

A TATA SIA JV

# vistara<sup>®</sup>

THE INFLIGHT MAGAZINE  
AIRVISTARA.COM  
JULY-AUGUST 2021  
VOLUME 7 ISSUE 4

## *The Unity Issue*

ACROSS INDIA IN A TEACUP

STORIES OF SOLIDARITY

UDAIPUR'S ART LABORATORY | TOKYO IN 8 DISHES



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- Raman Walia

Vistara flyer, UK 707, IXC-DEL



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UNITY, AS THE THEME FOR OUR JULY-AUGUST edition, is an apt one as we collectively take a step towards a positive and safer tomorrow. With the world, and India in particular, attempting to resume life as we once knew it, we find hope in the countless tales of solidarity, survival and selfless service of the many heroes across our vast country.

As nationwide vaccination drives gain momentum, we at Vistara are at the forefront of this. We are happy to state that nearly 100 per cent of our eligible employees have been vaccinated with the first dose. In fact, on 16 June, we became the first airline in India to operate a flight with a fully vaccinated crew— inching slowly, but surely, towards normalcy and safe operations.

With unity being at the core of this issue, our cover story is a celebration of India's most loved unifier—the humble cup of chai. Embark on a pan-India journey that takes you from Amritsar to the rolling Nilgiris, via Kashmir and Kolkata, to discover how the flavours of the ubiquitous cup of tea can vary drastically, yet have the same soothing effect. Join us as we travel to the Spiti Valley's surreally picturesque Komic village for a rather undiscovered celebration that includes a thrilling horse race and lots of local

rice wine. Our human-interest feature on tales of solidarity about the nation's COVID heroes is a must-read. The photo essay snapshots some candid Pride moments from across the globe. Behind the glitzy costumes and cheerful fanfare, a newfound sense of inclusion and awareness is emerging. Don't forget to check out our culinary trail in Tokyo, seen through eight local dishes. And bookmark it for the near future once Vistara starts weekly flights between Delhi (DEL) and Tokyo (HND) under India's travel bubble agreement with Japan.

Could this be a sign of wonderful things to come? We sincerely hope so and can't wait to welcome you on board soon. Together, let us ensure that *#FlyingFeelsSafeAgain*. 🌟

- Team Vistara

**1**  
Komic in Spiti Valley is known for its rustic charm

**2**  
Tokyo is, undoubtedly, one of the world's culinary capitals

**3**  
India and it's unsaid bond with chai

# C O N T E N T S

JULY-AUGUST 2021



Tea—the quintessential drink of India

**20**

## Retail Therapy

Objects and experiences of desire from the world of luxury

**22**

## Binge Stream

Documentaries and podcasts that you need to bookmark this season

**26**

## Business Trends

Here's how tech giants in India are giving back to society through various initiatives

**42**

## Cover Story

Traverse our vast, culturally diverse country with multiple cups of tea!

**48**

## Hope

These citizens harnessed their social networks to do good



In a chat with photographer **Joseph Radhik**

### Homegrown brands for the win



**14**

## The Celeb Diary

Ace photographer **Joseph Radhik** on storytelling through photography

**18**

## Vogue

Check out these homegrown fashion brands!



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Fly the new feeling

# Fly with the airline that India trusts.

“They say travel is the only thing you buy that makes you richer! This one definitely made me feel rich, happy and most importantly safe.”

- Anuja Saini

Vistara flyer, UK 979, DEL-AMD



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# C O N T E N T S

## VISTA

**08** Snapshots of New York City and Mumbai

## #TRENDING

**12** **The Round-Up**  
Destinations that are opening up this season

**17** **Social Feed**  
Know about the Vistara experience straight from our flyers' feeds

**24** **Bookmark**  
Our current favourite e-books and audiobooks curated for you

## SUITCASE

**30** **Food Trail**  
Explore the Japanese capital through eight dishes

## ESCAPE

**38** **Adventure**  
Witness a riveting horse race in Spiti Valley's Komic village

**52** **Canvas**  
Some gorgeous Pride moments from around the world



**32**  
**Udaipur's New Art Hub**  
An exclusive tour of the art lab, engaged in ethical conservation, at the City Palace Museum



**58**  
**New Normal Networking**  
**Riyaaz Amlani** on his heart-warming collaboration with Mumbai's *dabbawalas*

## DISCLAIMER:

While this issue might inspire you to travel, we ask that you bookmark these stories and travel only once conditions are safe to do so. Please continue to cooperate with government advisories and restrict travel for only essential purposes.

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Carry-On Plus			✓	✓
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\*Fare difference applicable | Please visit [www.airvistara.com/trip](http://www.airvistara.com/trip) for details.

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A psychologist, actor, singer and reality TV star, Sushant Divgikar is one of India's leading LGBTQIA+ activists. The Mr. Gay India 2014 winner is popular for his drag avatar, Rani KoHENur. He curates this month's photo essay. Follow his work on Instagram @sushantdivgikr



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Bengaluru-based Bindu Gopal Rao is a widely published writer and photographer, with a strong passion for the environment. When she is not looking for unusual spots in a destination, she is busy birdwatching. Check out her blog at [bindugopalrao.com](http://bindugopalrao.com)

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# VISTA

PERSPECTIVES ON AWE-INSPIRING LANDSCAPES

## New York City

The very quintessence of multiculturalism! The Big Apple's best kept secrets are hidden in the lanes behind its skyscrapers. Shot, but not seen, from the top, the Italian, Chinese, Jewish, Latino (and many more) precincts of Manhattan coexist effortlessly. If there were one motto that summed up the DNA of this city, it would be: Diverse and proud!



**“New York City, for me, is a veritable hotbed of musical culture. As a DJ, I find this city truly inspiring because there are so many cultural influences blended together and reinterpreted every single day. Any kind of art or music is accepted and embraced in this city. No judgement!”**

**DJ SHAAN**

*Music Producer, Dj, First Indian to play at Tomorrowland*





LEAD IMAGE: Nick Starichenko/Shutterstock. INSTA COURTESY OF @JShaan

VISTA PICTURE PERFECT

# Mumbai

India's answer to The Big Apple, Mumbai truly is the city that never sleeps. Nowhere else in India does one see a diversity as embracing and heart-warming as in the 'maximum city' — cultures, sub-cultures, communities, languages and cuisines blend seamlessly in every neighbourhood. Mumbai has room for everyone!



**“Mumbai is the sweet smell of hopes and dreams, where every moment tells a story. Thanks to the diverse cultural influences and art that dwell together in its heart, the city never fails to amaze me. The creativity that emerges from my designs often takes inspiration from Mumbai’s sublime structures.”**

**KUNAL RAWAL**  
*Fashion Designer*





LEVO IMAGE - Namak/Singapore - NISTE - Courtesy of Kunamata

# #TRENDING

YOUR WORLD THIS SEASON

## ON THE HORIZON: WHAT'S REOPENING

### LOS ANGELES

The west coast's trendiest city, Los Angeles, is welcoming tourists back! The city's public health experts have issued notices to resume leisure travel this summer. There has never been a better time to enjoy the glamour of Beverly Hills or the restaurant scene of Los Angeles, its diverse neighbourhoods or take a road trip down to Las Vegas!





## SPAIN

Spain, too, is welcoming vaccinated tourists back. Plan a trip to explore the breathtaking Catalan countryside, appreciate Barcelona's unique architecture, marvel at Madrid's fashion scene and enjoy Grenada's cultural trail. Some restrictions are still in place, though. Museums like The Prado, for instance, ask tourists to book e-tickets 24 hours prior to the visit.

## PHUKET

Craving some Thai food, infinity pools and island getaways? Well, the pristine beaches of Phuket will open for vaccinated tourists. The Tourism Council of Thailand is even offering certain hotel rooms at a price as low as \$1! There's no quarantine for vaccinated tourists. You are, however, required to spend the first 14 days in Phuket, after which you are free to travel across the rest of Thailand.



## ICELAND

Offbeat and undiscovered—that's Iceland for you! Travellers with coronavirus vaccination certificates can now enter the Atlantic country. However, expect a few restrictions due to the new normal. It's a small price to pay to visit the country's surreal natural sights, like the Fagradalsfjall volcano, Reykjavik's Blue Lagoon and some remote Icelandic villages.

## GUATEMALA

The beautiful Central American country is open to travellers who are vaccinated, have tested negative for COVID-19 or have recovered from it within the last three months. Now is your chance to discover Guatemala's ancient Mayan sites, the Pacaya Volcano, sites of architectural significance, and not to mention, a lesser-known culture with great food and wine.



## DREAMING OF THE DAYS



### DIGITAL CREATOR RASNA BHASIN HAS PICKED HER NEXT TRAVEL DESTINATION

[@@rasnabhasin](https://www.instagram.com/rasnabhasin)

"Honestly, I can't wait to travel and discover a new destination again. Next on my wishlist is Keukenhof in the Netherlands! Over the last one year, I have realised that we need to seize the opportunity to travel whenever we get a safe option to do so. I am never taking travelling for granted again."



*Disclaimer: The information on this spread has been compiled in mid-June 2021 and is likely to change. Readers are requested to get themselves vaccinated and adhere to each country's guidelines and travel policies.*

## THE LENS RACONTEUR

Ace photographer **Joseph Radhik** uses his snapshots and social media to share beautiful stories of people, nature and travel. A rendezvous with this creative genius.

by RIAAN JACOB GEORGE



**Your job is inherently linked to travel. What are some of the most memorable destinations you've been to?**

There's a long list, but here are three of my most favourite memories. I shot the wedding of a Dutch bride and Telugu groom at a vineyard in Franschhoek, South Africa, with 70 odd guests. It was equal parts fun and a beautiful mix of cultures! The next one would be the winter wedding of Anushka Sharma and Virat Kohli in Tuscany, the photos of which, I think, the whole world has seen by now. My memories of it have little to do with those photos, but the celebration of love that I witnessed and the gorgeous background of the Italian countryside. Third, and my most favourite destination is St. Moritz, Switzerland. Watching the frozen landscape of St. Moritz was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for me!

**Do you ever stay back to explore a destination after a shoot?**

I hardly ever get the chance to stay back, because most of these weddings are in the





1



2

#### THIS SPREAD

1. Joseph Radhik connects stories and emotions through his shots;
2. St. Moritz is one of Radhik's favourite spots;
3. Radhik loved capturing sunsets in Seychelles;
4. A stunning wedding shoot by Radhik in the lavender fields of Provence, France

travelling, I try to catch every sunrise, sunset and starry sky. Oh, and I eat a lot of the local food.

#### Have there ever been times where you have just put your camera aside to soak in a place, without chronicling it?

Yes. I remember sitting by a frozen lake at St. Moritz and just taking in the bizarre reality of my life. I am always aware of the extraordinary places I go to and the unique things I get to experience. In that moment, I was simply soaking in the blessing that is the life I live.

#### Name a few places you'd like to check out once travel opens up?

First and foremost, I want to go and meet my family whom I haven't seen in months. Then I want to go to new places with them! On my bucket list are a few road trips around India—to the Northeast, to Kerala and back to Rajasthan.

#### We love your Instagram handle (@storiesbyjosephradhik). Tell us about your approach to 'storytelling'.

The name was coined by my brother (Joshua Karthik), who is also the co-founder at Stories. As a wedding photography brand, we realised that the foundation of our work is not the places or colours or outfits, but always the stories. That is our secret sauce. My approach to storytelling is to make it personal.

#### Finally, since this is the "Unity" issue, what, in your opinion, is that one thing that unites and thrills the entire photography clan?

Photographs. It is the one thing that thrills us. It is not about good or bad images. It is about the joy in the act of making a photograph that connects us all. The happiness we get after creating a photo, just like the one we had in our mind, is unparalleled. Everything else—the destination, the subject, etc.—is an excuse to that point. 🌟

season when we have back-to-back assignments. The one time I did extend my work trip was in Seychelles, where we drove around for a week, exploring each corner of the tiny island, in an open-top Mini Moke, while staying at a beachfront villa, and capturing every sunrise and sunset there.

#### What kind of traveller are you?

A compulsive road tripper! All my travel plans revolve around routes, cars and stopovers. I have a long bucket list of road trips around the world.

#### As a visual storyteller, what is it about a destination that piques your interest the most?

Since most of my travel happens between towns and in the countryside, it's the 'nothingness' that allures me the most. Whether it is chasing the sights of the Milky Way in Madagascar or finding an abandoned lighthouse in Portugal, I always gravitate towards calm more than chaos. I never miss a sunset at home. When I am



3



4

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Courtesy of Joseph Radhik, courtesy of Stories by Joseph Radhik, Konektus Photo/Shutterstock, thelavenderfields.com, courtesy of Joseph Radhik

PROTECT  
THE WILD

# SUPER SNIFFERS

Canines on a mission to #EndWildlifeTrafficking

Illicit wildlife trade is the fourth largest criminal activity globally, threatening the future of many wildlife species. In India, the poaching of wild animals continues for their meat, use in medicine and illegal pet trade. Since wildlife crime has evolved itself as an organised activity, it needs an organised response. The use of sniffer dogs for curbing wildlife crime has proved to be a game-changer.

**#DYK dogs' olfactory capabilities are 10,000 to 1,00,000 times stronger than those of humans, making them excellent sniffer and detector dogs?**

## India's wildlife sniffer dogs

TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network and WWF-India launched India's first wildlife sniffer dog training programme in 2008 with two dogs. Today, 74 wildlife sniffer dog squads have been trained and deployed across India, with another 13 currently under training. These have been deployed across 20 states with forest departments and also Railway Protection Force (RPF).

Along with their handlers, the dogs undergo rigorous training of 6-9 months. Apart from being trained to detect tiger and leopard, elephant tusk, bear bile, deer meat and antlers, the sniffer dogs are also taught to trace illegal trade of plant products such as red sanders and caterpillar fungus that are a part of the wildlife. In the field, these dogs

have adapted their sniffing skills to detect an array of additional wildlife parts and derivatives, including live birds, snakes, porcupines, turtles, tortoises and several marine products. Super sniffers have so far assisted enforcement agencies in detecting and investigating over 500 wildlife crime cases in India.



Images © Dr Saket Badola

## YOU CAN HELP!

DO NOT BUY ILLEGAL WILDLIFE PRODUCTS. You can be imprisoned for it. REPORT wildlife crime to local enforcement agency. SUPPORT WILDLIFE SNIFFER DOGS and other initiatives that help protect wildlife! Scan the QR code to know more.



**TRAFFIC**  
the wildlife trade monitoring network

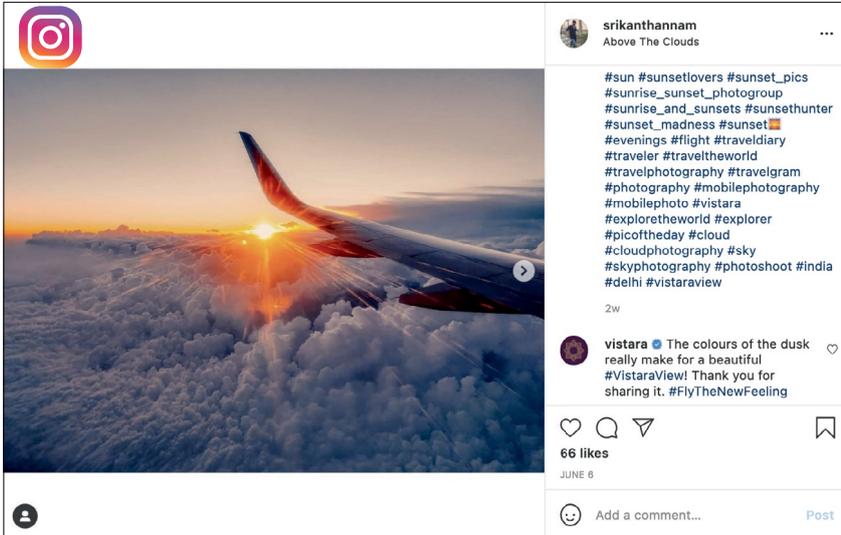
TRAFFIC is a leading non-governmental organisation working globally on trade in wild animals and plants in the context of both biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. In India, it operates as a programme division of WWF-India.

[www.trafficindia.org](http://www.trafficindia.org) ; [www.wwfindia.org](http://www.wwfindia.org); [www.traffic.org](http://www.traffic.org)



# WHAT'S UP ON SOCIAL?

Tune into all the Vistara chatter on social media.



@srikanthannam



@SyamkumarRamesh



@SimranChhatri

## #TAG US IN

### GET SOCIAL WITH US

Tag us on social media, add #vistara and you could stand a chance to be featured in the Vistara inflight magazine



## TWEET ON POINT



@LiveFromALounge



@karanjaidka



@awnusharma

#TRENDING VOGUE



## ECO STYLE

Who doesn't love fashion for a cause? Get hold of some homegrown brands that wear their sustainable causes on their sleeve.  
by RIAAN JACOB GEORGE

### HEART TO HAAT X KA-SHA

An indie label that has made news in recent times for its upscale upcycling. Clothes are mended and repurposed into super-chic pieces like jackets and dresses. This label helps artisans by putting them in direct contact with international consumers.

[ka-shaindia.com](http://ka-shaindia.com)



### OKHAI

An impressive collective of 24,000 pan-India artisans is committed to reviving India's forgotten art and craft forms. The result is an online portal with the most exquisite creations ranging from indigo and *mulmul* fabrics to *ajrak* sarees and hand-blocked bed linen, using traditional techniques. Must have!  
[okhai.org](http://okhai.org)





### CROW HANDCRAFTED LUXURY

Based in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, this niche brand uses organic cotton in most of its creations and promises that all of its minimalist pieces are handwoven. All of Crow's weavers use non-power-based indigenous techniques and tools to weave, thereby keeping the craft alive. Crow sources its fabrics from select weavers across the country.  
[worldofcrow.com](http://worldofcrow.com)



### INMATE

This is a unique story to tell—INMATE's footwear is handcrafted by a bunch of prisoners in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. Over 200 inmates have been trained and reskilled to become self-sustained artisans, creating the most beautiful *kolhapuris* and sandals using cruelty-free genuine leather.  
[byinmate.com](http://byinmate.com)



### IWASA SARI

With its self-explanatory name, this Mumbai-based label uses pre-loved sarees and gives them a second lease of life as kurtas, kaftans, dresses, shirts and even cloth jewellery. So much so that the brand was even noticed by Gucci! This team of dedicated women work towards a circular economy! So chic!  
[iwasasari.com](http://iwasasari.com)



### ETHICUS

This initiative describes itself as a 'farm to fashion' movement. The brand grows its own organic cotton and works with specialised handweavers in Pollachi, Tamil Nadu. They also work with artisans across India who specialise in *chikankari*, *kalamkari*, *bandhani* and *ajrak*.  
[ethicus.in](http://ethicus.in)



### PAPERMELON

Based out of her tiny atelier in Chennai, designer Devi Chand's sustainable label makes the most stunning jewellery pieces out of waste paper. Gorgeously sculpted and featuring a host of bright colours, Papermelon's pieces are definitely worth checking out.  
[papermelon.com](http://papermelon.com)



### ROUKA

Fashion designer Sreejith Jeevan works out of his atelier in Kochi to connect weavers to high-fashion consumers. His pieces are deeply rooted in Kerala's culture—handwoven *kasavu* sarees, cotton tissue sarees and embroidered *kasavu* cotton *mundus*-dhotis.  
[shoprouka.com](http://shoprouka.com)



#TRENDING RETAIL THERAPY



## LUXE PICKS

In the mood to splurge?  
Here are our latest picks of the most desirable  
products and experiences in the luxury market.  
by RIAAN JACOB GEORGE



### FRENCH LEGENDS COLLABORATE

Maison Christian Dior has partnered with the historic 150-year-old Hotel du Cap-Eden-Roc in Côte d'Azur, to release their signature Eden-Roc scent. Conceived by celebrity perfumer François Demachy, this fragrance is a perfect representation of luxury travel to France.

[dior.com](http://dior.com); [oetkercollection.com](http://oetkercollection.com)



### GERMAN WHEELS

At a whopping ₹2.43 crore, the jaw-dropping Mercedes-Maybach GLS 600 4MATIC marks the German carmaker's entry into the ultra-luxury SUV segment. Some of the perks include reclining and climate-controlled massage seats in the rear, in-car fragrances, a dedicated Maybach drive programme, and an MBUX rear seat tablet to control comfort and entertainment functions. Chic! [mercedes-benz.co.in](http://mercedes-benz.co.in)

### SAIL STYLE

If you're in the market for a luxury yacht, Ferretti Yachts' new flagship, the Ferretti 1000 New is the Italian manufacturer's largest yacht yet—at 100 feet. It can accommodate up to 10 guests, across two levels and five cabins. [ferretti-yachts.com](http://ferretti-yachts.com)





### HERITAGE CARS & WATCHES

Historic Swiss watchmaker BOVET 1822 and Rolls-Royce have collaborated to create two tourbillon timepieces, which have been engineered, designed and developed in parallel with the production of a coachbuilt Rolls-Royce. These timepieces can transform from a wristwatch to a pocket watch and a dashboard clock!  
*bovet.com; rolls-roycemotorcars.com*

### ISLAND INDULGENCE

Fancy being the only one on a remote island? That's not too difficult if you book yourself into the Private Island four-bedroom villa at the Cheval Blanc Randheli, Maldives. You and your family have the island all to yourself, including a private access jetty, a sprawling villa, a dedicated chef and an 82-foot-long pool. Price is, of course, on request.  
*chevalblanc.com*

### AIRPORT LOOK

As travel opens up slowly, invest in some new luggage! Check out Tumi's Short Trip Expandable 4 Wheeled Packing Case. Available in navy camo, black and russet ombre colour options, it is made with recycled bottles and post-industrial recycled nylon. Don't forget to monogram it!  
*tumi.com*





### SEASPIRACY

Netflix's *Seaspiracy* takes you on a voyage around the world, bringing to light the impact of the fishing industry on ocean life. While many applauded it as a call to action, others blamed the investigative film for oversimplifying the complex issue. Watch and pick your side!



### WRITING WITH FIRE

A tale of courage and conviction—this recently released documentary chronicles the rise of *Khabar Lahariya*, India's only newspaper run by Dalit women. Watch these ambitious reporters break traditions and make their own space in a male-dominated news landscape.



### MY LOVE: SIX STORIES OF TRUE LOVE

Watch six couples from around the world share their decades-long love stories. Filmed through tender portraits over the course of one year, the heart-warming Netflix docuseries implies that love conquers all.



## UNSCRIPTED!

We've picked out some of the most intriguing, true-to-life documentaries for your watch list.

### THE YEAR EARTH CHANGED

Narrated by David Attenborough, this timely documentary floods your screen with footage of Mother Nature reclaiming her rightful space, when global lockdowns demanded a sudden withdrawal of humans and their intrusions last year. With shots of whales peacefully gliding in the ocean, wild animals strolling through deserted urban streets, and birdsong replacing the city's clamour—Apple TV+'s first documentary special is a lesson in human-wildlife coexistence.



### INDIA FROM ABOVE

Let Nat Geo's two-part documentary series take your breath away with awe-inspiring aerial shots from across India, paired with unheard stories narrated by actor Dev Patel. From extravagant festivals to natural marvels, the surreal panoramas are sure to keep you hooked.



### THE MINIMALISTS: LESS IS NOW

The minimalistic approach to lifestyle is on the rise today, and this Netflix documentary helps dispel all your doubts about the movement. It comes with a great deal of relatability and tackles issues like hoarding and our dependence on consumer culture.

## PODCAST PICKS

Creative, humorous, reflective and philosophical—this checklist of trending podcasts on Spotify is just what you need on your smartphone.



### MAED IN INDIA

India's top indie music podcast has hosted hundreds of independent artists over the years. Expect weekly live shows, talks and even music biz seminars!



### TED TALKS DAILY

*TED Talks Daily* brings to you compelling stories, intriguing insights and fascinating history, through a new podcast every weekday, with host and journalist Elise Hu.



### ON PURPOSE WITH JAY SHETTY

Life coach Jay Shetty aims to make “wisdom go viral” through conversations with the most influential personalities in this thought-provoking podcast.



### RABBIT HOLE

*New York Times* tech-columnist Kevin Roose explains how the internet is changing us, and compels us to ask if we're too dependent on the online world.



### CYRUS SAYS

Let the inimitable Cyrus Broacha make you laugh till you drop, with his wit and amusing takes on urban India, sports, politics, and life in general.



### HBR IDEACAST

This weekly podcast by *Harvard Business Review* brings to the table leading thinkers who provide important insights on business, management and finance.

## JOIN THE CLUB!

The buzziest app of the season has arrived! Catch all the live audio action happening in the digital world on Clubhouse.

Clubhouse, the latest invitation-only social media platform, has become the talk of the town in no time. Simply put, the audio-only app allows its users to join ‘rooms’ and discuss absolutely any topic under the sun. But then, it's more than just

that. Unlike other social networks, Clubhouse doesn't demand to ‘see you’ and lets the spotlight remain on stimulating real-time discussions. It's the original medium, reborn, if you will. And the digital world is sure loving it for that!



# A LITERARY FEAST

Here's what we downloaded on our e-readers and placed on our bookshelves, this season.

by AMEESHA RAIZADA

 **THE INVENTION OF WINGS**

*Sue Monk Kidd*

(e-book and audiobook)

Set in the early 1800s in South Carolina, the novel begins with Sarah Grimké's 11<sup>th</sup> birthday. Decked in lavender ribbons, a ten-year-old girl, Handful, is gifted to her as a handmaiden. Henceforth, their destinies are intertwined through a time marked by rebellions against injustice. Follow the lives of the two girls and their struggles for freedom: one against oppression, the other for the liberation of her spirit.



 **TO THE ELEPHANT GRAVEYARD**

*Tarquin Hall*

(e-book)

A killer elephant is on the loose in Northeast India. Forest officers, unable to thwart the 'beast', request for a death warrant as well as help from one of the last licensed elephant hunters. Tarquin Hall, a Delhi-based journalist, reads about the hunt in a newspaper, and flies to Assam to investigate. What follows is a compelling account of the Khasi tribe, their peaceful coexistence with wild elephants and the tragic aftermath of shrinking forests.

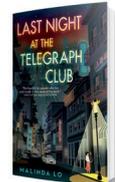


 **LAST NIGHT AT THE TELEGRAPH CLUB**

*Malinda Lo*

(e-book and audiobook)

The neon sign of the Telegraph Club flashed as Lily Hu walked into the bar, unaware of what lay ahead. There, she meets Kathleen Miller, who ignites in her youthful desire and the need for self-discovery. But in 1954, America is not safe for two girls to fall in love. The tender warmth of first love, conflict of duties and societal paranoia form the backdrop of Malinda Lo's masterpiece.

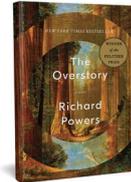


 **THE OVERSTORY**

*Richard Powers*

(e-book and audiobook)

A work of realist fiction, this book is a discourse on the bond between humankind and nature. Indelible memories and experiences of nine individuals with five trees, draw them up to face the reality of impending catastrophes: from deforestation in New York to the Timber Wars of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond. Subtly weaving in activism and resistance, this sweeping piece by Richard Powers won the 2019 Pulitzer Prize in the Fiction category!



 **THE SLEEPWALKER'S GUIDE TO DANCING**

*Mira Jacob*

(audiobook)

Mira Jacob's iconic debut is a timeless story—a testimony to hope and the bonds of love. Amina, a photographer settled in Seattle, heads home to help her father, who is losing his sanity with each passing year. What happens when she discovers the whole truth? *The Sleepwalker's Guide to Dancing* takes readers through the tribulations faced by a family coming to terms with its complicated past.



 **EDUCATED**

*Tara Westover*

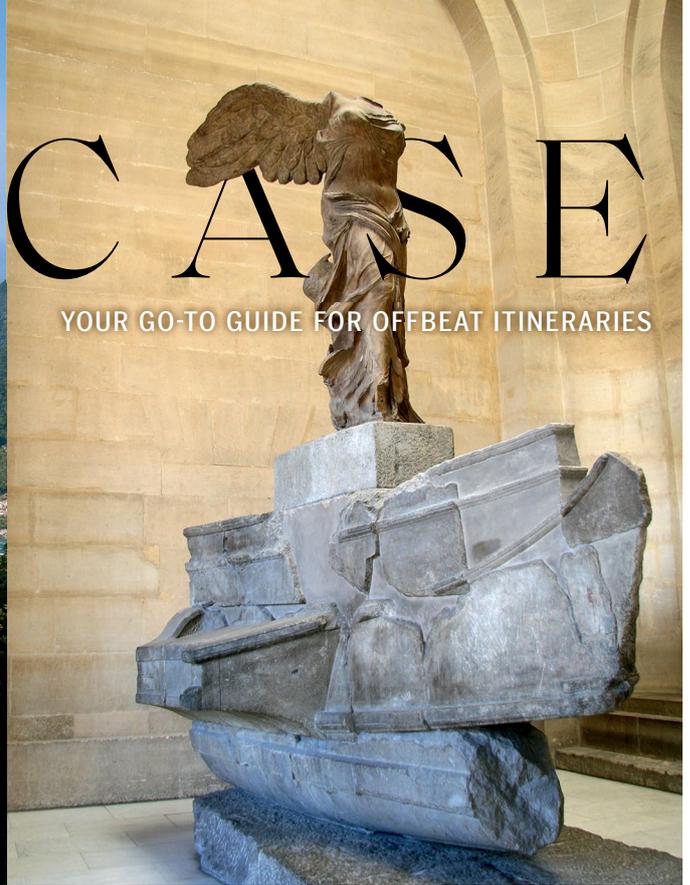
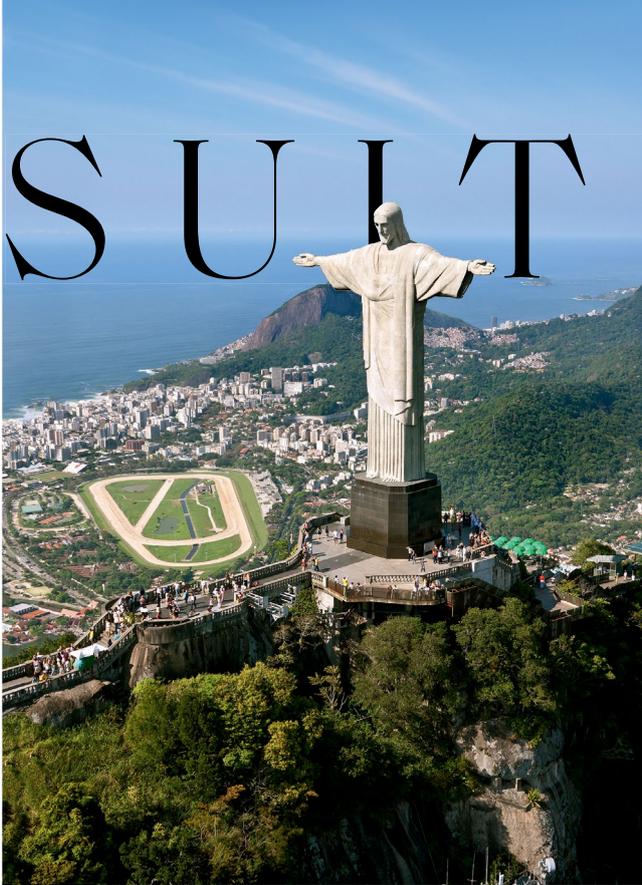
(e-book)

Born in the mountains of Idaho to a couple that isolated itself from mainstream society, Tara Westover was 17 when she first stepped into a classroom. She had taught herself enough to be admitted to a university, and later, her hunger for knowledge took her across continents far from home. A tribute to the power of learning and the quest for self-invention, this memoir has fuelled debates, and inspired educationalists and students alike.



# S U I T C A S E

YOUR GO-TO GUIDE FOR OFFBEAT ITINERARIES



## Christ the Redeemer

This colossal statue of Jesus Christ with open arms—symbolising peace—overlooks Rio de Janeiro. The world's largest art deco sculpture, standing at 98 feet, has inspired dozens of similar monuments across South America.

## The Winged Victory of Samothrace

Enjoying pride of place in the Louvre Museum, Paris, the 'Nike of Samothrace' is one of the world's most photographed statues, dating back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. It is an epitome of Hellenistic sculpture and honours Nike, the goddess of victory.

## MONUMENTAL & SYMBOLIC

Across the globe, these monuments have come to represent unity, peace and freedom.



### The Little Mermaid

Copenhagen's locals flock to the waterfront to see this bronze statue of an elegant siren seated atop a rock. This folkloric piece symbolises the unison of love.



### The Statue of Liberty

No points for guessing why this New York icon makes it to our list, owing to its role in shaping the city's culture and its representation of freedom in America.



### The Statue of Unity

This gargantuan statue of Indian freedom fighter Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel is the world's tallest statue at 597 feet. Situated by the Narmada River, it is a huge draw for tourists to Gujarat.



### David

Michelangelo's Renaissance masterpiece represents the artistic heritage of Florence. The original statue stands at the Galleria dell'Accademia, and is symbolic of David's victory over Goliath.

# TECH GIANTS LEND A HAND

Here's how major players in the Indian technology space have spearheaded some noble initiatives for the new normal.

by PALLAVI SINGH

IN RECENT TIMES, TECHNOLOGY has been the single most important element for us to connect, communicate and reach out. Social media has emerged as the biggest asset during the pandemic, in terms of disseminating crucial information to help those in need and save lives. We look at how major stakeholders in the technology segment in India have launched a host of initiatives and marketing strategies to help out society at large in these trying times. Travel, skill sharing, and hospitality... the list is endless.

## Travel Tech

Travel is becoming more and more sustainable and technologically advanced, and Booking.com has been working at enhancing its services, making it easier for travellers to experience the world better. As per their in-house Future of Travel research, 77 per cent of Indians mentioned that they would only book a particular accommodation if it's clear what health and hygiene policies

it has in place. "To cater to this need, we have introduced the Health and Safety Measures feature on our platform, where accommodation partners can list the different safety measures they are taking. These are then displayed on the property page on Booking.com," says Ritu Mehrotra, Regional Manager-South Asia at Booking.com.

Amanpreet Bajaj, General Manager, Airbnb-India, Southeast Asia, Hong Kong and Taiwan, tells us that the company has designed various programmes to support the health and safety needs of their community, guests and hosts. This includes introducing the Airbnb Frontline Stays in 2020, as a global effort to provide healthcare workers with free housing, while they are away from their homes.

"We connected non-profit partners, government agencies and others with our incredible host community to work together in these extraordinary times. We also raised \$250 million for those affected



Many major stakeholders in India's technology segment have launched COVID relief initiatives in the past few months



Marcin Mierzejewski/Shutterstock

# SUITCASE BUSINESS TRENDS



## THIS SPREAD

1. & 2. Facebook hosted a live fundraising concert with Arijit Singh to provide essential supplies in rural India; 3. & 6. Facebook's COVID-19 announcement tool for the state health departments in India; 4. Airbnb is helping its host community through its Online Experiences; 5. LinkedIn's Open to Work profile frame for job seekers



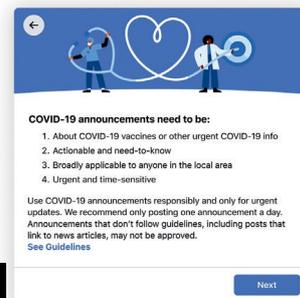
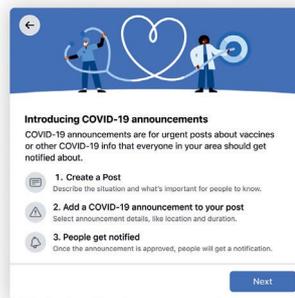
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Today, the job market is fiercely competitive, and LinkedIn data shows that the competition for jobs has spiked 30 per cent since last year.

by COVID-19 in our host community, to help them cover cancellation overheads. Airbnb continued to innovate and drive demand for our host community through Online Experiences, which remains the fastest-growing product we have ever launched,” Bajaj says.

### The Social Network

In recent times, Facebook has been at the forefront, supporting local communities across India with medical supplies and other life-saving equipment. This includes a \$10 million grant for emergency response efforts. The social networking giant has also launched a Vaccine Finder tool on its app and a COVID-19 announcement tool for the state health departments to share essential updates in India.

Facebook also organised a live fundraising concert with singer and music composer Arijit Singh through its SocialForGood initiative and GiveIndia to raise funds for COVID relief in rural India. Manish Chopra, Director and Head of Partnerships,

Facebook India, says, “Our SocialForGood initiative is focussed on supporting large community causes by bringing together public figures and creators to raise both awareness and funding.” In addition, it also enabled a dedicated tag, one of their biggest product features, that automatically linked related posts and stories to the Facebook’s Coronavirus Information Centre.

### Employment in the New Normal

As the world grapples with a global unemployment crisis, business and employment-oriented service provider LinkedIn is helping professionals identify new careers and empowering them with insights on in-demand jobs and fastest-growing skills.

LinkedIn’s new Career Explorer tool helps employment-seekers find new jobs by mapping their skills to open roles, and the new *#Hiring* frame helps hiring managers make announcements directly from their profiles, enabling candidates to see open job opportunities simply on their feeds.

“LinkedIn data shows that the competition for jobs has spiked 30 per cent since last year. During this global unemployment crisis, we are committed to helping those seeking jobs, with the right insights and tools. Our new *#Hiring* profile photo frame is also making it easy for candidates to find open roles,” says Ashutosh Gupta, Country Manager, LinkedIn. The personalised LinkedIn profile features help people share more about themselves, their career and goals in an engaging way. This includes a Cover Story video that allows them to present their soft skills to recruiters.

### Reskilling

Online learning courses offered by Microsoft, GitHub and LinkedIn helped millions prepare for and

secure the most in-demand roles, including customer service, project management and data analysis, during the pandemic. Promoting skills has been a top priority for Microsoft Corporation. It helped millions of people in over 200 countries, of which approximately three million people are from India, to acquire digital skills, by the end of March this year. The company is extending its commitment to help 250,000 companies worldwide with skill-based hiring this year. LinkedIn’s integration with Microsoft is pioneering. “Skills will be the new currency in the post-pandemic world,” points out Ahmed Mazhari, Asia President, Microsoft Corporation. “Reskilling needs to be at the centre of our economic reset. Together with LinkedIn, we are doubling up our efforts to redesign work by supporting the development of a more inclusive skills-based labour market, creating alternatives, greater flexibility, and accessible learning paths connecting people with new job opportunities.”

In India, Microsoft has partnered with the government, industry bodies and non-profit organisations to create a strong digital skilling ecosystem. Last year, for instance, the tech major joined hands with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) to empower 100,000 underserved young women across India with digital skills. It has also partnered with the Directorate General of Training (DGT), Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) and NASSCOM Foundation to create learning pathways for students at the Industrial Training Institutes (ITI) in India. To promote reskilling as a national priority, NASSCOM FutureSkills and Microsoft collaborated last year to launch a nationwide Artificial Intelligence (AI) training initiative. 🌟



# TOKYO IN

# Eight Dishes

The Japanese capital is one of the world's culinary hotspots, and you must add these local specialities to your list.

by AMEESHA RAIZADA

"TOKYO WAS SO DENSE, SO CROWDED with stuff, so complicated, tempting, delicious and seemingly unknowable: Layer upon layer of maddeningly interesting *izakayas* in one building alone. One city block a life's work of exploration," Anthony Bourdain, American celebrity chef, wrote in his book *Rice, Noodle, Fish*, fascinated by the layers of Japanese cuisine.

Hard to pin down, Tokyo's culinary scene is distinguished by traditional Japanese dishes available in 'speciality' restaurants. Here are our top picks for the Japanese capital's most tempting dishes.

## ONIGIRI

A staple of Japanese bento boxes, these rice cakes are stuffed with sour ingredients such as *umeboshi* (brined Japanese plum), salted salmon or pickled *takana* (mustard greens). Wrapped in *nori* (dried edible seaweed), Onigiri offers a tantalising blend of subtle flavours.

### TRY IT AT:

[Onigiri Asakusa Yadoroku](#) 3-9-10  
Asakusa, Taito City

## GYOKURO

An aromatic tea blend, Gyokuro has a distinctly mellow, sweet *umami* punch. The smallest leaves from the





top of shaded plants are harvested to create this unique infusion. Also called 'jade dew' thanks to its colour, Gyokuro is hard to come by, and is often coveted among tea sommeliers.

**TRY IT AT:**

**Yamamotoyama Fujie sabo** 2-5-1  
Nihonbashi, Chuo-ku

**YATSUSHASHI**

A 'souvenir sweet' often served at tea time, Yatsushashi is a baked confection stuffed with *anko* (red bean paste). Made with sticky rice flour and flavoured with cinnamon, it's typically shaped like a triangle.

**TRY IT AT:**

**Seigetsudo** 7-16-15 Ginza, Chuo-ku

**FUKAGAWA-MESHI**

Born from the traditional cuisine of the Fukagawa fishermen, this dish is comfort food. The seasoned rice is fluffy, topped with *asari* (short-neck) clams and green onions cooked in a blend of Kanto and Shinshu miso.

**TRY IT AT:**

**Choju-an Kyosho** 1-7-2 Hirano, Koto-ku

**OSHIZUSHI**

Oshizushi's signature rectangular shape is created using a wooden mould. Vinegar-soaked rice is topped with seafood and condiments, then neatly layered. The fish is usually marinated or grilled, but its raw variants are also quite common.

**TRY IT AT:**

**Sushi Ichibanboshi** Takaban, Meguro-ku

**YAKINIKU**

The concept of barbecue came to Japan through Korean immigrants. As adaptations were made, yakiniku



(grilled meat) came into existence, becoming a part of Japanese dining culture. Charcoal-grilled steak is the most popular version.

**TRY IT AT:**

**Shin'ichikan Shinjukuonten**  
Kabukicho, Shinjuku-ku

**CHANKO NABE**

Nothing can beat a traditional Japanese hotpot. Chanko nabe is made with different vegetables, from daikon and bokchoy to mushrooms, cooked in a rich stock. Pick your protein source and drizzle a dash of mirin (rice wine) for that added zing.

**TRY IT AT:**

**Negima** Ikebukurohoncho, Toshima-ku

**HANAMI DANGO**

Inspired by the cherry blossoms of Japan, these mochi rice dumplings in pastel hues (pink, white and green) are lined on a skewer. The tender, sticky texture of the dessert is what sets it apart.

**TRY IT AT:**

**Habutae Dango** Higashinippori,  
Arakawa City 🍡



# UDAIPUR'S *New* ART HUB

This art laboratory at the City Palace Museum, Udaipur, is abuzz with a host of ethical conservation efforts. We get an exclusive look.

by BINDU GOPAL RAO

UDAIPUR'S CITY PALACE MUSEUM IS a huge draw for tourists and needs no introduction. It is the repository of a priceless art collection that has been handed down over generations, attracting local and international art and heritage enthusiasts. However, beyond the 'No Entry' boards, there is a treasure trove kept out of bounds for tourists. Located within the palace complex is the Conservation Laboratory, where specialists work on art restoration projects.

A small group of dedicated conservation experts sit near the entrance of the lab, working painstakingly on what appears to be a set of large paintings. While the plans for the Conservation Laboratory at the City Palace Museum, Udaipur, were

conceptualised in 2015-2016, the structural restoration of the selected space commenced in 2017, and the laboratory became fully functional in January 2018. It has been set up not just to cater to the collections of the museum, but also to serve as a centre of expertise and knowledge-sharing with national and international institutions. The dedicated team comprises consultant conservator S Girikumar, and two full-time conservators, Anuja Mukherjee and Bhasha Shah.

## THE PROCESS

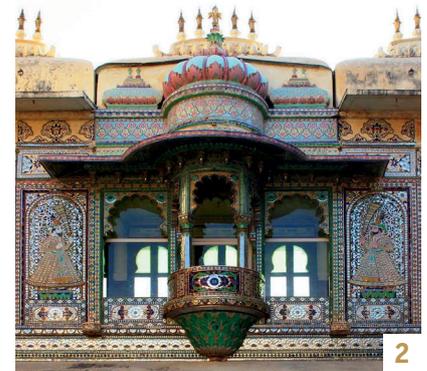
The conservators at the lab are currently working on Mewar paintings, and they have already restored about 35 art pieces to date. Each painting goes through a unique set of conservation processes.





THIS SPREAD

1. An ancient Mewar painting;
2. Mor Chowk in the palace complex



Mukherjee explains, “When an artwork comes to the lab for conservation, the required treatment depends on its material composition and condition. First, the painting is unframed. Then, it is examined closely through a microscope, by clicking photographs in natural and raking lights, which show the painting’s texture and detailing accurately. Detailed documentation of the nature and condition of the artwork, and a tentative course of treatment are established. If the paper on which the artwork is done is thin, transmitted images are used. Here, a backlight helps detect the thickness of the ink and identify the pigments used in the paint.”

All the paintings that are currently being restored belong to the City



The lab has a forward-thinking ethos—the equipment here has been chosen to help not just ongoing but also future conservation requirements.

Palace Museum, Udaipur, an integral part of the Maharana of Mewar Charitable Foundation, Udaipur. Treatment often starts with a spot test (to avoid colour bleeding), followed by cleaning the object with solvents and a soft brush.

As the weather in Udaipur is very dry, these paintings are mostly found with their top layer cracking and flaking. In that case, the consolidation of the flaking paint layer is carefully performed using a suitable adhesive. Removal of old tape from the back of the paintings is also a part of the restoration process. “Another kind of damage is delamination, in which layers of paper support—which are fixed using adhesives—get separated as they lose adhesive strength. Tears and losses are infilled using Japanese

tissues, whose fibrous nature merges with the original handmade paper to provide overall structural stability to the paintings,” explains Shah.

### AN INSIDE LOOK

The lab itself has several sections and is laid out in a vertical design, with all the equipment and working tables kept movable to ensure optimum use of space. There is a separate section for mounting the artwork, and a couple of areas are occupied by the conservators. Towards the extreme end is the area where water-based treatments are done. Since transporting paintings to the lab is challenging, due to the narrow alleyways within the palace, a provision has been made for a 16-foot hydraulic lift to safely transfer these paintings from the courtyard to the laboratory with



**THIS SPREAD**

- 3. The City Palace is a huge draw for tourists in Udaipur;
- 4. Removal of old tape from the paintings is part of the restoration process;
- 5. Microscopic imagery is used to work on old flaking paint;
- 6. The latest equipment, like a low-pressure vacuum table, is used in the lab



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minimal vibrations. The lab has a forward-thinking ethos—the equipment here has been chosen to help the ongoing and future conservation requirements. The studio lights help in photographic documentation of the artworks. In order to keep the dust away, windows have been sealed. Fume extractors ensure that all hazardous fumes from the chemicals used in the treatment are removed.

**INTEGRITY INTACT**

A key aspect of the paintings is, of course, the paint used. Over time, several paintings have witnessed a loss of medium, so much so that the underdrawings have become visible. Girikumar explains, “Reintegrating or in-painting the lost areas is done ethically, without interfering with the original intention of the artist.



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## SUITCASE CONSERVATION

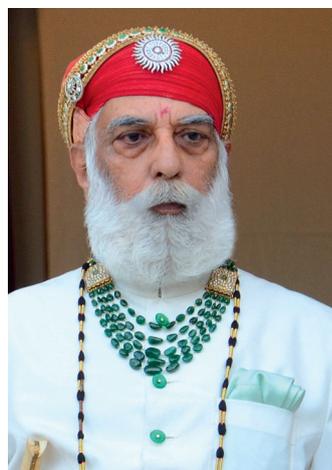
### THIS SPREAD

7. Conservation experts in the lab;  
8. A steam pencil is used to remove old and stubborn adhesives;  
9. The Conservation Laboratory's modern set-up within the palace

Over time, several paintings have witnessed a loss of medium, so much so that the underdrawings have become clearly visible.

Usually, we never paint anything unless there is a hole or loss that has been reconstructed. That's when we in-paint a neutral colour so that it merges with the original work." Once the paintings are ready, they will be stored in a special storage area and mounted using archival-quality mount boards. All the paintings will be stored in flat file drawers, interleaved with archival-quality tissues to ensure that they are preserved well.

The conservation of art using ethical means, is indeed a task, but is also the best way to make sure the next generation looks back at Indian art and heritage with pride. ⚙️



**SHRIJI ARVIND SINGH MEWAR OF UDAIPUR, THE 76<sup>TH</sup> CUSTODIAN OF THE HOUSE OF MEWAR AND CHAIRMAN AND MANAGING TRUSTEE, MAHARANA OF MEWAR CHARITABLE FOUNDATION**

"This whole business of restoration of paintings is very new in India. Our climatic conditions cause paintings to deteriorate. When they are not displayed in ideal, controlled environments, moisture, heat and temperature variations wreak havoc on them. While it is expensive to maintain them in such conditions, there is a clear realisation that these paintings need to be conserved. I am getting a lot of requests from other people who want to do

this, as we have a world-class team that is working on the restoration process. In that sense, we have always been ahead of our time.

Now, many other museums are following suit. However, this is a laborious, time-consuming and expensive process, and it will take a long time before it makes an impression on the minds of people. Artworks don't deserve to die, and we are striving hard to conserve them all."

# ESCAPE

OF IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES

THE TRAVEL VOCAB FACE-OFF

## PRE-PANDEMIC VS POST-PANDEMIC



"I never travel without my **passport**."



"They won't let me board without my **vaccine passport**."



"I desperately need a **vacation** after all this time at work."



"I desperately need a **workation** after all this time at home."



"**Visa on arrival** is the best thing that happened to us travellers."



"Do you know if India offers an **RT-PCR test on arrival**?"



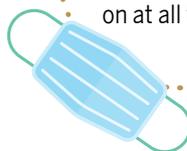
"How long is your en route **layover**?"

"How long is your post-flight **quarantine**?"



"Passengers, please turn off all **electronic devices**."

"Passengers, please keep your **face masks** on at all times."



"This season's top trend is **wellness travel**."



"**Revenge travel** is the next big thing this season!"

ESCAPE **ADVENTURE**



# OF HORSE RACES & STEEP GORGES

It's easy to feel like you belong in Komic, a remote village located at the far end of Spiti Valley in Himachal Pradesh. A community festival shows you exactly why.

by SUSHMITA SRIVASTAV



#### THIS SPREAD

1. Komic, at 15,049 feet, is one of the world's highest villages accessible by a motorable road;

2. Horses in action at the starting line in Komic



#### An Idyllic Setting

“Isn’t this exciting?” asks a tipsy Sounam, his eyes gleaming as he straightens his back and cracks his knuckles. Before I can nod in affirmation, he quickly adds, “Pray for us. This is his first race!” pointing to the white pony he is sitting on.

I look around. Just like Sounam, the local lad we had befriended just a day before, there are dozens of others, perched atop their woolly horses, engrossed in loud chatter. Flocks of backpackers saunter about with their bulky cameras hanging low from their necks. Kids run around; motorcyclists roar their engines; horses neigh and click their hooves. The air is filled with a mix of ecstasy and soft chants coming from the monastery in the background.

This delightful scene is from Komic, Spiti Valley in Himachal Pradesh two years back.

Our journey to the nomads’ land wasn’t easy, I must say. It took us a four-day road trip to get to Spiti from Delhi via Old Manali. Once we crossed Rohtang Pass, we were happy to leave traffic snarls and network signals behind, with only untamed routes dotted with steep gorges and massive mountains for company. The journey beyond was thrilling—crossing notorious streams at Pagal Nala, braving constant storms at our campsite near Chandra Taal, treading through bucolic routes to the Kunzum Pass, and not a soul in sight for miles, while en route Komic via Hikkim. But a surprise at our destination made it all worth it.

### A Village Affair

Komic is an endless, desolate moonscape 15,049 feet above sea level. With mammoth mountains guarding its rugged terrain and 10 odd homesteads housing a very small population of villagers, Komic's barely lush and paddy fields, and a handful of homestays offering basic accommodation, is a habitat worth experiencing. Sitting on the edge of a deep canyon nearby, is the Tangyud Monastery. Home to over 40 lamas, the 14<sup>th</sup>-century monastery is one of the only two monasteries of the Sakya sect in Spiti Valley. A stuffed snow leopard hangs from the ceiling at the entrance, and the inner prayer hall or *dukhang* brims with tantric masks and unique statuettes, rendering the entire setting rather fascinating.

Life is simple in Komic, one of the highest villages in the world connected by a motorable road. On any other day, the village feels like a quiet slice of Tibet, marooned in the far end of the Himalayan valley. But today is different. There's a major event in town. The 'drunken' horse race from Komic to Langza, as I discover, is part of the annual Namkan festival. This celebration marks the arrival of the harvest season in the highlands of Spiti and demands participation from all, locals and guests alike. The merry-making symbolises unity, where people come together to bond over rice pudding and homemade *chang* (barley wine), while watching riders showcase their horsemanship.

On the morning of the big race, the *gompa* hosts a theatre group from

*Life is simple in Komic. On any other day, the village feels like a quiet slice of Tibet marooned in the far end of the Himalayan valley. But today is different. There's a major event in town!*

the United Kingdom that decides to perform a play in the spirit of the community festival. Huge crowds from the nearby Langza, Hikkim and Kaza villages gather to watch. The halls are filled with giggles and cheers, as together we watch them dance, mimic and juggle props in the air. The race is up next!

### Chasing the Wild

Right after the play at the monastery, a kind lama offers to tell me more about the race, as we walk down together to the racing ground. There are no specific routes or defined rules for the riders. However, the head of each house must participate. In the nearby Demul village, the celebration is grander—many come dressed in traditional attire, and the race is followed by what's called *sgor-gzhas* (Tibetan group dances).

I now stand at a corner with a camera in hand, as my heart pounds in anticipation. But minutes before the race starts, we decide to jump



into our four-wheel drive instead and chase the horses down all the way to Langza. No gunshots, no smoke—a loud cry by a local at the starting line and just like that, the race is on. Before we can start our car, over two dozen horses and ponies zoom past, leaving us and a cloud of dust behind. While we do manage to chase them for a good minute, the horses gallop through the wild terrain and disappear in no time.

At the finish line, a sweeping meadow of wild grass and a soaring Buddha statue in the backdrop wait for us. The race ended a while back. Sounam and his little pony didn't win. Nevertheless, he comes waving to us, grinning ear to ear. Now is the time to celebrate. We sit down. Local women fill our plates with rice



THIS SPREAD  
 3. The winning horse (*centre*) grazes in a field in Langza after the race; 4. A Tibetan shrine or *chorten*, decked with sacred *mani* stones and prayer flags; 5. Local kids in Komic waiting for the race to start; 6. Chandra Taal looks surreal after a shower; 7. One of the few homesteads in Komic

pudding, the winning horse grazes gracefully before us, and people dance around to local tunes, singing of harvest and friendship.

When I look back at that day, confined to my home and aching to travel again, I find myself back in Langza, sitting in the middle of the sprawling bed of green, and sharing laughs and *chang* with my local friends. And I can't help but think of how right Christopher McCandless was to say, "Happiness is only real when shared." 🌀



ESCAPE COVER STORY

# CHAI: THE GREAT INDIAN EQUALISER

Travelling through India makes us realise just how much of a cultural icon the humble cup of chai is.

by ANINDA SARDAR



1

**A CUP OF FRESHLY BREWED TEA** on the table, next to your morning newspaper, with its woody aroma melting in the crisp air and marking the dawn of a new day in its own invigorating way. This has probably been the overriding image of almost every Indian household for decades. Yet, the tea in your cup might taste completely different from that at your neighbour's. In fact, chai is a reflection of our unique nation in a way that no other beverage can be—it is a perfect celebration of the idea of unity in diversity. This diversity is best seen during travels to different states of India. How you consume tea in Kashmir would differ greatly from, say, West Bengal or even Karnataka. And who can forget the unique tea culture of Mumbai? Read on.

### India in a Cup

Although historical records indicate that India's tryst with the *Camellia sinensis* leaves goes back to antiquity, it was only in the early 1830s that the British started establishing large-scale tea plantations in India. This was after a stand-off with China, the principal producer of tea at the time. In fact, the very word *chai* is derived from the original Mandarin *cha*. I have always been fascinated with how tea changes flavour, taste and texture around the country, but I really got to experience it some years ago, when I undertook a tea-tasting sojourn from the India-Pakistan border at Attari to the India-Bangladesh border in Taki, West Bengal. As I continued my journey eastwards, stops at *dhabas* and chai stalls became a frequent affair. It was then, at these places, that I began to notice the nuances in every cup of tea across states.



### Northern Flavours

We had started our journey in Amritsar, the jump-off point for any trip to the Attari-Wagah border. Amritsar in itself is a fascinating city, bustling with energy and with a vibrant food scene. Whether you have tea at the local corner shop near the border, or in the city, or a slightly more upmarket eatery near the Golden Temple, you will always find the beverage rich and creamy. Robust and flavourful, much like the multitude of street food options that this spiritual hub offers. The tea in Punjab is brewed strong with the leaves being boiled with the milk and sugar to create a fairly frothy saccharine drink. No delicate Darjeeling here. In fact, you wouldn't be able to make this *Amritsari* chai with the delicately flavoured leaves from Himalayan Bengal. You would have to fall back on the much stronger and full bodied black tea pellets. Then of course there is the addition of spices and sometimes even a topping of

### THIS SPREAD

1. Nothing like a hot cup of morning tea in the Himalayas;
2. A shopkeeper selling ingredients like loose green tea, saffron and cardamom bark for Kashmiri kahwa

*Chai is a reflection of our unique nation in a way that no other beverage can be—it is a perfect celebration of the idea of unity in diversity.*

chopped dry fruits. Almost a tea sundae if you like, except it's hot. As you move eastwards towards Delhi, the richness of the tea reduces and the dry fruits disappear by and large. The taste, however, remains sugary sweet and the texture thick.

### Kashmir Delights

Strangely, in spite of its geographical proximity to the frothy, sweet tea of Punjab, the Kashmiri kahwa is an entirely different cup of tea. Light and delicate, kahwa is brewed from green tea in a *samovar* (a traditional brass urn) and has absolutely no trace of milk. It does have almonds and spices though, most significantly, saffron. With Kashmir once again on the domestic tourist map, following a major resurgence of travellers to its ski slopes and lakes, kahwa is now becoming more mainstream in cafes across the country. Best enjoyed floating in a *shikara*, on Srinagar's Dal Lake, on the ski slopes of Gulmarg or on the gorgeous streets of Pahalgam, kahwa is a staple for any traveller to truly enjoy the Kashmir experience.

### Along the Gangetic Plains

Back on the highway heading east, as you cross the National Capital Region and head deeper into the heartland of Uttar Pradesh, the dense tea of Northwestern India starts to give way to a thinner liquid. Here, the cities of Lucknow, Varanasi and Patna have architectural and cultural

identities as strong as their local tea. You might find traces of spices in it or sometimes ginger (*adrak*). In fact, I particularly like the *masala adrak chai* (ginger-infused tea). The process of brewing, however, remains more or less the same throughout the vast expanse of the Gangetic plains. Water, milk, sugar and tea all boiled together to make a strong bodied beverage.

I, then, continued my travels through the Gangetic plains, moving from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, and crossing into West Bengal. The landscape and culture here change drastically, just like its tea. Here, tea leaves are brewed separately. The water is boiled first and then when the boiling stops the leaves are dropped in to brew. The duration of the brewing depends on the leaves and how you want your tea—strong or delicately flavoured. There are many who will eschew milk altogether and will add a bit of lime juice into a delicate brew to create an entirely different flavour. Nothing remotely close to the thick frothy sweet cup of the west. Here, in the east, it's not called chai either but by its original name *cha* and rarely will you come across a Bengali household that doesn't wake up to *cha-biskoot*, tea served with a couple of biscuits. In fact, travellers to Kolkata are fascinated to see how the city's tea culture ranges from nondescript roadside stalls to the elegant, colonial



gymkhanas and clubs, that the city has always cherished.

### In the Peninsula

While travelling through Maharashtra, I got introduced to the Amrutulya chai and even the new-fangled tandoori chai. The former is prepared in a brass vessel with water and milk being boiled together at first. Powdered tea leaves are added once the liquid has boiled over, followed by sugar once the liquid has assumed its colour. What's unique about this is that the whole thing is done in a brass vessel. As the vessel ages, it adds to the flavour of the tea. Although the name means 'akin to the nectar of the gods', quite frankly, it's an acquired taste. Tandoori chai, on the other hand, involves pre-baking terracotta cups or *kulhads* in a tandoor. Half-brewed tea is poured into these hot cups where the tea froths over and acquires a smoky aftertaste.



THIS SPREAD

- 3. Chai and chatter in progress at a local shop in Old Delhi;
- 4. Bun maska with tea is a common sight at Mumbai's Irani restaurants;
- 5. A happy street vendor in Rajasthan preparing masala chai;
- 6. Brewing tandoori chai is no less than a video-worthy spectacle



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*The traditional Kashmiri kahwa is best enjoyed floating in a shikara on the stunning Dal Lake in Srinagar.*

### **Irani Influences**

Then, there is the much-older Irani chai—a particular favourite of mine when I was a student in Pune—served at the affordable, and now nearly extinct, Irani cafes. The sweet and creamy tea is created by mixing mawa or khoya (milk solids) into the milk that will be mixed with freshly brewed black tea. It's pretty good in its own right but if you really want to enjoy it, get yourself a bun maska, dip it in the tea and eat it before you drink your tea. There is also the Parsi choi where mint leaves and ginger are added into the mix to create a rather unique beverage, much like the community itself. Enjoy it with khari (hard-baked salted biscuits). Travellers to Pune or even Mumbai, often find themselves chasing the last remaining Irani restaurants for this chai-bun-mask experience.

### **Mumbai's Cutting Chai**

You'd be amazed to know that a cup of tea can even define a regional identity. Take the immensely popular cutting chai of Mumbai. There is no unique brewing method, and it's readily available at any corner tea stall. Yet, cutting chai reflects



8

- THIS SPREAD
7. Kashmiri kahwa is a staple during explorations of Srinagar's Dal Lake;
  8. Nothing unites India like a cup of tea;
  9. The historic Kyani & Co. is famous for its Parsi choi;
  10. A cultural icon in India—tea with Parle-G biscuits



9



10

Mumbai's commercial spirit and its desire for optimisation. Essentially meaning 'half a cup of tea', it costs less than a full cup, and there is just enough in your glass (never a cup or a *kulhad* here, mind you) to give you that hit of caffeine when you need it. Mumbai, in a glass, if you please.

At the very end of my sojourn, I found that chai, in India, takes a new avatar in each state. The tea grown in the Nilgiris is distinctly different from what I've had in Assam or Darjeeling. While Assam tea is rich and bold, Darjeeling tea is more floral and delicate. Nilgiri tea is smoother and more balanced than either. The tea I have been served by the road in Chennai or at a breakfast joint in Bengaluru, is always subtly spiced, with no overwhelming tastes and textures from Northwestern India, nor the delicate flavouring as preferred in the eastern region. This highlights the fact that nothing unites India quite like a cup of tea, no matter who or where you are! 🍵

# Anecdotes *of* Solidarity

When ordinary people do extraordinary things, the results are astounding. We picked a few heroes, who leveraged their skills and networks to bring India together in these trying times.

by PRACHI JOSHI



Kusha Kapila used her tongue-in-cheek videos to amplify requests and calls for COVID-19 resources, by posting to her 1.7 million+ Instagram followers.

IT'S BEEN MORE than a year since the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world. India's second wave saw citizens banding together and offering help in any way they could—through on-ground efforts, raising funds or providing services. With a glimmer of hope at the end of the tunnel, we decided to compile stories of unity and solidarity. These are the real-life stories of just a few of the remarkable people who, individually or collectively, made a difference.

#### SHARING LAUGHS: Kusha Kapila

They say 'laughter is the best medicine', and during the grim days of the second wave, we had digital content creators proving it right. One of them was Kusha Kapila, who channelled her inimitable Monday Aunty avatar through tongue-in-

cheek videos to amplify requests and calls for COVID-19 resources, by posting to her 1.7 million+ (@kushakapila) Instagram followers. Even during the first wave last year, Kapila had started a fundraiser and had raised ₹21 lakh to distribute protective gear like face masks and shields to hospitals across India.

#### GHAR KA KHANA: Saransh Goila

A few direct messages on Instagram spurred Chef Saransh Goila (@saranshgoila) into action. Recognising that many COVID-positive families were looking for home-cooked meals while they were isolating, the Mumbai-based chef put together an online spreadsheet to connect them with home cooks. Within a couple of days, the spreadsheet



**THIS SPREAD**  
**1.** Neysa Mendes raised over ₹25 lakh for COVID relief through her bake sales;  
**2.** Kusha Kapila amplified requests for resources through her tongue-in-cheek videos;  
**3.** Chef Saransh Goila helped families in need of home-cooked meals

morphed into a searchable website ([covidmealsforindia.com](http://covidmealsforindia.com)), through which 4,300+ home cooks provided meals across 400 cities. “I felt that it was my duty to help my fellow citizens, so I used my online influence to connect people in need with people who could help”, says Goila.

### NO FAKE NEWS: Faye D’Souza

Since the beginning of the pandemic, independent journalist Faye D’Souza has become a one-stop source for verified news and information on COVID-19 resources. Through her Instagram ([@fayedsouza](https://www.instagram.com/fayedsouza)), Twitter, and YouTube channels, D’Souza not only brought the news but also posted crucial analyses, explainer videos, and informative interviews with subject-matter experts that helped thousands to learn and take required safety measures. She also joined hands with

actress Alia Bhatt to amplify details about COVID-19 resources, and supported thousands of people in urgent need.

### BAKING FOR A CAUSE: Neysa Mendes

Mumbai-based food stylist and recipe developer Neysa Mendes decided to take action through what she knew best—baking. She announced the *#BakeForIndia* bake sale fundraiser on Instagram ([@goodslice](https://www.instagram.com/goodslice)), pledging to make 10 of her signature dark chocolate tarts and donating 100 per cent of the proceeds towards COVID relief. She also invited other bakers and chefs to join the initiative and received massive support from across India, Singapore, Dubai and Paris. “We even had many young bakers join in, like 12-year-old Saachi, who raised over ₹1.5 lakh”, says Mendes.

“I felt that it was my duty to help my fellow citizens, so I used my online influence to connect people in need with people who could help”, says Goila.

## ESCAPE HOPE

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WORKING IN COVID RELIEF**

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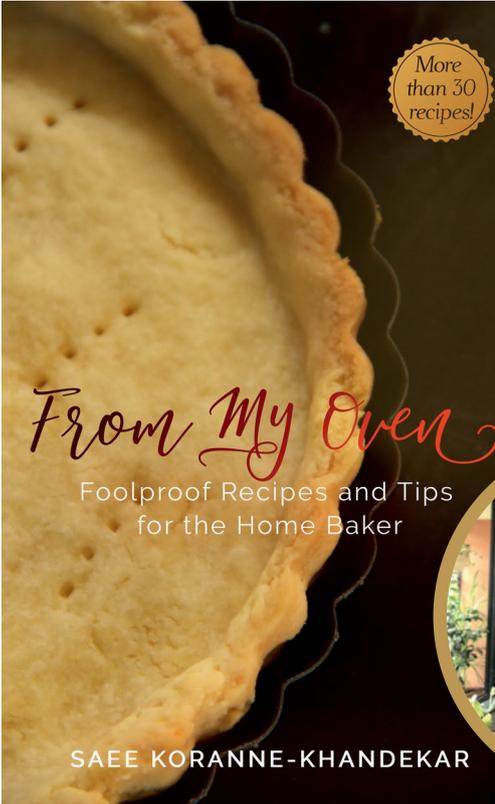


In collaboration with Alia Bhatt

4

**ePsyClinic**  
Quality Mental Healthcare For All

5,00,000+  
Received Quality Mental Health Care



More than 30 recipes!

*From My Oven*

Foolproof Recipes and Tips  
for the Home Baker

SAEE KORANNE-KHANDEKAR

Many mental health professionals and services have stepped in to offer help. One such organisation is ePsyClinic, India's first online mental health portal.

#BakeForIndia has raised over ₹25 lakh through more than 150 bake sales.

### BEATING HUNGER: Surya Balakrishnan

"We realised that hunger has become a bigger pandemic, because people have lost their livelihoods and depleted their savings", says filmmaker Surya Balakrishnan, who teamed up with creative producer Chhitra Subramaniam to co-found HOPE, a collective that has raised over ₹38 lakh to provide grocery supplies and medicines in five communities across Mumbai (in collaboration with Mesh Foundation). They are also running a children's nutrition programme, providing eggs, milk and bananas to 1,500 children in these communities, and have provided 150 crematorium workers in Vasai-Virar with daily PPE kits for three weeks during the height of

the second wave. "We will continue to run the nutrition programme for at least six months to ensure children's immunity is built in a sustained manner", adds Balakrishnan.

### MENTAL HEALTH IN FOCUS: Shipra Dawar

Apart from affecting physical well-being, the pandemic has also had many mental health repercussions, ranging from fear of contraction to anxiety, panic attacks, depression, etc. Many mental health professionals and services have stepped in to offer help. One such organisation is Gurugram-based ePsyClinic, India's first online mental health portal, started by Shipra Dawar in 2015, which has a team of trained psychiatrists and psychologists. ePsyClinic teamed up with state governments like Haryana and Rajasthan to offer pro bono counselling to ASHA workers,



**THIS SPREAD**  
**4.** Faye D'Souza, along with actor Alia Bhatt, shared verified COVID-relief updates on her social media; **5.** Shipra Dawar started ePsyClinic, an online mental health portal; **6.** Saeë Koranne-Khandekar (*inset*) and her e-book *From My Oven*; **7.** Led by filmmaker Surya Balakrishnan, HOPE is offering nutritional meals to children across Mumbai; **8.** Patent consultant Vinay Kumar procured over 100 oxygen concentrators from Germany by fundraising ₹84 lakh



migrants workers, delivery executives and more.

**CHANNELLING OXYGEN:  
 Vinay Kumar**

“It was a chain of trust between strangers”, says Bengaluru-based patent consultant Vinay Kumar, who reached out to his network to raise €100,000 (approx. ₹84 lakh) and procured more than 100 oxygen concentrators from Germany with the help of friends associated with Technik ohne Grenzen (Technology Without Borders), a German organisation that aims to improve living conditions in developing countries. DHL provided free shipping to bring the concentrators to India, and the NGO Project Smiles distributed them across five states. With the oxygen crisis now eased up, Kumar says that the ongoing fundraiser will be used to source amphotericin to combat the

increasing cases of mucormycosis as well as to provide livelihood support. Like Kumar, there were many other individuals who came forward to address the oxygen crisis.

**PENNING IT DOWN:  
 Saeë Koranne-Khandekar**

Culinary consultant and cookbook author Saeë Koranne-Khandekar has put her writing skills to good use by creating an e-book, *From My Oven*, and launching a fundraiser, so that people could buy the book and donate to an NGO. “Snehalaya operates in Ahmednagar district, one of the worst COVID-hit areas of Maharashtra. The funds are used for procuring medical aid and other COVID-relief material as well as for distributing ration to daily wage workers”, she says. The e-book contains 30+ recipes, baking tips and equipment guidance, and Koranne-Khandekar has raised over ₹10 lakh through its sale. ⚙️

“It was a chain of trust between strangers”, says Bengaluru-based patent consultant Vinay Kumar, who reached out to his network to raise €100,000.

FROM TOP LEFT: Courtesy of Faye D'Souza; courtesy of ePsyClinic; courtesy of Saeë Koranne-Khandekar (2); courtesy of Surya Balakrishnan (2); courtesy of Vinay Kumar

# ACCEPTED, RESPECTED, LOVED

Here's a fun fact: Most Pride marches across the globe are held in the month of June, to commemorate the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York City, which was a turning point in the LGBTQIA+ movement. Today, most major international cities like New York, Sydney, San Francisco and Paris are striving hard to stand out in the annual celebrations. But underpinning this joie de vivre is a strong sense of evolution—where these parades have transformed into something that unites society at large, eliciting solidarity from every citizen.

Interestingly, the bigger parades like those in New York, or Sydney's Mardi Gras, or La Pride in Paris are big draws for tourists as well. Today, as these rainbow parades grow to include many more genders and preferences into the fold, what stands out is the call to action of acceptance, respect, love and normalisation.

Most importantly, even our very own Pride movement has grown by leaps and bounds, especially over the last couple of years, since the legalisation of homosexuality in India. In keeping with this theme of acceptance, I have curated some of our most favourite 'Pride Moments' of all times from across India and the globe. Brace yourselves—here come the snapshots!

curated by SUSHANT DIVGIKAR





Left: Reinsier/Shutterstock, Right: Whitehaven/Shutterstock



**1**  
*Washington D.C.,  
United States*

I find it so heartening to see people from all walks of life come out in large numbers to support LGBTQIA+ communities in the US. Washington D.C. celebrates the annual Capital Pride festival, with a strong emphasis on awareness, education and community building.

**2**  
*Munich, Germany*  
Festive ambience, breathtaking colours and the sense of joy lingering in the air—what's there not to love in European Pride parades?

**1**

**2**



**3**  
*New Delhi, India*  
Closer home, I am happy to see that major Indian cities are now playing host to *desi* Pride parades and helping local communities like never before.

**4**  
*Madrid, Spain*  
Madrid's MADO, the biggest European Pride festival, is the epicentre of the LGBTQIA+ movement in Spain. It is hosted in the Chueca neighbourhood with great fervour every year.

**5**  
*Milan, Italy*  
The Milano Pride is a glamorous event organised by the city's leading associations supporting LGBTQIA+ rights. It is amazing how Milan's ancient neighbourhoods are repurposed to host Pride events every June.

**6**  
*Mumbai, India*  
Rani KoHENur caught in a moment! I created Rani, my drag queen avatar, with the





3



4



6



5

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: INDIVATI/MOODY/Shutterstock; earlos ganza/ez ximeretz/Shutterstock; Timxi/Shutterstock; courtesy of Sushant Duggal

ESCAPE CANVAS





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9

notion that every woman is a queen, and every person that celebrates the female energy within them, can be a queen as well!

**7**  
*Mumbai, India*

Frowned upon until recently, Indian Pride marches have started gaining momentum. People now show up to these events without covers or facades, and that, in itself, is quite an achievement.

**8**  
*London, United Kingdom*

If I were to define, in one word, my experience of London's diversity and liberal energy, it would be 'unforgettable.'

**9**  
*Barcelona, Spain*

If you happen to be in Barcelona in July, you are in for a real treat. Expect extravagant events that spread through the city, from across its breathtaking beaches all the way to Plaza España.

**10**  
*New York City, United States*

For me, no other place celebrates LGBTQIA+ communities like New York City, given its historic links to the gay rights movement.

## THE LAST WORD



### NEW NORMAL NETWORKING

Restaurateur extraordinaire **Riyaz Amlani** recently joined forces with Mumbai's *dabbawallas* in a heart-warming move to brave the storm. He shares some highly positive insights with us.

by RIAAN JACOB GEORGE

#### Your recent engagement with Mumbai's *dabbawallas* made headlines across the country. Tell us about it.

We recently partnered with the iconic army of Mumbai's *dabbawallas*, to serve as delivery partners for direct ordering from our restaurants. In a first-of-its-kind pilot project, my company Impresario Handmade Restaurants is employing many of these *dabbawallas*. They will service direct delivery orders received on our tech-enabled platforms for brands like SOCIAL, Smoke House Deli and Salt Water Cafe. Orders from these restaurants in areas like Lower Parel, Bandra (West) and Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC) will be fulfilled by the *dabbawallas*.

#### How do you propose to expand this association?

This association will roll out in phases over the next few months, each employing more *dabbawallas* and further strengthening the alliance.

#### What prompted you to create this collaboration?



Mumbai's *dabbawallas* are the backbone of the city, and coming together to weather the second wave of the pandemic was the best thing we could do for each other. Now, the direct orders help to provide employment to these icons, who have lost their livelihoods due to the pandemic. We need to support one another through these trying times. I am hopeful that this association will trigger the rest of the hospitality industry to employ them too.

#### What is your message to diners across the country?

One of the biggest things we need right now is public support in ordering directly from their favourite restaurants.

#### And, in your opinion, how does that help?

When a customer orders straight from us, it not only enables us to have end-to-end control on the quality and hygiene but also pass on savings on commissions to our delivery partners aka the *dabbawallas*. ⚙️



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