

The Pioneer EXOTICA

TRAVEL & LIFESTYLE

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NOVEMBER 2025 | ₹50

*Where the river
meets the sea*

Discover two moods of Thailand:
Bangkok's brilliance and Hua Hin's calm

Plus

**THE LIVING
ART OF STONE
LUXURY IN THE WILD
DRIFTING ON ICE**



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IN PURSUIT OF PLACES THAT SPEAK TO YOUR SOUL



*"LATELY, THERE HAS BEEN A
SHIFT IN THE WAY TRAVELLERS
DEFINE LUXURY. IT IS LESS ABOUT
OPULENCE AND MORE ABOUT
ACCESS"*

As the year winds down, November invites us to travel not just for escape, but for experience. It lures us to chase warmth, wonder and the quiet luxury of discovery. Speaking of which, lately, there has been a shift in the way travellers define luxury. It is less about opulence and more about access.

I was reminded of this during a recent trip when a quiet sunrise by the beach felt more indulgent than the plush resort suite itself. There's something extraordinary about sitting in silence as the waves hit the shore — to watch the sky change colours, the distant call of the seagulls, the air thick with the scent of salt and sea... You realise that the most memorable experiences are often the least orchestrated. It is this sentiment that is shaping travel today. There is a shift towards experiences that are both grounding and elevating. This issue of *Exotica* celebrates journeys that speak to all the senses.

Our cover story takes you to Thailand, where the contrasts of Bangkok with its ornate temples, bustling alleys and riverside calm, flow seamlessly into the seaside serenity of Hua Hin, a retreat that pairs heritage with modern elegance. In our trend feature on luxury in the wild, we explore how forest lodges are redefining indulgence. How sustainability, silence and starlit skies is replacing gold-plated glamour.

Far to the north, Lapland offers an experience like no other — an Audi ice driving Experience through Arctic landscapes, where design meets the drama of nature. Closer home, the French Quarters of Puducherry beckon with pastel facades, leafy boulevards and the timeless art of slow living.

At Kevadia in Gujarat, the world's tallest statue stands as a modern ode to unity and resilience. What makes this article special is that starting October 31, India is celebrating Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's 150th centenary for a year. And then, there is Rajasthan's Kishangarh, where a private institution is carving a new chapter, putting this storied town back on tourism map and giving form to art through stone.

As you leaf through this issue, we hope that you would be inspired to travel curiously and consciously. We also hope that you find beauty in both the grand and the quiet moments along the way.

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With over two decades of work experience as a journalist with leading newspapers and financial dailies, and as production editor of an art gallery, Abhilasha Ojha is also a professional singer who sings Hindustani semi classical genres such as thumris, dadras, and ghazals.

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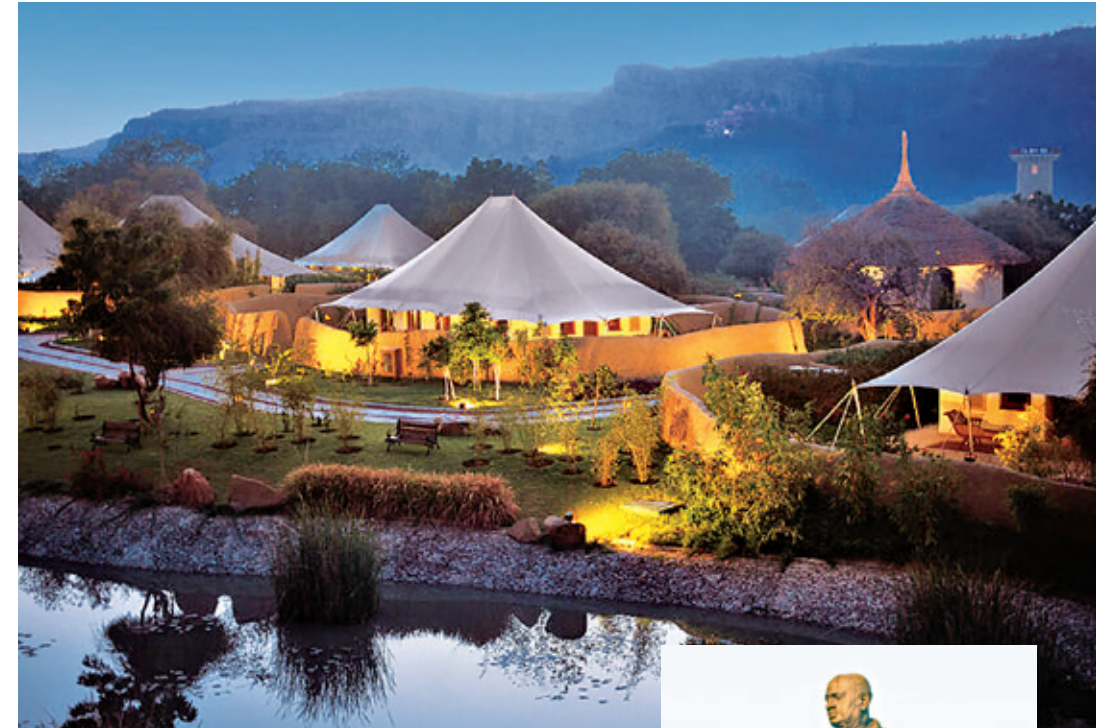
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VOLUME 18 • ISSUE 24

From Bangkok's buzzing streets to Hua Hin's serene shores, Thailand unfolds in colour, culture and contrast



Grecian Secrets



Travelling to Greece anytime soon? Designers Jigar and Nikita travelled to the country recently and were struck by its effortless poetry in every corner. They share some of their best finds with our readers

FINE DINING

Negrita Bar on the shore of Aegean Sea in Mykonos could well be the best sunset cafe there is! We booked a sea-facing table well before sunset to ensure the best views. Vegetarians must check out their truffle fries, Greek salad and cocktails.

Check out Pasaji, located at the old port for some great pizza and day beds. The vibe is chic and it gets more relaxed during dinner. Must order their signature passion fruit selection.

The party animals can make their way into Scorpios Mykonos. The vibe shifts beautifully from day to night.

Queens club on Mykonos street is another hit. Vibe with the strangers. It's an experience!

SHOPPERS' STOPS

Luxury:
Namos Mykonos. The best place to buy the latest designer collections by Chanel and Dior. Reserve a beachfront cabana by noon if you want the full experience of the place.

Street-shopping:
Poniros Studio/Jewellery Streets. For the best jewellery by local artisans, gold and silver pieces inspired by Greek art and local flair. Speira Concept Store. You can also find unique accessories by Greek designers and a lot of gifting options.



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BOOK A TRIP, GAIN AN ADVENTURE

Whether travelling solo or in a group, adding festivals to your travel itineraries always amp up your trip. They transform trips into experiences, where culture and music bring in different and fun. These events are your gateway to local traditions and lend you tales worth telling. Here's a list of festivals and celebrations being held this month that you can look forward to attending.



ISTANBUL BIENNIAL, TURKEY

Venue: Istanbul
Dates: September 20, 2025 - November 23, 2025
Istanbul Biennial is a siren song for art lovers and wanderers alike, drawing you into its rich creativity. The 18th edition, titled 'The Three-Legged Cat', curated by Christine Tohmé unfolds across eight walking-distance venues in the Beyoğlu-Karaköy axis, illuminating Istanbul with works by 47 artists from over 30 countries.
Free admission gives you the freedom to drift from restored han courtyards to waterfront façades, absorbing installations, performances and screenings. This Biennial offers moments to plan extra days to enjoy both the exhibitions and the call of Istanbul's streets.



LUCERNE FESTIVAL 2025, EUROPE

Venue: KKL Luzern, Switzerland
Dates: November 21, 2025 - November 23, 2025
With the opening lineup including Soloists of the Lucerne Festival Contemporary Orchestra (LFCO), Estelle Costanzo and Jack Adler-McKean, the Forward Festival 2025 kicks off in dramatic fashion. This celebration of contemporary music brings bold innovation and highly curated programming. Over three days attendees will enjoy an exhibition titled 'In the Eye of the Storm' marking 125 years of the Swiss Musicians' Association, a book launch and a panel discussion pondering the future of modern music. Concerts feature star performers such as Patricia Kopatchinskaja and Anastasia Kobekina.



SANGAI FESTIVAL, INDIA

Venue: Imphal, Manipur
Dates: November 21, 2025 - November 30, 2025
For the travel enthusiasts, the Sangai Festival in Manipur offers a deep journey into Northeast India's energetic and full of life culture. This 10-day festival showcases the region's rich traditions, arts and natural beauty. Visitors can experience all the same place — cultural performances, indigenous sports, traditional cuisine and handicrafts.
Fun events include martial arts displays, folk dances, and boat races on the picturesque Loktak Lake. The festival also emphasises eco-tourism, highlighting the unique flora and fauna of the region. It's an opportunity to witness the endangered Sangai deer in its natural habitat and explore the floating islands of Loktak Lake.



AMSTERDAM LIGHT FESTIVAL, NETHERLANDS

Venue: Amsterdam
Date: November 27, 2025 - January 18, 2026
Chilly, cosy and lit is where you can find yourself in the Netherlands during the Amsterdam Light Festival. Each winter the city's canals, bridges and facades are transformed into a glowing open-air gallery of light art installations. You can wander the walking route through the historic canal ring or glide silently on a canal cruise to view reflections dancing on water and art shimmering against architecture. This 14th edition features 27 artworks under the theme Rituals, each telling stories of memory, community and light. For travellers it's the kind of festival that invites slow wonder and lets Amsterdam's nightscape mesmerise you with reflection.

ME'GONG FESTIVAL, INDIA

Venue: West Garo Hills, Meghalaya
Date: November 28, 2025 - November 29, 2025
For the travel-lovers, the festival offers a blend of music, culture and heritage that beckons you to India's northeast. In the serene Garo Hills, Me'Gong celebrates the region's identity through electrifying performances, traditional games, fashion shows and local cuisine. During two nights, the festival brings together national and international artists, tribal dancers and artisans to create a lively cultural mosaic. Travellers can wander through handicraft stalls, savour indigenous flavours and feel the pulse of community pride. It's a passport to discovering Meghalaya's culture.



SMALL COUNTRY WITH BIG HEART

While addressing the Georgia Roadshow in New Delhi that was organised by the Georgian National Tourism Administration recently, Ambassador of Georgia to India, HE Vakhtang Jaoshvili shared why Georgia should be on your 2025 bucket list



WELCOMING THE WORLD

From the snow-tipped Caucasus Mountains to the gentle vineyards of Kakheti and the breezy Black Sea coast, Georgia offers a world of experiences within a single journey. As Georgia’s Ambassador to India, I am proud to see the growing friendship between our people. Over the past year alone, we have witnessed more than 40 per cent growth in Indian arrivals, reflecting a shared curiosity and affection that warms every Georgian heart. Our capital city, Tbilisi, is a living museum. Walk its cobbled streets lined with colorful balconies, visit the Old Town beneath the ancient Narikala Fortress. There is history in every corner.

“Georgia is not just a destination. It is an emotion — a place where every guest is greeted as family.”
— H.E. VAKHTANG JAOSHVILI

KAKHETI: THE BIRTHPLACE OF WINE

Few know that Georgia is one of the oldest winemaking regions in the world. Our tradition spans over 8,000 years. In the Kakheti region, wine is more than a drink; it is a way of life. Visitors can explore small family maranis (cellars) and see wine fermenting in qvevri — clay amphorae buried in the earth, a UNESCO-recognised method that symbolises purity and patience. Pair a glass of Saperavi or Rkatsiteli with Georgian specialities like khachapuri (cheese bread) or khinkali (dumplings), and you will understand our culture. It is joyful, generous and deeply connected to the land. Every moment whispers timeless spirit.



“When you raise a glass of Georgian wine, you drink history itself.”
— H.E. VAKHTANG JAOSHVILI



THE LAND OF CONTRASTS

Georgia’s greatest gift is its diversity. Within a few hours’ drive, landscapes transform from alpine peaks to palm-lined shores. In the northern mountains, the town of Kazbegi offers one of the most iconic vistas in the world: the Gergeti Trinity Church, standing proud on the slopes of Mount Kazbek. To the west, the remote region of Svaneti reveals ancient watchtowers and untamed beauty. You have villages over there, and totally different and picturesque landscapes. It is a paradise for trekkers and photographers alike and you can compare it to the Himalayas but with a Georgian touch. And for those who prefer the sea breeze, Batumi on the Black Sea coast awaits. It is a vibrant city where modern architecture meets subtropical charm offering lively boulevard and sunsets.

“In Georgia, you will arrive as a guest, but you will leave as family.”
— H.E. VAKHTANG JAOSHVILI

GEORGIA AND INDIA: BRIDGES OF FRIENDSHIP

India and Georgia have been connected for centuries through trade, culture and mutual respect. Today, this bond grows stronger through tourism, cinema and collaboration. Indians rank at 6th to 7th place in visiting Georgia, but close to top in visiting Georgian national parks. Which means they come and they travel in the country and then explore natural parks, forests and waterfalls. Additionally, Georgia offers a four-season destination — skiing in winter, hiking in summer, looming in spring and harvesting in autumn. Take your pick! Also, with direct flights, simplified visa procedures and an ever-expanding hospitality network, Georgia is welcoming more Indian visitors than ever. I often meet travellers from Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru, who tell me they came for the scenery and stayed for the warmth of the people.



“In one journey, Georgia lets you feel the power of mountains and the calm of the sea, both within your reach.”
— H.E. VAKHTANG JAOSHVILI

TRAVEL TO RESET

Looking for a break but want it to be relaxing and calming? The new frontier of luxury travel is about a profoundly curated return to self. While travelling now, the thought process is to travel to a calm place that has fewer people and more peace, that is more about healing but still ropes

in a holiday. Travellers can surrender to expert guidance in breathtaking landscapes, moving the dial from mere pampering to true and lasting transformation. From ancient healing hills to sacred rivers, we bring to you dedicated sanctuaries where the focus is solely on your mind, body and soul.



ATMANTAN WELLNESS RESORT, MAHARASHTRA, INDIA

With the integrated concept of Atma (soul), Mana (mind), and Tann (body), the genesis of Atmantan Wellness Resort is philosophical and powerful. Its story unfolds on a majestic 42-acre crystalline hill in the Sahyadris, overlooking the Mulshi Lake — a location chosen for its natural healing energy. Atmantan's mission is to be an international, integrated centre of wellness, guiding guests through a life-altering transformation that addresses all three elements of being. This is achieved through the ancient wisdom of Ayurveda Panchakarma. As an individual, you can find here profound self-rediscovery, where environmental consciousness supports the inner work of the self.



CGH EARTH HOTELS

The CGH Earth is not about one destination but about an overarching philosophy: creating travel experiences that are responsible, sustainable and authentic. Their story is told through a collection of unique properties across South India, each designed to have a small ecological footprint while delivering a stirring, immersive journey. Wellness and healing are channelled through specific properties dedicated to different practices: the structured, accredited treatment of their Ayurveda Hospitals (Kalari Kovilakom) and Nature Cure and Yoga centres (Prakriti Shakti, SwaSwara). CGH Earth gives their travellers a personal connection to the place.



COMO SHAMBHALA ESTATE, UBUD, INDONESIA

In between the forest near Ubud, Bali, the COMO Shambhala Estate is a time-honoured sanctuary, a place where local tradition holds it is aligned with purifying energy. Its story is rooted in the constant flow of The Source, a revered natural spring, which fuels the Estate's mission as a "Retreat for Change." Here, transformation is a meticulous, deeply personal process. The experience is delivered through highly nuanced bespoke wellness programmes that fuse the ancient wisdom of the land with modern healing science. Guests are guided towards vitality and renewal not only through therapies but through mindful cuisine prepared in the healthy COMO Shambhala Kitchen. For travellers, it tells a story of holistic change, where the body, mind and soul are subtly and scientifically recalibrated.



ANANTARA ANGKOR RESORT, THAILAND

The story of this resort is one of adventure wrapped in luxury, acting as a sophisticated basecamp for exploring the majestic temples of Angkor Wat. It is an intimate, all-suite sanctuary where peace provides a necessary contrast to the world outside. November through March also brings you the season for Hot Air Balloon experience. You can soak in the sunrise views from high above the sky and then follow it up with the Anantara Spa for relaxing and rejuvenating treatments based on ancient Khmer wellness rituals. This resort is now more accessible for travel and leisure with the direct IndiGo flights that are beginning from Kolkata to Siem Reap every Monday, Thursday and Saturday.





WHERE THE RIVER MEETS THE SEA

In Thailand, luxury isn't loud, it's luminous. A river at dawn, a coastline at dusk, and somewhere in between, the rhythm of a *dhol* on the sea breeze... This is what awaits Navneet Mendiratta on her recent holiday.

It begins with reflection. Sunlight spills over the Chao Phraya River, water gleaming like silk beneath the morning haze, as I draw the curtains aside for a view from the window of my room at Avani+ Riverside Bangkok Hotel. Bangkok is already up and about.

At a distance, the hoot of the ferries sound alerts like a morning rooster. The city unfolds slowly, its pulse softened by

distance. Ferries glide across the silver surface, temples gleam from their gilded spires and across the river the ICONSIAM ferris wheel looks inviting to the child within.

Bangkok, viewed from above, is breathtaking. It feels infinite. Like a city in constant motion, yet capable of extraordinary stillness. From where I stand, this is where indulgence begins not with extravagance, but with equilibrium.



BANGKOK: LAYERS OF LIGHT AND TEXTURE

A dip in the infinity pool and a leisurely breakfast later, I submit to the temptations of the shopaholic in me. Opting for the river route instead of a cab, I make my way to the private pier across the road where a free shuttle service would take me to the Sathorn (central) Pier. The helpful staff guides me on my connection further before dropping me off. The air smells of tamarind, rain and smoke – Bangkok distilled into one breath. Another short ferry ride and short walk later, I reach Song Wat Road, Bangkok’s slender artery pulsing with history and reinvention. Lined with vintage stores, art studios, aesthetic cafes and boutiques selling niche wares, this road was once the heart of the city’s trading quarter. Today, it makes for a design lover’s dreamscape. At Mother Roaster, coffee is brewed with quiet reverence, the aroma wrapping itself around the old wooden beams. Located a short walk from Song Wat in Talat Noi, Mother Roaster is known

for its slow-drip coffee served by its passionate barista. This cafe is all about quality coffee in a cozy, welcoming setting. A few steps away, a ceramic atelier displays indigo-glazed bowls that look more like art than tableware. If you are the kind who likes to indulge in people-watching once in a while to absorb the vibe of a place, this makes for a perfect spot. The street hums with understated sophistication. It is a place where creativity, not commerce, leads. There’s no rush here; only rhythm. It’s Bangkok, but turned inward – sensual, curious, refined. CHINATOWN AT DUSK When night falls, Yaowarat Road blazes to life. Chinatown is an opera of neon and aroma – lanterns glowing crimson, woks singing in high flame, the air heavy with star anise, garlic and promise. It’s a Sunday and the footfall here is exceptionally heavy. A complete contrast to the Song Wat Road, here, indulgence



WHEN NIGHT FALLS, YAOWARAT ROAD BLAZES TO LIFE. CHINATOWN IS AN OPERA OF NEON AND AROMA - LANTERNS GLOWING CRIMSON, WOKS SINGING IN HIGH FLAME, THE AIR HEAVY WITH STAR ANISE, GARLIC AND PROMISE

is democratic. It lives in the crispness of oyster omelettes, crab croquettes, the melt of mango sticky rice, *tanghulus* (or a traditional Chinese snack consisting of several malt sugar coated fruits of Chinese hawthorn on a bamboo skewer made popular by the C-Dramas), the laughter of strangers sharing tables and content creators trying to capture the vibrancy of the space. Between bites, I watch steam rise into the night air, illuminated by pink and gold lights. This is the theatre Bangkok is famous for – unscripted, unforgettable and deeply human.

FIRE AND PRECISION AT BENIHANA

Back at Benihana at Avani Riverside, the mood shifts from street-side spontaneity to curated spectacle. Flames rise, knives flash and laughter echoes as chefs turn dinner into art. It’s a performance, yes, but beneath the playfulness lies precision. The grilled lobster is tender and buttery, the wagyu perfectly caramelised. Each dish is plated with an elegance that matches the skyline beyond. Bangkok is glittering across the river, its lights mirrored in the Chao Phraya’s midnight current. Here, luxury feels alive, not still, not silent, but thrillingly in motion.

HUA HIN: THE RHYTHM OF REST

Moving around in Thailand is actually very easy and it is not unusual to see women take up driving jobs. My cab driver is a fashionable Thai woman with impeccably done nails, three styles of sunglasses tucked in the overhead car shade and





AT AVANI+ HUA HIN RESORT, LUXURY TAKES A QUIETER FORM. VILLAS OPEN ONTO PRIVATE POOLS FRAMED BY BOUGAINVILLEA, SPA PAVILIONS DRIFT IN THE SCENT OF FRANGIPANI, AND TIME SEEMS TO SLOW JUST ENOUGH FOR THOUGHT TO SETTLE

superb driving skills.

A few hours south, the road unwinds towards the sea. Hua Hin, once a royal retreat, remains a study in restraint. The horizon here stretches endlessly, the sands fine as powder, the waves soft as breath.

Sticking to the brand for all my bookings, at Avani+ Hua Hin Resort, luxury takes a quieter form. Villas open onto private pools framed by bougainvillea, spa pavilions drift in the scent of frangipani, and time seems to slow just enough for thought to settle. Here, indulgence is about texture and tone — linen against skin, salt in the air, a rhythm that aligns with the sea. It's all about personalised luxury here.

A WEDDING BY THE SEA

It is not on every trip that you chance upon a Thai Sikh wedding, executed *a la* Bollywood style. We have a surprise awaiting us. The stillness of the evening is broken by the sound of celebration. From my villa, I hear the beat of a *dhol* carried on the breeze — deep, joyous and magnetic. The guests are dressed in their finest best as they gather to celebrate at the resort's lawn. As fireworks light up over water, I realise that luxury, at its finest, is this: connection. The seamless meeting of worlds.

The following day, I head out to explore the local market to buy snacks for souvenirs. Flower cookies, tamarind candies and clam

IT IS NOT ON EVERY TRIP THAT YOU CHANCE UPON A THAI SIKH WEDDING, EXECUTED A LA BOLLYWOOD STYLE. WE HAVE A SURPRISE AWAITING US. THE STILLNESS OF THE EVENING IS BROKEN BY THE SOUND OF CELEBRATION...

cookies in sour cream and onion with pineapple filling are some of the unusual and in-demand snacks that I pick up to carry home with me.

The power of a translator app is best tested at a place such as this. Can't read, turn to google image translate. Unable to communicate, switch to conversation mode. It is at times such as this you are grateful for how technology has changed the way we travel.

Stalls selling popular fried insect munchies are hard to miss. Thai fried insect snacks, known as *ma-laeng tod*, are popular street food in Thailand made from deep-fried insects like crickets, grasshoppers, and bamboo worms. These snacks are typically seasoned with soy sauce, fish sauce, pepper and chili powder, offering a crunchy, high-protein treat that is both a local delicacy and a nutritious alternative to meat. While I am

experimental with my food, I have to admit this is not how far my palate has evolved. I buy myself a portion of sticky rice and mango before a Gatchapon machine catches my fancy.

A MOOD, NOT A MAP

Back in Bangkok, the river glows beneath the Avani Riverside once more. The skyline hums with life, but Hua Hin's softness lingers. I realise that Thailand's greatest gift isn't its beauty, it is its balance.

It's a country that can thrill and soothe in the same breath. Where fire meets water, and spectacle gives way to silence. Where a chance wedding on a moonlit beach can feel like it was meant for you all along. Because Thailand doesn't ask you to choose between adventure and ease. It lets you have both. And somehow, it makes it all feel like home.

A MONTAGE OF MEMORIES

Ekta Nagar in Gujarat has evolved into a vibrant travel hub where art, adventure, wellness and nature converge around Sardar Patel's monumental legacy – the Statue of Unity, says **Shashi Sunny**. India is set to celebrate his 150th centenary for a year starting October 31

Standing at the feet of the mammoth Statue of Unity (SOU) that holds the record (182 metres) for being the tallest statue in the world is an intriguing experience — at once exciting, full of amazement and anticipation to get up there for the view, and also humbling. You stand there in the shadow of the vast structure, and the greatness of the man himself washes

over you — surely, it was no easy task to unify the subcontinent into an organic entity. A thought that is even more profound now. This is the Iron Man of India, and what better way to celebrate him than to pay a visit to the SOU and learn more about him as India prepares to celebrate his 150th centenary for a year from 31 October onwards.



A NOVELTY

Put Ekta Nagar and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's Statue of Unity on top of your travel list this year and you will be glad you did. The novelty of the destination is a draw, of course, but it also packs many different punches that leave you gobsmacked.

Ekta Nagar (old name Kevadia) in Gujarat is a new township that has been built around the SOU. This is a well-laid-out neighbourhood — clean, green, serene, quiet except for birdsong. Private vehicles are not allowed and all tourist accommodation, except for the tent cities, is on the periphery, leaving Ekta Nagar as an isle of calm. Transportation here is by government-permit taxis and buses and cute pink autos driven by local women.

NATURE AT ITS BEST

Nature is at its best here — a heron wading in the shining Narmada waters or a kingfisher diving, a unique Miyawaki garden and tribal dining by local tribes cheek by jowl with the staggering modern technology of the awe-inspiring statue. This diversity is just one aspect of this circuit which is surely, to use an oft-used phrase — a hidden gem.

A couple of hours by road from Vadodara, post-monsoon the drive is lined with lush greenery and the roads are mirror smooth. You literally glide into Ekta Nagar through cotton fields, mountain vistas and shimmering water bodies.



TALLEST STATUE IN THE WORLD

Once there, you will spot the Statue of Unity dominating the horizon. Behind the grandeur of the Statue of Unity stands the legacy of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel — the Iron Man who turned the dream of a united India into reality. A freedom fighter, reformer and nation-builder, Patel’s quiet strength and pragmatic vision helped integrate a patchwork of princely states into a single Republic. Today, his towering likeness in Ekta Nagar embodies that same spirit of cohesion, urging travellers to look beyond the monument and reflect on the unity it represents.

The rush of adrenalin you feel will have you speeding as soon as you can to the SOU venue. A nominal ticket price will allow you to view the statue from ground level while, for a higher price, you can ride the lifts situated within the feet of the statue to chest level at a height of 132 metres for an amazing view of the Narmada and the riverbank. It is an experience you will never forget. The ticket allows entry to an interactive museum also located within the structure. Now a gleaming bronze, the SOU, like the famous Statue of Liberty, will turn completely green by oxidation in 100 years, informs the guide. We will not be around to see the scientific spectacle, but it is indeed exciting to see the big toe of Sardar Patel already showing a bright green tinge!



DO AVOID

SIGHTSEEING IN SUMMER

Temperatures can cross 40°C; walking around the gardens and viewpoints during day hours is tiring. It is best to sightsee early morning or late evening hours.

UNPLANNED VISITS

There are long queues for Statue of Unity entry, safari, cruises, or Glow Garden tickets. It is advisable to pre-book online to avoid chaos at the ticket counters. Avoid weekends and festival times when the local visitors turn up in large numbers.

PACKED ITINERARIES

This circuit has several attractions that are spread over a wide area. A day trip is not adequate, and trying to accommodate everything in a few hours can be exhausting. Choose your activities based on interests such as nature, family interests, technological sites, and cultural experiences.

CHILDREN'S NUTRITION PARK

Unless accompanied by children who will enjoy it, this is not a draw for adults.

HI-TECH LASER SPECTACLE

Come dusk, views of the Sardar Sarovar Dam will have you captivated while you wait for the laser magic to unfold. That done, you can enjoy a sound-and-light show at a nearby flower garden. A beautifully lit Glow Garden will delight young and old alike.

It is a good choice to stay at the Statue of Unity’s Tent City 1, which is perfect for a 360-degree experience of everything the place has to offer. This is a luxury accommodation set right by the riverside, large enough for wedding groups and conferences but also cosy enough for the solo traveller, couples and families.

To complete the local feel, the kitchen serves up the full range of delectable Gujarati cuisine from the typical *kadhi*, *dhokla*, to *undhiyu* and *thepla*. An outdoor pool, amphitheatre hosting cultural events, a large hall for indoor activities, Sardar Sarovar Dam and Narmada views and lush forests — it would be tempting to stay put were it not for the attractions outside. The SOU Tent City 1 has many exciting packages including jungle safaris, river rafting, boat cruises and an evening *aarti* to Goddess Narmada for the spiritually inclined.

IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES

The true bonus is the immersive nature of this getaway. At every point, your emotions take over — the statue inspires awe and a sense of patriotism, the many curated gardens such as the Garden of Butterflies, Garden of Flowers, Cacti and Orchid Garden are joyous to behold, the Narmada waters and thick forest along its banks are restorative and calming, the veneration of the river as a deity is profoundly spiritual and moving. As you bid goodbye to Ekta Nagar, you realise it is not just another happy holiday but a journey inwards, touching all the buttons of the heart, mind and soul.



LUXURY IN THE WILD

As sustainable travel takes centre stage, India's wildlife tourism is evolving beyond traditional safaris. Travellers are embracing conservation-led lodges, mindful adventures and authentic encounters that balance comfort with conscience – redefining luxury as an experience rooted in nature and purpose. **Ayandrali Dutta** maps the trend.

Until a few years ago, luxury vacation in Indian hospitality meant grand chandeliers, city views and fine dining. Today, it's about watching a tiger at sunrise, staying in a stylish tent by the forest, or enjoying a quiet sundowner far from phone signals. The much desired, these luxury wildlife resorts have the resources and influence to play a key role in conservation. Located close to national parks and rich natural habitats, they stand at the forefront of environmental efforts,

often using guest revenue to support vital wildlife projects. With modern travellers redefining luxury by choosing immersive, eco-conscious wildlife experiences over conventional safaris.

"Modern travellers are now seeking immersive experiences that emphasise biodiversity and the ecosystem as a whole. They prefer eco-conscious resorts that use sustainable materials, and those that involve local communities. Luxury lies in cultural interaction with indigenous communities, and the ethical

footprint of their travel choices," says Harry Fernandes, General Manager, Amanbagh and Regional Director for Aman India.

With experiential luxury being the tone of travel, India's wild landscapes offer a rare opportunity to experience tranquility, and a sense of connection with nature.

"What has changed in today's traveller is the perspective. There is the presence of intention now. They don't really come with the aim to see tigers. They are inquisitive about flora fauna, want to learn how a waterhole was restored near Madnapur, attracting not just predators but bee-eaters, lapwings, dragonflies and they pause to observe the behaviour of a gaur herd or a lesser-known civet. This is because the lens has widened. The forest is no longer just tiger territory. It's a living, layered eco-scape," adds Sudeep Mehta, Founder-Partner, The Bamboo Forest (Experience Safari Lodge, Nature Conservancies, Wilderness Camps).

LIVING ALONG WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES

"Travellers can make a meaningful impact when it comes to conservation and community engagement. Supporting eco-certified accommodations, local guides and responsible tour providers ensures that tourism revenue directly benefits both wildlife protection and local livelihoods. By travelling mindfully, we help sustain the delicate balance between people and nature," confirms Manav Khanduja, Co-Founder, Pugdundee Safaris. More travellers today are seeking "raw and rare" escapes – journeys that take them beyond manicured luxury and into the heart of the wild. In India's forests and reserves, they find beauty in the untamed: misty mornings,





With experiences that breathe in harmony with the wild, the balance between luxury and responsibility travel lies at the heart of what distinguishes us from other eco-retreats

distant roars, and star-filled nights. These experiences offer not just adventure, but a sense of grounding that constantly reminds us of our place within nature as we engage with local communities to understand their rhythm. Supporting this fact Fernandes says, “At Aman-i-Khás we adapt several grassroots and policy-driven initiatives. Ranthambore remains one of India's leading examples of a wildlife reserve that balances ecological preservation with community-inclusive tourism to protect its rich biodiversity. Some initiatives also involve local communities, supporting sustainable livelihoods.”

BALANCING COMFORT WITH ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

At places like Tadoba and Umred Karhandla, the conservation-driven lodges go beyond offering comfort; they teach you how to live gently with nature. “It’s a place where your morning coffee comes with birdsong and your room stands gracefully around a tree,” shares Mehta.



What has changed in today’s traveller is the perspective. There is the presence of intention now. They don’t really come with the aim to see tigers, says Sudeep Mehta.



With experiences that breathe in harmony with the wild, the balance between luxury and responsibility travel lies at the heart of what distinguishes us from other eco-retreats.

These resorts also help raise awareness among high-end travellers, turning their guests into supporters of conservation. In this way, luxury becomes a force for good, and tourism turns into a way to make a positive difference.

“We aim to reduce human-animal conflict and provide sustainable income sources for communities, where authenticity replaces excess and every encounter feels both humbling and transformative,” Khanduja explains.

Far from the chaos and constant motion of city life, these serene havens blur the line between indulgence and exploration.

In some of India’s finest luxury wildlife resorts comfort meets curiosity — where candlelit dinners follow jungle drives, and the luxury of stillness becomes as enriching as the thrill of discovering the wild just beyond your doorstep.



GO, TAKE A WALK

Walking mindfully in the bylanes of Puducherry is an exercise in meditateness, finds Abhilasha Ojha, as she settles down to the pace of life in the 'French Riviera of the East'

In Ryan Holiday's exceptional book, *Stillness is the Key*, the author, in one of the chapters, 'Take a Walk' writes about the 'ritual' of walking and how the act makes you not just a traveller but gets you closer to stillness, a state of meditateness. "Yes, we are in motion when we walk, but it is not frenzied motion or even conscious motion – it is repetitive, ritualised motion. It is deliberate. It is an exercise in peace," says Holiday.

In Puducherry, the scope to walk is tremendous; what's more, the numerous coloured or 'insta-worthy' walls and doors of the White Town ensure there's enough creative stimuli at every step of the way. I find myself on a roadmap of discovery in every lane and bylane of this charming destination.

It may sound bizarre to many, particularly those of you who are critical about hypnotherapy, but years ago, while I



was undergoing hypnotherapy as part of counselling sessions, very often, I imagined myself in Puducherry (this, when I had never visited the place ever). When I finally went there, close to a decade ago, before revisiting it a couple of months ago, I could understand why this "French Riviera of the East" kept showing up in my subconscious mind. There is a sense of meditative calm about this city, dotted with churches, temples, boutique stores, kiosks selling local food, plastic toys, colour lights and old shops for tea and snacks, besides the scenic 1.5-kilometre stretch of the car-free promenade area.

To look for the calm within the chaos, you have to deep dive into the din of all the *shor-o-gul* (hustle-bustle). Our group is there on a weekend, and all the lanes and bylanes of Old

Town are teeming with pre-wedding shoots of couples happily posing, smiles firmly in place, even as they're jostling with the crowds. The energy of Puducherry is electric in its own unique way – it allows for that rush, but you can still sense the calm. The quiet early morning at KBS or Kofi Barr, where one can enjoy *masala chai* and snacks (most of which are over by noon), for instance, prepares the mind for the day ahead, when crowds will start building up in the lanes. A quick detour into Galerie Surcouf, which keeps an array of textiles, objects, antiques and collectibles, allows for inspiration to strike you to get the creative juices flowing. Then there's the iconic Cluny Embroidery Centre, housed in 18th century heritage bungalow that's attracted, since it started 150 years ago, people from

ON A QUIET EARLY MORNING AT KBS OR KOFI BARR, ONE CAN ENJOY MASALA CHAI AND SNACKS. IT PREPARES THE MIND FOR THE DAY AHEAD





BOOKMARK THESE!

WHERE TO EAT: Ciclo Café's freshly baked breads, artisanal ice-creams, varieties of coffee, and a range of dosas (seafood lovers shouldn't miss the prawn-filling one), besides the coffee offerings, are hard to miss.

Solitude Farm, Auroville, offers *thalis* with brown rice, *dosai*, banana stem curry, spinach *poriyal*, mango *pachadi*, and more. Prepared by local women, the produce is handpicked daily from the farm, promoting clean eating.

WHAT TO BUY: Opt for local, natural, handmade cheeses from La Ferme

all over the world. The quietude of this place, while women (survivors of financial, emotional and physical abuse) turn every struggle of their lives into prettily stitched patterns, is a reminder of why acts of creativity allow us to survive.

While the walks in the White Town can create a meditative state of mind or what Buddhists call *kinhin*, it's worth noting that the exercise in peacefulness begins from where one decides to stay or call "home" for those few days of retreat.

We're staying in House of Upasana, a 100-year-old heritage villa with a teal-colour façade that was also featured in the film *Life of Pi*. The villa features six well-appointed rooms, surrounded by the shade and comfort of centuries-old trees that have the power to still the mind. (Note: Highly recommending this place for women solo travellers for the safety and security that it offers; and the attention given to guests by the owners, Ashish Thadani, his son Aman Thadani, and the rest of the staff). House of Upasana also houses Ciclo Café, a popular brand in South India, known for promoting

Cheese. There are lots of cheese farms in and around Puducherry; plan in advance to see the process of cheese-making.

WHAT TO DO: For those of you who want to study pottery intensively, go to Mantra Pottery in Auroville. You can also opt for hour or two-hour-long sessions in studios such as Clay and Glaze in Puducherry.

WHERE TO STAY: House of Upasana, a boutique heritage villa that has six well-appointed rooms nestled in the lap of shaded trees. Other brands such as Taj, CGH Earth, Radisson, and Accord are also present.



Pathé Cine Familial, the first cinema theatre in Pondicherry, was opened in the early 1930s and was built by the French company Pathé.



cycling through its cafes in Chennai. Quite expectedly, then, the décor incorporates upcycled bicycle wheels that have been used innovatively to double as lighting solutions on the two floors of the café, dining area and the bar.

Staying in House of Upasana is an experience to smell the fragrance of Puducherry's vibe: the frangipani trees at the entrance; the smell of freshly brewed coffee, and freshly baked bread; the musty, familiar smell of old books (it's called bibliosmia, by the way) kept at the entrance of the café; that whiff of the mango artisanal ice-cream getting scooped out for a diner... these become entry points that ease your mind, and make you aware of why you're living in the moment).

Walking in alleys, lanes, and bylanes of Puducherry is akin to a rich tapestry of discoveries and experiences: Observing the richly designed heritage villas, homestays and private homes with their numerous doorways, arches, and artistically painted walls, along with the colourful bougainvillea underneath which people are happily posing, one realises how the place carries with it parts of history that need to be preserved and protected. Pathé Cine Familial, the first cinema theatre in Pondicherry, was opened in the early 1930s.

It was built by the French company Pathé, one of the earliest movie business companies established in the 1890s. Then there's the Romain Rolland Library, founded in 1827 as the Bibliothèque Publique, one of India's oldest libraries, named after Nobel Laureate Romain Rolland, who was also a friend of Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore, and wrote extensively about India.

It's worth mentioning at this point that for a complete experience of Puducherry, a trip to Auroville for a silent, meditative session inside the Matrimandir Inner Chamber is highly recommended. The quiet walk leading one to the Inner Chamber allows you to hear your own thoughts and retune your perspective on life's strains and struggles.

Be it the old lighthouse that you spot while strolling on the promenade in Puducherry, the comforting hymns sung inside the Église Notre-Dame des Anges or Our Lady of Angels Church, or the sounds of waves crashing the centuries-old rocks on the sea front area of Rock Beach while the sun sets in the horizon, Puducherry has a way to rejuvenate you in a way no city spa treatment can.

However, to experience the stillness, you need to walk, and then walk a little more, one step at a time.



FOR A COMPLETE EXPERIENCE OF PUDUCHERRY, A TRIP TO AUROVILLE FOR A SILENT SESSION INSIDE THE MATRIMANDIR INNER CHAMBER IS HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

THE LIVING ART OF STONE

If you are drawn to lesser-travelled paths and places that evolve while still rooted in tradition, Kishangarh in Rajasthan will speak to you. Maybe even in stone, as discovers **Navneet Mendiratta**



Beyond the whispers of it being India's marble capital and home to the famous Kishangarh School of Miniature Painting, known for the ethereal *Bani Thani* (the woman with arched brows, lotus eyes and an enigmatic smile), I had not heard much about Kishangarh. Most travellers race past this dusty industrial Rajasthan town on their way to Pushkar or Ajmer, but few know of it as a town layered in history, artistry and quiet reinvention. Kishangarh isn't loud or showy. It reveals itself slowly, like a block of marble gradually sculpted into form.

THE FIRST GLIMPSE OF STONE COUNTRY

A missed flight turned into a blessing in disguise as I got to make a road trip via western-aligned Delhi-Mumbai Expressway (which includes the Delhi-Jaipur Expressway section) to reach Jaipur and then proceed to Kishangarh, just an hour short of touching Pushkar. It's a beautiful drive and extremely smooth, cutting down time taken to travel compared to old routes.

Driving non-stop, I arrived in Kishangarh on a hazy afternoon in a little short of 5 hours. As we neared the town, the scenery began to change. Gone were the vibrant Rajasthani towns painted in pink or blue. Here, the

landscape was more industrial, almost moonlike with stacks of gleaming white marble slabs lining the roads, stretching into the horizon like some surreal modern-day Stonehenge.

WHERE CRAFT MEETS CONTEMPORARY

Tucked away inside a sprawling marble yard on the outskirts of town, StoneX Refinery in Kishangarh isn't your typical art space. It's part workshop, part open-air gallery and part creative laboratory. One of the world's leading names in natural stone, in recent years, StoneX has been reimagining its identity as more than a global leader in stone – positioning itself as a patron of art and cultural storytelling, where stone becomes a vessel of identity, memory and permanence.

"StoneX isn't just about making sculptures," said Sushant Pathak, Group CMO StoneX Global as he took me on a walkthrough. "It's about rethinking how we work with stone and how we tell stories with it. We want to move beyond construction and into expression," he said. What followed was a mind-opening exploration.

Towering stone installations that responded to light and shadow, sound sculptures that hummed with the wind and delicate





marble inlays that felt almost like lace. Artists from across India and abroad have collaborated here, each bringing their own interpretation of what stone could be.

From a section dedicated to interactive workshops, where local artisans teach traditional carving techniques, to sculptures on display by visiting designers and travellers, the layout of the refinery is interspersed with creative spaces that make you pause and see the process up close.

What struck me most was how the space attempts to redefine a heavy industrial layout and veer it towards creativity in a fearlessly experimental fashion. The collaborations with artists are just not for preserving heritage or creating another product line, they are meant to push boundaries and demonstrate what creative minds and skilled hands can create.

In fact, documenting its creative initiatives, StoneX has launched a coffee-table book as a tribute to the timeless artistry of stone and to the extraordinary artists who transformed raw stone into iconic works of contemporary sculpture. The book traces the creative journeys of ten distinguished artists — Shanthamani Muddaiah, Sudarshan Shetty, Gigi Scaria, Shaik Azgharali, Harsha Durugadda, R Magesh, Yogesh Ramkrishna, Teja Gavankar, Chandrashekar Koteswar, and Harmeet Rattan. The volume also features global pioneers of stone art such as Sebastian Errazuriz, Nicolas Bertoux, Cynthia Sah, Alex Seton and Kota Kinutani, situating the project within a broader international dialogue.

KISHANGARH'S ROYAL PAST

Not many are aware that this was once the seat of the Kishangarh royals, patrons of art and architecture. The Phool Mahal Palace of Kishangarh is set beside Gond Talav, a serene lake that mirrors



A distinct style of Rajasthani miniature art, that flourished under King Savant Singh in the 18th century, Kishangarh School of Miniature Painting is known for its stylised portraits often featuring elongated faces, lotus-shaped eyes and pointed chins.



the palace's weathered arches and domes. The palace now functions as a boutique hotel.

And then there is, of course, the Kishangarh School of Miniature Painting. A distinct style of Rajasthani miniature art, that flourished under King Savant Singh in the 18th century, is known for its stylised portraits often featuring elongated faces, lotus-shaped eyes and pointed chins. Popular themes include the romantic and divine love of Radha and Krishna and it is especially famous for the iconic painting of the royal courtier *Bani Thani*, who was the muse for both the ruler and the artist Nihal Chand.

A DAY TRIP TO PUSHKAR

Kishangarh makes a perfect base for exploring nearby Pushkar, just under an hour's drive away. While Pushkar can feel chaotic during the Camel Fair season held in October till early November, its spiritual rhythm is best captured in off-season.

I began my morning with a sunrise trek to Savitri Temple, climbing hundreds of steps before the desert sky turned gold. From the top, Pushkar Lake looked like a silver coin embedded in the earth, ringed with ghats and temples.

Later, I wandered the quieter ghats — Varaha Ghat and Gau Ghat — watching

pilgrims light lamps and release flower offerings. The fragrance of incense mingled with the sound of temple bells and the cooing of pigeons. There's something undeniably grounding about Pushkar, and even as a visitor, I felt a strange stillness settle over me.

A RETURN TO STONE

I returned to Kishangarh that evening, dusty and sun-warmed from the desert. Later, as I caught up with a resident artist over dinner I asked her what kept her coming back to Kishangarh. "Stone has memory," she said. "You just have to listen long enough to find it." That stayed with me.

Kishangarh may not have the palaces of Udaipur or the forts of Jodhpur, but it has something rarer — a living, breathing dialogue between craft and creativity. Between ancient skills and modern thought. And in places like StoneX, it invites you not just to see it, but to participate in it.



JUST UNDER AN HOUR'S DRIVE AWAY, PUSHKAR CAN FEEL CHAOTIC DURING THE CAMEL FAIR SEASON HELD IN OCTOBER TILL EARLY NOVEMBER, ITS SPIRITUAL RHYTHM IS BEST CAPTURED IN OFF-SEASON

DRIFTING ON ICE



The point is having fun, and to do that, you have to get back to the elemental aspects of driving — knowing the weight and balance of a car, realising how acceleration and braking can change that, and how to manipulate the steering.



When Finland freezes, the thrill begins. On the icy lakes of Kittilä, Audi's Ice Driving Experience turns winter into an art form – elegant, daring and unforgettable. **Kushan Mitra** shares the experience.



The retreating glaciers from the last ice age scoured the Nordic nations, and in Finland, they left the country full of lakes, large and small. In summer, the lakes provide a place for fishing, fun and frolic. And when the temperature falls to minus twenty, the lakes predictably freeze up. But because it stays cold for many months, the ice gets quite thick — over one foot thick. And the fun and frolic can start all over again.

THIS TIME, WITH CARS

Early in 2024, I was invited by Audi India to participate in the Audi Ice Drive Experience in Kittilä, Finland. Located north of the Arctic Circle and near the border with Sweden, Kittilä is usually empty most of the summer. But as the first snowflakes fall on the ground, the entire region transforms into a winter wonderland. Kittilä Airport, which usually sees a single daily flight, becomes an international hub for winter sports enthusiasts and motoring enthusiasts. Audi isn't the only carmaker with an ice driving experience — several others also have them, some even driving down a snow slope!

Flying into Kittilä Airport in the midst of a snowstorm was an interesting landing, to say the least.



ADVENTURE ON SNOW

It isn't just the driving, though, that is the fun aspect of this winter wonderland. For that, you drive a snowmobile at speed through the snowy landscape while the sun sets and the northern lights start flickering in the distance.

Getting off the plane onto a snowy tarmac is not easy and one has to make sure they have the right shoes.

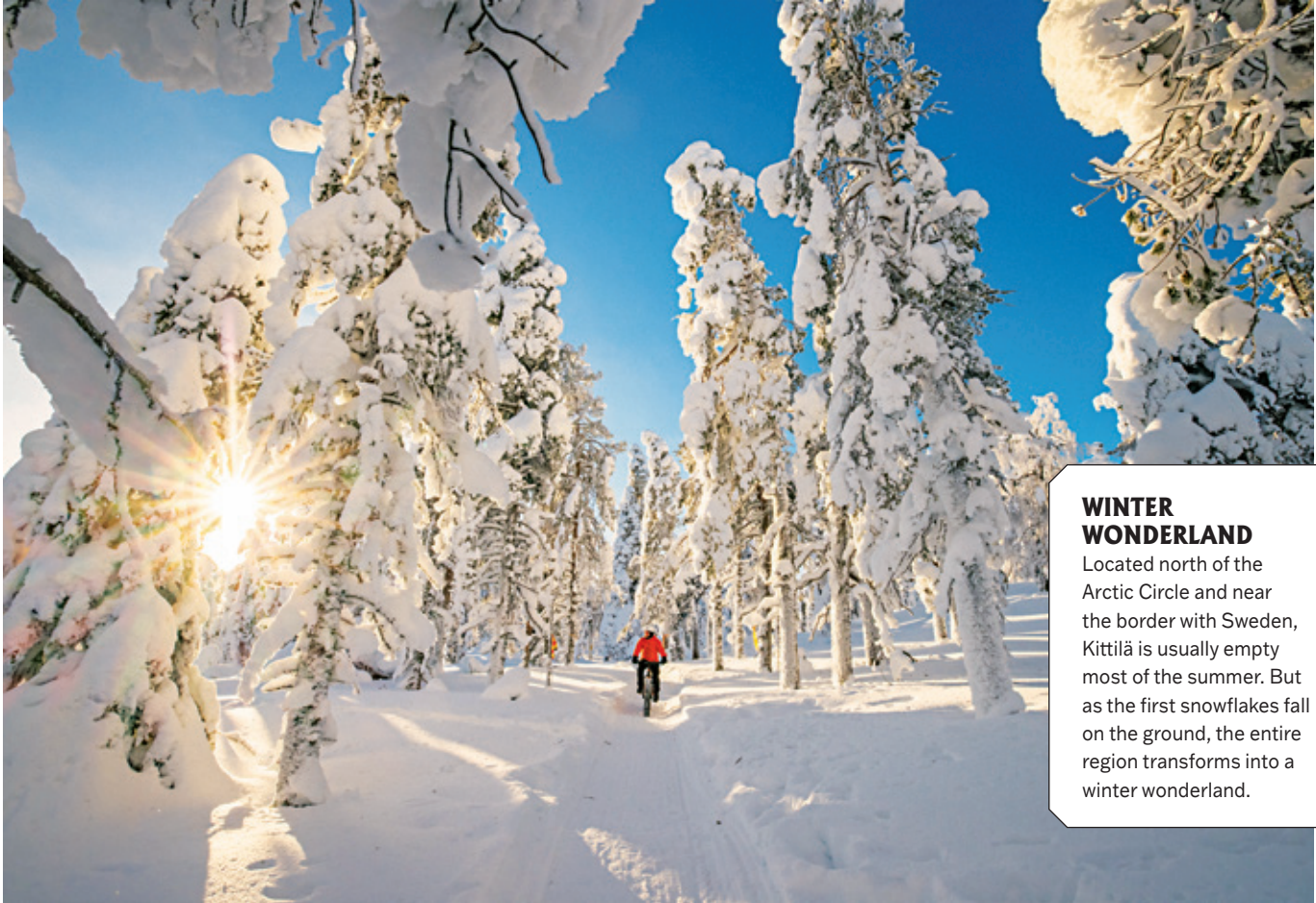
Thankfully, while the weather outside was colder than a freezer, everything else was heated. Our resort, the Lapland Resort, even came with a little sauna room. The Finns love their little steam rooms, and it was nice to give the sweat glands, a workout in the cold.

The next morning, though, it was time to pick up the cars — the Audi S5 sedans. Three hundred and fifty horsepower and four-wheel Quattro drive, but on the ice and snow, the electronic aids that make life on the road easy have to be turned off. Sure, they will keep you nice and steady on the ice, but





FROZEN LAKES AND TRACKS
The idea is to manipulate the steering enough to be able to drift from one corner to the next and not slide out. And learning the track — but unlike, say, a circuit on dry land, this track had no markings; you have to keep everything in your head.



WINTER WONDERLAND
Located north of the Arctic Circle and near the border with Sweden, Kittilä is usually empty most of the summer. But as the first snowflakes fall on the ground, the entire region transforms into a winter wonderland.

that really isn't the point.

The point is having fun, and to do that, you have to get back to the elemental aspects of driving — knowing the weight and balance of a car, realising how acceleration and braking can change that, and how to manipulate the steering. On ice, without the electronics doing the heavy lifting, it becomes a ballet with your hands and your feet.

And here is the funny part — when you are driving at six in the morning, well before sunrise, your eyes can barely differentiate between the various shades of white: the path carved into the ice, the snowbanks, and the frozen lake and dull grey sky beyond all merge into one. This is what they genuinely meant by '50 Shades of Grey.'

The idea is to manipulate the steering enough to be able to drift from one corner to the next, all while trying (desperately) not to slide out and have the tractor come and rescue you. So much for this being stress-free. And learning the track — but unlike, say, a circuit on dry land, this track had no markings; you have to keep everything in your head. This is driving at its most basic, but something that

reminds you why you chose to drive in the first place.

It isn't just the driving, though, that is the fun aspect of this winter wonderland. For that, you drive a snowmobile at speed through the snowy landscape while the sun sets and the northern lights start flickering in the distance. Clad in various layers of clothing to cope with minus ten-degree temperatures — even colder when you are on an exposed snowmobile going at 50 kilometres per hour — the snow is thick and soft; a little bit off the track, and you sink all the way to your waist.

It was a fun way to end the day, and you definitely feel like you have earned your whisky by the end of it.

But the day isn't over when you see the lights in the distance. Catching the auroras is rare, but nature sure put on a show for us that night. It was bright, and while the phone camera does 'enhance' the image a bit, it was an amazing sight, even as the wind and snow picked up.

The Audi Ice Driving Experience is an open course that anyone can join through the Audi website or through their local dealer.

THIS IS DRIVING AT ITS MOST BASIC, BUT SOMETHING THAT REMINDS YOU WHY YOU CHOSE TO DRIVE IN THE FIRST PLACE. IT ISN'T JUST THE DRIVING, THOUGH, THAT IS THE FUN ASPECT OF THIS WINTER WONDERLAND. FOR THAT, YOU DRIVE A SNOWMOBILE AT SPEED THROUGH THE SNOWY LANDSCAPE WHILE THE SUN SETS AND THE NORTHERN LIGHTS START FLICKERING IN THE DISTANCE

STAY CONNECTED

Have you experienced that sense of lost when you are unable to use the apps that you thought are basic for connectivity in a foreign land? Some social apps that you thought were common may actually be restricted in another country. From messaging to maps, not every app travels as freely as you do. Restrictions on global platforms vary from country to country, often leaving travellers surprised when familiar apps stop working. Here are some alternative options for you that work best in place of those restricted.



WHATSAPP

Restricted

China, North Korea, and parts of the UAE

Local alternatives: In China, WeChat is the go-to app — a mix of messaging, payments and social media. In the UAE, travellers can opt for BOTIM — popular government-approved calling apps. While, in Thailand and Georgia, WhatsApp is not restricted, but locally Line app and Facebook Messenger are used as a replacement, respectively. In South Korea, KakaoTalk is more commonly used for staying connected.



VIDEO CALLS AND MEETINGS (ZOOM, SKYPE, GOOGLE MEET)

Restricted

Some Middle Eastern countries, including the UAE, Qatar and Oman, restrict video calls on platforms like WhatsApp and Skype

Local alternatives: BOTIM, Zoom (licensed version), and Microsoft Teams are often permitted. Check with your hotel Wi-Fi provider, as many use approved connections for business travellers.

ALWAYS BACK UP TRAVEL COMMUNICATIONS WITH OFFLINE OPTIONS LIKE DOWNLOAD MAPS, SAVE IMPORTANT CONTACTS, CARRY PHYSICAL BOARDING PASSES OR PRINT-OUTS

PRECAUTIONS TO TAKE

You must be cautious while using a VPN. In countries like China, UAE, Russia, Iran and North Korea, unauthorised VPN use can lead to heavy fines or even imprisonment. Always check local regulations, use only government-approved or licensed providers to stay safe.



GOOGLE SERVICES

Restricted

China, Russia and South Korea

Local alternatives: Use Baidu for search if in China, Yandex for Russia, and Naver Map for South Korea. For navigation, you can switch to Apple Maps, which works smoothly in most regions. Although Google Maps is accessible in France, a locally better option is Waze.



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