



RELAX. THE WEEKEND'S HERE

# brunch

DEC 07, 2024



## Flipping the switch

A filmmaker, writer, artist, musician and comedian tell us how they boost their creativity. And how you can too

**Need a break?**

Check into the best hotels | Grab your bestie, or go solo | Set sail for new horizons

Free weekend e-magazine of the Hindustan Times

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# This week, we're.

## Team Brunch

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**Worried about the next year.** Chronically online folks have noticed that the first day of 2025 falls on a Wednesday. That means the year starts with WTF. It may sound like your life, but it's not a good omen. This also happened in 2020, and look how that turned out. It's like even the calendar can't believe we're 25 years into the millennium. Wasn't 1990 ten years ago?



ADOBE STOCK

**Giving dua to the right folks.** Dua Lipa ate and left no crumbs at her Mumbai concert last weekend. Shoutout to her team, or to whoever made that Levitating x Woh Ladki Jo mash-up happen on stage. She also stopped by Veronica's. Maybe her team could tell us what those sandwiches taste like?



**Marooning one man.** Seems like tickets to the Maroon 5 concert were still available, discounted, a day before the show. Adam Levine's band didn't play to a packed house. Serves him right. He cheated on his wife, supermodel Behati Prinsloo, when she was pregnant in 2022. And despite his India fanbase, This. Love. Has... Taken its toll on us.

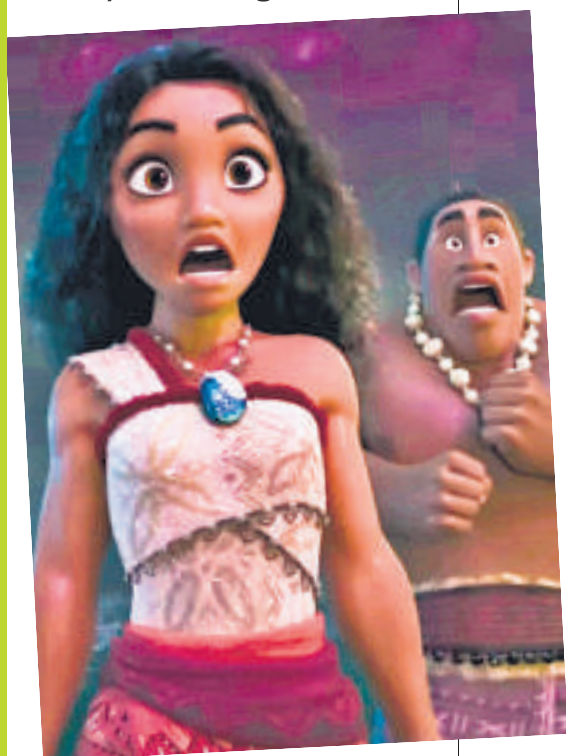
## Not going to palat.

The DDLJ musical, Come Fall in Love, first played in San Diego in 2022. It's heading to Manchester in May 2025. Kya? DDLJ belongs to us. Why did we build the new NMACC? Aditya Chopra directs. Vishal-Shekhar do the music. OK, OK, who's playing Raj? And Simran? Who's playing the train?



**Diving into the details.** The Moana sequel isn't just a great movie, it's a cultural studies class. The story is set about 3,000 years ago, in the islands of Polynesia, which include Hawaii, Tonga and Tahiti. So, there are Hawaiian words in the songs. The more linguistically gifted may also recognise

**Logging into finstas.** In the first episode of Be A Parent, Yaar! S2, Ananya Panday accuses dad Chunky of being on Instagram all the time and liking everything on his feed. He says he just likes to know what his daughter is up to. She then tells him that his online activity is bad for her profile, and asks him to delete his account. Chunky Uncle, just get a finsta, yaar!




Tairāwhiti, a Māori dialect. The villains are voiced by actors from New Zealand, the closest country to Polynesia. Stay for the end credits scene, BTW. That's all we're telling you.

### Still rooting for Jimmy Shergill.

This man never gets the girl. Not in Mere Yaar Ki Shaadi Hai (2002) and Dil Hai Tumhaara (2002). Not in Tanu Weds Manu (2011) and the 2015 sequel, in which he loses the girl and her doppelganger to the same guy. Now, in Sikandar Ka Muqaddar,

he plays a cop chasing a jewel thief for 15 years. . So, let's give the guy a break, maybe?



**Waacking along.** We watched Amazon Prime's Waack Girls, about dancers in Mumbai, and we want to try some of those moves ourselves. The show is cute and heartfelt – women bonding, standing up to bullies and fat-shamers. But we love that they cast Rytasha Rathore as the group's manager. Her emotional breakdown feels as real as it did in Masaba Masaba, if not more. 



# We're on the bomb squad

**Don't hate on bad movies. They're good for business; they can end franchises no one asked for. And hey, they're low-key fun**

**Christalle Fernandes**

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**B**atman and Robin (1997). Ghost Ship (2002). Dungeons and Dragons (2000). The Human Centipede (2009). Love is in the Air (2023). What do these movies have in common? They all have low IMDb ratings, they got trashed by critics upon release, they show up on lists of The Worst Films Ever Made. But in a twist no one saw coming, they also make it to Reddit and Tumblr discussions about films that are so cringe, they surpass their genre and shine in a realm of their own. "Every second of it is fully entertaining and hilariously

bad," writes Reddit user, Phantom JB93, of The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift (2006). We've suffered through the tale of drift racing in Japan. We agree.

We also watched Irish Wish around Valentine's Day this year, knowing full well what we were getting into. Lindsay Lohan plays the bride-to-be's bestie, pining for the groom in Insta-filter Ireland, who gets her wish, with disastrous results. We rolled our eyes as the predictable meet-cute gave way to the wishful thinking, as the blessing turned out to be a curse, as the actors woodenly trudged on. And yet, Irish Wish broke streaming records for the month. All our cringe watching turned Lohan back into a bankable star.

Bad movies can do for viewers what great movies can't. They can offer smaller delights that are unfettered by the larger story. How would we see ➔



Irish Wish (above) broke streaming records for February. All our cringe-watching turned Lohan back into a bankable star. Looks That Kill (right) about a man whose good looks are literally lethal, was committed to its own ridiculous premise.



VIEWERS ARE AS CURIOUS ABOUT BAD OFFERINGS AS GOOD ONES. SO, RAZZIE-AWARD WINNERS OFTEN SEE A BUMP IN TICKET SALES



Leave The World Behind (2023) got hate for its dull ending, but it was the perfect close. Cats (2019) gets A-listers to prance about in ridiculous furry costumes.

Taylor Swift, Judi Dench, and Idris Elba in furry costumes (whiskers, ears and moving tails too), cavort across the screen if not for Cats (2019)? How would we obsess over actor Brandon Flynn if not for Looks That Kill (2020) about a boy who has to wear gauze over his face because he is – wait for it – lethally attractive? Even in Anyone But You (2023), a terrible version of the fakers-who-fall-in-love romcom, there are scenes of Glen Powell shirtless.

Bad movies have power. They can put an end to a franchise no one asked for in the first place. Consider last year's dud, Winnie The Pooh: Blood and Honey, an indie horror parody that attempted to introduce the Twisted Childhood Universe. The movie is so bad that the entire TCU has been put on hold. Aren't you glad they figured this out early?

Besides, bad movies are good for business. Viewers are as curious about bad offerings as good ones. So, films that win Razzies, the awards for Hollywood's worst, often see a bump in ticket sales. Blood and Honey won last year, beating out Shazam! Fury Of The Gods and Expend4bles. And it made a profit. The Razzie nominations for the two other films means we'll be spared more sequels.

And who knows? Those who hated on dystopian movies today might find themselves living in a similar reality tomorrow.

Critics panned Don't Look Up (2021), saying that it trivialised the possibility of an apocalypse. Someone's going to have to hold their hands and tell them that this is exactly what it was about: Our indifference to the climate emergency. Leave the World Behind, last year's movie about a global cyber-attack, got low ratings because viewers felt cheated by the build-up that led nowhere. We're all just one IT outage away for that anti-climax to ring true. 🍷



# Don't travel in groups of foe

**Vacationing with the besties? Here's how to have an epic time without losing your mind. Or each other**

**Tanisha Saxena**

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In *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* (below), the group has to make space for each other's interests. Everything matters on a trip in *The Darjeeling Limited* (bottom): The past, the present, even the weirdos.



Nobody dies in *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara*. Karqaan is bloodless too. So how come, when friends go on holiday in real life, there's always that one person who the rest of the group wants to kill? As more buddies make it out of the group chat and travel together, here's expert advice on how to keep the round trip running smoothly, through delays, detours and other disasters.

## ● **Get talking.**

"Group trip planning works best when everyone's voice is heard from the beginning," says Shazan Abbas, international operations manager at the travel firm Capture a Trip. As the itinerary takes shape, figure out what the focus of the trip will be and

whether it's your idea of fun too. "A friend uninterested in museums might find Cairo a tough sell but would love snorkelling in Sharm El

Sheikh. Knowing these things early helps create a balanced itinerary," he says.

## ● **Set the budget early.**

Few things strain friendships faster than unplanned expenses. Pay attention even before the trip starts; speak up when flights and hotels are being booked, in case you were hoping to spend more or less. Use an app such as Splitwise to track shared expenses, solo purchases, currency exchange and bank discounts. "The last thing you want is everyone nit-picking





Make time for solo moments to recharge your social battery, like the trio did in Karwaan (above). And be flexible. Marcus and Emily in Vacation Friends had to deal with a new itinerary when a couple joined them on their holiday.

over minor expenses and losing sight of why they came,” says Sanjay Kothari, Founder and MD of Just Holidays.

● **Chalk out Plan B.** “While a set itinerary

offers structure, a backup plan allows the trip to keep going despite a sudden weather shift or a cancelled gig,” Abbas says. And often, running both plans simultaneously might work better. In Istanbul, for instance,

part of a group might want to explore the Grand Bazaar, others might prefer a tranquil hammam. Splitting up is simpler than enduring every activity to please the group.

● **Outsource the expertise.** A local guide or travel planner will take the sting (and resentment) out of one person having to plan, lead, navigate, calculate and accommodate the group’s needs. “If three people want adventure sports while two prefer quieter activities, an expert can craft a combo option quickly and cheaply,” says Yashish Birla of Beyond Road Tours.

● **Hit snooze on fights.** If tensions arise, avoid airing grievances publicly. And be flexible. “No matter how well you plan, something will go awry,” says Kothari. “But that’s often where the magic happens.” 🌸



# What's floating India's boat?

**Along Indian coasts, cruises are giving big deck energy. Locals are signing up. Tours are sold out. See how we're all diving in**

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Cordelia Cruises, like other operators in India, have seen an uptick in bookings in the aftermath of the pandemic. Antara Cruises offers luxury suites (right) at affordable rates.

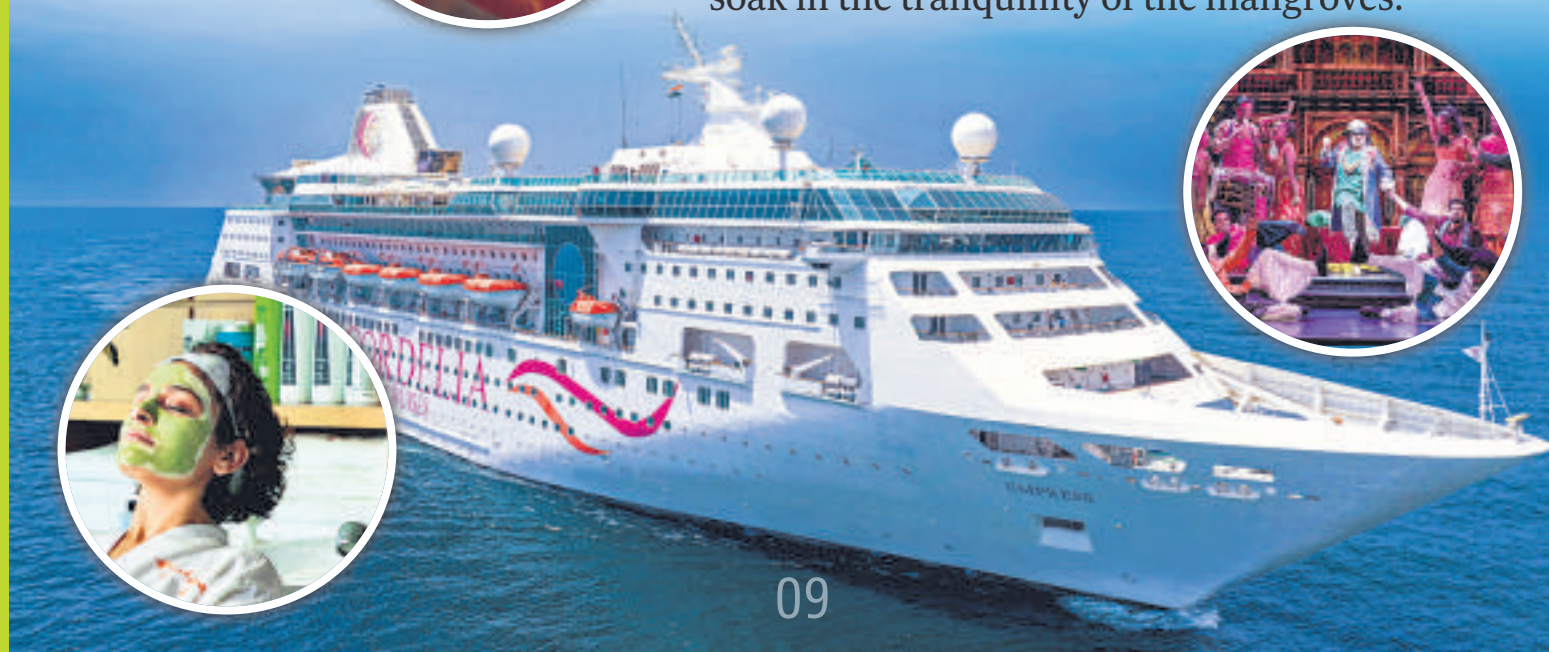


Hollywood tends to view cruises unfairly. Those large, luxe liners are where unlikeable heiresses get murdered in the Art Deco suite – the perfect locked room mystery. In Bollywood, it's almost a decade since Kamal and Neelam took their family and buddies aboard a chic ship to play out first world problems on their 30th anniversary.

For us, on land, a cruise is still impossibly glamorous, but finally within reach. According to Skift, a travel data company in New York, roughly 470,000 travellers went on cruises in India in 2023-2024, and 80% of them were domestic tourists. For a nation of go-everywhere-do-everything tourists, we might be finally learning to chill.

## All aboard

In November last year, Delhi resident Shikha Gupta and her partner sailed through the Sunderbans for two nights and three days, paying close to ₹50,000 for the experience. They were visiting family in Kolkata and found that a cruise was a novel way to soak in the tranquillity of the mangroves.





The peak cruising months across waterways in India are from September to April, with river cruising picking up as well. ADOBE STOCK

At the G20 Summit in 2023, Union Tourism Secretary V Vidhyavathi stated that India is aiming to attract four million cruise tourists by 2041, up from around 3,00,000 last year. “India has enormous potential both as a cruise destination and homeport,” says Naresh Rawal, senior vice-president of sales for India and the Middle East at Resorts World Cruises. The company launched in June 2022, and has noticed a demand for the “fly-cruise” segment, which includes a flight to and from the port where the cruise ship is moored, in addition to the cruise. “We see everyone – young travellers, couples, multi-generation families and corporate groups,” he says.

### Sync and float

In the years after the pandemic, more Indians have been trying out cruise holidays, companies say. It used to be all foreign tourists a few years ago. For many, the office off-site is the moment of discovery. Delhi resident Garima Singh’s Mumbai-to-Goa trip in April 2023 was more relaxed and luxurious than the usual fancy resort, particularly since she was at a low point in her personal life too. “How many opportunities do you get to stare into the waves of the Arabian Sea while drowning in your misery?” she asks, laughing.

Singh enjoyed herself so much, she’s planning a cruise outing with her family. At ₹50,000 per person for a three-night, all-inclusive trip from Mumbai to Goa and back, with activities, food and entertainment on board, many travellers find it’s priced only slightly higher than a regular vacation.

Cordelia Cruises has been operating since September 2021. The home port is in Mumbai and they visit ports in Goa, Kochi, Lakshadweep, Sri Lanka, Visakhapatnam, Chennai and Puducherry, ➔



says Jurgen Bailom, the company's president and CEO. "The market has expanded a little," he says. "Our ships are always full. People book in advance, but there are a lot of spontaneous bookings too."

### Setting sail

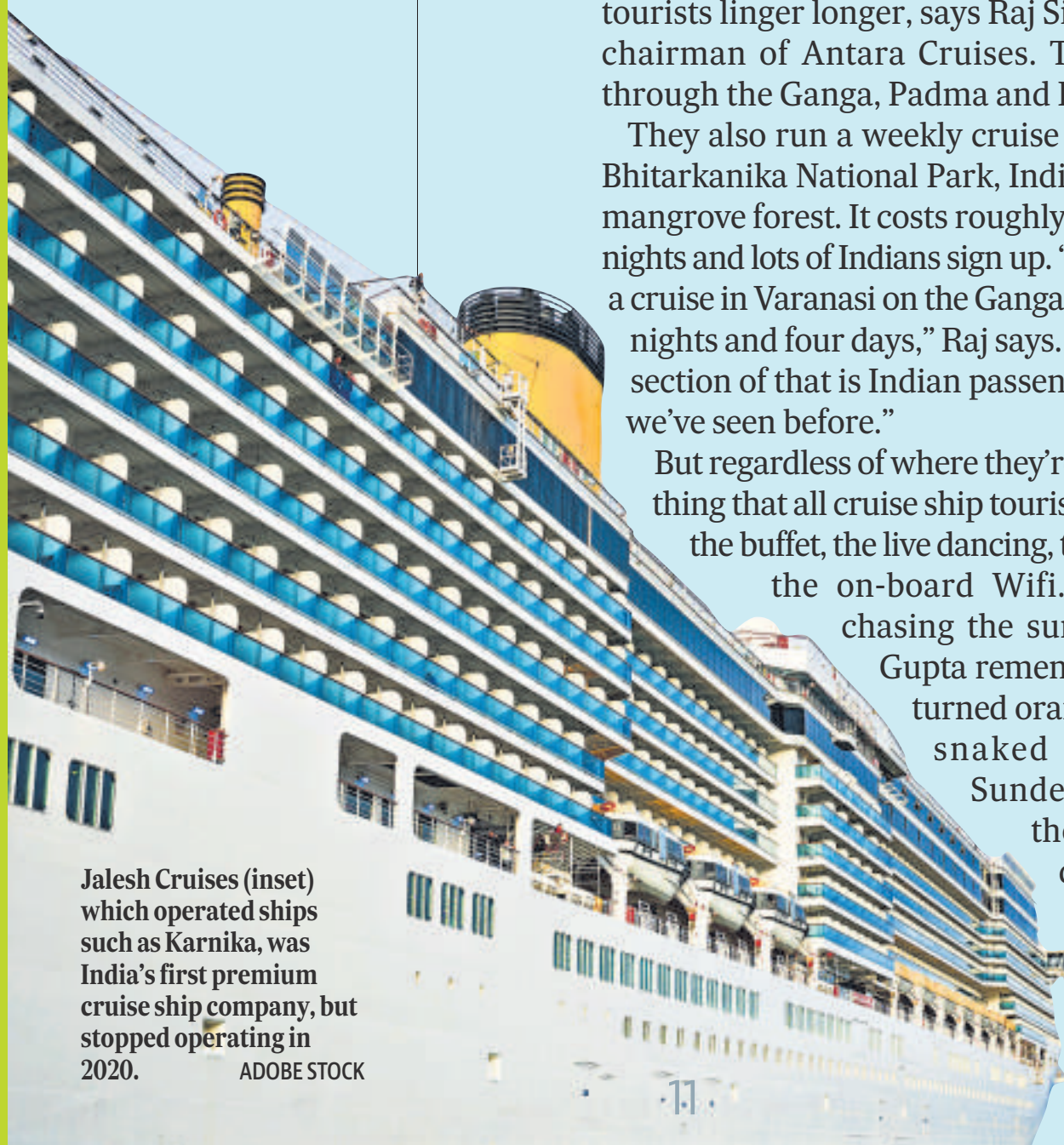
Peak cruising months along India waterways are from September to April, and trips can be as short as a two-night stay or a fully immersive 52-night journey that goes from Varanasi to Kolkata to Dhaka to Guwahati. Indians keep it short, foreign tourists linger longer, says Raj Singh, founder and chairman of Antara Cruises. Their cruises run through the Ganga, Padma and Brahmaputra.

They also run a weekly cruise through Odisha's Bhitarkanika National Park, India's second largest mangrove forest. It costs roughly ₹92,000 for three nights and lots of Indians sign up. "Currently, I am on a cruise in Varanasi on the Ganga, which is for three nights and four days," Raj says. "It's full, and a big section of that is Indian passengers — more than we've seen before."

But regardless of where they're from, there's one thing that all cruise ship tourists love. No, it's not the buffet, the live dancing, the games room or the on-board Wifi. Everyone loves chasing the sunrise and sunset.

Gupta remembers how the sky turned orange as their vessel snaked through the Sunderbans. "Seeing those fiery colours dissolve into the water... Who wouldn't choose that over a road trip?" 🌸

Jalesh Cruises (inset) which operated ships such as Karnika, was India's first premium cruise ship company, but stopped operating in 2020. ADOBE STOCK



# Have a **better idea?**

**You'll have to wait. Inspiration strikes when it wants to. But some creative people know how to ignite the first spark. A comedian, artist, novelist, musician, and filmmaker show us how it's done**

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If you were to stumble upon filmmaker Koval Bhatia in the morning hours, you'd be surprised to find her staring at the blue wall in front of the writing-desk in her Goa home, doing seemingly nothing for hours. Bhatia, who made the award-winning documentary *Against The Tide* (2023) and the TV show *Postcards from Arunachal* (2021), had the wall specially painted the colour of the sky. "I wanted a feeling of openness, but without the distraction of a view," she says. Staring at it allows her mind to wander. And if all else fails, it is a reminder that every day is a fresh start.

Creative thinking is practically a cottage industry these days. Jeff Bezos, former Amazon CEO, says he swears by the power of wandering – for him, that's when the best ideas occur. Singer-songwriter Patti Smith, in her 2015 ➔



I worked in radio. We had to figure it all out ourselves. It's where I learnt to come up with content on the fly.

**JOSE COVACO**, stand-up comedian





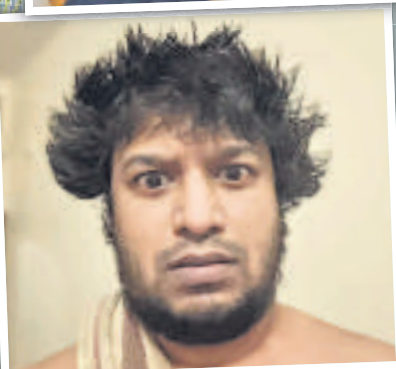
memoir, M Train, says that she prefers to write in bed, “as if I’m a convalescent in a Robert Louis Stevenson poem”. Every naive, aspiring writer has, at some point, tried to follow Haruki Murakami’s infamous 4am writing routine.

Creativity isn’t magic. It’s not a limited-edition drop from the gods. There’s no 10-step plan to becoming creative. It’s not something to become, anyway. “It’s a bit of a paradox,” says Vinita Mungi, Mumbai-based artist and sculptor. “Creativity is something we’re all born with, and yet it’s something we have to work on developing.” You can’t summon a flash of insight, but it’s possible to get better at coming up with good ideas. Here’s how artists do it.

### Getting in the zone

Jose Covaco, stand-up comedian and someone who’s been producing funny videos for more than a decade, says being thrown into the deep end helps. “There are circumstances that force you to act or think in creative ways,” he says. Covaco was a radio jockey from 2002 to 2014. “They would just shove a microphone in front of us and be like, ‘Here you go. Now, figure it out’. That’s when I learnt to come up with content on the fly.” Being forced to think on his feet shaped the way he churned out ideas, he says. It’s probably how he’s turned everything from the day’s headlines to misheard lyrics into punchlines in his videos.

Breaking out of your own rut helps too. A 2023 research paper in the Journal of Indian Psychology suggests that creative ideas emerge when we expose ourselves to different sensory inputs. Novelist ➔

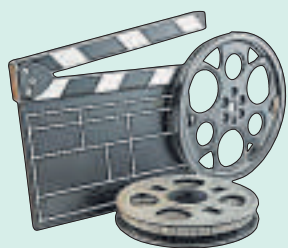


Comedian Jose Covaco has been drawing humour from seemingly nothing for years. One series (above) plays off his own head of hair. When he’s stuck, he just tests his material on himself. If it makes him laugh, he lets it loose on to the world.



I spend the morning either writing, thinking about writing, or doing nothing. Sometimes I journal about how much I don't want to write!

KOVAL BHATIA, filmmaker



Bhatia's documentary *Against The Tide* came from long hours of her doing nothing but incubating her ideas.

ILLUSTRATIONS: ADOBE STOCK

Novoneel Chakraborty, who's written *The Heartbreak Club* (2024) and *Heart on The Edge* (2022), views change as a trigger. He deliberately frequents crowded coffee shops, malls and food courts to people-watch. "I go to with my laptop and pretend that I'm writing, but I'm actually doing my best to overhear what people are saying," he says, with a conspiratorial laugh. "Once, a woman came up to me and started telling me her office problems. That was how the idea for *The Stranger Trilogy* was born. It's a story of the relationship between a girl and a person who has no link to her."

Make room for ideas and they're more likely to drop in, says Bhatia. For her, it's a particular block of time – a hour or so, mid-morning. "I spend this time either writing, thinking about writing, or doing nothing. Sometimes I journal about how much I don't want to write!" She may not immediately be able to drum up ideas in the moment, but just the act of sitting in that confined space, with a blank document open on the computer, is motivation enough. "Sometimes, you're sitting there every day, and nothing is happening. But by Day Five or Day 50, something will emerge."

Singer and songwriter Mohammad Muneem Nazir, aka Alif, finds that he produces his best ideas when he's worked himself into a particular state of mind. "You have to find that one thing that pushes you over the edge," he says. "It can be an interesting word, a sentence that's thought-provoking, the colour of the sky, or even life lashing out at you." Recently, when he was stuck composing the middle section ➔



Sculptor Vinita Mungi has set up a system that allows her to produce works without distraction.



of the title track on his new EP, *Ab Mujhe Ishq Karna Aata Hai*, with Rekha Bhardwaj, it was the word “junoon” that came to the rescue. “The song is about the seven stages of love. The sixth stage is junoon, or madness and obsession.” He used the word, and the passionate images and feelings it invokes, as inspiration for the sudden crescendo, the change in the key in that section.

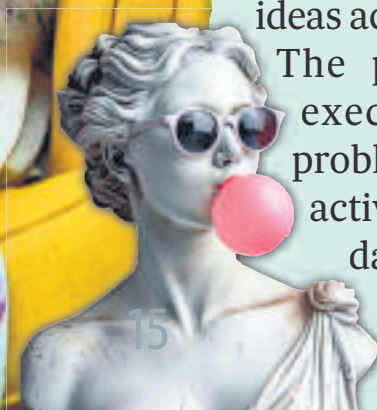
### Cracking it open

Some artists see creativity as innate; it only needs to be channelled well. Mungi’s sculptural work draws on post-colonial feminist themes. “I have to keep going back to my books to find new stories, ideas and information to develop into art,” she says.

“But my medium, ceramics, is a slow one. It doesn’t leave room for ups and downs in the cycle of inspiration.”

So, she’s set up a system that allows her to work without distraction. “I organise my ideas, my mind and even my process. I do my research, I go to the studio, start on a new piece, finish it, and start my research for the next piece. I don’t allow myself to reach a point where I don’t know what I am doing.” One of Mungi’s sculptures, *The Habitat 2*, was recently displayed at the biennial exhibition *Homo Faber* in Venice, Italy.

A 2021 study in the journal *Cerebral Cortex* found that creative ideas activate two regions of the brain: The part that’s responsible for executive functions such as problem-solving, and the part that’s active during mind-wandering or daydreaming.





## Breaking the blockchain

It's possible to run out of ideas or know that there's a great one, frustratingly out of reach, Covaco admits. "There's no escaping it – you have to just walk it out, sleep it off, or even just eat." When he's

stuck, he uses himself as the test. "If it makes me laugh, it will make the audience laugh too. For me, it's wanting to laugh. That's the source of my ideas."

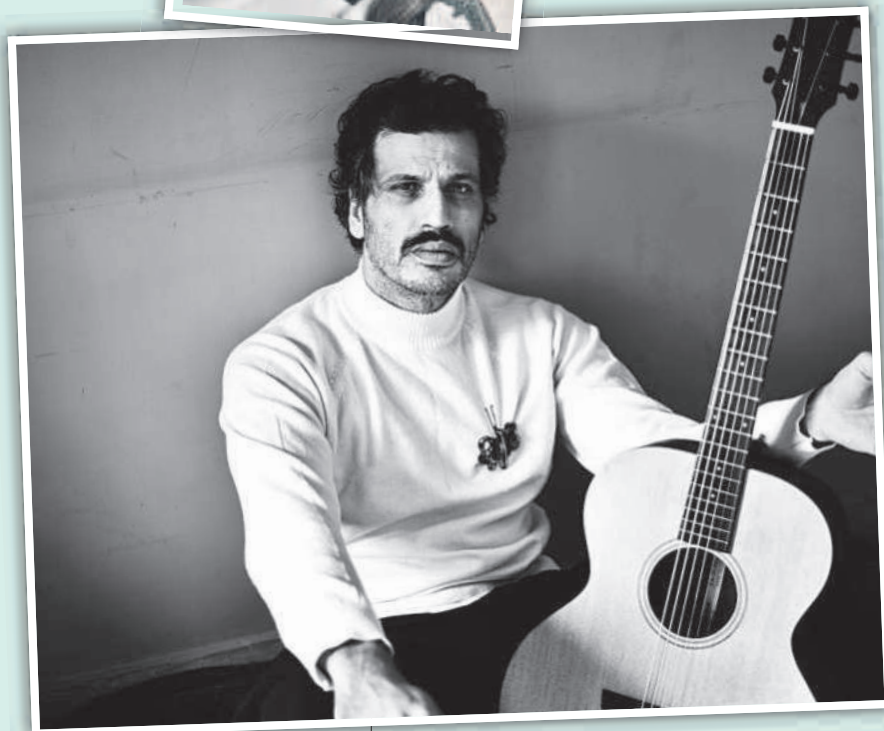
Muneem's way to fight mental stagnation is to literally chase a runner's high. "I get out, I run. I run until there are no thoughts in my head. I run to get out of my own way." And when he's back in the studio, he finds that something's shifted, the ideas flow better.

Chakraborty paces as he navigates plot points, character arcs, and timelines. "I talk to

myself out loud. Hearing your own ideas spoken out loud helps you understand whether they make sense or not. I just make sure nobody is around!"

And sometimes, it's just about being honest about what you're avoiding. Bhatia, who was out of ideas for months, tried all her usual tricks. She rearranged her home furniture over and over before she admitted that it was just a way to put off work. "Writing is hard – it means confronting things you don't want to confront," she says. "But all good work is a function of persistence. Keep at it until everything you produce comes out kicking and screaming." 🌸

Musician Mohammad Muneem (above) finds that ideas flow better after a jog. Novoneel Chakraborty finds inspiration for his novels by eavesdropping at cafes.



# The keys to an epic stay



VIR  
SANGHVI

**Tokyo, Bangkok, Venice, Paris, Cairo. Top hotels everywhere are levelling up their rooms, views, service and experiences. This is where to check in on your next trip**

Rare is the hotel that has the power to surprise you. Most of the time, you get what you pay for. But very occasionally, you get a little bit more. I try not to judge Indian and Indian-owned hotels abroad too much because I am recognised at many of them and have nothing like the average guest experience. So, here is a list of hotels with no obvious Indian ownership, where I've had memorable stays and would gladly go back.

## St. Regis, Cairo

My most recent surprise. Egypt is not unlike the India of the 1970s. The people are friendly, but everything does not always go smoothly. But I enjoyed my stay at The St. Regis, Cairo. The hotel is glossy and classy. The service is thoughtful, hyper-efficient and flawless.

## Atlantis the Royal, Dubai

Lovely rooms, terrific restaurants, amazing views, very good service. Forget about the hype and enjoy the experience.

## Park Hyatt, Tokyo

I went in 2016. The hotel has since been renovated. It was a super-refined environment with elegant, gracious service that epitomised the best of Japan. ➔



Not everything in Egypt runs smoothly. It all takes a little getting used to, but the St Regis, Cairo manages to get everything right.



Both the Park Hyatt (above) and The Edition (right) in Tokyo epitomise the best of what Japan has to offer. But the Four Seasons in Florence (below) may just be the loveliest city hotel in the world.



### **The Edition, Tokyo**

The Edition hotels were launched in 2013. This gleaming, sparkling hotel is in Tokyo's Toranomon Hills. When I stayed, the hotel benefitted from an outstanding general manager in Anshul Kaul. It was trendy and modern, but also luxurious.

### **Four Seasons, Italy**

I am going to combine two remarkable hotels. The Four Seasons in Taormina, Sicily. Season 2 of The White Lotus was shot there. Now it is hard to even get a room, never mind the rates.

The Four Seasons in Florence is one of the few hotels in the world where you feel that every moment you spend in your room is a privilege. I stayed in a room that was centuries old and was decorated with the original frescoes.

### **Four Seasons, Koh Samui**

It has now been officially confirmed that the third season of The White Lotus will be set here. No doubt, rates will skyrocket. So, try to book before February, when the show is set to be released. It is one of the best resorts I have stayed in, with beautiful villas scattered across cliffs with magnificent views of the beach and the sea.

### **Le Grand Controle, Versailles**

I reckon that this is one of the world's best hotels, a tiny property (13 rooms), located in a period building on the grounds of the palace of Versailles. Guests have access to the palace after visiting hours are over, and that alone is worth the rate.





### Gritti Palace, Venice

Located on the Grand Canal, with breathtaking views of Venice, it has only 82 historical rooms, of which 22 are suites. The structure dates back to the 15th century and was once the residence of the Doge, Venice's version of a monarch. It is run to the highest standards of discreet Italian luxury.

### Le Bristol, Paris

It has all the attributes of a grand hotel – a sense of luxury, excellent concierges, a great location, a three-Michelin-star restaurant, etc – but it does not take itself too seriously. There is a friendly quality to the service, symbolised by the cuddly cat mascot.

### Amanpuri, Phuket

The regulars own villas and allow the hotel to rent them out when the owners are away. The idea has been widely imitated, but the original may still be the best. My villa had its own staff, including a cook who would make whatever I wanted, and only charge for the ingredients.



The Amanpuri in Phuket (top) is the blueprint for luxury resorts the world over. The idea has been widely imitated. It's worth splurging on a stay at the Gritti Palace in Venice (above); it has extremely high standards, and lives up to them.

*The views expressed by the columnist are personal*

### Anantara, Bangkok

It is old-fashioned and some might find it not slick enough. But it reminds me of a gentler, classier and warmer Bangkok.

### Maldives

For me, it comes down to one of two properties: Soneva Fushi, and Cheval Blanc, the classiest and most elegant hotel in the Maldives. It's hard to choose between them. 🍷

# Leave the baggage behind



SEEMA  
GOSWAMI

**If you're doing your own thing on vacation with family and friends, you're probably better off travelling solo. Try it**

It was while I was travelling in Egypt last week that I first noticed it. Even though I was surrounded by people who were on holiday with their spouses, children, extended family or large groups of friends, they all acted as if they were vacationing alone.

At dinner, there was the nuclear family at the next table where both the children were rapt, watching videos on their respective iPads with their earphones on while their parents scrolled social media idly on their phones. Next day, as I trundled through a museum, I saw couples caught up in taking selfies of themselves in front of important antiquities, acting as if the other person didn't exist. At historical sites, members of large groups gravitated to different corners, doing their own thing until it was time to board the bus back to their hotel.

They may have come on holiday with other people, but all of them were essentially solo travellers, concentrating only on what pleased them and treating their co-passengers with what could most charitably be called benign neglect.

Once I became aware of this trend, it was hard to ignore it. The more I observed the people around me, the more I realised that nobody really seemed to care about the other people sharing their vacation; they



There may be safety in numbers, but when you travel solo, you can set your own schedule, do your own thing and at your own pace.

PHOTOS: ADOBE STOCK





Some people would rather sign up to holiday with total strangers than brave their own company. But it's better to keep an open mind, and head out on your own adventure.



*The views expressed by the columnist are personal*

were only really focused on doing what they pleased.

And that set me thinking. Why is it that people are so wary — even scared — of solo vacations, given that most vacations these days are 'solo' anyway?

Is it that we seek safety in numbers, and once we have that we feel secure enough to go off and do our own thing? Is it that we are embarrassed to admit that we don't have a family or friends that are close enough to holiday with us? Or is it that we feel that we will be treated as curiosities as solo travellers in a world that sees so few?

Which perhaps explains why most people who are holidaying alone sign up with travel agencies to travel with complete strangers rather than be brave enough to admit that they are fine — even happy — with their own company. If you ask me, I would pay good money not to vacation with a group of unknowns. I would rather be pitied as a sad loner than have to make nice-nice with people I will never see again in my life (frankly, the very thought is exhausting!).

So, if you are one of those people who is experiencing trepidation at the thought of heading out on holiday alone, I have three words of advice: Just Do It.

Grab your suitcase or backpack, book your ticket, reserve a hotel room at the destination of your choice, and head out to an adventure of your very own. Pack a good book to keep you company, keep an open mind to any new experiences, and make the most of your me-time.

If you feel any embarrassment at all about being on your own, remember that all those people around you, allegedly travelling with their loved ones, are essentially on their own anyway.

And that, in fact, means that you are not alone — not by any measure! 🌸

# Two can play this game



HORMAZD  
SORABJEE

**Mahindra's new cars are proof that it is prepared to go both futuristic and classic to charge up India's electric motor dreams**

**M**ahindra's two new electric vehicles couldn't be more different from each other. But both have a common mission: To redefine India's EV landscape.

The BE 6e (meant to sound like Be Sexy) has a design that seems straight out of a sci-fi flick: Futuristic, angular lines, wide stance, flush door-handles, aerodynamically optimised wheels, trapezoidal window line, bold geometric detailing. It's a head turner.

But it may not be to everyone's tastes. So, Mahindra has cleverly launched the more conventional-looking XEV 9e as well.

This is the electric cousin of the XUV700, but with a SUV-coupe design, illuminated accents and a dramatic-looking blanked-out grille. The BE 6e grabs more attention. Let's dive into this model first.

The BE 6e has sports-car-like cockpit, a unique halo loop and a hexagonal steering wheel.

Highlights include a twin 12.3-inch screen setup and features that even most luxury cars don't have. It offers augmented reality for its head-up display, a 360-degree camera, auto parking, and a ➔



The BE 6e looks like it's been plucked out of a sci-fi flick. It has a sports car-like cockpit, twin screens and 16 speakers. There's also auto parking and a camera that can click selfies. Of course, there's a frunk too (inset).





The XEV 9e is for those seeking a more traditional-looking car. It has enough space for five adults, and offers a plusher ride.



*The views expressed by the columnist are personal*



Dolby Atmos-enabled 16-speaker Harman Kardon audio system. Plus, an on-board camera for selfies.

The user interface is unnecessarily complicated.

Essential functions like adjusting the air-con or drive modes are multi-step processes. Mahindra is working on improving the interface before the car goes on sale in January. The mechanical side is thankfully sorted. There's a strong electric motor driving the rear wheels, powered by two battery pack options (59kWh and 79 kWh). With the smaller 59 kWh pack, the motor delivers 231 hp; the 79k Wh pack (which I drove) gets a big bump up to 286 hp. Race mode

unlocks its full potential, achieving 0-100 kph in a claimed 6.7 seconds and 200 kph-plus top speed. This makes the BE 6e the fastest Indian-made car today. Ground clearance of 207 mm makes it practical for Indian roads.

The BE 6e is for those who love to stand out, love to drive, and love the future.

For a more familiar vibe, there's the XEV 9e, plush, with ample space for five adults. Even on bad roads, it's so quiet that it feels like you're gliding. A big selling point on the XEV 9e is the third screen for the front passenger.

Both models show Mahindra's dual approach to electrification. One redefines what's possible; the other blends EV tech with practicality.

The true shocker is the starting price of ₹18.9 lakh for the BE 6e and ₹21.9 lakh for the XEV 9e.

If that doesn't entice people to buy an EV, nothing will. 🌸

# Now, binge with your ears

**Hear us out: These 10 series are worth a watch just for their killer background scores**

**Urvee Modwel**

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**1 Mirzapur (2018 - ):** When your opening-credits track is your calling card, you know you've won. Mirzapur feels desi (thank you, tabla) but sounds international. S1 features 12 songs, and is the best of the three seasons. There's just so much diversity: A Sufi song (Varoon), a Bhojpuri number (Sajanwa Ki Gunwa), a Punjabi wedding tune (Saure Chali Ve) and the Munna rap, a rare hit about a villain.



**2 Scrubs (2001 – 2010):** How did a sitcom about life in a hospital manage to nail every single feeling on screen with the music? They picked right, making us hear Joshua Radin,

The Fray, Deathcab for Cutie, The Coral, Keane, Five for Fighting, Outkast and even Abba in a new way. Listening to it now is nostalgic too. One of our top moments: When Ain't No Reason by Brett Dennen plays after Laverne's crash. Argh.





### 3 **Sacred Games (2018 – 2019):**

Netflix India's first original series knew its soundtrack had to shine independently of the show. It also needed a Mumbai sound that the world could appreciate. So, a song by rapper Divine (Kaam 25)

and instrumental tunes that never overshadowed the cat-and-mouse mood of the show. Yashraj Jaiswal and Alokanda Dasgupta composed the score. Dasgupta also worked on Netflix's *Leila* and Prime's *Breathe*, which we love.

### 4 **Sex Education (2019 – 2023):**

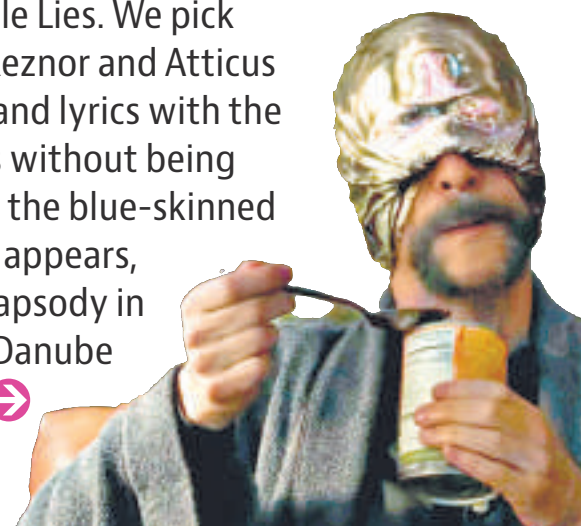
The sex-comedy-drama imparts actual sex ed and has a pretty banging soundtrack too. Salt-N-Pepa's *Push It* and Rod Stewart's *Do Ya Think I'm Sexy* are obvious picks. But *The Breeze/My Baby Cries* by Bill Callahan, plays when Otis and Maeve first kiss. Man, Netflix seems to know what it's doing.

### 5 **The Umbrella Academy (2019 – 2024):**

The show jumps timelines, bends the laws of physics, has family drama and action. Thankfully, the soundtrack drops eclectic cues to help the plot along. There's *The Doors*, *Radiohead*, *David Gray*, *Morcheeba*, and *The Kinks*. A highlight moment: *I Was Made for Lovin' You*, by *Kiss*, plays during a fight scene in S2E4.



6 **Watchmen (2019):** HBO has killer opening tracks: *Game of Thrones*, *True Blood*, *Succession*, *Big Little Lies*. We pick *Watchmen*. Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross tie the music and lyrics with the narrative elements without being showy. In E8, when the blue-skinned Doctor Manhattan appears, listen carefully: *Rhapsody in Blue* and *The Blue Danube Waltz*. Perfect! ➔



**7 The Family Man (2019 - ):**

Raj and DK collaborated with musicians and artists across the country for both seasons of the spy thriller series. There's Sachin-Jigar, Shreya Ghoshal, The Local Train, Underground Authority. The theme song starts off with a sitar and builds up into a rap with a doha by Kabir. Perfect to play on your commute.



**8 Bridgerton (2020 -):** Its music does for the ear what the blind-casting does for the eye – it forces you to write new rules. At the balls, it's orchestral covers of hits by Ariana Grande, Billie Eilish, Rihanna, Nirvana, and Taylor Swift. We can't hear Wildest Dreams without dreaming of a certain duke now.

**9 Bandish Bandits (2020 - ):**

It's literally set in the world of Indian classical music. Our hero, a young YouTube pop star, finds himself in a professional (and romantic) partnership with a classical Hindustani singer. The songs, composed by Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy, do full justice to the show. A tasting platter for our ears.



**10 Stranger Things (2016 - ):** Rewind to two years ago, when we all had Runnin' Up That Hill by Kate Bush on loop. And think back – there's bound to be at least one song in every episode that made you go "OMG, I remember this!" The story is set in the 80s, and the music is

all cassette-era nostalgia. The Clash, Madonna, The Bangles, Peter Gabriel, Talking Heads, The Police. The show has won awards for its soundtrack almost every season. Only one left! 🌸



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{ **A LITTLE EXTRA** }

There are bad movies and there are bad movies. And then, there's Brunch editor **Rachel Lopez's** favourite genre: The American High-School Flick. She worships the good ones (Clueless, Mean Girls, Booksmart). She likes the cringey classics (Fast Times at Ridgemont High, American Pie). But it's the bad ones that she adores. All Cheerleaders Die (2013) is exactly as awful as the title promises. Vampire Academy (2014) ruins the novels, but Zoey Deutch is better in Before I Fall (2017). To get into the mood, watch **Brick** (2005). A panicked call, a murdered girlfriend, a missing brick of heroin, a flustered young Joseph Gordon-Levitt, a teen movie with a noir topping. 🍷

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ADOBE STOCK



**Today I'm craving:**  
Mallu  
Thalassery  
biryani.

## Currently I am:

Grateful for the overwhelming response to I Want to Talk.

## On my playlist:

Rockman, by MK.gee; Peach by Kevin Abstract; Musafir, by Taba Chake.

## My favourite bad habit:

Procrastinating and indulging in movie marathons.

## I won't leave the house without...:

My Royal Enfield keys.

## A superpower I wish I had:

To make the world's waste vanish.

## A secret skill I have:

I have an exceptional ability to recognise faces from films.

## My favourite Sunday memory growing up:

Skating sessions.

## If I could time travel, I'd...:

Meet my parents when they were my age.

## A trait I despise in people:

Making others feel bad about being excited or enthusiastic.

## The best thing about fame:

The opportunity to collaborate with the best in the business.

## The worst thing about fame:

It sometimes robs you of the ability to simply be human. 🌸



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