all while enjoying Michelin-starred dining.

Renting the Chateau de Versailles for a private event

One of the poshest experiences in Europe, you can rent the Chateau de Versailles for a private event, where



Royal Suite at The Plaza, New York

history and opulence come together. A gala dinner or private tour in the Hall of Mirrors offers a once-in-a-lifetime glimpse into royal grandeur.

Safari at Singita Grumeti, Tanzania

For wildlife enthusiasts, a stay at Singita Grumeti in Tanzania's Serengeti is a dream come true. This ultra-luxurious safari lodge offers unrivalled game-viewing opportunities, exquisite accommodation and a chance to witness the 'Great Migration' in style.

Submarine voyage in Fiji

At Laucala Island Resort in Fiji, guests have the chance to dive deep into the ocean with a personal submarine. Exploring coral reefs in complete luxury, this experience is unmatched by any standard scuba diving trip.



Emirates first class suite

Emirates first class suite

Emirates Airlines redefines luxury in the air with its first-class private suites. Complete with a personal mini-bar,

sliding doors for privacy and even a shower, flying has never been this indulgent.

Private tour of the Vatican museums

Skip the queues and experience the Vatican like never before with a private after-hours tour. With an art historian as your guide, you can take in the Sistine Chapel and Raphael Rooms in solitude, an experience reserved for the few who can afford such exclusivity.



The North Pole by Luxury Icebreaker

The North Pole by Luxury Icebreaker

Travelling to the ends of the Earth has never been so sumptuous. Onboard a nuclear-powered icebreaker, guests can journey to the North Pole in supreme comfort, enjoying gourmet cuisine and helicopter rides over the Arctic landscape.

Amanpuri's 20-guest villa in Phuket

For a group looking to indulge, Amanpuri's 20-guest villa in Phuket offers sprawling ocean views, a private



Amanpuri's 20-guest villa in Phuket

infinity pool and personalised service from a dedicated team of staff. It is the ultimate tropical getaway for those seeking both privacy and perfection.



Maldives underwater villa

The Muraka, underwater villa in the Maldives

The Muraka at the Conrad Maldives Rangali Island is the world's first underwater hotel residence. The two-storey villa features a submerged bedroom with panoramic views of marine life, making this an immersive and unforgettable experience.

Ski chalet in Courchevel 1850

For winter luxury, the private ski chalets of Courchevel 1850 in the French Alps offer ski-in/ski-out access, private chefs and luxurious spas. These chic chalets are the ideal playground for the rich and famous.



Exclusive wine tasting at Chateau Margaux, France

Exclusive wine tasting at Chateau Margaux, France

One of Bordeaux's most prestigious wine estates, Chateau Margaux, opens its doors



Ski chalet in Courchevel 1850



Private villa at Laucala Island, Fiji

to the world's elite for private tastings. Guided by the estate's chief winemaker, guests can sample some of the most expensive wines in the world, an experience to savour.

Private villa at Laucala Island, Fiji

For those seeking the epitome of tropical luxury, a private villa at Laucala Island offers stunning views, a private beach and a dedicated team to cater to every whim. This limited island retreat is only accessible by private plane.

Bespoke shopping experience at Harrods, London

Harrods, the iconic London department store, offers a high-class shopping experience where clients can work with a personal stylist and enjoy private fittings, all while sipping champagne in a private suite. It is the prime indulgence for fashion lovers.



Polar bear safari in Churchill, Canada



Helicopter ride over Mount Everest

Polar bear safari in Churchill, Canada

A lavish safari with Natural Habitat Adventures takes guests to Churchill, Canada, to observe polar bears in their natural habitat. With five-star accommodation, gourmet dining and expert guides, this is one of the world's most exclusive wildlife experiences.

Helicopter ride over Mount Everest

For the ultimate thrill, a helicopter tour

over Mount Everest offers unparalleled views of the world's highest peak. After taking in the majestic scenery, guests can enjoy a gourmet meal served at the base camp, making this an unforgettable wealthy adventure.

These 20 experiences represent the pinnacle of travel, offering a glimpse into a world where nothing is out of reach. From private islands to space travel, these journeys are about more than just grandness; they offer an escape from the ordinary and a chance to indulge in the extraordinary. For those who can afford it,

these experiences promise memories that will last a lifetime and for the rest, they remain a dream worth chasing.

What makes these experiences so remarkable is the blend of exclusivity, craftsmanship and personalisation that comes with them. Every detail is carefully curated since luxury tourism is not just about accommodation; it is about how an experience can connect travellers with the rarest, most pristine environments while offering unmatched comfort and convenience.

These journeys often take months of planning and involve exclusive access that most can only imagine.

For many, simply knowing that these experiences exist is enough to fuel the imagination and inspire dreams of future adventures. Whether it is a bucket list or a far-off aspiration, luxury travel offers a window into a world where every desire can be fulfilled, leaving travellers with unforgettable stories to tell.

From distilleries to destinations

Ajay Kakkar's

journey through spirit trails

Ayushi Anand



Ajay Kakkar

Few people manage to merge passion and profession as seamlessly as Ajay Kakkar, Assistant Vice President at Radico Khaitan, one of India's leading liquor companies. As a seasoned traveller and industry veteran, Kakkar doesn't just explore the world—he sips his way through it, discovering new perspectives in every pour. From boutique distilleries in Scotland to street-side brews in Sikkim, his journeys reflect a keen eye for detail, a love for authenticity and an innate understanding of what today's consumers crave.

In a candid conversation, Kakkar shares his travel-inspired insights on the evolving identity of Indian spirits, the global rise of regional flavours and how luxury is being redefined by experience.

How do you think India's spirits and beverage brands are being viewed in abroad today?

There's been a noticeable shift. Indian brands are no longer seen as mass-market options. Whether its Goan craft gin or Himalayan whisky, the world is beginning to appreciate our quality and regional authenticity. There's genuine curiosity around our ingredients and innovation now.

“Every bottle we produce isn't just competing on taste—it's competing on memory.”

What's one unexpected travel destination that surprised you with its local bar or spirits culture?

Aberdeen, Scotland. Everyone talks about Edinburgh or Speyside for whisky, but Aberdeen has this incredible, under-the-radar scene. I discovered a local gin distillery with an immersive tasting experience—it was experimental, youthful and very forward-thinking.

When you travel, do you always have your 'brand hat' on—observing how alcohol is served, what people are drinking, how it's presented?

Absolutely. I'm constantly watching how menus are structured, what stories are being told, how the staff introduces a pour. In Berlin, I once saw QR codes on coasters telling the backstory of the

drink. That inspired an idea we later tried in India.

If you had to plan a spirited travel trail within India for someone who wants to discover regional liquors and beverages, what would be your top five stops and why?

I would suggest the following destinations (as it's also my dream itinerary):

Goa – For feni, of course, but also the cocktail culture in bars like Tesouro.

Nashik – The wine capital and not just for tastings—the food and ambiance are exceptional.

Rajasthan – To explore tribal and royal spirits like mahua and handia.

Bengaluru – A hub for the craft beer revolution with a bold, youthful vibe.

Sikkim – For Himalayan brews like 'Chhang' in a setting that feels untouched and pure.

How do you see the luxury travel industry collaborating with premium beverage brands in the years to come?

Luxury today is about immersive experiences. Think whisky trails, vineyard weekends or curated mixology nights at

“Abroad, there's genuine curiosity about Indian ingredients, heritage and our innovation.”



boutique resorts. Even airlines are now working with top mixologists. For Indian spirits, this is a goldmine of opportunity to pair with hospitality brands globally.

Has there been a travel experience that fundamentally changed how you think about spirits or branding?

Yes. Kyoto in Japan did that for me. The sake breweries operate with such restraint and respect. The elegance in their storytelling —simple, silent, but powerful—really made me rethink how we present our own products. Branding doesn't need to scream; it needs to resonate.

What trends in global beverage culture are you excited to see taking off in India soon?

There are four trends that I'm particularly excited about. These are :

Low and no-alcohol cocktails: Social, sophisticated and health-conscious.

RTD (Ready-to-drink) cocktails: They're redefining convenience with craft.

Hyper-local ingredients: Indian gins with Gondhoraj lime, tulsi, Himalayan herbs—this is the future.

Tasting rooms and experiential distilleries: It's not just about drinking—it's about discovering.

"Branding isn't about being loud; sometimes it's about quite excellence."

If you had a month off with no work commitments, where would you travel and why?

Without a doubt I'd go to Paris. The wine bars, the champagne trails, the rhythm of life—it all celebrates taste and tradition. I'd spend time meeting small-scale producers and just soaking in the culture that values finesse and flavour.

How has travelling enhanced your understanding of what today's luxury consumers are looking for when it comes to beverage experiences?

Travel has shown me that modern luxury is about feeling. People want an experience, not just a label. I've met travellers who book hotels based on bar programs. For us in the industry, this means thinking beyond the bottle—how can we create something unforgettable?

Lastly, what is one thing the Indian spirits industry should focus on to shine brighter on the global stage?

Consistency. Innovation is here, but global credibility comes from reliability. Along with that, we need to tell our stories better. A great spirit deserves a great narrative—that's how you build legacy.



"Travel teaches you how to build stories that connect and linger."



Czech, please!

The essential food guide to Prague's coolest kitchens

Prague isn't just Europe's fairytale capital—it's a culinary canvas in the midst of a creative revival. While hearty Czech classics still anchor the menus, a fresh wave of chefs, bakers and artisans are redefining what it means to eat in Czech Republic in the 21st century. From neo-bistros to heritage-rich taverns, this is your ultimate hit list of what to eat—and exactly where to go in Prague.

Daisy Saxena

Svíčková na smetaně

What: Marinated sirloin in a velvety vegetable-cream sauce with bread dumplings.

Where: Lokál Dlouhááá – For a faithful, unpretentious version in a buzzing beer hall atmosphere.

Vepřo knedlo zelo

What: Roast pork, sauerkraut and bread dumplings—the Czech national plate.

Where: Mincovna, near Old Town Square, serves an elevated take with local pork belly and buttery cabbage.

Kulajda

What: Creamy mushroom soup with dill and a poached egg.

Where: Eska, in Karlín, gives this dish a fermented spin with wild mushrooms and smoked cream.

Chlebičky

What: Czech open-faced sandwiches, both retro and reimaged.

Where: Sisters Bistro in Dlouhá Passage—a modern chlebičky institution.

Moravský vrabec (Moravian Sparrow)

What: Tender pork cubes, sauerkraut



Palate Play



Bramborovým salátem carp with potato salad

and dumplings.

Where: U Kroka, in Vyšehrad—traditional done right.



Chlebický chlebíček open faced sandwich

Tatarák (Beef Tartare)

What: Raw spiced beef with garlic toast.

Where: Kantýna—dry-aged beef tartare with DIY toppings and a buzzy meat-lovers vibe.

Smažený sýr (Fried Cheese)

What: A crispy block of cheese, often street-style or served like a burger.

Where: Mr. HotDoG in Holešovice—gourmet street food with house sauces.

Grilovaná klobása

What: Grilled sausages with mustard and bread.

Where: Náplavka Farmers Market (Saturdays only)—grilled fresh with artisanal sauces.

Fermented veggies

What: Carrots, cabbage, beets—fermented the old way, now in chic new forms.

Where: Výčep—a neo-tavern with house-pickled vegetables served alongside

mains.

Bryndzové halušky

What: Soft dumplings with sheep cheese and bacon.

Where: Kolšovna Celnice—classic Slovak-style in a beer hall with Czech flair.

Kapři hranolky (Carp fries)

What: Thin-cut fried strips of Czech carp.

Where: Tiskárna Jindřišská—a playful take on this holiday fish, served year-round.

Znojemská



Kulajda Czech mushroom soup with dill featured

What: Beef stew with tangy pickled cucumbers.

Where: U Modré Kachničky (The Blue Duckling)—a romantic, upscale spot reviving heritage recipes.

Moravian natural wine

What: Unfiltered, minimal-intervention wines from the Czech countryside.

Where: Veltlin in Karlín—a cool wine bar focused solely on Central European natural wines.



Czechia Trdelník at Gastronomy Market

Medovník (Honey cake)

What: Multi-layered cake with honeyed biscuit and cream.

Where: IF Café by Iveta Fabešová—a pâtisserie with a cult following for traditional sweets.

Lívance with forest berries

What: Fermented batter pancakes with seasonal fruit.

Where: Café Jen—cozy Vršovice spot with weekend brunches that sell out fast.

Trdelník (Chimney cake)

What: Sweet dough grilled over coals, dusted in cinnamon sugar, often filled with ice cream.

Where: Good Food Coffee & Bakery, just off Charles Bridge—touristy but undeniably delicious, especially the Nutella-filled version.

Prague's food culture today is equal parts nostalgia and novelty. You can feast on centuries-old recipes in 14th-century taverns and then walk five minutes to a minimalist wine bar serving trout pâté on fermented rye.

Whether you're in search of a perfectly charred klobása or an artfully plated rendition of svičková, Prague invites you to taste the past and the future—all on the same fork.



What the world is posting A scroll through the global feed

Ayushi Anand

From Tokyo's neon-lit ramen bowls to Lisbon's sun-drenched rooftops, the world is documenting its every move in real time. As borders blur and trends transcend geography, a new question emerges for the digital age: What exactly is the world posting right now?

In a landscape where algorithms evolve faster than trends themselves, understanding what's being shared reveals more than just selfies and sunsets—it reflects our moods, priorities, obsessions and aspirations.

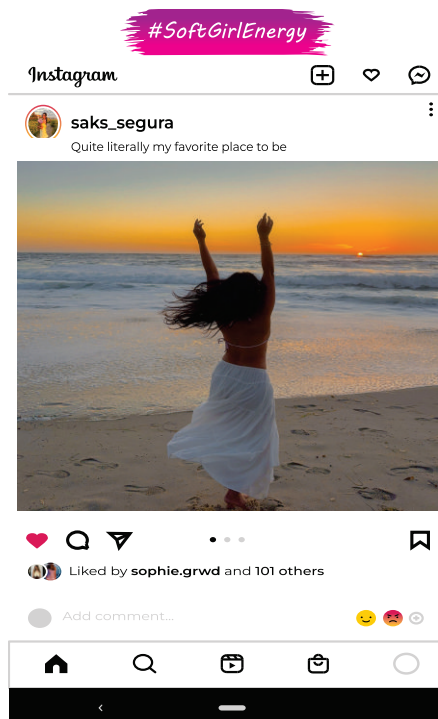
Here's a curated scroll through the world's digital mood board in mid-2025.

The rise of 'Soft Living'

Across continents, there's a notable shift toward what TikTok and Instagram are calling soft living—a visual rebellion against hustle culture. Think long morning rituals, filtered golden light,

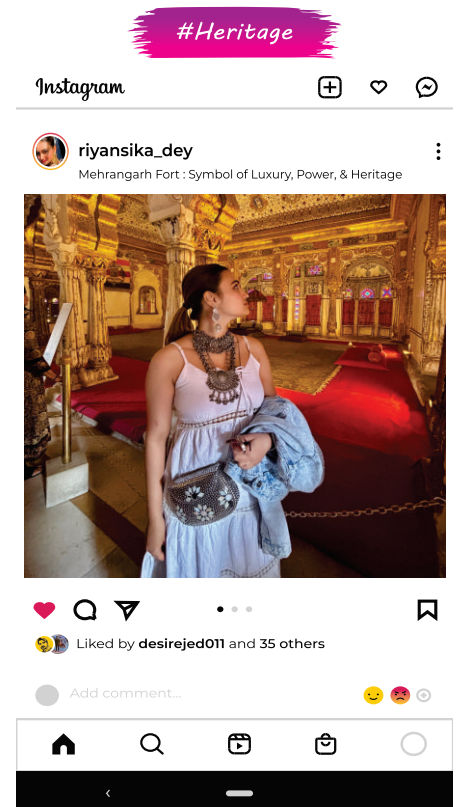
farmers' markets and journaling by candlelight. On Instagram Reels, hashtags like #slowdays and #softgirlenergy are trending in Europe and Australia, especially in cities like Copenhagen, Amsterdam and Melbourne.

This trend isn't about escapism—it's about reclaiming time. According to social media strategist Carla Bento, "Post-pandemic, people crave a slower pace. They're romanticising their own lives—turning the ordinary into art."



Layover content is king

Airport content is back, but now with a twist: in-transit storytelling. From Qatar's Hamad International Airport to Singapore's Changi, travellers are documenting layovers as mini-adventures. TikToks with the caption POV: 'You only have four hours in Doha' rack up millions of views.



YouTube shorts and TikTok are flooded with 60-second city guides filmed on long layovers—"How I saw Milan in 3 hours," or "Best coffee near Munich Terminal 2."

Heritage reels: The new Gen-Z pride

Gen Z is embracing roots with flair—ancestral recipes, traditional outfits and hometown nostalgia are going viral. In Nigeria, creators are filming traditional weddings with cinematic production. In India, reels of saree-tying tutorials and millet-based meals (like ragi dosa or bajra khichdi) are trending alongside AR filters.

This isn't just cultural—it's political. Young creators are reclaiming narratives and proudly spotlighting their heritage, especially in diasporic communities.

What's Trending?

#Heritage

Instagram



lancearamouny

The Beyhorn Mansion has always...



Liked by anearstisterie and 845 others

Add comment...



Meals you can hear

Yes, food content still rules—but it's evolved. ASMR is no longer niche—it's mainstream. Trending videos aren't just of dishes plated perfectly—they're of meals being made and eaten. The sizzle of scallion pancakes in Taipei or the crunch of tempura in Osaka is what keeps users hooked.

Sound-driven food content is particularly

#MoroccoRoofTop

Instagram



salutmaroc

Yes you were right, @karimagouti stayed with us



Liked by wafae_sl and 311 others

Add comment...



big in South Korea, where Mukbang continues to morph into quieter, more aesthetically rich formats. It's intimate, immersive and addictive.

Geo-specific aesthetics

Every region now has its own visual language on social media—and people are leaning into it.

Italy: Film grain, linen shirts, seaside Vespa rides.

Japan: Minimalist cafes, handwritten notes, seasonal sweets.

Morocco: Terracotta tones, rooftop teas, ornate tiles.

Iceland: Misty landscapes, thermal pools, cinematic drone shots.

#Vespaitaly

Instagram



vespaclubdb

VCDB & PragoVespa



Liked by vespafnd and 85 others

Add comment...



Global creators are travelling with the intent to 'shoot the aesthetic' of a place, making destination visuals as much about style as they are about story.

The return of the night out

After years of at-home content, the night is back on the grid. But it's less about clubs and more about curated nightlife—vinyl-only bars in Mexico City, underground jazz lounges in Seoul, secret cocktail dens in London.

There's also a surge in 'quiet nightlife'

content—night walks, silent discos, late-night bookstores. Social media, it seems, is in its nocturnal era.

Trends to watch

Photo dump 2.0': Messy grids, blurry pics and honest captions are in. Aesthetic curation is giving way to emotional storytelling.

Third-culture creators: More influencers now identify as belonging to multiple places—born in the UK, raised in Dubai, now living in Singapore and their content blends cultural identities into something uniquely modern.

Passport POV: Travel posts filmed through open passports or boarding passes—part nostalgia, part brag, part wanderlust.

What the world is posting is more than trend—it's testimony. A testimony of who we are becoming as a global collective: slower, softer, more intentional, yet still in pursuit of beauty and belonging.

So the next time you double tap a reel from Brazil or save a carousel from Egypt, know this: you're not just engaging with content. You're catching a pulse.

#QuietNightlife

Instagram



hmlswann

The world is a strange place to live, especially these days.



Liked by vespacalabria and 87 others

Add comment...



Talk like a traveller When in Japan!

Shafika Sengupta

Sumimasen! I hadn't even landed in Tokyo when I first heard the word — murmured politely by a woman brushing past me in the airplane aisle, bowing slightly, as if apologising for occupying space. This wasn't just a word. It was a portal. A soft, syllabic key that would unlock the rhythms of my time in Japan.

Where language meets lifestyle

In Japan, you don't just learn the words — you learn how to inhabit them. It's a place where language is delicately layered, like a perfect piece of sashimi. Every phrase

carries not just meaning, but mood, intent and respect.

Sumimasen means excuse me, but also sorry, and sometimes thank you. It's a social buffer, a balm. You say it when getting a waiter's attention or when you slightly bump into someone or even when someone does you a favour. It's the oil in the well-oiled machine that is Japanese society.

My first real test? Navigating the Tokyo Subway. I fumbled with the Suica Card, stumbled down the wrong corridor and nearly got on the train going to Chiba instead of Shibuya. Daijōbu desu ka? A kindly woman asked me — translating to Are you okay? I nodded, heartened. I was learning that in Japan, kindness often comes quietly, but it always shows up.

Coffee shops, konbini culture and local lingo

By my third day in Kyoto, I had a new favourite phrase: Omakase. It means I'll leave it up to you. A sacred word in sushi restaurants where you trust the chef's instincts. At a tiny 8-seater sushi bar in Gion, I whispered it with both reverence and curiosity. In response, I received six perfect pieces of nigiri and a smile. Then came the konbini — Japan's famously efficient convenience stores. Every morning, I'd stop by Lawson or 7-Eleven and say, kore kudasai, or this one, please, pointing at a rice ball I couldn't pronounce (turned out to be ume shiso, pickled plum). The staff would respond with Arigatou gozaimasu, bowing, always bowing.

Language in layers

Even in silence, Japan speaks. In onsens (hot springs), the signs gently advise,



Speakeasy



tattoos are not allowed. In shrines, the phrases on wooden prayer plaques, ema — whisper wishes in Japanese, Korean, English and Mandarin. Hope is multilingual here.

By week two, I could tell the difference between a casual Ja ne (See ya) and a more formal Mata aimashou (Let's meet again). I started bowing without realising it and I began appreciating how language isn't just about speaking — it's about listening, watching and adapting.

The untranslatables

Some words, of course, don't translate at all. Such as:

Wabi-sabi: The beauty of imperfection, seen in a cracked teacup or the asymmetry of a zen garden.

Komorebi: The way sunlight filters through trees.

Tsundoku: Buying books and letting them pile up unread (guilty!). Japan doesn't just give you words — it gives you concepts. It hands you emotions you didn't know had names.

Sayonara, not goodbye

When I finally left, I said Sayonara to the staff at my hotel in Osaka. The concierge gently corrected me saying, better to say 'mata ne'(see you again).



That's the thing about Japan. Even the farewells leave the door open.

Japan doesn't ask you to be fluent. It simply asks you to be present — to listen carefully, bow respectfully and speak with intention. And when you do? You realise that sometimes the most powerful travel stories aren't in the places you visit, but in the words you learn to say.



Your quick-fire phrasebook

Phrase	Meaning	When to use
Sumimasen	Excuse me / Sorry / Thank	Bumping into someone, asking for help
Arigatou gozaimasu	Thank you (polite)	Every transaction or kind gesture
Oishii!	Delicious!	When tasting the ramen you always dreamt of
Konnichiwa	Hello / Good afternoon	Greetings during the day
Daijoubu desu ka?	Are you okay? / Is it alright?	To check on someone or ask permission
Mata ne	See you again	Friendly farewell



Luxury on rails

The legacy of the Palace on Wheels

Ayushi Anand

Step aboard the Palace on Wheels, where India's regal past meets modern luxury. This iconic train, launched in 1982, was designed to offer travellers a royal experience while promoting tourism in Rajasthan. Launched by Rajasthan Tourism Development Corporation and Indian Railways, it is a pioneering luxury train that has redefined travel in India. It offers an unparalleled experience of opulence and grandeur, reminiscent of the personal carriages once used by Maharajas, Nizams and Viceroys. Over the years, Palace on Wheels has been modernised to keep up with technological advancements. This exceptional train has

earned its place among the top five luxury trains in the world, offering an immersive journey through Rajasthan, a state known for its forts, palaces and vibrant cultural heritage. The train goes to Bharatpur, Jaipur, Udaipur, Jaisalmer, Chittorgarh, Sawai Madhopur, Taj Mahal, Jodhpur and Red Fort.

A tribute to royalty and tradition

The history of the Palace on Wheels is as enchanting as the journey it offers. Following India's independence in 1947, the lavish royal carriages once used by Indian royalty were no longer viable for regular passenger services due to the high cost of their upkeep. However, these

magnificent carriages were given a new lease on life when the Palace on Wheels was conceived to offer global travellers a glimpse into India's regal past. The train has since become a global icon, winning accolades such as the prestigious PATA Gold Award in 1987.

Exquisite guest coaches reflecting royal heritage

Palace on Wheels features 14 guest coaches, each named after a princely state of Rajputana. Inside each coach are four twin-bedded chambers adorned with traditional Rajasthani décor. These cabins are equipped with all the modern conveniences a traveller could need,



Deluxe bedroom

including running hot and cold water, air-conditioning and wall-to-wall carpeting. Each coach also boasts a personal 'Khidmatgar' or attendant, who is available round the clock to cater to the guests' needs. The train also offers a lounge in each salon, complete with a television, DVD player and a small library, providing a cosy space for guests to unwind and socialise. There is also a mini-pantry serving hot and cold beverages and refreshments.

World-class amenities on board

Palace on Wheels goes beyond luxury accommodation, offering a range of facilities designed to enhance the royal travel experience. The two dining cars serve gourmet meals prepared by an expert team of chefs, with a focus on fresh local ingredients and traditional Rajputana dishes.

The Spa Car provides rejuvenating treatments, while the Lounge Car and Bar Car allow guests to relax and enjoy the finer aspects of life as they journey through Rajasthan. Each cabin on the train is a sanctuary of comfort, complete with rich silk fabrics, antique wooden furniture and beautiful artwork. Guests have access to internet connectivity,

electronic safes and individual climate control, ensuring a seamless blend of tradition and technology.

A timeless experience of luxury

Palace on Wheels is not merely a mode of transport but an experience that allows travellers to relive the grandeur of India's royal heritage. With its opulent

décor, exceptional service and state-of-the-art facilities, this train offers a truly imperial journey through one of India's most culturally rich regions. It's a voyage of discovery, indulgence and nostalgia, all rolled into one unforgettable adventure.



Palace on wheels at station



Guests waiting to board the train



Sitting lounge

APPOINTMENTS



Sameer Thanvi

joins

Fairfield

by Marriott Jodhpur

as the Assistant
Manager Marketing.



CMA

Apoorva Tripathi

joins

**Hilton Mumbai
International Airport**

as the
Director of Finance.



Shivansh Dixit

joins

**Le Meridien
Mahabaleshwar
Resort & Spa**

as the Assistant Marketing
and Communication Manager.



Pradeep Rawat

joins

**The Westin Sohna
Resort and Spa**

as the Executive Chef.

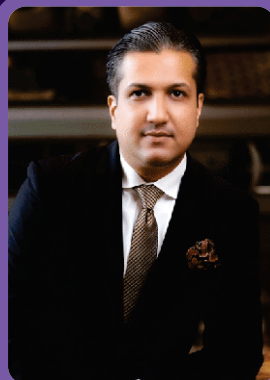


**Vishvapreet Singh
Cheema**

joins

Lemon Tree Hotels

as the President.



Niket Sood

joins

Lemon Tree Hotels

as the
Vice President.



Vineet Sarna

joins

Linkin Reps

as the Head of
Business Development.



Lavraj Matnani

joins

**ExpoINN Suites
& Convention**

as the Director
of Convention Sales.

Events Recap

EGYPTAIR honoured as Africa's best for airline staff service

EGYPTAIR has been awarded 'Best Airline in Africa for airline staff service 2025' by Skytrax, celebrating its excellence in customer experience across the continent.



Korea Tourism Organisation hosts MICE Roadshow 2025 in Mumbai




COUNTRY
INN & SUITES
by Radisson
SOHNA ROAD GURUGRAM

#gurugramluxurystay



An escape to
Effortless Comfort



For Reservations

Call +91-9810432444, +91-8130668444

Falafel at dawn, Koshari at dusk One flight, Endless flavors — only with Egyptair ✈️

Fares Starting at INR 41000*



*Fares are subject to change as per flight situation

** Terms & Conditions apply

For more information, please contact:

Toll free number: 18001033586 | E-mail: delhi_to@egyptair.com

Scan me

for more:

