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Nathan Lyon on *The Test* docu-series and how he became Australia's leading spin bowler **P6**

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From travelling to Italy and going on safaris, gap year students are trying various options before choosing the right academic course for themselves.
GETTY IMAGE/ISTOCK AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



A safari before you head to college?

The idea of a gap year, where students take a break from academics to travel and explore has been slowly catching on in India. How are they using their year off?

Arjit Agarwal has been obsessed with wildlife since the age of two. Before he signed up to study Ecology in a college in the US, he was clear that he wanted to spend a gap year immersing himself in wildlife parks. He planned 14 safaris for his gap year and managed to gather work experience with conservationists, naturalists, and rangers through this time. His favourite trips were to Bandhavgarh National Park, Madhya Pradesh, where he had some incredible leopard sightings as well as to Masai Mara in Kenya.

To defer, to take a gap year, a year off, a bridge year – these are ideas that used to be scary for many, but are now being contemplated by many young people at the cusp of adulthood. Taking a gap year between high school and college is not common practice in India but more people are open to the idea now.

"From our experience, there is a slight increase in students taking gap years as opposed to earlier," says Nitin Jain, co-founder of On Course, an Indian educational consulting firm. "There are lots of reasons for this. A gap year used to be considered taboo but now that feeling has diminished. There was this idea that college admissions would be harder after taking a gap year but that myth has been busted now."

In fact, Harvard University's admissions committee encourages admitted students to defer enrollment for one year to travel, pursue a special project or activity, work, or spend time in other meaningful ways. It is believed that students who do this tend to have better grades, better mental health, and end up in leadership roles.

Aarush Khanna from New Delhi's Shiv Nadar School was in the middle of college applications when he heard of Baret Scholars, a global gap year programme that takes students across seven regions of the world from North America to East Asia.

"Which 18-year-old doesn't want to travel the world? When my college counsellor sent the programme website to us, I thought it was super exciting and knew immediately that I would apply. I haven't decided between Finance and Computer Science so I am most excited about going to Silicon Valley and meeting tech entrepreneurs and also exploring São Paulo in Brazil, the financial capital of Latin America," he says.

The programme gives students exposure through experiences like learning about tiger conservation in India or going on a culinary tour of Italy.

"A student that we worked with took a gap year and used it quite well," says Nitin. "First, he worked with a professor on a research

paper which they completed writing. Then he moved to South Africa for four months where he worked as a radio jockey with a local channel. He met lots of interesting folks and travelled to other parts of the country. It was an exploratory programme with some funding support and it worked out well because he eventually got into Stanford after the gap year."



sports. Many people suggested she do STEM since she was good at maths but she was not sure of her calling. Her mother Swagata, a mental health therapist, suggested she take a gap year to figure it out.

Keya took her mother's suggestion and dabbled in the arts from graphic design and painting to clay modelling in her free time. Somewhere along the way, she got exposed to UX/UI design and found it interesting. She built a portfolio to learn more about it and eventually signed up for a degree in UX (user experience) design at The Hague University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands.

"Both my parents switched their degrees midway through college so they've encouraged both my brother and me to take gap years," she says. "I'm very grateful I took a gap year because I would have been miserable otherwise and dropped out of college."

Tisha Jain from Salem, Tamil Nadu, played squash at the National level and spent most of her youth training and travelling. So, she chose to take two gap years



Often students are not sure about what they want to do with their lives. Instead of picking a degree amid their confusion, it can be a good idea to take a gap year to immerse themselves in various fields and think about what really excites them.

Keya Mody, a student in Mumbai's Jamnabai Narsee School was good at most things from academics and extracurriculars to

Harvard University's admissions committee encourages admitted students to defer enrollment for one year to travel, pursue a special project or activity, work, or spend time in other meaningful ways

in between high school and college. She had always been passionate about preserving the planet and even modified her lifestyle to be more eco-friendly. During her gap years from 2021 to 2023, she got the opportunity to work in the renewable energy space with two scientists, (who were family friends) and jumped at the chance. She and her brother collaborated with the scientists for a year and eventually created a design for an automated cleaning mechanism for solar panels which was then patented in 2021.

Tisha used her time off to help the world's environmental crisis by advancing solar technology and is now enrolled at Krea University,

Andhra Pradesh.

Tara Govil studied at Welham Girl's School in Dehradun (where her mother was a teacher) and then moved to Gurgaon when she was 18. This move triggered some mental health struggles and she decided to take a gap year because she had procrastinated on college applications.

She spent her time interning with the social media team of Jaipur Literature Fest and subsequently got hired as a speechwriter. After that, she worked with an NGO called Salaam Balaak Trust where she taught young children. Before her gap year, she was planning to study Law but these experiences helped her realise that her real passion is

Psychology and that is what she is studying now at Krea University.

"I also discovered that writing is not a hobby but a gift and I want to do it professionally now. Taking a gap year eased my transition into college because I was not ready for it at the end of high school."

Diah Khaitan was not sure what she wanted to study after her IB (International Baccalaureate) from Nahar International School in Mumbai but had been curious about filmmaking since the age of 12. At her sister's wedding, she met Vishal Punjabi – founder of The Wedding Filmer and he offered her an internship. Nine months later, the internship turned into a job; Diah first worked in production and then got promoted to editor/DOP.

Eventually, she says that she would like to get a diploma or university degree in Filmmaking. But right now she wants to study for the right reasons: ie genuine learning versus getting a degree for societal approval. Her mother has encouraged her to continue with work experience instead of going into the classroom.

High school combined with college applications leaves so many students burnt out that taking a gap can be a transformative way for 18-year-olds to begin the next chapter of their lives.

Keya's mother Swagata agrees. "You get so caught up with life and you start worrying about your finances once you're older," she says, adding "If not now, then when?"

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77th Tony Awards: Hosted by Ariana DeBose for the third time in a row, the 77th annual honours, which recognise excellence in live Broadway theatre, will be held on June 16 at Lincoln Center's David H Koch Theater in New York City. Nominations for the best musical include *Hell's Kitchen*, *Illinoise*, *The Outsiders*, *Suffs* and *Water for Elephants*. @thetonyawards



Talkingpoint

World's loneliest plant: Artificial Intelligence (AI) has turned matchmaker for the world's loneliest plant — *Encephalartos woodii*. One of the most endangered organisms, with only male species ever found, a research project by the University of Southampton is scouring the forests in South Africa to look for its female partner.

Pick of the week

Concerts, workshops, tours and everything else you need to plan your social calendar.
For events, contact us on weekend@thehindu.co.in



For the record!
The Revolver Club (TRC), a vinyl-revival initiative, will debut in Chennai today at KUP Coffee Roasters. Expect listening sessions, Recordwala pop-ups, movie screenings and more. 11am to 11pm; Entry's free. Meanwhile, Chennai-based band **Squirrels in the Attic** will perform covers of iconic female rock, pop, and punk artistes of 70s, 80s and 90s at Bay 146, June 7. ₹250 upwards; insider.in.

Dramatic drapes
MellowDrama's new edit, **Utopia**, embraces flamboyant palettes, featuring 3D textures, laser-cut patterns, and patchwork. ₹10,400 upwards; mellowdrama.co.in. Anushka Khanna too has launched a new collection, **To Dye For**, which also features vibrant hues and embellishments like mirror work, sequins, and iridescent beads. Starting at ₹7,500, it is available on anushkakhanna.com.

Batting for votes
Lokes Ambigapathy's stand-up, **The Indian Political Premier League Comedy Show**, which imagines politics as a high-stakes sporting event, will be staged at Fika, Chennai, tomorrow at 7pm. ₹249; in.bookmyshow.com. For observational comedy, check out Mervyn Rozz's first standup solo show, **Moving On**, at Chennai's Museum Theatre tomorrow, 6.30pm. ₹499; in.bookmyshow.com.

Home to luxury
TimeVallée's first boutique, in partnership with Art of Time, brings timepieces from top brands like Bulgari, Cartier, IWC, Panerai and Piaget to Mumbai's Bandra West. The outlet also has the first-ever **Time Café**. The city is now also home to the first **Range Rover House** in Alibaug, displaying the brand's Range Rover and Range Rover Sport vehicles, which will now be produced in Pune.

Head and tale
Watch old-school animation at a **glove puppetry** session in Chennai's Lake View Party Hall, Chetpet Eco Park, on June 8; 6pm onwards. ₹149 upwards; insider.in. Speaking of storytelling, Chennai's mental health group, **MyRafiky**, is hosting a chat session where all blindfolded participants can share their stories with each other at RMZ Software Park, Chennai, tomorrow, 3pm. ₹399; in.bookmyshow.com.

Art for autism
Titled **Spectrum of Possibilities**, an art exhibition and fundraiser, also aimed at autism awareness, will display mosaics by Jyoti Srivatsan, driftwood art by Mary Malini, and glass art by curator Radhika Krish. The proceeds will go towards **ARAM Charitable Trust**, a home for abandoned girls with special needs. 10am to 8pm, today at Chennai's CP Arts Gallery (Shakuntala gallery).

Summer bites
Radisson Blu Hotel GRT Chennai's Kadal Virundhu, an exotic **seafood festival**, marks Kari Theory's first anniversary. Expect Pazhaverkadu nandu peratal, Thoothukudi singi eral varuval and more. June 1-16; 11am to 11.30pm; ₹3,000 upwards. Vegetarians, check out Royal Vega at ITC Grand Chola's **Grishma Ritu menu** with dishes like singhara soyas, kalmuni kofta and kesar lakkali. Available till July 15.

A watermelon in Cannes

Kochi's Diya John talks about putting together actor Kani Kusruti's look for the film festival

Shilpa Nair Anand
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Carrying the watermelon clutch on the red carpet at Cannes was *All We Imagine As Light* actor Kani Kusruti's way of showing solidarity with Palestine. The watermelon slice has been a symbol of Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation as it shows the colours of the Palestinian flag. The film won the Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival 2024.

The green, red and black beaded bag was a well thought out statement from the politically aware actor, says Kochi-based designer and stylist Diya John, who helped Kani put her look together.

"We bounced about ideas on how she wanted to be styled. Kani mentioned incorporating an element that would show solidarity with Palestine," says Diya, who has a designer label Salt Studio and an eponymous store.

Kani had offers from labels outside Kerala, but she chose to showcase a homegrown designer on an international platform. So, most of the outfits she wore at Cannes were designed and styled by Diya.

Although Kani knew what she wanted to do, she was unsure about how to go about it. "Any



Kani Kusruti with the *All We Imagine As Light* team at the 77th Cannes Film Festival at Palais des Festivals; (right) Diya John. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT AND GETTY IMAGES /ISTOCK

kind of inscription on a garment would be too loud. We wanted it to be poetic, we wanted it to be subtle," says Diya.

They tossed around ideas which included a brooch, embroidery and patchwork, but Diya felt these could go unnoticed. Over many discussions the friends zeroed in

on using the watermelon slice motif.

She adds, "The conversations stimulated my brain. I thought it would be interesting to include Indian craft too." Kani's wardrobe for the events took three weeks to put together – from ideation to execution.

The handcrafted bead work

embroidery on the bag is the work of two *karigars* (craftsmen) and took over 20 hours, while the construction of the bag took six hours. The embroidery was done at Diya's studio, "initially we made a sample swatch in order to get an idea of the



NYC Fashion Pride

Mayur Girotra, who became the first Indian-South Asian fashion designer to showcase his collections at the New York Pride last year, will now launch his edit, Ride to Pride, at this year's edition of NYC Fashion Pride at Rockefeller Centre on June 5. The gender-neutral range of high-waist pants, trench coats, oversized shirts, lehenga skirts and saris features Kutch patchwork and ikat patterns.



Bagging Brittany

France's northwest region, Brittany, has caught designer Christian Louboutin's fancy. Its limited-edition Breizcaba tote bag pays homage to Brittany's traditional symbols, like the Triskelion, and is inspired by Breton suits embroidered with the ancient folkloric techniques of Pontivy. Part of the proceeds of the sales will go to foundations that are safeguarding, promoting French heritage. Available at the brand's New Delhi and Mumbai boutiques.

Here are five reasons gathered by eavesdropping and recording conversations

Cyrus Broacha

Although, I have no data to support the fact that anyone out there has actually read my two consecutive columns, I need to give some finishing touches to the last article. I left you, dear reader, on a knife-edge. Waiting with bated breath to see how things unfolded on May 20, or polling day, or as South Mumbaikars called it, a holiday.

Now, as you know, South Mumbai has a reputation for having the lowest voter turnout in the country. Half of the constituency wants to change the image, and is willing to do anything without actually voting. The other half is happy with this legacy, and as proud torch bearers want to maintain this record with dignity and self respect and pass it forward to the next generation.

As one of the only four genuine investigative reporters left in the country, (bear in mind, one is on maternity leave, and two were lost in the last Kumbh Mela), I feel, the need of the hour is for me to find out what ails South Mumbai's voters? For this, I took on the arduous task of



ILLUSTRATION: SATHEESH VELLINEZHI

THE COLUMN THAT WASN'T

Why SoBo folks don't vote

interviewing and understanding a South Mumbaikar's mind. (Mind you, that should read a collection of minds, not just one collective mind, please infer from this as you will).

Anyway, coming back to my investigation, I decided to

interview and store data of over 300 South Mumbaikars, from all walks of life. The whole gamut of society – from the very rich, the very seriously very rich to the extremely very seriously very rich, who are so rich, they make the very rich appear very poor,

relatively speaking. However, I couldn't get past their drivers, and so I abandoned the plan. I then took up plan B, which meant standing close to fellow citizens, without coughing loudly, (that would cause the South Mumbaikar to flee – ever since the pandemic, coughing is feared more than earthquakes or bridges), and recording their conversations with one another. Oh, and since they rarely talk to one another, it was more like listening to their complaints on the phone to their mothers.

Reader, please note, the South Mumbaikar animal tends to live with his mother, as a rule. Here's where I struck gold.

The complaints came thick and fast. Some of course didn't make sense, such as, 'Jigna wants a lift, I better leave fast', or, 'why does Shweta have henna on at 9am?' However, many comments, however, actually did, and here's the list I've made of the five most popular reasons voiced about the voting process that proved deterrents to the once-courageous South Mumbai Mammal. (I'd say amphibians, but no Mumbaikar, North or South swims in the sea).

• **Reason 1:** There was no parking allowed outside the polling booth. South Mumbaikars

are not used to walking long distances, and by long distances, I mean 100 metres or less. A huge issue, many were vociferous about.

• **Reason 2:** Mobile phones were not allowed in the polling booth. This upset almost the whole population. Many felt at least one of their three phones should've been allowed on their person, so they could promote the polling process on Twitter (now X) and Insta.

• **Reason 3:** Shocking as human rights violations go, polling booths were not air-conditioned. That too on May 20.

• **Reason 4:** May 20 was a Monday. How could you waste a three-day weekend, by staying back in Mumbai, on some flimsy pretext?

• **Reason 5:** We'll vote next time. This is the 'Kal Karega' philosophy, which is embedded in our very DNA itself. In English, it translates into, 'Just do it next time'. Proof of this can be seen in the incomplete infrastructure, from bridges, to metros, to coastal roads.

That's my complete investigative report, I hope the Election Commission and other organisational bodies take cognisance of these facts, and redress the grousing laid bare. Let's get the South Mumbaikar out of his house.

The writer has dedicated his life to communism. Though only on weekends.

Gargi Guha

It is a blistering, hot April day in Goa and the sun is merciless.

We have just arrived in Curdi, the submerged village that emerges only between April and June every year. I look down at my feet and see deep, gaping cracks fanning out on the dry and arid land.

As a reprieve from the overbearing heat, sweet strains of music cut through the sultry heat. We listen rapt. "The music ceremony has begun in the temple," announces Pankaj Kamble, our storyteller cum tour ambassador from Soul Travelling.

His stories about Curdi are plentiful. Looking around, he points to the home of renowned classical vocalist Mogubai Kurdikar, born here in 1904; she is the mother of the well-known singer Kishori Amonkar.

"Curdi was a thriving, bustling village and the inhabitants, now displaced, come visiting their lost homeland every year in the summer months," says Pankaj. Soul Travelling has been conducting storied trails around this village every Sunday during the summer, and there has been a rising popularity, thanks to social media.

Today, there is a buzz as we see cars stopping by and people spilling out in droves. The Shree Someshwar Temple is at a distance, and the annual festival that takes place on the third Sunday of May happens to be today. The Shiva temple is the only structure, a relic from the past, that still remains intact.

Upon arriving in Curdi, we first stop at the Portuguese checkpoint, a nod to its glorious past. We are regaled with stories from Curdi as we stand facing the ruins of the



Paradise regained

Take a trip to the submerged Goan village that comes alive for its annual temple festival in summer



Panchayat building, post office and what appeared to have been a school.

Legend has it that once upon a time, this was a village of flourishing abundance, the bounty of its agriculture, nourishing many families. So

fertile was the land that it yielded the most sought-after fruits and cashewnut harvests. Today, the parched surroundings are testimony to the fact that Curdi gave in to the swell of the river when the Salaulim Dam water rose.

Curdi's story is one of remembrance.

When the Salaulim Dam project was commissioned by Goa's first Chief Minister Dayanand Bandodkar, the villages and hamlets around Curdi, namely Kurpem and other smaller wards like Dhapode, Kaman, Unan, Karmal, Stristal, Akrimal, Talsai, etc. in the Sanguem taluk were in peril. At first, the inhabitants did not take it seriously, but when the water level started rising at an alarming

(Left) A tourist exploring Curdi; (below) parts of the old town. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

rate, people abandoned their houses.

"I was only 15-years-old at that time, but remember leaving hurriedly to an uncertain place with my grandfather, parents and two sisters. We had to leave everything behind and start all over again," reminisces 57-year-old Ajay Curdikar, who runs his catering business from nearby Vaddem.

Each year, thousands of people would visit the temple to reminisce, soak up a day filled with classical ragas and enjoy a hearty feast, where the star dish was the famed *khatkhate*, a Goan vegetarian stew made from local, seasonal vegetables and spices.

Exploring Curdi is not a new thing, but has gained momentum in the last few years, reveals archivist Balaji Shenoy, 32, who used to conduct walks here in 2014, right after graduating from college. He now works for the Government of Goa's Department of Archaeology.

Balaji reveals many lost aspects about Curdi, among which is the fascinating discovery of the 8.2-feet Lajja Gauri or mother goddess, an ancient statue carved out of laterite stone.

"This statue was salvaged from the Salaulim River bank and is estimated to have existed for at least 2,500 years," he says.

Intrigued with stories of this doomed village we finally return. Whether or not Curdi keeps making its reappearance, one thing is certain – its stories and memories will live on.

The last guided trail in Curdi will be on June 2. To book a spot, call 9529490245.

Say hello to the ultimate delicious Amul Cheese Sauce! Whether you're a cheese lover or simply looking to add some creamy goodness to your meals, this flavourful treat is here to elevate your dining experience to new heights.

Amul Cheese Sauce isn't just your average seasoning. It's a versatile superstar that can be used in a variety of ways. Need a dip for your crunchy pakoras? Want to spice up your tacos with a zesty kick? Amul Cheese Sauce has got you covered. Whether they're mouthwatering pizzas, crispy samosas, or golden-brown french fries, all drizzled with the irresistible goodness of Amul Cheese Sauce undoubtedly sounds like a dream come true.

Made from the goodness of milk, this creamy delight truly stands out and becomes a cheesy and healthy alternative to conventional sauces and spreads. Besides, with four unique flavours to choose from – Pizza Sauce, Green Chutney,



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Mexican Salsa, and Jalapeño, there's something to tantalize every taste bud. It is a flavour powerhouse that can take your meals from ordinary to extraordinary in seconds. Whether you're hosting a dinner party or just craving a midnight snack, a dollop of Amul Cheese Sauce is all you need to transform any dish or meal into a masterpiece. In addition to being incredibly convenient, this wholesome treat is also a big hit amongst adults and children alike! It's like a warm hug for your taste buds – comforting, satisfying, and extremely delicious. So, whether you're a cheese lover, a busy parent, or just someone who appreciates good food, it's time to embrace the Amul Cheese Sauce's perfect blend of spices and tanginess. With its irresistible flavour, versatility, and convenience, it's sure to become your new culinary companion. So go ahead, squeeze yourself a dollop of cheesy goodness, and get ready to dive into a world of cheesy bliss!

"CONSUMER CONNECT INITIATIVE"

Try a Bloody Mary for breakfast

From shots by the pool to a soul station for readers, Ronil Goa blends the old and the new, making space for high energy party seekers as well as guests in search of a quiet holiday



Sangeetha Devi Dundoo
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At Ronil Goa, JdV by Hyatt's first property in India, Sachin, aka Rocketman, greets guests lounging in the cabanas with a free shot. Strapped to his back is a large can with the drink of the day. The Rocketman, who stands by the Energy pool (one of two on the property), is one of the many small additions that makes Ronil Goa less of a formal hotel and more of a relaxed holiday space. I watch the cheer with which Sachin's gesture is received, while trying an apple-cinnamon slushie.

Old and new
The hotel which was established 37 years ago has been renovated, keeping some of its Indo-Portuguese design elements – such as the sloping terracotta roofs – intact to offer a hint of nostalgia to old-time patrons while reimagining it for contemporary holiday seekers by offering minimalist, functional decor with pops of colour.

The 135-room boutique resort situated on the busy Baga-Calangute Road tries to make both party seekers and holidaymakers who seek some quiet, at home. The Energy pool thrives with music by an in-house DJ until the wee hours of the night (the decibel level goes down by 10pm). The DJ alters the

playlist to suit guest preferences and one can listen to music while trying the barbecues and wood-fired oven pizzas.

Although the Energy Pool is at the heart of the boutique resort Pratiti Rajpal, general manager points out that Ronil Goa is also for those who seek a quieter holiday and a breather from the party spots on the Baga-Calangute stretch. "The idea is to make both younger and older people find their space. We see *susegad* (the cultural concept of Goan lifestyle, derived from the Portuguese word 'sossagado', which means quiet) as a state of contentment. For one, contentment could be checking out the party scene and for another, it could be about winding down and having a quiet time," she says. Hence, while one set of rooms flank the Energy pool, another is by the quieter Tranquil pool.

A farmhouse breakfast kickstarts the day at the bistro and the chefs ensure there is something for every guest till late at night. The menu is an assortment of cuisines, with Goan specials, South Indian and North Indian staples, Italian and Continental; tasting trials are on for Asian additions.

Native specials
The charm of travel lies in savouring local specialties. Chef Pankaj recommends the caffreal. Traditionally it is made with chicken, but if you are vegetarian, the bistro is game to make the dish with mushrooms. I tried the caffreal with the local poe bread, a chewy bread made of wheat flour that works like a pita pocket. The caffreal has a hint of tang from

the tamarind, offset with a blend of spices and coriander greens. I also tried the vegetarian Goan xacuti. The assorted veggies cooked in a base of coconut milk with a touch of vinegar and spices made this ideal to go with steamed rice. The vegetables retain their textures and the spices blend in without an overpowering note.

Watching the sun go down, you

can try the barbecue or signature wood-fired oven pizzas. The sourdough base offers crunch to the melt-in-the-mouth pizzas. The dessert section is limited but the experience is worthwhile. Their warm churros dusted with cinnamon sugar and served with chocolate and their pistachio gelatos are winners.

The off white exteriors are



If travelling with a group and looking to host a get-together, try the Ronil Studio or The Loft with a mix of formal and relaxed seating arrangements or the garden area. A lounge area named the Soul Station welcomes guests to use noise-cancelling headphones to cut off the music and catch up on reading.

A fun addition to the breakfast spread is the option to have a Bloody Mary. "A spirited holiday can begin at dawn if the guests want to," says Pratiti, adding "Imagine you are at a friend's luxury holiday home."

The writer was at Ronil Goa on invitation

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(Clockwise from below) The interiors at La Panthera; chicken sukh Thai noodles at Kembara; food at Aamchee; and the lobster risotto at La Panthera. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



La Panthera

There is a sense of opulence conveyed by the name La Panthera even before you enter the restaurant. Past the ornate black door emblazoned in gold with the symbol of a panther and the name of the restaurant, you enter what feels like the chic living room of a European manor, but set in the heart of Bandra Kurla Complex.

Chef Manuel Oliveira, the man behind the Spanish sensation La Loca Maria, and his wife Mickee Tuljapurkar envisioned a space that captured the old-world charm of Europe. Being in the art and financial hub of Mumbai, they wanted to create an impact and hence came up with the name La Panthera which conveys power and elegance in one go.

Stepping inside, one's eyes are drawn towards the impressive 21-foot marble and wood bar before proceeding to notice the coffered ceiling with intricate mouldings and grooves as well as the low-hanging brass chandeliers.

The time-honoured traditions of European cuisine with its diversity of ingredients and richness of flavours lends itself well to the ambience. The 14 signature handcrafted cocktails are made from scratch with in-house cordials and syrups. To begin with, Mickee suggests the mezcal-based Roll The Dice with lavender nectar, bitter bianco, citrus and orange blossom. There is a smokiness to the drink which goes well with the floral notes and we are hooked.

Timeless European classics and contemporary culinary techniques combine in the menu, which takes inspiration from the owners' travels across Europe. The Beetroot Carpaccio, for instance, comes with a flaky philo pastry

which forms the base. "This is a dish inspired by our trip to Greece where we had something similar and we were very keen on replicating it here," says Manuel. The subtle hint of wasabi with braised onions, arugula and parmesan shavings along with the beets is a match made in carpaccio heaven.

Other dishes among the cold plates include the decadent stracciella with poached pear and crystal toast, and tiradito de hamachi served in a delicious pineapple leche de tigre with a burst of flavours from cucumber and coriander oil. The charred octopus stands out for its stuffing of the Spanish nduja pork sausage and potato, a robust combination that brings out the sweetness of the octopus.

One of the highlights of the menu is the woodfired pizza made with dough which has been fermented for 48 hours resulting in a pillow, airy crust. Our La Panthera Pizza is topped with the aforementioned nduja pork sausage enhanced with a creamy burrata and tomato sauce.

Things look cheerful again with the arrival of the tiramisu La Panthera and the La Panthera profiterole, but the former is excessively sweet and the latter has a choux pastry which is too cold and hard to bite through. We suggest you stick to the tapas and pizzas.

Address: G Block, BKC, Bandra East
A meal for two costs approximately ₹5,000 (plus taxes)



Kembara

A year ago, when Chef Seefah Ketchaiyo and entrepreneur-restaurateur Shilpa Datla opened Kembara in Hyderabad, they already had Mumbai in mind for their next outpost. As planned, the Asian restaurant recently opened its doors in the city.

Located in Bandra Kurla Complex, in the midst of high-rise office buildings and glitzy restaurants, Kembara feels like an oasis of calm with its earthy pastel palette, high ceilings and plenty of light flooding in through its glass doors.

Unlike their Hyderabad counterpart, Shilpa tells us that the

Mumbai outlet has more seafood so expect dishes from Japanese, Thai, Chinese, Vietnamese, Malay, and Korean.

Sushi, dimsum, baos, soups, and salads are aplenty in the menu and one would be hard-pressed to make a decision but we eventually call for the spicy crab and prawn dimsum as our entry into Kembara's world. The generously-stuffed seafood dimsum has robust flavours and spicy undertones.

Next on the table arrives the spider roll maki, hamachi sashimi and hotate nigiri. The soft-shell crab tempura in the maki is elevated with spicy mayo and tobiko while the hamachi

sashimi is delicately flavoured.

The bar is open and we get our hands on the Green Tea Geisha, a cooling drink of cold-brewed green tea, gin and sake. For someone who does not like sweet cocktails, this refreshing drink is a sure-shot winner. The tequila-based Root Elixir has a hint of spice from ginger and spiced wine foam and is a worthy addition to the menu.

Back to the food, and this time we order the mains. The soft



shell crab in Thai chilli paste is a no-brainer. Paired with Thai style fried rice, the curry has the right balance of flavours and spice with the succulent crab meat.

The lemongrass cheesecake with seasonal berries topping comes drenched in caramel sauce, which is a bit of a turn-off. However, considering this is the only dish we do not see ourselves ordering again, Kembara's Asian delicacies are a worthy addition to the neighbourhood.

Address: G Block, Bandra Kurla Complex, Bandra East
A meal for two costs approximately ₹2,000

When tapas met vada pav

Mumbai celebrates Spanish tapas, Asian fare, and local delicacies at the recently-opened La Panthera, Kembara, and Aamchee

Deepali Singh

Aamchee

For most eateries, the inspiration for the décor comes from the cuisine they are offering. In the case of Aamchee, the vegetarian café by Pinky Chandan Dixit of Soam, it was the charming heritage bungalow which was the starting point of their Mumbai-themed dishes. Situated across Wilson College near Girgaum Chowpatty, the cafe's high ceilings, intricately patterned tiles, coloured window panes and whitewashed brick walls transport you to hillside colonial bungalows.

Pinky fell in love with the bungalow when she set her eyes on it last year. "This space has an old-world charm about it and the potential and ambience to make it look like a gymkhana," she says. Divided into three dining spaces including a Private Dining Room (PDR) with large windows overlooking the Arabian sea, it also includes a small bakery section with pastries, pies, and breads.

A glance at the menu is enough for an average Mumbaikar to get nostalgic about their city with its myriad histories, communities and flavours. Local favourites



such as bun maska, thalipeeth, thecha and dabeli make an appearance. Although they are familiar flavours, the fun lies in the way they have been reimagined for the customer looking for comfort in the familiar yet also open to some amount of play.

A spicy pomegranate paloma kickstarts our culinary journey before we hop on to the vada pav sliders. These were bite-sized snacks paired with four different chutneys – chilli mustard, garlic chutney, green thetcha and curry leaf podi – each with a smattering of creamy white butter which cut down on the spice. An ode to the chutney sandwiches of Mumbai,

the Parsi chutney bombs are fried potato balls with a spicy green chilli chutney stuffing. The Aamchee onion rings are crisp, chatpata and finger-licking good.

Moving on to the mains – a section titled Mumbai Specials as it celebrates the city's diversity – we call for the Khar Sindhi sai bhaji meal and Babulnath MMM parathas. The former boasts of a caramelised onion pulao with chura papad and crispy tikki which works well on its own and really does not need the slightly bland spinach and chana dal served with it. You would think that a methi malai matar in a rich, creamy gravy would be a task to digest but this one is light on the tummy and paired with masala parathas. But if you still crave something sweet, the IC Colony serradura has layers of orange marmalade, whipped cream and ginger crumble biscuits that will have you digging in for more.

Address: Pandita Ramabai Road, Girgaon Chowpatty
A meal for two costs approximately ₹1,400

Playboy Hospitality, known for night clubs, opens its first gastrobar in Bengaluru, offering South Indian flavours and Asian twists



The Bunny in Bengaluru

Anagha Maareesa

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Tollow the rabbit" reads an enigmatic neon sign as I walk into the latest entrant in Koramangala's nightlife circuit, Bunny Bar. Licensed under Playboy Hospitality, a brand which is known for its nightclubs the world over, this is a gastropub-style offering with a strong focus on the food and cocktails. This is the first Bunny Bar in India, as well as the world. The biggest draw for Bunny Bar is the brand name. The first Playboy Club was opened in Chicago in 1960 under the media and lifestyle company founded by Hugh Hefner and the iconic bowtie

wearing bunny is now one of the most recognisable logos in the world. In the Koramangala outlet, managed by Jay Jay & Kwality Restaurants, one can spot the bunny motif on every floor.

Located on Koramangala's

already busy 80 feet road, the bar has popular and well-established brands right next door. So are they going to stand out among the crowd? The bar is spread over four floors and 14,000 square feet. It offers both indoor as well as an open rooftop seating area which overlooks the bustling street. Mid-century modern furniture set between bursts of greenery make the place feel elegant, yet welcoming.



(Clockwise from left) The restaurant's interiors; fruity mango sushi; and the tomato halwa. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

We are first served the house special Kerala spiced plantain chips: long slices of plantains dusted with a spicy masala, and served with a salsa and sour cream. I do not need to tell you just how moreish plantain chips can be. The seaweed chips are innovative, featuring deep fried nori sheets topped with a fresh mango salsa. The textures in this dish are a winner.

When it comes to cocktails, there is plenty to choose from, both classics and signature creations. The Bunny Twists section pays homage to bartenders who have created famous cocktails. For instance, British barman Dick Bradsell invented the Espresso Martini in the late 1980s at Fred's Club in London. At Bunny Bar you can order the Unespresso Martini, the classic with a twist

of ginger vanilla. They also offer a selection of beer on tap, from brands such as Geist and Toit.

I opt for one of their signatures, a drink called Rhapsody. Made with gin and mint, and topped with a frothy mint foam, the drink is light and refreshing. Even though the flavours were balanced, the foamy texture did not quite hit the right spot. If you also like Bloody Mary for its spice, the one here is a must try. Called the Tomarillo Mary, it uses tequila, king chilli, celery oil and the tomatillo fruit, also known as Naga tree tomato to create an addictively punchy drink.

For appetisers, expect Italian,

Asian, and kebabs with a healthy dose of South Indian options. The Andhra Chili Chicken Taco uses the traditional Andhra dish and is served atop a coin parotta inspired taco. Also try the deep fried arancini-esque bites, made of creamy risotto and earthy porcini mushrooms. If you like mushrooms, the Al-Fungo pizza is a must-try; it has a Neapolitan-style crust topped with a bechamel sauce and a variety of mushrooms such as shiitake, and wood ear mushrooms.

The menu also has many North Indian classics, Asian bowls and burgers on offer. A special mention needs to be made of their dal burrata. Black dal is cooked for 24 hours and instead of cream, it is topped with a ball of fresh burrata. Although with their cocktail selections, I would recommend something from the quick bites rather than a heavy meal.

Chef Narendra Chauhan has another trick up his sleeve when it is time for dessert, a tomato halwa. Do not be fooled by this deceptive dessert that looks like a carrot halwa, but is actually made from fresh and skinned tomatoes. The halwa is sweet and rich, and has no notes of the vegetable (or fruit, whichever side of the debate you stand on) coming through. It is topped with a kulfis and rabri, which bring the dish together.

The brand also has plans to open up a Bunny Bar Garden Cafe on the ground floor, which will serve all-day breakfast. It is likely that the

popular Playboy stamp and creative menu will make the Bunny Bar stand out despite the fierce competition in Koramangala.

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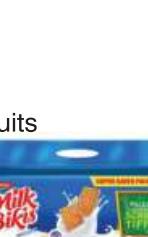
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Badam

Australian off-spinner Nathan Lyon reminisces about the latest season of *The Test*, a docu-series on the cricket team's journey

Spin is in



Nathan Lyon in *The Test*, and the Australian cricket team.
PRIME VIDEO



Srinivasa Ramanujam

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Nathan Lyon hobbles and limps gingerly as he walks out to bat to a cheering audience at the Lord's Cricket Ground.

Batting on one leg and visibly in discomfort due to a calf injury, Nathan would go on to add four off 13 excruciating balls in one of the most dramatic cricketing moments as part of the England-Australia clash for the Ashes 2023.

Nathan's wife, Emma, did not want him to bat under such circumstances. Nor did his captain, Pat Cummins, or the team's physio. Luckily, head coach Andrew McDonald wanted him to, and Nathan knew right away that he would find a way.

"A lot of people around the world go to work uncomfortable. I know the importance of 10 to 15 runs in an Ashes, and I wanted to contribute. When I had a calf injury, I felt like I had let down my teammates and I just wanted to make sure that I help them out by playing a role," says Nathan, over a virtual conversation, about a vital moment that is also chronicled in the *The Test Season*

3, currently streaming on Prime Video.

The current season of *The Test* follows the Australian men's cricket team as they embarked on a gruelling tour of England in 2023, where they faced India in the World Test Final and took on England in the Ashes. Apart from cricketing moments, *The Test* also gives a peek into locker-room talk and how players navigate the challenges of balancing sport at the highest level, and their family life. "There are superstars on the team, like Steve Smith and David Warner, but we're all human, and we see that element coming out in *The Test*. It's important for everyone to realise that we make mistakes but we also try our best to go out there and win some games."

Such documentaries chronicle not just sporting moments, but also provide insights into sportspersons' lives and how they deal with success and loss. Nathan agrees, "It's massive, mate. I watch a lot of such stuff, like *Quarterback*, *Full Swing* and *Tour de France: Unchained*. My favourite is the Formula 1 documentary, *Drive to Survive*. There are great insights into the way individuals prepare for big moments, and that makes for some amazing viewing for fans."

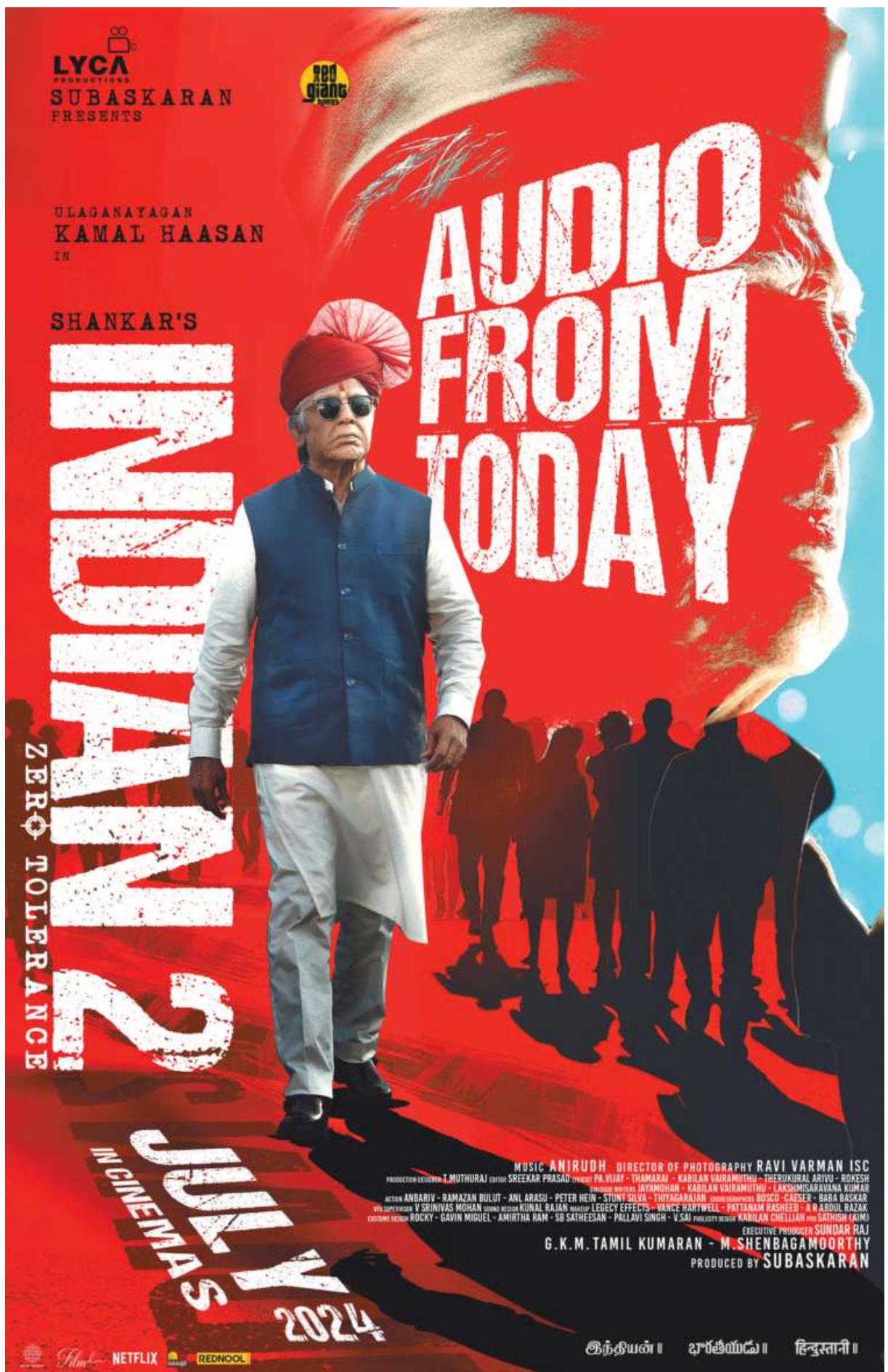
Growing up in Australia, known to produce fast-bowlers of pedigree such as Glenn McGrath, Brett Lee and Pat Cummins, Nathan Lyon still wanted to get into spin, a skill that you would largely associate with the subcontinent.

He idolised late Australian legendary spinner Shane Warne. "Well, my brother (Brendan Lyon) and I idolised Shane Warne. Seeing him win games for Australia was so special, and so, Brendan took up leg spin. I just wanted to be bigger and better than my brother."

Today, Nathan, with over 500 wickets to his name, is considered Australia's most successful offspinner and he loves it when the ball spins. "I watched the IPL, and if I'm being honest, I'd like to see the wickets come back a little bit to see a fair contest between bat and ball. Spin is incredibly important in all formats of cricket. Whenever the ball spins, you get the maximum eyes on the television. When we tour India for Test cricket and the ball spins, I feel there are more people watching than anytime else. I absolutely love it when the ball spins and see some batsmen panic."

While he is not part of the IPL, Nathan swears by the five-day Test format, something that he describes as the 'pinnacle of cricket'. "For me, it is a place where you cannot hide. If you cannot play the short ball, you cannot hide. You have to ensure that your skillsets are good enough to compete against the best in the world. T-20 and one-day cricket are here, and Test cricket, well, is miles above."

The Test: Season 3 is currently streaming on Prime Video



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Hindi

A toothless revenge saga



Anuj Kumar
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Bhaiyya Ji is a different beast for popular Hindi cinema. It seems the makers seek to reach out to the single-screener audience in the Hindi heartland who are missing their *desi* hero and his rustic milieu in the multiplexes. After revelling in realism where they make their silence heard, Manoj Bajpayee and Suvinder Vicky seem to have walked into the set of a Salman Khan actioner this week, with their toolkits of method acting.

Nothing wrong in it and one was keen to see how Bajpayee, known to do a lot of digging to realise his characters, would literally wield the spade to bludgeon his opponents. Director and co-writer Apoorv Singh Karki, who worked with Bajpayee on courtroom drama *Sirf Ek Bandaa Kaafi Hai*, sets up the stage for a revenge saga this time.

The intentions are loud and clear but the outcome is disappointing because Karki who showed immense promise in his debut feature falters in putting his vision on the final print. Based on the internecine battles between Brahmin and Rajput satraps in Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh, Ram Charan (Manoj Bajpayee) alias Bhaiyya Ji has to come out of self-imposed retirement when his stepbrother Bhola (Jatin Goswami) is killed by the son of Chandra Bhan Singh (Suvinder Vicky) after an ego tussle takes an ugly shape.

After spelling out the premise, the narrative takes a predictable shape. An archetypal mother seeking an eye for an eye, a would-be wife (Zoya Hussain) who can pull the trigger, a slimy police officer (Vipin Sharma) who shifts sides, and so on. The problem is that Karki is not sure of the tone. In his bid to give the commercial tropes a somewhat realistic touch, the mayhem turns into a mishmash. Revenge drama runs on a regular supply of genuine emotion but here it runs dry after the first injection. The dialogue-baazi and the bombast that pull you in in the first 15 minutes gradually starts sounding hollow. Then there are issues with editing and pacing and in the second half the storytelling starts feeling patchy, repetitive, and disjointed.

Without the meat, Bajpayee cuts a sorry figure. The intensity he carries on his face is undone by the insanity that spills around him on the screen. You want to see Bhaiyya Ji jostle for pride but not in the space Karki has provided him. The action choreography is not seamlessly built into the narrative as the intrinsic logic doesn't hold. It seems we are watching a series of 'entry' scenes of Bhaiyya Ji with some inane rhetoric thrown in between. The romantic angle between Bajpayee and Zoya remains unexplored and the Bhojpuri songs lack the recall value. Suvinder Vicky does get a hang of the dialect and the mood and along with Vipin Sharma provides some sparks but they are not good enough to light up the embers.

Bhaiyya Ji is currently running in theatres



Bhaiyya Ji

Director: Apoorv Singh Karki

Cast: Manoj Bajpayee, Suvinder Vicky, Jatin Goswami, Zoya Hussain, Vipin Sharma

Storyline: Ram Charan, who goes by the name Bhaiyya Ji, seeks violent revenge for the murder of his stepbrother

Held back by a weak screenplay

Turbo will be remembered for recycling all the old tropes that have been part of its genre since time immemorial and for its reluctance to try anything new

Malayalam

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Amid the high-octane yet monotonous background score in *Turbo* stands out the whirling sounds of someone stepping on the accelerator, which plays every time 'Turbo' Jose (Mammootty) is about to launch into one of his frequent fights. It is supposed to be a warning for what he is about to unleash, a means to build the anticipation. Though the promised action follows, all of it is built on such a weak foundation that one almost stops caring after a point, whether the vehicle hits top speed or not.

But, considering the fact that filmmaker Vysakh's previous work was the disastrous *Monster*, what we get in *Turbo* is certainly an improvement. *Turbo* appears to work on the philosophy that the film only needs the bare minimum story, to have an excuse to showcase all the action set pieces and to fill the gaps between them. Screenwriter Midhun Manuel Thomas's job here is to deliver just this. Thus, he does not get an opportunity to reverse the downward

Turbo

Director: Vysakh

Cast: Mammootty, Anjana Jayaprakash, Raj B.Shetty, Bindu Panicker, Shabareesh Varma

Storyline: 'Turbo' Jose, who has a habit of getting into fights, crosses paths with Vetri Velumugam Sundaram, a shadowy businessman, who is at the centre of a major banking scam



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trajectory of his screenwriting career.

'Turbo' Jose is conceived as a regular guy from the high ranges, with a habit of getting into fights. After one such fight, it is revealed that the target of the goons was not Jose, but his friend Jerry (Shabareesh Varma), who is in love with Indulekha (Anjana Jayaprakash). Jose's attempt to help his friend has unintended consequences, leading to the action shifting to Chennai. It is not long before their path crosses with that of Vetri Velumugam Sundaram (Raj B. Shetty), a shadowy businessman who is attempting



to capture power in Tamil Nadu through some good old horse-trading, which is much in vogue these days.

Vysakh and Midhun use the initial half of the film to set up this story without any ambiguities or grey shades, leaving the latter half for all the chases and long-winded action sequences. This ends up as one of the things which pulls down the film, for there really is no surprise in store after the banking scam at the centre of the plot is revealed. In what is an otherwise flat screenplay filled with all clichés, Midhun does slip in a few interestingly written bits, like Auto Billa (Sunil)'s Marlon Brando act in a rundown mall, where Jose reveals his true self to his boss or Jose's narration of a traumatic episode from his childhood to explain the closeness with his mother (Bindu Panicker).

But, in the end, *Turbo* will be remembered for recycling all the old tropes that have been part of this genre since time immemorial and for its reluctance to try anything new. Just like every second movie these days, this too ends with the promise of a sequel. As it is said about 'Turbo' Jose in the film, one has to give it to them for that level of confidence.

Turbo is currently running in theatres

Hiphop Tamizha Adhi bats for empowerment in this dull entertainer

Tamil

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PT Sir, starring Hiphop Tamizha Adhi, seems like just another templated hero-centric commercial entertainer. But a first-time viewer might wonder if director Karthik Venugopal's sophomore film might be a solid attempt at infusing fresher ideas into this stock formula.

There is a lot of colour and charm in how we are introduced to Kanagavelu a.k.a. Velu, a physical training teacher at the GP Matriculation School. The visuals and lyrics of 'Nakkal Pudichavan da Kanagavelu' tell you all you need to know about Kanagavelu, and at least initially, it is hard not to like Adhi as this unassettled man-child of a PT master, dancing with school children as he makes a statement against teachers stealing PT periods.

You begin to see promise in how this plot might shape up when told



of a 'Magic Wall' in the school, on which students write their wishes that somehow get fulfilled. Except for a few embarrassing attempts at comedy there's a lot that works in these portions.

There is also an effort to explain why Velu is the way he is. As per an astrologer's prophecy, Velu should not find himself in trouble until he gets married, or he will meet an

ill-fated end. And so, his mother (Devadarshini) has conditioned Velu to be so meek, to not go out at night, and to take up a 9-to-5 teacher's job. The prophecy is also written as such to give prominence to Velu's romance with fellow teacher Vaanathi (Kashmira Pardeshi), as their marriage might end his troubles.

But, as one would expect, trouble

finds Velu's way, but it has nothing to do with what a teacher in a school full of hormonal adolescents must go through. The film shifts its tone when a young woman named Nandini (Anikha Surendran) gets assaulted by a bunch of imbeciles at a bus stop, and she gets blamed and shamed for "inviting" this upon her by wearing a "revealing" net-fitted top. When more unfortunate events follow, Velu is forced to confront GP Institution's Chairman, Guru Purushottaman (Thiagarajan), a man one should not be messing with.

To make the film more 'family-friendly' and to justify the freedom that Nandini enjoys to take some drastic measures, the film brings back the Magic Wall and establishes how there's a college next to the school, all to make the victim a college-going adult and not a high-school girl – which is quite unnecessary for a film that states how sexual harassment is a social evil that imperils women of all ages. And yet, the setting where Velu takes his fight for justice is neither the school nor the college, but the general society.

You soon realise that all this clever writing to piece together a loophole-free screenplay was to create a launchpad for Kanagavelu to become the White Saviour Knight who has come to save women. How the film goes about that is miserable as well; it only takes one scene with 'Kanda Shasti Kavasam' playing in the background for this fearful PT master to take on a mass hero avatar. The grouse with Velu putting on this justice-seeking vigilante cloak is that

PT Sir

Director: Karthik Venugopal

Cast: Hiphop Tamizha Adhi, Kashmira Pardeshi, Devadarshini, Thiagarajan

Storyline: When a young woman gets assaulted, a meek physical training instructor transforms into a crusader for women's safety

he is hardly equipped with the know-how on how to handle sensitive issues of this magnitude; this is a guy who needs an intervention to be made aware that women of all ages undergo sexual harassment in our society, and his immediate resolution to find justice is violence.

PT Sir touches upon some truly sensitive issues in the name of 'messaging,' but settles for low-hanging fruit for pay-offs. It offers nothing fresh in the David versus Goliath fight between the hero and the villain.

If anything, an utterly contrived abracadabra moment only paints *PT Sir* as a film that milks women empowerment for the hero to belt out punchlines that might end up as clips on WhatsApp statuses and Instagram Reels. It just so happens that any PR against victim-blaming might be good PR for our social media times, and you hope that the lesson from this *PT Sir* reaches its intended ears.

PT Sir is currently running in theatres

**Atlas****Director:** Brad Peyton**Cast:** Jennifer Lopez, Simu Liu, Sterling K. Brown, Mark Strong**Story line:** An analyst with a deep distrust of AI has to overcome her misgivings to save the world

A middling actioner

English

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Just when you crave mindless pyrotechnics on screen, the universe – via Netflix – answers with *Atlas*. Brad Peyton who kept us deliriously amused with *San Andreas* and *Rampage* returns with this lovely sci-fi actioner, which pretends to be discussing deep and meaningful things like whether AI has a soul in its trillion lines of code, when it actually just wants to have fun blowing things up. And blow things it does in jolly spectacular style.

In the future, AI becomes self-aware and led by Harlan (Simu Liu) turns on human beings. After several attacks including one on Bengaluru which leaves “over 500,000 killed in

an AI-controlled drone strike,” Harlan flees to a planet, GR-39, in the Andromeda galaxy.

The International Coalition of Nations (ICN) is formed to fight the threat and Harlan is declared public enemy no 1, the first AI terrorist. Twenty eight years later, a grumpy counter-terrorism analyst working for the ICN, Atlas (Jennifer Lopez), is woken up by her smart home – she had fallen asleep playing chess with it.

That she is brainy is obvious from her winning streak in chess of 71, and her genius-level IQ is indicated by her glamourously wild Einstein hair. General Boothe (Mark Strong), who refuses to abandon Atlas “because she is not user-friendly”, has an assignment for her. Casca (Abraham Popoola), Harlan’s fearsome AI soldier has been captured and Boothe wants Atlas to interrogate him.

Atlas (why would parents burden their child with such a name), has some history with Harlan and Casca, as it was her scientist mum Val Shepherd (Lana Parrilla) who created Harlan. Using the principles of a smartphone, she created a cognitive intelligence... and see where that led. Atlas tricks Casca into revealing where Harlan is holed up and the ICN

decide to send out a mission led by Colonel Banks (Sterling K. Brown) to capture Harlan or rather his CPU.

Atlas insists on going along as she knows Harlan best having spent 28 years studying the little critter. Though she tells the crew to eschew all digital trails, coming to the first briefing with printouts, they do not listen and it is up to Atlas to save the world overcoming her distrust of artificially intelligent beings starting with her AI companion, Smith (Gregory James Cohan).

There are nicely-visualised explosions, GR-39 is interestingly visualised, and the final battle is vaguely reminiscent of *Terminator* with Harlan’s single glowing eye. Lopez’s considerable star power cauterises any plot holes while Strong and Brown do their thing – the former being the wise mentor and the latter the wise-cracking tough guy. Liu does not have much to do apart from look menacing, which he does with aplomb and nice clothes.

While not as relentless as Lopez’s *Mother*, *Atlas*, with its regular-as-clockwork battles, wisecracks and explosions, offers a suitable adrenaline fix.

Atlas is currently streaming on Netflix

Snippets

**Marvel sets Vision series for 2026 with Paul Bettany**

Marvel has tapped Terry Matalas, the executive producer of *Star Trek: Picard*, to resurrect Vision, the synthezoid essayed by Paul Bettany for a new Disney+ series for 2026. Matalas will be the showrunner and Bettany will return to the role. Vision, who was killed by Thanos in 2018's *Avengers: Infinity War*, came back twice in 2021's *WandaVision*, first as a spectral creation by Wanda Maximoff (Elizabeth Olsen), and then as a rebuilt, nuts-and-bolts android with a ghost white appearance and zero memory of his past life. The upcoming series could be about ghost Vision exploring his new purpose in life, and the story will resume after the events of *WandaVision*.

**Steven Spielberg's new movie to come out in May 2026**

Hollywood veteran Steven Spielberg is set to start his next feature directorial project, which will be released in theatres worldwide in May 2026. Hollywood studio Universal and Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment announced the filmmaker's new film, which is currently untitled. It is described as an “original event film”. Based on a story by Spielberg, the screenplay is written by longtime collaborator David Koepp, who previously collaborated with the director for *Jurassic Park* and *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*. Spielberg last directed *The Fabelmans*, released in 2022.

**Daniel Craig returns for third *Knives Out* film, releasing in 2025**

The title of the third *Knives Out* film, featuring Daniel Craig as suave detective Benoit Blanc, has been revealed. Directed by Rian Johnson, the new installment will be called *Wake Up Dead Man*. The film will be released in 2025, Netflix announced in a short video shared by Johnson. The 55-second clip features a voiceover by Craig, describing his latest adventure as his ‘most dangerous case yet’. Johnson was also at the helm of the previous two Benoit Blanc outings, 2019’s *Knives Out* followed by *Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery* (2022).

George Miller’s manic vision

This is the origin story to the one-armed female lead with a rollicking epic that also serves as a glorious companion piece to 2015’s *Fury Road*

English

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It is ridiculous to think that George Miller made his debut in 1979 with the first *Mad Max* (starring Mel Gibson), and that 45 years later, he is still obsessed enough with his own ingenious invention to be swimming in its high tide.

In 2015, Miller rebooted the franchise with *Mad Max: Fury Road*, arguably the greatest action film of the last decade, thanks to a spectacular turn from Charlize Theron as Furiosa. Now, the ageless filmmaker brings us an origin story to his one-armed badass female lead with an absolutely rollicking epic that also serves as a glorious companion piece; surely Miller needs to find a way to splice together *Furiosa* and *Fury Road* into a six-hour double feature at some point?

Much is different from last time around, and yet, both films are inseparably linked, as we enter Australia’s post-apocalyptic wastelands again to finally understand what Theron’s Furiosa meant when she said that her “mother died on the third day.” *Fury Road* took place over the course of a few days – a relentless, souped-up action fest with singular focus, while *Furiosa* spans 15 years, divided into five intense episodes and giving us time to breathe in between.

We first meet our titular heroine as a 10-year-old (Alyla Browne) at the Green Place of Many Mothers – a rare oasis in the dystopian, violent universe the *Mad Max* films are set in – from where she’s kidnapped by the fearsome warlord Dementus (Chris Hemsworth) and his hoard of creepy bikers. Over the next few

Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga

Director: George Miller**Cast:** Anya Taylor-Joy, Chris Hemsworth, Tom Burke, Alyla Browne, Charlee Fraser, Lachy Hulme, Goran D. Kleut**Storyline:** As the two tyrants, warlord Dementus and Immortal Joe, fight for dominance, a young Furiosa finds herself in a non-stop battle to make her way home

years, Furiosa has to equip herself with every skill possible to survive the madhouse as she soon encounters the Citadel and Immortal Joe (Lachy Hulme) and passes into their service; about an hour in, Browne makes way for Anya Taylor-Joy during an astonishing full-throttle set-piece as she comes of age as a warrior.

Caught in this battle between both her feuding masters, she finds an unlikely ally in Praetorian Jack (Tom Burke), the head of the war rig, who sympathises with her and the two strike up an almost-friendship/romance (?) that is unfortunately short-lived, but still gives the movie some much-needed heart amidst all the burning rubber and carnage around. From there on, it’s a non-stop thrill ride to Furiosa’s eventual showdown with Dementus, which, of course, sets into motion the events of *Fury Road*.

There’s minimal dialogue, but the



phenomenal Taylor-Joy’s endlessly immersive eyes – standing out against her oil-darkened forehead – do most of the talking, conveying Furiosa’s deep-seated emotions furiously. There will be plenty written about the extreme close-ups of her expressive face, but Taylor-Joy also rises up magnificently to the many physical challenges asked of her, her lithe frame doing as much of the heavy lifting as her eyes.

But as arresting as Taylor-Joy is, she is upstaged by Hemsworth, in what is surely a career-best for the MCU superstar. Cast against type, he is irresistibly charismatic and hilarious, taking to his mad despotic avatar with total aplomb and venomous swagger (shades of his underrated turn in *Bad Times At The El Royale* pop out). Armed with a strange prosthetic nose and distinct accent, Hemsworth playing the dastardly Dementus – complete with tragic backstory and riding a royal chariot bike to boot – steals the show every scene he is in, ending up as one of the great movie villains of our times.

On that note, Miller hits it out of the park with the rest of the casting choices too, be it the brilliant Burke as Praetorian Jack, an extraordinary Browne as the younger Furiosa or the bevy of other colourful supporting characters who inhabit his manic world. Not to mention a series of crazy high-octane fights, mind-boggling stunts and visual effects that must be seen to be believed; a three-day frantic chase across the desert is my pick of the lot.

So, how does someone follow the greatest action movie of the decade? This is how.

Oh, what a day. What a lovely day.

Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga is currently running in theatres