

metro PLUS

THE HINDU

Bar-tailed godwits spotted together at Pulicat Lake bring cheer to the birding community **P3**

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM BALAJI'S SORGAVAASAL **P4**



Track record Snapshots from the current edition of Jagriti Yatra, where budding entrepreneurs learn from established professionals during a 15-day train journey across India. S SHIVA RAJ



Journey of a lifetime

We hop onboard the Jagriti Yatra, a special train journey that showcases the real India and hopes to kindle the entrepreneurial spirit among yatraris

Srinivasa Ramanujam

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The all-familiar vendor's cries of 'chaai' and 'samosa' are missing on this train.

Instead, words like 'startup', 'business plan' and 'SWOT analysis' are bandied about in the AC chair car coach. Elsewhere, an *antakshari* is in progress, with participants breaking into a rendition of 'Kabhi Kabhi' in unison.

Life inside the Jagriti Yatra is special. Every day is different and every passing hour, an experience. Yatraris – as its passengers are called often describe it as a "life-changing moment". It is. Conceptualised in 2008, this year's edition of the Yatra picked 525 people from different parts of India, selected after a screening of 47,000 applicants in the age group of 21-27 who are interested in entrepreneurship. The participants then visit 12 destinations across India, covering 8,000-kilometres over a 15-day trip during which they meet role models, observe business enterprises and get a glimpse into



A lot of youngsters in tier-2 cities are migrating to bigger cities for jobs that aren't there. We need enterprises to nurture local development

ASHUTOSH KUMAR
CEO, Jagriti Yatra

how India works, with specific focus on tier-2 and tier-3 districts.

Travelling with them is a team of volunteers, some former yatraris, and also a few foreigners, trying to catch a glimpse of how rural India operates. They eat at platforms, and share seats and responsibilities in buses. As the train chugs along the heartland of India, friendships are forged,

introverts open up to strangers and somewhere along the way, business ideas are shaped.

The Jagriti Yatra, organised by non-profit organisation Jagriti Sewa Sansthan in its 17th year now, and aims to do one thing: build India through enterprise. "We want to create more job creators than job seekers," says Ashutosh Kumar, CEO, Jagriti Yatra.

Different dreams
"I hope to meet my co-founder here," says Agam Agarwal, a chartered accountant by profession and entrepreneur by passion who is undertaking the yatra, "I have a crazy idea that I want to execute with someone on this train. A majority of the rural population don't pay taxes, which leaves them away from the loans they can avail and Government subsidies that they can use."

He is on the look-out for a tech guy on the train to set his plans in motion. Like Agam, there are several others with business opportunities. Take Tejaswini Kapadia, from Solapur, for instance, who quit a corporate job to pursue her entrepreneurial dreams. "My younger brother and I now run a

ghee business. Ghee is an ancient Indian superfood and we want it to go to the global level," says Tejaswini, who is undertaking this yatra to develop her personality and increase her network.

Also doing that is Shivam Porwal, founder of IT consultancy firm Expertsmania. A differently-abled professional based out of Ahmedabad, Shivam's driving force was to meet like-minded people. "I strongly believe that your network is your net worth," he says. He credits his fellow yatraris, all of whom he met

during this journey, to have helped him during the travel. "Accessibility is an issue. I have felt exhausted on the train and found it difficult at railway stations. I understand we are a minority but just constructing a ramp will impact our lives greatly."

During this trip, some participants find investors or collaborators, while some others, find their life purpose. Some find life partners, like Jignesh Talasila, an alumnus of Vishakapatnam's Gitam University,

did in 2014 when he went on the yatra with his now-wife, Vyshali Sagar. Many other established professionals too attribute their success to embarking on this journey, like Prachi Shevgoankar (Cool the Globe), Aditi Madan (Blue Line Foods) and Ayush Bansal (iDream Career), all of whom have also featured in the popular business reality television series, *Shark Tank India*.

While in Sri City (75 kilometres from Chennai), these yatraris get a peek into manufacturing business units, and a visit to the Akshaya Paatra Foundation in Vishakapatnam gave them information on the workings of



ON THE TRAIN

WHO?

Anyone in the 21-27 age group who hopes to be a changemaker or an entrepreneur can apply. Professionals above 28 years can apply to be facilitators. This year, 47,000 applicants were received, of which 525 were selected for the journey. The selected participants have to pay around ₹70,000 for trip costs, for which scholarships are available for the economically-disadvantaged sections of society.

HOW?

This special train from the Indian Railways is meant only for the yatra and has 19 coaches. It stops at 12 locations across the country. Along the way, the passengers not only network among themselves, but also meet entrepreneurs and observe their business models.

WHAT?

Designed as a university on wheels, the train usually runs in the night to the next location. Food is sometimes served on the train by a special catering team or on the platform. While the amenities are much like any other train, it has speakers in each compartment for communication, charging points, clothes hangers and a few bathing units. It undergoes a deep-clean service every day in the mornings when the passengers are out.

For more information and to apply for 2025's yatra, log on to www.jagritiyatra.com



an organisation providing nutritious meals to school children. As the train journeys into Brahmapur in Odisha, the yatraris took a trip to Gram Vikas, an organisation that helps rural communities lead a dignified life by concentrating on aspects of sanitation, hygiene and education. Explains Chinmay Vadnere, COO of Jagriti Yatra, "Someone on the train is from IIT but there's also someone who is a farmer. The common aspiration for both is developing the country."

From more than 8,500 people who have undertaken the journey, 28% have started their own enterprises. There are more plans in the future, as Ashutosh reveals. "We are mulling on doing two yatras per year, considering the demand. We also want to do a ship yatra."

The waters will have to wait, but for now, Jagriti Yatra 2024 – which is currently on, till December 1 – is journeying through places like Rajbir (Bihar), Deoria (Uttar Pradesh), Delhi, Tiloniya (Rajasthan) and Ahmedabad. As the train travels past these towns and villages, just before lights off at 11pm, the yatraris are still up



I was fascinated that I could meet 500 people on a train. Through this journey, you understand the pulse of India

SHIVAM PORWAL
IT entrepreneur

discussing the day's events. Come morning, when the clock strikes 6 and the sun makes a shy appearance, the yatraris wake up to AR Rahman's stirring 'Yeh Jo Des' from Shah Rukh Khan's *Swades*, which plays from speakers set up in all compartments. It is a brand new beginning – they could be in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh or Odisha – and they are awake and ready.

India is waiting.



TO WATCH
a video from the yatra, scan QR code.

Nidhi Adlakha

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If you have been inching towards the slow life, here is an event that brings together like-minded individuals in the space. Curated by Maithreye Rajagopal, The Honest Hustle Collective "aims to offer a platform for brands that truly make a difference, encouraging everyone to make more conscious choices," says the 34-year-old who switched from corporate marketing to marketing for social enterprises.

The seed for the Collective was sown post her pregnancy, when Maithreye was looking for purpose-driven brands. "Chennai is often seen as a tricky market for sustainable brands, with Bengaluru being the preferred choice due to its more mature audience for ethical products. But I believe Chennai is just as promising. We, as a city, connect deeply with stories

A hustle for Nature

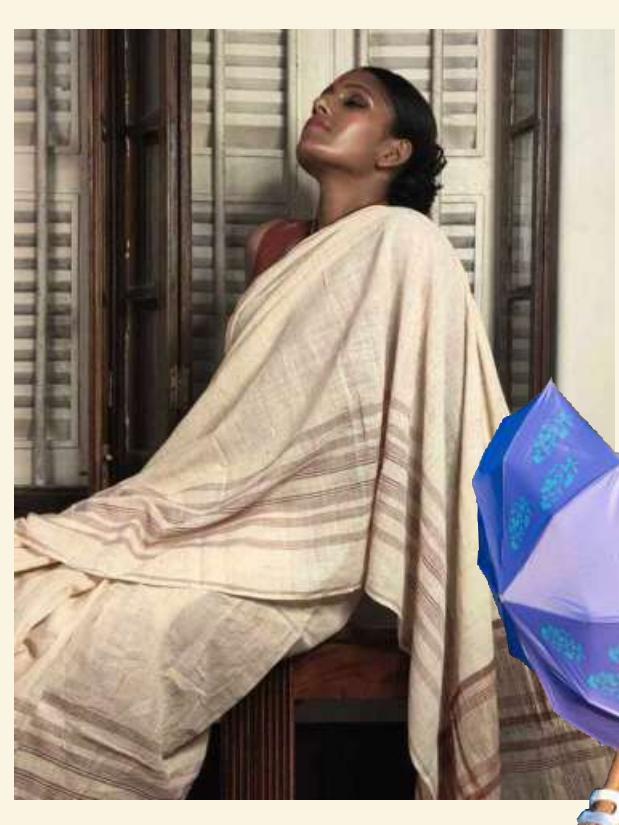
Sessions on art, mending wares and seed sovereignty come together at The Honest Hustle Collective

– the passion and purpose behind a product," she says, adding how in today's fast-paced world, "convenience often leads us to settle for what's readily available, without considering the hidden costs".

Participating brands comprise Tula, Avani, Porgai, Hastha, Upasana, and Manas by Manas Ghorai, among others. The brands will showcase apparel, jewellery and more. "I was intentional about curating a line-up that embodies the spirit of social impact. This meant including only social enterprises, NGOs, and brands committed to organic farming and

farm-based products," says Maithreye, who is also offering an organic lunch thali by Safe Food Focus.

The schedule in the workshops segment comprises a session by Vignesh Babu, a self-taught clay artist, Padma Malini of The Plain Papers Page who will guide children to create postcards with oil pastels, and Repair Cafe Collective India which is all set to collaborate with participants to mend and repurpose their items. There is also a session by Yogavahini, a yoga collective known for their work with people with Parkinson's and inner healing,



Slow life A weave by Manas Ghorai; and apparel and accessories by Hastha. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

that will focus on mindfulness and self-awareness. "And for music lovers, a surprise live performance awaits on Saturday evening," she adds.

A highlight, however, is a session on the revival of Bengal muslin by Arup Rakshit from Mahatma Gandhi Gram Seva Samaj, West Bengal. "He will share the remarkable story of Bengal's muslin revival, an effort that honours traditional craft and works towards its preservation in modern times. This story of heritage and innovation exemplifies how traditional crafts can create social and cultural impact," she says, adding how Arup's work "focusses on promoting indigenous cotton fabrics and supporting the artisans who create them".

On November 30 and December 1, at CP Art Centre, Alwarpet.

Balustrades of history (Clockwise from below) The library; the hotel's brightly-hued facade featuring traditional Chettinad motifs; and the courtyard. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Nidhi Adlakha
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W herever you travel in Chettinad, the lotus has its way of finding you – be it in temple ponds filled with blooms, or on the intricately carved mansion facades, textiles, or brassware. The main courtyard of the newly-launched property by The Park in Chettinad – aptly named Lotus Palace – is inspired by the Sahasradala Padma, a 1,000-petal lotus pattern.

The heritage retreat is housed in a mansion situated in Kanadukathan, near Karaikudi. It took the team helmed by conservation architect Kaushik Mukherjee around four-and-a-half years to restore the structure originally built in the late 17th Century. A brightly-hued facade featuring traditional Chettinad motifs such as the *yaazi*, parrots, and British horsemen, leads to intricate Burmese teak wood-carved large doors, preserved as is. These, then lead to an expansive open-air courtyard. Flanked on either side of the courtyard – across two floors – are 15 rooms (priced upwards of ₹18,000-plus tax).

The erstwhile home was the venue for recitals of the *Ramayana* for over a century. Raja Ravi Varma-influenced stained glass panels, each depicting a unique

Where the lotus blooms

Set in Kanadukathan, near Karaikudi, The Park's new luxury boutique hotel is housed in a restored 17th Century mansion



scene from the *Ramayana* adorn the walls of their fine dining Chettinad restaurant, 86 Pillars.

Unlike most establishments in the region that cater to traditional Chettinad fare, the restaurants at The Lotus Palace have a mix of international cuisine as well. At the

bar, 1795, handcrafted cocktails alongside Asian-inspired bites are offered. This overflows to Aqua, a poolside restaurant and spa.

On the first floor lies Red Room, an ode to Chettinad's Burma connect, which features everything from the decor to furniture in red

Burmese lacquer. At this lounge, diners are offered a high tea experience with Rangoon puttu, egg puffs, *bajjis*, etc., and a wide selection of books and board games.

Step out of the property to whiz past lanes lined with brightly hued homes and mansions that now lie abandoned and come alive only for weddings or the annual Chettinad Cultural and Heritage Festival. Take scenic drives to explore the Athangudi Palace and mansions.

There is a high tea experience offered by the hotel at the Thirumayam Fort where guests are served in traditional tiffin boxes; tours of Pillayarpatti temple, Koppudai Amman temple, and Kundrakudi Murugan temple; traditional games such as *parama padham* (snakes and ladders), and *nondi* (hopscotch); cycling expeditions; and *kili josiyan* (parrot astrology), among others.

A highlight is the visit to the Chettinad Vintage Cars and Camera Museum helmed by LM Lakshmanan. It comprises 801 cameras, 11 vintage cars, and a range of gramophones from his personal collection, including miniature car models.

But a trip to Chettinad is also about sinking into the slow life: watching cows ambling through fields, villagers going about their day while elsewhere, a *jallikattu* begins.

The writer was in Chettinad on the invitation of The Park Group.



Swing by A golfer in action.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

dominance in the sport. The brand's watches are backed by the Master Chronometer Certification, representing high standards of precision, performance, and magnetic resistance. In resonance with this, the brand vowed to support athletes who strive for achievements on the global stage.

Minutes of glory

The third edition of the OMEGA Trophy Golf Tournament honoured India's sporting talents like Avani Lekhara and Sarabjot Singh

Golfers and horologists gathered in swathes of green to celebrate Indian sportspersons last week at DLF Golf and Country Club, Gurugram. The third edition of the OMEGA Trophy Golf Tournament honoured India's sporting talents while seasoned golfers from across the country tested out the course. The event by the Swiss watchmaker celebrated not only their sporting skills but values of fair play and camaraderie.

Avani Lekhara, a double gold medallist in the 10m rifle event at both the Tokyo 2020 and Paris 2024 Paralympic Games, Simran Sharma, a bronze medallist in the women's Paralympic 200m T12 event, and Olympic bronze medallist Sarabjot Singh, who made his debut in shooting at the Olympic Games Paris 2024, were in attendance.

At the event anchored by actor Mandira Bedi, the athletes were also part of a curated golf clinic designed to take both amateurs and experts through a golfing experience. OMEGA recently felicitated Irish golfer Rory McIlroy who claimed his sixth Race to Dubai title on November 17. This victory marked a third consecutive win for the golfer, underscoring his

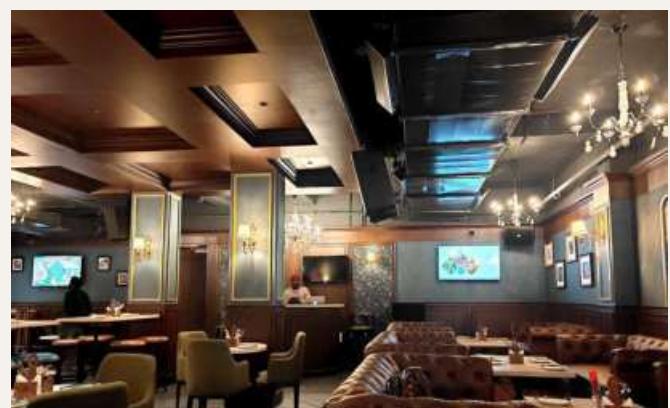


Grit is the word

The Madras Reading Company will be releasing a book by Madhu Ranganathan, titled *The Child Who Never Knew*. The book is a personal account of the visually-challenged author and charts a story of resilience.

@The E-Hotel, Royapettah. 4pm to 6pm, December 1. Entry to the event is free and open to all. For details and to register, call 8800292271.

Cocktail in a dvara



With inventive cocktails and unusual food combinations, The Neighborhood Bar aims to become a T Nagar hangout

a tad too sweet and mild, but is an interesting blend of flavours nonetheless.

The alcohol menu at The Neighborhood Bar is modestly priced, and this will probably give them a strong advantage in Chennai's ever-expanding food and alcohol scene.

While their cocktails are inventive and yet not too offbeat, a first look at their food menu leaves us with several questions. What is a Naanza? Are idiyappam and Thai green curry actually a good combination?

Of course, there are some favourites like a regular paneer butter masala, and a Kung Pao chicken on the menu but we decide to take the adventurous route. Warm idiyappam with a juicy chicken Thai green curry does make for a great comfort dish, but the Naanza, a naan with pizza toppings doesn't quite hit the mark. The cheese is chewy and the naan needs to be a lot more light and flaky. Among the starters, the karuveppilai prawn fry makes for the perfect crunchy and peppery accompaniment to the drinks.

While the effort to craft inventive cocktails and a menu with a twist is evident, it is yet to be seen if all their experiments with the menu will work.

There is however much potential, in the price point, location, and crafted cocktails.

The Neighborhood Bar is at Mango Hill Central hotel in T Nagar. A meal for two including alcohol costs ₹1,700.

Local brew (Above)
Inside the bar; (inset) and on the menu.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



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A door much like that of a red British telephone booth takes us to a basement where The Neighborhood Bar is gearing up for its opening. A part of the Mango Hill Central hotel in T Nagar, the space previously housed a bar as well. The interiors now however, are vastly different with plush seats, chandeliers, and a warmly lit up bar, seemingly inspired by a speakeasy. "We wanted to create a bit of intrigue. People should want to come in and discover the space," says Balaji Kathirvel, corporate head, Food and Beverage, Mango Hill, when asked about the telephone booth door. True to its name though, Balaji says the restobar has been conceptualised keeping in mind a comfortable neighbourhood bar, with crafted cocktails and a menu with a twist. The city and its neighbourhoods offer much inspiration for their menu; the Besant Breeze is a fruity and refreshing vodka and whiskey cocktail with passion fruit syrup and mint, and the Flaming Coffee, a creamy concoction of dark rum, espresso and vanilla ice cream comes in a steel dvara set. We also try the purple-hued T Nagar Tingle Tequila, which combines ABC (Apple Beetroot Carrot) juice and tequila. The cocktail is

Pushing boundaries (Clockwise from below) Bharwan mirch; smoked duck shami and head chef Shantanu Mehrotra. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The iconic Indian Accent celebrates 15 years with a pop up at the Hyatt Regency. Try their tofu medu vada and Kanyakumari crab



Milestone meal

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In the fast-paced, ever-changing world of Indian dining, restaurants come and go faster than you can make a reservation. It feels like a new place opens every month, with promises of reinvention and flair, only to shutter its doors even faster. But surviving – no, thriving – for 15 years in this environment? This requires an unwavering commitment to creative culinary excellence. And that's what Indian Accent embodies.

Indian Accent has redefined how we think about Indian cuisine. Before phrases like "locally sourced ingredients" became a marketing cliché, Indian Accent was already doing it. Over the years, Indian



Accent has shown us what Indian cuisine can be: refined, playful, boundary-pushing, yet deeply respectful of its roots. Whether it is their signature blue cheese naan, which reimagined the humble flatbread, or the Daulat ki chaat, the restaurant has consistently delivered food that resonates far beyond the plate.

To mark this milestone, Indian Accent is taking its signature flavours on the road with a series of exclusive pop-up events across India, in collaboration with American Express. After wowing diners in cities like Kuala Lumpur, Tokyo, Bangkok, and Perth, the India tour kicked off in Bengaluru on November 8. Now, it is Chennai's turn. The pop-up lands at the Hyatt Regency for three days, from November 29 to December 1, followed by events in Jaipur, Kolkata, Hyderabad, and Ahmedabad.

"When we embarked on the journey of creating Indian Accent, our vision was to redefine the perception of Indian cuisine. We aimed to move beyond the stereotype that Indian food is

synonymous with excessive oil and overwhelming spiciness. In reality, our culinary traditions are rich and varied, with flavours that are nuanced and balanced. Spicy dishes are just one facet, enjoyed by those who prefer them, but they don't define the entirety of our cuisine," says head chef Shantanu Mehrotra, who has been the backbone of Indian Accent since its inception, serving as the right-hand to Manish Mehrotra for decades, who now helms it.

The specially curated menu for this multi-city tour is a delightful showcase of Indian Accent's innovative take on Indian cuisine. Vegetarian options include the tofu medu vada, served with Madras gunpowder and creamy sambar, and the arbi galawat, paired with crisp sevai and tangy barberry chutney. There is also the flavourful ker sangar paneer with Rajasthani papad kadhi and the indulgent bharwan mirch stuffed with goat cheese mousse, to name just a few.

For non-vegetarians, the menu has Kanyakumari crab spiced with Tellicherry pepper, the rich and aromatic duck shami paired with crisp sevai and barberry chutney, and the standout meetha achaar pork ribs, balanced beautifully with sundried mango and sour apple.

To end on a sweet note, desserts include the iconic daulat ki chaat, topped with rose petal chickpea and roasted almonds, and the comforting doda burfi treacle tart, served with a scoop of creamy vanilla bean ice cream.

"We've always prided ourselves on adapting our dishes to diners' palates and preferences. And with this tour, the focus, as always, will be on creating a memorable dining experience that encompasses food, service, and ambience," says Shantanu.

The vegetarian and non-vegetarian spread is priced at ₹5,000 and ₹6,500 plus taxes respectively. For reservations, call 9880292271.



Pitstop at Pulicat

Much to the excitement of birders and experts, five bar-tailed godwits paid Pulicat a visit

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In the early hours of November 11, city naturalist S Venkatraaman, better known as 'Poochi' Venkat, spotted something unusual at Pulicat lake. Five bar-tailed godwits were sitting

together on a landmass inside the lake. "It is very rare to see the birds together," observed Venkat, adding that he shared the photographs he shot with experts from the Madras Naturalists' Society (MNS).

Bar-tailed godwits have been spotted in the region before, but not as a flock of five. "These are waders that are known to travel long distances at a stretch,"



A rare occurrence Bar-tailed godwits have been spotted in the region before, but not as a flock of five. POOCHI VENKAT

explains Subramaniam Shankar from MNS. "They fly up to 25,000 kilometres," he adds:

"Their digestive organs shrink after being loaded up with fat to extract energy for these long travels."

The small birds with long, sharp beaks, are supposedly "audacious". "At their breeding grounds, they are known to



Their digestive organs shrink after being loaded up with fat to extract energy for these long travels

SUBRAMANIAM SHANKAR
Madras Naturalists' Society

constantly fight over territory," says Subramaniam. Their call is onomatopoeic, which means it sounds similar to their name, going 'godwit, godwit'. Subramaniam says that their exact migratory route is not known, and that they are observed on intertidal flats and salt pans with some greenery all along the Indian coast through the year. "I have seen individual birds before, but not a group," he adds.

The reason why the birds were spotted together is a subject that requires research by ornithologists, Venkat says. "It could be due to climate change, displacement due to their forest area getting affected... this has to be analysed," he says. On the day they were spotted, the tide was high, reducing landmass over higher areas. "However, our boatman, who is an expert in birding, told us that this was not the reason why the godwits were bunched together. He too had never encountered such an occurrence," he adds.

Venkat and his friends travel during the first week of every month to Pulicat to document birds. While he is known for his expertise on insects, he has now ventured into birding and studying fauna as well. "With a lot of development going on around the place, we are not sure about the future of Pulicat lake," he says, adding that the same is the case with waterbodies around Mamallapuram.

Songs of the season

The weather is nippy and a festive spirit fills the air. Here's a list of carol concerts you can head to



GETTY IMAGES/STOCKPHOTO

The Madras Guild of Performing Arts rings in the festive season with its annual concert-cum-singalong, Sounds of the Season. Join both the senior and junior ensembles and sing along to some old favourites and new, conducted by Atul Jacob Isaac.

@Museum Theatre, Egmore.
November 30, 7pm-8.30pm.
Tickets at ₹499 @mdnd.in.

Join The Minstrels in the spirit of celebrating Christmas at their 45th carol service, Echoes of Christmas Day. The evening will feature the Adaikalanathar Lutheran Choir, Voyz Male, Rolling Tones, Bella Voci, Satya Family, Dhwanvi, Lutheran Men's Voice and Mount Ensemble.

@CSI St Mathias Church, Vepery.
December 13, 6.15pm. For details,
9884029700.

The Confederation of Tamilnadu Malayalee Associations presents Carol Bells, a Christmas carol concert free and open to all.

@Malayalaee Club Auditorium, Club Road, Chetpet. December 14, 6pm onwards.

The Indian Missionary Society, Chennai branch, hosts its Christmas carnival featuring singers from the Genesis Chamber Orchestra, Women's Christian College, Dishon Samuel Medley Band, Rolling Tones and Laudant.

Alwin Paul Isaac, Jaffy Isaac and MK Paul will also feature.

@Kamarajar Arangam, Teynampet. December 1, 6pm.
Donor passes ₹1,000 upwards. Contact
9176670160.

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The Union Christian Association presents Gloria, a Christmas carol concert featuring a host of carollers from UCA school and college's combined choir, The Minstrels, Dhwanvi, Women's Christian College, CSI Holy Trinity Church, Madras Mar Thoma Syrian Church, St Thomas Orthodox Cathedral, Northeast Christian Fellowship, Celestial Voices, and St Peter's and St Paul's Orthodox Church.

@UCA Auditorium,
Nowroji Road, Chetpet.
December 8, 6pm.

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@UCA Auditorium,
Nowroji Road, Chetpet.
December 8, 6pm.

The Madras Musical Association's 67th Carols by Candlelight is a community carol singing event by candle light.

@St Christopher's College of Education,

EVK Sampath Road, Vepery.

December 21, 6.30pm.

The Madras Musical Association's 67th Carols by Candlelight is a community carol singing event by candle light.

@St Christopher's College of Education,

EVK Sampath Road, Vepery.

December 21, 6.30pm.

When a blind date goes right

Read a book that a stranger picks out for you — Bessy Reads' latest community initiative mimics a blind date, but with books

KS Swati

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In a pleasant Sunday afternoon, 30 strangers gathered at Crafte, T Nagar, each feeling a mix of excitement and curiosity. It was not your typical blind date event — there were no introductions or small talk. Instead, everyone was there to meet a book, handpicked by Bessy Reads based on their favourite genres, along with their favourite coffee.

Bessy Reads, a silent reading community that meets every Sunday between 6am and 9am at Besant Nagar and Thiruvanmiyur beaches, organised the event. "Ever since Bessy Reads hit the 10K mark on Instagram, I have wanted to explore ideas that could engage our community of book lovers," says Kruthika Kumar, one of the organisers. "We have quite a lot of ideas that we are working on as a team but wanted to implement one and see how it goes," she says.

Kruthika, along with fellow members Divya Maheshwari, Sri Sivakumar, and Janani Umapathy, initially considered bringing a few books from different genres and letting attendees choose based on clues. However, they quickly realised how specific readers' preferences can be. "It took us three days to match books to genres and another full day to package them. We even added clues on the wrapped books," Kruthika shares. There were 30 books in total. Each book, wrapped in a newspaper giving an old-school charm, had clues penned inside. For instance, Deborah Rodriguez's *The Little Coffee Shop of*



A library, some bable Participants chatting over coffee and books. AKHILA ESWARAN

Kabul had a note that read "Brews and biscuits in a war-torn land, life and hope blend with a steady hand." Along with promoting the reading habit, the team is committed to supporting small, independent bookstores through these events. The team got these books from three bookstores: Subashini Book House, Tambaram; Siriram Bookstore and Booksbykilo, Nanganallur. "The kind of personal connection we used to

have with books and the person at the bookstore, who curates books with affection, is dwindling in the digital era," explains Kruthika.

Sruthi Muthukaruppan, 29, says, "This is such a unique experience. Here, reading is celebrated, not judged. It's a great space to meet people with diverse literary tastes and

make new connections." She recently finished *It Ends With Us* and is of the opinion that the novel was better than the TV show adaptation which aired on Netflix recently. Harold Prabhu, 27, a regular at Bessy Reads sessions, says his go-to genres are non-fiction, productivity-help, self-growth and at times, biographies. "The event fosters a sense of belonging. It's wonderful to gather with like-minded people and exchange book recommendations," he says. For Adithya Dushyanth, 29, the surprise element was the highlight. "Having someone else pick a book for me adds an exciting new perspective to my favourite genre," he says. At the event, he received *Coming Home* by Rosamunde Pilcher. "It's a coming-of-age novel and I love the sound of it," he says.

Looking ahead, the Bessy Reads team is brimming with ideas: a book reading session at a sanctuary or zoological park where they will gift books or plants to people, a women-only reading session, and reading retreats to serene locations. "Author meet-ups, and podcasts featuring writers are also in the pipeline," adds Kruthika.

Today, when connections can disappear in the blink of an eye, there is something reassuring about losing yourself in a book.

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THE GUARDIAN QUICK CROSSWORD-13618

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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To play The Guardian Quick Crossword, The Hindu Cryptic crossword, Sudoku & other puzzles online, scan the QR code.

- Across**
- 1 Go along with (9)
 - 2 Appeal (4)
 - 3 Playground game using numbered squares (9)
 - 10 Brainwave (4)
 - 13 Silky strands (5)
 - 15 In a nonchalant manner (6)
 - 16 Like Lord Peter Wimsey or Count Dracula, say (6)
 - 17 Business magnate (6)
 - 19 A good deal (6)
 - 20 Weapon — search (5)
 - 21 Pipe (4)
 - 24 That's fine! (informal) (4-5)
 - 25 Spoken (4)
 - 26 Runway lights to guide a pilot when landing — 1942 Terence Rattigan play (5,4)
- Down**
- 2 Harvest (4)
 - 3 Kiln for drying hops (4)
 - 4 Under the weather (6)
 - 5 Most pleasant (6)
 - 6 Young and inexperienced — newcomer (9)

Solution will appear in MetroPlus dated December 5, 2024.

Solution No. 13617

T	H	U	N	D	E	R	S	T	R	U	C	K
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Eight and counting

Tamil stand-up Praveen Kumar's latest show, 8, is a funny take on a few memorable incidents in his life

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If you follow the Tamil stand-up comedy scene, you probably know all about Praveen Kumar's life. That he has a daughter who shares his birthday. That he loves biryani and hates upma.

Popular Tamil stand-up comic Praveen Kumar – aka The Family Man – is now back on stage with a brand new show, titled 8. Inspired by Rajinikanth's popular song in *Baasha* that divides a person's lifetime into eight stages, Praveen's 8 is a collection of incidents that happened in his life, narrated in humorous fashion.

"These are stories from eight stages of my life," says Praveen. These include his experiences going to karate class when he was a little boy, college tales, staying with roommates, his first on-stage outing and how he taught his daughter to ride a bicycle. It does not talk about the most significant story of his life – his marriage – but that is because it has already been explored in his previous stand-up special, *Kancheepuram Maapla*.

How comfortable is he sharing a large part of his life with the public? "If I write a joke about a common topic, there are many comedians who would have thought on similar lines. I remember wanting to write a set about a Taj Mahal visit, but saw another comedian who had presented something similar. With general issues, it is difficult to avoid a clash of ideas. The only thing that differentiates you from other comics and memes is your life itself. Also, if someone has to get offended with my jokes, let it be," he laughs.

8 was initially conceptualised to revolve around seven stories, but that was before Praveen decided to do *The Family Man Returns*, a second part of his hit show. "I wanted to establish that brand in detail, like *Singam 1* and *Singam 2*. I don't think anyone has done a part two in the stand-up

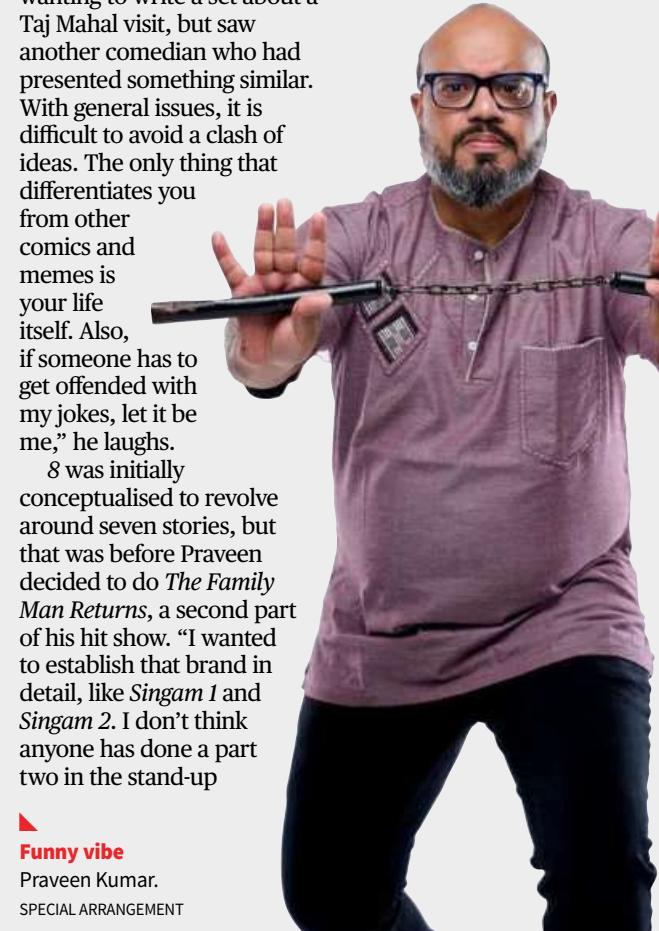
Funny vibe
Praveen Kumar.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

scene before," says Praveen, whose latest show is about 90-minutes long.

While he is looking to stage this show in multiple locations, including towns like Tirunelveli, Thoothukudi, Namakkal and Neyveli, Praveen is firm on one thing: that his content will always be family-friendly. "I cannot write an adult joke. I also believe that people who see my face in the posters trust that this will be a family-friendly show. I don't want to break that trust. You don't need to make arrangements for the kids to be at grandparents' house while watching 8; you can bring them along."

On the subject of kids, Praveen has a show targeted at children that is in the works. He is also writing an entire stand-up set on Tamil cinema, a subject close to his heart. Does he dream of a step into Kollywood as an actor or director someday? "I have starred in a small role in the upcoming Tamil film *Kadhalika Neramillai*, directed by Kiruthiga Udhayandhi," he reveals, "But I wish to write a movie script sometime. It is a dream."

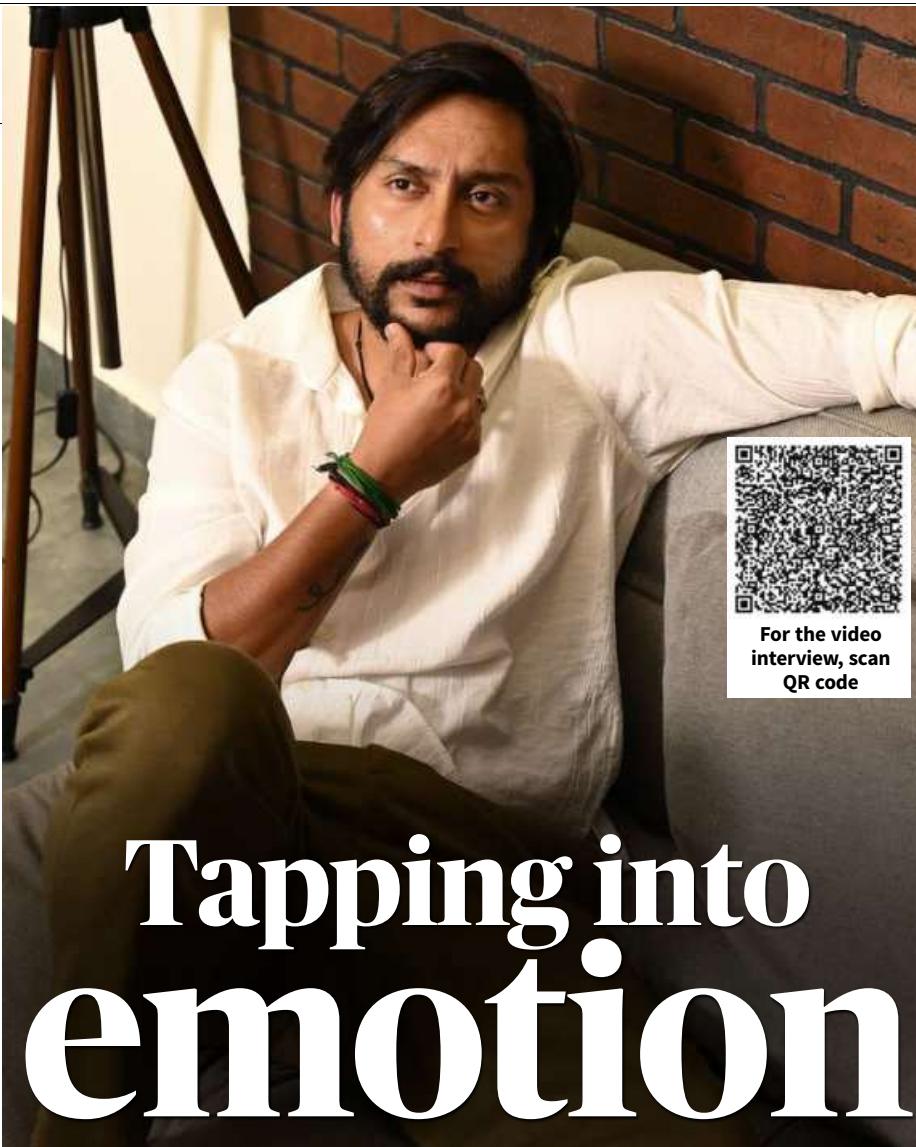
8 will be staged on December 1, 6.30pm, at Museum Theatre, Egmore. Tickets on [bookmyshow](#)



Over 200 pieces of art by Pallava Artist Village are on display at Lalit Kala Akademi

Melting pot

Canvas connect Art by Sujatha Narayanan. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



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Tapping into emotion

RJ Balaji, whose upcoming film is *Sorgavaasal*, on his evolution as an actor and director

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R J Balaji is not one to forget his humble beginnings. His office is filled with the awards and memorabilia he received in his past life as a radio jockey before becoming an actor-director. His earlier experiences on the road to achieving stardom are nuggets he shares in his interactions for his upcoming film *Sorgavaasal*.

Excerpts from the conversation:

Question: After a slew of comedy films some of which you even co-directed, you ventured into the serious films category with *Run Baby Run*. How was it to transition to serious films?

Answer: I've directed two films (*Mookuthi Amman* and *Veetla Vishesham*) and wrote and almost co-directed one film (*LKG*). I realised I liked to act more as it takes close to two years to direct a film.



Pages of history

Nikkhil Advani on adapting his recent political thriller, *Freedom At Midnight*

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Very few contemporary filmmakers have switched genres like Nikkhil Advani has. Still fondly remembered for the mushy *Kal Ho Naa Ho*, Nikhil over the years, has developed a diverse palette where of late, lesser-known historical accounts told with the flourish of a dramatic thriller, form the dominant shade. After making heads turn with *The Empire and Rocket Boys*, Nikhil is currently in the news for *Freedom At Midnight* – SonyLIV's seven-part series based on Dominique Lapierre and Larry Collins' eponymous novel that depicts the backroom politics and ideological battles leading up to India's independence and the Partition.

Excerpts from an interview:

Question: What inspired the perspective you chose to explore this pivotal period in history?

Answer: When Danish Khan (executive vice president, SonyLIV), said in passing, that the series was about a history you may not know, rather a history you should know, it became the mantra with which we approached the writing. The events between August 16, 1946

when Jinnah gave a call for Direct Action Day and January 30, 1948, when Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated are indisputable, but how each personality responded in the discussions could be debated.

Q: How did you work with half a dozen writers?

A: I felt if there is a diametrically opposite view to what we intend to say in the series, we should know and possibly try and understand it. This understanding has subconsciously reflected in our expression, making it richer.

Q: Were you conscious that the book was written from the perspective of Viceroy Mountbatten?

A: Absolutely. Lapierre and Collins admit in the preface that Mountbatten called on them to write about one of the most defining events of history. For us, the protagonist is India, not Mountbatten, not Gandhi or Nehru and Jinnah for that matter.

Q: There has also been a debate

over your casting choices, particularly young Siddhart Gupta playing Nehru...

A: This is subjective. We needed a competent actor to justify Nehru's age from 25 to 58. Casting choices are also governed by the demands of the prosthetic artist. It is easier to make a young person look older than the other way around. Hailing from Jammu, Siddhart has a sharp nose like Nehru. All the actors had to submit themselves to the look for one-and-a-half years.

Q: What should we expect in the second season?

A: If the first season is about backroom politics, in the second, the time bomb would explode as we move outside to see the opposition to Gandhi, the response to the Partition in Punjab and Calcutta, the plight of the refugees, and the question of Kashmir.

Freedom At Midnight is currently streaming on SonyLIV

Khushi Bhuta

Walking through Lalit Kala Akademi today envelopes one in a journey of the city's artistic culture. For one sees the dance of Radha/Krishna on a canvas as well as their grandmother's folktales come to life, all within the same walls. Drawing its essence from India's rich flora among other things, Pallava Artist Village's *A Mixed Bag*, currently on display at the gallery, features senior as well as budding artists from the city.

Curated by National Award-winning artist A Viswam, the exhibition is an homage to the artworks of late artists 'Village' Mookkaiya, Veera Santhanam, M Balasubramanyam and Natesh Muthuswamy. The display features over 200 pieces of artworks and sculptures by over 80 artists from different walks of life. The gallery will be showcasing work by several

renowned artists and sculptors including G Raman, Asma Menon, Athiveerapandian, Manohar Natarajan and Elanchezhiyan.

A stroll through the right side of the gallery engrosses one in a sea of abstract artworks by curator Viswam. With brushstrokes that run across blues, greens and reds, he is inspired to mirror the uniqueness of movement in Nature. He says, "I was inspired by Nature and its five elements. I particularly wanted to show the floating aspect of Nature."

KR Karthikeyan, an artist from Pallava Artist Village, is a textile designer who has translated his interpretation of the 'tree of life' in his art. His artworks feature unknown flowers and leaves seen in the wild and mimics their unsung, vibrant details. "My concept is that the tree is the forest. I wanted to show unity through my work," he says.

On the other hand, budding artist Sujatha Narayanan connects with art through the medium of

spirituality. She is inspired by Andal, the only female poet among the 12 poet-saints in Vaishnavite texts. Sujatha sees the saint as a feminist symbol since she is given the right of prominence over men". Also growing into the world of art is young artist Rekha Senthoo, who captures the realm of landscapes through acrylics. "The hero of my art is not the tree, it is the acrylic paint. I want to go with its flow," she says.

The gallery will also be featuring artworks of students from the Government College of Fine Arts, Egmore and Kumbakonam College of Arts alongside more seasoned artists. In order to inspire artists from all disciplines, the exhibition will feature evening interactions with writers and filmmakers at the end of every day.

A Mixed Bag will be on till December 3 from 11am to 7pm at Lalit Kala Akademi, Dreams Road, Chennai. Priced at ₹5000 onwards.

