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The Slow Tide

From Kodaikanal to Rwanda, ideas for vacations that are immersive, eco-friendly, and fun

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PARIS LIKE AN
INSIDER: 75+ TIPS



CONTENTS

Aug-Sept-Oct 2024

076

Feet In The Forest, Head In The Clouds In Kodaikanal, **Chandahas Choudhury** finds a community of dreamers who open their homes to travellers in search of mindful living

086

Retracing Steppes While revisiting the Mongolia of his past, **Stanley Stewart** loses himself again in a wide open world of wild horses, eagle whisperers, and the haunting songs of nomads

100

Top Of The Lake They may be less widely venerated than their Italian or Swiss equivalents, but Savoy's lakes in the French Alps overflow with romance and echoes of Rousseau. By **Steve King**

110

Natural Order Across Rwanda, communities are quietly coming together to right past wrongs, one sapling at a time. By **Noo Saro-Wiwa**

A view of
the mountains
in Rwanda

010 First Word Photographer Shaaz Jung on his love for the wild

WORD OF MOUTH

012 Bienvenue à Paris As the city hosts another bumper tourist season, here are the top trends to know

019 Ask A Local Chef Rotanak Ros shares her recipe for a culinary deep dive into Cambodia's Phnom Penh

020 Come To Light Finland's creative folk offer tips on how to amp up your northern lights experience

GETAWAY

024 Biggest Game In Town The year's most exciting safari lodges

030 Back On Track The iconic Eastern & Oriental Express brings back the romance of train travel to Malaysia

WHERE TO STAY

034 First Look Soneva Secret 2024; Raffles Jaipur; Six Senses Kyoto

FOOD & DRINK

044 Where The Wild Things Are For chefs in India, foraging is all about learning from communities

WELLNESS

048 Going The Distance An immersive 21-day Panchakarma purge in Kerala that pushes one's physical limits

052 Circle Of Trust Self-discovery blossoms at Formentera's women-only retreat

055 It's For Everyone Men discover the value of self-care—massages, meditation, and mental wellbeing

056 Let It Glow The healing power of a therapeutic spell at Kamalaya and Absolute Sanctuary on Koh Samui

061 ** Off And Leave Me Alone** How a writer overwhelmed with hormonal rage reclaimed her life at an idyllic retreat in Bath

SHOP & STYLE

066 Shopping In Baku Local artisans spotlight Azerbaijan's creative side

072 Fashion Diaries Designer duo Abu Jani and Sandeep Khosla on their love for India's crafts and textiles

ROOM WITH A VIEW

124 Soori Bali, Indonesia



THIS ISSUE'S COVER
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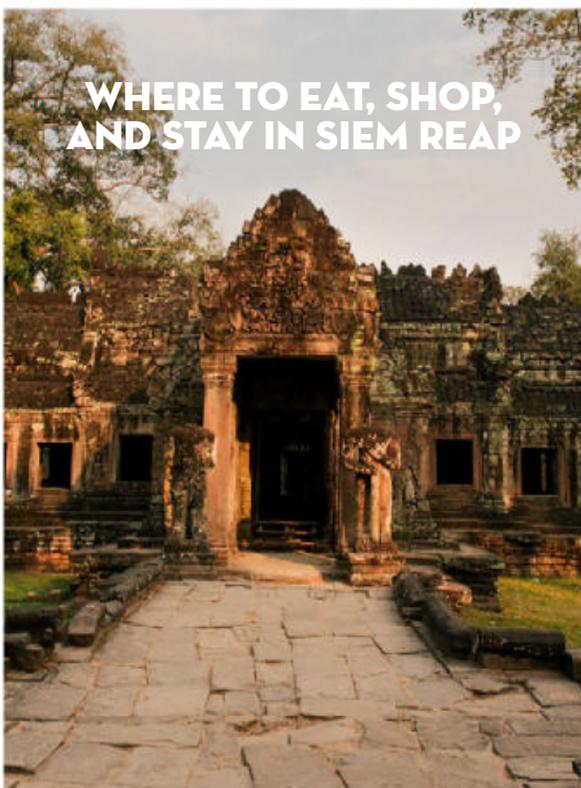
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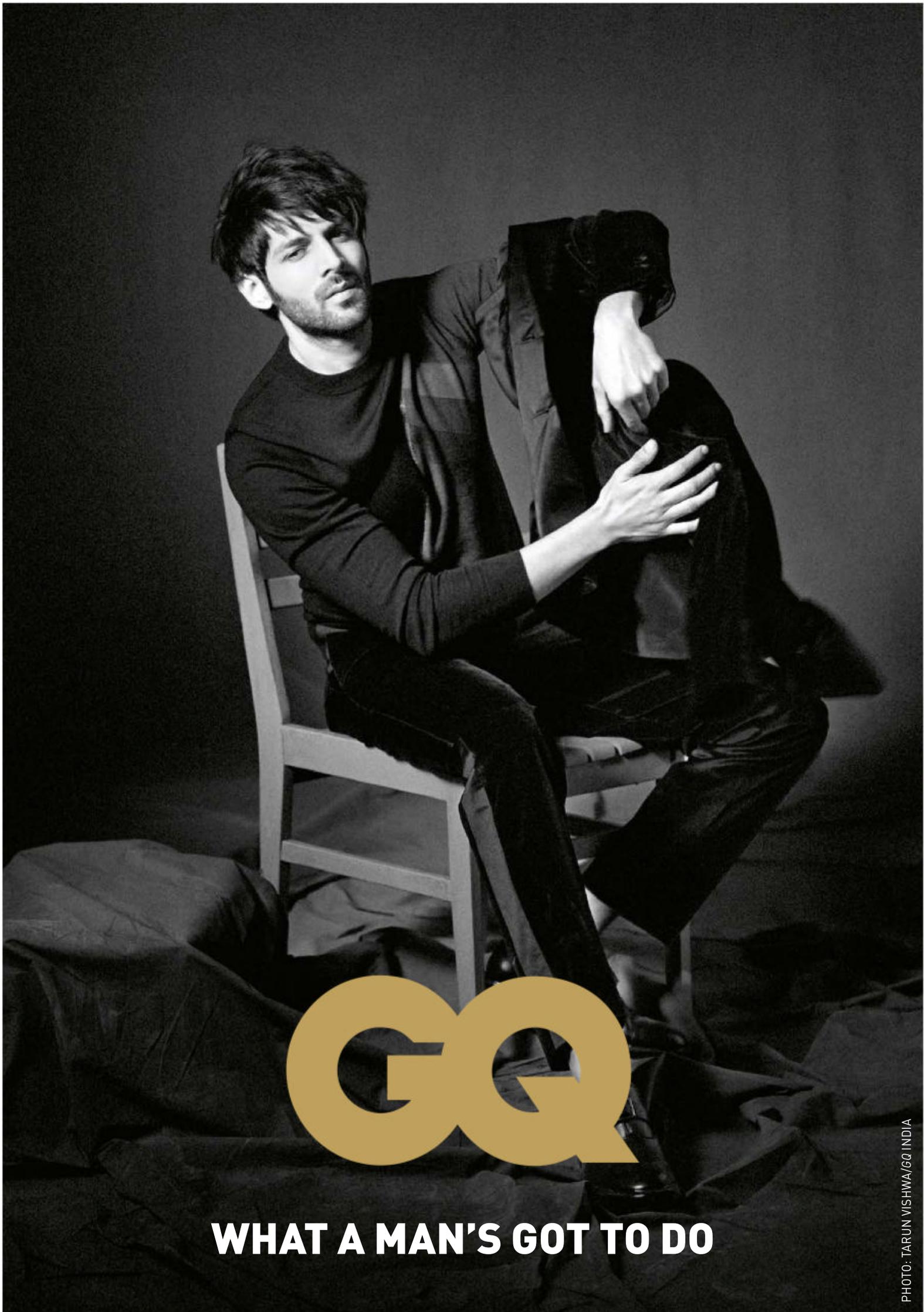


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GQ

WHAT A MAN'S GOT TO DO

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DIYA KOHLI

Writer; *Where The Wild Things Are*; p44

Experience the jungle with all your senses. Hear the birds, smell the forest, and register the different colours all around you. To truly take it in is to feel the forest as a whole magnificent phenomenon.

 diyak



HIMANSHU LAKHWANI

Photographer; *Raffles Jaipur*; p37

Get ready to sit for hours or have long days. The thrill of going on a safari needs to be accompanied by patience.

 hlakhwani

CONTRIBUTOR SPEAK

'ONE FAVOURITE TIP FOR ANYONE GOING ON SAFARI'

ALISTAIR TAYLOR-YOUNG

Photographer; *Retracing Steppes*; p86

Time is precious while on safari. Go for a night drive. Also, do your research and travel with a specialised travel company. Journeys By Design and Natural World Safaris are the best I've come across.

 alistairtayloryoung



SHRADHA SHAHANI

Writer; *Fashion Diaries*; p72

Book the earliest slot. Predawn alarms may not sound enticing, but there's something magical about watching the first sun rays hit the park. Wildlife is also the most active in the morning.

 shradhashahani

STANLEY STEWART

Writer; *Retracing Steppes*; p86

Get out of the jeep. Try to incorporate a walking element in your safari. With a good guide, you'll get a more intimate understanding of the natural world's wonders.

 stanleystewart.writer



CHANDRAHAS CHOUDHURY

Writer; *Feet In The Forest, Head In The Clouds*; p76

Enjoy the smaller delights of the jungle: birds, trees, and flowers.

 chandrahaschoudhury

PHOTOGRAPHS: PANKAJ ANAND; SHREYANSH RAJPAL



In Ladakh this summer, I had a strange experience. I sat in front of a lhamo, an oracle, who channels the spirits to find answers to your problems. Her remit is mostly matters of medicine, though I was told I could ask her anything. With all respect to the faithful, I am quite sceptical about shamans and soothsayers. But I am also aware that these prophecies can mess with your mind in the funniest of ways. So, after she lit the incense, strapped her headdress, and entered the otherworld, I tossed her a dolly: how do you raise a child who is kind yet strong?

Looking into the sky that night, it was hard not to see the irony. We are in an age where all human knowledge over millions of years is available in the palm of our hands. And yet, when we are truly seeking an answer, back to the roots we go. Take, for instance, writer and photographer Shaaz Jung who spent his first years in the forests of Karnataka. Growing up with the local tribe, Jung fell in love with the forest in the most beautiful of ways—chasing fireflies, catching leaves. The tribe and its people, he writes, held the blueprint for a better world—the kind of a world he hopes to leave for his young son.

This issue is full of ideas, big and small, of what that world can look like, with cues from people who are making it happen. Like

“We are in an age where all human knowledge over millions of years is available in the palm of our hands. And yet, when we are truly seeking an answer, back to the roots we go”

the locals of Kodaikanal who are showing that a low-impact, sustainable way of life—and travel—is possible. Or the people of Rwanda who are working hard to restore not only the wild but also their own society. The last bit is important: self-care often comes with baggage; but the regenerative power of travel can be unlocked only when we first start healing ourselves.

For some, healing can mean regimented diets and hyperbaric chambers; for others, it is letting a stranger purge a deep-seated pain from their heart. But watching others in that room in Ladakh accept the word from the oracle, I realised that, sometimes, it is as simple as learning to receive the wisdom of the ancients. “You can tell him anything you want,” the spirits told me that evening. “But your son will do only as you do.”

Salil Deshpande

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PHOTOGRAPHS: NUNO OLIVEIRA; SALIL DESHPANDE



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ONLY NATURE REMAINS

Growing up with people of the land inspired wildlife photographer **Shaaz Jung's** love for the wild

The year was 1987; my parents pursued a dream. Somewhere down the road less trodden, they arrived in a verdant valley and built a little cottage in the foothills of Karnataka's Bandipur National Park. My father, by then, had played cricket for India. My mother, no older than 24, married him and together they chose to leave the city to carve out a life in the jungles of south India. A year later, I was born.

The window in my room faced south and on a clear day, the lofty summit of the Nilgiri mountains would magically appear, blue as the ocean, only to vanish quickly behind a veil of mist. Every time the mountains took shape, my parents would excitedly summon me to the window. I learnt at a very young age that beauty was fleeting.

Not far from the cottage was a quaint village of the Jenu Kurubas, a tribe of honey collectors. Their little hug of wooden huts was clustered around an ancient banyan tree and they used the branches as a form of natural architecture. This small community was full of life, as children chased wild fowl, men herded the cattle, and women carried firewood home.

Under the evergreen canopy is where we first met Gundu, a young, knowledgeable tribesman who was the son of the tribe chief. Shirtless and barefoot, with a tiny cloth around his waist, Gundu was like no man I had ever seen. He was missing a few teeth and was almost certain to always have a mouthful of wild berries. Little did I know that this man would take me under his wing and raise me for the first four years in these jungles.

The world was simple back then. Rolling hills, eternal birdsong, the changing of seasons, and a slow passage of time. Gundu and I caught leaves in the wind, counted fireflies at night, and ran through herds of deer

in our garden. The glory of nature's omnipresence shaped my childhood. My first words were local names of indigenous trees that my parents had planted at the time. Soon, *tectona grandis* (or teak) grew from the barren land, inch by inch, and within a year, they were taller than I was. Our roots grew deep but as the winds of change began to drift through the valley, I soon left for the city and joined school. Years passed and life in the hills became a distant memory, yet the cottage and the teak trees remained.



Memories shape the way we perceive the world and as I grew older, my early exposure to the forest began to take form. After years of studying in the Netherlands, I longed to return home. The indescribable yearning for the past eventually took me back to the doorsteps of the cottage I was raised in. Twenty years had passed, and the trees were now 20 feet tall. A cacophony of birds filled the air from the canopy above, unfamiliar songs at first but, like a moth to a flame, I was drawn to each chorus with a bird book and binoculars. I began retracing the path back to

my past. But something was missing. Winter was here and Gundu's favourite bird, a paradise flycatcher, had just arrived at the plantation. Ethereal in flight, its white plumage and foot-long tail were a sight to behold. The deer now gathered in the garden and the blue mountains appeared between the passing clouds. Beautiful as always, yet less magical without Gundu's words of wisdom to tell me which way the winds were blowing. Without him, my journey back home felt incomplete and I scoured the valley in search of my old friend, only to learn that Gundu had passed a few years ago. It was hard to digest. I couldn't believe I would never hear his voice again, excited at the sight of a banded peacock butterfly and sad when the rains didn't arrive on time. His presence had shaped my destiny and I soon realised how the forest was empty without its people. Nature didn't just represent animals, but also the indigenous tribes that help preserve the sanctity of these lands. Gundu's tribe held the blueprint to a better world and his teachings were invaluable to me. Here I am, 30 years later, pursuing the same dream my parents once had. We couldn't have asked for a better caretaker; Gundu's childhood company is what brought me back to the jungle and made me the man I am today.

Unlike me, my just-born son does not have a Gundu in his life, nor might yours, but it is our responsibility to fill in. To evolve back in time and teach our children the importance of a simpler world, where nature is sacred and humans are a part of it. To catch falling leaves and count fireflies. To wait patiently for the mountains to appear. To plant trees, without knowing at the time that they are going to outlive all of us. To realise that everything is transient. Only nature remains. 🌿

FIRST WORD

A tiger in the Bandipur jungle, 1991. Opposite page: **Shaaz Jung as a child in the forest**

“The glory of nature’s omnipresence shaped my childhood. My first words were local names of indigenous trees that my parents had planted”

Bienvenue

PHOTOGRAPH: JACKIE COLE

WORD OF MOUTH

Paris

As the city hosts another bumper tourist season, these are the top trends to know. Edited by **Toby Skinner**

WORD OF MOUTH



My Paris

HORTENSE BOUDET, SURFSKATER

Originally from Avignon, 25-year-old Boudet, who started off skateboarding and surfing, combines the two with stylish surfskating around Paris—especially at Quai Anatole France on the Seine’s banks, where surfskaters and longboard dancers practise.



“I live near the 18th arrondissement town hall, close to Montmartre and the Sacré-Cœur. It’s a cute, relatively quiet neighbourhood of cafés and boutiques, with lots of young families. I usually go to **Café Pimpin** at 64 Rue Ramey for brunch or a quick lunch, or **Two Doors** on Rue Francœur for coffee and matcha. For a meal out, I love **Bouillon Chartier Grands Boulevards** in the 9th arrondissement. It’s a real experience, like a cartoon reproduction of

a Parisian restaurant, from the sound of the dishes and the noisy customers to the waiters in uniform and the décor. The food is simple but so good—I like the devilled eggs and the chocolate mousse. My tip for a hidden gem is the **Jardin des Rosiers Joseph Migneret** in the Marais, which has a hard-to-spot entrance but is so pretty, overlooked by mansion hotels such as the Hôtel de Coulanges. I love to grab a falafel on the street and go and chill there.” @tensehorr →

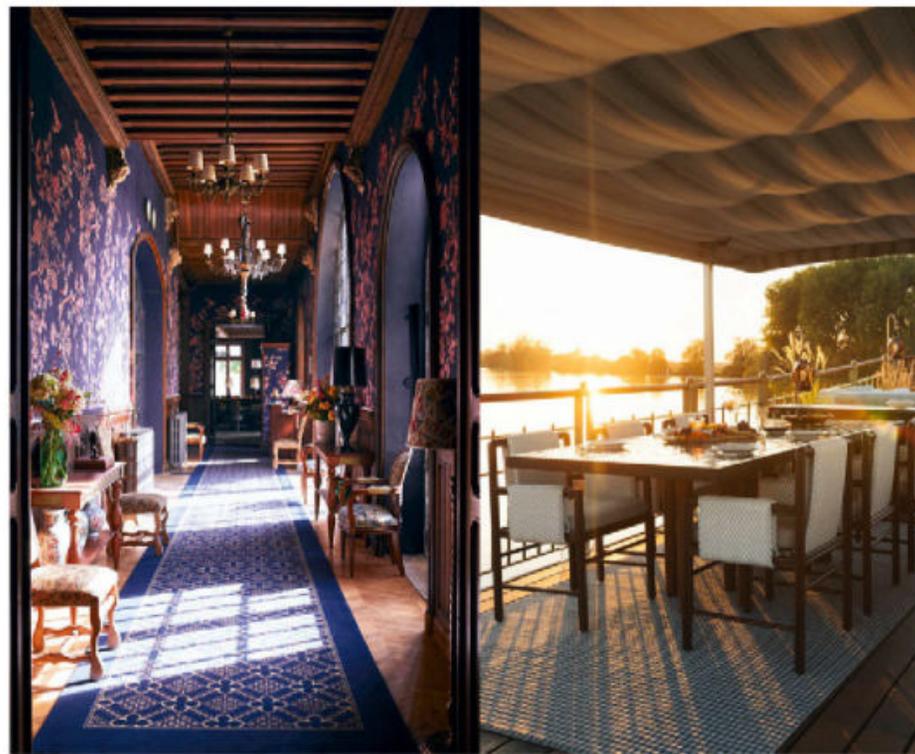
TREND #1

SURPRISING SUITES Next-level stays are popping up in unlikely places, such as the parquet-floored **L’Appartement**—with its sauna, Alvar Aalto vases, and Notre-Dame views—above the iconic, newly relaunched La Tour d’Argent restaurant; or **Les Suites Cinabre**, two exquisite vintage-glamour suites with Pierre Frey striped fabrics and Hästens bedding above the shop that makes President Macron’s ties.



THE ESCAPES RAMBOUILLET AND CHAMPAGNE

An hour’s drive southwest of Paris, **Abbaye des Vaux de Cernay** in Rambouillet was first a 12th-century Cistercian abbey. It was revived in the 19th century by Baroness Charlotte de Rothschild, and rebooted last winter after a £51-million makeover by lifestyle group Paris Society. From its neogothic halls to its bedrooms, medieval relics sit beside vintage finds in this idyll with a 49-seat cinema, pétanque court, and boating lake. In Champagne, the new **Coquelicot** barge is the smartest Belmond boat: an art nouveau beauty in organic colours and textures, by Monegasque Parisian design duo Christophe Poyet and Emil Humbert, created for week-long canal cruises featuring serious food paired with fine vintages from Maison Ruinart and others.



Clockwise, from top left: **Boudet in action; Les Suites Cinabre; Coquelicot barge; Abbaye des Vaux de Cernay; stuffed peacock at Deyrolle; Bouillon Chartier Grands Boulevards.**
Opening pages: **the Eiffel Tower**

FIVE GREAT SHOPPING AREAS

Saint Ouen, for the world’s largest flea market: Paul Bert Serpette has over 350 stalls with smart finds.

Montmartre, for vintage and quirk: from haute thrift at Chinemachine to L’Objet Qui Parle’s homeware treasures.

Saint-Germain-des-Prés, for curiosities: artist Marin Montagut’s quirky ceramics or the lush taxidermy store Deyrolle.



Le Marais, for smart and small: beauty buys at Officine Universelle Buly to three-storey concept store Merci.

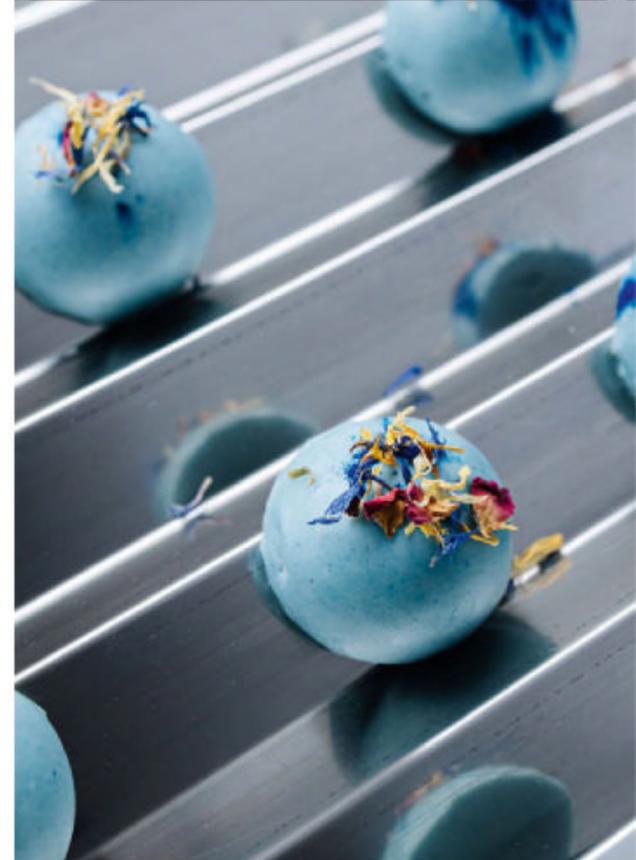
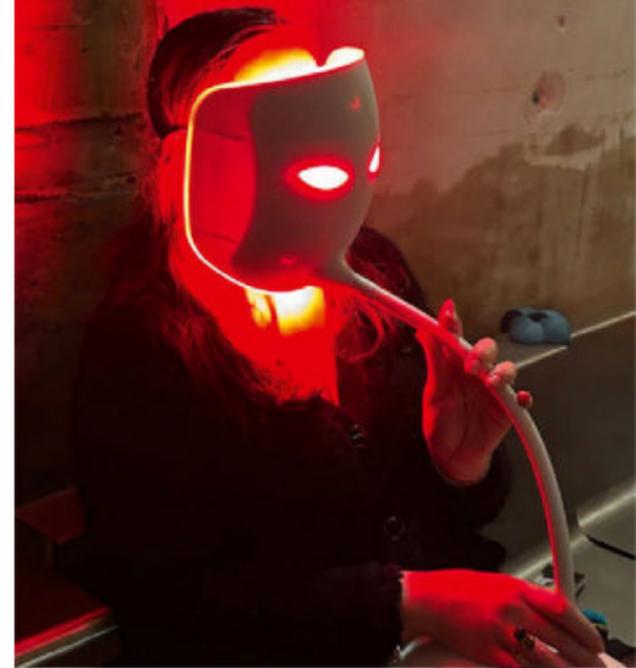
The Golden Triangle, for luxury: Louis Vuitton and Hermès flagships; Galeries Lafayette.

PHOTOGRAPHS: EMMA EMELIE/@WASTEDSWELL; LUDOVIC BALAY; BILAL TARIQTI; SIMON MCGILL/GETTY IMAGES

WORD OF MOUTH

TREND #2

FUTURISTIC WELLNESS Paris movers and shakers such as Camille Charrière are regulars at Bauhaus-style, tie-dyed 48 **Collagen Café**, which offers collagen-infused coffees and smoothies, and anti-ageing red-light therapy sessions. Infrared saunas are available at Galeries Lafayette's **La Wellness Galerie** and the futuristic **Octane**.



THE HOT CHEF MORY SACKO

Sacko's rise to power is astonishing given that he grew up as one of nine siblings in the Paris banlieues. The 31-year-old's debut, **MoSuke**, rocked the city's fine-dining scene, blending his Malian and Senegalese roots with nods to France and Japan; within weeks it had won a Michelin star. And casual fried-chicken joint **MoSugo** nails le comfort food. "The common thread is the mix of cultures, which allows people to broaden their minds and taste new things, always with a lot of spice and techniques," says Sacko. His **Lafayette's** occupies a townhouse once owned by the namesake marquis. There's an Afro-French slant, with American staples like puff-pastry-topped corn chowder. Embracing his role as an ambassador and a cult chef, he says, "I'm very proud because it shows a different image and a new face of French gastronomy." →



Clockwise, from top left: **chef Mory Sacko; Lafayette's; 48 Collagen Café; delicacies there; La Wellness Galerie; MoSuke; spread at Lafayette's**





FIVE GREAT VANTAGE POINTS

Hôtel Dame des Arts, for 360-degree views from the seasonal rooftop bar.

The sixth-floor hanging garden at sustainable restaurant **Le 39V**.

Hotel **Madame Rêve**'s Roof bar overlooking Notre-Dame.

The rooftop cocktail garden at **La Fantaisie** hotel's Bar sur le Toit.

Michelin-starred Le Tout Paris in the iconic **Cheval Blanc Paris**.

TREND #3

KYOTO SYNDROME Forget Paris syndrome, the city's going faint for Japan: at the 26-room **Hotel Hana**, close to Little Tokyo, with Japanese-inspired interiors by designer Laura Gonzalez; at **Cheval Blanc Paris**, where sushi master Takuya Watanabe is behind omakase restaurant **Hakuba**; and at **Minore**, a hyped Pigalle restaurant and cocktail bar with adored Abri chef Katsuaki Okiyama in the kitchen.



Clockwise, from top: **rooftop garden at Bar sur le Toit; Jeanne Damas; Minore**

THE STYLE SECRETS
FASHIONISTA JEANNE DAMAS

Nailing Parisian style is easier than some people think, says Damas, the Parisian it-girl and founder of fashion brand Rouje. "I can't speak for other women but, for me, the key to dressing like a Parisian is simplicity," she says. "I wear more or less the same things every day as a kind of uniform. A wrap dress works for any occasion. A men's style jacket, slip dresses, a trench coat, and ankle boots are all essential. When I buy a sweater, I get the size bigger as I prefer how the fabric falls when you tuck it inside your trousers. I don't like to be too dressy in the evening, so I often wear a pair of high-waisted jeans with a nice top and some mules—I like how those shoes can upscale even a simple outfit. I love a zero-make-up look, with just a big red lip, applied with fingers for a soft blurry effect." →



PHOTOGRAPHS: JÉRÔME GALLAND; VINCENT FERRANÉ; MATHIS NEBOIT

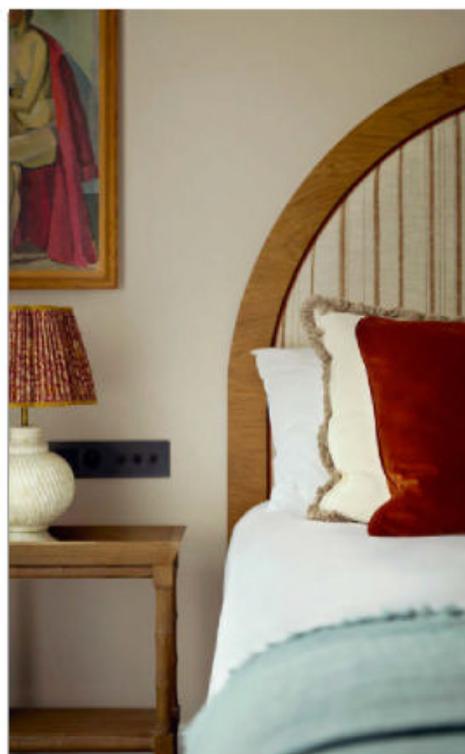
My Paris

SALIF GUEYE, DANCER

Gueye, 27, has 2.8 million Instagram followers and has worked with brands such as Lacoste and Christian Louboutin, which were drawn to his swagger and Michael Jackson-esque moves (his breakout was a viral video set to “Rock With You”).

“I love going to clubs, even though there isn’t always space for me to do my thing. The people and music are beautiful at **L’Arc**, by the Arc de Triomphe. Another favourite is **Matignon**, a smart club in the 8th arrondissement where it’s always busy for the hip-hop nights on Mondays. I often go to **Restaurant Armonia**, near the Eiffel Tower, a zen space that serves classic French food with a hint of Japanese influence. If I want great pasta and good music, I’ll go to **Siena** on Place du Marché Saint-Honoré, a Tuscan restaurant that’s my favourite Italian (spot) in Paris. I also love the vibe at **Bonnie** in the So Paris hotel, near the Seine—like being in a movie, with views right across the city.” @salif_crookboyz

Clockwise, from top left: **Salif Gueye**; **Le Grand Hôtel Cayré**; **Galerie Kreo**; **Scène Ouverte**; **Babylone**; café at **LV Dream**; **Librairie 7L**



TREND #4

CEREBRAL LUXURY Style and brains have always gone hand in hand in Paris, turbocharged by the late bibliophile Karl Lagerfeld’s **Librairie 7L**, with more than 30,000 arty tomes. Others have followed suit, like Saint Laurent’s **Babylone**, with its Basquiat books, Donna Summer vinyls, and DJ nights; and **LV Dream**, with portraits of Louis Vuitton by big hitters like Alex Katz, Refik Anadol, and digital artist Cao Fei.



THE SMART SCENE THE LEFT BANK

While the Rive Gauche has never gone out of fashion, it has been relatively lacking in new hotels—until recently. Three openings have changed that: the poetic **Hôtel des Académies et des Arts**, **Hôtel Dame des Arts**, and **Hôtel des Grands Voyageurs**, channelling the spirit of the Montparnasse art scene, Nouvelle Vague cinema, and the private residences of Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Bergé. A new group, Miiro, is launching its first neighbourhood hotel, the 123-room **Le Grand Hôtel Cayré** in Saint-Germain-des-Prés, with interiors referencing the Roaring Twenties. As with the **Lutetia** nearby, the Cayré’s history reflects that of its surroundings: the epicentre of literary and artistic Paris before, during, and after the Second World War. Through links with specialist food shops, and art and design galleries, it’s also spotlighting the area’s dynamic present. The gallery scene is flourishing (**Ketabi Bourdet**, **Scène Ouverte**, and **Galerie Kreo**). The first Design Miami.Paris was in Lagerfeld’s former home last year. Next year, the Experimental Group is due to open its first Left Bank hotel—its first five-star in Paris—in a private mansion. →

WORD OF MOUTH



THE FOOD HOOD BELLEVILLE

The multicultural eastern neighbourhood of Belleville is the latest star of the city's food and drink scene, symbolised by **Le Cheval d'Or**, riding high since a new team took the reins in late 2023. While its red lacquered sign suggests another of the low-key Chinese joints for which Belleville is known, inside, the haute menu roams across Asia. The minimal-chic venue is part of a new wave of places to eat—following the Bourdain-approved **Le Baratin**—doing the neo-bistro small plates thing with aplomb (most are affordable). Local staples include **Le Jourdain**, **Coup de Tête**, **Paloma**, **Le Cadoret**, seafood spot **Soces**, and **La Cale**, a date-friendly choice offering over 150 natural wines. The drinking scene isn't lagging; cocktail bar **Combat** joined on the Rue de Belleville by **Kissproof**, a vibey offshoot of a much-loved Beirut bar. If Paris is surprisingly poor for coffee, hip cafés are now par for the course, with laptop-toting creatives flocking to **Mardi** and **Candle Kids**.



Clockwise, from top left: **Le Jourdain**; **Oriane Bertone**; tart at **Gilles Marchal**; **Yann Couvreur** pastry; **Stohrer**; **Le Cheval d'Or**; **La Cale**



My Paris

ORIANE BERTONE, ROCK CLIMBER

At just 19, Bertone, who grew up in tropical Réunion but now lives in Paris, is already a force in the world of rock climbing. She has broken numerous records and even qualified to represent France in sport climbing at the Olympic level.

"I love Asian food. A favourite is **Omakase by Goma**, with really creative bites from sushi champion Eric Ticana. I also often eat at **Kodawari Ramen**, which does the most amazing broth. Everything is handmade and it has its own wheat field to make the noodles. **Sweetea's** does great Korean food plus Asian-inspired afternoon tea. On a summer's day, my favourite park is the **Parc des Buttes-Chaumont** in the 19th arrondissement. It is landscaped to evoke the mountains, with a wooden footbridge designed by Gustave Eiffel. It's not that busy, and has become a real escape for me—a place to breathe." [@oriane_bertone](#) (Words by Rebecca Cope, Lisa Johnson, and Clodagh Kinsella)

FIVE GREAT BAKERIES

Boulangerie Louvard, for sublime fruit tarts and "crookies" (cookie croissants).



Stohrer, the city's oldest patisserie for baba au rhum, éclairs, and lemon tarts.

Yann Couvreur, for roulé pastries or deconstructed millefeuilles.



The French Bastards, for pistachio babkas and chocolate cruffins.



Gilles Marchal, for lemon zest and dark chocolate madeleines.

PHOTOGRAPHS: SALOMÉ RATEAU; BLACK SUN CORP; TAISUKE YOSHIDA; ALEXANDRE GUIRKINGER; LUCIA BELL-EPSTEIN/@LUUUUUSH; LATOILE.DESIGN

ASK A LOCAL: PHNOM PENH

ROTANAK ROS

The chef shares her recipe for a culinary deep dive into the Cambodian capital

Rotanak Ros, widely known as Chef Nak, travels around Cambodia preserving and spotlighting traditional Khmer recipes. On top of hosting home dining, cooking classes, and food-focused homestays, she also curates the Khmer section of the menu at the Rosewood Phnom Penh's French-Cambodian Brasserie Louis. She says the region's ancient cuisine comprises "at least a thousand dishes", which congregate in her home city. "This is not just the hub for art or culture," she says. "This is the place where everyone comes for a better life."

CENTRAL MARKET

"I like to start my day at Phnom Penh's main market, with breakfast from the food court or the street vendors. Here you'll find everyday Cambodian food, from grilled pork on rice with sweet-and-sour sauce and crunchy pickle to nom banh jok: fresh rice noodles accompanied by seasonal vegetables. I'm also a big fan of the crispy banh chao crepes stuffed with minced pork and bean sprouts."

VILLA 5

"Chef Sao Sopheak, who comes from Siem Reap, puts a contemporary spin on traditional Khmer flavours, and he's so clever and creative. I love the marinated sun-dried fish served with seasonal fruit, such as watermelon or ripe mango. The fish is salty, but the sweetness of the fruit balances the whole thing."

SORA

"The view of the city from this bar on the 37th floor of the Rosewood Phnom Penh? Oh my God. The sunsets are amazing, and so are the cocktails. I'll sometimes go off-menu and ask for Cambodian rum, passion fruit, and a dash of star anise, shaken—no sugar required."



KRAVANH

"This restaurant has made an effort to preserve Cambodian cuisine. It's the type of place high-ranking government officials will take visitors to show off the country's culinary prowess, and I've been eating here since before I became a chef. I love the snails amok, which has a creamy lemongrass paste and coconut milk. This signature Cambodian dish is usually made with whitefish wrapped in a banana leaf and steam, but I always go for the version with snails, which are a common protein in Khmer cuisine."

NIKA'S SEEING HANDS MASSAGE THERAPY CENTER

"At Nika's, the massage therapists are blind, and they are really skilful. They've been fixing me for years now. Their main treatment is a traditional Khmer massage, a centuries-old technique incorporating stretching and pressure points for a restorative experience. They really know what they're doing, and I like to support their community." chefnak.com

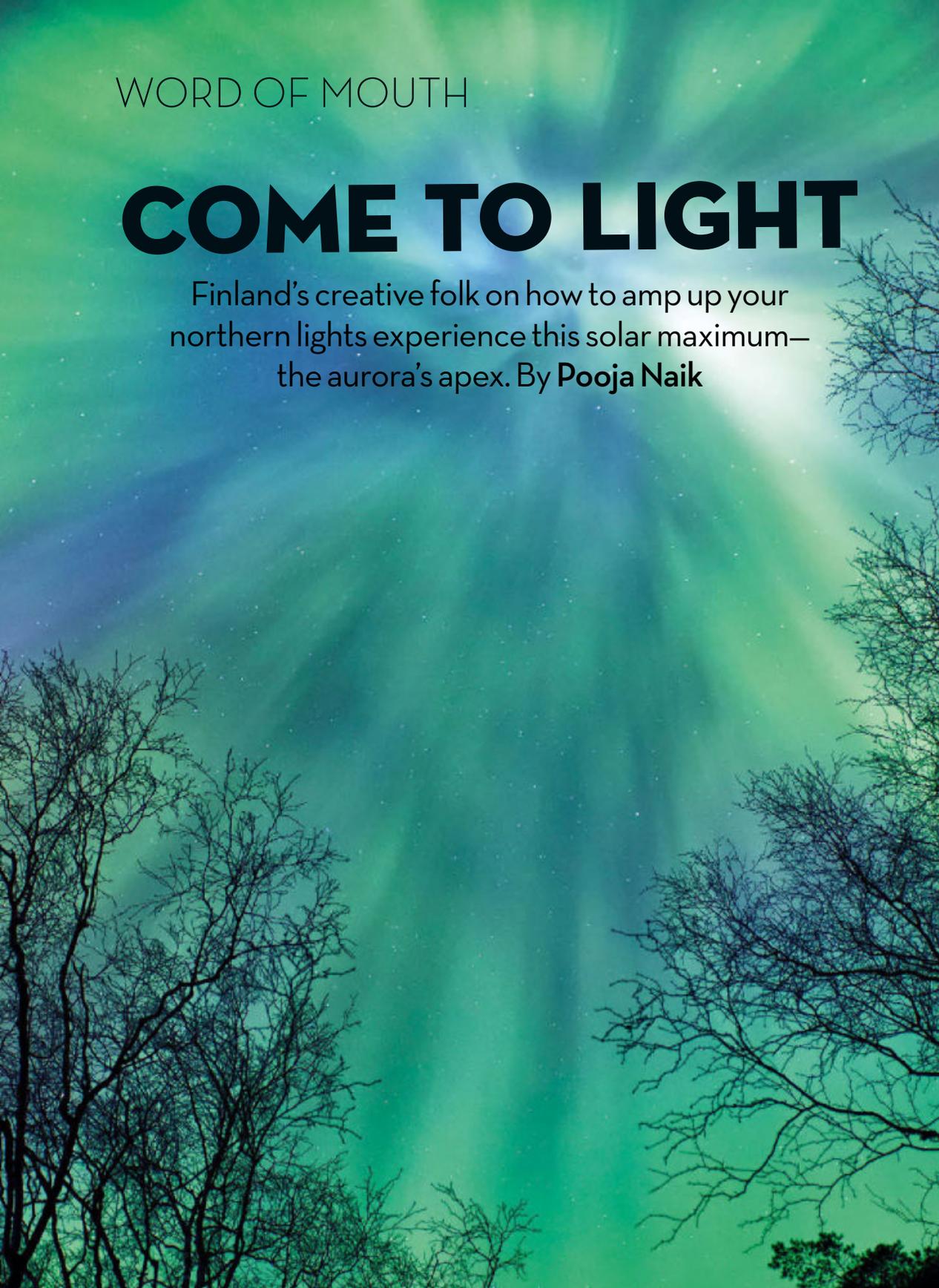
Ros was speaking to Megan Spurrell

Clockwise, from top left: Rotanak Ros at Brasserie Louis in the Rosewood Phnom Penh; Kravanh; Cambodia's Central Market; the Rosewood's lobby; curry at Kravanh; Sora bar

WORD OF MOUTH

COME TO LIGHT

Finland's creative folk on how to amp up your northern lights experience this solar maximum—the aurora's apex. By Pooja Naik



ERKKI PEKKARINEN

ARTIST AND WOOD CRAFTSMAN

What's your earliest memory of the northern lights?

As a young boy, skiing home under their glow was wonderful. The brightest I've seen were in Pielisjärvi—they illuminated the ski trails in the darkness, flickering brightly with sharp edges.

What local arts and crafts brands do you recommend?

Marimekko (marimekko.com) offers a range of clothing, accessories, and home décor inspired by Finnish culture, with stores located across Finland. For elegant glassware and minimalist Scandinavian design, Iittala (iittala.com) has a stunning collection of products at nationwide stores. Check out Arabia (arabia.fi), renowned for its rich Finnish heritage in ceramics, at its flagship store in Helsinki.

RIITTA RAEKALLIO-WUNDERINK

CREATOR OF HALIPUU, A FAMILY-RUN TREE ADOPTION COMPANY

What's the story behind HaliPuu?

In 2015, my family started HaliPuu—Finnish for “hugging trees”—to save our family forest in Levi from being cut down. Now, people from all over the world can adopt trees from our forest for five years, during which the owners are welcome to explore the expanse and connect with trees for healing and restoration. We guide our guests on tours to immerse them in the transformative environment of the Arctic forest. We also provide overnight Arctic cocooning in hammocks, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in the natural beauty of the northern lights from their hammocks. halipuu.com →



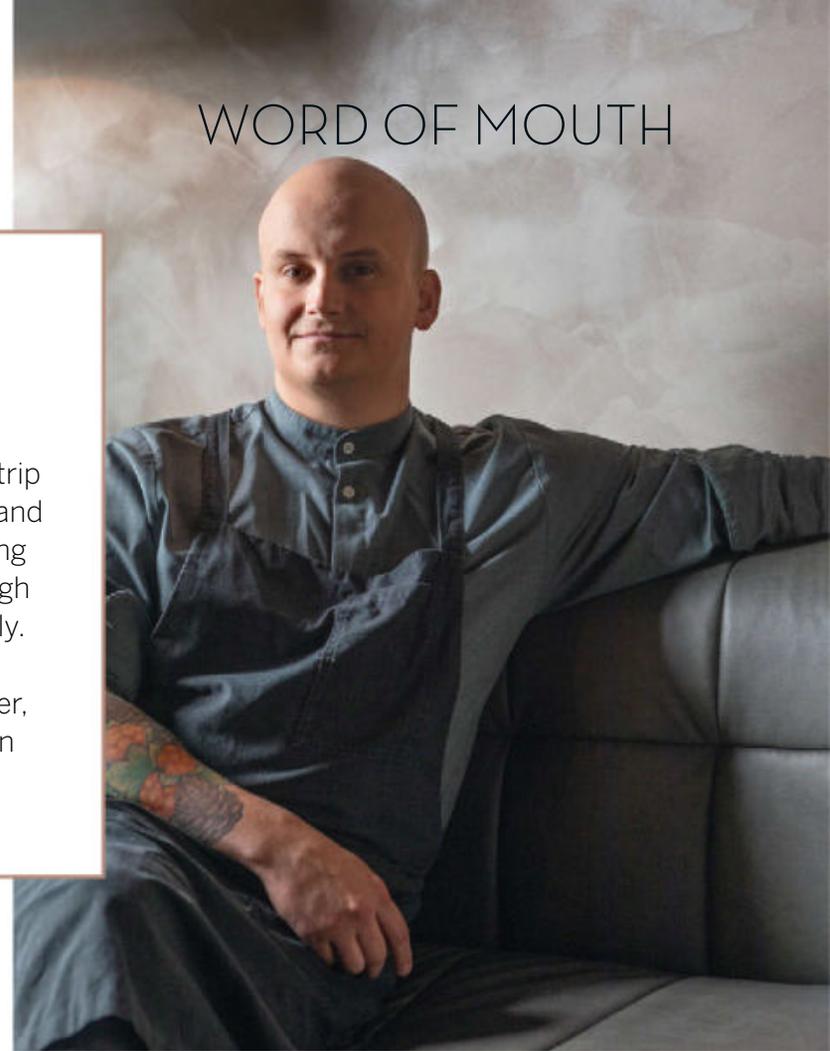
PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY IMAGES; YELI GRANÖ

REMI TRÉMOUILLEHEAD CHEF AND FOUNDER OF
AWARD-WINNING RESTAURANT SOLITARY**What's your favourite place in Finland?**

Lake Saimaa's natural beauty is unrivalled. I recommend a guided fishing trip with Nature Hotel & Spa Resort Järvisydän (jarvisydan.com). For foraging and hiking, consider visiting Punkaharju in the Savonlinna area for breathtaking scenery and Linnansaari National Park for hiking trails. Take a stroll through the region, and gather blueberries and lingonberries that grow abundantly.

Where you recommend travellers view the northern lights?

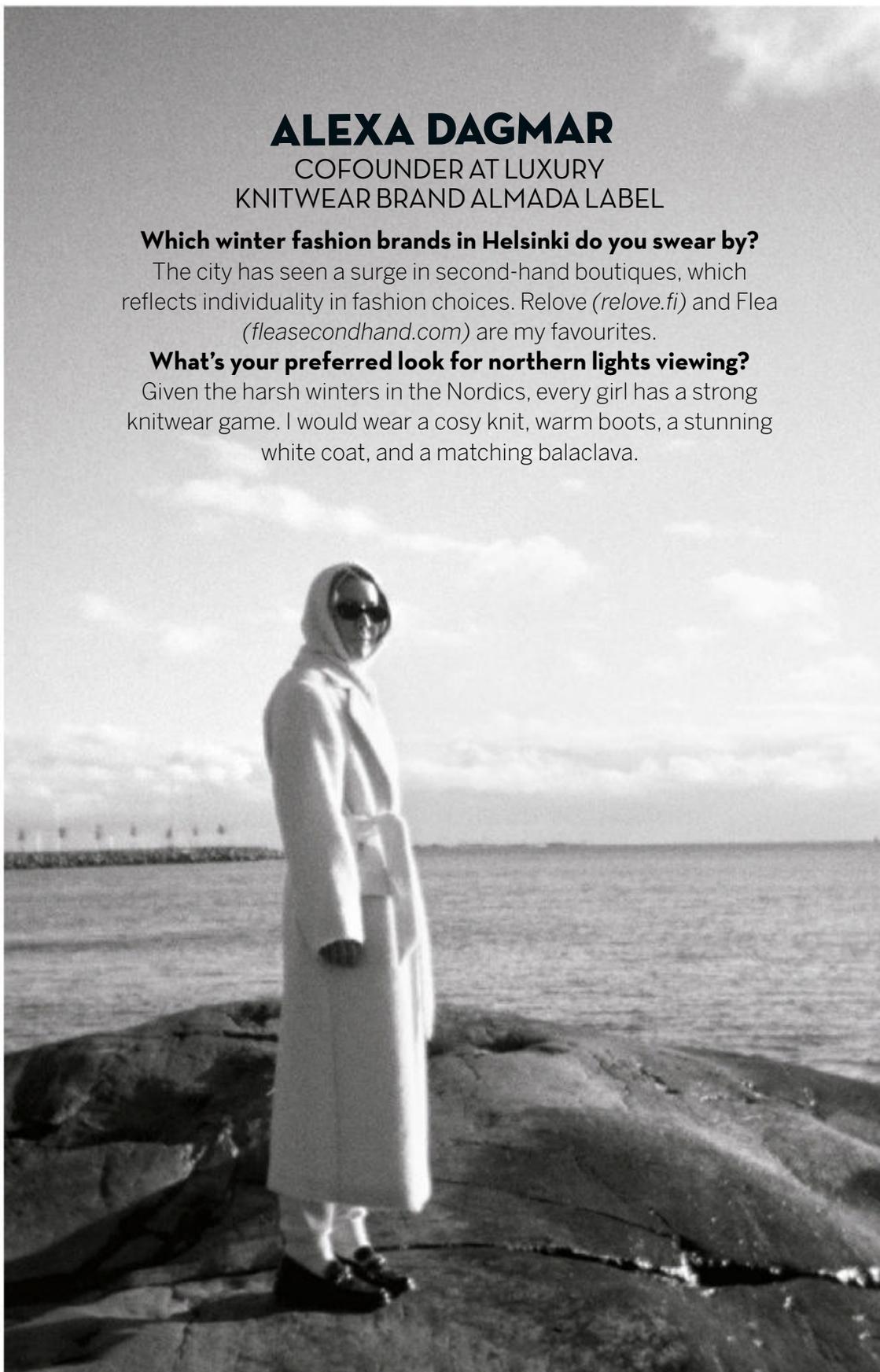
I got lucky thrice with strong sightings in Rantasalmi last year—September, October, and March are the best months to go for the lights. Opt for open areas such as lakes or fields for the best views. For top accomadation, consider Kuru Resort in Rantasalmi (kururessort.com).

**ALEXA DAGMAR**COFOUNDER AT LUXURY
KNITWEAR BRAND ALMADA LABEL**Which winter fashion brands in Helsinki do you swear by?**

The city has seen a surge in second-hand boutiques, which reflects individuality in fashion choices. Relove (relove.fi) and Flea (fleasecondhand.com) are my favourites.

What's your preferred look for northern lights viewing?

Given the harsh winters in the Nordics, every girl has a strong knitwear game. I would wear a cosy knit, warm boots, a stunning white coat, and a matching balaclava.



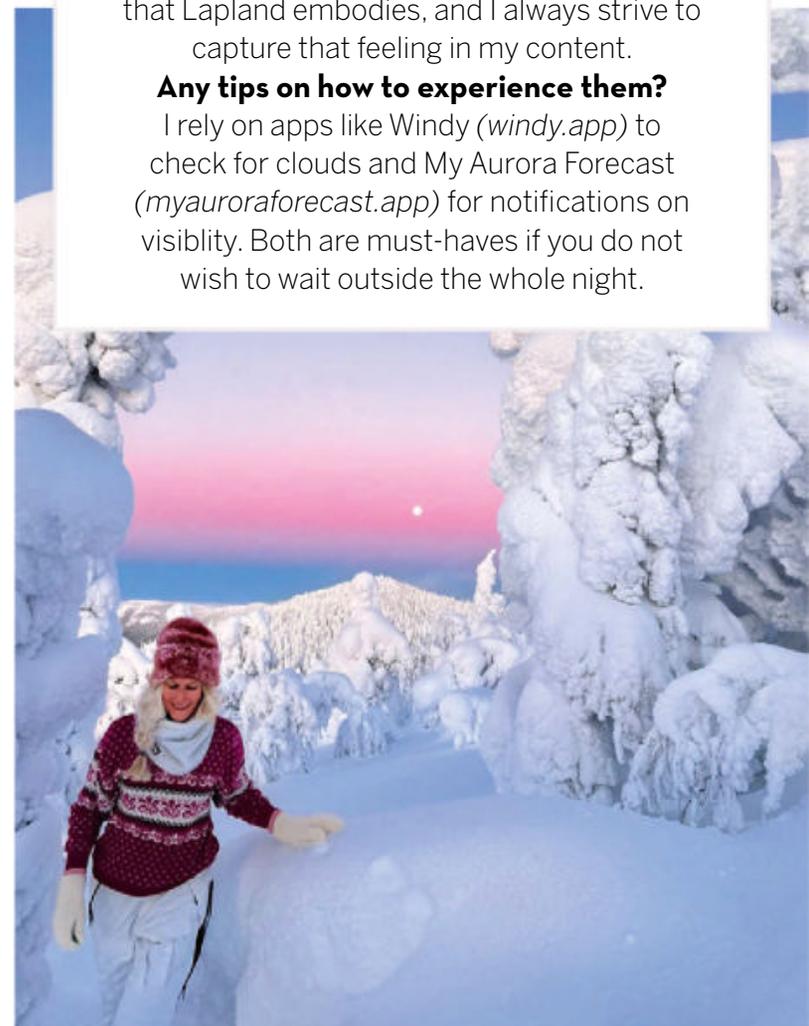
PHOTOGRAPH: JARI LAMPÉN

SANNI OKSANENSNOWBOARDER AND CONTENT
CREATOR FROM LAPLAND**How have the northern lights influenced your photography?**

In my twenties, I grew to love photographing them, especially in Levi and Saariselkä. These spots offer the best aurora borealis views—capturing the perfect shot is incredibly rewarding. They have inspired me and influenced the mood of my work. Their unique beauty evokes the sense of wonder that Lapland embodies, and I always strive to capture that feeling in my content.

Any tips on how to experience them?

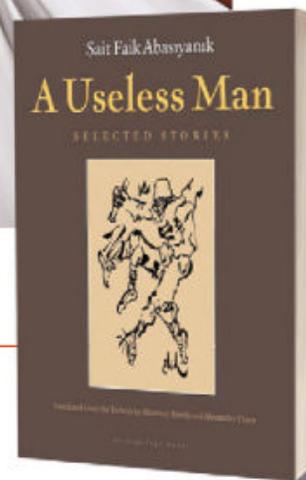
I rely on apps like Windy (windy.app) to check for clouds and My Aurora Forecast (myauroraforecast.app) for notifications on visibility. Both are must-haves if you do not wish to wait outside the whole night.



FLIGHT MODE

TURKISH DELIGHTS

Read, Watch, Listen: a recipe for in-flight immersion into the culture. By **Julian Manning**



READ

A USELESS MAN: SELECTED STORIES

For many Turkish people, Sait Faik Abasıyanık's melancholic short stories—especially those in his *A Useless Man* collection—stay with them like clouds of steam cling to “mournful copper samovars”. He is considered to be the foremost chronicler of Türkiye's transition to a secular nation in the 1930s. While he had a keen eye for setting a scene—creaky Istanbul coffee houses, windswept Burgazada—he believed that “it is people who bring beauty into a landscape”.



WATCH

KEDI

This delightful documentary dives into the lives of Istanbul's countless stray cats, who loaf about its urban landscape—from the roofs of apartment buildings to metro turnstiles—like in no other city. The documentary follows several entertaining cat characters—the protective girlfriend, the fish filcher, the dutiful mother—and their interactions with city folk who care for them deeply. The camerawork captures Istanbul deftly, with stunning shots of the Bosphorus and sprawling seaside markets—the lens often taking a cat's eye view of the city.

LISTEN

A TASTE OF THE PAST

In the “Sheilah Kaufman and Turkish Cuisine” episode of the podcast, cookbook author Kaufman speaks with host Linda Pelaccio about how the Ottoman Empire influenced Türkiye's cuisine. Calling the conquerors “culinary plunderers”, she describes how the empire took the best food from around the world—Persian stews, Mongolian manti, Greek round breads—back home. Tune in to find out why Turkish chefs worth their salt know how to cook eggplant in 50 ways.



AD



PHOTO: BIKRAMJIT BOSE/AD INDIA

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL HOMES IN THE WORLD



PHOTOGRAPH: ANDREW MORGAN

GETAWAY

BIGGEST GAME IN TOWN

The year's most exciting safari lodges offer a light footprint and deep immersion. Edited by Lydia Bell

SOUTH AFRICA

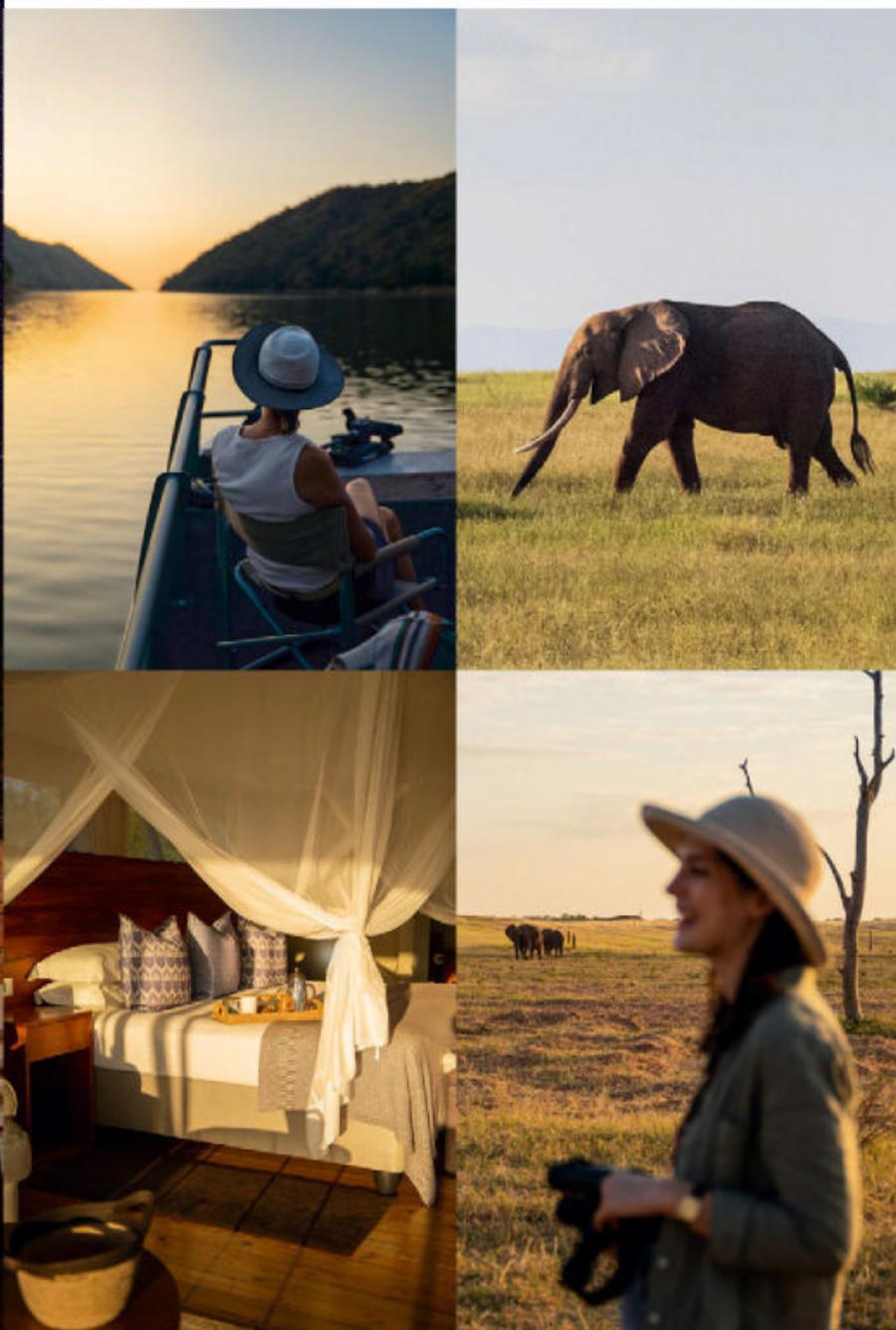
LOAPI TENTED CAMP

Loapi is the newest addition to Tswalu, South Africa's largest privately owned reserve, in the arid Kalahari. It's been a 25-year passion project for the South African Oppenheimer family, with three high-end properties, and land restoration and conservation initiatives focusing on rhinos, pangolins, and meerkats. Loapi is the most ambitious arrival yet: six sustainable stand-alone homes with private house managers, chefs, guides, and trackers. The glass, steel, and canvas houses are self-sufficient and can be dismantled and moved, leaving the land untouched. Inside, interiors by Cape Town's Gregory Mellor

are flecked with mohair tapestries, clay sculptures, and carved wooden panels—all just backdrop for the main view of golden grassy plains and rust earth that bleeds into distant mountains and a cloudless, electric blue sky. Tswalu is not for the first-time safari goer who wants to see the Big Five in one day. But those searching for rare pangolins or armadillos, black and white rhinos, and cheetahs may be rewarded. At night, a private chef prepares butternut salads, droëwors and biltong, or cauliflower soup next to a fireplace. It's big and bold, and, without another soul to be seen, invites introspection. MARY HOLLAND *A tented home starts from ₹9,86,000 for a minimum two-night stay; tswalu.com* →



GETAWAY



NAMIBIA

ONDULI RIDGE

If the Flintstones were transported to Namibia, this is where they'd live: among the giant boulders of Damaraland in one of the least populated areas of the second least populated country on earth. The landscape—part dry desert grasslands, part Mars-like kilometres of stone—is spectacular: scattered with rocks of all morphologies and colours, from black basalt to shards of glittering granite, and dotted with huge boulders and stunted, hardy trees. Ultimate Safaris' Onduli Ridge sits on a neck between two inselbergs, with views from the rooms at dawn and dusk over wide, flat plains and, in the distance, the purply peaks of the Brandberg, Namibia's highest mountain range. Every room is spacious and set high upon a deck among the rocks. In some, the shower head juts from a hunk of granite; in all, bathrooms are partly open to the hills and sky, and the bed can be wheeled onto the deck for stargazing. Ultimate Safaris is renowned for upskilling local workforces, and the cooks, trained from the community,

turn out inventive and fresh food, from tapas lunches served on multilayered wooden platters to wood-fired pizzas cooked by the pool under the stars. Local attractions include the Unesco-protected Twyfelfontein rock art sites, the Doros Crater, created by a meteorite, a petrified forest, and geological formations such as the Organ Pipes and Burnt Mountain. Plus, if you're very lucky, desert-adapted elephants and wild-roaming rhinos. LISA GRAINGER *Doubles from ₹87,300 all-inclusive; ultimatesafaris.na*

ZIMBABWE

FOTHERGILL ISLAND

Lake Kariba is like an inland sea in Zimbabwe: a 1.38-million-acre man-made lake bordering Zambia, fed by the Zambezi River, and surrounded by spectacular conservation areas. Two wildlife lovers took over Fothergill Island, within the remote Matusadona National Park, in 2019, and transformed it into the lake's smartest camp, reopening it in 2021. The five one-bedroom canvas-walled suites, two two-bedroom suites, and one three-bedroom private retreat are more

like mini villas than rooms, most with an outdoor sala, plunge pool, ponds, and pretty gardens protected by electrified elephant-proof fences. A practised team of staff serve modern multicultural cuisine, serious international wines, and sundowners around a starlit boma and in upscale safari-style living and dining tents, with views over the pool and lake. The real treats, though, are the activities on land and water: game drives with sunny, well-read guides to track lions, elephants, and buffaloes; bush breakfasts on sandy river beds over which gem-coloured sunbirds flit; sunset trips into river gorges teeming with hippos and giant crocodiles; and catch-and-release fishing excursions to try to snag the lake's famously ferocious tigerfish. For the restless, there's a gym, yoga deck, and running track; for children, archery, swimming, and wildlife excursions with guides who ooze enthusiasm for this special wild spot. Fothergill has a landing strip for charters, and speed boats for whizzing to Kariba airport. LG *From about ₹62,500 per person; fothergill.travel* →

**KENYA****ANGAMA AMBOSELI**

Africa's tallest mountain and some of the continent's last big tuskers set the scale for Angama's new camp, close to Amboseli, one of Kenya's prime national parks. Here, 10 canvas-roofed suites arc around the base of Kilimanjaro, with bedside views of the semi-dormant volcano rising from a magical fever tree forest. Taking up exclusive residence in the community-owned Kimana Sanctuary, the camp is set on an ancient elephant migratory route, protecting an area under threat from agriculture. Built in partnership with NGO Big Life Foundation, which leases the land from Maasai communities, Angama's first project outside the Mara has its biggest conservation focus to date, and the best place to get a grip on the story is the mushroom-shaped observation tower. Sink into a rocking chair with a sundowner and watch elephant herds parade across swamps while lights twinkle below Kili—a reminder of the challenges cohabiting humans and wildlife face. Every design detail of the camp pays homage to the elephants

who regularly pass through: exterior walls are made from dung and concrete, curved surfaces resemble their physical form, and textured table mats mimic their coarse skin. A proposed new road will make Amboseli National Park accessible within 30 minutes, although there's enough wilderness inside the sanctuary. Along with game drives and elephant tracking on foot, this is a place to rest and relax; a safe haven for four- and two-legged guests. SARAH MARSHAL *From ₹1,38,000 per person; angama.com*

MOZAMBIQUE**MUZIMU LODGE**

For years, Gorongosa National Park offered basic rondavels and tents, and a campground for the more intrepid. Those who visited the park—which has undergone a two-decade restoration—weren't seeking private plunge pools; rather, extraordinary nature and wildlife. Set at the southern tip of the Rift Valley, Gorongosa has a rich and varied landscape, its dense jungles and infinite savannah roamed by lions and wild dogs. But 2023 ushered in a new era of

hospitality with the opening of Muzimu, an intimate tented lodge connected via wooden walkways on the banks of a river bed. Its six canvas tents are simple and restrained, with locally made wooden headboards and desks, as well as pendant lights and lounge chairs in colourful printed fabrics. Their wooden decks overlook a thick tangle of palms and acacia trees. In the main spaces, local chef Vália Dimitri serves extraordinary salads and home-baked breads. There's also a giant fire pit for late-night stargazing and a pool fringed with sunbeds for a post-drive dip. The daily game drives seem almost mundane compared with the other excursions on offer: you'll be up mountains; visiting local research labs and coffee plantations; on epic bike rides; and exploring deep limestone gorges and waterfalls. MH *From ₹81,500 per person; gorongosa.org →*

Clockwise, from left: **Angama Amboseli; sunset, Muzimu Lodge; dish at lodge; décor there.** Previous page, clockwise, from left: **Onduli Ridge; Sanyati Gorge; an elephant in the wild; safari; suite at Fothergill.** Opening pages: **Loapi Tented Camp at dusk**

BOTSWANA**KHWAI LEDIBA**

Striking a balance between creature comforts and adventure isn't always easy. But African Bush Camps (ABC), helmed by Zimbabwean former guide Beks Ndlovu, has mastered the art of delivering smart, Champagne-popping safaris without compromising on the thrill of waking up in the wild. Its Khwai Lediba in the Okavango Delta is a prime example. Hidden in a quieter corner of Botswana's community-owned Khwai Concession—now booming with camps—it neighbours slightly more upmarket sister property Khwai Leadwood, opened by ABC in 2020. Both are a decent distance from the mobile campsites used by self-drivers and Khwai's main airstrip, though a helicopter can provide faster transfers for an additional fee. Much closer

is the Khwai River crossing into the Moremi Game Reserve, where most game drives happen, clocking up sightings of lions, leopards, and wild dogs. When four-wheel fatigue sets in, walking safaris and breezy late-afternoon mokoro rides unfold in the concession. Elephants frequently pass quietly through, leaving telltale footprints on sandy paths leading to seven wooden-framed canvas tents, including one honeymoon suite and a family room, both with bathtubs. In the main sitting room, bright murals and thatch-woven lampshades foreground local artists. And shared dinners are the place for the local staff's storytelling skills to shine. SM From ₹4,50,900 per person (sharing) for six nights at Khwai Lediba and Linyanti Bush Camp; africanbushcamps.com →



**BOTSWANA****NORTH ISLAND OKAVANGO**

If the name sounds familiar, that's intentional. Similar to its Seychellois namesake, this retreat occupies its own island, is surrounded by wildlife, and has all the starry qualities set to make it a dazzling success. Some of the team who worked on the lauded Indian Ocean launch more than two decades ago have since founded Natural Selection, the management company overseeing Botswana's sexiest new lodge. Set in a community-owned concession on the edge of the Okavango Delta's panhandle, shared with only one other camp, North Island enjoys a degree of exclusivity—although game drives often meander into the neighbouring concession, where Natural Selection also manages Duke's and Duke's East. Wild dogs are among the top animal draws here, with several known active dens attracting the likes of BBC Studios' Natural History Unit, which filmed a sequence for *Planet Earth III* in the delta area. Spearheading a new trend for micro-camps, the lodge has four suites that horseshoe

around a lagoon, fanning from an open-front dining area and help-yourself bar—an ideal gathering spot for buyouts. Especially glorious at dusk, a decking area snakes into the lagoon, perfect for a sundowner, and there's a well-equipped outdoor gym and hot tub. Shaded by ebony trees, the villas sit on elevated wooden platforms tickled by reeds, with plunge pools, outdoor showers, and wraparound verandas perfect for watching elephants. *SM From ₹1,16,500 per night; naturalselection.travel*

TANZANIA**WILDERNESS USAWA SERENGETI**

Given its presence across Africa, safari brand Wilderness has taken its time to arrive in the Serengeti, but last summer, it made its move, partnering with local walking-safari pioneer and TV regular Jean Du Plessis. Solar-powered mobile camp Usawa is designed to leave no trace. It was joined late last year by a second camp and, by July, will become part of a trio, all three easy to disassemble and use at any of the nine walking zones scattered across 14,762 square kilometres of

park. The concept? Seamless private on-foot access to the Great Migration, Africa's 1,931-km odyssey of life, death, and rebirth. Days at Usawa are a tapestry of wild species—from lions, giraffes, and hippos to the mega-herds of wildebeests, zebras, and elands; and the crocodiles and hyenas who lie in wait. Du Plessis's knowledge of the terrain curates a Serengeti seemingly devoid of other humans. The six tents were designed by glamping pioneer Luxury Frontiers and cater for 12 around a central tent where campfire dining unfurls below star-strewn skies. From the acacia-thorn light fittings to the handblown glassware and ebony furniture, everything has been commissioned locally. While the animal kingdom runs through the barks and shrieks of its nightly playlist, guests enjoy a prime selection of wines paired with international and regional treats, including Zanzibari urojo, a coconut- and dhal-rich stew. *ANDREW HARRIS From ₹79,300 per person; wildernessdestinations.com*

Clockwise, from left: **North Island Okavango; Wilderness camp; lions; camp dining; suite there.** Previous page: **pool at Khwai Lediba**

GETAWAY

BACK ON TRACK

The return of Belmond's iconic *Eastern & Oriental Express* four years after the pandemic shut it down brings the romance of train travel to the wilds of Malaysia. By Arati Menon

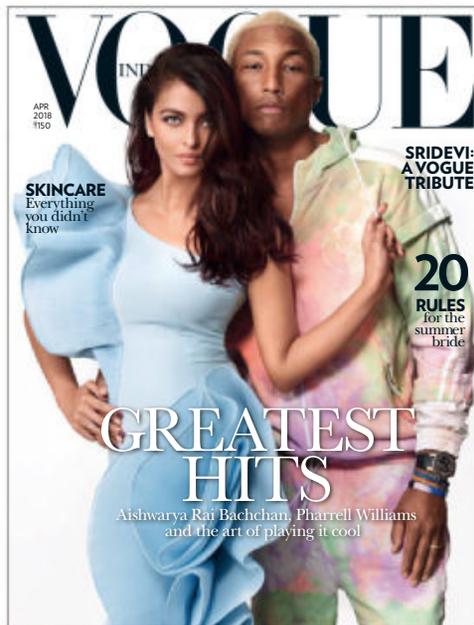


PHOTOGRAPH: LUDOVIC BALAY



INDIA VOGUE

BEFORE IT'S IN FASHION, IT'S IN VOGUE!



GETAWAY



I pried open the blinds, letting dawn's opalescent light into the cabin. Outside my window, wild forest zoomed past. All night, the train had barrelled up the "jungle rails", a historic set of tracks that spans the length of peninsular Malaysia, from its southernmost tip to its border with Thailand in the northeast. It would lead us to Taman Negara, one of the world's oldest rainforests and the last refuge of the Malayan tiger.

I was one of 56 passengers, hailing from as far as Texas, Romania, and New Zealand, who'd boarded the previous afternoon at Singapore's Woodlands station to experience the return of the *Eastern & Oriental Express, A Belmond Train, Southeast Asia*, four years after it was shut down by the pandemic. Over three days, the train would bear north on the eastern coast to Taman Negara, then backtrack and head up Malaysia's more populated west coast to Penang, before looping back to Singapore. We'd pass forests, paddy fields, and townships

while cosseted in the silken luxury for which Belmond's sleepers are renowned. For its second coming, the train has retained its trademark exterior green and gold, but the interiors have been carefully restyled. My cabin was bathed in peacock blues and jade greens, with vintage touches like brass lamps and fine marquetry. A velvet couch turned into a bed at night; cherry wood panelling concealed a full bathroom. This was my private oasis, where I enjoyed breakfast and high tea in solitude.

On our first evening, the piano bar—resplendent in gold Thai silks, with tiger orchids blooming across the green carpet—was filled with laughter, the glug-glug-glug of Champagne pouring, and the tinkle of keys. The opening night special was a magician named Ming Da who brandished a pack of cards and grinned broadly at the guests in floaty dresses and linen jackets. I met Andy and Chris, a young couple in tech from San Francisco, and Rob and Alan, brothers from Nova Scotia with

unflagging pep. We toasted the start of the journey, then ate laksa bouillabaisse in the train's glamorous dining cars as it trundled through the darkness.

About twice the size of Singapore, Taman Negara is the largest protected lowland rainforest in Malaysia. It's the headliner of Belmond's "Wild Malaysia" itinerary, which gives passengers special access to the country's diverse and vulnerable ecosystems. Accompanied by guides, we piled into jeeps and drove through pristine forest wreathed in mist, looking for signs of the dusky leaf monkey or barking deer. I knew better than to expect to see a tiger—the species is critically endangered. An elevated walkway took us close to the canopies of the trees, including the majestic tualang, which have been undisturbed for millions of years. Illegal logging and poaching are ever-present threats in Taman Negara, but for a moment, the babble of the river and the chattering of cicadas let us forget those concerns.



GETAWAY

“It affords glimpses into the small towns of rural Malaysia, where a quarter of the country’s population lives, with candy-coloured homes and tin-roofed stalls”

On the second morning, we rode a ferry to George Town, a colonial port on the island of Penang, where we navigated the bylanes by Vespa, exploring street murals, shop houses, and artist ateliers. Other adventures were less planned, like a pit stop at the historic tin-mining town of Ipoh that turned into a heritage walk, with train manager Wolfgang Eipeldauer leading a small group past stately colonial buildings and hip cafés with peeling paint and bright stools.

But perhaps my greatest pleasures came from finding a quiet corner and losing myself in the unfolding landscapes. The ride affords glimpses into the small towns of rural Malaysia, where a quarter of the country’s population lives, with their candy-coloured homes and tin-roofed stalls. Between the towns are rice fields,

limestone outcropping, and oil palms as far as the eye can see. When I wanted company, the piano bar was a fulcrum of swinging social activity. There Kishen, the lead bartender, dipped into his arsenal of dehydrated herbs, grilled pineapple shrubs, and baobab jellies. “I’m not just making drinks,” he told me. “I’m giving you a piece of my heart.”

As the journey progressed, the passengers’ stories got more personal. Barbara, an older British lady, recounted the bucket list adventures she’s gone on every year since emerging from a long coma 27 years ago. By the third day, guests were sharing cigars and coffee on the observation deck, and passing out tiaras and maracas for the birthdays of several passengers. The carousing reached its apogee on the final night. After a sumptuous meal that included Penang duck curry, a few of us returned

to the bar, where the singer was belting out power pop hits. Our nightcaps — pineapple-infused cognac sweetened with honey from the tualang tree — came out flaming. “One more song,” we took turns shouting. We’d barely noticed when we arrived (or left) Kuala Lumpur; the bar car had turned into a rowdy sing-along. By morning, we’d be back among Singapore’s bright lights and thrumming streets. But in this moment, we were a world away. 📍

The three-night “Wild Malaysia” itinerary starts from ₹3,13,000; belmond.com

From far left: a Champagne lunch set in the dining car of the **Eastern & Oriental Express**; the emerald exterior of the iconic train, which made its maiden voyage in 1993; the Pullman cabin in the train. Opening page: **taking in the jungles of the Malaysian countryside from the observation car of the train**



PHOTOGRAPHS: STEVIE MANN FOR SONEVA; JENNY ZARINS; PRESHITA SAKA

WHERE TO STAY

SONEVA SECRET 2024 MALDIVES

A longtime admirer of the Soneva brand, **Divia Thani** gets an early peek at its hush-hush third Maldivian chapter

I first visited the Maldives in 2009. Then, this far-flung cluster of more than 1,000 paradisiacal islands scattered in the Indian Ocean was a dream for most of us; a seaborne world of overwater villas and screen-saver vistas, where even the breakfasts floated (in private pools). But the food wasn't anything to write home about back then, and the focus on honeymoons always felt a little prohibitive to solo travellers.

The evolution of the Maldives has happened fast. Almost every luxury marque in the world has gathered here since, each upping the ante with design concepts, experiences, and wine lists. Where once the food was to be tolerated more than enjoyed, today the archipelago draws starry chefs who've opened restaurants (Sri Lankan maestro Dharshan Munidasa, Singapore-based barbecue wizard Dave Pynt) or flown in for pop-ups (Gordon Ramsay, American TV chef Bobby Chinn). And the iconic honeymooners' go-to is becoming almost as well known as a family getaway, its kids' clubs focusing on learning as much as adventure, immersing children in marine sustainability principles, with programmes on coral, sharks, and manta rays.

Leading the pack has always been Soneva, the brainchild of Sonu and Eva Shivasani, who arrived on the islands in the 1980s—having met, with suitable glamour, at the Monaco Grand Prix. It was Swedish model Eva who introduced the Maldives to Sonu, an Eton- and Oxford-educated British Indian. He fell as much in love with the islands as she had on a photoshoot some time before.

Together, they built the first Soneva resort, Soneva Fushi, which was boho-chic before the term had been invented, with a “no news, no shoes” philosophy that is oft-copied. Over the years, the couple made these islands their home, and their Soneva Fushi and Soneva Jani resorts are among the best in the world: repeat winners of *Condé Nast Traveller's* Readers' Travel Awards, and regulars on our annual Gold List.

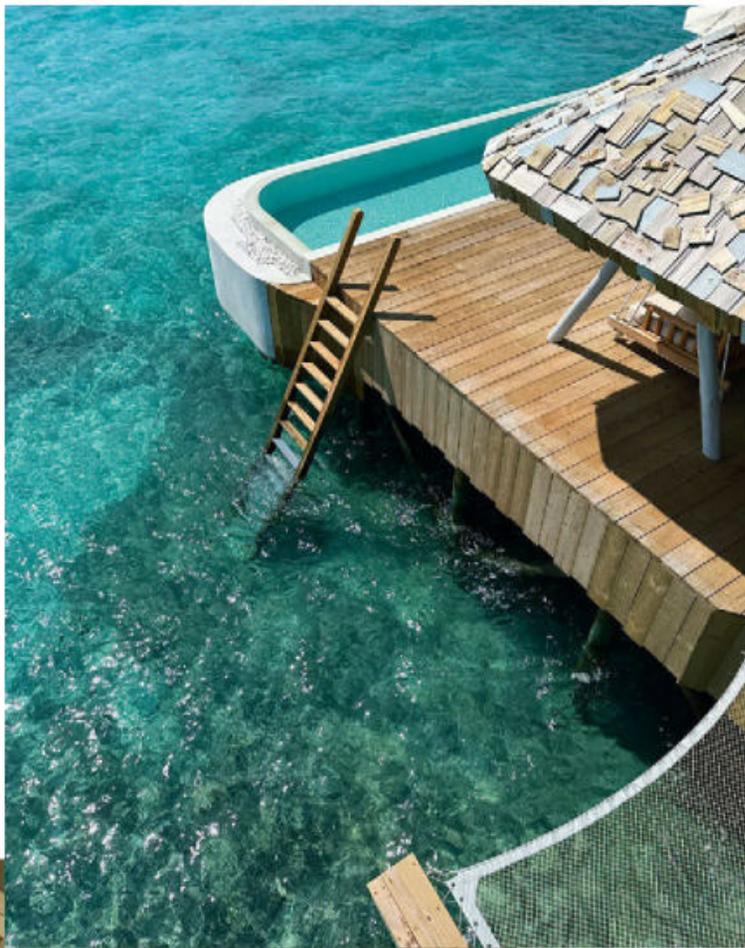
Their formula is equal parts luxury, responsibility, and soul. It's all conscientious at the back end and carefree at the front—so you're pampered silly with caviar, but it is sustainably farmed. They have vast wine cellars, but their electricity is mostly solar-generated; drinking water is filtered and bottled on site; and all waste is recycled and composted. Most of their villas have retractable roofs, so you can watch the stars from your bed, and there are slides from the first floor that plunge you into the ocean. The question on my mind as I arrive—after an hour-long seaplane ride—at Soneva Secret 2024, their just-opened ultra-luxe, super-private western Maldives resort shrouded in secrecy, is: How can they possibly raise the bar? Just what have they conjured up?

The arrival is breathtaking. Because there are no other islands around, you float down into a pure turquoise world, where the views of blue skies and bluer waves are uninterrupted from each of the 14 villas. The design of the villas is even more open to the elements than at the other two Maldivian resorts. The glass doors of the bedrooms (the only main spaces with air-conditioning) can disappear, and you can sleep to the sounds of waves seemingly lapping up to your toes. There is a sunken sitting area, a swing, little reading alcoves, and →





“Soneva Secret walks the fine line between living your best life and mitigating environmental damage”



those signature Soneva design elements: a private infinity pool, a ladder transporting you straight into the ocean for dips, and that slide from the roof deck into the blue. Each villa has an upstairs room with a massage bed for private spa treatments, and a dedicated barefoot butler and assistant, who can handle requests via WhatsApp. A chef is also assigned to each villa per day, with a roster as international as Soneva's clientele.

Still under construction are several of the beach villas plus another first: a “floating” villa on stilts in the ocean, which will be able to move locations. There are two main places to eat: the more casual driftwood-chic Living Room and a circular fine-dining restaurant about 330 feet off the shoreline. I

zipline there from the Living Room—very much the Soneva way—to sample ambitious morsels by tattooed chef Henrique Lork, who started as a baker in his native Brazil. I love his three-layer sourdough with truffle, cacao, and curry, served with popcorn butter, and the recycled glass plates it's served on, designed and handblown in the Soneva Fushi studio.

While there are options to sign up for water sports, wellness sessions, underground slow cooking, or guided astronomy, I particularly love the “secret

day” created by my barefoot staff, with a surprise itinerary inspired by a long form I filled in a week before arriving. There are questions about everything from the fragrances I like (lemongrass) to what I want in my bathroom (a Dyson Airwrap) and the books I enjoy reading (literary fiction). I've had shorter doctors' forms but it hits the nail on the head. The day starts with an authentic Indonesian breakfast, including bubur ayam, with Indonesian music playing in the background. Next, I have a spa treatment with experienced Bhutanese therapist Tashi Dekey, who, knowing that I have sensitive skin and a preference for all-natural and organic ingredients, mixes up a scrub with Maldivian rice, cold-pressed local coconut oil and soothing fresh aloe vera, with a yoghurt pack for my face.

Then we take a quick speedboat ride, seeing dozens of dolphins along the way, and arrive at tiny Makunudhoo, the last island in the Maldives to the west and the 17th and final on this atoll—so remote that ousted royalty and criminals have been exiled here. Bursting with bright pink bougainvillea, rose apples, and mangoes, it's still home to coral-made buildings (banned by the 1970s) and traditional weavers of baskets and roofs. Many of Soneva's workers commute from here, but keep the island's traditional lifestyle alive. On the beach, in the welcome shade of coconut trees, we're treated to a lunch cooked by a local family on an open fire. It's one of the best tuna curries I have eaten—on palm leaf mats with our fingers, everyone asking for seconds.

Sonu and Eva talk about Soneva Secret as an evolution that has built on the core principles of sustainability, conservation, and wellness. But it's also a conscious decision to return to the rustic beauty that enticed them to this place in the beginning: the views, the warmth of the people, and the ability to lose yourself, but also to restore yourself. Soneva Secret 2024 highlights privacy and seclusion, and walks the fine line between living your best life and thoughtfully managing and mitigating environmental damage. I ask Dekey if she's happy working here, so far from home. “I can adjust to anywhere,” she replies. “Happiness comes from within.” She's right, of course—but for those of us less evolved, there's Soneva. 🌿

SONEVA SECRET 2024 Dhipparufushi Island, Haa Dhaalu Atoll, Maldives. (Doubles from ₹2,66,500; soneva.com)

FIRST LOOK

RAFFLES JAIPUR

The newest Raffles in India is a modern-day palace rooted in the city's history and traditions. By Diya Kohli. Photographs by Himanshu Lakhwani

FIRST LOOK

Enter Jaipur's newest hotel through an open-air walkway around a large fountain. A singer plays the songs of his village and the sound carries as I walk into a spectacular circular lobby with mirrored doors. Everything at the Raffles Jaipur unfurls the further you walk in, and for a first-timer, the space seems like a grand illusion with its nonlinear design.

The 50-key Raffles Jaipur opens exactly three years after the brand's first Indian outing in Udaipur. Conceptualised by the same architect, Clive Gray of Bangkok's Randolph Gray Design, the two properties are unique. The modernist East-meets-West lines of Raffles Udaipur are dramatically different from the intimate layers of Raffles Jaipur that uses a Rajput queen's palace as its design inspiration.

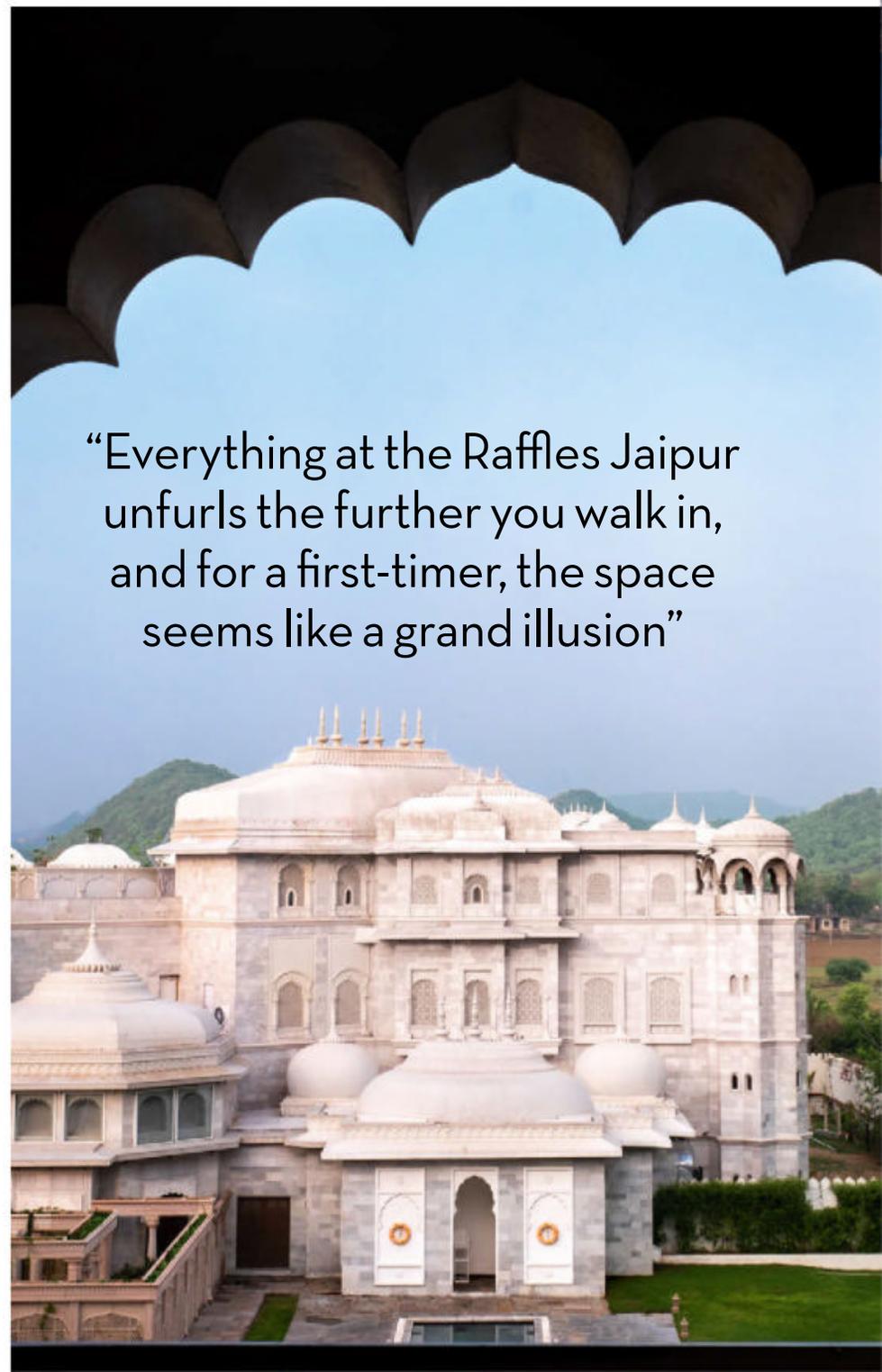
While it might be among the smaller hotels in the portfolio, Raffles Jaipur is replete with a sense of place and an inherent sumptuousness that is a throwback to its first outing in Singapore in 1887. Ensnared amid a luxury mile in Kukas village on the outskirts of Jaipur, which houses big hitters like Leela, Taj, and Le Méridien, the property's size plays to its advantage in a city crowded with sprawling destination wedding hotels and larger-than-life palaces. Located next door to the 255-room Fairmont, Raffles is designed as a delicate foil to its bold sandstone edifice. The rooms and suites fan out around long verandahs, each a private oasis with a balcony, an outdoor tub, or a private pool. Rooms within the same category are of different sizes following the shape of the building, which eschews uniform edges for the varying contours of a palace. My Signature Suite is in a pale Jaipur pink, kitted with a canopied bed, a living room, and an ample bathroom that comes with a clawfoot bathtub and a double vanity with marble sinks shaped like lotuses in bloom. Floor-to-ceiling windows and a large balcony look out over a forest skirted by the Aravallis. The arid hills of summer are rendered green by the monsoon showers and soundtracked by the piercing cries of the peacocks.

When I visit, the final touches are still being added to the property, including the lavish two-level spa with its hammams, two mineral pools, and an assortment of treatment rooms. What is absolutely in place is the impeccable butler service. There are floor butlers as well as personal butlers, depending on your room category, and they are the single point of contact for guests. Snehal, whose care I am in, is with me from the moment I arrive, taking note of all that I need. My late arrival is made a tad sweeter by a rose-scented bath that she has kept ready in my room. The next day, on a whirl through the old bazaars, she remembers my note on wanting a pair of Jaipuri juttis and bargains till a fair price is reached. We discuss our shared love of street food and she makes sure I get a taste of the best mirchi vadas in town.

Raffles stands out for its service and experiences, offering guests a chance to stay in and experience Jaipur via the curation at the hotel. The rooftop is a wide open space with an infinity pool lit by giant mashaals and feels like the royal baths of Rajput queens of yore. The adjacent bar and dining area have several nooks for special evenings. Other dining spaces across the hotel include the opulent Arkaa, where classic dishes from Rajasthan and north India are reinterpreted as modern plates, and a flautist behind a screen plays ragas per time of day. Safir, in the atrium, forms the setting for a grand afternoon tea or Champagne brunch.

And then there is the Writers Bar, with its hand-painted wall art, a two-floor library, and chiaroscuro lighting—rendered even more special in Jaipur as it plays host to one of the biggest literary events in the world. I sip on a Jaipur Sling that matches the terracotta pink walls of the city as the hotel's GM Binny Sebastian talks of a future filled with black-tie dinners, harp recitals, and writers' salons. For a moment, I see the original Raffles dream, lined with slings and soirees. Maybe, this is how history repeats. 📍

RAFFLES JAIPUR Khasara no. 2060, 2061/2267, Amer, Kukas, Rajasthan 302028. (Doubles from ₹45,000; [raffles.com](https://www.raffles.com))



“Everything at the Raffles Jaipur unfurls the further you walk in, and for a first-timer, the space seems like a grand illusion”



SIX SENSES KYOTO JAPAN

Greenery, space, and stillness define the Six Senses urban resort in Japan's old capital. By Pico Iyer

I stepped through a low, worn wooden door on a quiet lane in the western suburbs of Kyoto and found myself in another world. In front of me was a classic Zen karesansui, or dry garden, its swirls and ridges evoking streams and hills. A master of such gardens, Noriyuki Takao, who has been designing meditation spaces for one of Kyoto's great temples for 35 years, was awaiting me with a smile. "So long as you control your breath," he explained, "it will show, perfectly, in the straight line you make in the sand."

He gave a demonstration, stepping backwards with effortless grace as he raked parallel lines across the garden. "Now," he said, "You try it." I have been living around Japan's ancient capital for 36 years, but I never imagined I'd be given the chance to pursue this form of moving meditation and fashion a Zen enigma myself. The final miracle was that the garden that gentle and encouraging Takao-san has been tending all these decades turned out to be the one at Tōfuku-ji, the 15th-century temple where I met my Kyoto-born wife three weeks after I moved to Japan in 1987.

It seemed only fitting that I came upon this experience, thanks to the city's new Six Senses resort, whose very name points to the extra faculty that Takao-san kept stressing: intuition. The minute I stepped through the property's modest entrance on busy Higashioji Street—"It looks like a temple!" cried my wife—I felt I was in a sanctuary made for mindfulness. The air was scented with cedar, yuzu, and cardamom. Ambient music floated through the small lobby. Right in front of me was an explosion of greenery, no window or door separating me from a flowering garden.

Visitors are often startled that Japan's cultural centre for more than 1,200 years—famous for its 1,600 temples and 17 World

Heritage Sites—is a bustling, traffic-jammed city full of skyscrapers, with a population three times larger than that of Manchester. In recent times, a tourist boom has brought 8.7 crore visitors a year to the prefecture, and sometimes, in the narrow lanes and hidden shrines, it can seem almost impossible to move. Yet, for its second urban resort—the first opened in Rome last year—Six Senses alighted on a quiet, lyrical corner along Kyoto's eastern hills. It has opened an intimate six-storey hotel that enshrines



the city's serenity and composure, which belie the crowds that throng through its modern metropolis.

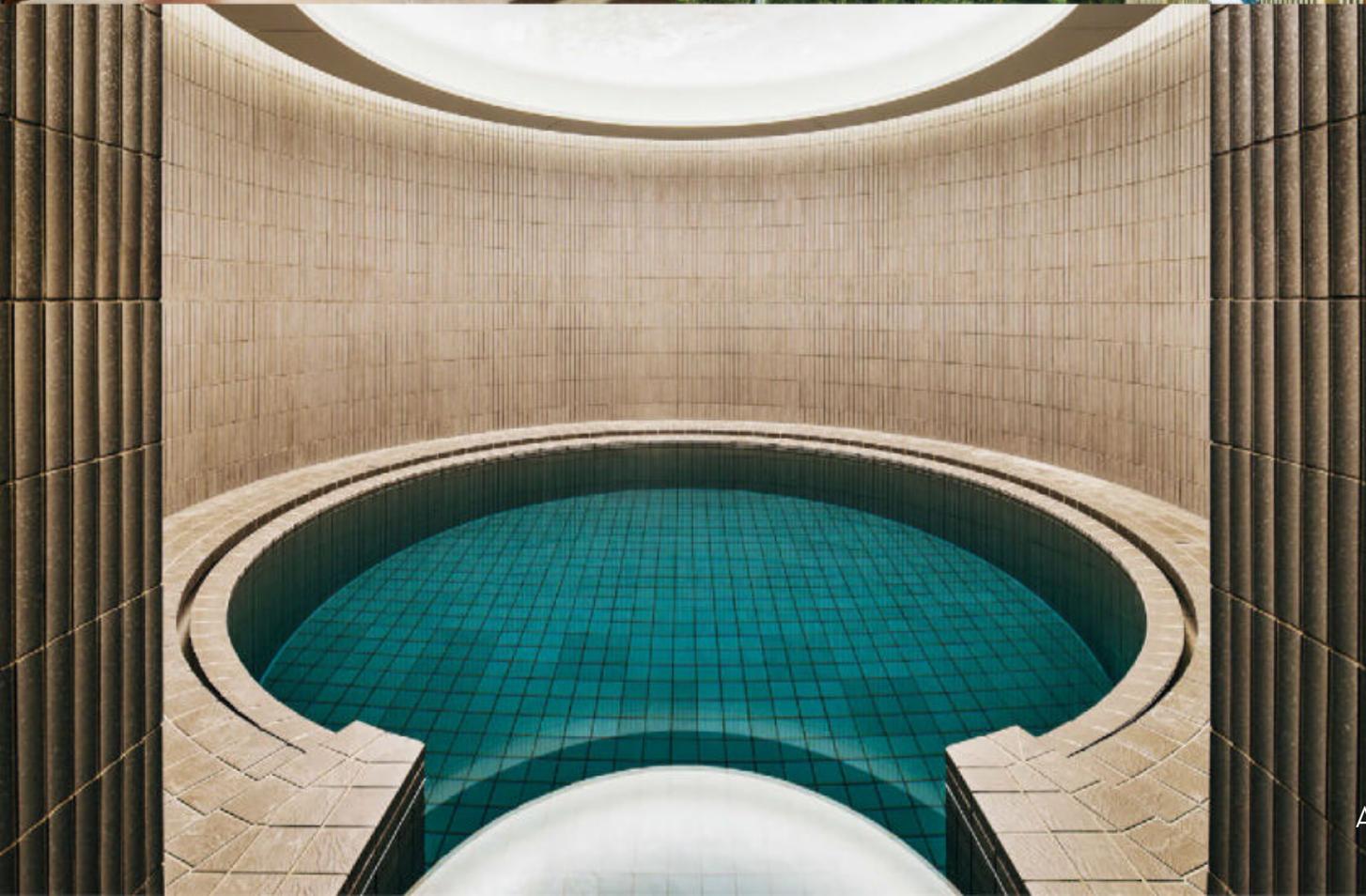
I was lucky to be given one of the property's Garden suites, with a terrace as long as five Teslas, looking out over the entire city to the western hills of Arashiyama in the distance. A cherry tree grew right in front of me, and below, I could make out an exquisite garden, complete with a bamboo ladle and stone lantern. To my right was a field

where a man was labouring in the green-golden light; to my left was Six Senses' herb garden: bushes of tea leaves around plots of camomile, lemongrass, rosemary, and mint. A small maze led past the lavender to a tiny pavilion and, even in midmorning, everything was silent and nothing seemed to stir.

Ever since I left my fast-paced job in Midtown Manhattan to live in a temple not far from the new Six Senses, I've seen this area as one of Kyoto's secret treasures. Up the street from the hotel is the jewelled garden at Chishaku-in, not known to many sightseers. Around the corner is the elegant National Museum and, across from it, Sanjusangen-do, the unique temple that's home to 1,001 life-sized golden statues. A pleasant seven-minute walk leads to Kyoto's central artery, the Kamo River, made for long strolls amid motionless white egrets and courting couples.

Amazingly, the Six Senses property also sits at the back of the historically important but little-visited Toyokuni Shrine. Step through a small back door and you're soon in a classic space with a tall stone torii gate, old wooden shrine, and school children playing around the site of the first Shinto altar in Japan built for the worship of ancestors. Indeed, this very spot was once home to one of the wonders of the world: a Great Buddha constructed by the swaggering samurai Hideyoshi Toyotomi in 1588—the largest building in the world at the time, apart from the Pyramids—only to be destroyed eight years later by an earthquake.

In choosing Kyoto as the setting for their first Asian urban resort, the minds behind Six Senses were selecting a city of "purple hills and crystal streams" that has always been defined by the slopes that surround it on three sides, and the parks and temple gardens to be discovered →



FIRST LOOK



“I was led into a room by a soft-voiced Japanese woman and invited to draw an ensō, or Zen circle, with a calligraphic brush, while sandalwood incense burned”

round every corner. Most rooms in the hotel look out onto a garden, often sweetened by birdsong and the sound of running water. And though my suite sported an elegant deep tub and a sofa big enough for five, I found myself content just to sit for long stretches on my terrace, watching an elderly couple take a small dog for a walk, or looking out on a crescent moon in the navy blue sky.

This being a Six Senses, of course there is much else on offer, including a bright and friendly children's room where kids can practise origami, supervised all day. On arrival at the spa, I was treated to a 30-minute consultation with a visiting wellness practitioner who measured my biomarkers and offered a long-term health assessment. Then I was led into a room by a soft-voiced Japanese woman and invited to draw an ensō, or Zen circle, with a calligraphic brush, while sandalwood incense burned. Thus clarified, I was given a 90-minute Japanese Ah-un treatment,

to complement the infrared mask and zero-gravity chair I had been offered the previous day to fend off jet lag.

Six Senses sets the standard when it comes to healthy and organic practices, which means that I could sample every kind of anti-ageing elixir or detox smoothie in its small café and restaurant, not to mention shiitake kombucha and shiso ice cream. Among the offerings at Nine Tails bar is a non-alcoholic Cedar Hightail “designed to be like a walk in the forest with sun showing through the trees”. When I stepped out of the hotel one day at 4am, I saw a young uniformed woman carefully polishing every stone in the pavement outside the entrance. The next day, at the same time, a man was sweeping the driveway.

After spending half a lifetime around Kyoto, I felt I'd seen almost everything. But one morning, a kimonoed woman appeared in the Six Senses' Earth Lab sustainability space, and spread before me 10 small bottles filled with spices: patchouli, star anise,

borneol, clove. A member of the family that has run an incense shop for four generations near the Katsura Imperial Villa, she invited me to make two sachets of incense, wrapped in an elegant silk pouch.

The great challenge of staying here, I realised, was that its self-enclosed calm was so enveloping that I never wanted to leave. Then, however, I recalled what I'd heard 36 years before—from the Zen master who ran Tōfuku-ji, the temple where Takao-san has spent three decades caring for the sand garden. “The point of our practice,” Keidō Fukushima-roshi told me, “lies not in the stepping away from the world, but in the coming back to it.” Thus fortified, I stepped out of the hotel again and went to the spotless, silent garden at Chishaku-in across the street. 🍵

SIX SENSES KYOTO 431 Myōhōin Maekawachō, Higashiyama Ward, Kyoto, 605-0932 Japan. (Doubles from about ₹93,500; [sixsenses.com](https://www.sixsenses.com))



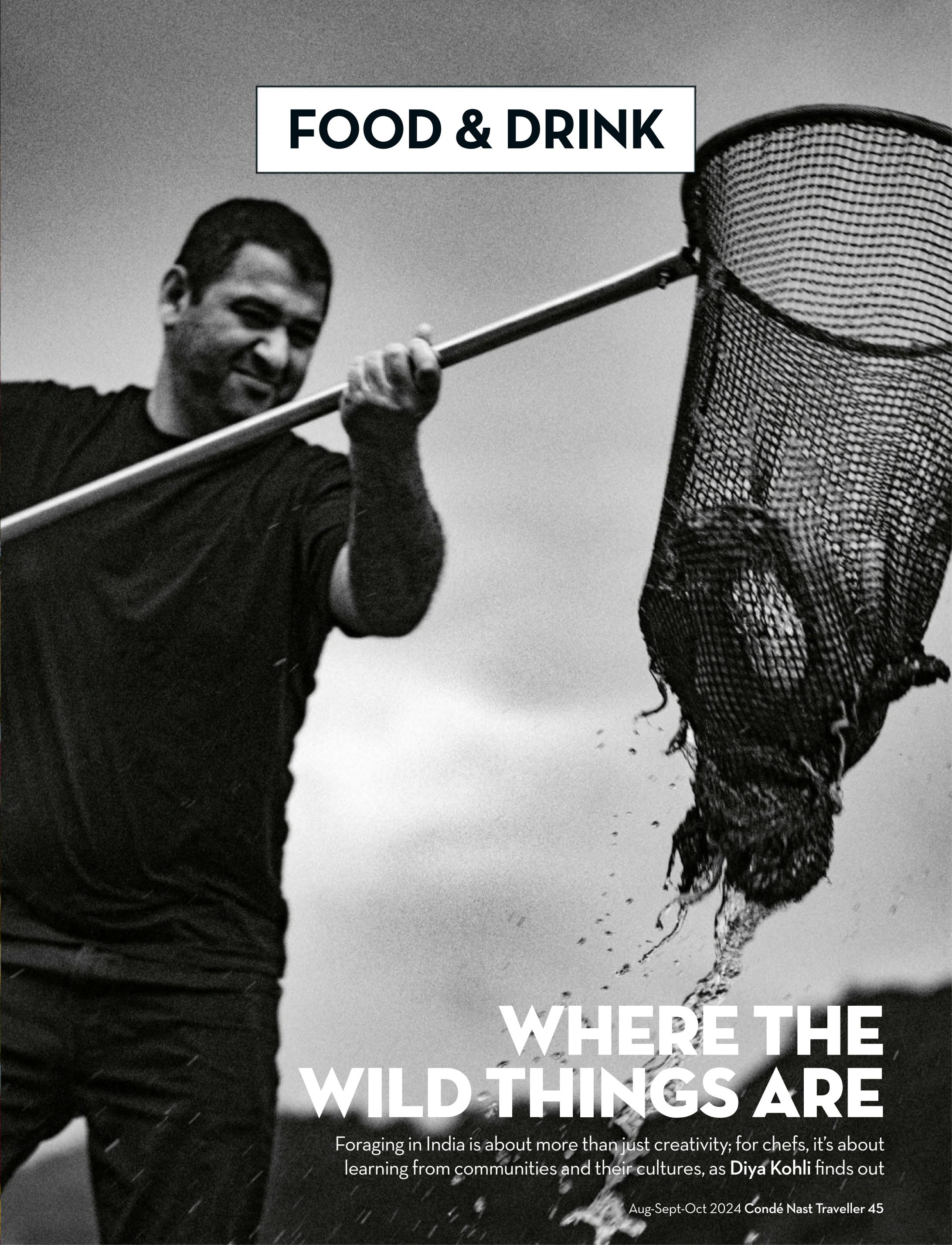
Condé Nast Traveller



THE LAST WORD IN TRAVEL



PHOTOGRAPH: ATHUL PRASAD



FOOD & DRINK

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

Foraging in India is about more than just creativity; for chefs, it's about learning from communities and their cultures, as **Diya Kohli** finds out

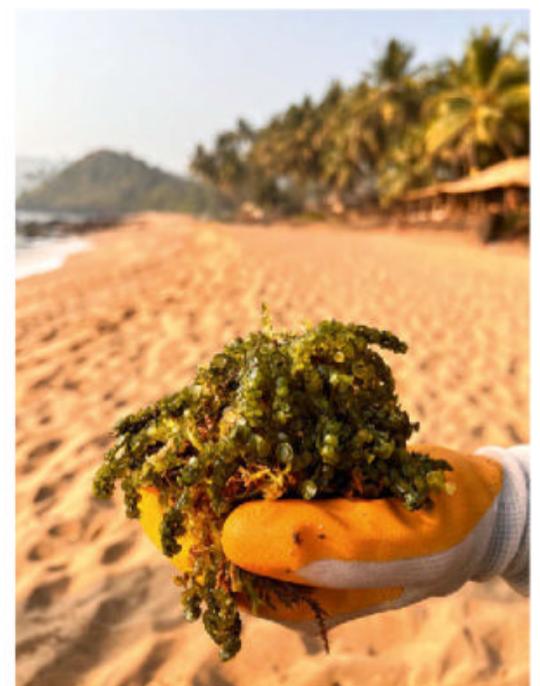
FOOD & DRINK

A trip to a remote fishing village in Thoothukudi to source sea urchins changed chef Varun Totlani's notion of how locals hunt for their seafood. "We wanted sea urchins and had seen videos of people diving in with fancy equipment and scuba gear. Here, the men just jumped into the sea to pluck sea urchins with their bare hands. They didn't even have goggles, and yet, they looked like they were having the time of their lives. And so we followed," says Totlani, head chef of Mumbai's Masque, which offers seasonal tasting menus with hyperlocal ingredients from across India. "All around us in the water there were starfish and puffer fish—supposedly very poisonous. But we followed the cues of our fishermen and these creatures remained 'bystanders' while we hunted for sea urchins," he says.

While the term *foraging* has been largely appropriated by Nordic fine dining, in India, away from the cities, it is synonymous with food that's on the table, a tradition as old as the land itself. A far cry from the Instagram reels of Scandi chefs scraping lichen off rocks in their backyards, foraging in India is not for beginners and is not always glamorous. But, armed with an open mind, a hungry belly [and some antihistamines], chefs are leaving the Noma manuals behind.

"Here, it is very different. In the mountains, for example, the forests give you food," says Prateek Sadhu, chef and owner of Naar, a 16-seater fine-dining restaurant near Kasauli in Himachal Pradesh, which showcases the culinary traditions of the hills. "This is where you get your fuel and where your animals go out to graze. It's also not easy. Sometimes, temperatures don't suit you. Sometimes, you fall sick because of the altitude. And most of the time, it's very expensive to get to a place with little guarantee that you'll get enough of that berry/herb you want," says Sadhu. As a Noma alumnus, learning to forage in India was an unlearning of how they do it in the West and a 10-year-long journey around the Himalayas to build a pantry of mountain ingredients. →

Clockwise, from top left: **Thomas Zacharias; sun-dried wild garlic; a dish at Naar; sea grapes from Varun Totlani's Goa trip; the chef foraging; lantern berries.** Opening pages, from left: **preserve made with foraged ingredients in Likkse; Prateek Sadhu catching trout in the Sutlej River**



PHOTOGRAPHS: THOMAS ZACHARIAS; PANKAJ ANAND; SHYAMALI PATEL



Foraging in India is filled with surprises. There is always the threat of encountering toxins — at their mildest, they'll leave you with a rash, and at their worst, a trip to the hospital. From stinging nettle to poisonous berries, it is a wild world out there and every chef who's been foraging will tell you to travel with a guide who knows the lay of the land.

For chef Vanika Choudhary — whose Mumbai-based restaurant Noon derived its dynamic menu from her foraging trips — communities are key to understanding wild foods. Although Noon has recently shut, Choudhary continues on her expeditions, drawing inspiration for her pop-ups. From trips to Ladakh with a local all-woman farmer's cooperative to scouting for native ingredients in the Western Ghats with Adivasi women, Choudhary's adventures have been guided by a sisterhood of female foragers. "In Neral, I followed Ambi bai into the forest to pick mahua. The flowers fall from the tree at sunrise and sunset. It was magical as the mahua rained down and Ambi bai sang an old folk song about the tree," she says.

Neral is under 100km from Mumbai, and yet, it might as well be a different world where Adivasis still collect their ingredients from the wild. Urban diners might think that the foraged foods on the table are from far-flung places, but the prize, sometimes, lies much closer home.

In fact, chef Thomas Zacharias first encountered foraged ingredients not in a forest but amid the chaos of a market in Mumbai's Grant Road, through a man selling shevla, a variety of yam indigenous to the Western Ghats and available for a short window during monsoon. "I saw it, and immediately bought a whole bunch. The first thing I did was taste it and it left me with a painful stinging sensation on my tongue. Milk, water, sugar... nothing helped," says Zacharias. Cooking the vegetable yielded similar results. His years of training in culinary school fell flat and he returned to the same vendor to understand what to do. The man quietly pointed to a small green fruit called kakde and told him to cook them together. "Later, on my travels to Palghar, I saw this fruit growing near the shevla, and learnt from the locals that the two ingredients balance each other and one nullifies the other's toxins," he says. The simple lesson learnt: local communities

and their knowledge of traditional ingredients. At the Wild Food Festival organised by OOO Farms in Mumbai in 2018, he was exposed to a variety of roots, shoots, greens, tubers, from within 100km of the city, and novel cooking techniques. "It was a turning point for me as a chef," he says. Soon after, he quit the kitchen to travel, understand native foods, and set up The Locavore in 2022, a platform highlighting ingredients, their producers, and building communities around food.

This idea of foraging as a way of life is a lesson learnt on vacations, in markets, and, sometimes, in a city's forest, pond, or riverside. Chef Auroni Mookerjee, culinary director of Delhi-based Bright Hospitality Group, had his first taste of wild foods thanks to family holidays. His father had a fun activity on his treks in the upper Himalayas. "The prize was gucchi [morels]. They grew under the large oaks, and my sister and I would compete to collect the most by the end of the day. Then we'd cook them on the campfire with some macaroni and wild herbs," says Mookerjee. Foraging was something he had taken for granted because he had the chance to leave the city often. "In urban India, foraging is a buzzword. But for most of the country, it is how people eat. I moved to Kolkata and realised that the bazaar was a treasure trove of wild foods — especially the shaak mashis [small-scale female vendors selling greens], who are the strongest foraging champions of our times," he says.

Even chef Choudhary gathered her first wild ingredients as a young girl in Srinagar. "Every autumn, my grandmother and I would take the shikara and go towards the Nigeen Lake to pick nadru [lotus stem]. This would be sun-dried and turned into achar," she says. "No one called this foraging back then; it was simply how we ate."

For chefs in India, foraging is less a stocking run and more about respecting the wild and interacting with those who still subsist as hunter-gatherers. "Over the years, I have learnt to be inquisitive and taste whatever I see," says Totlani. "Sometimes, it's unpleasant. Sometimes, it's smelly, but that is part of the foraging game." 🍄

From top: **Vanika Choudhary with her finds during her foraging trip; sea urchin from Varun Totlani's Thoothukudi trip; a meal made with foraged foods in Palghar**



WELLNESS

GOING THE DISTANCE

Jane Alexander is pushed to her physical limits with a deep, 21-day Panchakarma purge in Kerala

At night, the road from Thiruvananthapuram to Kollam seems like one long strip of flashing coloured lights festooning shops and restaurants. Kerala is a state on the move. Every empty space is a building site; the plan is to transform the main coastal route from single-lane mayhem to sleek superhighway. For now, makeshift markets huddle next to gleaming gyms and car showrooms, and wandering piddogs and kamikaze auto-rickshaws slow the traffic to a lurching stop-start crawl.

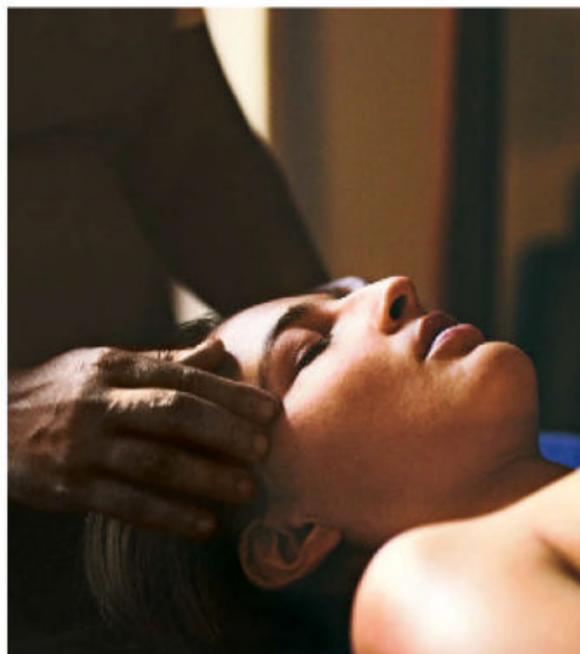
But Kerala's move to modernise doesn't extend to every aspect of life. The state is famed as the birthplace of Ayurveda, the 5,000-year-old traditional healthcare system, which remains mainstream medicine here, and hospitals, clinics, and training schools abound. A sudden right turn and the lights vanish. The road becomes narrow, winding through villages and coconut groves, where palms arch over stone walls. Abruptly, seemingly in the middle of nowhere, a sign appears: Kalari Rasayana Ayurveda Hospital.

"No way out for three weeks—you're trapped!" my driver laughs, as the gates close behind me. He's not joking. Once inside, it will be 21 days of monastic seclusion. No sightseeing or sunbathing, no trips to the beach or shopping at markets. Kalari Rasayana is one of two Ayurvedic hospitals owned by CGH Earth, the family-run hotel chain. In the early 2000s, managing director Jose Dominic became concerned Ayurveda was becoming diluted and debased. He had a point. Ayurvedic treatments were springing up on spa menus across the globe, often sanitised to the point where they bore little resemblance

to the original. Panchakarma was a prime example. The stringent cleanse and rejuvenation regime, once the sole preserve of princes, is often shoehorned into a five-day flurry.

Kalari Kovilakom opened in 2004, in a renovated palace, with a two-week minimum stay and an unwavering adherence to authentic Ayurvedic protocols. It was so popular that a second hospital, Kalari Rasayana, followed in 2013, spread over eight acres of coconut groves facing Lake Paravur. It has the feel of a sanatorium merged with a boarding school. You're assigned a doctor who prescribes everything from treatments to diet. There is zero choice involved and pleas for changes are met with a broad smile and a polite shake of the head.

Days follow an equally intransigent timetable: 6.15am asana and pranayama practice; breakfast; doctor's appointment; treatment; yoga nidra; lunch; another treatment; meditation; supper. There's plenty of free time in between, but not much to do with it.



Patients are a wide mix of ages and nationalities. If you've wondered where all the Russians, who once frequented Clinique La Prairie and Lanserhof have disappeared to, the answer is here. We amble back and forth along the lakeside like languid caged tigers. "Ma'am, put up your umbrella!" I'm chastised for venturing out in the sun with a bare head. Silence is golden, and the dining hall is laid out like an exam room to discourage chatter.

Yet snatched conversations create moments of joy. When everyone is going through the same purgatory, bonds are formed swiftly, and you look out for one another in a way that never happens at a standard spa. "Are you OK?" I whisper to the young Indian woman a few days ahead of me on the programme. She smiles weakly. "I'm struggling with the ghee."

Everyone struggles with the ghee. An intrinsic part of the preparatory stage, it involves glugging large quantities of medicated clarified butter. Ghee supposedly acts as a scavenger, drawing out toxic waste matter and pushing it into the intestinal tract for elimination. By the fourth day, I am ghee—it is oozing out of every pore and no matter how often I shower, I reek. "Excellent," says Dr Firoz Varun. "You're at samyak snigdghata, saturation point."

Next is purgation, to flush out the intestines. The tall glass of brown liquid smells sweet and spicy, but catches in my throat: I've to struggle not to vomit. It is followed by a day of cramping and explosive diarrhoea. Only WhatsApp messages from my new buddies, Russian psychologist Katia and Lebanese gallery owner Nisrine, keep me going. Once our bowels return →



CGH Earth's Kalari Rasayana is spread over eight acres of coconut groves facing Lake Paravur. Opening pages, from left: **the premises of the Ayurveda hospital; once there, you are assigned a doctor who prescribes everything from treatments to diets**

to a civilised state, we break rank and sneak up to Katia's balcony, giggling like schoolgirls. "We're regressing," says Katia. "I feel about five years old." Nisrine rolls her eyes: "I'm at the rebellious teenage stage. Sod it; I'm not going to yoga tomorrow!"

Without distractions, watching emotions rise and fall becomes the main form of entertainment. Nearly everyone cries or has a tantrum at some point. An in-house psychotherapist might be a valuable addition. Even the treatments are confrontational. I'm handed a langoti (a loin cloth-G-string hybrid) to put on and emerge from behind the curtain bare-breasted, hyperconscious of my softer layers. My team of therapists—Devi, Reshma, and Sruthi—chant prayers while I sit on a stool. Devi spreads herbal paste reeking of mothballs over my forehead to relieve my sinuses and I clamber onto the wooden Ayurvedic massage table, known as a droni. A massage-like pizhichil, which is a mesmerising delight at spas, becomes uncomfortable gymnastics here. You slither into one of five positions—sitting up, lying on your back, your front, and each side—while

every centimetre of skin is slathered in oil. Breasts, buttocks, nostrils, ears, eyelids: almost nothing is off limits.

The yoga, by contrast, is a delight; from the Bihar school. Everyone starts with individual lessons before joining group classes. I become entranced by a different joint each day. There's equal emphasis on pranayama and meditation, and asana. I can almost feel my nadis (energy channels) clearing, and my chakras starting to glow.

“Without distractions, watching emotions rise and fall becomes a form of entertainment”

There are no decisions to make other than which bench to sit on to watch the lake. Every day, a freshly laundered uniform of white cotton kurta-style pyjamas appears. My blood pressure lowers and mind stops churning. Food comes in tiny portions of pleasure, albeit bland (to not aggravate the gut).

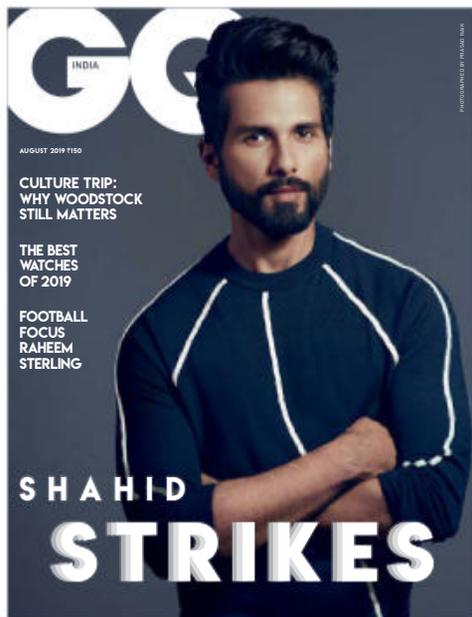
At the end of three weeks, I'm discharged into the world like a wide-eyed kitten. I have strict instructions

to take it very easy, as the toxin release continues for several weeks. I lose 3.6kg and most hurtles back on once I arrive home. But I've shed a chronic cough and sinusitis, joint pain, and a persistent rash. Most noticeable is the effect on my stress response. I'm sleeping better, my anxiety levels have plummeted, and I'm not as reactive to major or minor stressors. That strict unwinding from the world has finally allowed my HPA axis to come off red stress alert.

I still wonder if all that ghee is really necessary. There's little impartial research into Panchakarma, but it's possible that part of the answer lies in butyrate, a short-chain fatty acid found in ghee, that supports the immune system, reduces inflammation, and boosts gut health. Understanding why the practices are so vital would make them more palatable. Maybe it's time to stop relying on the "it's been working for 5,000 years" line and question why Kalari gets such good results. Last year, the WHO Global Centre for Traditional Medicine was set up in Gujarat to support traditional medicine with an evidence-based approach. A smart move, well overdue. Watch this space. 



IT'S WHAT'S NEW NOW





CIRCLE OF TRUST

Self-discovery blossoms at Formentera's women-only retreat. By **Suzanne Joinson**. Photographs by **Britney Gill**

I'm standing under a canopy, swathed in dunes, linking arms with a circle of women who were strangers a week ago. We're here to connect with our bodies and selves—and the tiny, most southern Balearic island of Formentera, its wooden walkways, lighthouses, and magnetic wildness. Joni Mitchell glimpsed Formentera's energy when she breezed through in 1970, penning the "Carey" lyrics, "The wind is in from Africa... oh, you know it sure is hard to leave here."

We're at La Luna, a female intimacy and desire retreat run by ex-model and coach Miriam Adler at Can 7, a barefoot-nomad-styled "eco leisure utopia" on the Playa de Migjorn. Swaying and singing, the sound of waves connects us to our breathing. No one wants this moment to end, and I'm surprised that my aloof heart has been cracked open by feelings of togetherness and acceptance. Miriam, a luminous beauty, specialises in women, relationships, and sacred intimacy. She's built retreats from the jungles of Costa Rica to Mexico's Riviera Maya, focusing on women-only and mixed-gender embodiment and explorations of the self.

"During this week," Miriam says at the opening sharing circle, "we allow one another to let go, to feel, peel, and return to our true essence: a state of deep and true self-love." That might sound like a euphemism for going to the bedroom for some "alone time"—it's partly that. But it's so much more. Rest, relaxation, space for contemplation, and true connection feature strongly. Whatever is going on, the experience is somatic: led by the body.

I confess to being nervous. I've practised yoga for years, and am no stranger to Ayurvedic diets. But, I can be uptight and, after a childhood spent with parents who followed the Divine Light Mission, I'm allergic to anything cultish. But I want to be open-minded. I listen as she posits questions: how can we find →



more lightness in our being? How can we enliven sensual pleasure and body wisdom? How can we rise in sisterhood and gratitude? She asks us to walk in a circle and make eye contact with everyone. I find this inordinately difficult. I haven't been in exclusively female company for a long time. "We long to feel deeply, to be intimately in touch with our aliveness but, on the other hand, we are terrified of it," says Miriam.

Over the next few days, I take in yoga, reflexology, and centring. Holotropic breathing aims to release pent-up energy that might be sexual tension or some other blockage. I lie down and surrender to Miriam's voice; 45 minutes later, I sob gently as she leans over me, her soft tones drawing out my anxieties. "Work with the body, open the places that are shut down, move them, breathe them, sound them," she says. I think of my children growing up and the inevitability of them leaving me; impossibility of trying to do it all as a mother, writer, daughter, and partner; and fragility of life. When I sit up, I feel as refreshed as a child does after a good cry.

La Luna's programme is curated: kundalini yoga, sacred dance, deep tissue massage, Tantric practices, and somatic trauma therapy. I explore Tantric rising Shakti energy; I "clear" my womb (squatting over a bowl of hot water with herbs); and I chat. People share a lot, only when they feel like it. A recurring theme is the search for female connection.

"I felt disconnected from myself in my 20s," she says. "I was unable to have the intimate relationships I was longing for,



From left: **plant-based lunch; Miriam Adler; Mayan temazcal ceremony.** Previous pages: **participants around a fire at La Luna**

and I was working in a field that did not inspire me. So I began a quest. I started studying psychology, but realised that the system was outdated, that I didn't want to process through the mind." More and more people need this, she says. "Slowing down, reflecting. For some, the pandemic was healing, for others, devastating and lonely. Either way, people saw that there was another way than going to the office and falling into bed at night exhausted."

In a workshop, I sit in front of a young stewardess on a break from working aboard a tech billionaire's yacht, and I cry about my mother. After these responses, I walk along the shoreline, and think about solace and sanctuary. I know the retreat's activities are designed to manipulate such results but, damn it, they're working.

I feel nourished by the clean and delicious food, but the most nourishing thing is the shared laughter that comes from talking freely to women. The retreat is a peaceful pause in the hecticness of my life; I realise I haven't rested properly since becoming a mother 15 years ago. I stop analysing my life's details on a neurotic loop. Instead, I gaze at the clouds above the sea and listen to the southern Migjorn wind, which whips up around noon. I feel lighter and can breathe, sleeping deeper, feeling more in tune with myself than I've done in a very long time.

In a 5Rhythms dance sequence with Ibiza-based dancer Marie Sol, I finally fully surrender. Breasts are laid bare (not mine; I am too repressed) and inhibitions are lost. The circle of women beneath the canopy breaks open. Everyone smiles and hugs. No judgement, no expectations—just something we do. 



FINDING THE FEELING

More new intimacy gurus

BIBI BRZOZKA

Brzozka focuses on "reclaiming" the body, accessing pleasure, and reigniting personal power. She works with Adler on La Luna retreats, and her online courses and private sessions are sought after, often including live "pleasure practices". bibibrzozka.com

SOPHIE BENGE

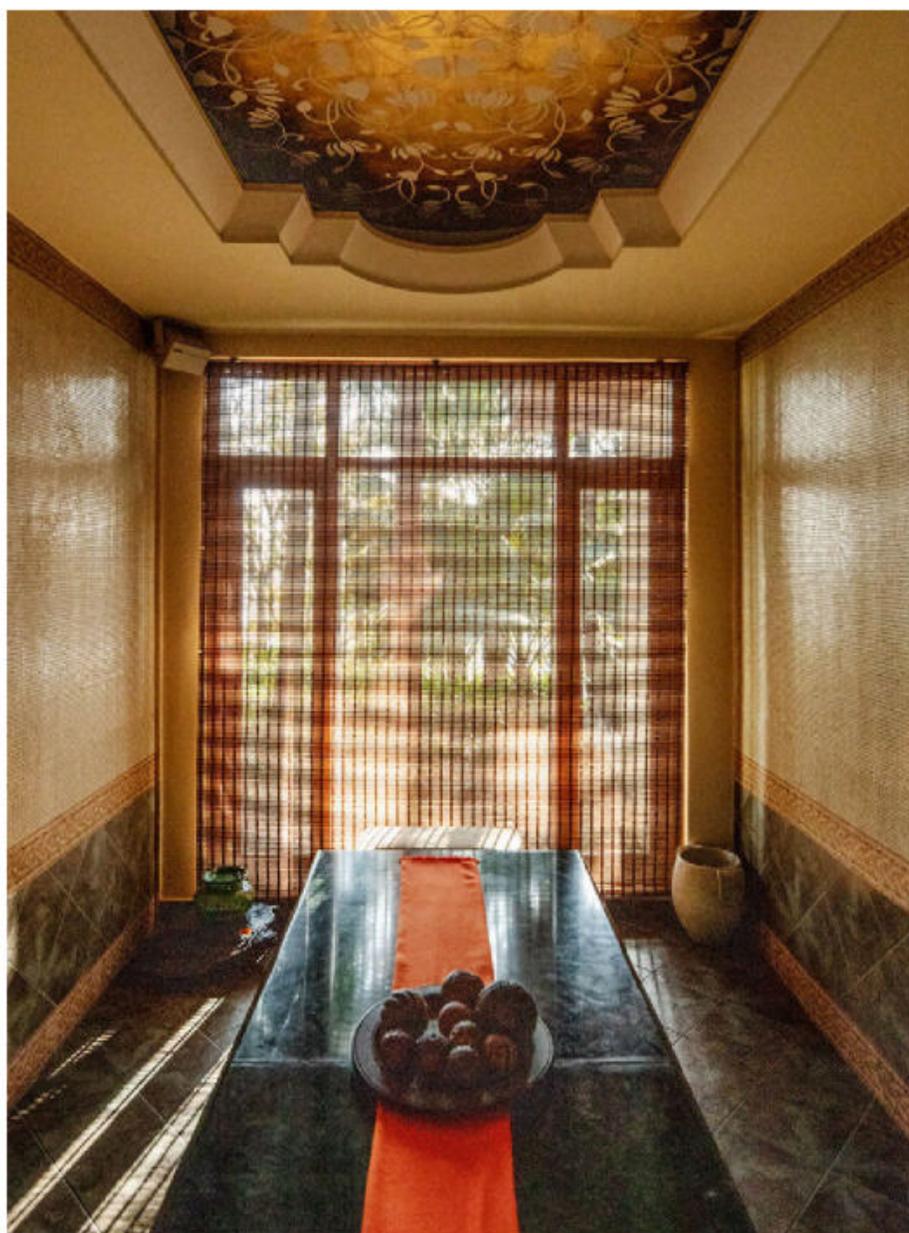
Benge describes herself as a feminine energy guide, with a mission to embrace sensuality, explore meditation in touch, and work with energy flows. She blends ancient systems of medicine with neuroscience and personal experience via courses, massage, workshops, and retreats. sophiebenge.com

ELINA PAVLIDIS

Born in Paris to a Greek architect and French dancer, Pavlidis draws on many lineages for her one-on-one coaching, workshops, and retreats. After a decade of studying yoga and working as a consultant, she dedicated herself to mastering practices like Tantra, sound therapy, and holographic healing, and coaches in developing "feminine magnetic powers". elinapavlidis.com; yennaei.com

KALINDI JORDAN

"Energy engineer" Jordan focuses on sexual healing, sacred intimacy, and conscious relationship guidance through workshops, events, and online coaching. Her programmes emphasise healing from sexual trauma and reconnection with the self. kalindijordan.com



IT'S FOR EVERYONE

Men are discovering the value of self-care through massages, meditation, mental and emotional wellbeing, and more. Enter wellness resorts. By **Prasad Ramamurthy**. Photographs by **Pankaj Anand**

It is a sunny winter morning, and I can see snow-capped peaks in the distance. The fragrance of pine fills the air. Birds chatter in the trees above. All is peaceful. And yet I feel as though I have just climbed a mountain—and I don't mean my recent six-kilometre uphill hike to the temple of Kunjapuri. I am on day seven of a weeklong stay at Ananda in the Himalayas, the lauded palatial destination spa near the spiritual hub of Rishikesh. I have come to work my way through a glut of issues, including work stress, niggling joint pain, anxiety, loss of libido, constant fatigue, and sleep disruption. The uncertainty that followed the COVID-19 pandemic had worsened all of them.

As a middle-aged man, I am not the traditional inpatient at Ananda, which is known for its integrative approach to wellness using therapies from modalities like Traditional Chinese Medicine and Ayurveda. Women have historically made up 60 per cent of all guests. Yet I do notice a handful of XYs in the treatment rooms and on the verdant grounds. Since 2019, Ananda's male clientele has grown by 14 per cent, consisting mostly of men between 35 and 65. They come, Mahesh Natarajan, Ananda's COO, tells me, to treat cardiovascular issues, hypertension, and imbalances, including digestive problems, sleep disorders, and reproductive health issues like sexual dysfunction. Many also seek to address

suppressed emotions. "We see it start boiling to the surface from the mid-40s onward," he says.

This trend is playing out across the luxury wellness sector. Frances Geoghegan, a *Condé Nast Traveler* travel specialist and the founder of the expert wellness-retreat agency Healing Holidays, says that men now make up 48 per cent of her business, up from 20 per cent a decade ago. "Men have been feeling the stresses and are now taking charge of their own wellness," she says.

One reason for the shift is an increasing social acceptance of men being proactive about self-care. "For men, going to the gym or taking up sports was the norm," says Mini Chandran, who works in product (p64) →

WELLNESS

LET IT GLOW

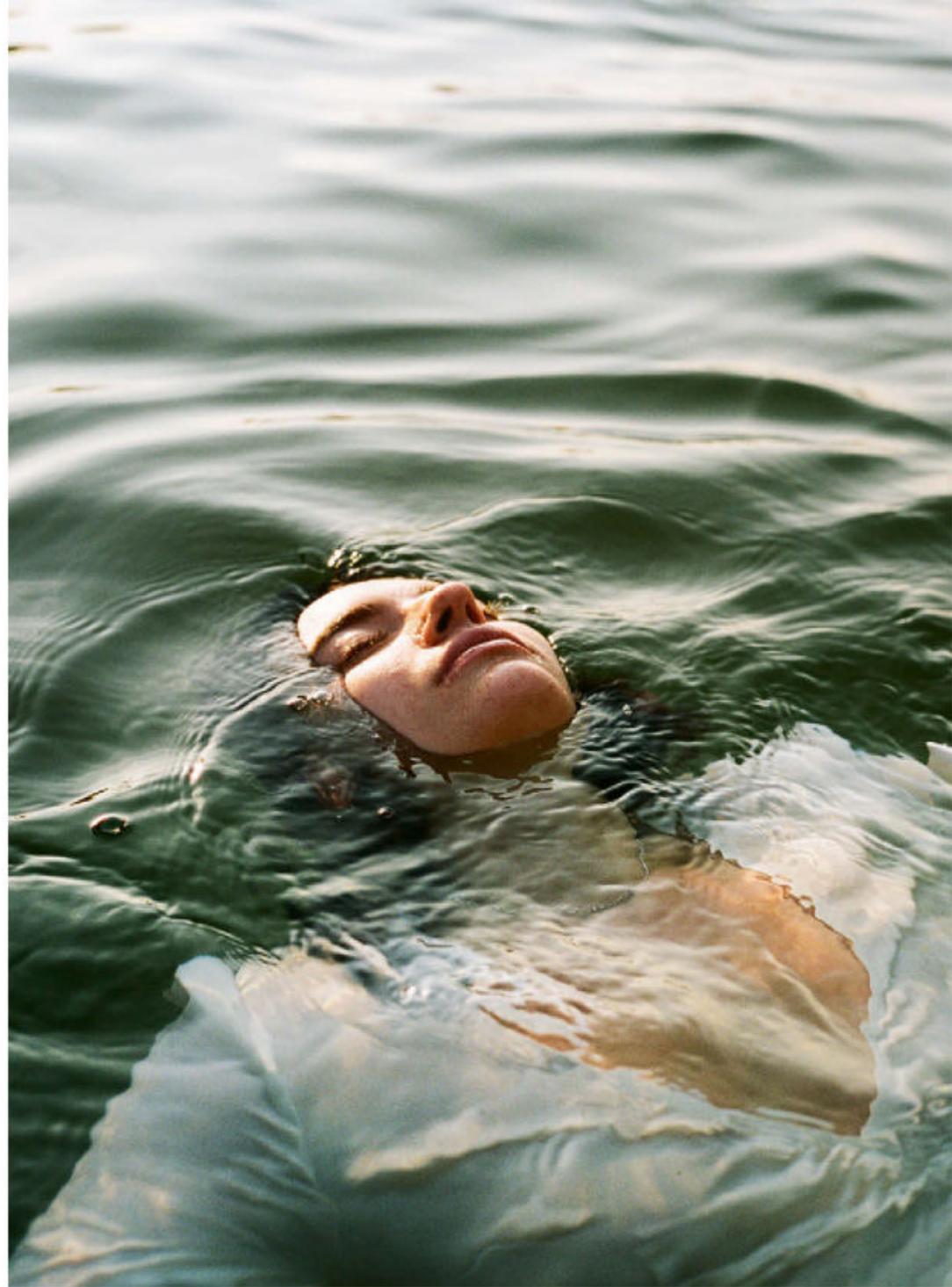
After a traumatic few years, a spell at Kamalaya and Absolute Sanctuary on Koh Samui brings **Chloe Bottero** back from the brink



PHOTOGRAPH: MORGAN MAASSEN



THE MOST BEAUTIFUL HOMES IN THE WORLD



Non-stop sunshine would have been too much after three years that felt like one long dark tunnel, the light too bright and insensitive. Instead, I arrive, exhausted, on Koh Samui during the monsoon, the wet jungle swaying. The season cradles me. Its air is a warm embrace of frangipani, chlorophyll, and earth. Its rains feel compassionate, falling on my belly like fat tears that evaporate. Then sunshine peers from pillowy clouds that beckon me to lie down. A lullaby

me for what was to come. When my sibling abandoned my Piedmont-based octogenarian father, a sufferer of Parkinson's with cognitive impairment, I drove to Italy, taking my sick mother. It transpired that he had been tricked out of his wine estate and beloved home of 40 years by the same family he had bankrolled and employed all his life. They were trying to evict him. Due to loopholes, destroyed documents, and a painfully slow legal system, we were told the situation was hopeless.

A&E, medications, incontinence, repetition, and aggression become a way of life. I mined every inch of my being for reservoirs of patience, annihilating myself and my needs until numb.

But my suppressed side, anaesthetised every night by red wine, always woke me at 3am. The next day, I would jack myself up with caffeine and nicotine, ignoring my back problems, chronic allergies, and migraines. I buried grief: of losing a father figure, my childhood home, my book, the baby I had planned

“I buried grief: of losing a father figure, my childhood home, my book, the baby

of drops helps me drift off to sleep at night and a far-off storm flashing on the horizon expels my subliminal rage, so I awake refreshed to birdsong.

Rage is one of many emotions compacted inside me like coal. For years, I have suppressed feeling, lived day to day, hour to hour, fire-fighting, awaiting a break in the clouds. In spring 2020, the pandemic had promised to be a productive time for redrafting my novel, but nothing could have prepared

Staying in the house to defend my father's rights, I refused to give up. Despite daily intimidation, I taught myself national law, investigated, tracked down documents and witnesses. Weeks turned into months, then years, by which time my parents had become fully dependent on me. There is no way to explain the trauma, isolation, and loss of identity that come from being a carer, days in which simple tasks become monumental feats. Complex logistics,

(now impractical), and the brutal three-year-wide bite taken out of life. While packing up my father's estate, I began to experience chest pains and an urgent desire to flush the poison of the previous three years from my cells.

I almost don't make it to Koh Samui's Absolute Sanctuary. My father has a bad fall; by the time I arrive at the lotus-pink buildings, the stress is affecting my short-term memory. I hate that my fatigued spirit feels out of sync



From far left: **Absolute Sanctuary; spa immersion; natural healing at Kamalaya; grounds of the health resort.** Opening page: **surfer at Koh Samui**

with the benevolent staff. Weak and with nothing to organise for the first time in years, I handed myself over to wellness consultant Aurelie Gauthier for a seven-day semi-fasting detox to support my body's self-cleansing and the parasympathetic nervous system to help switch off an excess of cortisol from stress and encourage serotonin production in the gut. My regime includes green shots, detox juices, broth, and ginger tea instead of coffee, and alkalising gluten-free vegan detox meals:

I had planned (impractical), and the brutal three-year-wide bite taken out my life”

pad Thai-style raw vegetables, spirulina rolls, nori, and shirataki noodles. To boot, there's a no-smoking or alcohol policy.

Propped up by nicotine and caffeine for so long, I'm hit by a tsunami of exhaustion as soon as I remove the artificial stimulants. I go deaf in my right ear and fall into a kind of narcolepsy for days, setting my alarm for treatments that I stagger to in my pyjamas. My mind goes into a detoxing haze: it seems to float on the surface of the pool or on the

breeze like a feather I cannot grasp. On the second day, a caffeine withdrawal migraine leads to uncontrollable vomiting. “You've been silencing your body for so long,” Gauthier explains. “This is the first time you've given it a chance to speak.”

After a day, we restart the programme and my body begins to expel. I sweat out negativity in the infrared sauna, cough it off my chest, and blow it out in streams of vile mucous. During colonic irrigation, I watch the ugliness from my insides float

past, cleansing and ridding all the old shits from my life. I am massaged back into existence one limb at a time, my feet, hands, arms, back, and head create a whole person again. I am fully supported by petite Thai women who stretch and pummel me with so much force, but care for me with such gentle compassion. By the end of the week, I have lost almost four kilograms, detoxed from caffeine alcohol and nicotine, and have a heightened sense of vision and smell.

Following the detox to reset my system, I move to a retreat in the island's south for much-needed emotional healing. Kamalaya means “lotus realm” in Sanskrit, and that is exactly what it is: a lotus-strewn wellness utopia and heavenly bubble cut off from the world. More luxury ashram than spa, it is built around giant boulders and babbling streams, with ornamental pools and waterfalls that flow energy down the steep hillside in front of a Buddha's smile of a beach. Prayer flags and devotional

marigolds bless the teak pagodas hanging with brass lanterns, the candle-lit shrines of Buddha and Ganesh and the clay-coloured rooms.

The wellness sanctuary is populated by more than 100 expert practitioners who exude meditative radiance: masters of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Ayurveda, Thai Traditional Medicine, and functional medicine. Naturopath Kate Upton encourages me to continue the detox on top of my burnout →



Clockwise, from top left:
pool at the retreat;
open-plan reception at
Kamalaya; yoga pavilion
at Kamalaya; massage;
shrine at Kamalaya

“A fire is lit on my belly, an act that makes my body sacred. As the flame dances, I vow to listen, be kind, and care for it as fiercely as if it were a loved one”

programme, with extensive menus of kaleidoscopic dishes that promote healing rather than abstention. Sessions of reiki the previous week have soothed my exhausted “giving” right side and primed my starved “receiving” left side so I am ready for vitamin IVs, ozone therapy to increase oxygen in my blood, acupuncture, Taoist abdominal massage, physiotherapy, and sessions with a life enhancement mentor.

Treatment rooms, overlooking islands that rise like domed temples from the water, are purposefully monastic, decked in Tibetan art, saffron textiles, and flooded with ochre light. In a Traditional Chinese Medicine session, my practitioner Pitchaya Kitti explains that I have an imbalance of wood (liver) and earth (spleen), and metal (lung) and fire (heart) elements. My pulse is too tense and my tongue purple, a sign of stagnated qi and long-term low mood. With needles inserted in my forehead,

chest bone, stomach, thighs, and ankles, she employs a dynamic technique often used on stroke patients to reopen the body’s nine sensory portals and combat depression, which shoots a sudden jolt of electricity up from my left ankle. At night, I sip on virgin mojitos in Soma Restaurant—serving fragrant pumpkin and okra curries, lentil dosa, and cauliflower rice—in a golden orb of candlelight and thought.

Going to bed early and rising at dawn, I feel recalibrated to the earth’s natural order. Everywhere I go, I am struck by beauty, the song of the palm swifts on the branches, and my own clarity of thought. A voice seems to come from my gut: “It’s time to let go”. In Lanna Abdominal Samunphrai Ron Massage, an ancient organ-stimulating therapy from Thailand, a fire is lit on my belly, an act that makes my body sacred. As the flame dances, I vow to listen, be kind, and care for it as fiercely as if it were a loved one.

“You deserve a beautiful life,” says Srinivas Bhat, my life enhancement mentor and former monk from Chennai, with such passionate conviction that I weep. “You are very strong and powerful but you are exhausted. You must stop resisting life, surrender yourself to the flow of the universe.” Healing, he says, is embracing your pain so it can extinguish itself. When he lays his hands on my head, it’s as if he has lit a wick in my mind that heats and glows. During guided meditation, my chair seems to levitate. The pain and grief is embedded so deep, it’s as if two tectonic plates in me are parting. I cry and shake with my eyes closed. Afterwards, I feel woozy and as pink and raw as a dragon fruit. I curl up in a towel on my balcony, the sound of monsoon rain massaging my brain. I wake three hours later, somehow changed. That night, glowing lanterns line my path like benevolent souls guiding me safely home. 

**** OFF AND LEAVE ME ALONE

Suffering from hormonal rage and overwhelm, **Anna Tetlow** reclaims her life at a retreat

For half a decade now, I've wanted to wake up less angry at the world. Feminist writer Sharon Blackie describes menopause as "an earthquake, shaking us to our deepest foundations". Which probably explains why I'm the Roy Kent of mothers: a bit swearsy and angry all the time. The bad sleep, overwhelm, anxiety, and rage of menopause have plagued me.

As the epitome of a super-stressed, single, working mum on Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT is not quite the silver bullet I'd hoped for), I'm in dire need of a reset. I'm hoping that the menopause retreat at Combe Grove, the UK's first metabolic health centre, will give me that (and potentially cure my rushing woman's syndrome, Cadbury addiction, hatred of meditation, and impatience with my chaotic children).

The first thing I noticed is the peace. Combe Grove is on the edge of Bath, in 70 acres of woods full of rabbits, owls, and badgers, with mesmerising views of the Limpley Stoke Valley. The jam-packed week kicks off with a welcome talk on metabolic health, the foundation upon →

which all good health is based. This means getting the body working optimally in terms of stable blood sugar and balanced hormones, leading to greater energy levels. Good metabolic health can improve, reverse, and prevent some lifestyle conditions and diseases. Helen Aylward Smith, who set up the Elmhurst Charitable Trust that owns Combe Grove, is heartfelt about the retreat's ambitious purpose: to share all learnings with the NHS. She speaks passionately about the retreat as a gift you will want to share.

While I love this thought, I'm a big fan of things being evidence based. Luckily, everything I experience is either strongly backed up by digestible science, or creates a change in me that needs no scientific explanation — how nice it is to walk into rooms that smell gorgeous and uplifting.

Diagnostics with Dr Campbell Murdoch include blood tests for glucose and cholesterol, HbA1C tests for diabetes risk, blood pressure tests, and an AccunIQ analyser to measure body composition and identify an excess of visceral fat or poor muscle mass.

Interactive sessions cover five “roots” of metabolic health: nutrition, sleep, movement, mindset, and environment. The retreat's passionate experts guide us through why and how to make simple but significant improvements and emphasise being flexible and gentle: not radical, unrealistic perfection, but rather sustainable progression.

I never feel judged at Combe Grove; the team's warmth and interest in me feels truly genuine. Food is celebrated as

the body's best friend: choose natural, nutritious meals and the body thrives. Every day, we eat delicious high-protein, low-carb, very low-sugar food, with brunch starting at 10.45am and dinner finishing by 7pm. A buffalo mozzarella salad might be followed by a filling fish pie topped with creamy mashed cauliflower, with balsamic-drizzled kale and flaked almonds. I never knew kale could deserve third helpings.

Nutritionist Oliver Pratt talks about eating within an eight- to 10-hour window, using Time-Restricted Eating (TRE). TRE allows the body to spend more time fixing itself rather than be busy digesting. Instead of being dictatorial about it, he advocates flexibility with TRE: if you can't do it every day, that's OK, do what you can. His engaging cookery class shows us how to prepare yummy but healthy food in five minutes.

My tests are reassuringly good, except the need to build much more muscle. The root I need the most help with is mindset. I now understand the depletive effects cortisol can have, stealing the building blocks that create progesterone, a crucial sex hormone. Stress equals further hormonal imbalance, equals bad news for already hormonally imbalanced women.

While it's called a “retreat”, I am busy with sessions and treatments every day. Those I was most sceptical are some of my favourites: Structural Integration — manipulating the fascial tissues of the body to achieve balance and space to breathe; belly dancing; forest bathing. And then the mind-blowing massages.

Before we leave, the team helps us create a personalised plan, with one commitment per root; the 100 other exciting things we've learned can wait till we're ready. The experts will follow up every four to eight weeks over the next 48 weeks, with blood tests, nutritional one-to-ones — plus a year's membership to all facilities and classes.

If I have to pick one highlight, it is making inner goddess headdresses with the spoils from our forest bathing walk, as the practitioners talk about enjoying life through the environment root. While it sounds ridiculous, it is just so joyous. It taps into the other amazing thing about a retreat like this: the power of women sharing laughter, tears, and our stories. By the end of the evening, in an alcohol-free zone, we are drunk on friendship.

And what about my stress? Deep breathing, we learn, stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, calming the stress response so it doesn't divert resources to the production of cortisol. The week helps me find a great way to de-stress. I've jettisoned haranguing myself to do “proper” meditation and instead “deep breathe” for eight minutes a day to music I love. Practising relaxation this way has helped me stay calm when my inner T-Rex wants to come out — a real game-changer.

It's been four weeks since I came home, and for me, the retreat was life-changing. Our group continues to support each other and we have plans to meet up. As Aylward Smith predicted, it has indeed been a gift. 🎁

MORE MENOPAUSE RESETS

PARK IGLS, AUSTRIA

The Menopause Fit programme covers diagnostics, Mayr nutrition, physiotherapy, therapy, and bodywork. Gynaecological endocrinologist professor Bettina Toth is on hand for medication.

CLINIQUE LA PRAIRIE, SWITZERLAND

The Menopause Centre specialises in perimenopause and menopause. The approach is a multidisciplinary one.

Homoeopathy, phytotherapy, and acupuncture support a medical programme that includes HRT.

PREIDLHOF LUXURY DOLCEVITA RESORT, ITALY

The Women's Retreat majors in menopause's psychological sledgehammer, offering a safe space to tease out unresolved trauma. The goal is to empower and reframe via trauma healing, bodywork, emotional wellness, and coaching sessions.

LANSERHOF SYLT, GERMANY

Extensive testing (including a DXA scan for bone density) and medical consultations form the backbone of the hormone balance package. Lifestyle changes aim to coax women into balance but HRT can be prescribed.

GRAND RESORT BAD RAGAZ, SWITZERLAND

An individualised package of testing and treatments with

special focus given to sleep, stress, and the microbiome, all key for hormonal balance.

SHA WELLNESS CLINIC, SPAIN

Treatment starts with a consultation with Dr Rafael Navas, an integrated hormonal health expert. Hormone precursors and HRT can be prescribed; emotional and psychological factors are also considered.
By JANE ALEXANDER

“It is just so joyous, tapping into the power of women sharing laughter, tears, and our stories. In an alcohol-free zone, we are drunk on friendship”



Sunrise yoga next to the music pavilion at Ananda in the Himalayas. Opposite page, from left: a therapy room on its premises; the property's façade

development at an Ayurveda-centric CGH Earth property in Kerala. “But now they are looking at prevention over cure.” Miraval, a luxury wellness resort with outposts in Arizona and the Berkshires, reports that male guests increased by 105 per cent last year from the year before. It has engineered specific programming, including talks on mental health guided by former NFL players and experts, the result of a partnership with the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Of course, physical fitness remains hugely important to wellness programmes, with European spas like Lanserhof and Sha excelling on these fronts. But Geoghegan says that men are seeking treatment for major life events, including divorce, bereavement, and career setbacks.

My stint at Ananda begins with an extensive consultation, where I answer queries about all aspects of my health, including my libido (or lack thereof) and the consistency of my stool. As awkward as the conversation is, I know that being honest will ultimately make for a more successful programme. What I most want is to regain sound, healthy sleep. The moment that happens, Naresh Perumbuduri, a doctor of Ayurvedic medicine and Ananda’s resident expert on hormonal issues, tells me, “is when you truly start to heal.” My answers, along with a check of my pulse, form the basis of my treatment itinerary, which includes daily four-hand oil massages, acupuncture, and sessions devoted to cupping, yogic posture, breath work, and meditation. Each treatment represents a step further on a journey in which detoxing is only the beginning and the ultimate goal is to nourish the soul.

Each day, I check in with the healers. Each of their specialties—including Ayurveda, Traditional Chinese Medicine, and yoga—will help me achieve greater balance. The conversations also force me to examine my own behaviour; I come to recognise that achieving long-term success will require me to make some lifestyle changes: more exercise, less coffee, even less alcohol. Every meal at Ananda is tailored to help me reach goals: a puffed rice dish for breakfast, a gluten-free laksa for lunch, a buckwheat and cabbage millefeuille for dinner.



Views of the Himalayas from a terrace in the old wing of Ananda in the Himalayas

“The turning point comes on the fourth day, when I walk out of a one-on-one emotional healing session after having sobbed my heart out... I feel like a load has been lifted off me... That night, for the first time in years, I sleep a still, dreamless sleep”

The turning point for me comes on the fourth day, when I walk out of a one-on-one emotional healing session after having sobbed my heart out. Roma Singh, a veteran clinical hypnotherapist and regressionist, had asked me to talk about the pain of my failed relationships, my guilt at not being a good brother, and my lingering grief over the death of my parents. I feel like a load has been lifted off me. And I don’t mean the kilograms I’d dropped. That night, for the first time in years, I sleep a still, dreamless sleep. Something, indeed, has shifted inside me. 🧘



SHOP & STYLE

SHOPPING IN **BAKU**

Home-grown artisans and designers are putting Azerbaijan's creative side in the spotlight. Words and photographs by **Chris Schalkx**

SHOP & STYLE

PRECIOUS PIECES

Azerbaijan's paisley-like buta, a Zoroastrian symbol for fire, is a recurring motif in rings, bracelets, and necklaces made by Baku-based brand **Resm**. At its store in the Nasimi district, each piece is displayed with a note on the design's cultural significance, from kaleidoscopic carpets (translated into earrings studded with amethysts) to cufflinks inspired by the ancient rock carvings found in the nearby Gobustan region. Handmade pieces by **The Anjir** adopt a more modern aesthetic: bubble-like gold rings, pearl chokers, bracelets with hamsa pendants. They're sold at its store on Rasul Rza street, along with feather-fringed dresses, boxy suits, and tops by local designers like Anara Zakirli and The Noisé. resm.com; [@theanjir21](https://www.instagram.com/theanjir21)

TAKING STOCK

Before designer Nazrin Agharzayeva launched Azerbaijan's first local fashion platform, **Stock**, with business partners Anar Iskandarli and Saida Nazirova in 2019, Baku's style crowd only had eyes for foreign brands. "The attitude towards local designers wasn't great," she says. "Everyone thought clothes imported from abroad were better." With Stock, the trio aim to shift that mindset by bringing together over 75 labels from Azerbaijani-diaspora and Baku-based designers in its industrial-chic showroom along the city's boulevard. Highlights from the ever-changing collection include Isabeyli's sharp-cut blazers lined with reclaimed silk from kimonos, boldly silhouetted tops and dresses by MMMDM, and tees with tongue-in-cheek slogans by streetwear label Estudio Barcode. Hit up nearby **Concept Store 27** for silk shawls by designer Menzer Hajiyeva, who puts a new spin on the traditional block-printed kelagayi head scarves worn by Azerbaijani women. [@stockinstockout](https://www.instagram.com/stockinstockout/); [@concept.store27](https://www.instagram.com/concept.store27/)

BAZAAR BUYS

Locals flock to **Yasil Bazar** (Green Bazaar), northeast of the Old City for groceries, and there are plenty of souvenirs to be found between the pomegranate pyramids and heaps of parsley. It's worth grabbing jars of preserved grape leaves to make dolmas at home, or scooping up a pick-and-mix bag of gem-hued dried fruits in the main hall. Boutiques on the perimeter specialise in local saffron, honey, and tinned caviar from Azerbaijani sturgeon. Many vendors proffer samples of nuts and salty regional cheeses ripened in sacks of inside-out shearing.

HIPSTER HUB

Think of **Gazelli House**, which encompasses two boutiques, a café, and a subterranean wellness centre, set in an unassuming residential building as the Azerbaijani answer to Soho House. Membership isn't required, but it has become a hush-hush hang-out for Baku's in-crowd, who you'll find sipping post-yoga oat milk lattes in the courtyard or brunching on Mediterranean-tinged salads at the glasshouse-like café. Founded by Baku-born genetic scientist Zarifa Hamzayeva in 1999, the Gazelli Group started life as a cosmetics producer, with a wide range of pomegranate-scented hand creams, face masks, and serums made from the brand's patented Gazelli White Oil on the shelves of the wellness boutique out front. The same shop also stocks healing crystals and bespoke tea blends with black tea from plantations around southern Azerbaijan's Lankaran region. The adjoining **Soroka** store specialises in homeware and accessories from around the world, including Jonathan Adler vases and cutesy ceramic cups sourced in Morocco. gazellihouse.az; [@sorokabaku](https://www.instagram.com/sorokabaku)

COOL CARPETS

Like many countries along the former Silk Route, Azerbaijan has carpet-weaving prowess that can be traced back thousands of years. Artisan communities from Shirvan to Tabriz developed their signature colours, patterns, and techniques, which Unesco deemed worthy of Intangible Cultural Heritage recognition in 2010. On a mission to keep this ancient craft alive, state-run **Azerkhalcha** works with women from around the country to produce fresh iterations of classic designs. At its flagship shop in the Old City, it hosts loom-weaving demos and works with artists like Baku-born Faig Ahmed on limited edition pieces. The brand can arrange the certificates needed to take authentic rugs out of the country, and can compress silk carpets into suitcase-friendly packages. [@azerxalca.carpets](https://www.instagram.com/azerxalca.carpets)

WHOLE SOME HANDICRAFTS

As a community-oriented offshoot of Azerbaijan's Social Innovations state agency, **Abad** helps small-scale farmers and folk artists with financial planning and marketing, resulting in a countrywide chain of boutiques. Its Baku outpost is housed in the Haji Bani Bath complex in the Old City—look beyond the typical tourist wares to find colourful wooden cheese boards

and coasters painted with patterns derived from flat-woven zilli carpets, alongside quirky socks printed with motifs of baklava and shekerbura pastries. The **Handicraft** concept store on Neftchilar Avenue stocks ceramics, leather goods, and photo prints by local artists. Keep an eye out for its felt slippers and embroidered vests crafted from natural-dyed wool by Pirsah, a charitable women's collective from nearby Pirsagi village. [@abadhandicrafts](https://www.instagram.com/abadhandicrafts/); [@handicraft_baku](https://www.instagram.com/handicraft_baku/)

HERITAGE HOMEWARE

Founded in 2013 by Azerbaijani artist Aida Mahmudova, **Chelebi** recasts the country's traditional arts and crafts as contemporary home décor. Its showroom in Port Baku Mall reopened last year as a shoppable gallery for furniture, home fragrances, and ceramics. In collaboration with the Azerbaijan National Museum of Art, Chelebi reinterprets heritage materials and techniques into high-design homeware: ceramic plates and cups take inspiration from the frescoes in the 18th-century summer residence of the Shaki Khans, while the whimsical works of the late Azerbaijani painter Rasim Babayev live on as woven throw blankets. It has also worked with Moscow- and Grasse-based perfumery Aadre on diffusers, hand soaps, and scented candles with notes of juniper, oud, and other ingredients inspired by folklore. chelebi.az 

Opposite page, clockwise, from top left: **glassware at Chelebi; The Anjir; Azerkhalcha; inside Chelebi; Gazelli House's library lounge; Resm; Abad; Soroka; café at Gazelli House**. Opening pages, clockwise, from top left: **Azerkhalcha's shop; Nazrin Agharzayeva; Flame Towers; Handicraft store; Heydar Aliyev Center**

WHERE TO STAY

In a turreted neoclassical building between the boulevard and the higgledy-piggledy streets of the Old City, the **Four Seasons Hotel Baku** delivers old-world glam without a hint of stuffiness. Its marble-floored lobby fades into a gold-trimmed bar, tearoom, and Italian diner. The cream-coloured rooms are spacious and timelessly elegant; those on the southern or western side come with views of the iconic Flame Towers. For those short on time, the concierge can arrange chauffeur-driven shopping tours with insider access to the boutiques of some of Baku's most envelope-pushing fashion designers.

fourseasons.com





SQUARE ROOTS

The iconic right-angled watch face is an enduring rarity.
Compiled by **Arundhati Ail** and **Jessica Diamond**

The world's first square watch was made as a one-off and gifted by Louis Cartier to his Brazilian aviator pal Alberto Santos-Dumont in 1904. Timepieces had always previously been round, largely down to the shape of the movement's cogs and wheels, and the ability to screw the case tight shut as some form of waterproofing.

It would take another seven years before a square Cartier timepiece would go into proper production, with the appropriately named Santos, its angular shape referencing the linear streets of Paris. Its style has remained, but it's the French maison's other square watch, the Tank, launched in 1919—its case shape inspired by the caterpillar treads of the First World War tanks—that has become a universal icon. It also signalled a step change in aesthetics: art deco was getting into its stride and this new, more graphic, masculine, and linear composition was the perfect refresh after the belle époque. A square or rectangular watch is still in the minority. Some brands eschew it; others reinvent it regularly, such as Jaeger-LeCoultre, with its Reverso. Despite being made initially for the British polo-playing army officers in 1920s India, with a case that flipped right over for protection, its form has outlived its function. The 20th century is punctuated with them—from Boucheron's Reflet in 1947 to Hermès's Cape Cod in 1991—proof that, although the shape is still rare, the best square watches can become true classics. 



Monaco Chronograph
TAG Heuer



Reverso Tribute -
Duoface Small Seconds
Jaeger-LeCoultre



Long Island Evolution -
Giga Tourbillon
Franck Muller



L'heure Du
Diamant
Chopard



Integral
Diamonds
Rado



Tank Louis
Cartier
Cartier



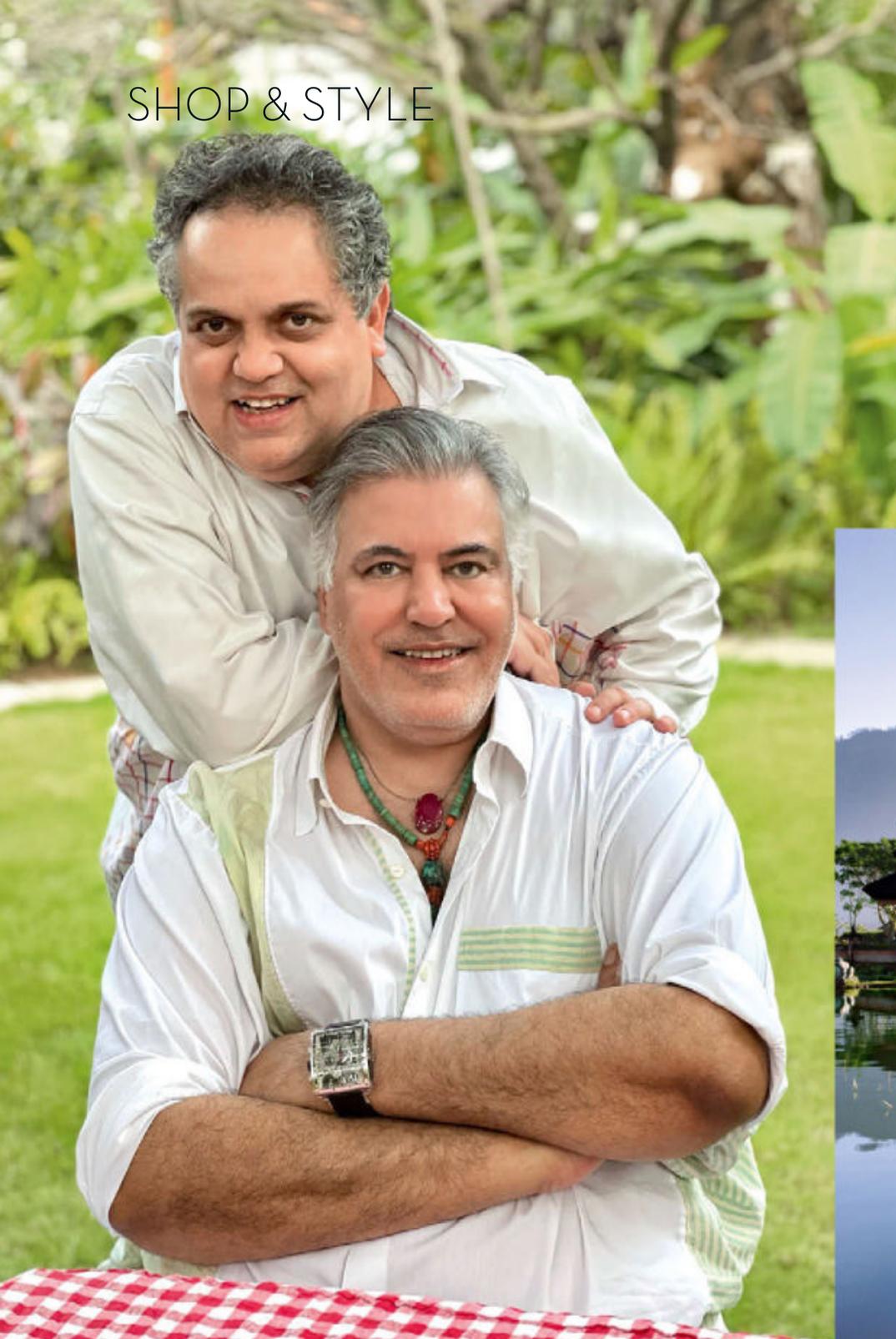
Mini
DolceVita
Longines

All prices on request

AD

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL HOMES IN THE WORLD





FASHION DIARIES: ABU JANI SANDEEP KHOSLA

The designer duo on their enduring love for India's craft and textile heritage. By Shradha Shahani



It's been 38 years since Abu Jani and Sandeep Khosla set out on their design journey, with many big wins over their tenure, including a National Award in Costume Design in 2003 for their work on *Devdas*—think Madhuri Dixit Nene's mirror-work lehenga. After nearly four decades of success, they continue to reinvent their designs, making the world take notice of India's heritage crafts and textiles, from Gigi Hadid's white chikankari sari to Isha Ambani's jadau blouse. Abu Jani and Sandeep Khosla talk to *CNT* about their creative partnership and how they continue to reinvent themselves. Edited excerpts from the interview:

WHAT'S THE SECRET TO YOUR PARTNERSHIP AT WORK AND AT HOME?

SK: It's been an incredible journey and very creatively fulfilling. The beauty is that we are still getting to know each other. We've always agreed to disagree. If you respect

someone, even if you have differences, you are sensitive to each other. We always find a middle ground where both of us are happy.

AJ: Every life has ups and downs but it's been fantastic. We are different people at the end of the day, so we will have creative differences. Mutual respect and the ability to adjust are essential for a relationship to last. More importantly, you have to be patient.

DOES TRAVEL IMPACT YOUR WORK?

AJ: On our visit to Bali, we were so inspired by Balinese textiles and architecture that our Dancing Dolls collection drew cues from them. We featured the traditional Balinese dance on our garments.

SK: Wherever we go, we visit antique markets, from Portobello Road Market in London to Marché aux Puces de Paris Saint-Ouen. It could be objects, bags, or even the architecture that influence our work.



Clockwise, from top left: **Isha Ambani; Alia Bhatt; models in chikankari and Ajrakh by AJSK.** Opposite page, clockwise, from top left: **Abu Jani and Sandeep Khosla; Pura Ulun Danu Bratan temple; outfit from Dancing Dolls collection; Gigi Hadid in chikankari sari**

HOW DO YOU CONSTANTLY REINVENT YOUR DESIGNS USING AGE-OLD INDIAN CRAFTS AND TEXTILES?

AJ: We've often been asked, 'Why would you turn something so pure [into something contemporary]?' However, both Sandeep and I feel it makes sense to modernise something and make it travel far. Chikan was always on mulmul. But when we started in 1986, it was a synthetic world, and we saw chikan on polyester without work on both sides. So, we decided to take the embroidery and do it on luxury fabric like chiffon, georgette, and organza.

SK: The ladies we worked with in Lucknow told us it was impossible, but we were willing to take that risk and it paid off. Similarly, we turned khadi into a wedding garment with real silver gota, and it was an instant hit. You have to be willing to take risks, and you have to encourage Indian artisans and spend time with them. Also, you must be patient and give them the freedom to do what they are best at.

WHAT'S THE ONE INDIAN CRAFT OR TEXTILE YOU CAN'T GET ENOUGH OF?

SK: Chikan, of course. But then there's also Ajrakh! It's a craft we have worked with for decades, and one that we continue to reinvent with equal passion even today.



WHERE DOES INDIA STAND ON THE GLOBAL FASHION STAGE?

SK: Nowhere, sadly. People would like to wear us, but we have to reach many more, and for that, you have to have loads of funds.

AJ: After two or three Paris Fashion Weeks, then what? It costs a huge sum of money to participate in and then it just fizzles out. I would love to encourage India in India.

SK: Having said that, there is an audience for India abroad. We know that from running a store in London for 10 years. If you're on a main fashion-couture street in a big city, you will get noticed. First, be India proud, and then be in the right places.

HOW DO YOU STAY RELEVANT AFTER 38 YEARS IN THE FASHION BUSINESS?

SK: Our competition is ourselves. We never followed trends, we set trends. Many designers do the same thing over and over. But if you notice, every crazy blouse has come from AJSK, like Isha Ambani's jadau one. We've always been inventive, and we've never been afraid of taking risks. 🇮🇳



VOGUE

INDIA



**BEFORE IT'S IN FASHION,
IT'S IN VOGUE!**

FEATURES

Branding mark
on a Mongolian
horse belonging to
a nomadic family.
Photographed by
Alistair Taylor-Young
for *Retracing
Steppes* (p86)





Feet in the Forest HEAD IN THE CLOUDS

In the hill station of Kodaikanal, Chandrahas Choudhury finds a community of dreamers who open their homes to travellers in search of mindful living. Photographs by Pankaj Anand



A

t first glance, Kodaikanal is a symptom of every problem of the modern Indian hill station. Nostalgia always has an element of unreason, but here, it was easy to appreciate the ruefulness of its long-term residents. Yet my visit to Kodaikanal was as immersive and sensual a week as I've had anywhere else. In the face of the violence of modern life, the best and brightest of Kodaikanal, I found, have retreated inward, not into a gated community living in privatised comfort, but rather a small society of sensitive spirits intent on preserving and sharing the best of a vanishing world.

The town has so many interesting people invested in alternative ways of living that I could've stayed another month and not met them all. Intellectually, gastronomically, ecologically, Kodaikanal was a bag of surprises. Here was a place that boasted a 125-year-old solar observatory, a golf course, and a serious local newspaper full of fine writing (*The Kodai Chronicle*, available online)—and yet, only one ladies' hairdresser and no picture framer. "There used to be one," said Vasu Balakrishnan, my host for the first two days, "but he passed away. Now, if you want a picture framed, you have to go down to Madurai." Even the shola forests were unique. "These are not forests of tall trees, but of vines and creepers and ferns," said naturalist and guide Vijay Kumar (9965524279), on a walk into the forest near the village of Prakasapuram, as we shook greedy leeches

off our shoes. "Each tree is different, each bush is different. No plant is trying to kill the other plant. All are helping each other to live."

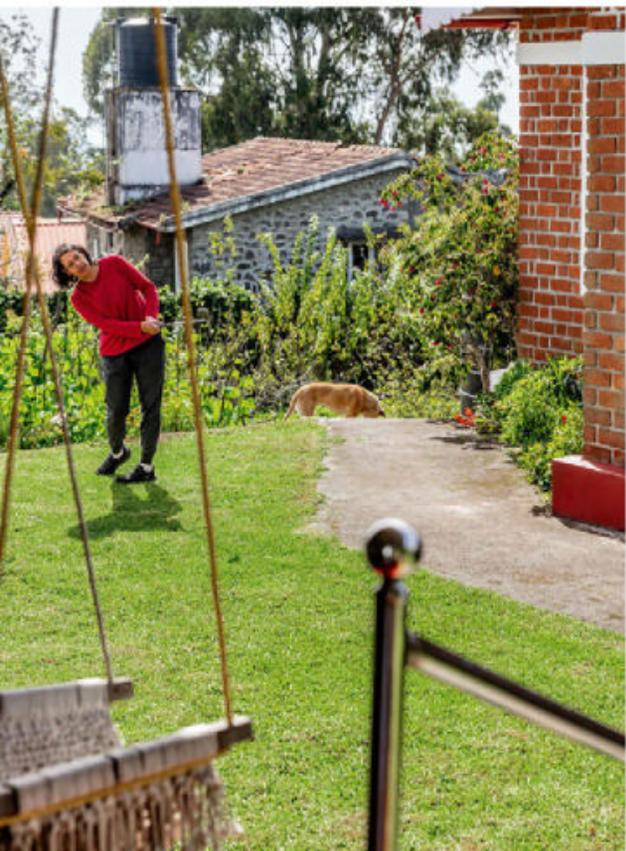
"If you came to live here 30 years ago, you had to be a little bit off," said Vasu's husband, K "Bala" Balakrishnan, that evening. "But soon we found out: Kodi keeps springing surprises on you." Bala and Vasu moved to Kodai—locals use this name in alternation with the more intimate, languorous "Kodi"—in the 1980s with two young children, and they've been welcoming visitors at their homestay, Cinnabar, since 2003. Unusually, they serve both breakfast and dinner. "Every morning, we plan the day's menu after looking at our garden," said Bala. "I've always loved growing things. Over the years, I've built what I call a food forest around our house."

But before we could savour the green of the food forest, we had a date with the green of the graveyard. The best place to understand Kodaikanal's social history is the American Mission Cemetery, in a small patch of forest just off the centre of town, now "closed" to newcomers. Over a century has passed since the last stone was laid down here in 1923, but even this land has a devoted caretaker. Beulah Kolhatkar, a retired teacher who lives in an old house next to the cemetery, ensures the land is kept clear of weeds and scrubs down the 44 identifiable gravestones twice a year. Trailed by her cats and dogs, often sitting down beside a gravestone to talk about it, Kolhatkar seemed to be living

Sunrise across Palani's upper hills. Opposite page, clockwise, from top left: **clusters of tomatoes at Cinnabar; the homestay's exterior; the food there; American Mission Cemetery; Beulah Kolhatkar at the cemetery; biryani at Mann Manam; Brian Jenkins at Sholai School; Vasu playing golf at Cinnabar; Bala showing a bean pod there.** Opening pages: **Isla Maria Van Damme with her pony at Isla's Ridge**



"It has so many interesting people invested in alternative ways of living."



"Intellectually, gastronomically, and ecologically, a bag of surprises"





as much in their age as ours. After a night and a morning, I was beginning to get a sense of the quirky cosmopolitanism of Kodai society. There were people who moved here with great deliberateness, like British educator Brian Jenkins, who set up the Sholai School here in the 1980s, inspired by the principles of philosopher J Krishnamurti, and who still chugs around in his 1934-make Austin. Even the people with long-standing roots in the place had vivid histories of migration. Shalini Biswajit, an artist and sculptor, and her husband, Biswajit Balasubramanian, who own the resort The Dunnottar Bungalow on the edge of Kodaikanal Lake, are long-naturalised Tamils who trace their heritage to 11th century Saurashtra. Biswajit is writing a history of their community, which has a significant presence in Kodaikanal.

The next day, I drove two hours northwest to meet one of Kodai's grandees. Isla Maria Van Damme was born in 1945, in Kodai's Van Allen Hospital on St. Mary's Road. "The doctor said I was 'born normal', which my friends still find hard to believe," said Loulou – everyone calls her that – with a great hoot of laughter. Shortly after, her parents left Kodai for Bombay, where she grew up in Andheri in the last days of the Raj before heading off to boarding school in England and then to life as an entrepreneur in Brussels selling Indian handicrafts and antiques. In the '90s, she returned to India to start a restaurant in Goa. Eight years ago, on a visit to the Palani Hills, she saw a beautiful plot of land. "And so I came back to live here, like a salmon going up the river to its breeding place." Now 79, Loulou had as many great lines

on her lips ("I can be very elegant, but I can be very jungli, too") as she has etched on her tremendously kinetic face, somehow a mix of the dervish and the tycoon. Very few people embark on a new life and build a new home in their seventies. But this was just what Loulou had done, setting down three large valley-facing bungalows, one for herself and two for visitors, on the 40-acre estate.

Isla's Ridge has recently opened its doors to guests as one of CGH Earth's stable of Experience Hotels – unique homestay-style properties that represent the best of their locales. Loulou's philosophy perfectly aligns with that of the brand: slow living, eating well but mindfully, giving visitors a real feel of the place and its people. The days at Isla's Ridge were the perfect initiation into all the wild beauty and biodiversity of the hills. Clouds hovered above the valley and you could see the late-afternoon rain coming from kilometres away. Monkeys swung from the branches of jackfruit trees. Loulou's two glistening ponies, Potluck and Blue Diamond, swished their tails and mowed the lawns with their avid mouths. And in the four skyflower bushes between the two guest bungalows, black-and-yellow carpenter bees buzzed from one blue flower to another, like the souls of Mumbai's kaali-peelis released from a lifetime of going up and down SV Road.

"I'm not always available to meet guests. But I want people to come here and dream," Loulou said. It was indeed dreamy. I even spent half an hour watching a red-yellow Tetrio Sphinx caterpillar doing a round of a stone statuette, following Loulou's instructions to the T.

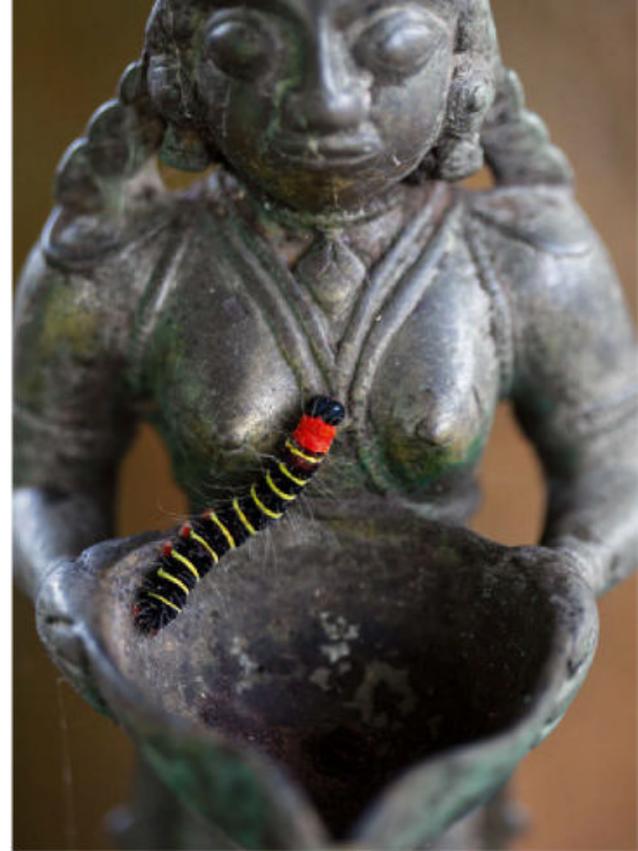
On a nature trail walk with naturalist Vijay Kumar. Opposite page: **a foggy view of the hills during the walk on the trail**

"Clouds hovered above the valley and you could see the late-afternoon rain coming from kilometres away"





Interior of Isla's Ridge. Opposite page, clockwise, from top left: bedroom at Isla's Ridge; the property's exterior; a Tetrico Sphinx caterpillar on a statue; bun and coffee at Daily Bread Pastry Corner; Isla's Ridge; Kodaikanal's map; aerial view of Kodaikanal Lake; a spread at Isla's Ridge; Vijay Kumar during the nature trail walk



"The days at Isla's Ridge were the perfect initiation into all the wild



beauty and biodiversity of the hills... it was indeed very dreamy"





One morning, Bala made me roll out the biscuit base for a home-made cheesecake “which we’ll bung into the oven for 40 minutes”. Then we crossed the threshold into his food forest, slopy like almost every plot in Kodai, but landscaped just as painstakingly as a potter might work clay. Here were three kinds of tomatoes, kiwis, pears, beds of lettuce and kale, potatoes gaining heft under the soil, and long rows of beans. Bala was just as pleased with his water management. “Every roof on this property is guttered,” he said, “so we don’t waste a drop of rainwater.” A homestay that was also a homestead: a Bala in hand was worth all of Vandana Shiva, Masanobu Fukuoka, and Bill Mollison in the book.

Food and nature, imagination and community, it seemed to me, were the real strengths of Kodai. On my final morning, I thought of bringing all the friends I had made there together for breakfast. Shalini and Biswajit generously offered the patio of The Dunnottar Bungalow as the venue, and Vasu and Bala drove over, as did Loulou. Here, in the buttery sunshine, was a feast of camaraderie to go with the sumptuous vadas and coffee, French toast and cake, mango chia pudding and fresh plums. Bala and Vasu admired Biswajit’s new pizza oven. Loulou picked Bala’s brain over how to turn surplus milk into cheese. Shalini, a sophisticated cook, shared her special recipe for tomato chutney with Vasu. It was like listening to a slow-playing raga of the best of the place. A sort of Kodi ki Todi. 📍

A PLAN FOR *Kodai*

WHERE TO STAY

About 55km northwest of Kodaikanal, **Isla’s Ridge**, a collaboration between designer Isla Maria Van Damme and CGH Earth, offers an unrivalled view of the Palani Hills from its perch. The five bedrooms have lovely sit-outs; there’s also a well-curated library, and guests are welcome to show off their culinary skills in the open-plan kitchen. (*Doubles from ₹20,000 with breakfast; cghearth.com*) At the edge of Kodaikanal Lake, **The Dunnottar Bungalow** is a Raj-era mansion transformed into an intimate retreat with charming terraces, lawns, and an outdoor patio with a pizza oven. (*Doubles from ₹40,000; thedunnottarkodai.in*)

Cinnabar is a fine homestay, offering the warmth, style, and nous of its hospitable hosts, as

also an education in small-scale farming, rainwater harvesting, and cheese-making. (*Doubles from ₹8,000; 9842145220*)

WHAT TO EAT

Locals swear by the sandwiches and puffs of **Daily Bread Pastry Corner**. Also try the delights of George Penner’s **George’s Gourmet Kitchen**, located in a warehouse-style hall. The cheddar and mozzarella pizza with sun-dried tomatoes and pesto is a masterpiece. Penner’s Montreal-style bagels and sourdough bread pair wonderfully with the fine gouda, cheddar, or edam that gild the shelves of **Kodai Cheese**. Sample local Tamil cooking—country-style chicken curry, mud pot biryani with seeraga samba rice—at **Mann Manam**.



A spread on the terrace at Isla's Ridge. Opposite page, clockwise, from top left: Vasu Balakrishnan, K Balakrishnan, Shalini Biswajit, Biswajit Balasubramanian, and Isla Maria Van Damme at The Dunnottar Bungalow



RETRACING STEPPES

WHILE REVISITING THE MONGOLIA OF HIS PAST, **STANLEY STEWART** LOSES HIMSELF AGAIN IN A WIDE OPEN WORLD OF WILD HORSES, EAGLE WHISPERERS, AND THE HAUNTING SONGS OF NOMADS. PHOTOGRAPHS BY **ALISTAIR TAYLOR-YOUNG**





From the air, the emptiness is always startling. Flying over Mongolia in the predawn, I saw no light below, just unfolding landscapes, a river spooling away, a range of mountains surging across steppelands, an empire of grass tipping to undisturbed horizons. Just Greenland and the Falkland Islands have a lower population density. The only signs of habitation were the occasional encampments of round white yurts, or gers, which appear suddenly and mysteriously in the grasslands like overnight mushrooms. In a few weeks, they would have vanished, to spring up elsewhere, leaving no trace other than pale circles on the grass, as the nomads moved to winter pastures. Like a vast vacant lot grown wild on the edge of it all, Mongolia is the planet's last truly nomadic realm.

When people ask me my favourite place in the world, there is never any hesitation. I love Mongolia so much that I once spent five months crossing a thousand kilometres of it on horseback, the baggage horse loaded with gear, from a temperamental stove to a rapidly disappearing bottle of whisky. I wrote a book about the journey that was translated into a dozen languages. I fell in love with a Mongolian, an intense affair that unwound over years. It ended two decades ago. She has moved on, wisely. But Mongolia is still there. And it was time to go back.

This time, I didn't have five months. The plan was to spend 10 days, visiting a couple of regions with a driver, a guide, and a photographer friend to whom I had been enthusing about

Mongolia for years. My calendar for the trip was surprisingly full. I had an appointment with a shaman, planned to search for wild horses, and visit eagle hunters. In between, I would look for myself, for my connection to this place, for what drew me here, for who I had been all those years ago.

We began at the beginning, among the wild horses and standing stones of Khustain Nuruu National Park. Mongolia was home to the Przewalski's horse, also known as the takhi, the only authentically wild horses left on earth. But by the 1960s, these short and thick-chested creatures had become extinct in the wild. Then in 1992, using stock from zoos, breeders successfully reintroduced them to their homeland in this park.

The tails of clouds spiralled down from Khustain's hills like tattered banners. In the valleys, standing stones, known as deer stones for their carvings of animals, are the only visible remnants of a culture that inhabited this landscape about 4,000 years ago. I scanned the hills with binoculars. High on the slopes, I could see a herd of red deer moving towards the ridge line. With the protection of rangers, Khustain has become a sanctuary for them as they're vulnerable to poaching: deer penis is a hot item in pharmacies of Traditional Chinese Medicine. Then I spotted the horses, females and foals, under a single stallion's command. I felt as if I was peering into the Bronze Age. Horses are the central fact of Mongolian history. Their domestication created powerful nomadic empires; prompted the building of the Great Wall by the Chinese, anxious about invasion; carried Genghis Khan's armies to the walls of Vienna in the 13th century.

A traditional Kazakh ger. Opposite page, from top: **Mandala Altai camp in Bayan-Ulgii; dining ger.** Opening pages: **a nomad family**



**A three-year-old
trained eagle.**
Opposite page:
**Tastulekh, the
eagle hunter**







Later, on the banks of the Tuul River, we stopped at a ger where a bow-legged woman was milking a restive mob of Mongolian horses. The milking of both yaks and horses is a tricky business, requiring a firm hand and cool nerves; the consensus in Mongolia is that women do a better job of it. Inside the ger, a young woman served us bowls of fermented mare's milk, known as airag, a kind of sour milky beer that is Mongolia's chief tippie. Our host, warming his toes by the stove, was 90 years old. His face was a map. I asked him to tell me what he thought were Mongolia's best years, hoping he would reflect on the

“THE SHAMAN TENSED LIKE AN ANIMAL, CROUCHED ON THE MAT. THEN THE SPIRIT SPOKE, SOUNDING EERILY LIKE MARLON BRANDO”

history of the country, the second communist nation. It spent 70 years as the Soviet Union's satellite. Capitalism had arrived with a thud in 1990. “The 1930s,” he said, looking at me with rheumy eyes. I asked why. “Because I was a boy in those years.”

We travelled westward, crossing a low pass to a wide plain where sunlight and cloud chased each other across the dun-coloured grasses. On a ridge above a silver stream, we found the shaman's camp. Crows swirled upward above a ger. Inside was the shaman, Amarjargal, a woman in her 50s. Shamanism has a tenacious hold on the Mongolian imagination. Even as the country became Buddhist in the 16th century, the herdsmen found solace in its reassuring rituals and promise of contact with the spirit world. In the 21st century, the changes of the modern

world in such a traditional society have inspired its revival. Amarjargal's day was packed, but she agreed to make time to perform a “beckoning”, a calling upon the spirits, for me.

While her husband, who acted as manager and roadie, lit cones of incense, Amarjargal donned the shaman's headdress. It had a screen of hair that hid her eyes and face, and was adorned with eagle feathers. She began to strum a mouth harp, the single repetitive note slowly built to a frantic pace, then suddenly subsided as a spirit entered her. Head bowed, she growled. A low animal sound filled the ger. Her husband lit a cigarette and

handed it to her. After some moments, he lit another. The spirit turned out to be a chain-smoker. After three more Marlboros, her husband asked me what I wished to know. I wasn't sure what to say. I had no idea about the question-and-answer session. I hemmed. I hawed. The spirit world was waiting. Amarjargal's spirit was growling. Finally, I blurted out, “Will I have a successful journey? What should I expect?” Amarjargal tensed like an animal, crouched on the mat, with puffs of cigarette smoke coming out from beneath the headdress. Then the spirit spoke, sounding eerily like Marlon Brando. “You will find nothing on this journey. What you need is to be found at home.”

After a couple more cigarettes and some additional frenzied mouth harp action, the spirit departed from whence it came.

Riding along the Khovd River in Chikhertei. Opposite page, from top: **eagle hunter practising with his bird; sheep grazing in Buyant**





**A horseman in
the Ulgii region**

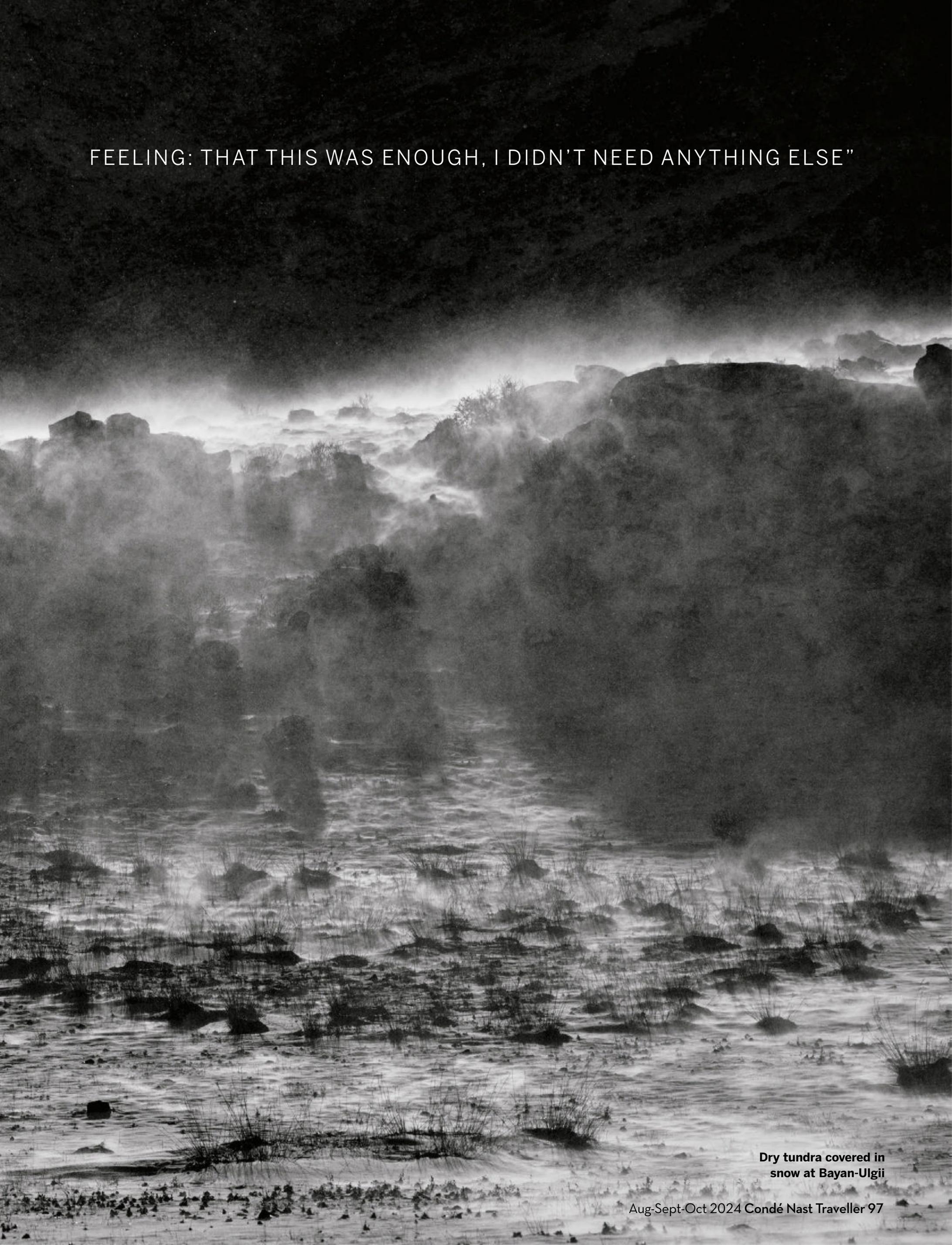
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“LIFE WAS REDUCED TO DELIGHTFUL SIMPLICITIES, AND TO THAT RARE



FEELING: THAT THIS WAS ENOUGH, I DIDN'T NEED ANYTHING ELSE”



Dry tundra covered in snow at Bayan-Ulgii

Suddenly I did have questions, lots of them. Why hadn't I asked about life after death, sent greetings to a deceased relative or, at the very least, received a hot tip for Mongolia's Naadam horse races? Now slumped at the head of the ger, Amarjargal looked depleted. She had removed the headdress. The spirit was gone and, after a few pleasantries, so were we.

Two days later, I flew west to Bayan-Ulgii in a propeller plane full of passengers carrying saddles and blankets. From the airfield, we set off in a four-by-four, passing a herd of shaggy yaks looking mournful on the edge of a lake. Camels appeared, strolling in loping slow motion, like elderly promenaders. For several kilometres, we followed a river winding through a gravel floodplain, then ascended over low hills and looked down on a valley carpeted with yellow grass. Stopping the car, we climbed out. In the middle of the valley was a single ger with a smoking chimney. At the far end, their backs to sculptural outcrops of black rock, were five more. This was Mandala Altai, our home for the next four days. It felt splendidly remote, a place removed from the world's complexities and our own petty struggles. On a

On horseback, I remembered the delight of my previous journey and the way it had stripped away all the measures of self: fears, aspirations, desires, all the nagging preoccupations. In the solitude of Mongolia, I had felt liberated. I had been content with the physical sensation of the present — the contours of a sloping valley, the way the light fell on a distant lake, the sense of movement, the horses jerking their heads. Now, once again, life was reduced to these delightful simplicities, and to that rare feeling: that this was enough, that I didn't need anything else.

In the evening, we were invited to dinner with Tastulekh. The photographer and I, our guides, drivers, and the cook from our camp were seated in the warm embrace of his ger. The tent had that aroma of Mongolia: of butter and mutton, of dung fires, and horses. Saddles were piled by the door; bridles hung from the rafters. A sheep had been slaughtered. The entrails — deemed to be the best parts — were bubbling in a pot on the stove. We ate with our hands, reaching in, never sure what we would pull out. Among the innards and the great slab of white tail fat was the sheep's head, balefully gazing up at me. As the guest of honour, I

“THE CHINGGIS KHAN VODKA CAME OUT, THEN THE TOVSHUUR. THE NOMADS' VOICES FILLED THE GER WITH HAUNTING SONGS”

far hillside, I could see the miniature figure of a horseman. Even at this great distance, I could hear the soft murmur of the hooves.

With their womb-like embrace, gers are the accommodation of choice in Mongolia. The visitors' version, while maintaining the atmosphere of the nomads' tents, has reached a level of glamping luxury that is surprising in such remote regions. Furnished with patterned Mongolian chests and tables, Mandala Altai had beds piled with quality linens. Each ger is centred around a wood-burning stove; in the early mornings an attendant would creep in to light it so the tent was cosy when we awoke. An adjoining ger acted as a spacious bathroom with hot water, an elegant open shower, and a compost loo. A central dining ger was the setting for evening aperitifs and lavish meals.

In the morning, we went to visit our neighbours, the area's only other inhabitants, who lived in a ger in the middle of the valley. Sitting on perches nearby were two magnificent golden eagles. Western Mongolia is home to the Kazakhs, a Muslim minority, who have a long tradition of hunting with them. We met the eagle hunter, Tastulekh. When I asked how he acquired his eagles, he described climbing the face of a cliff to a nest and choosing a female chick from the brood, all the while fending off the mother — a creature with a wingspan of almost seven feet and a curved flesh-ripping bill — as if talking about a visit to the supermarket to pick up cat litter. But he was not unsentimental. The Kazakhs say an eagle is a member of the family. When the birds reach about six or seven years of age, their keepers release them into the wild again. Tastulekh was in mourning. One of the birds outside, which he had raised, was due to be released soon.

In this landscape, the weather is unpredictable. One night, winter came. I woke to hear winds singing in the ropes of the ger and wolves howling from the ridge behind us. In the morning, snowdrifts were banked around the tents under a slate-coloured sky. We had breakfast, warm sweet porridge and mugs of coffee, and set off on horses, riding south into a newly white world.

was instructed to cut off the cheeks and pass them to the other guests. Then I was told to cut off the ears and give them as a treat to the children, which is thought to help them listen to parents.

Tastulekh and his wife, Guljan, asked if I would bless their child, Tanerbergen, who was not yet one. Apparently the parents thought me a model citizen and believed that whatever good fortune I had enjoyed might mysteriously be transferred to the child. I thought it was probably not the moment to mention the missed mortgage payments or the habit of procrastination. A long sinew of intestine was fetched out of the broth and wrapped around little Tanerbergen's legs. I made a speech, cut the intestinal ribbon as if I were opening a leisure centre, and Tanerbergen set sail into the future buoyed by my good wishes.

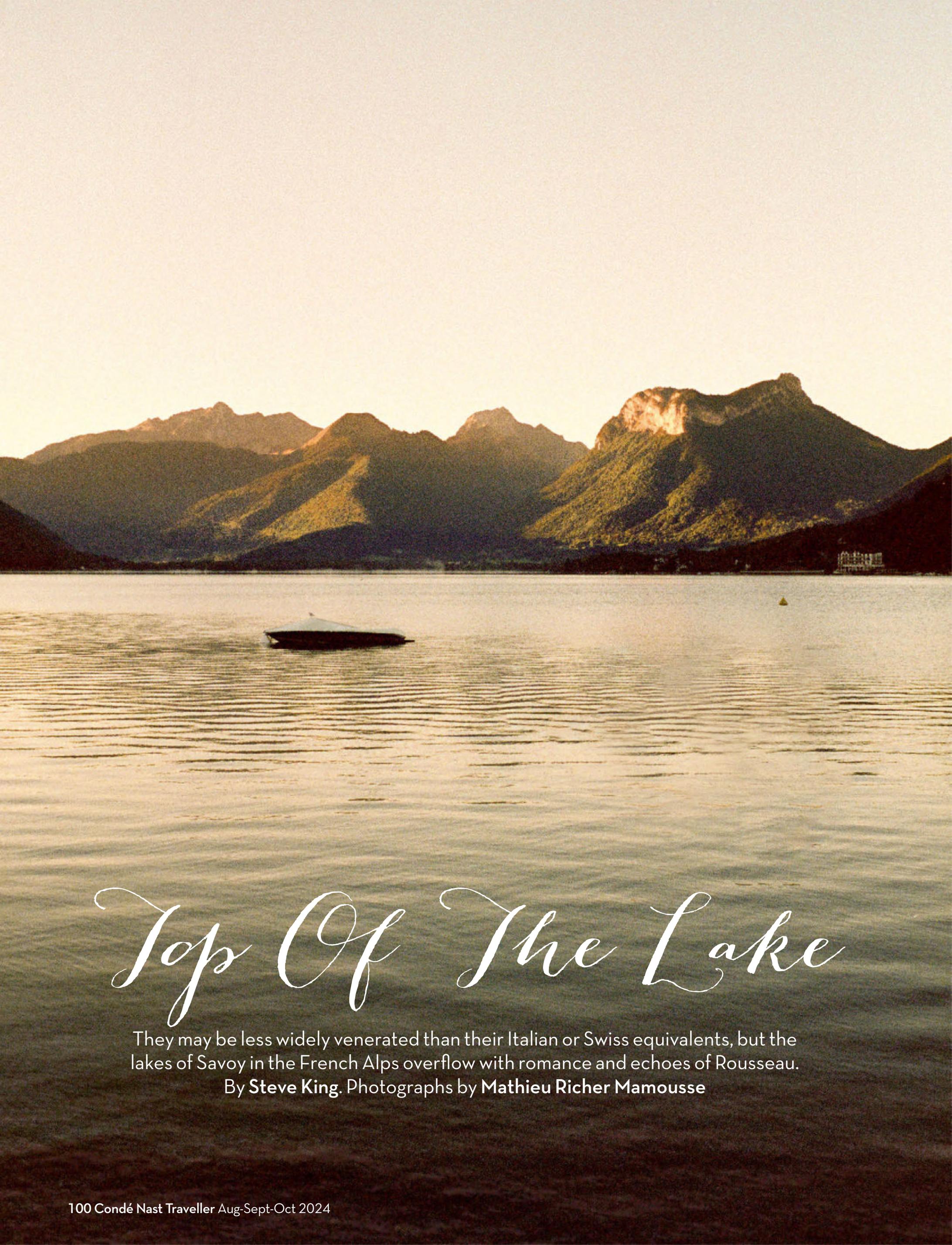
After dinner, the Chinggis Khan vodka came out, followed by the tovshuur, a two-stringed Mongolian lute. The nomads' voices filled the ger with haunting songs. The most beautiful singer was Guljan. She sat on a stool, looking down at her hands folded in her lap, and voiced tales about birds flying away at the end of summer. The changing of the season is the height of the nomad year, a time of festivals and gatherings before the days draw in, migrations begin, and hardships of the winter pastures return.

Later, I stepped outside. The wind had died down. In the moonlight, Mongolia ran away into her infinities, armoured now with that fresh fall of snow. In the distance, rising against the stars, was a ragged range of mountains. No lights showed anywhere. In monochrome twilight, the great sweep of landscape seemed empty, as if it were newly made, as if we were the very first people to have arrived, as if it belonged to no one. In these illusions, in this startling emptiness, all of life's baggage fell away. This was the Mongolia I sought. 📍

Black Tomato can arrange nine nights in Mongolia from about ₹9,43,000 per person, based on two people travelling, including a curated itinerary, private transfers, and most meals, but excluding flights; blacktomato.com

Opposite page, from top: **snowstorm at Mandala Altai camp; Amarjargal, the shaman**



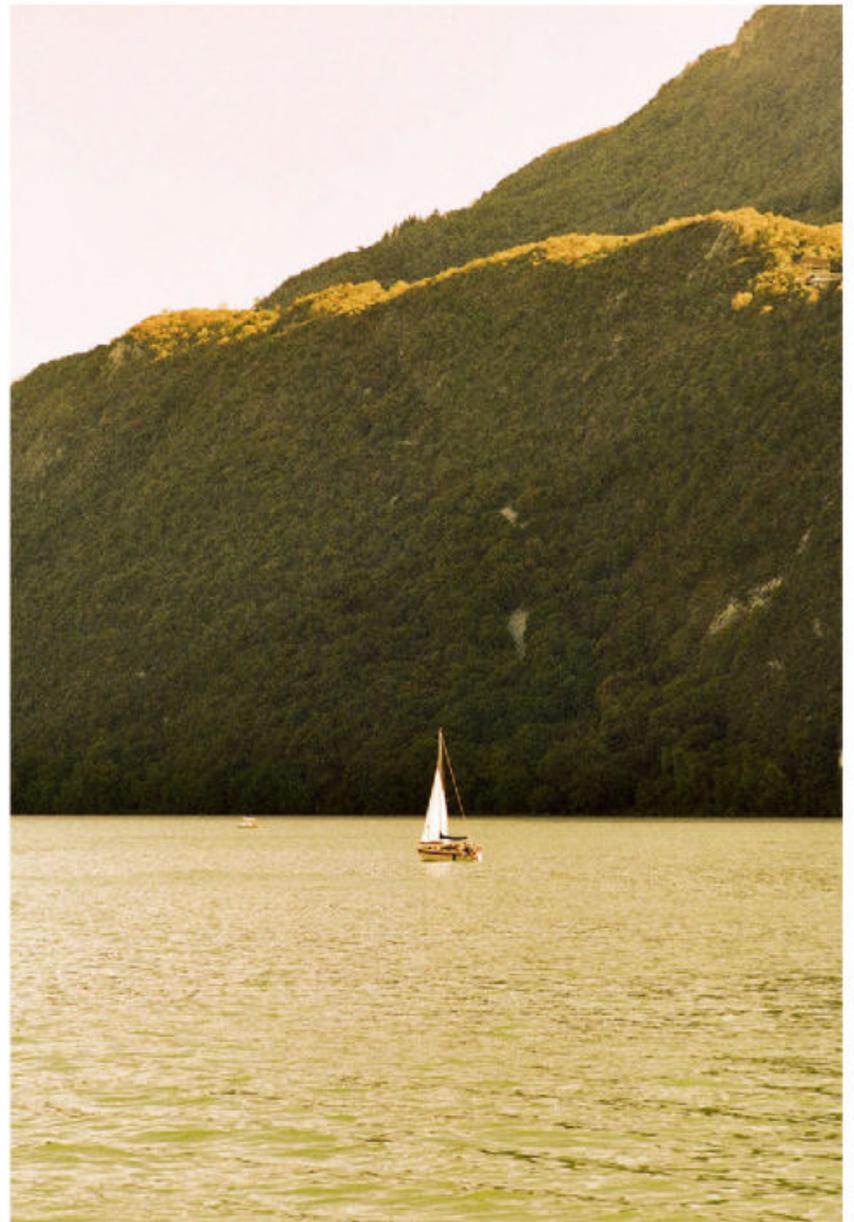


Top Of The Lake

They may be less widely venerated than their Italian or Swiss equivalents, but the lakes of Savoy in the French Alps overflow with romance and echoes of Rousseau.

By **Steve King**. Photographs by **Mathieu Richer Mamousse**





Clockwise, from top left: **Lake Annecy from Abbaye de Talloires; Lake Bourget; candy floss at Lake Annecy; Les Charmettes's living room.** Opposite page, from top: **Petit Hôtel Confidentiel; Casino Grand Cercle Aix-les-Bains.** Opening pages, from left: **Lake Annecy at dawn; the lake at sunset**



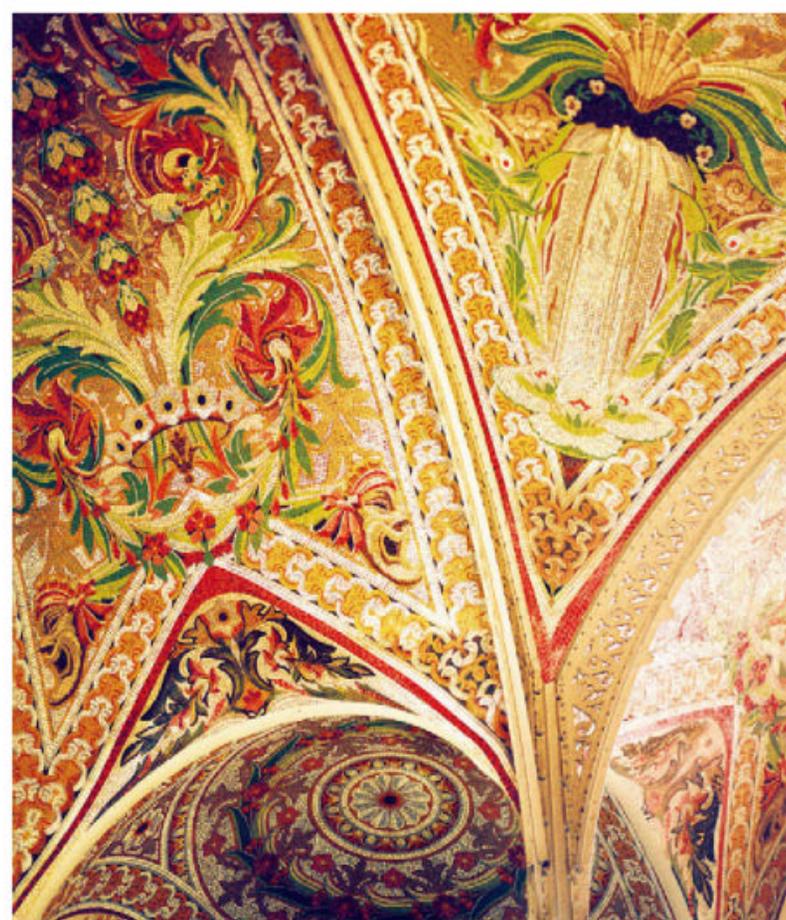
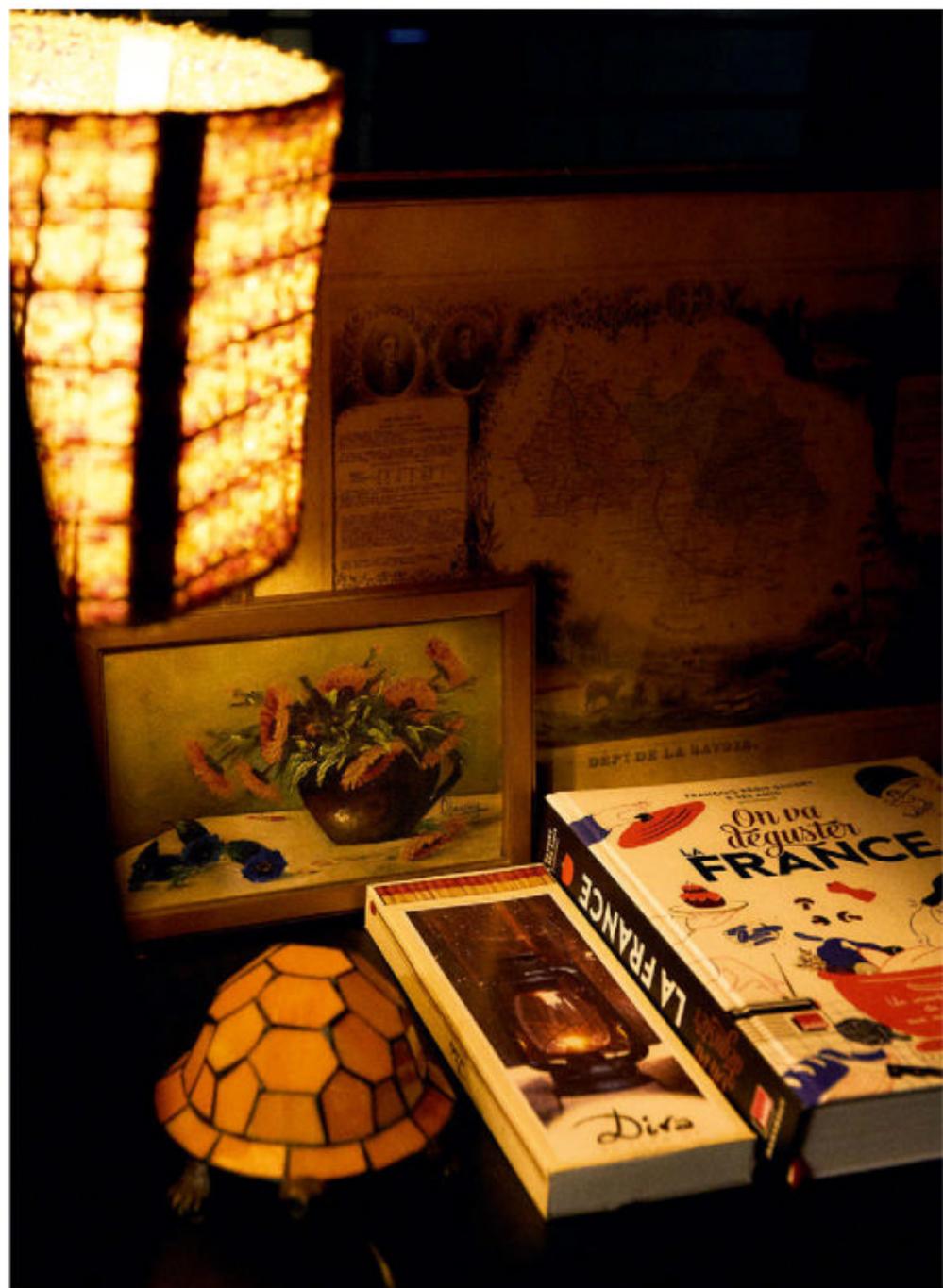
Mention Savoy and the first thing to spring to mind, unless it's a smart hotel in London, is likely to be the Alps—Mont Blanc in particular. Where there are mountains, there are generally lakes as well, and so it is in Savoy. If you run a fingertip from top right to bottom left on a map, the four main lakes are Geneva (or Léman), Annecy, Bourget, and Aiguebelette. If your fingertip kept going, it would soon arrive in the city of Grenoble. Together, they make an excellent set of coordinates for the would-be explorer, especially in spring and summer—not least because, in their inherent watery flatness, they direct the gaze not so much up and down as outwards and across: a landscape axis rather than portrait.

Savoy has an uncommonly complicated history: coveted and contested, haggled over and passed around; first a county, then a duchy, eventually a kingdom, and nowadays, a mere region. Following its annexation by France in 1860, it was subdivided into two départements, or administrative districts: Savoie and Haute-Savoie. Referring to them both at once as Savoy is a slight simplification. But a useful one.

“An impression of cleanliness and rude good health prevailed”

I started my journey around the four lakes in Evian-les-Bains on the southern shore of Lake Geneva, in the company of Céline Guillermin, a Savoyard with the face of a silent-movie star and the volubility of Eddie Murphy. What struck me about Evian was the extent to which it lives up to its own billing—a prosperous spa town of the belle époque, famed for its mineral-rich water, that subsequently became a more prosperous spa town, still famed for its mineral-rich water. An impression of cleanliness, order, and rude good health prevailed. The grassy squares were as beautifully mown, the hedges as beautifully clipped, and the flowerbeds as beautifully tended as their equivalents in a town on the opposite—the Swiss—side of the lake. I stood in the shade of sequoias and gazed into water so still and clear, I couldn't tell if there was anything there at all.

A touch uptight and clinical? It might be for some. Yet I found Evian endearingly mad. There's a *Through the Looking-Glass* quality to it. The opulence of the buvette, or taproom, where the swells of yore would congregate to drink their fill: the decorated stations of the toylike funicular that transported them between the buvette and the palace hotels on the hilltops; the bizarre casino on the lake's edge, its neo-Byzantine dome inspired apparently by Istanbul's Hagia Sophia. If I had encountered such curiosities anywhere else, I might've wondered whether the water had been spiked. From





Evian, Céline and I headed southwest to Annecy. The city, at the tip of the lake of the same name, flourished in the late 16th century as a centre of the Catholic counter-reformation. It gained eminence when Bishop—ultimately Saint—Francis de Sales, obliged to quit Calvinist Geneva, took refuge there in 1602. The old town around the cathedral remains dense and atmospheric, a maze of passages, arcades, and townhouses divided by canals and the River Thiou.

Lake Annecy has many moods. It takes on a different character depending on the point of view—and for me, there is none better than from the village of Talloires on its eastern side. The notoriously cranky Paul Cézanne, who spent several weeks here in 1896, paid it a backhanded compliment when he griped that it was all a bit too lovely for his taste. Yet he captured its loveliness to perfection in his ravishing, mysterious *Le Lac d'Annecy*, painted during that same visit. What I admire about the painting is the way it registers not only the physical beauty of the place but also its faintly unsettling quality—a consequence, I suppose, of its topography and orientation, the folds in the hillside, the contours of the waterline, and the resulting combination of dazzling light and deep shadows.

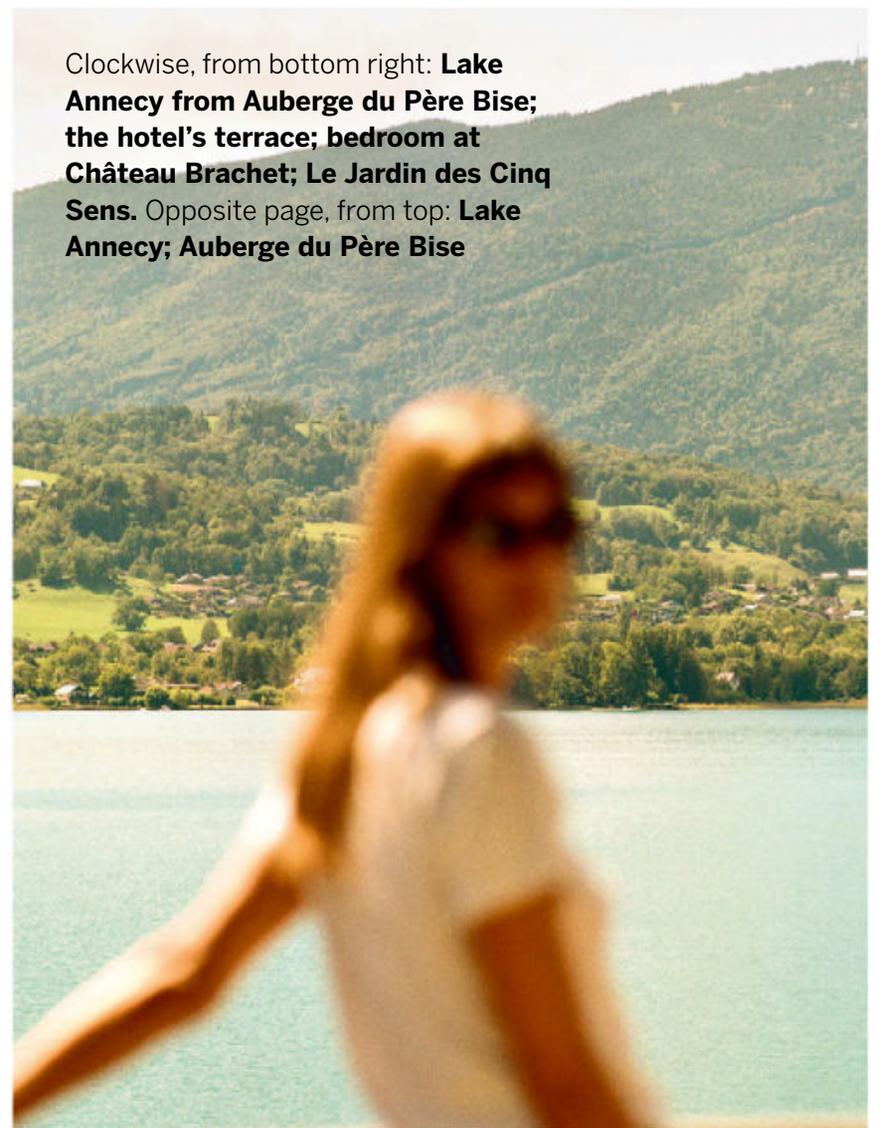
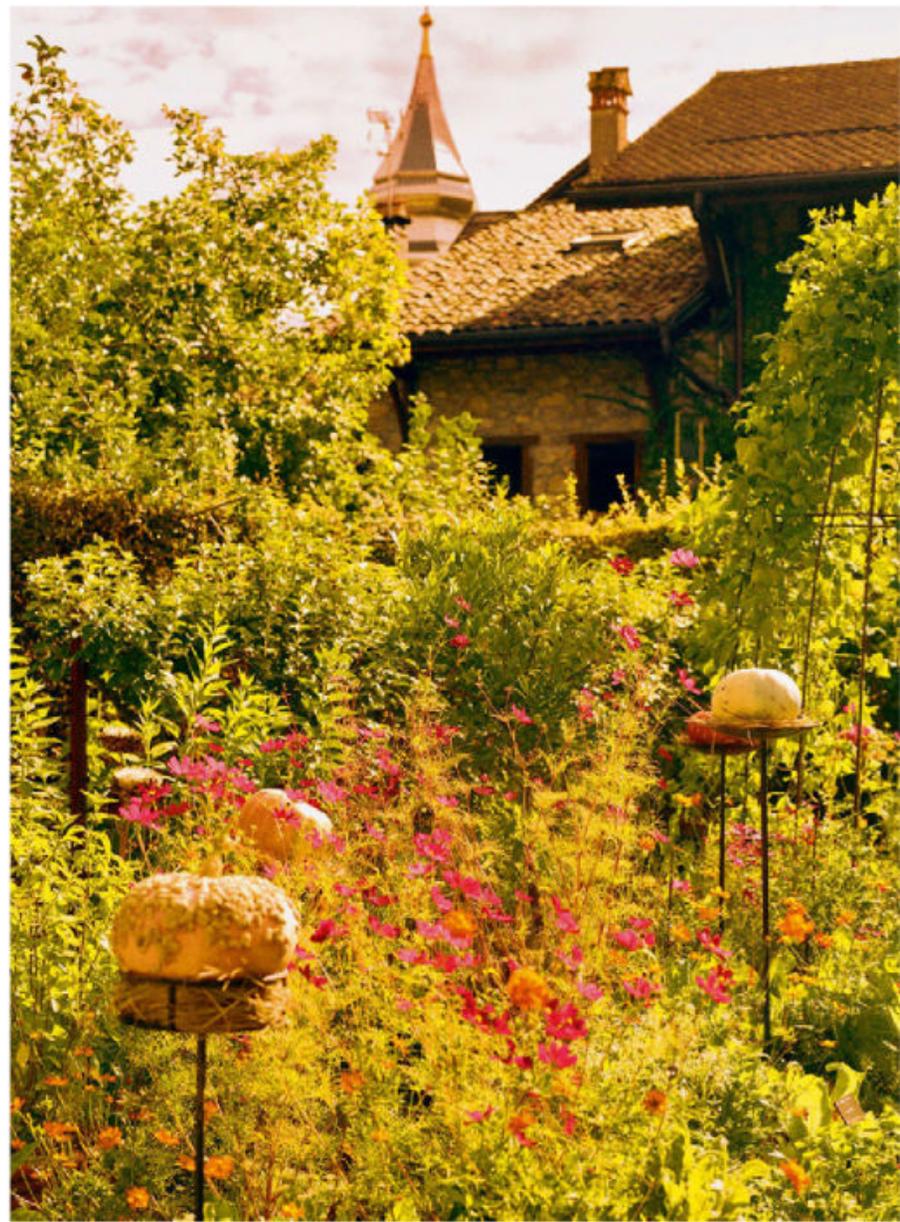
“A whiff of romance lingered. I sensed it the most on the water”

Onwards, on the same southwesterly trajectory from Annecy, to Aix-les-Bains on Lake Bourget. Aix is Evian on its uppers—Evian minus the Evian. Shabbily genteel, it has fallen drastically since its heyday, when Queen Victoria, Empress Sisi, and Dom Pedro II of Brazil mingled with the high rollers. The once-famous hotels have been converted into apartment buildings; the casino all but abandoned, its stained glass and mosaics outshone by gaudily flashing one-armed bandits.

And yet, a tantalising whiff of romance lingered. I sensed it most deliciously while on the water. A boat tour of Bourget is pretty much compulsory, if only for the view it affords of Hautecombe Abbey, a 900-year-old monastery on the western shore. Queen Victoria, incidentally, was so smitten by Lake Bourget, which reminded her of Loch Lomond, that she bought land overlooking it and, more surprisingly, “an exceedingly strong, handsome donkey”. She called him Jacquot and took him back to Buckingham Palace.

Chambéry, half an hour south of Aix, is Céline’s hometown; my expectations had naturally been raised sky-high in the days before we arrived. Though not on a lake, it is convenient to both Bourget and Aiguebelette. I was embarrassed to admit that I’d never been there and couldn’t really explain why not, since it’s so close to the places in the Alps I’ve visited many times. Chambéry was a great crossroads of western Europe, unavoidable if you wished to travel in this part of the





Clockwise, from bottom right: **Lake Anney from Auberge du Père Bise; the hotel's terrace; bedroom at Château Brachet; Le Jardin des Cinq Sens.** Opposite page, from top: **Lake Anney; Auberge du Père Bise**



continent — a fact we're apt to forget in an age when mountains pose no obstacle to free movement.

It was love at first sight. Chambéry had about it a youthful buzz that I didn't find elsewhere. Its proximity to Italy might account for its easygoing vibe, cool kids with ironic beards sipping drinks beneath fine Italianate arches. Although superseded as the Savoyard capital by Turin in 1562, Chambéry remained a crucial commercial and cultural hub. By the end of the Second World War, the historical heart of the city was so run-down that there was talk of razing it and starting over again. Wandering along those enchanted and now beautifully preserved streets, I found it difficult to imagine such desperation.

“Chambéry had a youthful buzz I didn't find elsewhere”

In a valley on Chambéry's edge is Les Charmettes, the house where philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau lived with his mentor and lover, Madame de Warens, from 1736 to 1742. It's an unpretentious two-storey stone building, dignified by a pagoda-like roof and tendrils of winter jasmine that curl around the window shutters. It has a formal garden with marvellous views of the Alps. Though their affair didn't end well, Rousseau never lost sight of de Warens' importance to him, intellectually and emotionally. He wrote of the years spent at Les Charmettes as the happiest of his life. Céline and I were the only visitors, accompanied by a guide who summed up the messy combination of sex, religion, and only partially compatible personalities that defined their relationship with sympathy and tact when she observed: “he was a terrible drama queen — but had a tragic childhood. She was une dévote — but no wallflower.” Knowing a little about them helps, but I couldn't help thinking that those who'd never heard of Rousseau or de Warens and came here on a whim, might become moved by those currents of deep feeling.

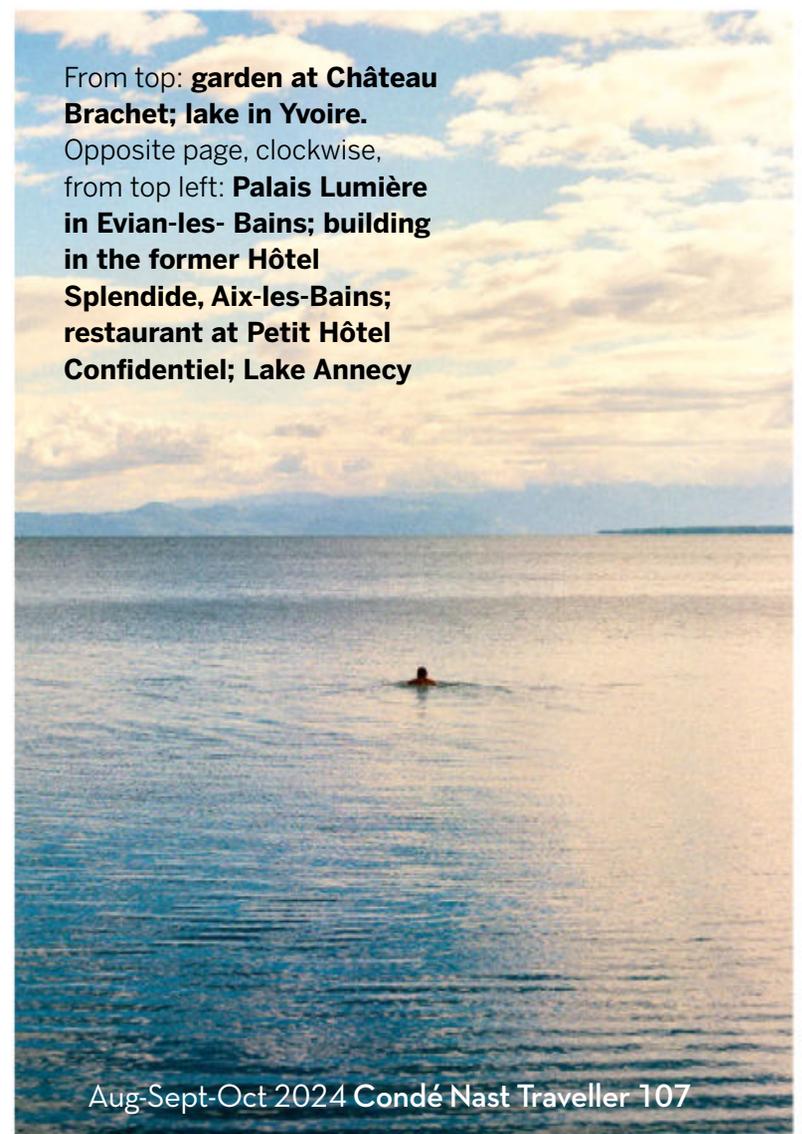
Aiguebelette, to the west, is the smallest of the four lakes. It's a neat isosceles triangle, fringed with reeds and walled in along its eastern shore by a ridge, the Chaîne de l'Épine, part of the Jura massif. It has none of the scale of Lake Geneva, the raffish glamour of Bourget, or the grandeur of Annecy. It's a more democratic sort of lake, popular with families and rowers, its shores dotted with weather-worn boathouses.

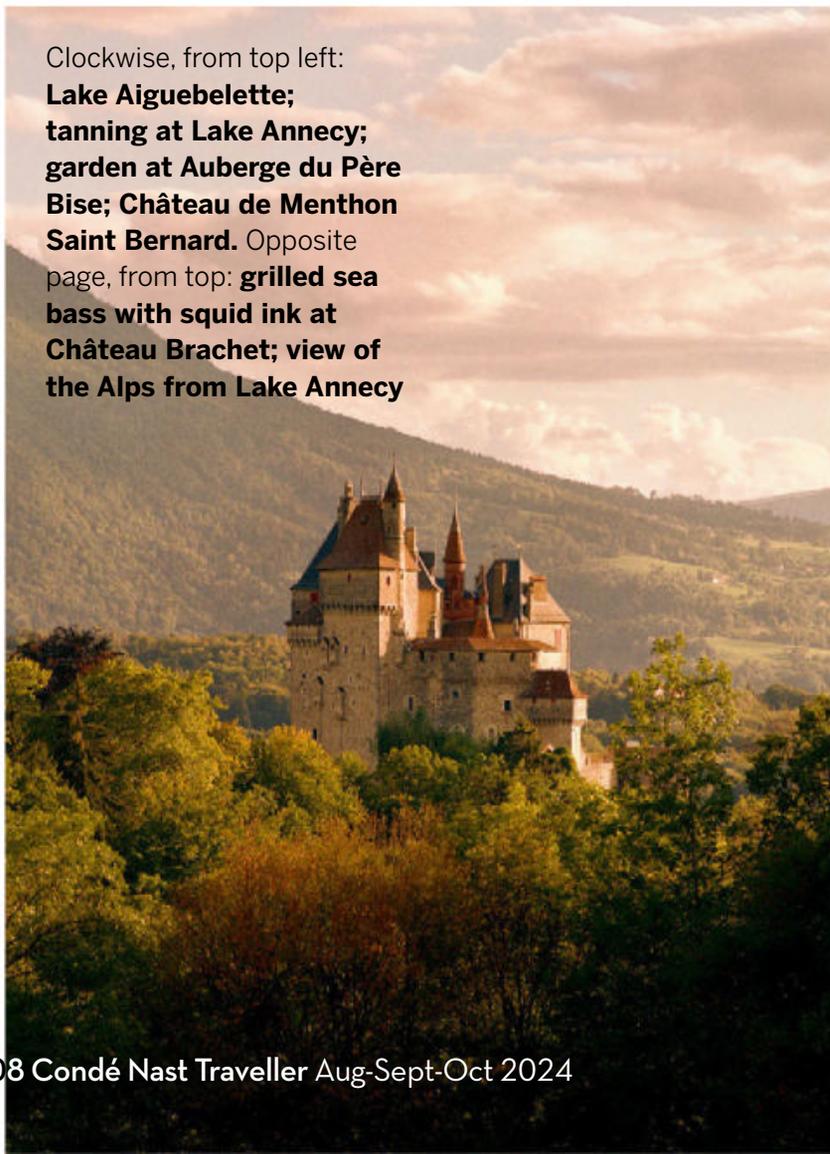
And yet, the image that lingers most vividly in my mind's eye is Aiguebelette, glimpsed from the car park of a modest hotel where Céline and I had lunch on my last afternoon in Savoy. The sky and the forested hillside mirrored in the emerald-bright surface of the water: one unimprovably beautiful image of nature superimposed upon another. In its still majesty, it was as representative of the splendour of the region as Mont Blanc itself. 📍



From top: **garden at Château Brachet; lake in Yvoire.**

Opposite page, clockwise, from top left: **Palais Lumière in Evian-les-Bains; building in the former Hôtel Splendide, Aix-les-Bains; restaurant at Petit Hôtel Confidentiel; Lake Annecy**





Clockwise, from top left:
Lake Aiguebelette;
tanning at Lake Annecy;
garden at Auberge du Père
Bise; Château de Menthon
Saint Bernard. Opposite
page, from top: **grilled sea**
bass with squid ink at
Château Brachet; view of
the Alps from Lake Annecy



Savoy Savoir-Faire

Where to Stay

Few grand hotels lord it over a town quite like the **Hôtel Royal**, located on 47 wooded acres directly above Evian-les-Bains. Seen from a distance, it resembles an old ocean liner. You can imagine it sliding down the hillside into Lake Geneva with a great whoosh and splash—cue wild cheers and the popping of Champagne corks before steaming off into the sunset. Doubles from ₹40,800; evianresort.com

A more modest alternative is **Villa Cécile** in the nearby village of Yvoire, a place of exceptional quaintness with one of the loveliest gardens not only in Savoy but in all of France: Le Jardin des Cinq Sens. Doubles from ₹20,200; villacecile.com

Talloires, on Lake Annecy, has not one but two world-famous hotels: former monastery Abbaye de Talloires and, diagonally across the street, Auberge du Père Bise, beloved of Brigitte Bardot and Jean-Paul Sartre. **Abbaye de Talloires**: Doubles from ₹40,400; abbaye-talloires.com. **Auberge du Père Bise**: Doubles from ₹46,800; perebise.com

Château Brachet, outside Aix-les-Bains, was the home of one of Aix's most influential belle époque figures. It's been impeccably converted into a small hotel of immense charm, with what must be the best croquet lawn in the region.

Doubles from ₹20,700; chateaubrachet.com

Contemporary minimalist boutique chic has arrived in the old town of Chambéry in the moody, monochromatic form of **Petit Hôtel Confidentiel**. Oddly enough, it fits right in.

Doubles from ₹29,700; petithotelconfidentiel.com

Where to Eat

On a warm afternoon in Evian-les-Bains, there is no more agreeable setting for lunch than the leafy courtyard of **La Verniaz**. Escargots, féra soufflée, a glass of something chilled. Marvellous. verniaz.com

Abbaye de Talloires and **Auberge du Père Bise** also have brilliant restaurants. Abbaye is old-school, its cellars magnificent. Yet Auberge has the edge, not so much for its two Michelin stars as for its unbuttoned elegance, its position on the water and the lightness of touch coming from proprietors Jean and Magali Sulpice, who previously ran the game-changing Restaurant Jean Sulpice at 7,545 feet in Val Thorens. abbaye-talloires.com; perebise.com

The most impressively experimental cooking I encountered on my trip was at **Folie** in Chambéry. Chef Shasitharan Manogaran applies his Malaysian sensibility—along with a great deal of papaya, ginger, and lemongrass—to Savoyard classics, with sensational results. restaurant-folie.com

Overlooking Lake Aiguebelette, **La Villa Ginette** became an instant favourite, thanks to the knockout view from its car park. Let the record show that the food, too, was excellent: a green salad, pan-fried perch, and a white Mondeuse.

villa-ginette.fr

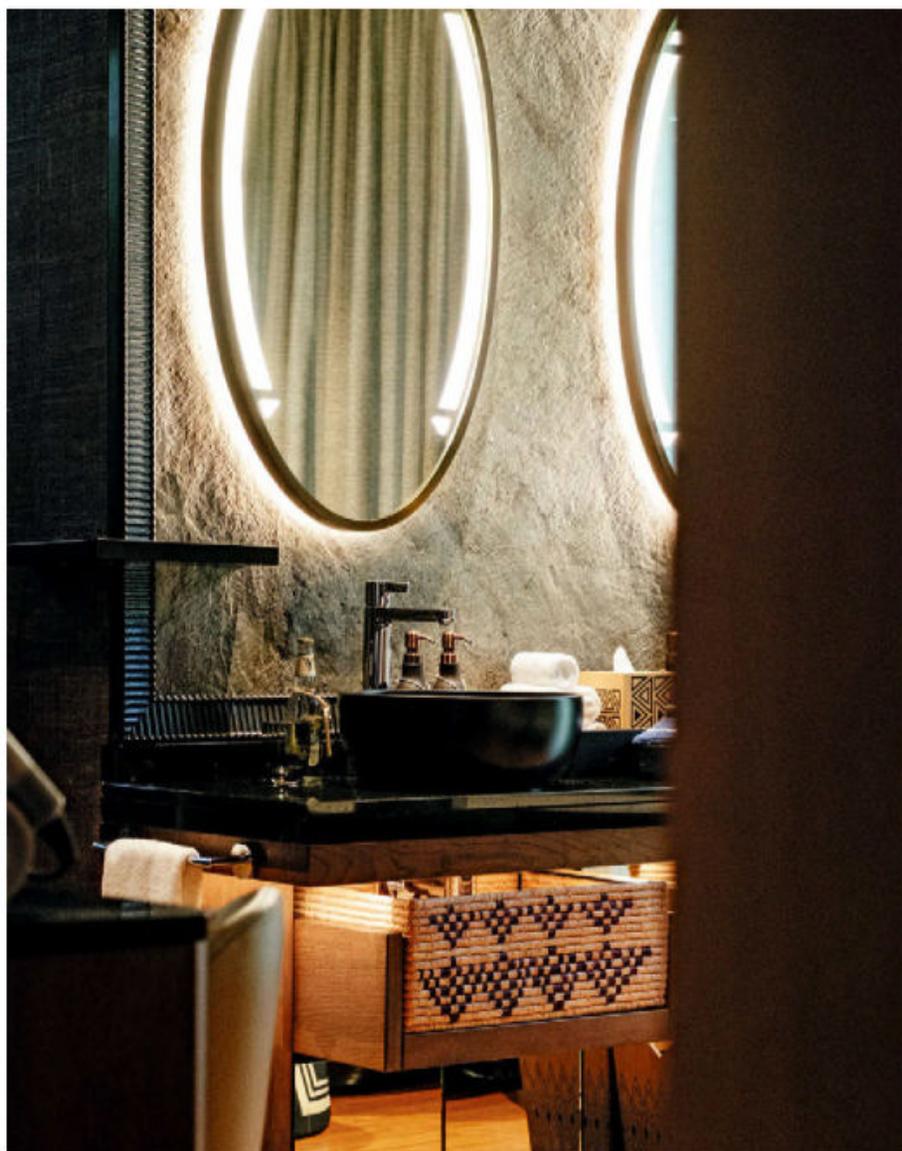






NATURAL ORDER

ACROSS RWANDA, COMMUNITIES ARE QUIETLY COMING TOGETHER TO RIGHT PAST WRONGS, ONE SAPLING AT A TIME. BY NOO SARO-WIWA. PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALEX BARLOW



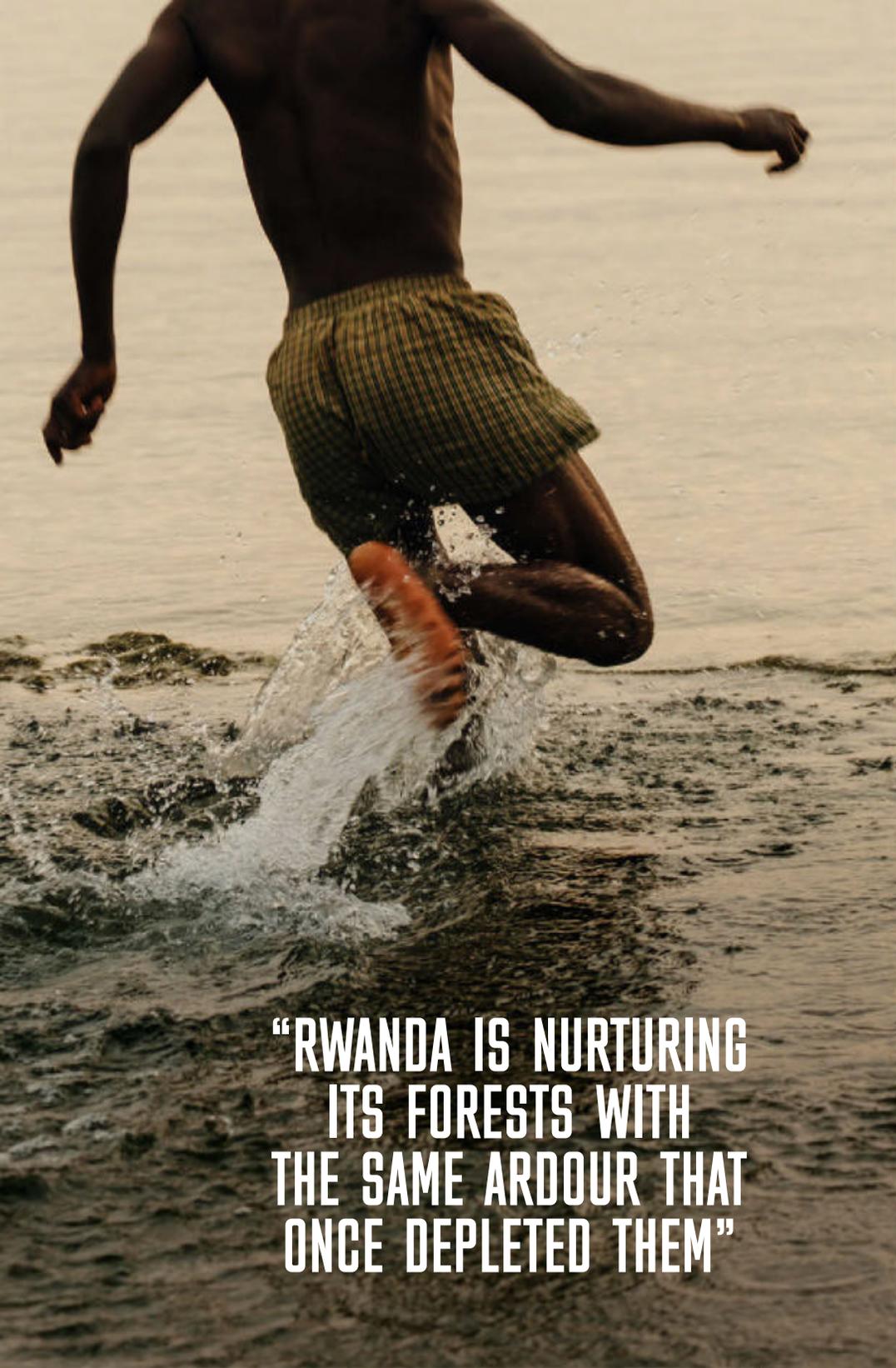
We are crouched among the towering hardwoods of the Nyungwe National Park forest in Rwanda's southwest. Orange butterflies ricochet between us and the plants. On a gentle incline, through a gap in the vegetation, we watch a baby chimp twirling from a branch while her mother lies supine beneath her, kissing her youngster's feet — a scene of silent tenderness. It's the payoff after an hour spent trying to keep up with their group, scrabbling through the forest slopes. The apes are now, finally, resting after their breakfast. Our guide recounts the time he witnessed a group of them celebrating the birth of a newborn between the tall buttress roots of a tree. "The males stood in a line and they took turns to hold the baby and kiss it," he smiles. The humanness of such behaviour, though, should come as no surprise: chimpanzee cultures are rich in variety and improvisation, just like humans. It's sewn up in our shared DNA.

We are observing one of two habituated groups among Nyungwe's 500-strong population. The national park is a conservation success story, going strong despite humanity's best efforts to reduce it. Hacked down for timber, honey collection, farming, and gold mining, the forest and its riches were plundered with abandon. Poachers picked off the last buffalo in 1974. Then came the Tutsi genocide of 1994, and the forest buckled under the strain of refugees seeking subsistence meals and wood for shelter. Since then, however, Rwanda has made a turnaround, guarding and nurturing its natural treasures with the same ardour that once depleted them, ensuring that Nyungwe remains Africa's largest protected montane forest.

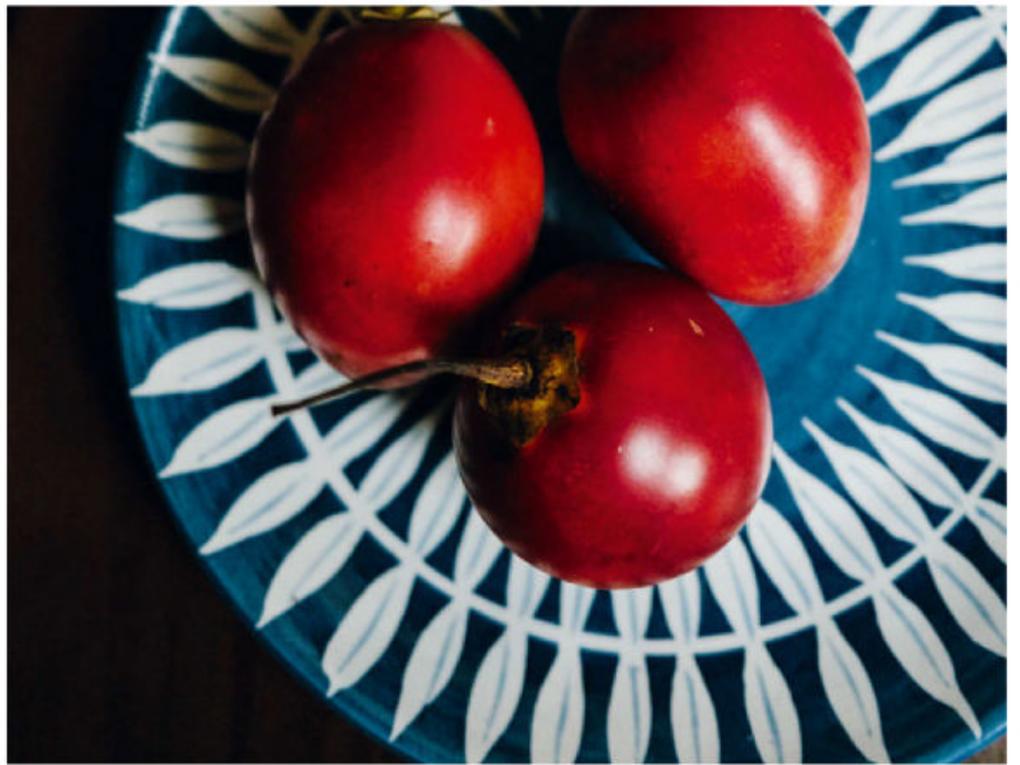
A Ross's turaco glides between trees overhead, its red wings made translucent by the sun's rays. Grey-cheeked mangabey monkeys rustle the foliage and create dancing spots of sunlight below. We encounter a large male chimp resting on his back beneath a tree, his left hand cradling the back of his head. His eyes settle on me with an incuriosity tinged with attitude. It's our less human-like cousins — olive baboons — who are more inquisitive. A family of them sit in the trees above our path and eyeball us unblinkingly as we head out of the forest.

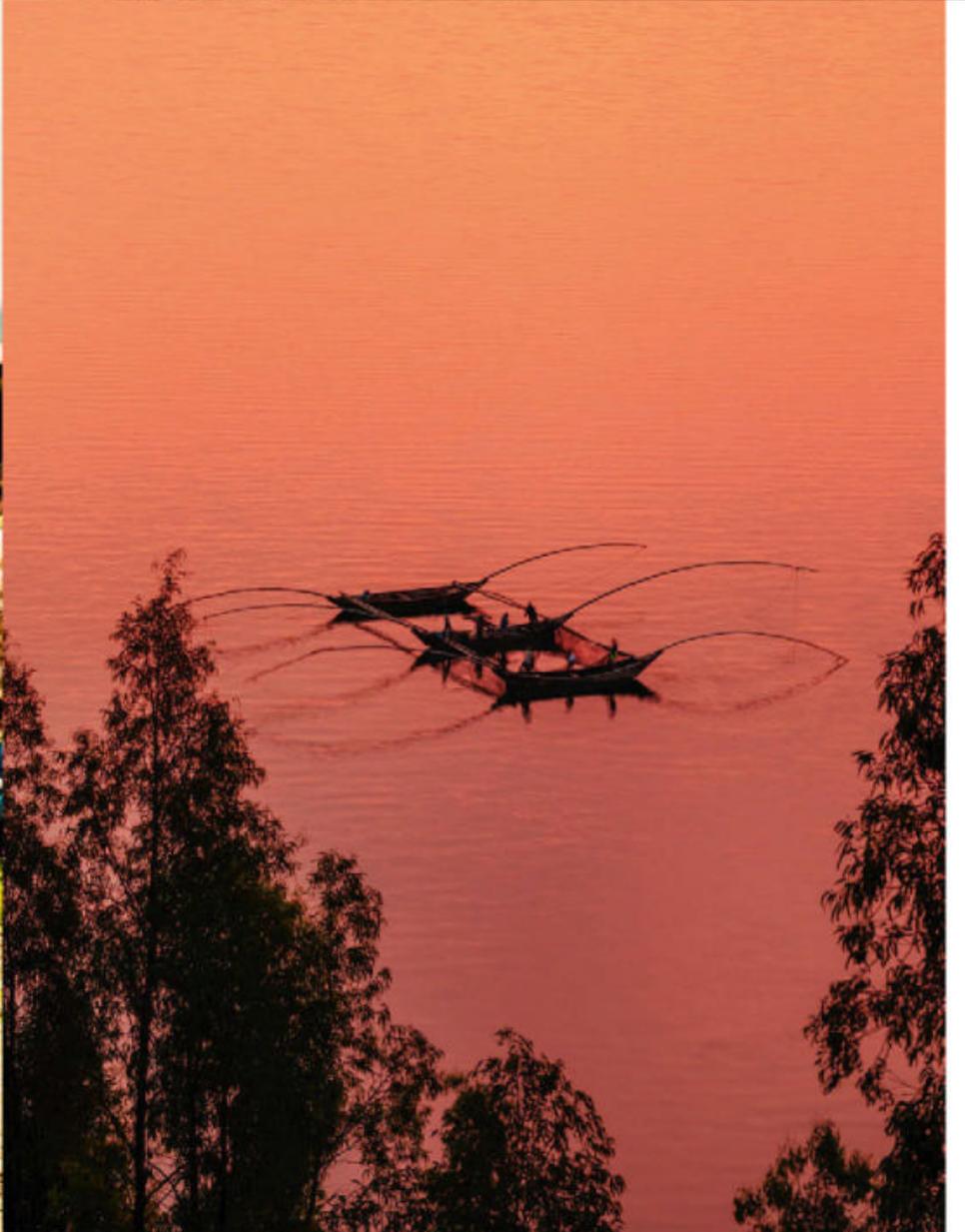
The road north of Nyungwe winds through countryside that undulates so frequently it makes Rwanda's Land of a Thousand Hills moniker sound like an undercount. There is a constant sense of being airborne, as if hot-air ballooning over lush slopes and the serrated fronds of banana trees. We stop to buy sugar cane on the roadside, but when I later try to fling the fibrous pulp out of the car window, my driver politely tells me to desist. Even if it's biodegradable, it's against the law, he says. Things are regulated tightly in Rwanda, from refuse management to social cohesion: on the roadside there are community gatherings, known as umuganda ("coming together to achieve an outcome"). Neighbours, no matter how fraught their past history, are obligated to convene and clean roads or plough fields together once a month. In this tiny country, compromise is a non-negotiable virtue: humans must live with one another and accommodate primates; agriculture must jostle with the wilderness for scarce space. Not easy, but it's an idea that is now

From top: **Nkombo Island; One&Only Gorilla's Nest.** Opposite page, clockwise, from top left: **Lake Kivu; tree tomatoes; Nyungwe National Park; chess set at One&Only Nyungwe House.** Opening pages, from left: **Rwandan dress; Colline Nyarugina village**



**“RWANDA IS NURTURING
ITS FORESTS WITH
THE SAME ARDOUR THAT
ONCE DEPLETED THEM”**





slowly being ingrained in the national character. “We like to be humble,” a fellow diner told me, back in Kigali. “We don’t like to boast, or for one person to stand out.”

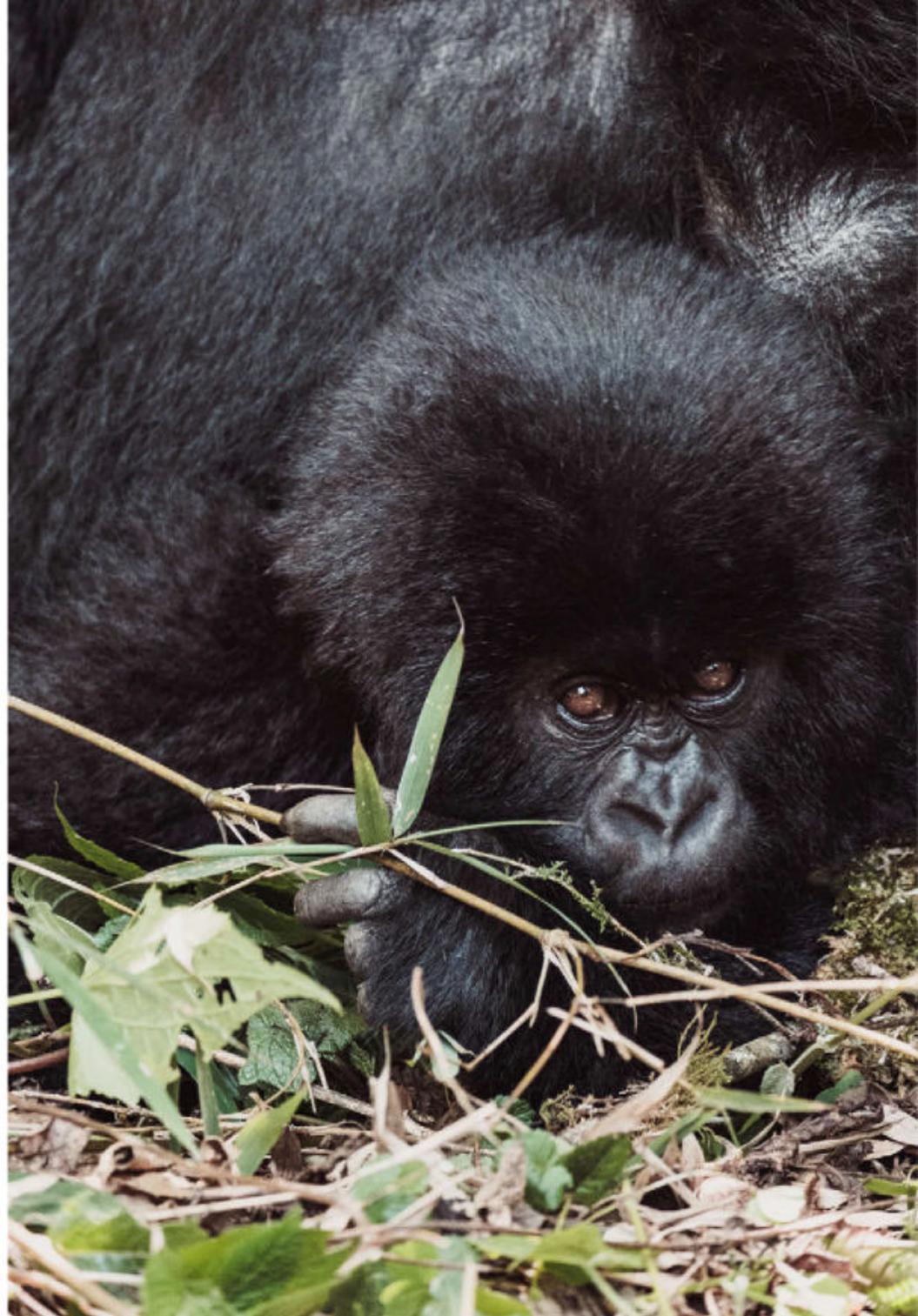
Rwanda is the “quiet man of Africa”, so much so that conversation between newly acquainted compatriots above a certain age can be oddly mute at times. The usual African icebreakers (“What’s your ethnicity?” “What of your parents?”) are sensitively sidestepped; personal histories buried beneath pain and conflict-averse silence. Fiery emotions are made to lie dormant, much like the volcanoes that dot the country’s northwest landscape. We see them rising from the horizon on our approach to the Wilderness Bisate eco lodge, a series of beautiful villas built on the hillside and shaped like oblong orbs with thatch-effect roofs. The sinuousness of their wicker-like balconies flows with nature rather than in geometric defiance of it, and they afford an up-close view of the surrounding flora and fauna. I find myself eye-level with a hagenia treetop that attracts yellow-bellied waxbills and Rwenzori double-collared sunbirds. And rising in the distance are the Bisoke, Karisimbi and Mikeno volcanoes, a lenticular cloud hovering over Karisimbi’s summit like a billowy UFO. Much of the land between it and the lodge may be converted to forest one day, as part of Bisate’s mission to restore pristine wilderness.

The valley resounds with noises of village life: children shouting playfully, cows mooing, ingoma drums pounding in unspecified celebration. I hear these sounds during a hike in the land surrounding the lodge, guided by Bisate’s agronomist, Jean-Moise Habimana, whose bionic eyes point out chameleons clinging to grasses and a jackal slinking among the bushes. We pass villagers standing waist-high in a sea of white pyrethrum flowers, a natural pesticide that’s harvested and sold. Plants such as these are not indigenous (introduced by Europeans in the 1930s), which is why Bisate is on a mission to return this area to its natural state. I, like all guests, am invited to plant a tree.

So far, Bisate has planted nearly 90,000 native specimens, including redwoods and lobelia, to replace the rampant eucalyptus, which hogs water at the expense of other vegetation. The newly reforested acres are already working their magic: golden monkeys, jackals, and elephants, among others, are back. Habimana shows me Bisate’s camera trap, fixed to a gate less than a mile from the lodge’s villas. Its lens has captured several cats, African buffalo, and bushbuck, he says. He whips out his phone to show us amazing footage of a hairy gorilla arm that fleetingly entered the frame one night. When reforestation is complete, these great apes could conceivably be glimpsed from guests’ balconies. But for now, by day at least, they stick to the main forest, where bamboo is abundant and humans are not.

We go searching for them in Volcanoes National Park the following morning. Our trek begins with a walk through bean and pyrethrum fields, past cute children who holler “Hello!”, and a porch where a man sculpts bas-reliefs on a wooden cane. After less than an hour of hacking through thickets of bamboo and thorny undergrowth, we encounter the Hirwa (“Lucky”) gorilla family lying in a shaded clearing and chewing bamboo. The light illuminates their faces and turns their brown eyes

From top: **gorilla in Volcanoes National Park; Nkombo Island.**
Opposite page, clockwise, from top left: **hiking sticks at Wilderness Bisate; One&Only Nyungwe House; view of Lake Kivu from Sextantio; Nkombo Island**





orange. We wonder what they're thinking about... it certainly isn't us: a female emerges from behind me and brushes past like I'm leaf-patterned wallpaper. Her proximity — a matter of inches — is momentarily terrifying but utterly exhilarating. A while later an adult male sitting 15 feet from me suddenly stands tall and beats his chest with his fists. I instinctively ball up in terror, but nothing comes of it. Gorillas are given to these sudden displays of dominance, says our guide, Fidele Nsengiyumva, who, literate to their emotions, never flinches. "They make 16 different sounds," he explains, including belches for contentment and whines for distress. Isango, a 136kg adult male, takes a long pee and then stamps his feet hard on the ground. The toddlers, meanwhile, are as unintentionally entertaining as their human counterparts. One of them holds a twig between his lips like a gangster, his hands resting on a branch slung horizontally over his shoulders.

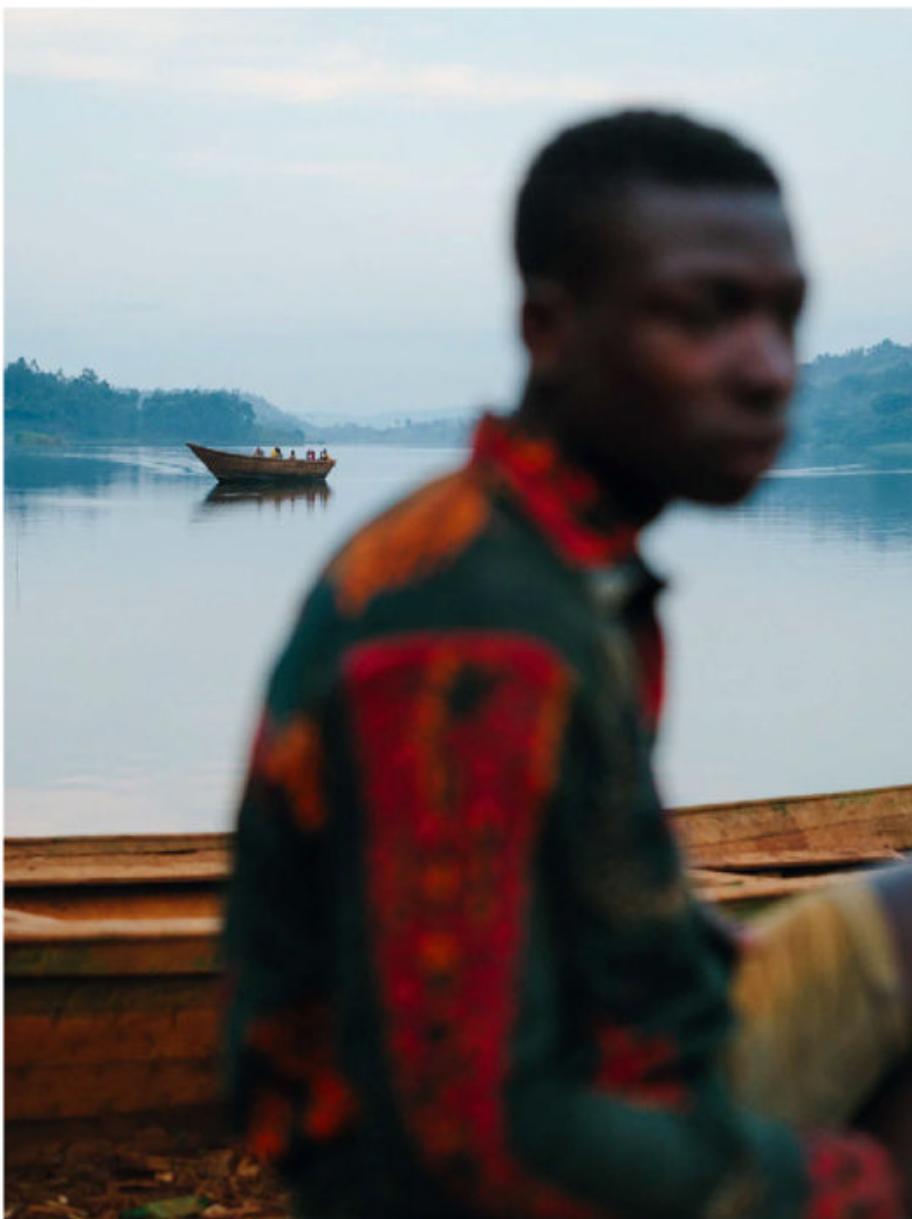
Attitudes towards these animals have changed. "Gorillas' hands were considered potent," a man tells me in the Gorilla Guardians Village, near Bisate lodge. "In the DRC, they stole the babies for export. You would see women in the markets carrying them on their backs like human babies." Former poachers now staff the village, showcasing elements of Rwandan culture, like Intore dancers with distinct lion-esque manes, arms outstretched to imitate Ankole cow horns. What might be a touristy spectacle is made entertainingly interactive when I'm invited to dress in robes and play bride in a mock wedding, selecting my groom before being wafted around on a sedan.

The next day, on the road out of Bisate, my driver waves hello to a bystander and tells us he's Francois Bigirimana, who worked with Dian Fossey, the American primatologist, to conserve the country's gorillas. We are on our way to Gishwati-Mukura National Park to see the work of regular Rwandans who are also working to restore their natural heritage. The once 250,000-acre Gishwati forest withered to its last 1,500 acres in 2001 when Thierry Inzirayineza and two friends created the Forest of Hope Association (FHA) to conserve what remained. "In the beginning we sold our cars to raise the money," Inzirayineza tells me. Government funding followed and, in 2015, Gishwati and its sister park, Mukura, were granted national park status. The FHA has built a new guest house with just two en-suite rooms, because "we want to keep tourism low volume," Inziravineza explains. As a result, visitors have the entire forest to themselves.

At dawn, I watch the mist move across the canopy like restless gossamer, backlit by a rising, peach-glow sun — witnessing this spectacle from the lawn outside my room. After breakfast, we roam our personal paradise, among Jurassic-sized ferns and symphonia hardwoods. Then we cool off beneath a waterfall that spills into a river swarming with butterflies. The chimp population, which has more than doubled to 35, eludes us today, but our interaction with the golden monkey youngsters is so prolonged and intimate it more than makes up for it.

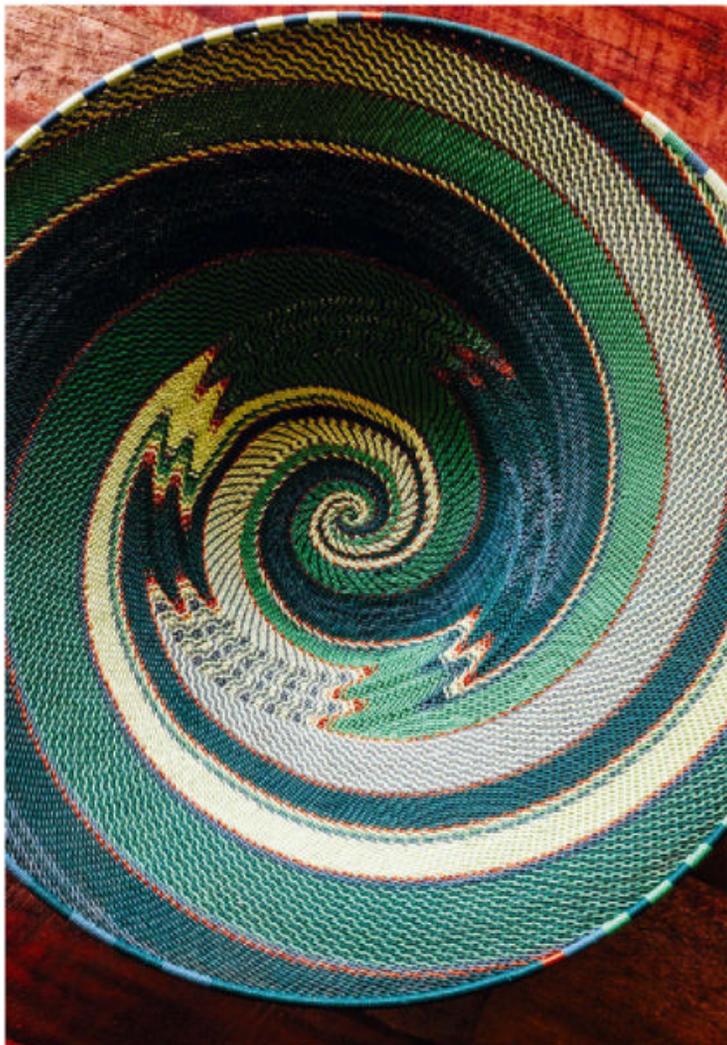
Hours later, we emerge from the forest, passing through emerald hills. Though these pastures have a green appeal to them, their baldness offers a sobering clarity over what's been

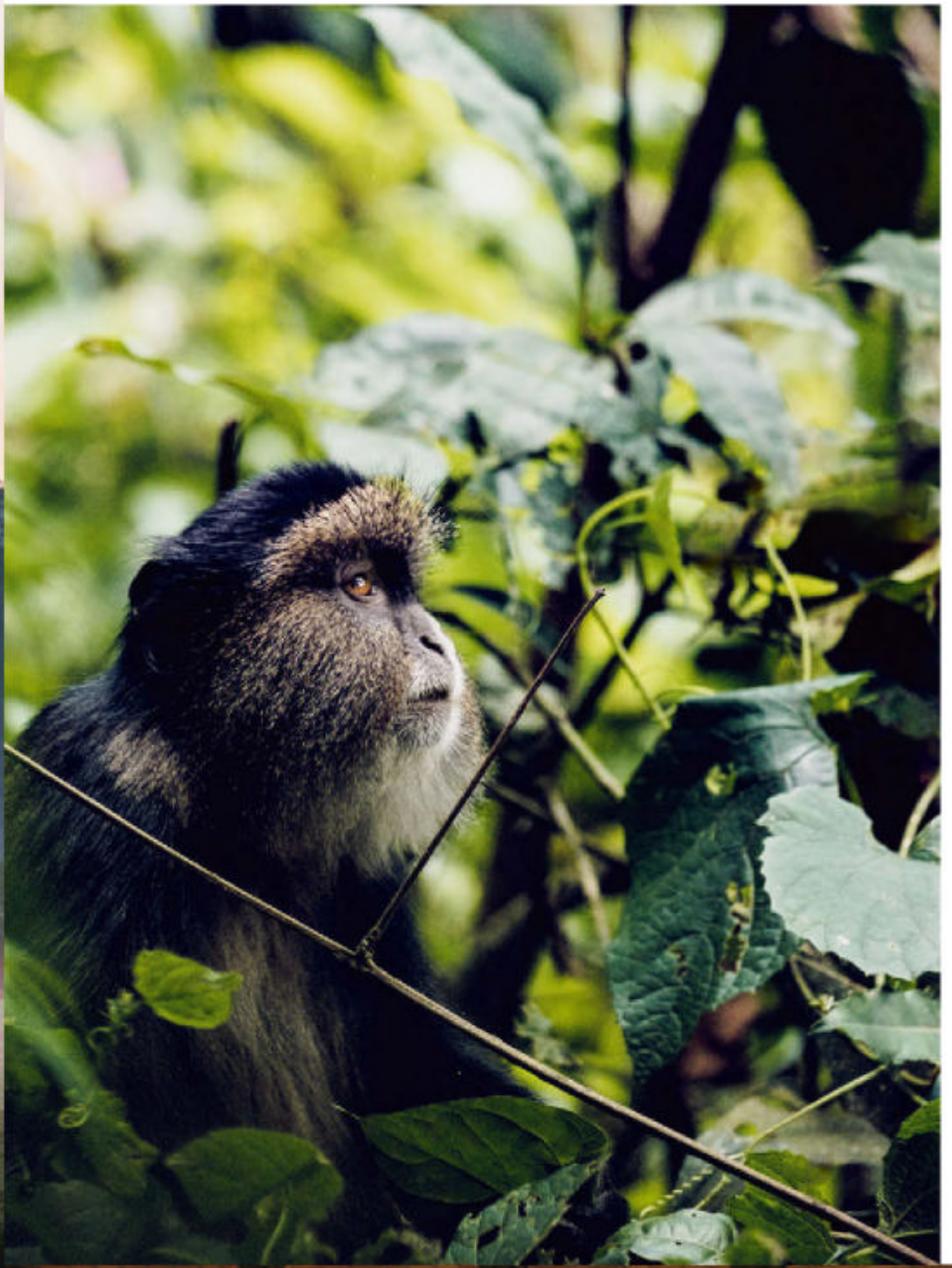
From top: **girl at Nkombo Island market; water taxi on Nkombo Island.** Opposite page, clockwise, from top left: **fishing boats on Lake Kivu; sunbird at Sextantio; Nkombo Island market; woven bowl at Wilderness Bisate**





**“FORMER POACHERS NOW
STAFF THE GORILLA GUARDIANS
VILLAGE, WHERE THEY
SHOWCASE RWANDAN CULTURE”**





lost. But Rwandans are on the case: with 37 per cent of territory earmarked for environmental conservation, areas such as Volcanoes National Park are being expanded by almost a quarter. This is a country on a mission to manage its destiny. Having once stared into the abyss, it is now looking upwards and onwards. I think about the photographs in the Genocide Memorial in Kigali, of the many faces of the fallen, and I can see that those who buried them had actually, unwittingly, sowed seeds. With every newborn gorilla or hardwood sapling, Rwanda demonstrates humanity's capacity for renewal. 🌱

From top: **One&Only Nyungwe House; schoolchildren on Nkombo Island.** Opposite page, clockwise, from top left: **morning at One&Only Nyungwe House; golden monkey; Wilderness Bisate; fruits at Sextantio**

WHERE TO GO

ELLEN DEGENERES CAMPUS, KINIG

Initially funded by the US comedian, the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund's home near Volcanoes National Park mixes research with fun, serving up interactive displays, Fossey memorabilia, and a terrace facing the volcanoes. gorillafund.org

ONE&ONLY NYUNGWE HOUSE AND GORILLA'S NEST

On the outskirts of Nyungwe National Park, One&Only Nyungwe House is pitched among tea plantations. At sister hotel, One&Only Gorilla's Nest, near Volcanoes National Park, wooden lodges look out onto eucalyptus groves. **One&Only Nyungwe House:** doubles from ₹1,90,300; **Gorilla's Nest:** doubles from ₹3,63,200; oneandonlyresorts.com

THE RETREAT, KIGALI

Husband-and-wife owners Alissa and Josh Ruxin have extended their boutique hotel, building eight secluded, Italian-designed villas, each with a private plunge pool, on a hill overlooking Kigali. *Doubles from about ₹43,300;* heavenwanda.com

WILDERNESS BISATE, VOLCANOES NATIONAL PARK

Six stunning cliffside villas offer views of the volcanoes at Bisate. For those needing to kill time before night flights, the new Wilderness Bisate Rwanda has day rooms with showers and impressive views of the vegetable garden and volcanoes. *Villas from ₹3,87,900;* wildernessdestinations.com

SEXTANTIO RWANDA, LAKE KIVU

On Lake Kivu, Sextantio Rwanda offers low-impact tourism with two traditional huts on a hilltop on Nkombo Island. Guests can live the rustic life (albeit with Wi-Fi and other modcons), eating isambaza fish around campfires. *Huts from ₹65,000 or discretionary donation;* sextantiorwanda.com

FOREST OF HOPE, GISHWATI

This NGO-run guesthouse has two en-suite bedrooms, a campsite with forest views, and offers chimpanzee treks. *Guesthouse from ₹17,300; camping from ₹1,770;* fharwanda.org



CONTEST

WHERE ARE YOU?

Built atop a hill, with work starting in the 13th century, this Unesco World Heritage Site looks out over a city that's been around since the medieval era. Here, nature interplays greatly with the design, be it the abutting park full of English elms brought over by a warring Duke, or an inner courtyard featuring a reflecting pool surrounded by myrtles. Marble is also a prominent feature of the structure, from long colonnades to sculptures of lions. This expansive historical attraction is steeped in legend, one being that one of its halls is named after massacred guests. Multiple armies from multiple continents have warred over these walls, resulting in a mesmerising mix of architectural styles. Where are you? **JULIAN MANNING**

For details on how to participate in the contest, see following page

PHOTOGRAPH: TINKER STREET/ON A HAZY MORNING/GALLERY STOCK

ON THE GO

Our pick of the most stylish finds and travel-related news

A VERDANT ESCAPE

JW Marriott Goa, a nature-inspired retreat nestled beside the Chapora River, emerges as the ultimate getaway this season. Marking its first anniversary, the resort has garnered notable acclaim. Marriott Bonvoy has also introduced the 'Resort Escapes by JW Marriott Goa' promotion, that offers travellers exclusive benefits as the holiday season approaches. This program allows exploration of 45 stunning South Asian resorts, each promising exceptional value and unforgettable experiences. Enjoy exclusive discounts and hotel credits, enhancing your stay with unparalleled luxury.

For more information, visit www.marriottbonvoy.com



MODERN POETIC GEMS

Discover Suuraj Popley, where modern global aesthetics meet rich Indian savoir-faire. Led by Suuraj Popley, a GIA-certified designer, the brand creates jewellery that defies gravity and embraces artistry and surrealism. Each piece transforms nature's hidden poetry into tangible beauty, merging free-flowing elegance with intricate charm. Located on the first floor of the Popley Eternal building, this collection is a true artistic journey, connecting with today's modern women through timeless, exquisite jewels.

For more information, follow [@suurajpopley](https://www.instagram.com/suurajpopley) on Instagram





WIN A THREE-NIGHT STAY AT JETWING SAFARI CAMP, YALA

You know you're holidaying right when chirping birds and trumpeting elephants replace your morning alarm. At Jetwing Safari Camp, hugging the wildlife-rich Yala National Park in southeast Sri Lanka, those sounds become the background score of your vacation. Ensnared within 38 acres of coastal wilderness, the camp offers 10 spacious jungle cabins, each with an outdoor shower; rustic wooden furnishing; and a breezy terrace to be in the company of wildlife that sometimes saunter into the camp's grounds—all with a personal butler at your service. Take in Yala's wild beauty while sipping a cocktail at the rooftop

bar or relish freshly cooked Sri Lankan delicacies under a starry sky, the camp's signature dining experience. Don't miss the game drives to the park to greet your neighbours—leopards, elephants, sloth bears, and more—up close. To win a stay at Jetwing Safari Camp, Yala, all you have to do is correctly identify the location of this issue's **Where are you?** competition before **31 August, 2024**. The prize includes a three-night stay for two in a cabin and is valid from **1 July, 2024**, to **1 July, 2025**, subject to availability. The prize is nontransferable and cannot be redeemed for cash. The winner will be informed personally by phone or email.



WINNER: MAY-JUN-JUL '24

The winner of the May-June-July issue's **Where are you?** competition is **Upasya Bhowal** for correctly identifying the picture above as that of the Abraham Lake in Alberta, Canada. They win a three-night stay at The Kumaon, Kasar Devi, Uttarakhand.

COMPETITION RULES*

1. *Condé Nast Traveller's* Where Are You? competition ("**Competition**") is organized by Conde Nast (India) Private Limited ("**CNI**"). By participating in the competition, the participant ("**you/applicant**") agrees to be bound by the Terms and Conditions ("**T&Cs**") as they appear on cntraveller.in/story/where-are-you/ and agrees that the same shall be binding upon you unconditionally.
2. Entries for the Competition can be sent on a postcard, by email, or online with the Applicant's full name, address, and telephone number, and it must correctly identify the place described according to T&Cs.
3. Entries by post should be sent to: **Where Are You? competition, Condé Nast Traveller, Unit Nos. 3A & 4, 20th Floor, One Lodha Place, Senapati Bapat Marg, Lower Parel, Mumbai - 400013, Maharashtra, India.**
4. Email entries should be sent to contactcnt@condenast.in; entries can also be made online at cntraveller.in.
5. The entries for the Competition must arrive no later than 31 August, 2024, and the date may be extended at CNI's sole discretion. Winners will be

intimated by email, post, or over the telephone, wherever possible.

6. The entries must be in English and complete in all respects. Incomplete entries will not be considered for a prize. Entries by text message are not eligible.
7. Winners will be judged at the discretion of CNI. The decision of the judges will be final and binding. No correspondence will be entertained. Only one correct answer will be registered per entrant per issue.
8. Prizes will not be transferred or exchanged for cash or any other item. No refunds or credits for changes or cancellations are allowed. All other expenses and costs, which are not specified as being included in the prize, are the sole responsibility of the winner. All prizes must be redeemed prior to the expiry date. Taxes if any on the prize are the sole responsibility of the winner.
9. CNI reserves the right to amend the T&Cs without prior notice to the applicant.

Full terms & conditions on cntraveller.in/story/where-are-you/



ROOM WITH A VIEW

Soori Bali, **Indonesia**

Seafoam seethes along the black sand shore that stands between Soori Bali and the sprawling Indian Ocean beyond. Set along Indonesia's southwestern coast, the 48 private pool villas peer out to rice terraces and spice gardens, the silhouettes of volcanoes standing out in the distance. The local materials and traditions that enwreath the property are fused into its building blocks. Cooling grey sandstone walls, Pejaten flower-patterned terracotta work in the spa, and volcanic stone accents in the villas all hark back to the natural, scenic wonders of the Tabanan region. **JULIAN MANNING** (*Doubles from ₹1,11,000; sooribali.com*)

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PHOTO: ERRIKOS ANDREOU/CONDÉ NAST TRAVELLER INDIA

THE LAST WORD IN TRAVEL



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INDIAN EDITION

Destination Wedding Guide

100+ INSIDER TIPS
ON PLANNING IT PERFECTLY
FROM **MANISH MALHOTRA,**
RHEA KAPOOR,
VANDANA MOHAN,
DOLLY JAIN, AND
OTHER EXPERTS



CONTENTS

06 THE ULTIMATE INSIDERS' GUIDE TO A DESTINATION WEDDING

From a wedding filmer's divine destination proposal, a Gen-Z content creator on how to have fun on your big day to Manish Malhotra's insights on the stunning Ambani pre-wedding gala's planning—the hottest tips from experts across the industry for your dream destination wedding

20 LOVE BY DESIGN

India's leading wedding planner Vedika Mohan and Omair Warsi's nuptials in Suryagarh, Jaisalmer, were all romance, no rituals

24 WILD AT HEART

Australian couple Jackson and Lauren England tied the knot with a safari at SUJÁN Sher Bagh in Ranthambore

Mustafa Kothawala
and Aisha Motan's
wedding in Turkey

CONTENTS



28 ETERNAL SUNSHINE

Camille Balgobin and Tabitha Balgobin's wedding in Cancun, Mexico, doubled as a holiday for their guests

32 WHERE TO WED IN INDIA

From Rajasthan's palace forts to Kerala's tranquil resorts—hotels across the country perfect for your dream destination wedding

42 PAST PERFECT

Akshaya Sivakumar and Ashwin Chari's Bengaluru wedding put a new spin on their shared Tamil culture and heritage

46 GRAND ROMANCE

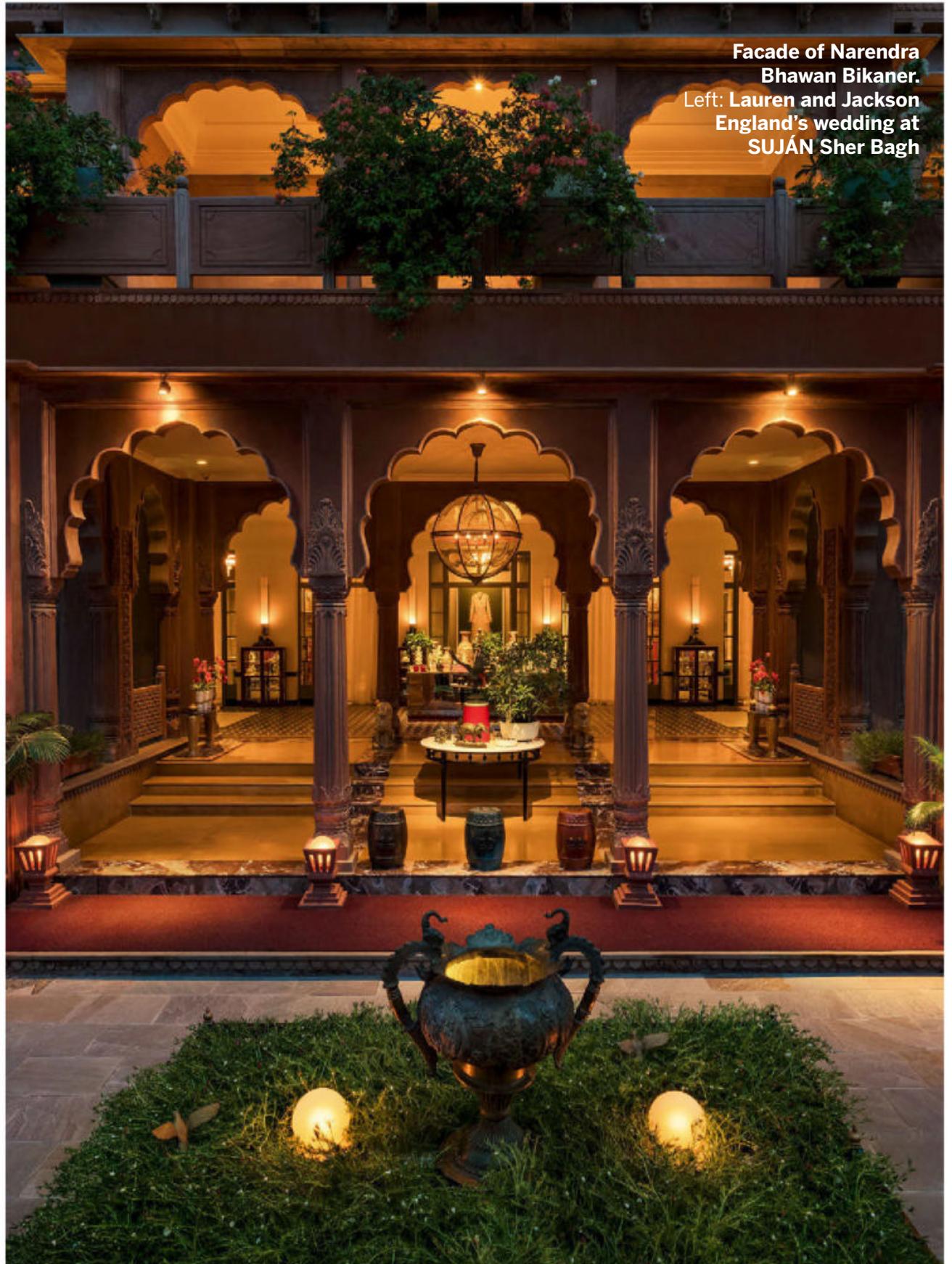
Umar and Nada Kamani's French Riviera union was a multicultural extravaganza attended by the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo and Naomi Campbell

50 AMAZING HONEYMOON HOTELS

Private island villas in the Maldives to mansions on the Amalfi Coast, a look at gorgeous hotels across the world

56 WOWED BY ISTANBUL

Mustafa Kothawala and Aisha Motan organised their nuptials at several historic hotels in their favourite Turkish city



60 AWAY WE GO

Joanna Nathan and Matthew Kuhn turned their Thailand wedding into a weeklong getaway for guests

65 BLACK BOOK

Your guide to the wedding experts featured in this book, and beyond

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“Perhaps the greatest lesson we can learn from the greatest in the wedding space is that this moment is truly yours to create in a way that feels right for you”

Now that the wedding of the century is behind us, it's worth stepping back and thinking about how your wedding—or a celebration of any kind of milestone, really—can be a true reflection of not only your style and personality but also your values and your spirit. This year's Destination Wedding Guide is full of insider tips and advice from the very best in the business, the people who do this day in and day out, and their insights are not only incredibly useful but also thought provoking. I love that ace wedding filmmaker Vishal Punjabi admitted that for his own proposal to his girlfriend Nikita, he opted to take no professional photos. Instead, they took selfies! Vedika Mohan, creative director of The Wedding Design Company, which has planned more lavish nuptials than the Ambanis had wedding functions, decided against having any religious ceremonies but embraced a four-hour-long baaraat. Sakshi Sindwani's reception featured a Drag Queen Glam Pyjama Night theme. And Rhea Kapoor, who styled this year's most talked-about bride, Radhika Merchant in a one-of-a-kind Abu Jani Sandeep Khosla lehenga handpainted by artist Jayasri Burman, has these words of advice: 'Do not obsess about looking perfect, or worry about what others think you should look like. Getting married is a happy time. The biggest gift I gave myself at my own wedding was taking the pressure off.' Perhaps the greatest lesson we can learn from the greatest in the wedding space is that this moment is truly yours to create in a way that feels right for you. So read through all these amazing expert tips in the pages ahead—and then feel free to disregard them all. Have a happy wedding! 🎉

Divia Thani
Global Editorial Director,
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Insider Secrets to A FABULOUS DESTINATION WEDDING

From personal stories to the biggest trends of 2024, influential names in the wedding world share their best and priceless wisdom
By Jasreen Mayal Khanna

I got married almost 13 years ago and it was a simpler time. Today, tying the knot involves so many decisions that the sheer plethora of choices for every detail from wedding themes and décor to outfits and makeup can leave brides and grooms confused. I'm glad I didn't have to create wardrobe moodboards for each event or search the world for new and immersive entertainment options or even hire social media managers. But times have evolved and so must we.

When I look back at my wedding, one emotion prevails: all the love I felt from my family and close friends. The experts are also unequivocal: focus on what's important—how you feel on your

big day. Another consensus: it's more fun to break the rules. So why not choose nuptials that buck tradition, throw a cruise ship party, or have a buffet counter for 'ugly delicious' food?

For this year's wedding trend report, we turned our focus to the ultimate insiders. What did a superstar wedding planner do when she walked down the aisle? How did an influencer bring Gen-Z vibes to her wedding? What does it take to pull off the country's grandest pre-wedding gala? To top it off, all the hottest trends, great advice and insights from these famous tastemakers have been packed into succinct, easy-to-remember tips. Is your vision board ready?



HERE COMES THE BRIDE, VEDIKA MOHAN

The Wedding Company's Creative Director on her unconventional ceremony

As a wedding planner, I turn others' dreams into reality. But when I became a bride, it unleashed my experimental spirit. My attachment to every detail sometimes made decision-making tricky.

In the end, our wedding celebrated our unique bond without traditional constraints. We skipped religious rituals and made unusual choices: tying kaleeras but not wearing chooda, a four-hour baraat minus pheras or nikaah. There were personal touches—handwritten vows, illustrations of our dogs on napkins, a word search game. The moment I cherish the most was exchanging vows in Jaisalmer. I walked down the aisle with my dad and brother to our favourite song, 'Chaap Tilak', by Jeffrey Iqbal. Omair and I were misty-eyed. It was truly the wedding of my dreams.

VISHAL PUNJABI'S THRILLING PROPOSAL IN KEDARNATH

The Wedding Filmer's founder used divine inspiration to pop the question

What's your love story?

I first met Nikki a few years ago while filming her sister's wedding in London and it felt like a scene from a Bollywood film. The next thing I knew, I was feeding her parathas with shakkar pare because her hands were adorned with mehendi. After the wedding, Nikki flew to India to see my world. From that point, there was no turning back.

Why Kedarnath instead of the Maldives or Gstaad?

I've always been fascinated by Shiva and Nikki is his devotee. I discovered the Triyuginarayan temple near Kedarnath, the site where Shiva and Parvati were married. And I knew it was the perfect place for our proposal. The mountains, the helicopter ride, the unpredictable weather, and the dramatic pooja were all fitting and meaningful to us.

How did you plan the logistics and still keep it a surprise?

My friends connected me to a local production contact in Uttarakhand. I flew to Delhi to meet Nikki's parents to ask for her hand in marriage but told her that I was on a local shoot and would be late. I made it back just in time before she got suspicious. My frequent and lengthy phone calls almost made her think I was having an affair!

Any funny moments?

Our helicopter couldn't take off due to bad weather after we landed at Triyuginarayan, so we had to spend the night in a shady motel in the middle of nowhere named Honeymoon Nights.

How did you personalise it?

Inside the ring, I inscribed the Om Namah Shivaya mantra. The diamond, held by four trishuls, was shaped like Shiva's eye. I also embedded the birthstones of her two sisters since they were key to bringing us together.

TIPS

CRAFTING A MEMORABLE PROPOSAL

1 Pick a spot based on your partner's preferences. Are they a beach or mountain person, or are they comfortable with a public declaration of love?

2 Plan your logistics ahead of time and stick to your budget because it's easy to get carried away. Make sure you have necessary permissions.

3 We opted not to have any professional photos taken at Kedarnath. Instead, we relied on a 360-degree camera and selfies. I arranged a proper photo shoot for Nikki later.

4 Think of an idea or a personal touch that ties it all together. Choose a location or experience that is meaningful to both of you. A treasure hunt or a romantic dinner? Customise the ring.

5 Try to include friends and family. I have seen some grooms get the family involved while they pop the question. Some even create flash mobs for fun.

TIPS

THE EXPERT'S WEDDING PLAN

1 Consider a combined baraat for both the bride and the groom's side.

Couples are now doing this or having separate baraats for both brides and grooms.

2 Explore non-traditional venues like art galleries, museums, libraries, and even private chateaus.

3 Always check if your venue has accessibility for the elderly or differently abled guests.

4 Have a backup plan for unseasonal showers or freezing temperatures.

5 Keep proximity and transportation logistics in mind as you plan the flow of events.



SAILING INTO THE SUNSET

Varun Chadha of TIRUN Travels, which reps Royal Caribbean, on the appeal of cruise weddings

“It’s about time Indian weddings woke up to the magic of cruise ships. You get a seamless experience with all your guests within shouting distance of each other. You get world-class food, entertainment, and exotic locales at one upfront cost. It’s great for the hosts because it is easily managed and for the guests as they get to visit multiple places in one journey.”

TIPS

HOW TO STEER YOUR CRUISE PARTY PLANNING

1 Advance notice Cruises fill up way ahead of time and visas can take long too. I’d recommend a Singapore cruise for accessibility. Else, the Mediterranean is really hot right now. We’re also seeing interest in Istanbul and Athens.

2 Get creative Cruise ship venues can be easily transformed for Indian weddings. The theatres are for family dance performances, skating rinks become sangeet venues, and the baraat goes down the ship’s promenade.

3 Be flexible One has to be flexible with timings to make the best of your cruise party. Work with the schedule of the ship and don’t demand a seven-course meal at 3am or that a pool buffet be served for eight hours straight.



HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

Event planner Aditya Motwane on the hottest Indian spots to get married in

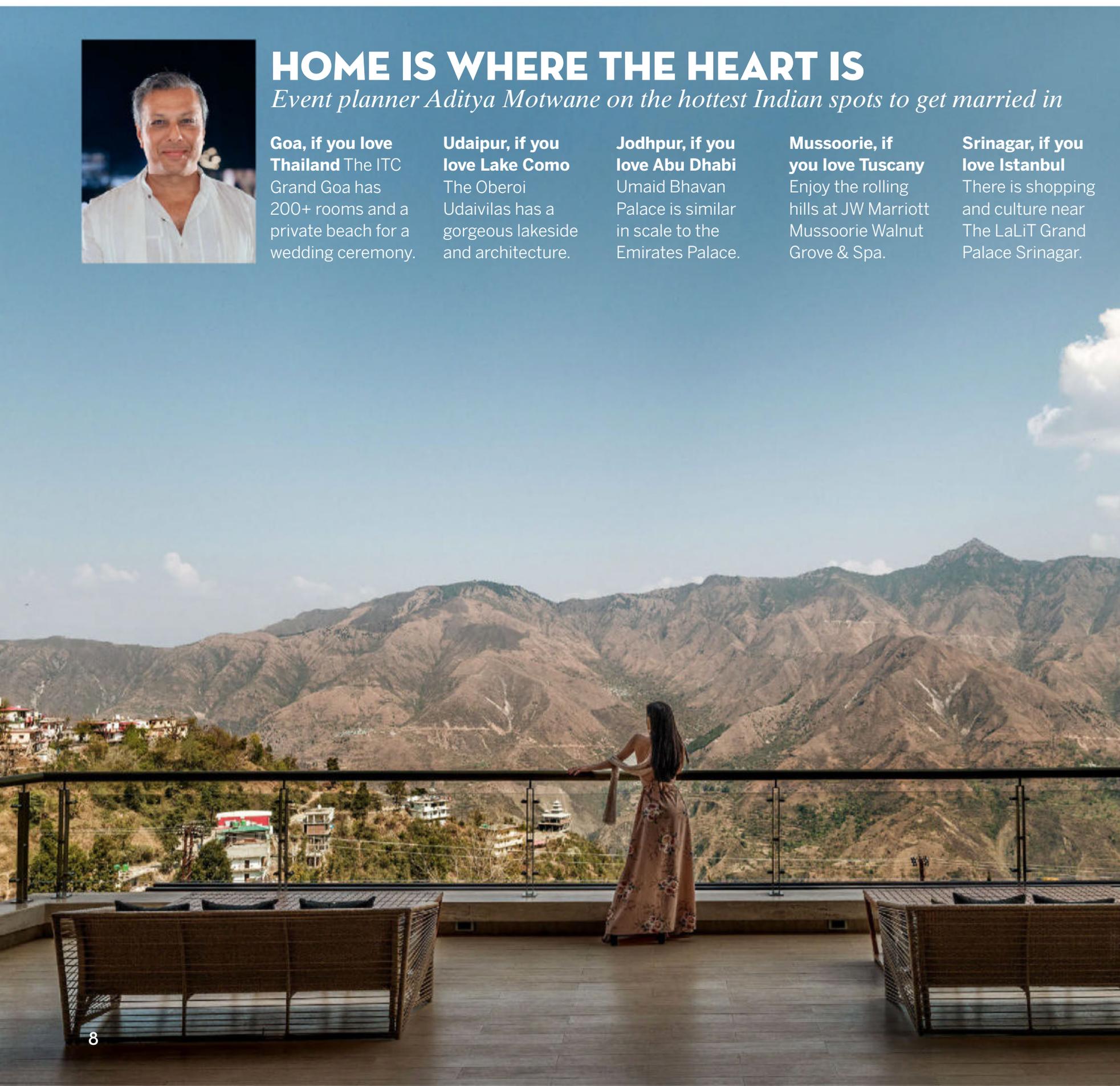
Goa, if you love Thailand The ITC Grand Goa has 200+ rooms and a private beach for a wedding ceremony.

Udaipur, if you love Lake Como The Oberoi Udaivilas has a gorgeous lakeside and architecture.

Jodhpur, if you love Abu Dhabi Umaid Bhavan Palace is similar in scale to the Emirates Palace.

Mussoorie, if you love Tuscany Enjoy the rolling hills at JW Marriott Mussoorie Walnut Grove & Spa.

Srinagar, if you love Istanbul There is shopping and culture near The LaLiT Grand Palace Srinagar.





GEN Z REBOOTS THE WEDDING STORY

Content creator Sakshi Sindwani's celebrations included a cricket match and a drag concert

Gen Z is giving traditional weddings a makeover. Sakshi Sindwani, the 26-year-old fashion influencer, is a great example. Anaita Adajania Shroff styled her, every major designer created a dress for her and her wedding content went viral. How did she make her Delhi-Jaipur wedding sizzle?

"Raghav and I have been dating since 11th grade. The minute he proposed, I sent a message to Anaita Adajania Shroff asking her to style me. She said yes. Wedding attire for a midsize or a plus-sized bride can be difficult to find. So we tapped Manish Malhotra, Tarun Tahiliani, Falguni & Shane Peacock, Heena Kochhar, Papa Don't Preach, etc to customise outfits for each function. The number of changes we made to the outfits were only possible because Anaita was involved. Manish Malhotra even texted me: 'I hope you know how much we love you because we've never made so many changes on a bridal lehenga for anyone.'"

TIPS

GOLDEN RULES TO ENJOY YOURSELF AT YOUR WEDDING

1 Make it fun Sakshi's father, Dinesh Sindwani was a national-level cricketer and had always wanted a cricket match to be part of her wedding. So the Jaipur celebrations started with a welcome lunch and cricket match where she designed sweatshirts and bandanas for the bride and groom teams. There were similar touches throughout the wedding, where guests played games, painted with thumbprints and simply let their hair down.

2 Get out of your head You may be the most important person in the room on that day but the trick is to be yourself and not let other people's opinions matter. Sakshi and Raghav didn't want to behave like a typical bride and groom. "I

didn't act like a bride, I was acting like her excited BFF," she says. "One uncle came up to my folks and asked in all seriousness: Who is that girl who is dancing so much—your daughter's best friend? In the end, you'll remember how you felt, not what someone said."

3 Don't be afraid to experiment The couple made quirky choices for entertainment. During the pheras they enlisted a 15-person choir that had only sung at one wedding before. Sakshi loved their music so she attended many rehearsals to help them perfect their skills. Their reception, based on the theme 'Drag Queen Glam Pyjama Night', featured a performance by actor-singer Rani KoHENur. The evening was a resounding hit.

4 Communication is key Planning weddings in the Indian context can be complicated and conflict-ridden but Sakshi believes clear communication is the answer. "I think the biggest thing is to be firm about what you want. For instance, our parents had never even heard of drag queens so we explained everything clearly. They got it and didn't resist the idea of a transgender star singing at our wedding."

5 Savour the moment "On the day of the nuptials, I was not meant to see Raghav until the bridal entry but after my chooda ceremony, I ran into him. I'd written him a two-page letter which he read in front of me. We were both in tears. I'll remember that moment forever."

MANISH MALHOTRA, IMAGINEER OF ANANT AMBANI AND RADHIKA MERCHANT'S GRAND PRE-WEDDING REVELRY

Being Creative Director of the country's most extravagant pre-wedding fete in Jamnagar was a formidable challenge. The famed designer on his meticulous method behind the magic

What was the vision for Anant and Radhika's pre-wedding celebrations? What were the themes for each function?

Mrs Nita Ambani's vision was clear—she wanted her guests to fully immerse themselves in the essence of India. As the creative director, my responsibilities encompassed every aspect of the event, from conceptualising themes to collaborating with talented teams of planners, florists, décorators, caterers, choreographers, production companies and more. We also ensured that every wedding collateral, small and big (from car decals to chocolate boxes) reflected the event's grandeur, even extending to inflight menus and comprehensive handbooks on Jamnagar for guests.

How these ideas come to life?

Each function was designed to transport guests into enchanting realms, blending fantasy with Indian culture. The first day's theme, Evening in Everland, centred on building a new world. A glass house became the centrepiece, with floral displays and a toy train, creating a whimsical ambience. On the second day, the focus shifted to highlighting Vantara and its majestic animals. The décor showcased animals, depicted through various artistic mediums such as Pichwai art and traditional paint techniques. The Mela Rouge event created a burst of burlesque opulence, inspired by

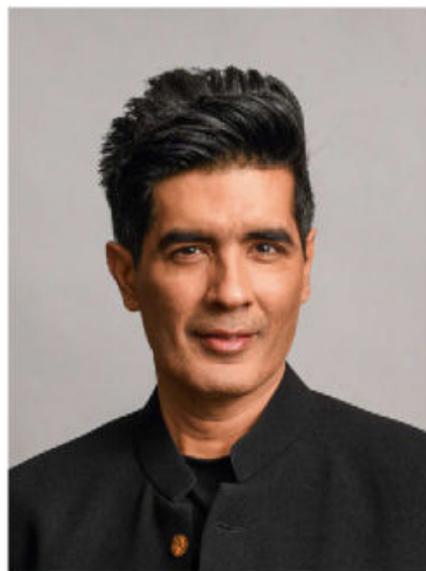
Moulin Rouge. The venue was transformed with an explosion of red florals, a mammoth rouge windmill, and gilded arches. The following day paid tribute to elephants, incorporating earthy elements like bamboo sheds and wooden accents. Indian-style seating arrangements and printed cushion covers. Lastly, the Valley of Gods function delved into Indian spirituality and mythology, with an existing temple as the day's focal point.

The most noteworthy pieces or sections of the décor?

On the cocktail night, the venue transformed into a floral-laden ballroom echoing the elegance of *Bridgerton*. Celebrity florist Jeff Leatham draped the place in rich swathes of fresh blooms, from ornate lattice work to towering Roman vases and chandeliers with blooms. Another aspect of décor which was appreciated by the guests were the Indian motifs, such as handpainted peacocks and elephant-inspired brass handles etc at the jungle-themed event. Chairs turned into standalone masterpieces, each brushstroke capturing the beauty of peacocks and jungle cats. The carnival theme at the Mela Rouge event was brought to life with an illuminated ferris wheel, gilded carousels and staircases flanked by crystal chandeliers.

How did you handle the pressure of the job?

I faced a unique set of challenges. Throughout the



process, Mrs Nita Ambani's dedication to perfection was profoundly inspiring. Her meticulous attention to detail ensured that we navigated any obstacles with grace. Despite the occasional last-minute curveballs, our team remained agile and resourceful, executing every element flawlessly and on time. We overcame every challenge, culminating in a truly unforgettable celebration.

TIPS

WEDDING DÉCOR IN VOGUE

1 There's a strong shift towards personalisation and creating experiences. Couples are seeking unique, bespoke elements that reflect their personal stories and tastes.

2 Blending traditional motifs and Indian craftsmanship with contemporary design sensibilities has also become popular. For instance, incorporating handcrafted textiles and intricate embroidery into contemporary décor.

3 Weddings now have a clear theme where every detail, from the décor to the attire, follows a cohesive aesthetic and experience, creating a memorable experience.

WHAT MAKES A FANTASTIC INDIAN FEAST?

Exotic eats always impress but don't underestimate ugly delicious classics

MARUT SIKKA,
CO-FOUNDER,
INDUS CULINARY
TEAM PVT LTD

How does one ensure good food at a wedding? Don't put your own preferences over the environment, seasonality and venue. So red meat in the Mumbai summer or wood-fired pizza in a closed banquet hall is not going to work.

Most popular traditional dish? At mehendis, snacky foods are most in demand like

Punjabi chaat, Gujarati farsan and Jodhpuri mirchi vadas. At weddings, clients prefer to serve food from their own community.

Most popular international dish? I always see the longest lines at the comfort food counters like live pizza and noodle bars.

Most popular dessert? It's hard to beat a classic Indian jalebi, fresh off the fryer.

A must-have live station? For me, true food is food that comes off the fire and into the plate. Whether it's freshly stretched mozzarella, hand-pulled noodles or tandoori roti.

A dish that feels overrated?

I'll answer the opposite. In the age of pretty pictures, we shouldn't bypass "ugly delicious" dishes like khichdi, mutton tawa tikka, or nihari.

New trends in wedding food?

Food from the streets of India and other parts of the world at wedding banquets as it should be served—with the right utensils and serveware.

The most innovative counter or cuisine?

We discovered Scrocciarella, a rare and extraordinary bread in Italy that only one or two people in the world can make. We've brought

those breadmakers over on occasion and also got them to train our chefs to recreate it.

The strangest request you've had?

We once had a request for French Polynesian food, and another time, a client insisted on South African food like bunny chow and chip sandwiches. In response, one guest even told me: why are you feeding us samosa sandwiches?

Best late night snacks at the post-sangeet cocktail party?

At 4am when the party winds down, people want chunky food like anda paratha, kathi kabab rolls, french fries, etc.





SANJAY VAZIRANI,
FOUNDER,
FOODLINK

How does one pick the perfect wedding caterer? Choose a reputable enterprise that handles large-scale events and has a passion for personalising the menu to reflect your tastes. For international destinations, the caterer should ideally have experience with said spot.

What kind of Indian food is doing the rounds? Indo-Western grills are a hit at cocktail parties.

A go-to Western dish at weddings? Thin crust pizza is a favourite at sangeets.

A forever classic dessert? Belgian chocolate mousse and waffles are crowd-pleasers.

An essential buffet counter? A progressive Indian chaat station for its variety and interactive appeal.

A dish we should see less of? Macarons look exquisite but can be a hit or miss.

Hottest catering trend? Small plates, mini portions and interactive food stations

The most exciting spread you have put together? Dishes incorporating molecular gastronomy awe guests. Sous Vide stations are an eye turner.

The most challenging request from a couple? A couple once asked for a menu based on their favourite travel destinations.

What is the perfect late-night snack at a wedding party? Mini sliders and fries are great for late-night snacking.

POOJA KAPUR & LOVEY BURMAN,
FOUNDERS,
COOKIE JAR

How do you plan the perfect wedding menu? Consider who your guests are and what they would appreciate eating.

What is your favourite dish at a wedding? Nothing satisfies the soul like a well-made biryani.

One international dish that should be on wedding menus? Pandan-leaf-wrapped spicy rice parcels with an Asian curry (tiger prawns for pescatarians and lotus stem/asparagus for vegans).

A dessert that never fails? Warm molten chocolate cakes with berries, nuts and ice cream.

Which live station has the most takers at a wedding? An elaborate and interactive dessert counter.

Your pet peeve? Cupcakes.

Best menu trend right now? Peruvian Asian small plates.

Your favourite curation of food at a wedding? French-Cambodian cuisine.

The weirdest menu request? One party asked us to make chocolate chandeliers ...and we did!

The ultimate late-night comfort snack at a wedding? Live baked foccacia with a choice of toppings.

TIPS

SANJAY VAZIRANI'S MENU ESSENTIALS

- 1 Personalise the dishes** Include fare that reflect your tastes and heritage.
- 2 Consider dietary restrictions** Ensure you cater to guests with vegetarian, vegan, and gluten-free requirements.
- 3 Balance traditional and modern** Mix old favourites like butter chicken and biryani with modern cuisines to appeal to all age groups in your guest list.
- 4 Prioritise quality over quantity** It's better to have a few well-executed dishes than an overwhelming number of mediocre ones.
- 5 Use seasonal ingredients** They naturally enhance flavours and quality.

THE THREE Cs OF COCKTAIL TRENDS

By Ami Shroff, flair bartender and mixologist



Creative bars are now being made of blocks of ice, plants, and cane for a rustic vibe and funky artwork. LED screen bars

are the new thing and they use it to screen wedding artwork and cool graphics.

Clarified cocktails have replaced molecular cocktails, tequila and mezcal have replaced gin, and no sugar or straight drinks have replaced sweeter concoctions.

Conscious consumption is in. While people are still looking to have a good time, they want to sip, savour, and enjoy their drinks instead of getting drunk. This speaks to the greater trend of mindful drinking and healthier lifestyles.

THE PARTYSTARTER

DJ Ganesh on going from small-time gigs to playing at the Ambani pre-wedding bash

How did you become a celebrity DJ? I never chose DJing as a career, it was a way to make ends meet. I started DJing at pubs in 2008 and worked my way up. A friend of Karan Johar's saw me play at a house party and recommended me to him. I played on his birthday and this led to other gigs like playing in Shahrukh Khan's house and performing with Salman Khan in Dubai.

What do you love most about your job? The best part of my job is creating unforgettable moments with music. Every event is unique, and I love making playlists that make

someone's special day even more memorable. The joy and energy of the crowd, especially at weddings, make all the hard work worth it.

Can you tell us about a few amazing weddings and events you've played at? Playing at the pre-wedding celebrations of Anant Ambani and Radhika Merchant in Jamnagar, Gujarat, was a grand and memorable experience. Recently I played an event in the middle of the Serengeti National Park in Tanzania. There was an after-party being held at the Four Seasons Hotel there and it was a surreal moment.



TIPS

FIVE HOTTEST WEDDING ACTS

1. Drummer (Bunny, a DJ and percussionist)
2. Violinist (Sandeep Thakur, Hindi and western classical)
3. Saxophonist (Ryan Sadri and his band, Ryanosax)
4. Emcee (Gurjeet Singh, family and corporate events)
5. VJ (Louis, video jockey for graphics on the screen)

WEARING IT WELL

Rhea Kapoor on the five commandments of getting your wedding dress right



CULTURE IS COOL

Fashion can be a great way to get in touch with your roots. Think about you and your partner's culture and family traditions. Then look up which designers work in that space and see which of them fit in your budget. Don't be restricted to brand names but think of the story that the designer and their artisans are telling.

NO PRESSURE

Do not obsess about looking perfect, or worry about what others think you should look like. Getting married is a happy time. The biggest gift I gave myself at my own wedding was taking the pressure off.

GO AGAINST TYPE

A lot of women choose to wear a lehenga but I went with a sari and added a second dupatta for its different work and drama. A lehenga is classic, and a sari is simpler but can

look stunning with innovative styling. It also highlights curves better.

BODY BEAUTIFUL

Ideally your wedding lehenga should be customised to fit your body and you shouldn't have to starve to be able to get into it. Always wear the right undergarments while trying on your wedding clothes.

KNOW YOUR SETTING

For a beach wedding, don't dress heavy. Mixing real and costume jewellery as well as flowers looks great. For cooler climates, embroidered jackets or vintage shawls do the trick.

TIPS

DOLLY JAIN UNRAVELS SARI DRAPING

Comfy shoes. Early prep. And of course, pins. How to avoid wedding day disasters



1 Underarm pads

You might not be a sweaty person normally, but weddings have a way of turning up the emotional and physical heat. Add underarm pads to your expensive blouses to avoid those dreaded sweat stains.

2 Fitting footwear

You've bought a ton of new shoes for the wedding but please don't wear brand new footwear on your big day. Break into them well in advance because you don't want to be slipping.

3 Drape drama

Whether you have a drape artist or not, practise draping your entire outfit beforehand. If you can, pre-pin everything. Time is precious and don't waste it on draping chaos.

4 Perfume perils

The alcohol in the perfume can stain or damage your attire. Ideally, spray the perfume into the air and walk through it.

5 Prep like a pro

Get all your outfits out of their boxes, have them steam pressed and hang them up properly a day before the wedding. Then you are all set.

BRING ON THE BLING

India's premier jewellers weigh in on how to style every type of bridal jewellery



MEENAKARI

"For a daytime mehendi event, pair pastels and softer colours with Meenakari sets in turquoise or rose pink. The jewellery will enhance your outfit without overpowering it, allowing you to shine on your special day. A traditional, red wedding look can also be accessorised with Meenakari jewellery, whether it's an all-polki ensemble or adorned with intricate Partash work. Men have also have a lot of jewellery options from a kantha (traditional neckpiece), a 13-piece button set, kalgi on their turban, or a stylish pocket pin." —SUNITA SHEKHAWAT, FOUNDER, SUNITA SHEKHAWAT JAIPUR



GOLD

"Trends come and go but gold jewellery has a nostalgic appeal and continues to shine despite economic and global uncertainties. For weddings, gold works best with Banarasi weaves or zardozi work. Brides can pair intricate gold rani haars with a choker and heavy jhumkas. For a heavier look, add a haathphool or a bajubandh (armlet) with statement hair ornaments like a paasa. Grooms can get intricately designed gold sherwani buttons." —ROHAN NARANG, DIRECTOR, HAZOORILAL LEGACY

DIAMONDS

"At weddings, we're seeing brides prefer more practical classics like a string of solitaires that can be stacked as opposed to elaborate necklace-and-earring sets. Old silhouettes are also getting their time now, be it maang tikkas, haathphools or layered rani haars, all set with a twist of diamonds. My favourite reference for this styling is the Ambani pre-wedding function." — RICHASINGH, MD, INDIA & MIDDLE EAST, NATURAL DIAMOND COUNCIL

1 Bvlgari 2 Moksh 3 Raniwala 1881 4, 5 & 6 Sunita Shekhawat Jaipur 7 Hazoorilal Legacy

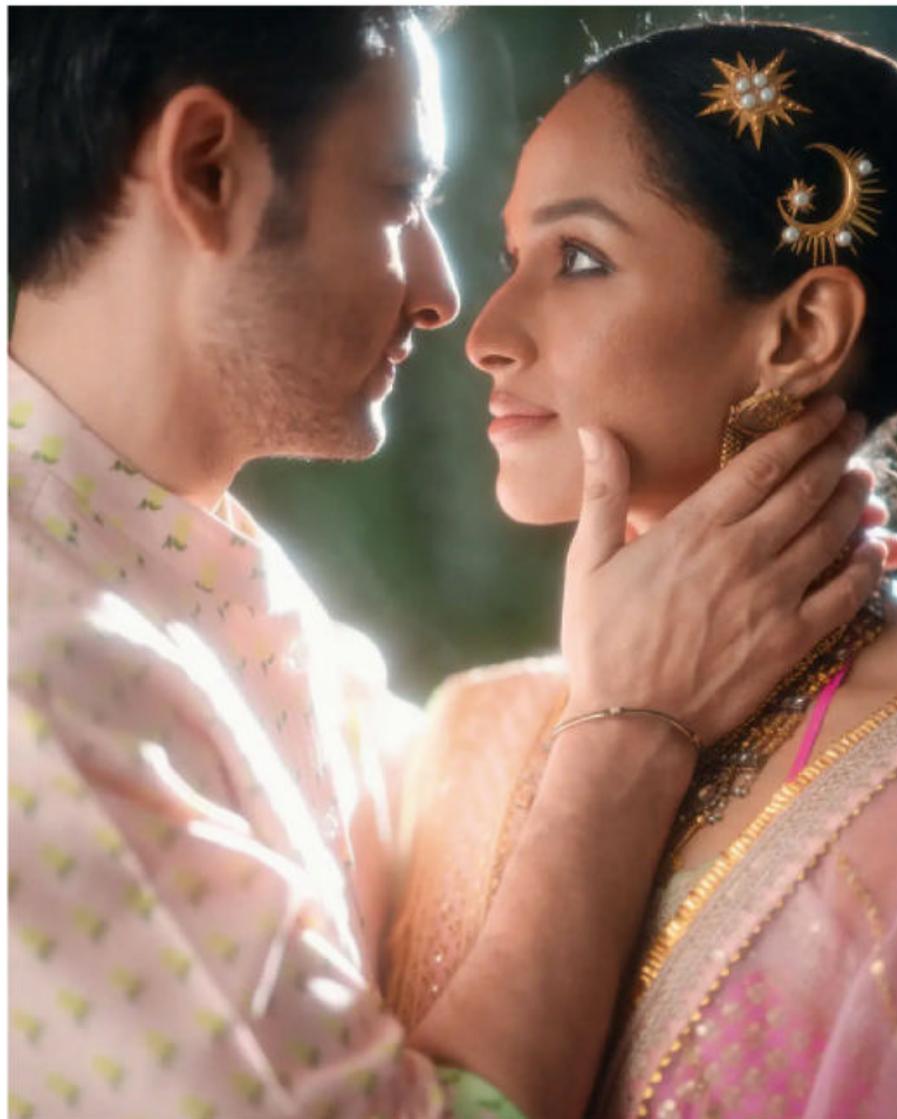


POLKI

"More brides are dressing in subtle colours and pastels. So we recommend far-size polki Victorian jewellery enhanced with gemstones like emeralds, rubies, or sapphires. Younger brides often layer their polki instead of using one set. A polki choker and a polki string pairs well or works individually." — ABHISHEK RANIWALA, CO-FOUNDER AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR, RANIWALA 1881

MORE IS MORE, LESS IS A BORE

Take cues from these celebrity brides to choose creative wedding accoutrements



CUSTOM MADE

Kiara Advani's kaleeras by Mrinalini Chandra included charms with the couple's initials as well as a symbol of Sidharth Malhotra's late dog Oscar.

Aathiya Shetty paired a chikankari lehenga with her nani's antique chandelier earrings for her mehendi.

DRAMA MAMA

Swara Bhaskar donned dramatic maang tikkas from Khanna Jewellers.

Masaba Gupta got innovative with hair jewellery and had customised star, moon and sun hairpins designed by Anatina.

ALL ABOARD

For her pre-wedding cruise, **Radhika Merchant** paired a vintage Dior dress with an Hermès mini Kelly bag and Manolo Blahnik Hangisi flats. Her to-be mother-in-law, **Nita**

Ambani, paired an Oscar de la Renta dress with a Rainbow Astromania Fleurs de Jardin watch from Jacob & Co.

SHOE STOPPER

Ira Khan paired her wedding out with black Kolhapuri flats.

Rakul Preet Singh ditched the heels and wore sneakers with her haldi lehenga, both by Papa Don't Preach by Shubhika.



TIPS



MASOOM MINAWALA ON THE BEST ACCESSORIES FOR YOUR BRIDAL LOOK

1 For weddings, traditional ornaments are the usual choice but try experimenting with modern pieces. Contemporary designs in classic materials like gold, diamonds, and precious stones can create a unique look.

2 When you have to be on your feet for longer than three hours (or even dance all night), opt for chunky heels or platforms. A gorgeous pair of embroidered wedges are also perfect.

3 When it comes to bags, I recommend picking something that serves both purposes—complements your wedding look and gives you enough space to carry all the essentials you need. Ideally,

they should also be classic and versatile enough to be used beyond weddings.

4 I love fresh flowers like jasmine garlands. They not only enhance your hairstyle but also add a timeless touch.

5 Grooms, keep a pair of cool sunglasses handy and add a hint of colour with your pocket square.



TIPS

NAMRATA SONI'S POINTERS FOR A GORGEOUS WEDDING GLOWUP*Too much glitter or too little? The celebrity makeup artist breaks down what works, and what doesn't***1 Get a head start**

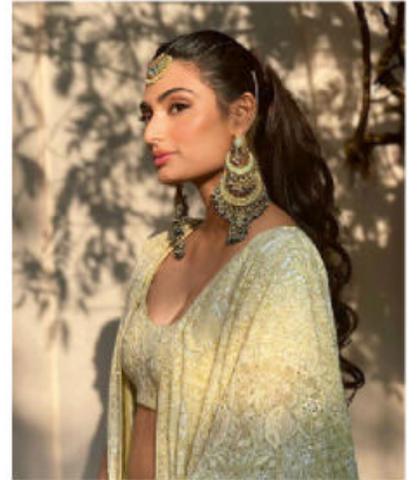
Implement a consistent skincare routine at least three months before your wedding to see changes. Book an appointment with a dermatologist who will offer advice based on skin type.

2 Face time

Aqua facials are good for intense hydration, photofacials for last minute glow, and dermapen facials tighten your pores. You can do a milder relaxing or hydrating facial up to five days before the ceremony but no cleanups one month prior to your wedding.

3 Food habits

In terms of nutrition, I'd suggest eating whatever suits your gut and drinking enough water. Spritz pure rose water and ice your face during the summers.



shift where brides want to look like themselves. They're opting for softer looks and going back to simpler hair and makeup instead of heavy contouring which makes you look nothing like yourself.

9 Research is key

Know your makeup artist and their body of work well. I can do almost anything but it's not my style to do layers and layers of foundation, eyeshadow and glitter. You don't need to hire the most expensive or the most affordable makeup artist, just book someone who will make you look like the most beautiful version of yourself and then trust them. I always have a conversation with my brides to align expectations and send over a fun mood board prior to the big day so they get a glimpse of what they will look like.

10 Man of the hour For men, I'd say definitely put some loose powder on your face to combat the perspiration. If you have dark circles or pigmentation you can do makeup but don't go for full coverage (instead do 50%). If you don't recognise yourself later, you may go and wash it all off. Instead, have fun styling your hair.

5 Trend spotting I love the blush drape which you create by underpainting. It gives the face a nice lift and shape with a natural flush—soft pinks and peaches for day and berries and purples for night. I think glitter will stay but we will change the way we use it, opting for diamond pixie dust instead of heavy glitter. Soft glitters, high cheekbones, strong brows, and dewiness is what the contemporary bride will go for.

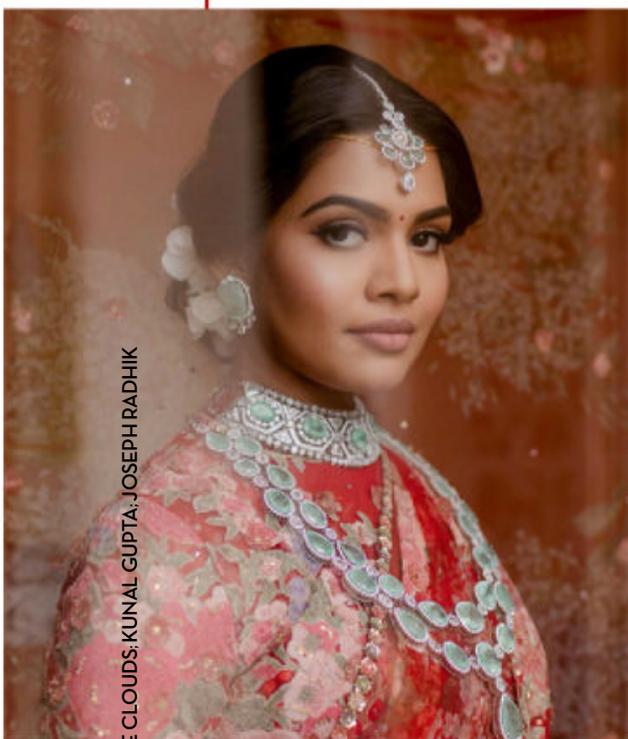
6 Real vs online Don't prioritise social media photos over how you look in person because the latter is more important. Instagram sets very unrealistic expectations of having glass skin but most of the time, it's nothing but a filter. My advice is go for a classic

look over trends so that even 25 years later, when you look back at your photos, you'll still like how you looked.

7 Eyes on you Contact lenses should be banned at weddings. As Indians we have such beautiful eyes and kohl looks so good on us because of our eye colour. We need to recognise that. You can wear clear lenses to make eyes look bigger if that's the purpose of wearing them.

8 Own your tone We need to get over our obsession with fairness. I still get requests from brides (or their families) to make them look lighter. It's difficult to explain to them that their skin colour is already beautiful as it is. Thankfully, I'm also seeing a

4 Colour code Wedding makeup looks have changed drastically in the last five years. We've gone from classic liner, kohl, and red lips to pastels, bronze, berry, and mauves.



10 WEDDING TRENDS THAT ARE THE TALK OF 2024

Bye, bye bidaais. Hello happy farewells, GIF booths, and audio clips

Modern rituals Instead of a coy bridal entry, some girls are choosing a baraat just like grooms and instead of teary bidaais some couples are doing a fun, celebratory exit.

Age-old traditions are being turned on their head to reflect a couple's personal values.

Wardrobe planners As wedding themes get more creative (Jungle Disco, An Evening in Everland) hosts are circulating wardrobe planners along with invites. The question is: do all guests want to abide by dress codes a la Met Gala?

Wedding BTS Instead of perfect portraits, we're seeing influencers upload BTS content with goofy and real moments from their functions. Talk to your videographer about a sizzle reel: a 90-second montage that you can watch the morning after in bed.

Experiential entertainment Hosts are incorporating live painters, collaborative art, cricket matches, tug-of-war games, and more to make the event memorable.

Minimal mehendi Instead of elaborate designs going up to your biceps, brides prefer paring back their mehendi to feel less hassled. Mehendi artists are using negative space to create striking and innovative patterns.

IV therapy Couples and host families are getting vitamin IVs prior to and during weddings to recover quickly from one function and dive into the next with maximum gusto.

Micro fashion 2024 has been declared the year of the mini. Think tiny dresses at the afterparty to tiny portions of food (main dishes plated in individual bowls). Famous and

fancy restaurants setting up pop-ups at weddings are also a common sight.

GIF booths Photo stations have been replaced by booths where you can strike crazy poses and convert them to a GIF for instant uploads.

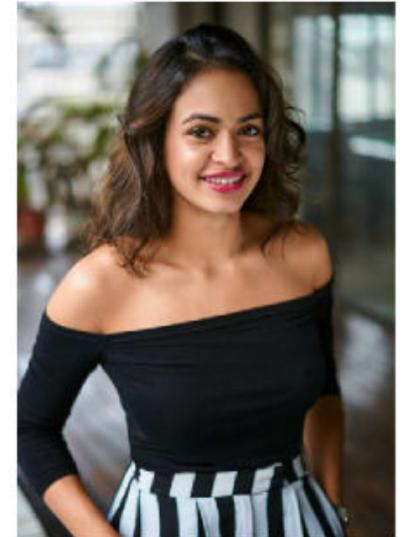
Social media managers In an effort to savour their special moments, couples are hiring experts to handle their wedding social media content. This way, they can enjoy themselves without having to think about Instagram.

Guest audio books A great way to relive your wedding memories is to ask your wedding planner to set up a red telephone at one of your functions. Guests can pick it up to record messages for the bride and groom which the couple can hear at leisure on their honeymoon.



TIPS

ANCHAL MORWANI'S AMAZING HACKS ON HAIR STYLING



1 Three months prior to your big day, start applying rosemary oil to your hair before a wash. It acts as natural minoxidil. I've seen some great results using the Rooting For You oil by The Basics Woman.

2 Your nutrition has an impact on your hair. My mom, Anjali Mukherjee, is a well-known nutritionist and she recommends eating eggs, fish, bone broth, Brazil nuts, amla, leafy greens, and curry leaves for hair health.

3 Think of dry hair as cotton and hydrated hair as chiffon. Note how differently they flow. Doing hair spas and protein treatments weeks prior to your wedding will improve the hair's elasticity.

4 For your wedding, I recommend a layered haircut. Focus on layers at the crown and get face framing layers as this works best for hairstyling.

5 If you have virgin hair and want to colour it for your wedding, do a trial. Placing different coloured hair swatches on your scalp is a great way to understand what works. Or drop by a salon and ask them to do a strand test.

FLY ME TO THE **HONEYMOON**

Hiking in Patagonia or chasing giraffes in Africa, the post-wedding holiday has come a long way

2024'S **TOP ROMANTIC ESCAPES** BY **GAURAV PUNJABI**, COZYMOONS

TAKING IT SLOW

Gone are the days that couples would jet off to stay indoors at a luxury resort and spam their Instagram with cliched experiences. Planning a wedding can be exhausting so couples today are seeking solace and rejuvenation. Rather than packing multiple countries into a two-week trip, couples are choosing to do slow travel and explore places authentically.

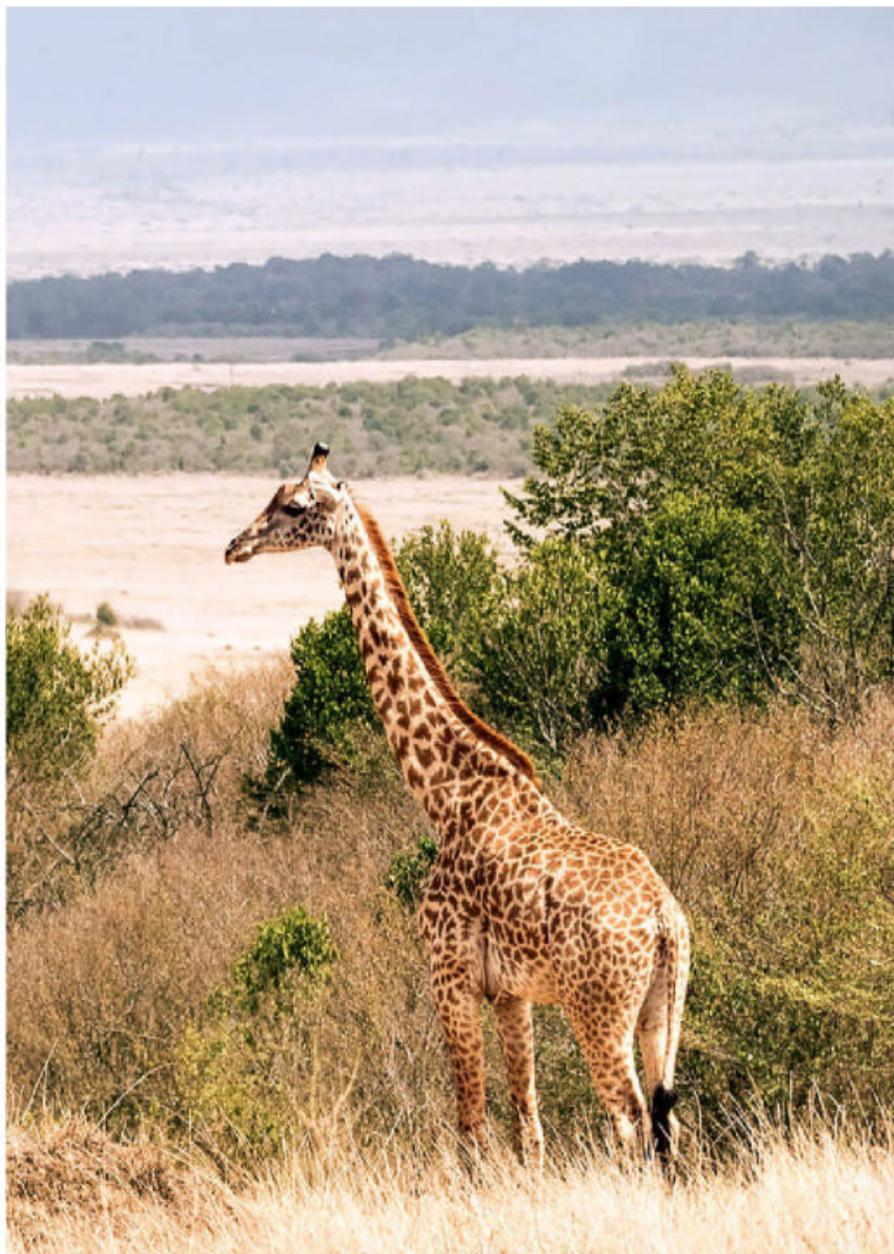
FARAWAY DREAMS

Latin America has emerged as a hot destination—from exploring the Amazon in Brazil and otherworldly marine adventures in Galapagos to

wondrous treks through the Patagonian landscapes of Peru and Argentina.

WILD WONDERS

Another big trend is an African surf & turf vacation which combines a luxury wildlife getaway with an idyllic beach. While Kenya's Masai Mara has been the most popular safari spot, couples are heading to Zambia, Zimbabwe, Namibia and even primate havens such as Rwanda and Uganda. Africa is also blessed with a powder-white beaches in Zanzibar, Mozambique, the Seychelles, and Mauritius, where many luxury hotels have outposts.



PHOTOGRAPHS: HIMANSHULAKHWANI; COURTESY OF AMANKORA BHUTAN

TIPS



POST-WEDDING VACATION POINTERS BY **PRITISH SHAH**, FOUNDER, A TRAVEL DUET

1 It is ideal to work with a travel planner to manage all the necessary arrangements before the honeymoon. But first, it's important to communicate your travel style and preferences with each other. Quite often we see that newlyweds are misaligned. A good starting point is to understand the vibe that you and your partner are looking for on your trip.

2 The amazing honeymoon itinerary is one where various variables are accounted for. For examples the ease of travel between places (not having to take too many internal flights), the diversity

in destinations visited, planning weekends in the city, choice of adults-only accommodation etc.

3 The Maldives remains a perfect getaway for minimoons. For a splurge worthy minimoon some of its high-end resorts have stand-alone units in the middle of the ocean that are secluded. Take the Romantic Pool Residence in VELAA Private Island or the Stella Maris Ocean Villa at Waldorf Astoria. Bhutan is another great option for those who love the outdoors. With chain hotel brands like Aman, Six Senses, and Como, it definitely checks all the boxes for a restful getaway. 🇹🇵

Love by

India's leading wedding planner Vedika Mohan and

Design



Omar Warsi's big day was all romance, no rituals

"We customised mini tambourines for guests to play after we exchanged our vows. The energy was magical."

Fashion entrepreneur Omair Warsi should probably thank his three Shih Tzus for stealing wedding planner Vedika Mohan's heart. Even though the couple went to the same high school, they only met several years later, at a series of parties in the same week in 2019. "The first ever text that I received from Omair was the sweetest video of his dogs after their evening walk, and this resulted in a lunch date," says the bride who is the creative director at The Wedding Design Company (WDC), which was founded by her mom, Vandana Mohan. They are known for pulling off more than a few lavish destination weddings across the world, from Cannes to Abu Dhabi.

When the couple decided to tie the knot earlier this year, the vision was simple: No conventional rituals or religious ceremonies.

THE DETAILS

The celebrations were spread across the couple's hometown, New Delhi, and one of Mohan's favourite hotels, Suryagarh Jaisalmer, where she had planned many weddings in the past. "The warmth, the food, the views—are all stunning," says the groom, to whom Mohan had raved about the hotel.

Events such as a lunch and cocktail-sangeet made the most of different corners of the fortress hotel. The vow exchange ceremony on the stepwell was a highlight. Mohan is Hindu-Punjabi and Warsi is Muslim. While respectful of both religions, the couple decided to forgo the nikaah and pheras, and chose a legal signing and an agnostic ceremony. "We customised mini tambourines for guests to play after we exchanged our vows. The energy was magical," reminisces Mohan. "There was a special seat reserved for our loved ones who were watching from the skies above," adds the bride.

THE WARDROBE

Mohan skipped the customary bridal lehengas and opted for modern silhouettes by Payal Singhal, Abhinav Mishra and Gaurav

Gupta. Her Seema Gujral ivory skirt set for the vows was embellished with the couple's initials 'VOW' on the veil. Warsi wore tuxedos and Indian wear by designers Abha Batra, Nine Styles and Seema Gujral.

—PRAACHI RANIWALA

TIPS

ON PLANNING A WEDDING LIKE A PRO

While organising the wedding was seamless because of Mohan's team at WDC, she admits that the emotional attachment to every decision made the process tricky at times. Even so, she wouldn't change a thing about her detail-oriented approach, something she'd advise other couples too.

- 1 "Little details go a long way. Personalised notes and touches especially make guests feel special."
- 2 "There's no going wrong with local touches—right from the food to the favours and entertainment—that highlight the destination."
- 3 "If you're getting married in a picturesque spot, the golden rule is to use your décor to enhance the location but never overpower it."

BLACK BOOK

Venue Suryagarh Jaisalmer

Wedding Planner The Wedding Design Company

Photography House on the Clouds, Annoushka Sharma, Fotowalle The Story Folks

Videography House on the Clouds

Makeup Pooja Khurana

Hair Archana Rautela

Music DJ: SRV; Band: V&A (Viraj and Abhishek)

Bar Perfect Potions

Invitations Itchha Talreja Designs 





Wild at



Australian couple Jackson and Lauren England

Heart



tied the knot with a safari in Ranthambore

"It was a dream to be married in the jungle at SUJÁN Sher Bagh. A dream that came true."

If sweet dreams are made of travelling the world and the seven seas, then Lauren and Jackson England were lucky to embark on the journey of a lifetime together. Travel has truly been the secret sauce that cemented their forever kind of love, playing an integral role in the Sydney-based couple's story.

When the co-founders of production company Jagat—a content house for leading luxury travel brands such as Aman, Hyatt and Relais & Châteaux—first started dating, they took off on a three-month adventure across Mexico, Cuba, Nicaragua and Costa Rica to test their relationship. "What better way to find love than in the trials and tribulations of travel," muses Jackson.

THE VISION

Having already travelled extensively through India in the past, the couple wanted to give their friends and family a taste of one of their favourite spots in the world too. Their vision was a wedding celebration (which also doubled as the bride's 40th birthday getaway) that embraced and showcased their love for Indian wildlife, "in an atmosphere of unparalleled culture, spirituality and love," they say.

THE DESTINATION

Ranthambore fit the brief perfectly, and they booked the glamorous 12-key luxury safari camp SUJÁN Sher Bagh for their party of 30 (including the couple's three- and six-year-olds) to host the property's first-ever wedding. It helped that in their last nine years of visiting the village, and working with SUJÁN properties, the couple had forged a

friendship with its owners Jaisal and Anjali Singh who helped plan the wedding. "It was a dream to be married in the jungle at SUJÁN Sher Bagh. A dream that came true," says the bride of their nuptials this January.

THE ITINERARY

The group's trip to India began in Delhi, followed by an exploration of Jaipur. In Ranthambore, the festivities started with a relaxed campfire and local thali dinner. The next day began with a morning game drive, followed by a safari-themed wedding ceremony conducted by a local priest, and a ride across town. The reception—a medley of speeches, folk music and an aarti—was back at the camp deck. Day three allowed everyone to soak in the property, ending with a twilight dinner under the stars.

—PRAACHI RANIWALA

TIPS

ON CHOOSING THE RIGHT DESTINATION

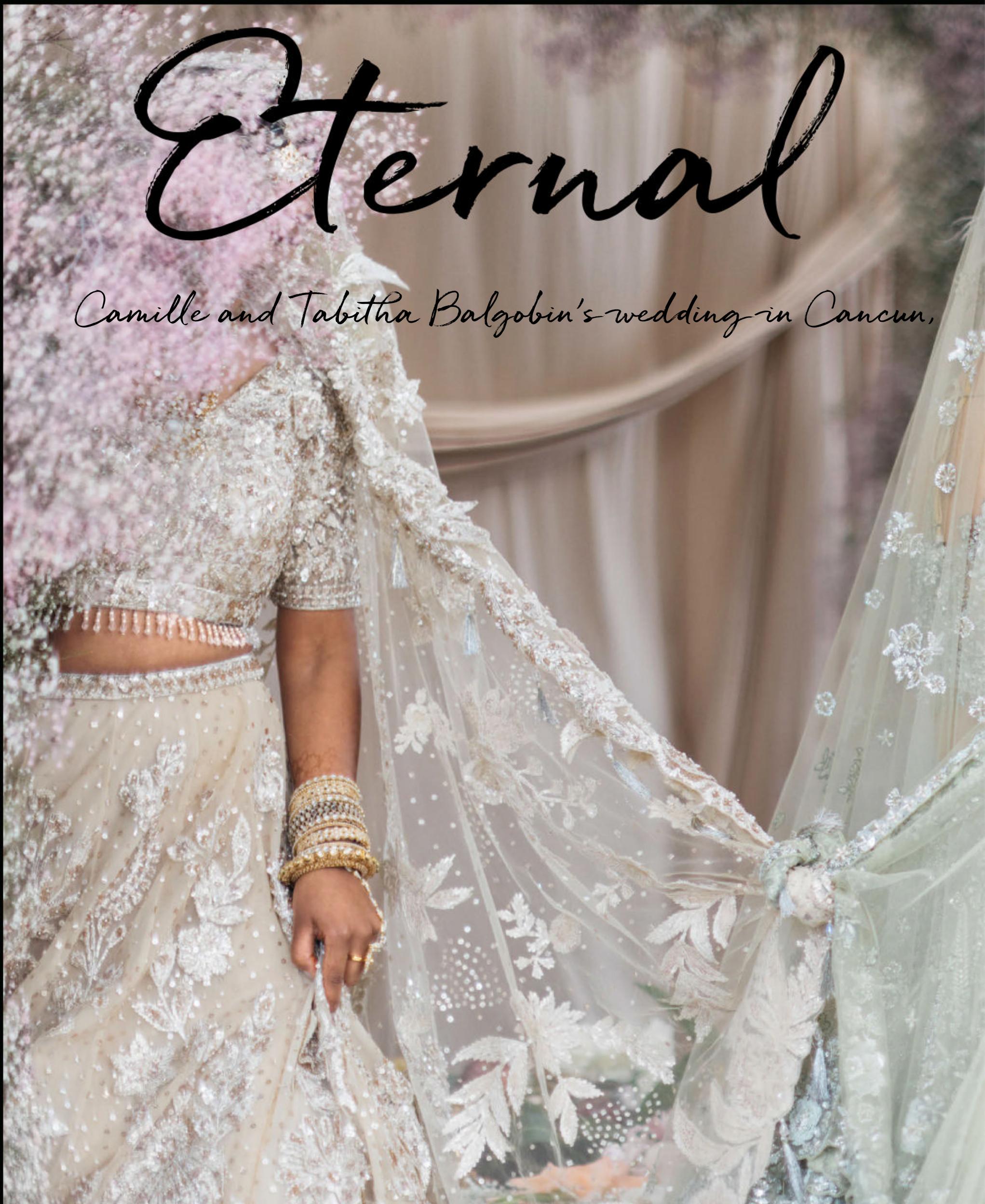
- 1 A personal connect to your wedding venue always helps. "Ranthambore has always felt like a second home. We also feel passionately about the conservation of the park and its ecosystem," says the groom.
- 2 Know the lay of the land, they further suggest. "We knew the place and property very well, so we were able to move guests around easily while also utilising all areas to create a memorable affair that didn't become repetitive," adds the bride. 





Eternal

Camille and Tabitha Balgobin's wedding in Cancun,



Sunshine

Mexico, doubled as a holiday for their guests



"The picturesque, laidback setting made it perfect for our families to mingle with each other."

Cupid struck engineering technologist Tabitha Balgobin and CT scan technologist Camille Balgobin the modern way, with a little help from an algorithm. The two matched on a dating app, one that the old-school romantics had reluctantly succumbed to during the pandemic. "Months of heartfelt conversations online finally culminated in our eagerly-awaited first date. The connection we felt virtually only intensified in person. As cliché as it sounds, it was love at first sight," says Camille. "We instantly knew we had found something special in each other," confirms Tabitha, who popped the question two years after this date.

THE VISION

The Orlando-based brides agreed on having a simple and sophisticated wedding, focused on the uniqueness and significance of their union. They stressed on the comfort of their guests, weather considerations and personal touches while planning every detail of the wedding this February.

THE DESTINATION

The couple chose Hilton Cancun, Mexico, having visited and loved it previously. "The picturesque, laidback setting made it perfect for our families to mingle with each other," says Camille. Part of the festivities were hosted at Waldorf Astoria Cancun.

It was important that their 150 guests also have enough time to savour their stay. "It had to feel like an extended vacation for them," the brides tell us.

THE DETAILS

The welcome party had a mix of Indian and Mexican elements—so there was a bangle bar and mehendi station, along

with tropical cocktails and music by local artists. The next day started with a Hindu ceremony officiated by a priestess, where the couple exchanged personalised vows. The brides wore pastel lehengas from Kynah with jewellery from Dhora and Kirni Designs. Then they changed into white gowns from The Bridal Finery for the reception. "I added my sister's veil and hair jewellery to my look. She was a huge part of our wedding planning, so this touch meant a lot," adds Camille.

—PRAACHI RANIWALA

TIPS

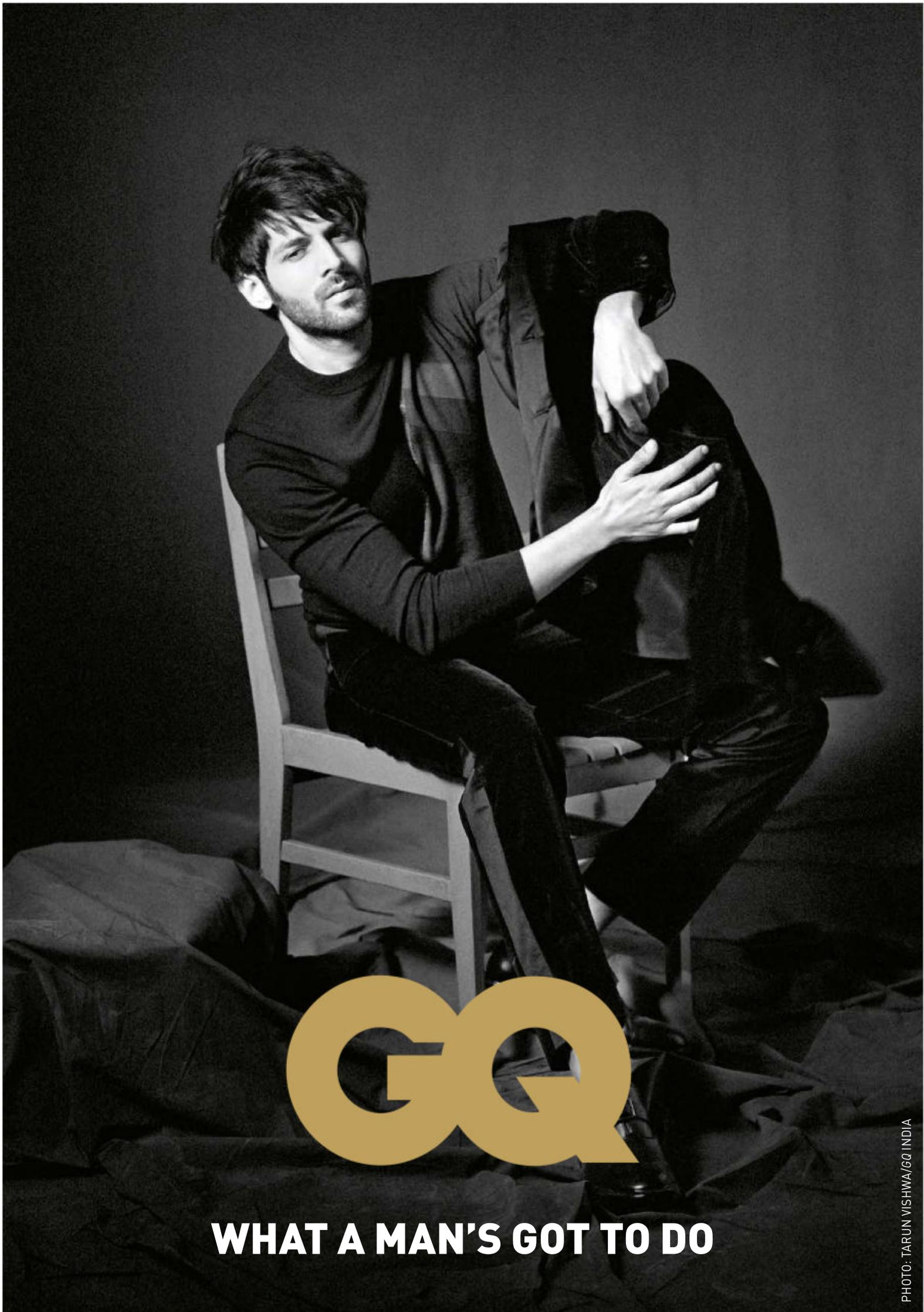
ON THE PERFECT WEDDING PLANNING

- 1 Start thinking about it early and hire a planner. "We gave ourselves a year to minimise stress."
- 2 "Work with local vendors for smooth coordination and better understanding of customs."
- 3 "Be prepared to answer questions from guests, no matter how detailed your invitation and website are."

BLACK BOOK

- Venue** Hilton Cancun, Waldorf Astoria Cancun
- Wedding Planner** The Eventeur, The Wedding Edit
- Photography** Agba Weddings
- Videography** Tan weddings
- Music** DJ Ishwar
- Rentals** Archive Rentals
- Mehendi** Loto Mehendi
- Makeup** Zoe Elizabeth
- Hair** Kahori Flores





GQ

WHAT A MAN'S GOT TO DO

PHOTO: TARUN VISHWA/GQ INDIA

Where to WED IN INDIA

From forts to beach resorts, dream hotels for destination weddings. By Lakshmi Sankaran

RAJASTHAN

FAIRMONT JAIPUR

Outside, the Aravalli views are unbeatable. Inside, this city hotel's Mughal-meets-Rajput quarters offers a combined banqueting space of 90,000sq ft. The grandest of its ballrooms has a capacity of 600 guests, while other opulence includes 245 comfy rooms, the central charbagh, and a stunning ceremonial ballroom staircase, gliding down which a couple

floats to their happily ever after. **Getting there:** 28km from Jaipur International Airport. fairmont.com

MEMENTOS BY ITC HOTELS, EKAAYA UDAIPUR

This 117-villa green retreat has a clutch of celebration venues, a lakeside and large grounds geared for mega events. Highlights include the frangipani lawn with a capacity of 1,000, butler service, and the signature Indian vegetarian

restaurant, Royal Vega. For fun activities, plan hikes across the property, a game of croquet, or painting sessions with the wedding party. **Getting there:** 42km from Maharana Pratap Airport. itshotels.com

UMAID BHAWAN PALACE, JODHPUR

It doesn't get more authentic, regal, and Rajasthani than this 26-acre estate, parts of which are still used by the Jodhpur royal family. The palace is a

preferred wedding destination of several high-profile celebrity couples. Its beautiful expanse covers 70 rooms and suites, an ornate fountain courtyard with jharokhas—ideal for intimate gatherings—and the lush Baradari lawns, for splashier celebrations of 400 seated guests. No matter the event, the sandstone glow at Umaid Bhawan is bound to make every wedding moment golden. **Getting there:** 5km from Jodhpur Airport. tajhotels.com



A wedding at Fairmont Jaipur



Lobby at The Oberoi Udaivilas, Udaipur

RAMBAGH PALACE, JAIPUR

Home to Jaipur's elite royals back in the day, the palace hotel is now a slice of Rajput and Mughal nostalgia, with 78 gilded rooms, airy gardens and terraces. The Maharaja and Maharani Mahal are sophisticated banquet areas, while the Panghat Garden and Sunken Lawn are tailored for outdoor festivities. Added perks: the hotel's princely cuisine and its impeccable royal service butlers. **Getting there:** 11km from Jaipur International Airport. tajhotels.com

THE OBEROI UDAIVILAS, UDAIPUR

A dreamscape of interconnected pavilions, lawns and hallways, the 87-room Lake Pichola property, once the hunting grounds of a Mewar ruler, is a place to mark milestones. The Chandra Mahal is a favoured indoor banquet space, but the hotel's vast garden is ideal for smaller, pre-wedding rituals. For a dramatic entrance, bring the *baraat* in via boat, much like one

famous couple who got married in Udaipur. **Getting there:** 26km from Maharana Pratap airport. oberoihotels.com

SIX SENSES FORT BARWARA

This 14th-century fort turned lavish resort includes two restored palaces and two temples. Also, suited for weddings—48 elegant suites, space galore (2,045sq ft of an indoor ballroom, besides the Zenana Mahal lawn), a world-class spa and views of the Barwara Lake. Culture is emphasised here, so showcase the local artistry at your musical nights. The hotel offers a guide on making your wedding eco-conscious. **Getting there:** 121km from Jaipur International Airport. sixsenses.com

JAISALMER MARRIOTT RESORT & SPA

A quiet marvel in yellow stone, the hotel accommodates up to 1,500 guests across its banquet halls, courtyard, poolside and garden. Wedding specialists are on offer to lighten your load.

Add some local Rajasthani flair to your menu with dishes from Jaisalmer Kitchen and cocktails from the Dunes Bar & Lounge.

Getting there: 15km from Jaisalmer Airport. marriott.com

THE LEELA PALACE JAIPUR

This pristine white city hotel has over 50,000sq ft of indoor and outdoor event spaces including massive ballrooms and manicured gardens. The Indian restaurant Mohan Mahal sparkles with thikri mirrorwork. Bespoke services such as a local artisan market, wine tastings or mixology sessions can elevate your wedding even further.

Getting there: 29km from Jaipur International Airport. theleela.com

MUNDOTA FORT AND PALACE, JAIPUR

The Thakurs of Mundota restored this 14th-century wartime hill fort into a heritage polo resort, with 125 rooms, including 10 war fort suites and 15 creative function spaces. A windswept rustic atmosphere is a given here and a pre-wedding polo-themed soiree will give your celebrations that extra imperial touch. **Getting there:** 40km from Jaipur International Airport. mundotapalace.com

SAMODE PALACE, JAIPUR

A 43-key cocoon on the city's outskirts, the hotel's interiors go from a bougainvillea-fringed courtyard and a Sheesh Mahal to a Durbar Hall, with frescoes and murals. Two poolside and terraces are designated pre-function venues. The hotel can be clubbed as a venue with the Mughal gardens of Samode Bagh, only seven minutes away. **Getting there:** 57km from Jaipur International Airport. samode.com

SUJÁN SHER BAGH, RANTHAMBORE

A wedding in the woods is peak romance. It helps that this stylish safari getaway, around 15 minutes from Ranthambore

National Park, is also fully outfitted to meet all the practical requirements of a small wedding party. There are 12 roomy tents with personal attendants, large common spaces (for main functions), a spa, and a menu spanning global flavours and local ingredients. The best part? All of nature in attendance.

Getting there: 167km from Jaipur International Airport. thesujanlife.com

ALSISAR MAHAL, SHEKHAWATI

Once occupied by the Thakurs of Alsisar, this desert property in Jhunjhunu district has 49 rooms and packs 17th-century Rajasthani flourishes everywhere. Pick between the elegant banquet area Kishan Mahal to the Badal Mahal, a blue-mosaic dining room atop the palace with a lovely rooftop extension. Weddings here can be as versatile as you like, whether you have a *sangeet* in the *darbar* courtyard or throw a cocktail evening in the hotel's underground 'Dungeon' bar.

Getting there: 217km from Jaipur International Airport. alsisarmahal.com

ALILA FORT BISHANGARH

The restored 234-year-old warrior fort stands imperial on a hill in the remote village of Bishangarh. With 59 rooms, a wedding here can be held across 15 diverse venues. Haveli terraces and the stepwell with a lawn evoke rustic glamour to the hilt. On request, a hot air balloon ride can be made available. **Getting there:** 75km from Jaipur International Airport. alilahotels.com

INTERCONTINENTAL JAIPUR TONK ROAD

Formerly Crowne Plaza Jaipur, the 218-room hotel was relaunched as an Intercontinental brand last year. There are open-air venues, multiple restaurants, including the Chinese specialty House of Han, and a pillarless ballroom

WEDDING HOTELS

with a banquet capacity of 400. Between events, guests can go on hikes or savour Champagne breakfasts. **Getting there:** 9km from Jaipur International Airport. ihg.com

SURYAGARH, JAISALMER

An amber vision looming over the Thar desert, the fort hotel has a cinematic bawdi (stepwell), which has been the backdrop of many a celebrity union. This 77-room property's indoor and outdoor spaces can host a range of celebrations. The Champa Garden, with gorgeous blooms, fits mehendis and brunches, while the Tulsi Aangan is built

to dance away on sangeet or musical nights. **Getting there:** 28km from Jaisalmer Airport. suryagarh.com

NARENDRA BHAWAN, BIKANER

Flamboyant art pieces and a museum aesthetic define this Marwari palace, which can accommodate an intimate wedding. Poolside space, ballrooms and regional cuisine are to be expected. Take a wedding selfie next to the vintage cars in the property. **Getting there:** 16km from Bikaner Airport. narendrabhawan.com

GUJARAT

ITC NARMADA, AHMEDABAD

Located by the Narmada, this hotel is full of décor accents inspired by the city's rich heritage—the façade nods to the Toran of Vadnagar, while the atrium inside borrows from the Adalaj stepwell. For weddings, the main banquet hall, Narmada Stateroom, will be central. Smaller spaces can be used as pre-function areas. Be sure to have frontier classics from Peshawri or a vegetarian spread from Royal Vega on the wedding buffet. **Getting there:** 14km

from Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport. itshotels.com

HYATT REGENCY AHMEDABAD

The Sabarmati riverfront property includes large ballrooms and 270 rooms. Banquets are serviced by three kitchens, one of which specialises in satvik cuisine. In keeping with its local milieu, the hotel also has a team of maharajs to vet all the Marwari and Gujarati sweets. **Getting there:** 10km from Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport. hyatt.com



A wedding setup at Suryagarh

GOA

ITC GRAND GOA RESORT & SPA

There's a charming warmth to this 45-acre Cansaulim property. Both indoor and outdoor wedding functions can be accommodated anywhere from the palm-shaded lawns to the banquet halls. For bridal parties, the hotel's signature Kaya Kalp spa is a must-do. **Getting there:** 16km from Goa International Airport. itshotels.com

ALILA DIWA GOA

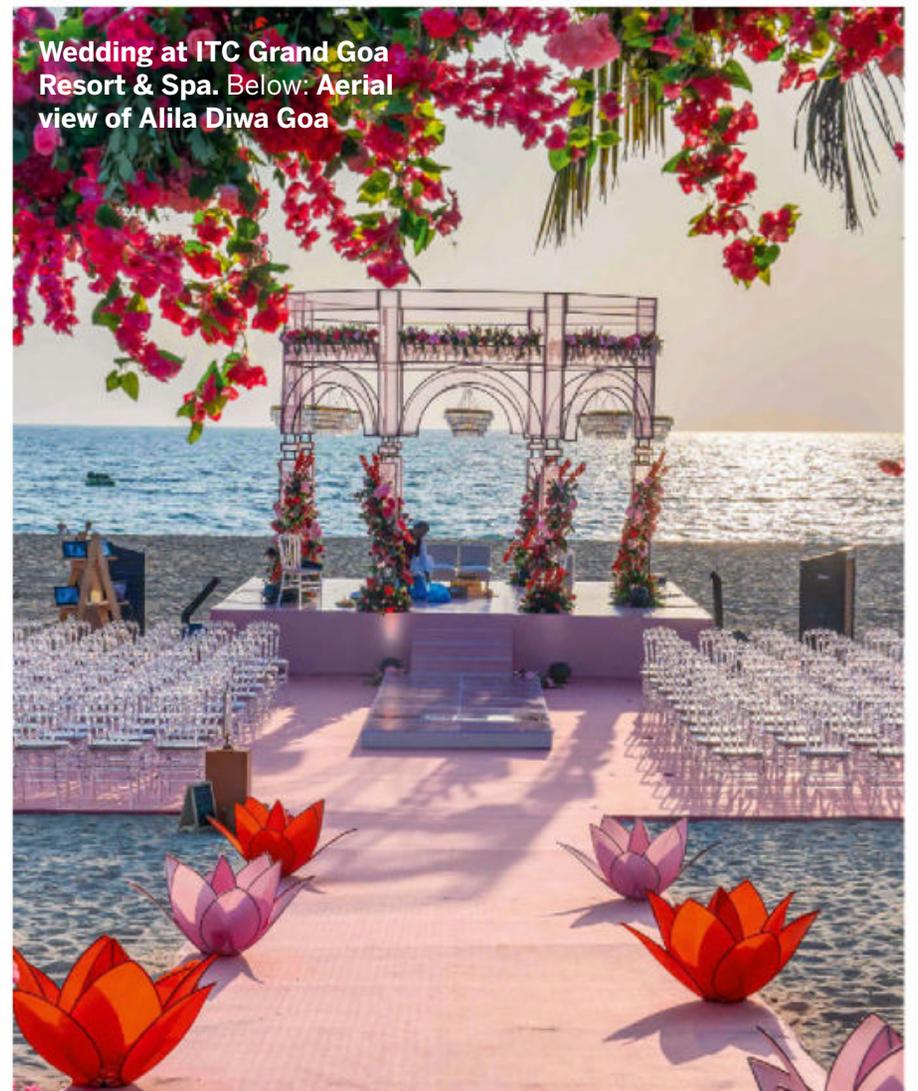
This tile-roofed resort in south Goa, with traditional design and décor, has a large event space spread across 18,000sq ft. Including an 8,400sq ft pillarless hall and a lawn, it can entertain up to 1,200 guests. The palm-lined poolside of The Edge can work for sundowners or dinners while the traditional restaurant, Spice Studio, is perfect for haldis. **Getting there:** 60km from Manohar International Airport. alilahotels.com

TAJ EXOTICA RESORT & SPA, GOA

This seaside property in Benaulim has 140 rooms, a beautiful beachfront, and 56 acres of gardens. Other wedding draws: a poolside for cocktails, your choice of banquet spaces such as the Sala Grande ballroom, and seafood from Lobster Village. **Getting there:** 28km from Goa International Airport. tajhotels.com

JW MARRIOTT GOA

Besides the sea-facing terrace and sizable garden, weddings at this sprawling Vagator hotel have ample space to work with. Especially in the Grande Salão ballroom, which can host a main function of 300. Bridal parties could pencil in a day of relaxation at the resort spa, which has Turkish hammams and refreshing facial treatments. Don't forget to include Indian delicacies from the JW Kitchen in your feast. **Getting there:** 27km from Manohar International Airport. marriott.com



Wedding at ITC Grand Goa Resort & Spa. Below: Aerial view of Alila Diwa Goa

W GOA

Couples who want their beach weddings to end with a bacchanal—this party hotel is your destination. The celebration can get started at any of the hotel venues, spread over its 28 acres, and wind down at the white-tented lounge bar Rock Pool. You can dance away at WooBar for a cocktail night. In the wedding menu, include pan Asian fare from Spice Traders. **Getting there:** 28km from Manohar International Airport. marriott.com

THE ST. REGIS GOA RESORT

This bucolic 49-acre Cavelossim beach resort can hold a party of 350 in its largest ballroom. A restaurant with views to Sal River serves as a spot for dinners or cocktails while the beachfront is for sunset nuptials. Besides this, there's also plenty of lawn space, a 12-hole golf course and a luxurious spa on deck for any downtime from all that hectic merrymaking. **Getting there:** 37km from Goa International Airport. marriott.com

HILTON GOA RESORT

Located in Saipem Hills, Candolim, the resort has placid views of the Nerul river. It has 104 guest rooms and around 19,400sq ft of event space, which includes a ballroom for 200. Smaller events can be hosted at Saipe, which offers stunning views, while the hotel's in-house menu can cater to global tastes. **Getting there:** 31km from Manohar International Airport. hilton.com

GRAND HYATT GOA

This 28-acre resort overlooks Bambolim Bay and is built in the style of a 17th-century Indo-Portuguese palace. Aside from the customary banquet space, lush gardens and lawns, there's Jharokha, a lovely canopied terrace with teak wood artwork above the banquet, from where the couple can be ushered into the hall. The resort has specialists if required, such as an executive chef to whip up your wedding cake. **Getting there:** 21km from Goa International Airport. hyatt.com

WEDDING HOTELS

KERALA

GRAND HYATT KOCHI BOLGATTY

The Vembanad backwaters are a picture of serenity and this 26-acre hotel is primely situated on its banks. Although the property has no dearth of indoor wedding space, the lakeside is the dreamier location. Standing on a houseboat exchanging vows, now that would be a moment for the ages. **Getting there:** 32km from Cochin International Airport. hyatt.com

TAJ BEKAL RESORT & SPA KERALA

Located by Kappil beach, this 75-villa resort's hallmark facet is its bamboo weave roofing, inspired by the kettuvallam houseboat. By The Bay Lawn is an enchanting backdrop for outdoor functions while indoor events could head to the Soiree Hall. Include a rejuvenation session with Ayurvedic facials at the brand's signature J Wellness Circle. **Getting there:** 71km from Mangaluru International Airport. tajhotels.com

KUMARAKOM LAKE RESORT

Beautiful sunsets frame weddings at this 25-acre lush heritage resort, by the Vembanad lakeshore. Sundowners can be organised on the deck of the resort's Vembanad Seafood Bar, while the lawn can be reserved for main functions. You and a choice group of guests could also hire a houseboat for a ceremony, if the weather approves. **Getting there:** 73km from Cochin International Airport. kumarakomlakeresort.in

THE LEELA KOVALAM, A RAVIZ HOTEL

Designed by architect Charles Correa, this red-roofed clifftop resort is awash in sea breeze from all sides. The 67-acre complex also includes the historic Kovalam Palace, a wonderful backdrop for a pre-wedding function while pheras or vows along the beachside will induce sighs from guests. **Getting there:** 15km from Thiruvananthapuram International Airport. theleela.com

View of Kumarakom Lake Resort

KARNATAKA

TAJ MADIKERI RESORT & SPA, COORG

Sitting pretty atop the mist-soaked hillsides of Madikeri, the resort is cradled by nature all around. There are 63 cottages and villas here, across 183 acres of untouched forestland. There is more than enough banquet room and outdoor space but be sure to include the green-terraced poolside deck for at least one of the functions, and get the team to curate locally inspired meals with farm-fresh produce for the menu. **Getting there:** 152km from Mangaluru International Airport. tajhotels.com

THE LEELA PALACE BENGALURU

The palace hotel pays tribute to Mysuru's royal architecture and heritage through its gardens and artworks displayed across the property. With 357 rooms, the hotel has several banquet hall choices and two terrace spaces for cocktail evenings. A poolside covered by trees creates a lovely ambience for intimate evenings. **Getting there:** 39km from Kempegowda International Airport. theleela.com

ITC WINDSOR, BENGALURU

Close to some of the city's prime shopping and nightlife hubs, the hotel recreates an English manor-style ambience, with a poolside pavilion and outdoor gardens. Regency 1 and 2 ballrooms cater to a banquet of 100 and 50 each. A wedding here should include food from the hotel's restaurants, especially slow-cooked fare from Dum Pukht. **Getting there:** 31km from Kempegowda International Airport. itchotels.com

THE RITZ-CARLTON, BANGALORE

Located in the city's upscale business district, the five-star property is plushness personified with rooms stocked with luxurious linens and Asprey

toiletries. The dazzle applies to weddings too with a planner and banquet concierge on hand to guide you through its 15,000sq ft of event space. **Getting there:** 35km from Kempegowda International Airport. ritzcarlton.com

CONRAD BENGALURU

At 24 storeys, this chic five-star arguably has some of the best city views overlooking Ulsoor Lake. Main functions can occupy multiple ballrooms, the biggest of which holds 400. For evening dos and dinners, gourmet Pan-Asian place Mikusu, as well as Tiamo, an al fresco bistro with hanging lights, are tasteful. Choose from one of the hotel's five signature spa treatments to get that perfect pre-wedding sheen. **Getting there:** 36km from Kempegowda International Airport. hilton.com

HILTON BENGALURU EMBASSY MANYATA BUSINESS PARK

Inside the Manyata Business Park, Hilton has carved out a chunk of leisure space that is unusual for the city. The hotel's 266 rooms, combined with a convention centre nearby, and the Hilton Garden Inn next door, makes 60,000sq ft of event space. There's a rooftop terrace that is perfect for a smaller event, and F5, the all-day diner, offers a selection of popular cuisines. **Getting there:** 28km from Kempegowda International Airport. hilton.com



Pool at Hilton Bengaluru Embassy Manyata Business Park. Below: the Maharaja Ballroom setup at The Leela Palace Bengaluru

WEST BENGAL

JW MARRIOTT HOTEL KOLKATA

A classic city hotel, this Tangra landmark has six banquet halls and 281 guest rooms to meet the demands of any modern wedding. For more intimate lunches or dinners, you could include Vintage Asia, their pan-Asian specialty restaurant. **Getting there:** 14km from Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport. marriott.com

HYATT REGENCY KOLKATA

If this five-star is your wedding venue, schedule one event at north Indian diner Gucchi. Choose The Bar, complete with a cigar lounge, for a small bachelor party. There are also multiple ballrooms and the hotel can plan a menu sourced from multi-cuisine restaurant Waterside Cafe and Italian bistro La Cucina. **Getting there:** 11km from Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport. hyatt.com

TAJ BENGAL, KOLKATA

Home to the ultra-popular Chinese spot, Chinoserie, the marble-and-stone Alipore five-star is a landmark. The Terrace Garden venue, accommodating 200 guests, is perfect for pheras while a reception can be hosted in Crystal Hall. Pick Sonargaon's classic Bengali fare for surefire success with your guests. **Getting there:** 23km from Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport. tajhotels.com

ITC ROYAL BENGAL

A signature of the Kolkata skyline, the hotel has 456 rooms including 82 serviced apartments, perfect for close family. For the different wedding functions, the Bengal Stateroom and Eastern Court are ideal. ITC's regal Indian restaurants and European specialty eateries offer a great mix for the reception buffet. **Getting there:** 14km from Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport. itchotels.com

WEDDING HOTELS

MAHARASHTRA

JW MARRIOTT MUMBAI JUHU

This 358-key hotel is often chosen for major weddings by the city's wealthy jet set. This year it has a new banquet space, the Grand Sangam Ballroom, with jazzier lighting and an exclusive landscaped driveway, among other things. **Getting there:** 5km from Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport. marriott.com

THE RITZ-CARLTON, PUNE

Event spaces at this refined urban hotel, near Poona Club Golf Course, include Ritz-Carlton Ballroom (7,200sq ft), and Crown Deck, perfect for a starlit night. The Indian restaurant Aasmana is known for its handcrafted cocktails. As part of their package, the hotel hosts a celebration featuring Bridal Suite spa treatments. **Getting there:** 4km from Pune International Airport. ritzcarlton.com

CONRAD PUNE

This hotel is located close to Pune's nightlife and shopping quarters. It delivers on all the classic parameters of wedding venues, from the Grand Ballroom which can hold receptions for 1,200, to a top-notch spa. There's also exceptional fine-dining at Coriander Kitchen and a space for a sundowner party at Al Dila. **Getting there:** 7km from Pune International Airport. hilton.com

GRAND HYATT MUMBAI HOTEL & RESIDENCES

Known for its popular in-house restaurants China House, Cellini, and Soma, the hotel has 548 rooms and suites, and 112 serviced apartments. Access to the airport and its ample space make this a convenient wedding hotel. Events can be held across several venues and its largest ballroom can hold 450 guests. **Getting there:** 4km from Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport. hyatt.com

UTTARAKHAND

HYATT REGENCY DEHRADUN RESORT & SPA

Standing amidst the Malsi forest, on the foot of Sivalik hills, this 4-acre retreat promises divine mountain scenes. Every amenity needed to organise an elegant wedding is here: 263 rooms and suites, a mountain-view pool and hearty farm-to-table cuisine. If there is time, club your spa treatment with a dip in a nearby hot spring. **Getting there:** 41km from Jolly Grant Airport. hyatt.com

JW MARRIOTT MUSSOORIE WALNUT GROVE RESORT & SPA

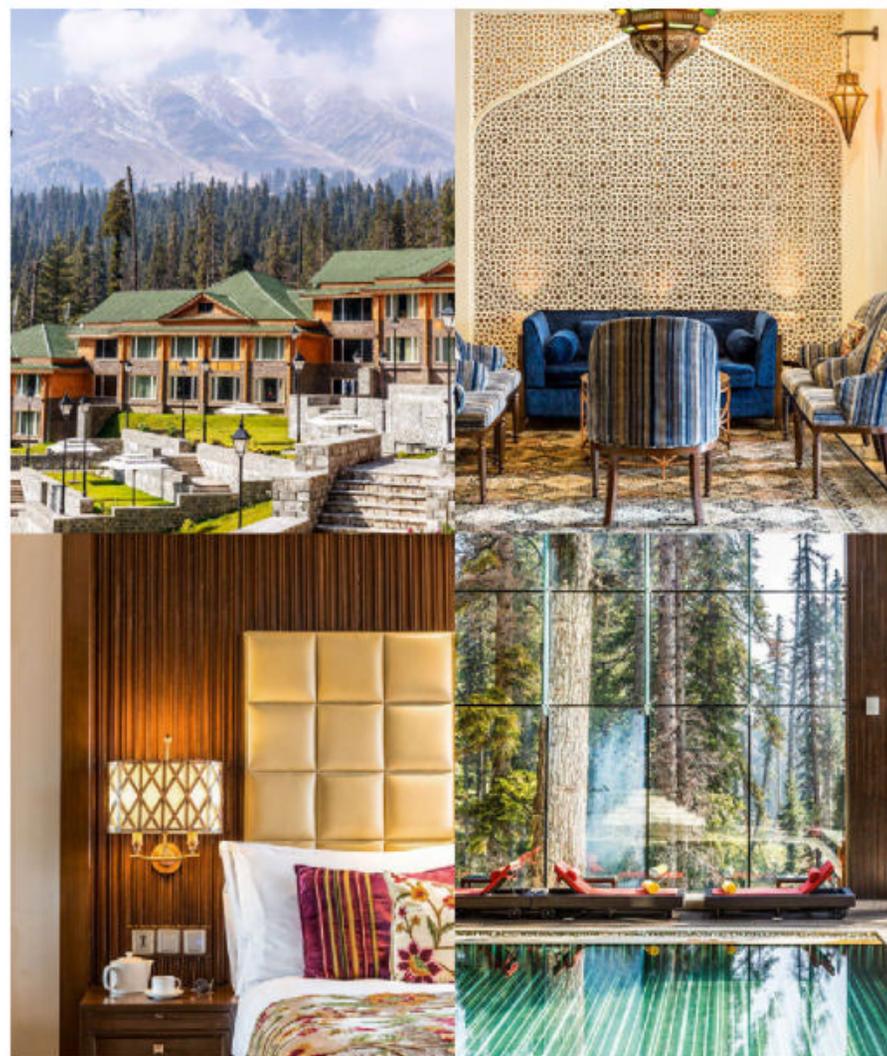
A must-visit for couples who dream of a stylish mountain wedding, the 115-key resort has five venues over 4,000sq ft of space including the Grand Orchard Ballroom for 275. Before the actual party kicks off, rev up with a night out at Mussoorie's hotspots, arranged by the hotel. **Getting there:** 66km from Jolly Grant Airport. marriott.com

ALOHA ON THE GANGES, RISHIKESH

The Ganga gushes right past this 125-room hillside complex, deep in the forest. A wedding here centres sacred rituals and spiritual meaning. There are three indoor and outdoor venues that allow upto 500 guests. After the soul connection is solemnised, guests can head to the Tattva Spa—equally nourishing. **Getting there:** 22km from Jolly Grant Airport. alohaontheganges.com

TAJ RISHIKESH RESORT & SPA, UTTARAKHAND

On the banks of the Ganga River, the resort has 79 rooms with its acreage shrouded in deciduous cover. For a pre-function, there's the indoor space Salle with a courtyard and garden, while the outdoor lawn is ideal for nuptials. **Getting there:** 50km from Jolly Grant Airport. tajhotels.com



JAMMU AND KASHMIR

THE KHYBER HIMALAYAN RESORT & SPA, GULMARG

A wonderland through the cold and sun, the superlative ski resort would make a stunning backdrop to all kinds of celebrations. Khyber can handle up to 200 guests across its gardens, amphitheatre and cottages. The property might even consider opening up one of its closed venues for a haldi or mehendi. **Getting there:** 59km from Sheikh Ul-Alam International Airport Srinagar. khyberhotels.com

THE LALIT GRAND PALACE SRINAGAR

An erstwhile Kashmiri royal residence, the hotel is the epitome of glamour. There are 113 rooms, including 10 cottages. Its gardens, with lovely Chinars, are the real scene-stealers. **Getting there:** 16km from Sheikh Ul-Alam International Airport Srinagar. thelalit.com

HIMACHAL PRADESH

TAJ THEOG RESORT & SPA, SHIMLA

With its rustic mountain lodge design and 97 spacious rooms, a wedding here could easily turn into an extended holiday. Rolling hillsides are dotted with Deodars all around and hotel's capacious ballrooms can hold multiple events. Weddings are high-octane events, so break the pace with leisurely picnics curated by the hotel's chefs. **Getting there:** 52km from Shimla Airport. tajhotels.com

HYATT REGENCY DHARAMSHALA RESORT

Begin a new chapter of your life in full view of the Dhauladhar mountains at this resort. Primed for big weddings, there's almost 20,000sq ft of event space here. The hotel can also curate fun tea garden picnics, short hikes and spa treatments. **Getting there:** 18km from Kangra-Gaggal Airport. hyatt.com

DELHI NCR

TAJ PALACE, NEW DELHI

This marquee hotel in the capital, known for its legendary eateries (from Loya to Spicy Duck), always wears a dignified air. Durbar and Shahjehan are the two most regal ballrooms for weddings, while 403 plush rooms and suites await your guests. For the ultimate party vibe, keep those cocktails from the hotel's iconic Blue Bar coming. **Getting there:** 8km from Indira Gandhi International Airport. tajhotels.com

HYATT REGENCY DELHI

In the buzzy centre of the city's diplomatic enclave, this hotel offers the consummate wedding experience. Over 1,000 guests can be accommodated across multiple ballrooms. The multi-functional Living Rooms come with live stations. **Getting there:** 9km from Indira Gandhi International Airport. hyatt.com

ANDAZ DELHI

A baraat riding in with an elephant? Bollywood fans can elevate the melodrama at this Aerocity hotel with the exclusive 'Elephant Path' service. The hotel's ballroom, along with the courtyard and pre-function area, entertain 2,000 guests. For mindful food options, include the hotel's AnnaMaya restaurant in the catering plan. **Getting there:** 3km from Indira Gandhi International Airport. hyatt.com

THE LEELA PALACE NEW DELHI

Channelling the architectural styles of ancient kingdoms, every corner of this palace hotel evokes grandeur. Several ballrooms and royal rooms are wedding-centred with the largest capacity at 300. Gourmet gastronomy from restaurants Megu and Le Cirque will keep guests returning for more. **Getting there:** 10km from Indira Gandhi International Airport. theleela.com



Lobby at Taj Palace, New Delhi. Previous page, clockwise, from top left: exterior, lobby, pool and bedroom, all at Khyber Himalayan Resort & Spa

WEDDING HOTELS

ITC GRAND BHARAT, GURUGRAM

This luxury haven is spread across 300 acres, which includes a 27-hole signature golf course, an outdoor swimming pool, a fitness centre, and Kaya Kalp, The Royal Spa. The palatial hotel has 100 suites and 4 presidential villas. Weddings here are truly regal affairs with menus sourced from Aravalli Pavilion and The India Room. **Getting there:** 38km from Indira Gandhi International Airport. itshotels.com

SHANGRI-LA EROS NEW DELHI

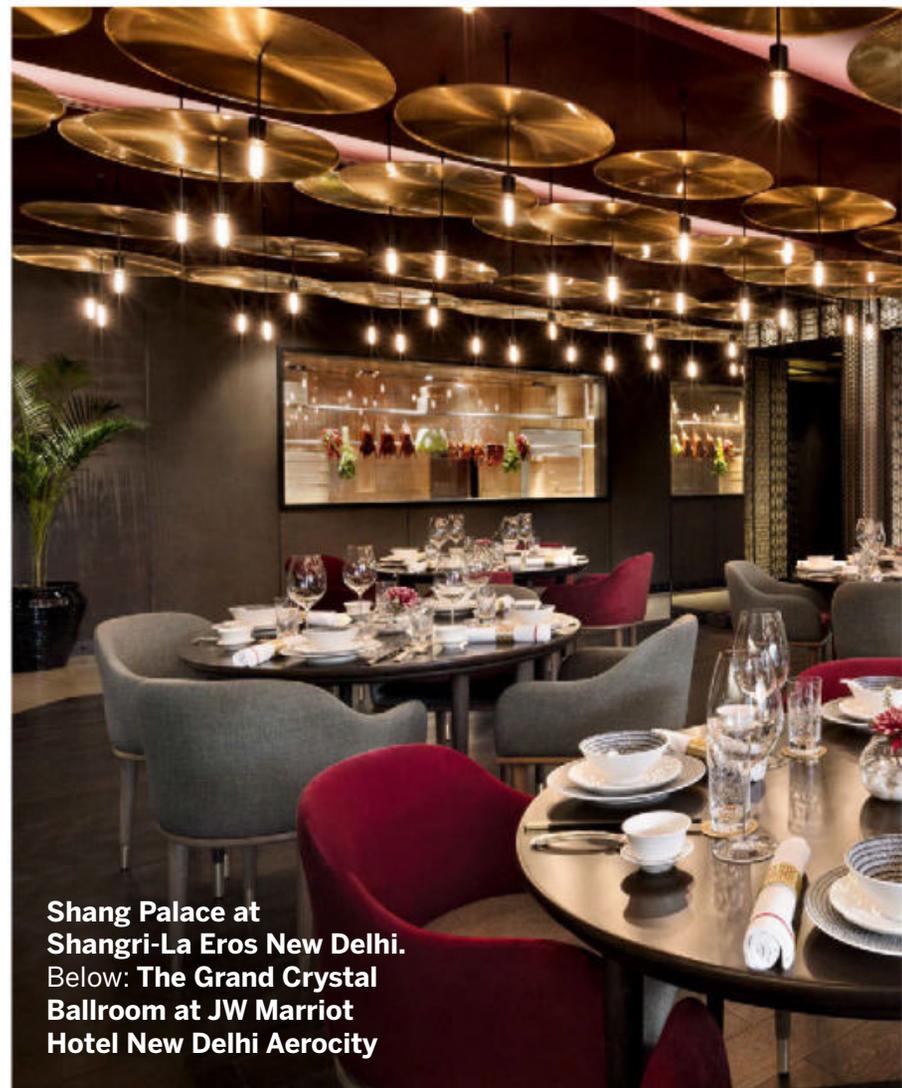
The 320-room contemporary hotel can hold nuptials and cocktails across its 6,480sq ft of space. The Shangri-La Ballroom has glass drop chandeliers and royal accents. For the menu, enlist chefs from its popular Cantonese and Italian restaurants. **Getting there:** 14km from Indira Gandhi International Airport. shangri-la.com

LE MÉRIDIEN GURGAON, DELHI NCR

In the shadow of the Aravallis, this lively city hotel can organise weddings over 15 venues, with the highest capacity of 500 people. Apart from the Perseus Ballroom, the celebrations can move to the enclosed lawn outdoors. For a bridal brunch, pick Longitude Bar or Bella Cucina, the Italian restaurant, with its top-notch wine collection. **Getting there:** 15km from Indira Gandhi International Airport. marriott.com

PULLMAN NEW DELHI AEROCITY

European architect Meriem Hall based this city hotel's design on the Indian peacock. Which explains the centrepiece in the main lobby ceiling: an installation of raindrops caught in mid-air. For weddings, there is a 12,700sq ft pillarless ballroom, which can be sectioned off into separate rooms for functions. Food can be catered from its six restaurants while a few hours of indulgence



Shang Palace at Shangri-La Eros New Delhi. Below: The Grand Crystal Ballroom at JW Marriott Hotel New Delhi Aerocity

at Pullman Spa & Salon can infuse life back into any sagging spirits. **Getting there:** 3km from Indira Gandhi International Airport. pullmannewdelhi.com

JW MARRIOTT HOTEL NEW DELHI AEROCITY

The five-star hotel has 511 rooms and a space of 30,000sq ft, of which small rooms can handle the pre-wedding festivities and 11 are for main events. Make space in the menu for Japanese small bites from the hotel's restaurant Adrift Kaya and live stations from K3, a "food theatre" restaurant. **Getting there:** 3km from Indira Gandhi International Airport. marriott.com

THE CLARIDGES, NEW DELHI

A Lutyens landmark, the hotel's three acres hold a multitude of event spaces and seven restaurants. Weddings can be handled between the Viceroy Banquet Hall and The Claridges Garden, wonderful for a brunch. **Getting there:** 12km from Indira Gandhi International Airport. claridges.com

CHANDIGARH

THE OBEROI SUKHVILAS SPA RESORT, NEW CHANDIGARH

Nature is in abundance at this 60-room retreat where the Siswan Forest Range breathes quietly outside. Between the darbar hall, poolsides and courtyard, there's enough wedding space. Spa treatments and forest bathing will keep guests refreshed. **Getting there:** 30km from Chandigarh International Airport. oberoihotels.com

TELANGANA

TAJ FALAKNUMA PALACE, HYDERABAD

This former abode of the Nizams, with its glimmering dining halls, gilded décor and gourmet food, spells high status. For a courtly scene, arrive in horse-drawn carriages from the gate. **Getting there:** 18km from Rajiv Gandhi International Airport. tajhotels.com



TAMIL NADU

THE TAMARA KODAI

An old British bungalow renovated as a heritage resort, Tamara Kodai has 53 suites and 8,000sq ft of lawns best suited for a storybook outdoor wedding amidst high winds and rolling mist. There is a large indoor venue—the Puliyan Hall, a rustic space with wooden rafters—but most of the functions will be better off taking advantage of the resort's forest beauty. Couples can also enjoy a complimentary post-wedding honeymoon at the hotel.

Getting there: 136km from Madurai Airport. thetamara.com

SHERATON GRAND CHENNAI RESORT & SPA

The five-star resort along the Eastern Coastal Road unfurls over 10 acres of land, which encompasses a reception venue, a party lawn and a chic spa, all in service of a wedding where you can exchange vows by the azure Bay of Bengal. **Getting there:** 43km from Chennai International Airport. marriott.com

INTERCONTINENTAL CHENNAI MAHABALIPURAM RESORT

Not too far from the Shore Temples of Mahabalipuram, this 15-acre resort with ocean views has 106 rooms, 15,000sq ft of gardens, and a private beach, which is idyllic for a wedding. The resort's design marries sleek modern lines with the seventh-century heritage of temples from the region. When a large lotus diya in the centre of the maze garden lights up at night, the spectacle is worth it. **Getting there:** 45km from Chennai International Airport. ihg.com

ITC GRAND CHOLA

A jewel in ITC's repertoire, the Grand Chola is a behemoth of a hotel with 522 rooms, imposing Chola architecture, and the Rajendra hall with 27,000sq ft



space. Dining options include the spectacular Avartana. Grand Chola weddings will make a statement. **Getting there:** 8km from Chennai International Airport. itshotels.com

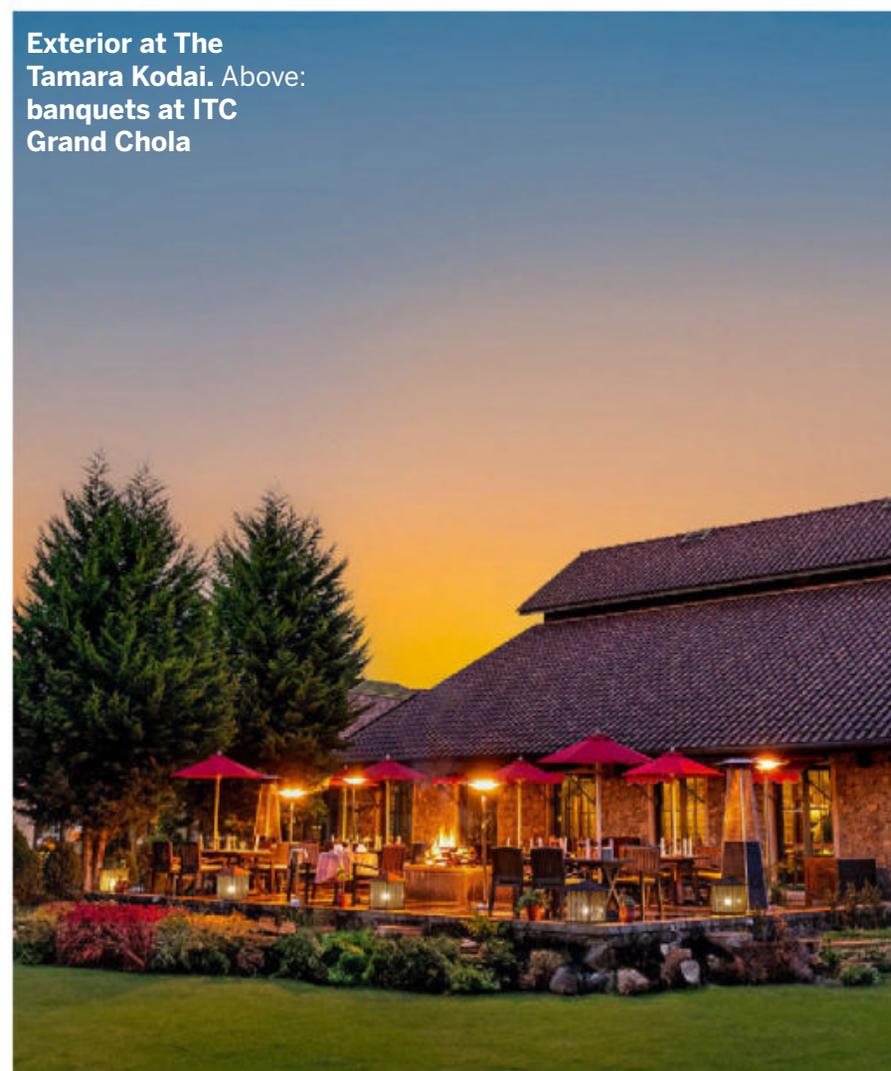
TAJ COROMANDEL, CHENNAI

A stately hotel with glittering artefacts and chandeliers, its biggest banquet ballroom holds 500. Include beloved Chinese restaurant, Golden Dragon, in your menu plans. **Getting there:** 16km from Chennai International Airport. tajhotels.com

UTTAR PRADESH

ITC MUGHAL, AGRA

A grand homage to Mughal monuments like Fatehapur Sikri and Agra Fort, this luxury hotel has an Aga Khan Award for its architecture. High ceilings and large windows look out to the Taj Mahal, which is only a 15-minute drive away, while the lobby interiors borrow from its marble polish. Diwan-e-Khas, the indoor ballroom that has three sections, holds at least 500 attendees. ITC favours green banquets, so the hotel will offer some suggestions on how to reduce the event's carbon footprint. Outside, there are 23 acres of gardens, ideal for main functions. Guests can choose from 233 rooms in five categories. And those who want their fill of the Taj Mahal or Agra's rich culture and heritage can sneak off between festivities to explore the neighbourhood. The hotel curates a tour on request. **Getting there:** 8km from Agra Airport. itshotels.com



Exterior at The Tamara Kodai. Above: banquets at ITC Grand Chola

TIPS

HOW TO PICK THE RIGHT HOTEL FOR YOUR WEDDING

- 1 Choose a hotel that matches your personality and aesthetics by evaluating its ambience, architecture, and reputation.
- 2 Ensure the hotel offers spaces that can comfortably accommodate your guest list and planned activities for local and outstation guests.
- 3 A wedding venue should offer diverse recreational amenities such as a spa, interactive dining, and guest entertainment options.
- 4 There should be excellent collaboration between a hotel and a wedding planner.
- 5 Both parties should prioritise bespoke amenities.
- 6 To ensure that the bride and groom's fairy-tale comes true, the on-ground team needs to provide them not just physical and practical but also emotional support.
- 7 Seamless coordination at the wedding must be ensured. Floor butlers should be dedicated to all the guests in attendance.
- 8 Understand the hotel's culinary USP while deciding the menu.
- 9 Discuss your vision and theme with the hotel's catering team, ensuring your menu aligns with the overall theme.
- 10 Consider the timing and flow of the meal service so that you can plan a great dining experience.

Contributions from Rajat Sethi, GM, Fairmont Jaipur; Rajesh Namby, GM, Raffles Udaipur, and Digvijay Singh, GM, Conrad Bengaluru

REAL WEDDINGS



Past Perfect

Akshaya Sivakumar and Ashwin Chari's Bengaluru wedding put a new spin on their shared Tamil heritage

"We are a reflection of our roots but we can only go forward, never backwards."

When Sydney-based couple, intellectual property lawyer Akshaya Sivakumar and fashion designer Ashwin Chari, first met, they did not think it would lead to anything serious. But life had other plans. And their first date in July 2019 eventually led to an engagement last January.

It was a strange affinity that brought them together, feels Sivakumar. While both were raised in Australia, the Tamilians bonded over their connection to their homeland. "We both come from families who have made significant contributions to modern Tamil culture in the fields of literature, India's freedom movement and politics," explains the bride. "Our ancestral homes in Tamil Nadu are now museums. We've learnt about our own families through books, literature and movies." This unexpected sharing of their unique lineages played a role in bringing them together.

THE VISION

When it came to planning their wedding earlier this year, they wanted to celebrate this very heritage. "Both our grandmothers live in India, and would not have been able to travel to Australia. We wanted them to be there," says the groom, leading to the decision to marry in their homeland.

The couple based a lot of their creative decisions for the Hindu wedding ceremony on a connection with the past and memories of their ancestors. "It was a modern take on a South Indian Hindu village wedding," they add.

THE DESTINATION

They chose five-acre verdant property The Tamarind Tree in Bengaluru for the two-day affair that included the nalangu (haldi), a Hindu wedding ceremony and reception. "It is the only venue we looked at. We loved the heritage property with its old-world charm reminiscent of an era gone by," says the bride. Their friends flew in from Australia, the UK and Europe, some of them visiting India for the first time.

THE DETAILS

The couple chose to have the rituals conducted by an Arya Samaj priest to remove any reference to caste. "We are a reflection of our roots but we can only go forward, never backwards. We don't ever want to cosplay our own culture, but we know that choosing the best parts of it also brings an understanding of what we can teach our future generations. It's what our families have strived for as advocates of social change too," explains the bride.

The couple also scrapped conventional elements like the couple entry, staged performances, speeches and OTT décor. "It wasn't revolutionary by any means, but unique in the current landscape of weddings. We wanted the day to be an experience, not a production or a show," they share.
—PRAACHI RANIWALA

TIPS

ON THE ULTIMATE DESTINATION WEDDING

1 A destination wedding doesn't necessarily have to be extravagant. "Sometimes it's just about making small things meaningful and memorable at a special location."

2 "Let people help. A lot of effort and organisation goes into planning a wedding in India. Our wedding would not have happened without our family and friends to organise it."

BLACK BOOK

Venue The Tamarind Tree
Photography Eshant Raju Photography
Videography SDS Studio
Makeup Disha Buxani
Hair Lavi Buxani
Florist Sathya Narayana
Food The Oterra Hotel 



AD



PHOTO: BIKRAMJI BOSE/AD INDIA

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL HOMES IN THE WORLD



Umar and Nada Kamani's French Riviera

Romance



union was a multicultural extravaganza

"We wanted to blend the sophisticated beauty of the Côte d'Azur with elements from our love story and diverse cultural backgrounds."

For this Dubai-based couple, their love story was as much about the coming together of two individuals as it was about fusing two cultures. British entrepreneur Umar Kamani is of Indian descent while his now-wife, model Nada Kamani, comes from a British-Saudi Arabian lineage. The newlyweds, who met through common friends, celebrated their distinct upbringing during their glamorous three-day wedding in the French Riviera this May. Their glitzy guest list included the likes of supermodel Naomi Campbell, footballer Rio Ferdinand, actor Christina Milian and designer Manish Malhotra.

THE DESTINATION

A storybook romance such as theirs called for an equally dreamy location to say 'I do'. And for the Kamanis, all roads led to Hotel du Cap-Eden-Roc in Antibes, France, one of the most stunning properties in the world. Not just for its picturesque vistas, but also because the jet-setting couple has several fond memories of their previous stays at the hotel. The French Riviera was also where Umar popped the question back in 2021, with a proposal at the historic Opéra de Monte-Carlo.

"The iconic status of the hotel and its beautiful settings perfectly aligned with the grandeur and elegance we envisioned for the wedding," explains the bride.

THE VISION

"We wanted to blend the sophisticated beauty of the Côte d'Azur with elements that reflect our love story and diverse cultural backgrounds," the bride carries on. "While we did want the wedding to be luxurious, it had to, more importantly, be deeply personal and reflective of our individual heritage." The end result was a culmination of Western influences with Arabian and Indian details.

The white-tie event, for instance, also had elements such as henna artists and belly

dancers. The groom's culture took centre stage during the Indian wedding ceremony, complete with dhol players, Bollywood music, Indian cuisine and custom couture by Manish Malhotra.

THE HIGHLIGHTS

For their Western wedding, the bride wore custom Dior and the groom was in Tom Ford. As Nada walked down the aisle, the moment transformed into something truly surreal with a live performance by Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli. "It really was a fairy-tale come to life," reminisces the bride.

—PRAACHI RANIWALA

TIPS

ON HOW TO MAXIMISE THE VENUE

1 The couple emphasises the importance of choosing a location that holds personal significance. "Start with a place that means a lot to you as a couple, and then work backwards to plan the details."

2 "Ensure the location offers a variety of spaces to host different events seamlessly. We spread all parties across many venues at the property."

3 If you're marrying in a beautiful location, highlight that. "We integrated the natural and architectural beauty of the venue into our overall wedding theme."

BLACK BOOK

Venue Hotel du Cap-Eden-Roc

Wedding Planner Banana Split

Photography German Larkin

Performances Andrea Bocelli, Mariah Carey, Jay Sean, Ronan Keating





Amazing HONEYMOON HOTELS

Secluded private island villas to dreamy heritage palaces, here are some tres romantique hotels for your post-wedding trip. By Lakshmi Sankaran

INDIA

RAFFLES UDAIPUR, RAJASTHAN

A preferred venue for many destination weddings, the private island resort also has enough intimate coves to have a peaceful, unbothered honeymoon. Rooms with private pools, baroque gardens where you can enjoy quiet walks, and a Belvedere viewpoint where high tea is served—all ensure

that nothing intrudes on your escape. **Getting there:** 16km from Maharana Pratap Airport. raffles.com

QAYAAM GAH, SRINAGAR, JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Four luxury villas and three suites sit among pristine green fields and orchids at this resort that looks down on Dal Lake. The lake's daily life does not interfere with your stay at all. Instead, grab a cup of kahwa to watch the floating gardens pass by,

and take in the Zabarwan Hills and Hazrat Bal Shrine. A moonlit shikara ride, with only the boatman's oar interrupting your reverie, is a must-do. **Getting there:** 23km from Sheikh Ul Alam International Airport Srinagar. abchapiretreats.in

GLENBURN TEA ESTATE & BOUTIQUE HOTEL, DARJEELING, WEST BENGAL

This 1860-built tea estate is now a luxury boutique hotel set on a fully-functioning plantation.

Glenburn serenades the past with its colonial bungalows and stretches of hillside beauty. Honeymoons here include tea tastings, a day at a riverside camp, picnics, and massages. There are momos and viewpoints in Darjeeling to be enjoyed, but if you would rather stay in, look no further than your private balcony with splendid views all the way to Sikkim. **Getting there:** 83km from Bagdogra International Airport. glenburnestate.com

The view from
Qayaam Gah



ARAMNESS, GIR, GUJARAT

Surrounded by the jungle in all its glory, this luxury safari lodge in Gir draws on local Gujarati village life for its design. After early morning game drives, return to your villa to relax in the stepwell-style pool. Evenings are best when you are huddling together on floor cushions under fairy lights while the staff cooks up a meal on the fire pit. **Getting there:** 53km from Keshod Airport. aramness.com

CHITTOOR KOTTARAM, KOCHI, KERALA

Built by the erstwhile royals of Cochin, this single-key mansion, with tiled roofs and traditional Kerala architecture, is now maintained by CGH Earth. Privacy and solitude are the main selling points here. Apart from the comfortable rooms, you have access to a dedicated team, who are discreetly attentive and give you all the space you need. **Getting there:** 26km from Cochin International Airport. cghearth.com

AMAN-I-KHAS, RANTHAMBORE, RAJASTHAN

On the outskirts of Ranthambore National Park, this luxury glamping resort has 10 expansive tents with all creature comforts. Each tent is designed to ensure the utmost privacy and comes with a living area, vintage writing desks, free-standing bathtubs, and a private deck. Besides daily safari drives, the spa is worth a visit. **Getting there:** 167km from Jaipur International Airport. aman.com

AHILYA BY THE SEA, GOA

Located near Dolphin Bay in Nerul, this heritage property includes nine rooms across three independent villas. The stay and service is homely with Goan, Italian and French cuisine on offer. Two swimming pools are best enjoyed for sunset and sunrise dips. **Getting there:** 33km from Goa International Airport. ahilyabythesea.com



Couple riding horses in the desert at Qasr Al Sarab Desert Resort by Anantara

ATLANTIS, DUBAI

If a cosy city staycation between longer trips is on your itinerary, then this iconic resort located at the tip of Dubai's Palm Island has all you need. Book one of the signature suites, with its private Jacuzzi, and head to the ShiQui Spa for a rejuvenating couples massage, capping it off with a romantic dinner at any of its Michelin-starred restaurants. **Getting there:** 32km from Dubai International Airport. atlantis.com

ANANTARA MINA AL ARAB RAS AL KHAIMAH RESORT

Bringing a slice of the Maldives to the Middle East, this resort surrounded by mangroves, has luxury overwater villas, Asian and Mediterranean restaurants, a healing spa, sunset cruises and late checkouts for couples. A personal chef will also whip up a beachside candlelit dinner as part of the honeymoon service. **Getting there:** 40km from Ras Al Khaimah International Airport. anantara.com

FOUR SEASONS HOTEL BAHRAIN BAY

Urban getaway seekers should consider this island resort with a private white sand beach. Enjoy swimming or snorkelling on a secluded isle, 45-minutes from the resort, or indulge in couple paddle boarding. You could also head to the beach deck to party with sheesha and cocktails. **Getting there:** 11km from Bahrain International Airport. fourseasons.com

BVLGARI RESORT DUBAI

It's the Mediterranean ambience that lends this five-star resort its charm. Couples should opt for the Bvlgari Suite which comes with a couples whirlpool tub and a wraparound private terrace. If being out is better, then there's a Yacht Club and a slew of top-tier European restaurants. **Getting there:** 17km from Dubai International Airport. bulgarihotels.com

MIDDLE EAST

ONE&ONLY THE PALM, DUBAI

This beachfront resort in Jumeirah is a sensory dream of glistening pools, Andalusian architecture and fine meals curated by award-winning French chef Yannick Alléno. The junior or executive Palm Beach Pool Suite, with a patio overlooking the beach, is perfect for couples. When you do leave the love nest, be sure to try some Arabian wellness rituals at the Guerlain Spa. **Getting there:** 40km from Dubai International Airport. oneandonlyresorts.com

SHANGRI-LA QARYAT AL BERI, ABU DHABI

With lovely undulating palms and its old-school Islamic architecture, this resort has an inimitable vibe. From the rooms,

there are sweeping views of Khor Al Maqta creek and Sheikh Grand Zayed Mosque. The hotel can arrange a private candlelit dinner on the beach with an elaborate sheesha and dining spread, as the Khor Al Maqta's waters gleam in the sun's light. **Getting there:** 17km from Zayed International Airport. shangri-la.com

QASR AL SARAB DESERT RESORT BY ANANTARA, ABU DHABI

The secluded resort in the middle of the desert is surrounded by golden sand dunes and changing colours of the sky. There's daily champagne breakfast-in-bed service, stargazing sessions, and hammam at the Anantara Spa. **Getting there:** 202km from Zayed International Airport. anantara.com

EUROPE

HÔTEL MARTINEZ, CANNES, FRANCE

A legendary fixture in Cannes, the gorgeous Art Deco palace hotel has been keeping the romance of the French Riviera alive for years. Come here for some sexy, stylish summer time at the hotel's private beach club. Soak in the wonderful art and architecture of this part of France. Or bliss out in the hotel's exclusive Spa by Carita. Two penthouses on the seventh floor are the most romantic accommodations in the hotel.

Getting there: 25km from Nice Côte d'Azur Airport. hyatt.com

JW MARRIOTT VENICE RESORT & SPA, ITALY

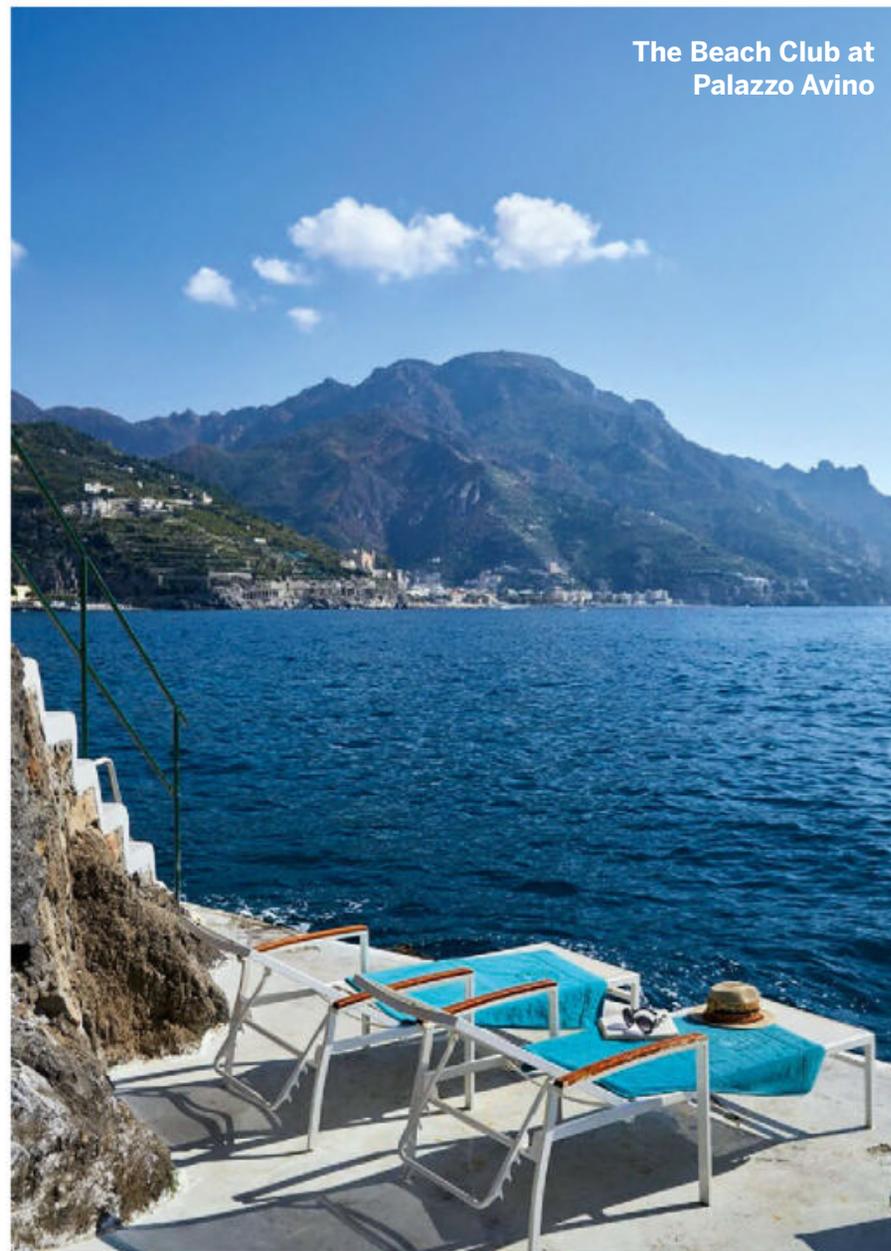
Set on the private island of Isola delle Rose, the 40-acre resort offers supreme exclusivity even though it's not far from the city's frenzy. For honeymooners, the Villa Rose features two bedrooms and its own pool while the Goco Spa has a biosauna and hammam. Once refreshed, head back into Venice city to fall in love all over again. **Getting there:** 14km from Venice Marco Polo Airport. marriott.com

GLENEAGLES, PERTHSHIRE, SCOTLAND

This 1920s golf hotel, at an hour's distance from Edinburgh, warms your heart. The resort has 233 bedrooms, nine bars and restaurants, and three golf courses to choose from. Pick Braid House, which overlooks the rolling hills of this region's fairy-tale countryside. Try one of the hotel's couples' spa sessions, and go for lovely arm-in-arm strolls along its lush green courses. **Getting there:** 68km from Edinburgh Airport. gleneagles.com

BADRUTT'S PALACE HOTEL, ST. MORITZ, SWITZERLAND

St. Moritz is a year-round tourist magnet for its alpine lifestyle and ski resorts. For couples,



The Beach Club at Palazzo Avino

the allure of heritage hotel Badrutt's Palace lies in its many lavish perks: Jacuzzis, saunas, a private garden and the stunning Swiss mountain landscape. Plan a romantic sailing trip if summer is more to your liking. In winters, take a horse carriage ride through St. Moritz's snow-covered streets. **Getting there:** 214km from Zurich Airport. badruttspalace.com

ÇIRAĞAN PALACE KEMPINSKI ISTANBUL, TURKEY

Istanbul's most beautiful hotel is the height of Ottoman decadence with white glove service all around. Private suites offer panoramic views of the Bosphorus, where you can take evening boat rides. Sunset picnics and an eye-popping hammam make for a charmed life. **Getting there:** 41km from Istanbul Airport. kempinski.com

THE BOWMANN HOTEL, PARIS, FRANCE

A favourite of Parisian pleasure-seekers, the Bowmann's offerings include an Eiffel Prestige Suite with a balcony directly looking at the iconic landmark and a Terraké spa, which comes with a balneotherapy and a herbal tea room. **Getting there:** 16km from Paris Le-Bourget Airport. hotelbowmannparis.com

HÔTEL DE PARIS MONTE-CARLO, MONACO

A perfect snapshot of the jet-set Monaco lifestyle, the Belle Époque-style hotel is for glamorous honeymooners, who can indulge themselves at Alain Ducasse restaurants, the Casino Square, a luxurious spa and one of the world's largest wine cellars. **Getting there:** 31km from Nice Côte d'Azur Airport. hoteldeparis.com

THE MADRID EDITION, SPAIN

Contemporary in aesthetic, this hotel in the heart of the city near Puerta de Sol should win over culture and art enthusiasts with its easy access to major museums. The hotel also has a massive infinity pool and a beautiful terrace, where you can plonk on a daybed, hold hands, and watch the sunset. **Getting there:** 15km from Adolfo Suárez Madrid-Barajas Airport. editionhotels.com

THE YEATMAN HOTEL, PORTO, PORTUGAL

Located in Porto's wine-making quarter, the hotel occupies a romantic vantage point. All the rooms and suites here have balcony or terrace views of the port city. The Bacchus Suite, featuring a rotating bed, a Jacuzzi, and a terrace with open log fireplace, will suit newlyweds. **Getting there:** 22km from Francisco Sá Carneiro Airport. the-yeatman-hotel.com

NYVÅGAR, STORVÅGAN, NORWAY

The cosy and well-equipped cabins in this hotel occupy the edge of a pier along the Lofoten Sea. Inside, there are rustic accents, a kitchenette, and a microwave. It feels like you are renting a quaint fishing spot for the summer. Head for long bicycle rides or kayak through quiet waters, and at the end of it all, drop in to the mountain-facing sauna at Lofotspa. **Getting there:** 12km from Svolvær Airport. nyvagar.no

PALAZZO AVINO, RAVELLO, ITALY

Overlooking the beautiful fishing villages of the Mediterranean, this 12th-century villa of Italian nobles is now a stunning five-star hotel. The sea view suites, some of which have terraces, should be ideal for couples. After feasting at Rossellinis, the hotel's restaurant, a lazy siesta is a treat. **Getting there:** 59km from Naples International Airport. palazzoavino.com

ASIA

VELAA PRIVATE ISLAND, MALDIVES

There are 45 exclusive villas on this private isle resort but the one that's most fitting for lovebirds is The Romantic Residence, a one-bedroom unit that floats above the lagoon and can only be accessed by boat. For play, there is a wide range of water sports including a nifty tandem jetovator. **Getting there:** 45 minutes by seaplane from Velana International Airport. velaapivateisland.com

CHEVAL BLANC RANDHELI, MALDIVES

The resort in the Noonu Atoll, in the northwest Maldives, is luxury personified with 45 one-and-two bedroom villas, all of which come with personal butlers, spa treatments, a quiet beach and the turquoise blue ocean, just a few steps away. **Getting there:** 50 minutes by seaplane from Velana International Airport. chevalblanc.com

Hammock at Velaa
Private Island

ANANTARA SIAM BANGKOK HOTEL, THAILAND

Near Lumpini Park, this city hotel evokes Thai art and history with its design. Bangkok's malls and night markets are close by but first, there are romantic dinners at hotel's Italian restaurant Biscotti or the deep-healing Soul of Siam massages to be enjoyed. **Getting there:** 26km from Don Mueang International Airport. anantara.com

JW MARRIOTT KHAO LAK RESORT & SPA, THAILAND

Located in Khao Lak, Phang Nga, this beachfront hotel offers a range of luxury rooms with private balconies and direct access into its lagoon pool. Cocktails at the Beach Bar during sunsets can be paired with a traditional Thai meal at Ta Krai. **Getting there:** 84km from Phuket International Airport. marriott.com

FOUR SEASONS RESORT MALDIVES AT LANDAA GIRAAVARU

Located in the Baa Atoll UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, the resort's secluded lagoon villas and suites transport you into another world completely. On a sunset cruise, you get treated with a champagne-soaked spread and at the jungle pavilion, you and your partner can practise yoga together. **Getting there:** 40 minutes by seaplane from Velana International Airport. fourseasons.com

AMANKILA, BALI, INDONESIA

Situated on a lush hillside among frangipani blooms, some of the suites here stand on lagoon-side stilts. The property's most exclusive stay is the Amankila suite, where honeymooners can enjoy a private poolside candlelit dinner. Among other pleasures, try cocktails and canapés at sundown at the resort's Terrace Bar. **Getting there:** 60km from Denpasar International Airport. aman.com



Exterior view at Pemako Punakha, Bhutan

PEMAKO PUNAKHA, BHUTAN

The luxury mountain resort in Punakha Valley combines comfort with Bhutanese traditional food and relaxation. The tented forest villas, each with a private pool, offers magnificent views of the forest, river, and surrounding hills. Unwind with a traditional hot stone bath or simply head for a walk in the hills. **Getting there:** 115km from Paro International Airport. pemakohotels.com

WILD COAST TENTED LODGE, YALA, SRI LANKA

This luxury lodge in Yala National Park is a camp at the cusp of the forest and a virgin beach, near the Indian Ocean. Designed to blend into its natural setting, the hotel is ideal for those who seek a jungle romance. **Getting there:** 258km from Colombo International Airport. resplendentceylon.com

AFRICA

MOUNT NELSON, A BELMOND HOTEL, CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

Located in the buzzing city centre, a honeymoon here can go from high tea on the terrace or yoga in its gardens to a tour of the African wine country. **Getting there:** 18km from Cape Town International Airport. belmond.com

XIGERA SAFARI LODGE, MOREMI GAME RESERVE, BOTSWANA

Inside Botswana's Okavango Delta, this lodge has only 12 suites, each designed to celebrate African art. Private picnics in the bush and sundowners by the water, along with game drives, make this a bucket list trip. **Getting there:** 120km from Maun Airport. xigera.com

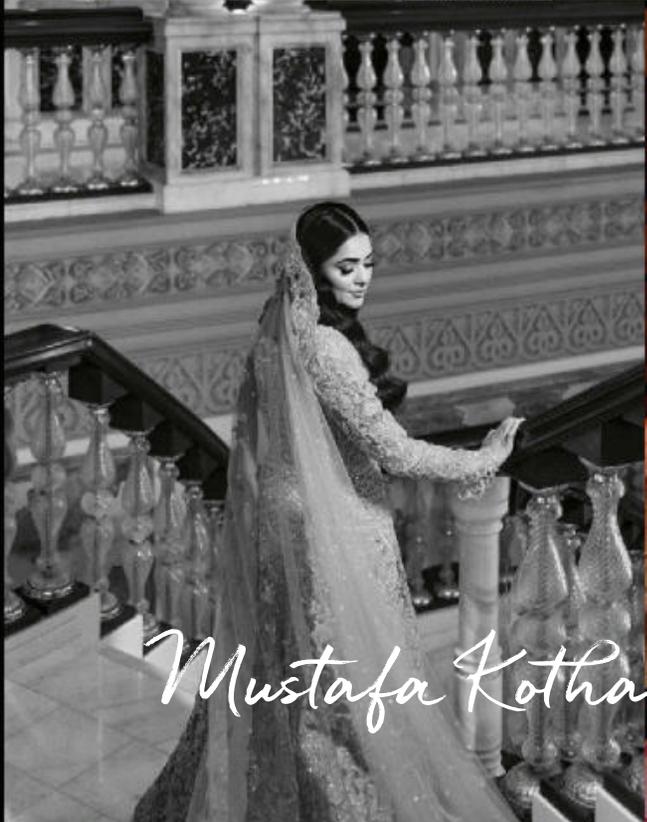
TIPS

WHAT MAKES A GREAT HONEYMOON?

- 1 Don't book too many activities or places. A honeymoon should be relaxing and leisurely.
- 2 Consider the resorts or hotels where you will be staying carefully—how much space or privacy do they offer, are they intimate, far away, or in the middle of a city?
- 3 If you are working with a travel planner, offer your own suggestions for anything that you would like to do in the location you are visiting.
- 4 Try to give locations that are less explored a chance.
- 5 Discuss any requests that you have for the hotels where you are staying, ahead of time.
- 6 While a honeymoon is about your time together, it's nice to plan little individual surprises for each other.
- 7 Long honeymoons are the trend now. Couples prefer taking a month or two off to spend with each other in a special location.
- 8 Couples nowadays often prefer to hop multiple countries, winding down their trips in any big European city.
- 9 Don't try to tick off your entire bucket list for a place on your honeymoon. Maybe you can return to the spot later to mark special occasions.
- 10 Botswana is an underrated honeymoon destination. New Zealand, Australia and Turkey are also becoming favourites.

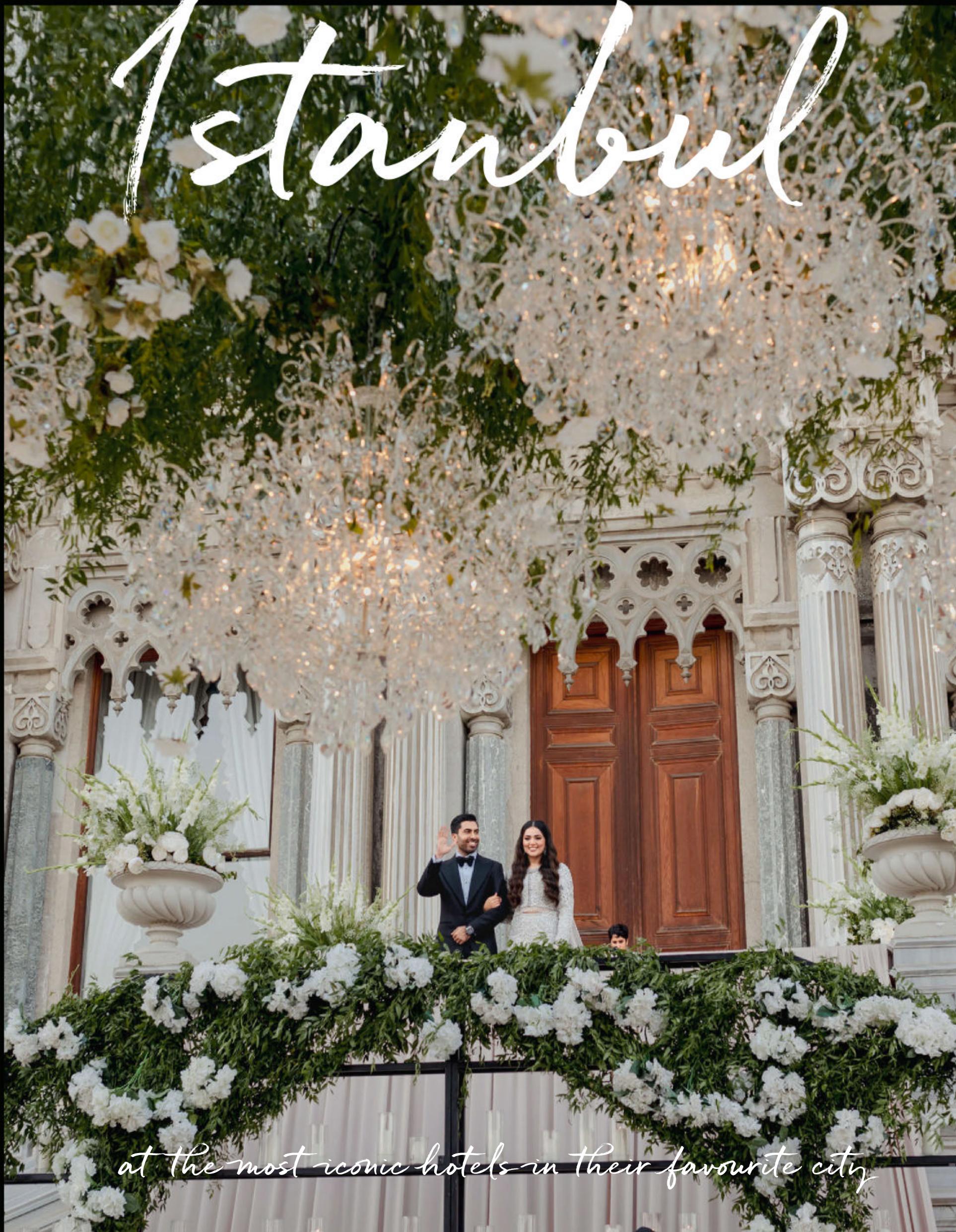
Inputs by Loveleen Multani Arun, founder-director, Panache World

Worwedding



Mustafa Kothawala and Aisha Motan said 'I do'

Istanbul



at the most iconic hotels in their favourite city

"We love the blend of East and West that is the heart of Istanbul. It's a beautiful city with a rich history we resonate with."

Weddings often make for great meet-cutes, but in Mustafa Kothawala and Aisha Motan's case, it was a last-minute date change in another couple's celebrations (due to the pandemic) that brought them together. "Aisha was already in Newport Beach in California, when her friend's wedding got postponed. Her cousin is my friend, and we ended up meeting each other at a party here," says the groom, an LA-based founder of an e-commerce company.

After dating for a year following this serendipitous meeting in 2021, the couple tied the knot in a grand affair in Istanbul last year.

THE VISION

While 400 guests from around the world did show up in Turkey to celebrate the couple's union, the duo still wanted the atmosphere to be very intimate. "We wanted to create a bespoke experience at breathtaking venues. We did not just want everything to be opulent, but packed with personalised touches too," explains the Chicago-raised bride, a consultant at Accenture. Culinary experiences and interactive entertainment were a special focus. They roped in artists like Sukhbir, DJ AJ Wavy and Turkish whirling dervishes to achieve the latter.

THE DESTINATION

"We love the blend of East and West that is the heart of Istanbul. It's a beautiful city with a rich history we resonate with," says the bride. Having visited the city several times, they carefully shortlisted three hotels to host their various events. The sangeet was at the Mandarin Oriental Bosphorus, their favourite hotel in Istanbul. They chose Raffles Istanbul for the wedding because they consider it a "home away from home". "Whenever we travel to the Middle East, we always stop in Istanbul and stay here," they add. The valima (reception) was at the Ottoman-era hotel,

Çırağan Palace Kempinski, which the couple considers one of the most exclusive wedding backdrops in the world.

THE WARDROBE

The couple wore a mix of Indian, Pakistani and international labels. The groom wore Arjan Dugal and Sabyasachi for the sangeet, and Tom Ford and Canali for the reception. All of Motan's bridal looks were by Pakistani designers—Sana Safinaz and Élan for the sangeet, and Faraz Manan for the reception. They both said 'I do' in Shehla Chatoor for the nikaah. —PRAACHI RANIWALA

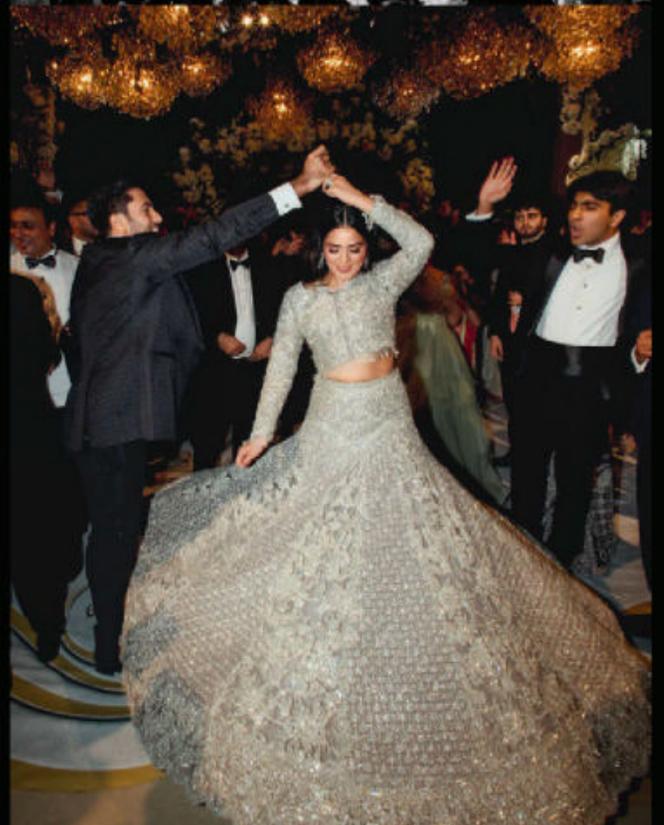
TIPS

ON A SUCCESSFUL DESTINATION WEDDING

- 1 "Pick a destination that has significance to you as a couple or offers the ambience you desire."
- 2 "Recces are important to get a feel of the place, meet local vendors, and make informed decisions."
- 3 "Consider accessibility for guests. We picked venues within a few miles of each other, which made logistics easier."
- 4 "Anticipate challenges such as transportation, language barriers, and planning conundrums caused by time differences."

BLACK BOOK

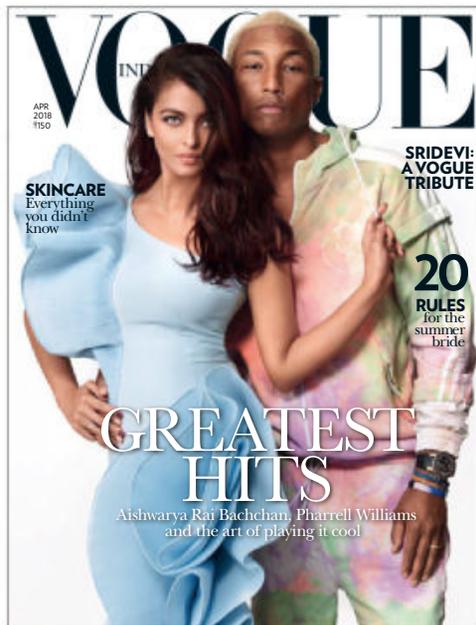
Venue Mandarin Oriental Bosphorus, Raffles Istanbul, Çırağan Palace Kempinski
Photography House On The Clouds
Videography The Wedding Filmer
Planning & Décor Inside Events
Makeup Yasmin Khan
Hair Sinan Çelikbas
Entertainment Sukhbir, Yusuf Ozer, Sandy Sax, DJ AJ Wavy, Irf DeeJay, DJ Zaar 





INDIA VOGUE

BEFORE IT'S IN FASHION, IT'S IN VOGUE!



Away

Joanna Nathan and Matthew Kuhn turned their



We Go

Thailand wedding into a weeklong getaway for guests



"Many guests had Thailand on their bucket list, and our wedding was the perfect reason to finally book a trip."

Joanna Nathan and Matthew Kuhn found love in the solid foundation of friendship. The Houston-based couple, who are founders of their respective medical device start-ups, first met as students pursuing graduate degrees, and even went on to work at the same company after that. "Over time, our friendship progressed into a romantic interest and quickly turned into love," says the bride.

THE VISION

Travel had always been an integral part of their relationship. So when it came to planning their wedding, the Indian-origin bride and American groom wanted to include their loved ones in such an experience too. "And we wanted to do this with a vibrant, intimate wedding on the beach," adds Nathan of their two-day celebration last September.

THE DESTINATION

Thailand was the perfect choice for them—it was far-flung but approachable for their 75 guests who were mostly coming in from the US. "Many of our guests had Thailand on their bucket list, and our wedding was the perfect reason to finally book a trip," says the bride. As fans of boutique hotels, the couple fell in love with Cape Fahn Private Islands Hotel, a luxurious retreat near Choeng Mon beach, just off the eastern coast of Koh Samui.

THE DETAILS

Their shared passion for exploring new lands drove the couple's itinerary. To maximise the destination, they planned a weeklong buddymoon for their friends before the main wedding events. "We rented several large

villas and explored Koh Samui, visiting an ethical elephant sanctuary, ATV off-roading through the hills, temple hopping and snorkelling in Ang Thong National Marine Park," the couple tells us.
—PRAACHI RANIWALA

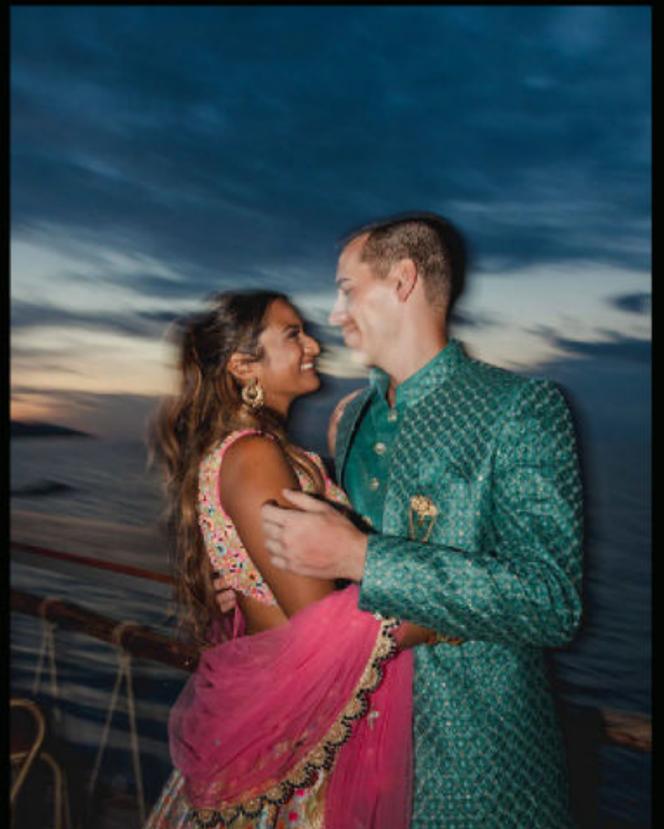
TIPS

FOR SEAMLESS WEDDING PLANNING

- 1 Investing in the best possible wedding planner is essential. "Work with someone who is familiar with local vendors and venues."
- 2 "Focus on the experiential elements that guests remember most about weddings such as the food, music and setting."
- 3 "Hire the best photographers because this will be a whirlwind busy time for you, and these are memories you will want captured well for the rest of your life."
- 4 "Trust your vendors to handle things that are hard to control or coordinate from afar."

BLACK BOOK

Venue Cape Fahn Private Islands Hotel
Wedding Planner The Wedding Bliss Thailand
Photography House on the Clouds
Videography 101 Cinematography
Bridal Stylist Veil by Dara Adams
Hair & Makeup Makeup Samui
Florals I Am Flower 🌸





Condé Nast Traveller



THE LAST WORD IN TRAVEL

THE PERFECT MATCH

A wish list of coveted luxuries to make your wedding unforgettable

Serenity in the hills

Nestled amidst the ethereal Shivalik Hills, Moksha Himalaya Spa Resort offers a transformative wellness experience. Combining the wisdom of Ayurveda with contemporary practices, their extensive spa therapies and bespoke programs promise a holistic renewal. Rejuvenate in their state-of-the-art spa, embark on invigorating treks, or simply unwind by the infinity pool, all while basking in the breathtaking Himalayan vistas. From adventure pursuits to soul-stirring yoga sessions, Moksha Himalaya Spa Resort's offerings are meticulously crafted to nurture the mind, body, and spirit. For those seeking an unforgettable celebration, the resort also provides a stunning backdrop for your wedding vows, with elegant indoor settings and scenic outdoor spaces to host a truly magical day.

For more information, visit www.mokshaspa.com

An ode to nature

Drawing inspiration from the intricate beauty of nature, the Enchanted Trails Collection by Tanishq is a celebration of Indian flora and fauna. Each design captures the essence of nature, from the graceful movement of branches to the enchanting allure of blooming flowers. The Flowing Whispers Diamond necklace set, for instance, mirrors the interplay of light and water, much like sun rays dancing on the ripples of a serene stream. Meanwhile, the Mystical Bloom Diamond necklace showcases the brand's artistry with gemstones meticulously embedded in a layered diamond neckpiece. This collection is a treasure trove of mesmerising designs waiting to be discovered.

For more information, visit www.tanishq.co.in or visit a Tanishq store in your city



An expression etched in history

Steeped in appreciation for jewellery's rich history, Jaipur Gems presents exquisite pieces that seamlessly blend tradition with contemporary design. Each handcrafted treasure, imbued with timeless elegance and a touch of modernity, transcends mere adornment. Jaipur Gems infuses each jewel piece with tradition and grace, ensuring it becomes an heirloom, whispering tales of royalty and exclusivity for years to come. Every piece is a testament to the rich cultural heritage of jewellery-making, etching a story waiting to be inscribed by you.

For more information, visit www.jaipurgems.com



BLACK Book

Your guide to the weddings specialists featured in this issue

FASHION

Abha Khurana Batra Elegant wedding wear for men and women. [@abha_batra_designs](#)

Abhinav Mishra Designed for the modern Indian woman with international sensibilities. [abhinavmishraofficial.com](#)

Abu Jani Sandeep Khosla Drama married with timeless appeal. [abusandeep.com](#)

Amit Aggarwal Bridal looks with an avant-garde flair. [amitaggarwal.com](#)

Anita Dongre A sustainable approach to bridal wear inspired by Rajasthan's textiles. [anitadongre.com](#)

Anaita Shroff Adajania The celebrity bride stylist was roped in by content creator Sakshi Sindwani for her wedding.

[@anaitashroffadajania](#)

Anamika Khanna For a cool, modern take on tradition.

[@anamikakhanna.in](#)

Arjan Dugal Contemporary and layered Indian menswear.

[@arjandugal](#)

Arpita Mehta Glamour, bold colours, and flirty silhouettes. [arpitamehtaofficial.com](#)

Canali Classic Italian luxury menswear. [canali.com](#)

Clad by Tanya Vohra A wedding styling service for the couple and their families. [cladclad.com](#)

Dior Legendary French couture, part of Radhika Merchant's wedding wardrobe. [dior.com](#)

Dolly Jain Sari draper to the stars. [dollyjain.com](#)

ÉLAN Pakistani fashion house known for luxurious bridal and evening wear. [elan.pk](#)

Falguni Shane Peacock Intricate designs that scream high-octane glamour. [falgunishanepeacock.in](#)

Faraz Manan Bridal couture heavyweight from Pakistan. [farazmanan.com](#)

Gaurav Gupta Couture that spans surrealist to sculptural



Signature red lehenga by Anita Dongre

and has a fan in Kim Kardashian. [gauravguptastudio.com](#)

Heena Kochhar Her signature chogas are a beautiful bridal choice. [heenakochhar.com](#)

Hermès Symbol of fine luxury craftsmanship. [hermes.com](#)

Kunal Rawal The designer who reinvented the modern Indian groom's wardrobe. [kunalrawalofficial.com](#)

Kynah California store for Indian bridal wear. [kynah.com](#)

Manish Malhotra The designer of the moment who was creative director of the entire Ambani wedding extravaganza. [manishmalhotra.in](#)

Manolo Blahnik Luxury shoe brand by famed Spanish designer. [manoloblahnik.com](#)

Nine Styles Exquisitely tailored formal and wedding wear for men. [nine-styles.com](#)

Oscar de la Renta Renowned luxury label worn by Nita Ambani. [oscardelarenta.com](#)

Papa Don't Preach by Shubhika Look-at-me fashion not for the faint-hearted. [papadontpreach.com](#)

Payal Singhal Bohemian meets vintage in her looks. [payalsinghal.com](#)

Raw Mango For the textile-loving bride. [rawmango.com](#)

Rahul Mishra For bridal apparel that tells a story. [rahulmishra.in](#)

Ralph Lauren Iconic American couture that has dressed Hollywood celebrities for nearly five decades. [ralphlauren.com](#)

Rhea Kapoor Stylist behind Radhika Merchant's wedding looks. [@rheakapoor](#)

Sabyasachi Deepika Padukone, Katrina Kaif, Priyanka Chopra Jonas—he truly is a bride whisperer. [sabyasachi.com](#)

Sana Safinaz Premier and luxury bridal couture from Pakistan. [sanasafinaz.com](#)

Seema Gujral Heritage with a new perspective for the modern bride. [seemagujral.com](#)

Shantnu & Nikhil Head here for the label's signature grand neo-drapes and distinctive cuts. [shantanunikhil.com](#)

Shehla Chatoor Pakistani designer known for glamorous elegance. [@shehlachatoor](#)

Taller Marmo Fluid silhouettes and a contemporary take on evening wear inspired by Middle-eastern style defines this brand. [tallermarmo.com](#)

Tarun Tahiliani A pioneer of the Indian Modern aesthetic. [taruntahiliani.com](#)

Tom Ford American designer famous for clean, sophisticated lines. [tomford.com](#)

The Bridal Finery Florida store for designer wedding dresses. [thebridalfinery.com](#)

Veil by Dara Adams Curating creative looks for stateside weddings. [@veilbydaraadams](#)

The Wedding Edit Retail outlet for a modern wedding look. [theweddingeditdn.co.uk](#)

JEWELLERY, WATCHES & ACCESSORIES

Amrapali Jewels Indian heritage with a modern twist. [amrapalijewels.com](#)

Birdhichand Ghanshyamdas Jewellers Jaipur-based heritage jewellers that are a go-to for brides. [bgjewellers.in](#)

Breguet Classic timepieces that are centuries old. [breguet.com](#)

Bulgari Gorgeous Italian style in jewellery and other high-end accessories. [bulgari.com](#)

Chopard Elegant Swiss watches that are a perfect addition to your trousseau. [chopard.com](#)

Forevermark Diamonds whose appeal will remain timeless. [forevermark.com](#)

BLACK BOOK

Hazoorilal Legacy Heirloom jewellery steeped in Indian craftsmanship traditions. hazoorilallegacy.com

Her Story Crafted with a superlative design sensibility. herstoryjewels.com

Jacob & Co. Fine watchmaking and jewellery. jacobandco.com

Jaipur Gems Timeless heritage pieces handcrafted in India. jaipurgems.com

Janavi India Embroidered accessories to add a personal touch to wedding gifting. janaviindia.com

Khanna Jewellers Jewels for connoisseurs of traditional design and authenticity. in.khannajewellers.com

Kirni Designs Indian bridal jewellery from Long Island, New York. kirnidesigns.com

Mrinalini Chandra Handcrafted customised wedding jewellery. mrinalinichandra.com

Nappa Dori Handcrafted leather adornments to decorate and elevate your wedding gifts. nappadori.com

Omega The Swiss watch label combines modernity and style with legacy. omegawatches.com

Panerai Italian-designed watches with superior Swiss technology. panerai.com

Raniwala 1881 Traditional polki jewellery from Rajasthan with a modern twist. raniwala1881.com

Rolex A priceless gift for your partner or yourself for the big day. rolex.com

Sunita Shekhawat Jaipur The designer is best known for modernising Meenakari work. sunitashekhawat.com

Zoya Refined fine jewellery that exudes pure elegance. zoja.in

WEDDING PLANNERS

A New Knot Rajkumar Rao and Patralekha Paul chose them for their Chandigarh nuptials. anewknot.com

ANS Weddings India For attention to entertainment, this is the company to call. ans_weddings.in

Banana Split UK-based luxury event and wedding planners pulled off Umar and

Nada Kamani's French Riviera celebration. banana-split.com

DbZ Events Boutique The Zibbi Khan-led London company brings a boutique focus to events and weddings. dbzeventsboutique.com

Elusive Dreams by Pooja Doshi It's all about the little touches for this company. elusivedreams_pooja.com

Istanbul Eventz They ensure a smooth organisation of your mega wedding in Turkey. istanbuleventz.com

Inside Events Turkish storytellers to create your fairy-tale nuptials. insideevents.com

Kith and Kin Three decades of planning events around the globe. kithandkin.co.in

Magnanimous Group It counts leading brands among its clients. magnanimous.com

Motwane Entertainment & Weddings When A-listers tie the knot, they go to Aditya Motwane's team of ace event planners. motwane.co

Mpire Weddings Specialists in destination weddings around the world. mpireweddings.com

Palkan Badlani The company behind Rakul Preet Singh and Jacky Bhagnani's beach wedding in Goa. palkanb.com

Percept Weddings One of the most trusted names in the Indian wedding business. perceptindia.in

Shaadi Squad Boutique planners favoured by Bollywood biggies. shaadisquad.com

Tailor Made Their destination dos are all about the details. tailormadeexperiences.com

Tamarind Global From Cambodia to Abu Dhabi, they design weddings to remember. tamarindglobalweddings.com

The Wedding Design Company The firm was involved in its Creative Director Vedika Mohan's dream nuptials in Jaisalmer. wcdindia.com

The Eventeur Coordinating weddings in Mexico, Dominican Republic and Cartagena. theeventeur.com

The Wedding Bliss Thailand Infusing personality into your destination wedding. theweddingblissthailand.com

Tirun Travels For planning weddings and parties on cruise ships. tirun.com

Wed Gurus The experts who will customise every aspect of your wedding. wedgurus.in

WEDDING DÉCOR

Altair Décor Designs that highlight your self-expression. altair-decor.com

Aroosi Events Personalised design is the buzzword with their service. aroosi.co.in

Archive Rentals Specialty event design and rentals

from Southern California. archiverentals.com

Atisuto Refined arrangements are the hallmark of this all-women team. atisuto_events.com

A46 Design Studio From magic gardens to dream castles, this Turkey-based company can do it all. a46.com.tr

Design by Peerapach The Thailand-based decorators make an indelible impression. dp_designbypeerapach.com

Devika Narain & Company A champion of mindful weddings, they are known for working with artisans local to the wedding destination. devikanarainandcompany.com

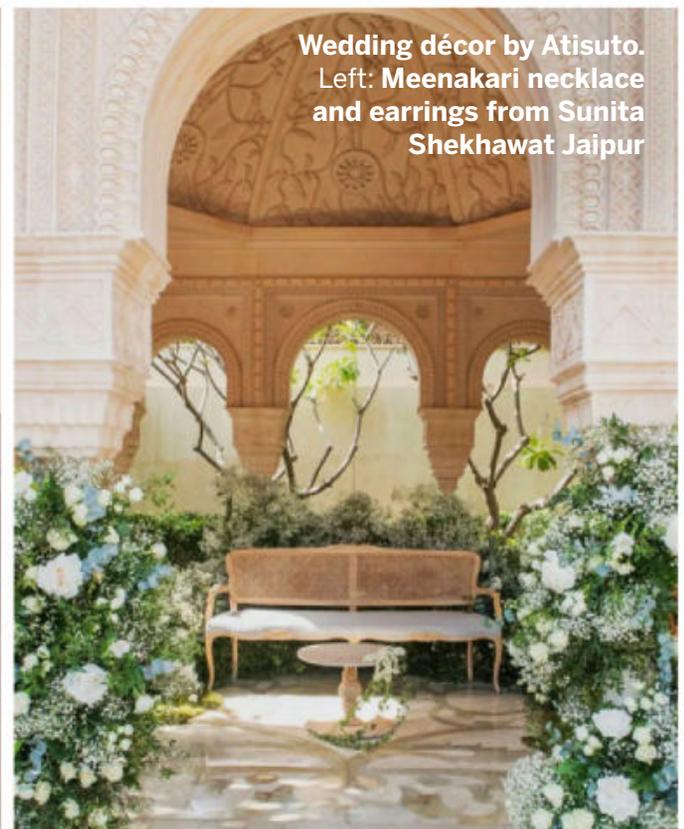
House of Vivaah One-of-a-kind ambience styling for destination weddings. houseofvivaah.com

I Am Flower Thailand company can elevate any celebration with their unique luxury floral decor choices. iamflower.co

Interflora India Florists who can transform your wedding events into magical spaces like the grand dreamscapes at the Jamnagar pre-wedding bashes. interflora.in

Jeff Leatham Flowers American florist commissioned by the Ambanis at their Jamnagar festivities. jeffleathamflowers.com

Rollo Fiori The Italian company uses refined styles to create unforgettable settings. rollofiori.it



Wedding décor by Atisuto.
Left: Meenakari necklace and earrings from Sunita Shekhawat Jaipur

Silhouette Events From traditional to modern glam, they will execute every brief with expertise. [@silhouette_events](#)

The A-Cube Project Known for incorporating the couple's romantic journey into their design. [thea3project.com](#)

Wedding Square Creating spaces that reflect your story, be it the centrepieces or the colour palette. [theweddingsquare.co](#)

ENTERTAINMENT

Bunny Percussionist and drummer [@bunny_percussionist](#)

Digital Chants This specialised service offers a harmonious blend of ancient Vedic chants for your wedding ceremony. [digitalchants.com](#)

DJ AjWavy Popular online for his mashups of Bollywood with Western pop. [@AjWavy](#)

DJ Ganesh Brought the dance vibes to the Ambani pre-wedding celebrations. [@djganesh_djg](#)

DJ SRV Delhi's foremost partystarter. [@srv_official_army](#)

Irf DeeJay UK and international events musician, he will get you grooving. [@irf_deejay](#)

DJ Zaar Dabbles in EDM, hip-hop and rock&roll. [@djzaar](#)

DJ Nanok The DJ from Mumbai plays electronica. [@nanokmusic](#)

Gurjeet Singh Corporate and events emcee. [@shandaarsardar](#)

Louis Video Jockey for onscreen graphics. [8082023335/djlouis555@gmail.com](#)

Rani KoHENur A trailblazing Indian drag queen performer.

[@sushantdivgikr](#)

Ryan Sadri The saxophonist is great for a jazz night. [@rynosax](#)

Sandy Sax Electro-house saxophonist whose melodies will leave any crowd spellbound.

[@sandy.sax](#)

Sandeep Thakur Classical violinist who has worked with AR Rahman. [@sandeepviolin](#)

Shiv Gopal Music The Indian ceremonial music on offer adds spiritual energy and good vibes to the wedding. [shivgopal.com](#)

Viraj and Abhishek Electronica mixed with alternative rock and industrial sounds. [vnamusic.com](#)

Yusuf Ozer Percussion artist from Turkey. [@yusufozer.tr](#)



Celebrations at Joanna Nathan and Matthew Kuhn's wedding

PHOTOGRAPHERS, VIDEOGRAPHERS & DIGITAL SOLUTIONS

Agba Weddings Creating honest and timeless images. [agbaweddings.com](#)

Badal & Raja Jain This duo has shot some of the biggest industrialists' weddings in the country. [@badalrajacompany](#)

Clickt The photographer-filmmaker duo is based in Lisbon, perfect for a destination wedding in Europe. [clickt.com.pt](#)

Eshantraju Photography

Wedding shots inspired by an eclectic style. [eshantrajuphotography.com](#)

Fotowalle The Story Folks

Capturing wedding moments that will be treasured by the couple. [@fotowallethestoryfolks](#)

German Larkin Milan-based society and fashion photographer who has captured such beauties as Naomi Campbell and Nicole Kidman. [germanlarkin.com](#)

House On The Clouds There is a reason these photographers are favourites with A-list stars like Kiara Advani and Alia Bhatt. [houseontheclouds.com](#)

Megha Israni Photography

A team of videographers and photographers who capture the most candid moments from your wedding. [isaniphotography.com](#)

Mili Ghosh A wedding photographer who will give your pictures a fashionable flair. [milighoshdiaries.com](#)

Mimmo Ricatti From lighting to mood, the Italian photographer's work is picture-perfect. [mimmoricatti.com](#)

Naman Verma A specialist in stylish couple portraits and capturing candid moments at weddings. [namanverma.com](#)

Raj Passy Photography From choreographed entrances to candid laughs, their cameras will capture it all. [rajpassy.com](#)

Reels and Frames by Anand Rathi Document your wedding with the people behind Sonam

Kapoor Ahuja and Anand Ahuja's fun pictures. [reelsandframes.in](#)

Sam and Ekta They capture candid shots of your big day. [samandekta.com](#)

SDS Studio Visual storytellers who bring a touch of true emotions. [@sdsstudio](#)

Social Art Cinema From luxury brands to glamorous couples, their clientele speaks volumes of its work. [@socialartcinema](#)

Stories by Joseph Radhik Anant-Radhika, Katrina-Vicky, Kiara-Siddharth—they are the chosen photographers for the biggest weddings in town. [josephradhik.com](#)

Tan Weddings Where love stories come to life through the artistry of tailor-made wedding films. [tan-weddings.com](#)

The Wedding Filmer

The pioneer of cinematic wedding movies in India. [theweddingfilmer.com](#)

The Wedding Story For intimate destination weddings and parties shot with flair. [theweddingstory.com](#)

Vinuthna Garidipura She captures the soul of your wedding. [vinuthnagaridipuri.com](#)

101 Cinematography Wedding shots from a team based in Thailand, working across Bangkok, Phuket, Samui and Chiang Mai.

[@101cinematography](#)

HAIR & MAKEUP

Aamir Naveed Sonam Kapoor Ahuja's go-to hairstylist.

[@aamirnaveedhair](#)

Amrit Kaur A bridal hair and makeup artist who stays on top of all the latest trends, styles, and treatments.

[@amritkaur_artistry](#)

Archana Rautela Hair artist based in Delhi who styled famous wedding planner Vedika Mohan for her special day.

[@archanarautela](#)

Bianca Louzado The makeup wizard that glam tennis star Sania Mirza swears by.

[@biancalouzado](#)

Disha Buxani One half of a Bengaluru-based sister duo, for all your hair and makeup needs.

[@makeup_dishabuxani](#)

BLACK BOOK

Fatima Soomar If soft glam makeup is your look of choice, this is one name to remember.

📍 [makeupbyfatimasoomar](#)

Hiral Bhatia From Katrina Kaif and Janhvi Kapoor to Priyanka Chopra and Radhika Merchant, she has created lasting looks for famous faces. 📍 [bbhiral](#)

Hot Hair Balloon Aanchal A Morwani, hairstylist to B-town's young stars including Janhvi Kapoor and Ananya Panday.

📍 [hot.hair.balloon](#)

Jasmeet Kapany This is your go-to makeup artist for the most glamorous bridal looks for your special day. 📍 [jasmeetkapany](#)

Kahori Flores Mexico-based master stylist of the bridal beauty team. 📍 [kahoriflores](#)

Lavi Buxani Along with sister Disha, a dynamic duo for all your hair and makeup needs.

📍 [hairartistry_by_lavibuxani](#)

Lekha Shah A makeup artist dedicated to enhancing the natural beauty of brides.

📍 [lekha_the-cutcollective](#)

Lekha Gupta Kiara Advani's preferred makeup artist.

📍 [makeupbylekha](#)

Loto Mehndi Organic henna patterns for brides and guests.

📍 [lotomehndi](#)

Lulu Nguyen An LA-based makeup artist who will glam you up for your special day.

📍 [dolledupbylulu](#)

Makeup Samui Thailand-based beauty and makeup artist who specialises in airbrushing technique. 📍 [makeup_samui](#)

Namrata Soni Her talent for creating soft natural looks as well as bold contours makes her a favourite with Bollywood celebrities. 📍 [namratasoni](#)

Ojas Rajani The celebrity makeup artist and hairstylist has worked with Sara Ali Khan and Anushka Sharma. 📍 [ojasrajani](#)

Pompy Hans Kareena Kapoor Khan swears by this makeup artist. 📍 [makeupbypompy](#)

Poonam Solanki Be it glamorous or dewy, she will create the look of your dreams.

📍 [artistpoonamsolanki](#)

Pooja Khurana Crafting beauty and hair makeovers for your special moments.

📍 [poojakhuranabeauty](#)



Sandhya Shekhar The artist is known for Deepika Padukone's stunning makeup. [sandhyashekar.com](#)

Savleen Manchanda This Delhi-based bridal makeup artist is known for her flawless finishes.

📍 [savleenmanchanda](#)

Shradha Luthra The contemporary minimalist makeup artist chosen by Alanna Panday for her Insta-perfect looks. 📍 [shradhaluthra](#)

Sinan Çelikbas Hair stylist based out of Istanbul.

📍 [sinanhairstylist](#)

Tom Perdigao The Lisbon-based makeup artist caters to brides around the world.

📍 [tomperdigao](#)

Urmi Kaur The makeup artist whose minimalist style will enhance your features.

📍 [makeupbyurmikaur](#)

Yasmin Khan The makeup artist from London believes in accentuating your natural beauty. 📍 [yasminkhanmakeup](#)

Zoe Elizabeth A beauty team that has created for brides across the world and highlights natural glamour. [zoeelizabethmakeup.com](#)

CATERING

Aart Grills by Aman Kapur

If you're looking for an eclectic mix of international and Indian cuisines, you're at the right spot.

📍 [aartgrills_catering](#)

Creative Cuisines Inc The full-service caterers will take care of it all during your celebrations. [creativecuisinesinc.com](#)

Kookie Jar The iconic Kolkata-based bakery have desserts to die for. 📍 [kookiejarkolkata](#)

Diva by Ritu Dalmia The renowned chef will bring global flavours to your wedding. [diva-italian.com](#)

Eat Drink Design by Pooja Raheja Unique customisations and thematic experiences are the company's forte. 📍 [edd_india](#)

Foodlink Banquets & Catering A gourmet caterer that celebrities and industrialists swear by. [foodlink.in](#)

Gaia Gourmet A luxe catering company in Mumbai and Goa, run by famed chefs Chinu Vaze and Christophe Perrin.

📍 [gaiagourmet.in](#)

Marut Sikka The mastermind behind revolutionising North Indian cuisine to make it a party favourite. 📍 [indusculinary](#)

Sage and Saffron From artsy tablescapes to authentic world cuisines, Aditi Dugar's boutique catering service does it all. [sageandsaffron.com](#)

Speciality Experiences by Speciality Restaurants Ltd Regional Indian delicacies as well as global cuisines. [speciality.co.in](#)

Perfect Potions Creative bartending for your wedding theme. [perfectpotions.co](#)

The Little Food Co by Bhakti Mehta Bespoke luxe caterers for parties and intimate celebrations. [littlefoodco.com](#)

INVITATIONS & STATIONERY

Entertainment Design Company Invites that whisper luxe sophistication. [edc.co.in](#)

Itchha Talreja Designs Customised graphic designs for cool events.

📍 [itchhatalrejedesigns](#)

Radhika Pitti Studio Hand-drawn artistic works to brighten up your invitations. [radhikapittistudio.com](#)

Sketch Design Studio They will bring your vision to life.

📍 [sketchdesignstudio](#)

The Bombay Lettering Company A boutique calligraphy company. [bombaylettering.com](#)

Wander Ink Unique stationary designs to choose from. [thewanderink.com](#)

HONEYMOON PLANNERS

A Travel Duet Curating food and adventure escapes, among other trips. [atravelduet.com](#)

Cozymoons Artisans of luxury travel. [cozymoons.com](#)

Panache World For the thoughtful honeymoon getaway. [panacheworld.com](#) 📍

Condé Nast Traveller

THE LAST WORD IN TRAVEL

Condé Nast Traveller



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THE LAST WORD IN TRAVEL