

weekend

wild

metro PLUS THE HINDU

The ghee comes from Dindigul, rare millets from Chenwetnyu and nendran bananas from Thrissur. Chefs are sourcing more speciality ingredients from across India

Back to source

Ruth Dsouza Prabhu

Ponram Biriyani opened an outlet in Chennai last year, bringing the city its legacy Dindigul-style biryani. This brand has painstakingly explored, tested and arrived at sources for each of its ingredients. "The raw material for our gingelly and groundnut oils are sourced from local farmers in Tamil Nadu, based on our specifications of grain size

and age," explains Prabhakaran R, managing director.

Reliable vendors are an integral cog in the constantly innovating wheel of the food and beverage world. Culinary establishments recurrently order ingredients or have them grown exclusively.

Based on generational experience and research, Ponram's pepper now comes from Tamil Nadu's



Thandikudi; coriander seeds and dry chillies from the State's Virudhunagar district; hill garlic and turmeric from Poombarai and Erode, respectively, all from Tamil Nadu.

The biryani, its star dish, is made from tender sheep, each not weighing more than nine kilograms. "Our controlled environment allows us to calculate the meat-to-fat ratio of our sheep accurately for flavour balance. All butchering happens at the farm ensuring the right cuts," says Prabhakaran.

Ponram Biriyani also owns a dairy farm in Kuttiyapatti village of Tamil Nadu's Dindigul district that supplies ghee and curd for not just the onion raita but for its home-grown regional ingredient-based ice cream, milk and butter too.

Travel diary
OMO: Soul Food Community in Gurugram is an ingredient-forward, plant-based restaurant that focusses on seasonal, regional and local produce. "We go

◀ Madavai, a dish at Farmlore.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

to farmers in remote areas and try to source ingredients that are unheard of. In Chenwetnyu, a village 71 kilometres from Mon district in Nagaland, we discovered rare millets locally called seafood, chithra, vaonthri, chaela, and ofoam," explains Vanshika Bhatia, executive chef-owner. "These inspired a special menu and were used as stuffing for pumpkin flowers, in mixed millet pancakes, in a millet congee, and in a fermented millet fruit bowl. This last remains popular and is now made with barnyard millet."

OMO shuffles the dishes on its menu regularly but retains some signatures year-round by adjusting ingredients seasonally.

The dish called seasonal greens, asparagus and broccoli is renamed winter greens, replacing asparagus with fiddlehead ferns. The team prioritises a supply chain without middlemen. It leverages local contacts for direct transport or personally carries and preserves ingredients. Coffee, tea, and organic fruits for ferments are sourced this way from Nagaland and Manipur.

OMO aims to conduct about three-four foraging expeditions annually and has so far travelled to Nagaland, Kashmir, and Bengal on long trips, and Uttarakhand, Mumbai, Coorg, Rajasthan, and Kerala on shorter trips.

CONTINUED ON
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Gourmet glory: Seven Indian restaurants have secured spots in Asia's Best Restaurants extended list (51-100) by 50 Best. Debuting are Naar (66) in Kasauli, Inja (87) in Delhi, and Bengaluru's Farmlore (68). Returning are Americano (71), The Table (88), Dum Pukht (89), and The Bombay Canteen (91). The top 50 unveils March 25.



Talking point

Turbo tots: Lamborghini and British nursery brand Silver Cross have launched the Reef AL Arancio, a \$5,000 luxury baby stroller limited to 500 units. Inspired by supercars, it features all-terrain wheels, and premium Italian leather. Available at Harrods, it reflects the growing trend of high-end baby gear.

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 .



Ramzan feast

Welcome the holy month of Ramzan with a scrumptious food walk. Head to Triplicane with a team from **The Park** on March 21 from 4.45. Experience the flavours and traditions of Ramzan at ₹1,500. Call 9840324991 to register. For iftar, head to **Seasonal Tastes**, at The Westin Chennai and indulge in traditional and contemporary delicacies until March 29 for ₹1,000. Call 8939892056 to register. Entry is free and open to all.



Style soirée

Here is a fix for your next shopping spree. Madras Market by **Dreamcatcher Events** is back for a one-day shopping fiesta! On March 15 at The Folly, Amethyst, explore 35-plus women-led brands featuring trendy fashion clothes and accessories, lab-grown diamonds, stylish footwear, handbags, home decor, natural skincare, delicious treats and more. Entry is free and open to all.



Screen to stage

Ashish Vidyarthi is ready to take the stage — this time, not in a film, but in his stand-up special **Sit Down Ashish!** Catch him at Trinity Studio, Kodambakkam, on April 26 at 7pm as he hilariously unpacks his journey through 300 films in 11 languages, and a lifetime of stories. To laugh along, book your tickets on in.bookmyshow.com starting ₹499. Expect a night of unfiltered fun.



Metal reigns

Chennai's metal scene is about to explode as **Metal Munnetra Kazhagam** returns for its third edition at The Spotted Deer tonight. Nu Metal will bring back the anthems featuring crushing renditions of songs by Limp Bizkit, Korn, System of a Down, and Deftones with David Simon, Beeto Jerrin, Nitty J Peter, and Hemanth Vinod at the helm. The pit is calling — get your tickets now on skillboxes.com at ₹499.



Film and freedom

The world's largest LGBTQIA+ digital film campaign, **Five Films For Freedom**, returns. This year, Chennai joins the global movement with a special screening on March 22 at 6.30pm at **Goethe-Institut**, bringing films from Indonesia, New Zealand, China, Switzerland, and the UK. This is a collaboration between the British Council and BFI Flare: London LGBTQIA+ Film Festival.



Doodle bliss

Discover the art of mindfulness at the **Zen Doodle Workshop** by The Kraft Factor. Led by designer and educator Deepa Sam, this hands-on session invites participants to explore the meditative joy of intentional art. Held at **Backyard, Adyar**, today at 10.30am, she teaches you simple techniques. Register for ₹1,500 on Instagram @thebackyardclan, and take home a handmade piece.



TEDx chronicles

Step into the world of crime and justice at Red-Handed: And Every Other Shade of Crime, a **TEDxNapier Bridge Salon** on March 16 at 2.45pm. Experience live crime scene explorations and forensic tool displays. Featuring Vidy Reddy, co-founder of Tulir, and senior advocate John Sathyam, the evening promises deep insights and thought-provoking discussions. Register on @tedxnapiers on Instagram.

Set in stone

The Stonex Art Soirée brought together 10 artists who transformed raw marble into striking sculptures, exploring the material's permanence and creative possibilities

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The quiet hum of chisels and the rhythmic scraping of marble polishers filled the air as artists, collectors, and guests moved through the exhibition space, a marble refinery by day.

Held from March 6 to 9 at the Stonex refinery in Kishangarh, Rajasthan, the Stonex Art Soirée brought together 10 artists, each offering a unique perspective on working with stone. The sculptures were placed within a maze of raw marble blocks sourced from across the globe — Italian Carrara, Turkish Cappadocian stone, Macedonian marble and more — creating a



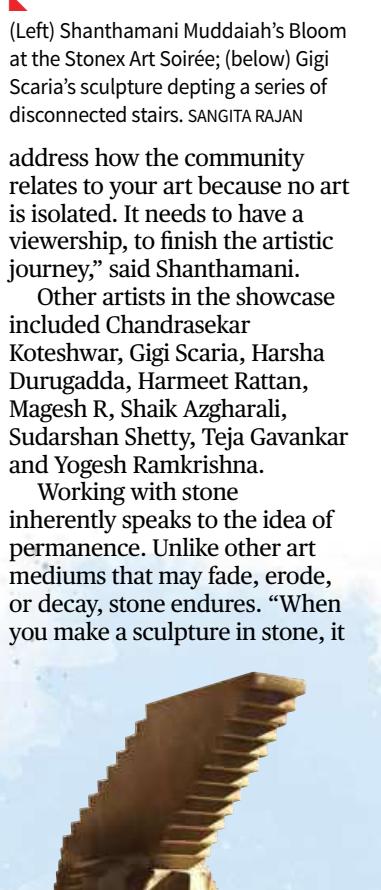
Shot on OnePlus

striking contrast between untouched material and the art. "We started with sculptures depicting botanical motifs, then moved on to depictions of objects, and finally closed with sculptures inspired by architectural influences. The flow worked out well," said art critic and curator Girish Sahane.

The first sculpture on display upon entering the maze was sculptor Shanthamani Muddaiah's Bloom; a sculpture resembling a cloth twisted in the



shape of a small shrub or blooming into a flower. Inspired by the silk-weaving traditions of her home state Karnataka, combined with influences from the Garden City of Bengaluru, the sculpture mimicked the softness of fabric despite being carved from Macedonian marble in Pantheon pink. "For me, works that go into public spaces have to be evocative and relevant to the people and communities around you. It is important to



acquires an aura of permanence, as opposed to the mode of text which is fleeting," said artist Sudarshan Shetty, whose sculpture, carved from Turkish marble, depicts an umbrella lying in a puddle of water, in its resting place, marked by a gravestone inscribed with a poignant and humorous text. "He walks in the rain with the excuse of a lost umbrella that he once borrowed from his mother..." it goes.



Another noteworthy sculpture is that of Gigi Scaria, depicting a series of disconnected stairs leading to nowhere, carved out of marble from Cappadocia. The sculpture was inspired from the region's rock-cut dwellings, and the absurdity of the construction, according to Gigi, is a critique of humanity's impulse to dominate and reshape Nature.

This commitment to longevity and artistic expression was at the heart of the Stonex Art Soirée. Beyond showcasing technical mastery, the event aimed to highlight how stone continues to inspire contemporary creativity while honouring its rich heritage. "This is a commercial setting, but we still find something artistic here, because we want to surprise people," said Sushant Pathak, group CMO Stonex India. He adds "You may only see it as a marble gallery and refinery, but then your perspective changes, and that's what we want to do — change people's perspective about the potential of stone."

This writer was at the Stonex refinery in Kishangarh at the invitation of Stonex.



Jewelled fusion

The House of Masaba X Amrapali Jewels is where centuries-old craftsmanship meets audacious modernity. With Amrapali's timeless artistry and Masaba's signature fearless design,

each piece is an ode to those who refuse to fit into a mold. Think antique-finished 18-carat gold, vibrant gemstones like pink tourmaline and aquamarine, and striking motifs. Shop the statement-making trinket hoarder necklace, the unconventional After Eight earrings and more at Evoluzione, Chennai, on March 20-21.



Timeless pour

The Expedition is India's oldest and rarest single malt, aged for 15 years in casks that have shaped its deep, layered character. Crafted by Amrut Distilleries to mark its 75-year journey, only 75 bottles exist, making it a true collector's piece. The whisky's journey begins with Indian six-row barley, maturing for eight years in European sherry casks before transitioning to ex-bourbon barrels. It has notes of sherryed truffle, black pepper and dark chocolate. Available at Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and New Delhi duty-free stores at ₹10-10.5 lakhs.



SCREEN SHARE



(Clockwise from far left) A scene from award-winning *Everything Everywhere All at Once*; Robert Pattinson in a scene from *Mickey 17*; a scene from *Don't Look Up*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

town for their fast food franchise was as hilarious as it was gory — that decapitation, swinging spinal cord and all, is burnt in the brain forever.

Robert Zemeckis' *Back to the Future* trilogy about a time-travelling teenager Marty McFly (Michael J Fox) was a blast. The franchise featured Christopher Lloyd as the eccentric Doc Brown whose experiments with time travel in a modified DeLorean sends Marty from 1985 to 1955 in the first film, to the future in 2015 in the second, and to the Wild West, 1885, in the third.

The goofy inventor is a sci-fi standard from Rick Moranis' Wayne Szalinski in *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* (1989) to Robin Williams in *Flubber* (1997). Miniaturisation was at the core of Joe Dante's *Innerspace* (1987). Mel Brooks' *Star Wars* parody, *Spaceballs* (1987), is good for laughs including Moranis as the heavy-breathing Lord Dark Helmet whipping off said helmet complaining he cannot breathe in it and Pizza the Hutt (Dom DeLuise) eating himself to death. *Ghostbusters* (1984) with Bill

Murray, Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis gave us spooky laughs as well as a catchy theme song from Ray Parker Jr.

The new millennium has a bunch of Marvel-stamped fun sci-fi superhero films including the *Guardians of the Galaxy* and *Thor* films. There was also the multiple-award-winning *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022), Jim Carrey unleashed as Dr Robotnik in the *Sonic The Hedgehog* films and the slacker film *Hot Tub Time Machine* (2010). *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (2005), while not as much fun as Douglas Adams' original books, was jolly good.

Adam McKay's star-studded *Don't Look Up* (2021) was a darkly comic satire on politics and climate change. Ryan Reynolds was a bank teller/video game NPC in Shawn Levy's riotous *Free Guy* (2021) and a time pilot in Levy's sweet *The Adam Project* (2022), while Wes Anderson's retro-futuristic *Asteroid City* (2023) was a wild, whimsical trip. Animation has some worthy additions to this cosy genre including *Wall-E* (2008), *Megamind* (2010) and *Wreck-It Ralph* (2012).

All these films underscore that time travel and quantum theory need not necessarily be gloomy excursions into questions about life, the universe, and everything (thank you, Mr Adams).

From The Hindu cinema team, a fortnightly column recommending films and shows tied to a mood, theme, or pop-cultural event.

(Clockwise from below) Whale safari at Mirissa coast; The Cove Pool; dining experiences at The Atlas; stilt fishing near Weligama Beach; homemade beetroot champagne sorbet; and Cape Weligama. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT, GETTY IMAGES/STOCK AND NIRANJAN R VARMA



Tide to Sri Lanka

Weligama, Mirissa and Galle, towns on Sri Lanka's southern coast, are a haven for tourists, hosting surfers and marine enthusiasts

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For a weekend getaway, Weligama, Mirissa and Galle, towns on Sri Lanka's southern coast, offer experiences that epitomise the island's diverse allure. Just eight kilometres away from Weligama, located 175 kilometres south of Colombo, is Mirissa – a gateway to marine encounters. Whale watching in Mirissa offers a poetic maritime experience. You have to leave before dawn at Mirissa Harbour, paying \$50 (\$4,400) per head for a group tour, to witness blue whales and dolphins during

nearly six-hour boat cruise.

Once a blue whale is sighted, boats go as close as 50 feet and turn their engines off. The peak season for whale watching runs from November to April, with highest chances of sighting occurring between January and March.

The coastal rhythm

Owing to its consistent waves and sandy shore, Weligama beach hosts surfers from dawn to dusk. While experienced surfers bring their boards or rent them from nearby shacks on an hourly basis, those who are apprehensive seek the help of numerous surfing schools located on the beach. A typical session of 90-minutes would cost you around \$25-\$40

(\$2,200-\$3,500).

The beach is more than just a scenic backdrop; it is a living canvas of local life. Here, the famous stilt fishermen – seemingly suspended between the sea and sky – continue their age-old practice, offering a glimpse into Sri Lanka's maritime heritage. Food shortages and limited fishing resources during the Second World War prompted the fishermen in Sri Lanka to come up with such innovative techniques to stave off hunger.

A beachside adventure

After soaking in the sun on Weligama Beach, you can explore some exciting activities. One popular option is snorkelling at Wijaya Beach.

Here you can swim alongside sea turtles in reefs which are as close as 20 metres from the beach. Early mornings or late afternoons are ideal for spotting these creatures.

Standup paddleboarding is another way to enjoy the calm waters. Rentals are readily available along the beach.

If you are looking for something more laid-back, take a stroll along Secret Beach, a hidden gem just a short distance from Weligama.

Completing this coastal trifecta is the historic Galle, located 35 kilometres away from Weligama, where centuries of

maritime influence have left an indelible mark. The UNESCO World Heritage Site Galle Fort is a mesmerising blend of Portuguese, Dutch and British architectural influences.

The writer was in Sri Lanka at the invitation of Cape Weligama.



Sanctuary of comfort

Nestled on a cliff 40 metres above the Indian Ocean and sprawling across 12 acres lies Cape Weligama - Relais & Chateaux, a luxury boutique resort located in Weligama that is part of the Resplendent Ceylon collection. It is a sanctuary that blends luxury with local authenticity. The design of the resort is inspired by traditional Sri Lankan village layouts, creating an immersive experience. The rooms are strategically placed across eight thematic gardens and are named after legendary explorers and writers.

The signature 60-metre crescent-shaped cliff-edge Moon Pool offers breath-taking ocean views while the Cove Pool provides a family-friendly environment with a 20-metre lap swimming area. You can indulge in multiple dining experiences at The Atlas – ranging from traditional Sri Lankan to European cuisines – each offering sophisticated and carefully curated items you can order from an à la carte menu. Notably, the homemade beetroot champagne sorbet is a standout dish. Melting in your mouth with each bite, this sweet dessert will challenge your previous perceptions of beetroot's flavour.

Equally impressive is the grilled Angus beef tenderloin, which is exceptionally tender when cooked to a medium-rare. The exterior develops a beautifully browned crust, while the interior remains warm and pink, bursting with flavour and juiciness. The meat boasts a soft, buttery texture that melts in your mouth, creating a truly satisfying bite. The resort also offers an extensive range of activities including scuba diving, surfing lessons, rice paddy bicycling and snorkelling.

For travellers considering this route, combine Mirissa, Weligama and Galle for a comprehensive southern coast experience; staying three to four days to fully absorb the region's diversity.

As the sun sets over the Indian Ocean, casting golden hues across the landscape, you realise that travel is less about the places you visit and more about the stories you collect. And here, in this corner of Sri Lanka, the stories are as endless as the horizon.

IN CINEMAS NOW

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LUXE PHOENIX MARKET CITY Velachery, 9:15 p.m.

*Check online for updated showtimes as they may vary.

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Chennai Meenakshi Hospital Brings in Robotic Innovations for Knee and Hip Replacement

Chennai Meenakshi Hospital announced the introduction of Robotic Innovations for knee and hip replacement surgeries. The hospital introduces the highly sophisticated ROBOSWISS System exclusively marketed by Plus Orthopedics. The aim is to combine cutting-edge technologies and advanced imaging into Knee and hip Replacement Surgeries. This state-of-the-art technology aims to enhance surgical precision and patient outcomes in Knee and hip replacement procedures.

The ROBOSWISS System, a recent innovation in surgical Handheld mini robotics for Knee and hip replacements, forms the foundation of the Unit. This device offers accurate and real-time guidance during Knee and hip procedures, boosting the surgeon's ability to obtain optimal results while minimising invasiveness. By implementing the system in surgical procedures, the unit hopes to offer patients the greatest level of care while increasing the likelihood of successful Knee and Hip Replacement Surgeries.

The surgeons of the Orthopedic Surgery unit at Chennai Meenakshi Hospitals said, "Adopting and innovating in this field is a big step forward in the future of Knee & Hip surgery. Roboswiss brings with it cutting-edge technology to deliver unparalleled precision and the best patient outcomes. We are proud to offer a new standard in the surgical care of knee and hip replacements." Dr V Krishnamurthy, CEO of Chennai Meenakshi Hospitals, said, "The introduction of the ROBOSWISS shows our commitment to offering the latest in orthopaedic care and providing patients with the highest quality treatment options."

By integrating the ROBOSWISS System into their surgical procedures, the hospital aims to set a new standard in knee and hip replacements, ultimately benefiting patients seeking relief from joint pain and mobility issues. This innovative approach reflects the hospital's dedication to advancing health-care technology and providing exceptional surgical care in the rapidly evolving field of orthopaedics.

CHENNAI MEENAKSHI
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(Left) Matcha Mirage Luxe, made with Davana Bianco, matcha, lime, white chocolate, yogurt and matcha white chocolate foam; (below) When I Was Young is made with Davana Rosso, bourbon, Bourvnia syrup and bitters. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



citrus peels and is lighter, fresher and nuanced. Its zesty, floral brightness offers a pleasing contrast to creamy cheeses like paneer, mozzarella, feta, a lightly spiced dahi kebab or even seafood.

The Rosso is a slightly more complex blend of botanicals – spices like cinnamon, cloves and dry citrus peel. I could also detect a candied orange or sorts, melding into a pleasing bitterness; not sharp or oppressive, but something rather reassuring. Perfect with chicken tikka! Both have a forgiving gentleness to them.

The journey

Many bars in Goa are using Davana in their cocktail programmes, like Kiki at the Sea, Ourem, Ye Catarina and Goodfella's.

Some of the signature cocktails the brand has created with the spirit include Matcha Mirage Luxe, Let's Whisper Essence, and When I Was Young. Matcha Mirage Luxe is a silky concoction with Davana Bianco, matcha, lime, white chocolate, yogurt, and a flourish of matcha white chocolate foam on top. When I Was Young is bold and bittersweet made with Davana Rosso, bourbon, Bourvnia syrup and bitters.

Concludes Adarsh, "Vermouth is a key ingredient in classic cocktails. But it is finding its own pride of position in India's evolving drinking culture, moving from just a supporting ingredient to a drink in its own right."

Davana Vermouth is retailing at ₹1,100 for a 750ml bottle in Goa

through over 50 recipe iterations with plenty of challenges. Some batches were too bitter, others lacked depth, but each helped us refine and improve before finding the perfect one," shares Adarsh Gadvi, owner of Goa's Naveen Distillery, founder of Davana Vermouth Indica.

Davana's production involves four stages: extraction and blending based on botanicals and herbs, while keeping an eye on temperatures to maintain balance; resting, to allow the flavours to develop fully inside stainless-steel tanks; and, finally, filtration.

Tasting notes

Vermouth is venerated for its gentle balance of bitterness and sweetness. At a tasting organised to experience both variants, we unpack the complex mix of curated extracts: 21 in the Bianco and 23 in Rosso. Davana Bianco incorporates a mix of herbs, spices and flowers like chamomile, vanilla, cinnamon and

The alchemy of Davana
Out of all the herbs and spices used, wormwood, or *Artemisia absinthium* (also a core component of absinthe) is the key ingredient in this fortified wine.

The name vermouth comes from the German word for wormwood, *wermut*. Davana being the Hindi word for wormwood, Indica pays homage to its Indian roots.

The brand offers two variants – Rosso and Bianco, which are available only in Goa. It aims to showcase local herbs and spices, proving that India can craft global aperitifs just as well. "We went

Hindi

Ibrahim Khan's debut doesn't pass the test



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A gossamer-thin romantic comedy that comes across as Karan Johar's latest home assignment for star kids to pass the Bollywood entrance test, *Nadaaniyan* doesn't pass muster. Reflecting the armchair sensibility of the Bandra school of filmmaking, the love story strains credibility and tests patience. Its nebulous ideas on education are irritating, and the cultural context of Delhi-NCR is deeply annoying. Moreover, when a dated plot is ploughed by stock characters, it invariably yields meagre returns.

Led by debutant director Shauna Gautam, a troika of writers promises to provide insights into adulthood. Set in an elite school, the film follows Pia Jaisingh (Khushi Kapoor) as she hires a middle-class student, Arjun Mehta (Ibrahim Ali Khan), as her boyfriend to secure the trust of her BFFs. As they come close, the pretense gives way to a predictable relationship, leading to cosmetic complexities that weigh a few Instagram-worthy reels.

While Pia gets caught between the acrimonious relationship of her parents, played by Mahima Chaudhry and Suniel Shetty, Arjun finds his folks (Dia Mirza and Jugal Hansraj) intruding on his life choices.

As the tension mounts and insecurities surface, the screenplay turns into a paragraph-writing exercise on parenting and the emotional turbulence that teenagers face on the cusp of adulthood. The commentary on patriarchal mores in affluent families remains superficial, and the references to Ivy colleges are repeatedly dropped without doing basic research. The wisecracks don't land. Even Archana Puran Singh, reprising Miss Braganza's role of *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, fails to energise the proceedings. As for finding true love, the distractions are written in such a lopsided manner that the outcome of a love story is never in doubt.

Nadaaniyan is Khushi's third film in a short span, and one can see an incremental growth in her performance. Her voice quality is strikingly similar to Janhvi's, and like her sister, Khushi might not be able to make a weak character shine, but she remains honest to the part.

It goes without saying that Ibrahim is a true copy of his father, Saif Ali Khan. An aquiline nose, a firm jawline, and innocence in his eyes are all there to notice, but the boy has yet to befriend the camera and seems to be reading his lines instead of rendering them. The writers and the technical team have done their bit to hide the limitations behind the abs and Manish Malhotra's outfits, but it doesn't work. There is an X factor hiding somewhere in this celebration of fopperies, but, for now, it is not legible.

Nadaaniyan is currently streaming on Netflix



This horror adventure is lost at sea

Even a deluge of horror elements cannot redeem Kamal Prakash's rushed, murky horror narrative

Tamil

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A nother Friday, another Tamil film that squanders its potential and settles for less. *Kingston* is yet another horror flick diluted by commercial compulsions, with a loud, distracting score drowning any chance to be transported into its world. And after 2024's *Sorgavaasal*, this is another feature film that rushes to unfurl its overstuffed narrative, with many confusingly connected arcs, and no feeling for scenery or suspense.

Let's get one thing straight: *Kingston* isn't one of those lazy cash-grabs meant to ramp a male hero into a star. There hasn't been a sea-bound horror adventure in Tamil like this; debutant writer-director Kamal Prakash shows a knack for serious genre filmmaking, and the film looks grand and confidently-made. Yet, it sinks.

For over an hour, Kamal breathlessly rushes you through a dizzying story spanning three generations. We are told how a spirit of a man named Stephen Bose (Azhagam Perumal) has been haunting the seas of the fishing town of Thoothukudi since his untimely death in 1982. All those who have gone into the ocean ever since have washed up dead, their bodies eerily blackened. With a fishing ban imposed, the locals have to resort to other means of livelihood or travel all the way to the fishing hub of Thoothukudi.

In the present day, Kingston a.k.a King (GV Prakash Kumar) smuggles Sea

Kingston

Director: Kamal Prakash

Cast: GV Prakash Kumar, Divya Bharathi, Azhagam Perumal, Chetan

Storyline: When a young man and his friends venture into a haunted sea, they are assailed by supernatural elements from the dark depths of the ocean

Cucumber in the Thoothukudi sea for his crime-lord boss, Thomas (Sabumon Abdusamad). Through a crassly choreographed song set at a funeral, we are told how money-minded King is, doing the odd job solely to buy his own boat and venture into the Thoothukudi sea. Why, you ask? He doesn't buy into the local myth of the evil spirit and is in denial that his father Charles passed away at sea. The adventure of *Kingston* begins – halfway into the film, mind you – when King, along with his friends (and foes), rows into the Thoothukudi sea.

Oh, wait, did I tell you about his girlfriend, Rose (Divyabhari), who gets only a flimsy connection to the larger story? Or his grandfather Martin (Kumaravel), whose nightmares connect the day Bose died to a vision of King in the ocean? Or the story of King's friend Godson (Rajesh Balachandran) whose sister was mysteriously found dead on the shore? What about Solomon (Chetan), a powerful man in Thoothukudi, who was allegedly killed along with his family by the spirit of Bose for revenge? Again, with a lot of backstory and material to cover, and too many set-ups for latter scenes, the film tries to bite off more than it can chew. The writer in Kamal attempts to use non-linear storytelling to hurtle us through the ideas; sequences are intercut to add meaning, while the screenplay pieces together the backstory only when it is needed.

The problem is that the narrative cuts back and forth in such a ragged rhythm that it hardly allows you to breathe in the world of *Kingston*. There's no space for silences, punctuations or any scope for good drama. Where even the death of a character hardly finds a breather, the emotional landscape of the leads hardly

matters. This is also why you feel nothing when the horror elements begin to haunt the men on the high seas. The characters we follow are no cleverer than the stereotypical horror movie chumps with no survival instincts.

Kingston doesn't even bother telling us where the cursed sea of Thoothukudi begins and ends. You would be forgiven to think this stretch of water is just a few kilometres into the ocean; however, this geographically mystifying place keeps going on and on, and you wonder what would happen to someone who ventures into this ocean not from the land but from, say, the sea in Thoothukudi. Yet, when King searches for a specific underwater relic, it's just there under him, as if it's all happening inside a children's pool.

Kingston truly could have redeemed itself had the deluge of horror elements – from creepy, toothy ghouls to zombies – come together effectively. Sadly, this isn't the case. In one instance, the boat's engine conks off after King and his friends have just been through hell and back. You know something's coming. There's tension in the air. The brooding music and the atmosphere almost send chills down your spine. Yet, when something climbs onto the boat and screams at the camera, you almost cackle at the absurdity of it all.

In the end, you wonder what could have been had *Kingston* anchored itself to one good idea – say, the battle between Solomon and Bose – and had the characters organically figured out a nerve-wracking horror mystery with minimal fuss. It would have also helped if the film wasn't so over-scored. Horror – the best kind – thrives in silences.

Kingston is currently running in theatres



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Gajraj Rao brightens this *Panchayat* lite

Hindi

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Gajraj Rao can act in his sleep. Quite literally. An agreeably slapstick moment in the new Prime Video comedy series *Dupahiya* finds Rao's character, a kindly but superstitious school principal, snoring away on a cot, making sweet music with those silly, rumbling, guttural sounds. Rao has the training of theatre, of engaging a crowd with the bare tools of physicality and behaviour, and is so warm and winsome a comedian that we tend to forget his nastier roles (he played the menacing, mysterious caller in 2008's *Aamir*).

Perhaps *Dupahiya* could have harnessed Rao's lurking nastiness to lend itself some zing. Built around a stolen motorcycle in a village, this is a *Panchayat* lite, a sweet, soporific series that passes the time, exceedingly flaky and forgettable. Director Sonam Nair, who made the



charmingly zany short film *Khujli* once upon a time, is decidedly out of her depth in the rural setting. The writing (by Chirag Garg and Avinash Dwivedi) is vacant and amateurish, the texture crumbly and second-hand. The oddball cast exhausts its whimsy in the first three episodes; indulged for six more, they verge on annoying.

The series begins on a fertile note. Dhadakpur, a fictitious village in Bihar, is on the cusp of celebrating 25 years of going 'crime-free'. It's a distinction built on extremely shaky ground: dowry, for instance, is as prevalent as anywhere. Dhadakpur is only 'crime-free' because no one has registered an FIR in a while. One night, however, the unthinkable

happens: a motorcycle robbery at knifepoint. The suspects range from a lovelorn kleptomaniac to a local moneybag. The model village has too many idiots. Hanging in the balance is the fate and fortune of one family. School master Banwari Jha (Gajraj Rao) had blown his life's savings in purchasing the gleaming two-wheeler

(*dupahiya*). It was intended as dowry for his daughter's wedding, due in eight days. The girl, Roshni (Shivani Raghuvanshi), dreams of city life, an ambition shared by her wayward brother, Bhugol (Sparsht Shrivastava).

Bhugol means 'geography', a plausible name for the footloose son of a school teacher. This is largely the drift of the show's humour.

Dupahiya takes after other recent

(and far superior) satirical comedies

like *Kathal* and *Laapataa Ladies*.

Dupahiya

Director: Sonam Nair

Cast: Gajraj Rao, Sparsht Shrivastava, Shivani Raghuvanshi, Renuka Shahane, Yashpal Sharma, Bhuvan Arora

Episodes: 9

Storyline: Chaos ensues when a prized motorcycle is stolen in a 'crime-free' village

Meanwhile, Renuka Shahane, playing a wily and hassled village chief, could have easily exchanged notes with Neena Gupta and Raghuvir Yadav from *Panchayat*. It is difficult to appraise the series in light of these works. Nair casts a glancing eye at the issues of village life. Like Phulera, Dhadakpur is another listless, un hurried, fly-swatting idyll, awkwardly modernising yet stuck in tradition and time. It lacks the incisiveness of *Panchayat*, and, even more damningly, the warmth and wonderment of *Malegaon*.

Piled with off-kilter quests and crazy characters, *Dupahiya* threatens to stall. Only Gajraj Rao, somehow, keeps it rolling. Though raised in Delhi, the actor has a face straight out of a classic Bengali comic-strip. His square, amiable features can curl into a smile or a scowl, with equal zest. Banwari, like most well-meaning Indian dads, is a patriarch, yet we feel for him. He is a 'temporary' principal, but Rao a permanent charmer.

Dupahiya is streaming on Prime Video



Mickey 17

Director: Bong Joon-ho

Cast: Robert Pattinson, Naomi Ackie, Steven Yeun, Toni Collette, Mark Ruffalo

Runtime: 137 minutes

Storyline: In the near future, a clone must confront the meaning of life in the face of his double, media-hungry tyrants and squiggly, threatening alien life forms

Seventeen shades of Pattinson

English

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It is well-nigh impossible to celebrate just one aspect of Bong Joon-ho's adaptation of Edward Ashton's 2022 novel, *Mickey 17* – Joon-ho apparently called the film *Mickey 17* for the pleasure of killing Robert Pattinson 10 more times. Every aspect of *Mickey 17*, from the writing to the acting as well as cinematographer Darius Khondji's lovely frames and those delightful creepy crawlies with their wriggling legs and many mouths, is laudable.

In the near future, 2054 to be precise, Mickey (Robert Pattinson) and his slimy, childhood friend, Timo (Steven Yeun), run afoul of a particularly vicious loan shark. Their

only escape seems to be off earth. Kenneth Marshall (Mark Ruffalo) is a tyrannical politician who has lost the last two elections. Marshall, with his equally sketchy wife, Ylfa (Toni Collette), have set course to colonise Nilfheim, a planet of ice and snow.

In the future, technology has advanced to 3D printing human beings, but thanks to all the ethical issues, it is banned on earth. Human beings are only printed as "expendables" to do dangerous work off earth.

Marshall's Nilfheim-colonising project offers a chance of escape for Mickey and Timo, who naturally gets himself a pilot gig. Mickey, meanwhile, signs up to be an expendable, without fully reading the paperwork, which he realises to his mild horror as Gemma (Holliday Grainger) explains his part in the larger scheme of things.

Mickey meets and falls in love with Nasha (Naomi Ackie), who stays by him through his 16 deaths as the science officer, Arkady (Cameron Britton), develops vaccines and sundry defenses for life at Nilfheim. Everything changes when Mickey 17 is ordered to get a specimen of the life form on Nilfheim, the many-legged and mouthed creeper that is not allowing full colonisation.

When he falls through an ice

crevice and is overrun by a multitude of creepers, he is presumed dead and Mickey 18 is printed. Mickey 17, however, survives and is shocked to find his aggressive double. The penalty for duplicates is immediate death to every version and suddenly Mickey is fighting himself as well as others who want him dead or doubled.

Pattinson is a revelation as different iterations of Mickey, clearly differentiating between the simple Mickey 17 and his belligerent double. Ruffalo, with his lisp and too-white teeth, is riveting as media-hungry Marshall, while Collette with her scary nails and penchant for sauce is mesmeric.

The many themes – including environmentalism, corporates taking over human beings and colonisation at the cost of indigenous populations – jostling for screen space, probably dilutes the message, but also proves to be *Mickey 17*'s strength as it bounces from concept to theory to genre in audacious leaps. And yes, *Mickey 17* conclusively proves the fact that no amount of Pattinsons is too much.

Mickey 17 is currently running in theatres

Snippets



Anurag Kashyap to make Kannada acting debut with sports drama

Popular Hindi filmmaker Anurag Kashyap, who recently told *The Hindu* that he has left Mumbai, is set to make his Kannada debut. Kashyap will star in the sports drama *8*.

His Kannada acting debut will be directed by Sujay Shastri and produced by Arvind Venkatesh Reddy, under the banner of AVR Entertainment. "The film *8* is about football. The story hit me. It's emotional. It's about second chances. I am glad someone saw beyond the 'psychopath' in me," said Kashyap at the launch of the movie.

Sujay James Balu has written the film's plot. Details of the other actors in the movie are yet to be revealed. Mrugashira Shrikanth will write dialogues while Hemanth Jois will compose music.



This gorefest bludgeons a stale beat

Neon's marketing magic strikes again, but Osgood Perkins' Stephen King adaptation proves why horror-comedy remains a graveyard of lofty intentions



Ben Stiller approached Barack Obama for a guest role in *Severance*

Actor Ben Stiller, who executive produces and directs Apple TV+'s hit series *Severance*, has revealed that he had approached former United States President Barack Obama for a guest voice role in the ongoing second season of the show.

Stiller revealed the same while appearing on Jimmy Kimmel Live! Stiller revealed that he had asked Obama to voice the narration of Lumon's puppet propaganda video, a role which was eventually done by Hollywood star Keanu Reeves. "There was one person that I asked before [Reeves], and he said no: President Barack Obama," said Stiller.



Rajinikanth's *Jailer 2* with Nelson goes on floors

Rajinikanth and director Nelson are teaming up for *Jailer 2*, a sequel to their 2023 film *Jailer*. The film is all set to go on floors. The banner backing the film, Sun Pictures announced the news with a special poster featuring Rajinikanth as Muthvel Pandian.

Other details regarding the cast and crew of the film are expected to be announced soon.

Jailer 2 was announced by the makers in January with a video featuring the superstar along with Nelson and music composer Anirudh Ravichander. *Jailer*, Nelson's first collaboration with Rajinikanth, was released on August 10, 2023.

English

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Osgood Perkins' *The Monkey* is a characteristically deranged swing at horror-comedy. It's loosely based on Stephen King's 1980 short story, but where King's original felt like a meditation on guilt and inherited doom, Perkins' adaptation cranks the camp to eleven. In many ways, *The Monkey* feels like the perfect soft reboot for the *Final Destination* franchise. Heck, it wouldn't be out of place in a James Wan *Conjuring*-verse crossover event, either. Some will revel in its cartoonishly elaborate death sequences; others will find its smirking self-awareness exhausting. Either way, the infernal cretin is impossible to ignore.

From its opening sequence, the film makes its go-for-broke intentions clear. The familiar face of a blood-soaked Lumon employee stumbles into a pawn shop to the opening notes of Asha Bhonsle's "Do Lafzon Ki Hai", desperately trying to offload a sinister-looking drummer monkey toy. The shopkeeper, naturally, doesn't take the warning seriously, and within moments, a chain reaction leaves him wonderfully eviscerated. Perkins revels in the excess, setting the tone for his film that treats these inane deaths like grotesque punchlines.

We jump to 1999, where twin brothers Hal and Bill Shelborn (played as kids by Christian Convery) stumble upon their

The Monkey

Director: Osgood Perkins

Cast: Theo James, Tatiana Maslany, Christian Convery, Colin O'Brien

Storyline: When twin brothers find a mysterious wind-up monkey, a series of outrageous deaths tear their family apart

father's old belongings, including – you guessed it – the monkey. Their airline pilot father (Adam Scott, in his brief but memorable turn), "made like eggs and scrambled", and it's not long before the brothers realise that every time the monkey bangs its drum, someone nearby meets an untimely demise. Bill takes a perverse pleasure in his brother's growing paranoia, while their oblivious mother (Tatiana Maslany) remains unassumingly preoccupied, until she too meets a grisly end.

Fast-forward 25 years, and the now-adult Hal (Theo James) has gone full horror protagonist-in-exile. He's estranged from his brother, haunted by his childhood, and doing his best to keep his son (Colin O'Brien) at arm's length for fear that the monkey's curse will resurface. Of course, fate (or Perkins) has other plans, and soon the bodies are piling up once more. The deaths are treated with a cartoonish absurdity – a Benihana chef's precision knife fillets the head off a customer, a motel pool transforming into an electrified deathtrap, an uncle trampled to strawberry jam by a stampede of wild horses. The violence isn't scary or disturbing, so much as operatic, with each elaborate set piece escalating in ridiculousness until the deaths become numbing.

This is where *The Monkey* runs into trouble. For all the ways horror-comedy has been a tough nut to crack, Perkins at least deserves credit for trying. His take on King's short swings for the genre's elusive sweet spot where creeping dread and a sharp sense of irreverence embrace. And for a brief moment it almost works.

The film flirts with the potential of being something fresh: a stylish, mean-spirited, and absurdist take on childhood trauma. But, like so many horror-comedies before it, *The Monkey* is yet another cautionary tale about why this genre hybrid rarely lands. It's too timid to be genuinely scary, too self-serious to be truly funny, and too convoluted by its own atmosphere to ever feel fully alive.

James does his best to inject the film with some gravitas, but it's an uphill battle when the story is more invested in its next elaborate demise than in any meaningful character development.

To his credit, Perkins commits fully to the bit. The film's aesthetic leans into a garish, late-'90s pastiche, and there's a certain offhand charm in its commitment to treating death as both inevitable and ludicrous. This is all the more disappointing given how *The Monkey* arrived in theaters riding a wave of meticulously crafted marketing courtesy of Neon. While *Longlegs* thrived on its unsettling slow-burn, *The Monkey* wears out its welcome by hammering home the same 'death is absurd, people suck' joke, without much variation.

For all its pulpy simplicity, King's original had a sense of gnawing doom. Perkins, by contrast, wants *The Monkey* to be a horror film for people who roll their eyes at horror films. The real terror is in the dawning realisation that Neon has once again orchestrated a masterclass in misdirection, whipping up a frenzy for a film that is little more than a cheap parlor trick when the blood and guts clear.

The Monkey is currently running in theatres