The Pioneer

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TRAVEL & LIFESTYLE

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DECEMBER 2025 | ₹50

Winter Wonderland

Snow-kissed December turns Europe into a glowing Christmas fairytale

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THE YEAR'S FINAL SPARK

"AS THE YEAR ENDS, I HOPE THIS ISSUE BECOMES YOUR COMPANION, WHETHER YOU ARE PLANNING TRIPS, REVISITING MEMORIES OR SIMPLY REVELLING IN THE JOY OF CLOSING ONE YEAR AND OPENING ANOTHER"

December has always felt like the world's natural pause button. Like a soft breath just before a new chapter... when everything slows down and yet, sparkles a little brighter. As I sit to write this editorial, Delhi is getting colder, fairy lights are being tested, suitcases are being pulled out for year-end vacays and conversations are drifting toward 'This is what I manifest for travel next year'. In that sense, this issue of *Exotica* is made for that exact mood that is celebratory, reflective and gently nudging you toward discovery.

This issue tempts you to experience the timeless allure of Christmas in Europe, where cobblestone streets glow under festive markets and medieval squares come alive with music, roasted chestnuts, laughter and the unmistakable scent of mulled wine. It is a journey into — one that feels like stepping into a snow globe. Closer home, we wander into Bow Barracks, perhaps Kolkata's most evocative pocket of Christmas cheer. It is a slice of old-world charm where traditions haven't just survived, they have flourished, carried forward by a community that celebrates with pride, music and warmth that reaches beyond its red-brick walls.

For those craving something quieter and more intimate, we bring you an offbeat winter escape to Naar — a Himalayan haven where silence is textured, the mountains feel almost sentient and time loosens its grip. Want something even more off-beat? We suggest you escape to Uttarey, a hidden Himalayan gem with peaceful landscapes in the Northeastern state of Sikkim. This is where misty mountains meet quiet villages.

We also take a detour into the world of words at the Dehradun Literature Festival, a gathering that has steadily shaped itself into a thoughtful cultural space. And for the futurists among us, we close with the exhilarating Japan Mobility Show, where imagination and engineering meet to suggest what travel, movement and adventure may look like tomorrow.

As the year ends, I hope this issue becomes your companion, whether you are planning trips, revisiting memories or simply revelling in the joy of closing one year and opening another. Here's to journeys that moved us, destinations that surprised us and stories that reminded us why we travel at all.

Happy reading, happy celebrations and an even happier new year ahead.

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VOLUME 18 • ISSUE 24

December transforms Europe into a dreamy travel escape, with sparkling red-and-white cities, joyful Christmas markets and magical winter moments everywhere

THE WORLD CALLS INDIA

How tourism campaigns turned 2025 into India's most glamorous year of globe-trotting

This year, travel was about stepping into a story. Destinations across the world rolled out bolder and more playful with campaigns that aimed squarely at the Indian traveller. With celebrity ambassadors, influencer-led visuals, and quirky brand crossovers, 2025 proved that tourism marketing has officially entered its fashion era. Here are the campaigns that made the most noise.

KOREA TAKES ITS K-COOL GLOBAL

Korea didn't just trend in beauty aisles and streaming lists; it became the destination Indian travellers had to talk about. With Hina Khan stepping in as Korea Tourism's honorary ambassador, the campaign leaned fully into its glossy cultural capital — K-beauty, K-dramas, cutting-edge design and food that deserves its own fan club.

MOMENTS IN SHARJAH

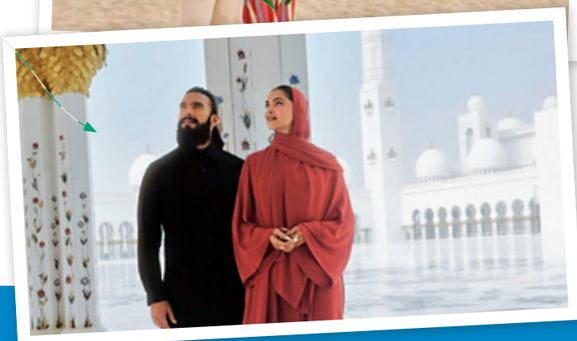
While its neighbours chase the superlatives, Sharjah crafted a campaign named *Har Rasta Ek Nayi Kahani* rooted in heritage, art and nature — and Indian travellers responded. Museums, mangrove explorations, traditional souks and peaceful waterfronts created a narrative of mindful travel. The result was a noticeable uptick in Indian arrivals and a fresh image for Sharjah as UAE's cultural gem.

DUBAI EVEN MORE UNMISSABLE

Just when Dubai thought it couldn't get any more iconic, Virat Kohli and Anushka Sharma arrived in a campaign that felt energetic and stylish. Equallt fun in adventure, luxury and lifestyle, their Visit Dubai visuals showcased why the emirate remains India's ultimate quick-holiday favourite with sky-high dining, desert safaris, beaches, shopping and that unmistakable cinematic skyline.

FILMY MAGIC IN ABU DHABI

When Ranveer Singh and Deepika Padukone were unveiled as the first Bollywood couple ambassadors for Visit Abu Dhabi, the campaign delivered exactly what it promised: cinematic indulgence. Think glamorous escapes, dreamy desert shots, thrilling adventure sequences and the kind of five-star luxury that fuels holiday envy. Abu Dhabi positioned itself as both a blockbuster destination and a chic weekend detour.



WESTERN AUSTRALIA X SWIGGY

In one of the year's most delightfully unexpected crossovers, Tourism Western Australia joined hands with Swiggy to give India a taste of its happiest resident — the quokka. Cute, charming and impossibly photogenic, the little marsupial became the face of a campaign that blended food culture with faraway wanderlust.

ITC Enduring Value

Savlon

Savlon kills 99.9% Hospital Acquired Infection-causing bacteria.*

ESKAPE pathogens are the leading cause of Hospital Acquired Infections (HAI) worldwide.

Savlon Antiseptic Disinfectant Liquid, with its synergistic CHG + Cetrimide formulation kills 99.9% of ESKAPE pathogens at 1:15 dilution.

ESKAPE pathogens refers to Enterococcus faecium, Staphylococcus aureus, Klebsiella pneumoniae, Acinetobacter baumanni, Pseudomonas aeruginosa and Enterobacter species.

Send us your queries at savlon@itc.in

*Dilute 1 part Savlon in 15 parts clean water. Basis lab study on sample microbes.

WALKING INTO THE NEW YEAR WITH A BANG!

December is the season when the world seems to sparkle a little brighter. As the air turns crisp and festive lights illuminate streets across the world and travellers find themselves drawn to experiences that stir the soul. We bring to you some festivals that promise to make your travels more spirited and definitely more fun.

SERENDIPITY ARTS FESTIVAL, INDIA

Venue: Panjim, Goa

Dates: December 12, 2025 - December 21, 2025

With a mix of theatre, music, exhibitions and immersive workshops, the Serendipity Arts Festival invites travellers to the cultural scene of Goa in full swing. Set against a destination already famed for its festivals, Goa — this edition celebrates a decade of creativity with bold contemporary art, culinary explorations and performances in heritage Panjim venues. You can wander through old-Portuguese-era forts, stroll along the Mandovi river and discover visual art installations and live concerts.

HARBIN ICE FESTIVAL , CHINA

Venue: Harbin

Dates: Around December 25, 2025 - Mid February 2026

Travellers who love winter places will find the Harbin Ice Festival nothing short of delightful. As temperatures dip, the city transforms into a sparkling world of towering ice palaces, giant snow sculptures and glowing lanterns carved with unbelievable precision. Walking through Harbin feels like frozen fairytale, where every corner reveals shimmering artistry and winter charm. You can wander through illuminated ice parks, admire intricate snow carvings, or warm up with hearty local dishes between adventures.

JUNKANOO FESTIVAL, THE BAHAMAS

Venue: Nassau & Paradise Island

Date: December 26, 2025 & January 1, 2026

With a high tempo of celebrations and colourful themed dresses which are a treat to watch, the Junkanoo Festival in the Bahamas excites travellers to experience island life like never before. You can also enjoy one of the most energetic cultural parades in the Caribbean if you plan a trip in late December. The streets of Nassau come alive at midnight with drums, whistles and dancing, hand-crafted costumes, and crowds cheering into the morning hours. It's a perfect celebration for anyone looking to travel beyond the regular experience.

WOODFORD FOLK FESTIVAL, AUSTRALIA

Venue: Queensland, Australia

Dates: December 27, 2025 - January 1, 2026

A sleepy rural landscape transformed into a buzzing village where music, art and community comes alive and that for you is the magic of Woodford Folk Festival. For six nights and days the festival brings together thousands of artists and performers from around the world, offering concerts, theatre, circus, workshops, street theatre, film and more. Amid subtropical forest, restored farmland becomes a creative playground complete with cafés, craft stalls, leafy campsites and nature walks among butterflies and rainforest orchids. Dancing under the stars, or joining a children's parade, the festival an inclusive journey unlike any other.

EDINBURGH'S HOGMANAY, UNITED KINGDOM

Venue: Edinburgh, Scotland

Date: December 30, 2025 – January 1, 2026

Called as the best New Year eve's party — cold, cozy nights and the moment the sky fills with lights is how the Scots celebrate year-end at Edinburgh's Hogmanay. As the bells toll midnight beside Edinburgh Castle, thousands of visitors join a river of fire in the Torchlight Procession, then dance through the historic city streets beneath fireworks that echo across cobbled roofs and ancient spires. If you are planning then it can be a travel-worthy moment where you can soak up Scottish warmth, history and spectacle in one unforgettable celebration.

WHEN IN MOROCCO

Ever dreamt of a place where ancient rhythm and modern wonder move in the same breath? Morocco feels exactly that. Here, terracotta cities rise out of desert horizons, mountains cradle hidden villages and the Atlantic hums softly along golden shores. One moment you are wandering spice-filled souks, the next, watching dunes glow under a violet sunset. We bring you our best picks.

WANDER THROUGH THE BLUE

Chefchaouen, Morocco's iconic blue city, feels less like a destination and more like a beautifully whispered secret. Nestled in the Rif Mountains, its labyrinth of cobalt alleys and indigo stairways seems to slow time itself. Here, mornings are gentle as sunlight glides across painted walls, and the scent of fresh mint tea curls through the air.

Travellers don't come to Chefchaouen for spectacle; they come to exhale. To wander. To let curiosity guide them from handcrafted leather ateliers to family-run rooftop cafés where terracotta pots bloom with bougainvillaea. The city is a photographer's sigh — soft light, serene hues, and the quiet hum of everyday life. Travellers can go for the colour, yes — but you can stay for the calm.

BLESSED WITH A STUNNING MOUNTAIN BACKDROP, CHEFCHAOUEN INVITES YOU TO LACE UP YOUR BOOTS AND WANDER. YOU CAN HIKE ALONG THE SCENIC TRAILS OF THE RIF MOUNTAINS, DISCOVERING A CALMER, MORE AUTHENTIC SIDE OF MOROCCO AS YOU GO

ON THE SHOPPING SPREE

Apart from Marrakech, you can wander into Rabat's old medina and you'll find narrow lanes scented with tanned leather and lined with ateliers selling silver jewellery, woven carpets and refined traditional fabrics. Souk Sebbat for leather goods, slippers and bags, traditional fabrics and clothes; Rue des Consuls is perfect for picking up effortlessly stylish silver jewellery and the famous rbatis carpets.

In Fez, craftsmanship is theatre. The famed tanneries and artisan workshops reveal the making behind Morocco's most coveted goods: richly dyed leather, intricate zellij tiles, Moroccan rugs.

Meanwhile, Tétouan, a UNESCO Creative City, remains a connoisseur's secret. Its medina specialises in wood-inlay, exquisite embroidery and delicate plasterwork — heirloom objects that carry the soul of the north. For travellers, across these cities, shopping is about collecting stories, tradition and artistry in their purest form.

YOU CAN DISCOVER THE EXQUISITE ART OF RABAT'S EMBROIDERY, A CRAFT THE LOCALS HAVE TRULY PERFECTED. DELICATE FABRICS LIKE SILK BROCADE, MUSLIN, COTTON AND LINEN ARE INTRICATELY EMBROIDERED TO CREATE STUNNING PIECES THAT ARE USED NOT ONLY IN ELEGANT CAFTANS BUT ALSO IN BEAUTIFUL HOME FURNISHINGS

UNDER A THOUSAND STARS

An experience of a lifetime is the only way to describe sleeping beneath the stars in the Sahara. As daylight slips away, the dunes shift from gold to rose to a deep, cinematic indigo. Silence settles in and out here, time feels suspended.

Desert camps range from elegant Berber tents to luxurious nomadic suites, where lanterns flicker and mint tea is poured slowly, like a ritual. And when night finally unfolds, the sky becomes a chandelier of constellations — so clear, so infinite, it feels almost unreal. Sahara is said to be one of the best places on Earth for stargazing, and it's true: the darkness is untouched, the horizon limitless.

You fall asleep to the whisper of warm wind over sand, and awaken with the sunrise spilling gold across the dunes — calmer, lighter and forever changed.

At dawn, you'll wake to the call of soft winds and the glow of sunlight spilling over the dunes, followed by a traditional breakfast amid golden sands. It's a night that grounds you, and might turn as a night of your life.

DESERT CAMPS RANGE FROM ELEGANT BERBER TENTS TO LUXURIOUS NOMADIC SUITES, WHERE LANTERNS FLICKER AND MINT TEA IS POURED SLOWLY, LIKE A RITUAL. AND WHEN NIGHT FINALLY UNFOLDS, THE SKY BECOMES A CHANDELIER OF CONSTELLATIONS — SO CLEAR, SO INFINITE, IT FEELS ALMOST UNREAL

ADVENTURE WITH A LAID-BACK BEAT

Kitesurfing On the wind-kissed coastline of Essaouira, kitesurfers glide across clean Atlantic waves, carried by steady trade winds over a wide, golden crescent of sand. The thrill sits beautifully beside the town's bohemian calm — fishermen at the port, art studios behind blue-painted doors, and long, honey-toned sunsets.

Skiing High in the mountains, Oukaïmeden rises to over 3,200 metres — North Africa's highest ski playground, compact, uncrowded and dramatically scenic. Powdered slopes and bright, crisp air deliver a winter escape just a short drive from Marrakech.

Hot Air Ballooning At dawn, float above the desert in a hot-air balloon as the city slips into soft gold below. The Atlas stands still on the horizon while villages and palms unfold like a painting. A gentle landing and traditional breakfast complete the moment making it unforgettable from every angle.

YOU CAN EXPLORE MOROCCO'S UNDERGROUND WONDERS WITH CAVE-EXPLORING ADVENTURES IN PLACES LIKE THE ICONIC HERCULES CAVES OR THE DEEP GALLERIES OF KEHF TIKHOUBAI. AND IF YOU PREFER WATER INSTEAD OF ROCK, YOU CAN GO SPORT-FISHING ALONG THE ATLANTIC AND MEDITERRANEAN COASTS

YEAR END HOLIDAY HOTLIST

The celebrations are underway for Christmas and New Year. If you are planning your travels, you can spend your holidays at some of the most festive and luxurious stays around the world. From a desert retreats to city scapes and beachside resorts, these places are turning the season into an experience worth enjoying.

MINOR HOTELS

Minor Hotels have rolled out a varied festive line-up across its resorts in Asia and the Maldives. Travel lovers can book a stay at **Anantara Koh Yao Yai Resort & Villas** to step into the mythical world of Himmapan through new-moon sound baths, folklore dinners, cultural workshops and an immersive Thai Cultural Day to welcome 2026.

Guests can head to **Anantara Layan Phuket Resort** for renewal with its wellness-led Sparkling Holiday Glow and New Year Reset journeys at Layan Life, offering skin treatments, diagnostics and personalised vitality plans.

Families can experience **Anantara Bophut Koh Samui Resort** and enjoy Lotus Whispers, a programme of themed dining, activities and a white-lotus spa ritual inspired by the resort's White Lotus fame.

Travellers can explore **Avani+ Luang Prabang** in Laos, celebrating land, river and spirit with Baci ceremonies, Mekong sunset cruises and guided cultural excursions. You can book your festive stay at **Niyama Private Islands** in the Maldives, where boho-luxe energy meets visiting chefs, fitness experts, yoga instructors and creative workshops, making the year-end celebrations truly unforgettable.

THE OLD WAR OFFICE (THE OWO), LONDON

The OWO brings a sense of old-world London glamour to the season, carrying its Edwardian heritage. Travellers can settle into a carol-inspired afternoon tea in The Drawing Room, complete with views of the Household Cavalry or sit down to Mauro Colagreco's Michelin-starred six-course Christmas menu. The bars add their own festive flair, from Christmas Carol cocktails at The Guards Bar to late-night, spy-themed parties hidden in the original Secret Service corridors. With champagne-laden stay packages, butler service and bespoke gifting experiences, The OWO offers a Christmas that feels historic.

RADISSON HOTEL GROUP

Radisson's leading hotels are also setting the tone for the season with special festive experiences. You can head to **Radisson Blu Greater Noida** for its hyperlocal flair with seasonal menus and signature *Gulkand–Mulethi* Christmas cake. **Radisson Blu Atria Bengaluru** is offering a grand gingerbread house, chocolate Santa and themed counters, Christmas Eve menus and sustainable, ingredient-led festive dining. **Radisson Blu Pune Hinjawadi** rounds it off with chef-led Christmas dinners, lavish brunches and celebration zones designed for groups and families. **Radisson Blu Towers, Kaushambi** brings traditional cake-mixing, rooftop spreads, Santa surprises and curated hampers.

CHRISTMAS AT THESE STAYS ARE NOTHING SHORT OF MAGIC AS CAROLS DRIFT SOFTLY THROUGH ELEGANT LOBBIES AND CHEFS CRAFT FESTIVE MENUS TURNING MEALS INTO CELEBRATIONS

AMAN

Aman Advent Calendar 2025 takes its cues from the stillness of Camp Sarika in the Utah desert, turning that sense of calm into a 25-day ritual. It includes a thoughtful mix of skincare, fragrance and wellbeing pieces, such as the grounding smoked body butter and the cedar-and-sage Sei candle. There is also a 111Skin x Aman gold face mask, along with a nourishing Sacred Heart Balm and a hydrating lip balm. A traditional dream catcher adds a gentle nod to the land that inspired the calendar. It offers travellers a quiet, luxurious way to ease into the festive season.

WINTER WONDERLAND

With the first flurries dusting the rooftops, carols echoing through cobbled lanes and the scent of mulled wine seeping through twinkling markets, Christmas in Europe is indeed the most wonderful time of the year. **Shibani Bawa** shares the best destination experiences

By the time November melts into December, Europe quietly slips into a dream. Cities glitter, music spills from cathedrals, and the scent of cinnamon and mulled wine wraps around you like a warm hug. From the storybook lanes of Germany to the imperial glow of Vienna and the snow-covered charm of Scandinavia, Christmas here feels like stepping into a picture perfect postcard. A few years ago, I spent a week wandering through the Christmas and Advent markets of Geneva, Bern and Basel, and it felt like living through one of the many yuletide stories that I have adored since childhood. Families bundled up in woolens, children gleefully going roundon carousels, it's truly a time for love and laughter. While most of the continent is covered in soft snow, the season's spirit brings incomparable warmth.

Across its cities, from Berlin to Nuremberg, Dresden to Munich, markets range from grand and urbane to quaint and folkloric

MOST ENCHANTING WINTER MARKETS

I'll never forget one of Geneva's most majestic Christmas markets, Noël au Quai, since it was my very first. Located along the shores of Lake Geneva, its Fondue Chalet, a rustic hideaway tucked amid the market's twinkling stalls, is one of the highlights. Although it looks like a tiny chalet from outside, once inside, I am amazed with the size — lined with endless tables, it is packed with locals huddled around bubbling pots of cheese, and dipping crusty bread to make the perfect bite, and the air fills with music and clinking glasses. As we move on to Basel, I am spellbound with the spectacle that includes over a hundred Christmas trees lining its avenues, each glowing under kilometres of fairy lights. The city's *pièce de résistance* is the giant Christmas tree on Münsterplatz, lavishly decorated by the legendary Swiss artisan Johann Wanner, whose handmade ornaments are coveted by royal households from Britain to Monaco.

If Switzerland is all heartwarming charm, Austria brings grandeur to Christmas. In Vienna, the market outside Schönbrunn Palace is perhaps the most majestic in Europe. Here, under baroque façades, stalls sell hand-blown glass, marzipan, and roasted chestnuts, while the scent of cinnamon drifts through the crisp air. As evening falls, a Viennese concert completes the experience — Strauss and Mozart performed by dancers in flowing gowns. Further west in Innsbruck, nestled among the Alps, the air turns livelier. "A traditional Tyrolean evening brings out the mountain soul," says Ruchi Kohli, Chief of Experience at Away&Co. "Local singers and dancers in national costume create an atmosphere that feels intimate and exuberant." She remembers one Christmas in Austria particularly fondly: "In Salzburg, Christmas markets glow under the snow, the air is thick with the scent of cinnamon and roasted almonds, and festive music spills out from every corner. You'll hear a choir in the cathedral, or sometimes a violinist playing in the street. What struck me most wasn't just the beauty, but the warmth of it all — it's not just festive; it feels timeless, as if the whole city pauses to breathe in the season."

AS WE MOVE ON TO BASEL, I AM SPELLBOUND WITH THE SPECTACLE THAT INCLUDES OVER A HUNDRED CHRISTMAS TREES LINING ITS AVENUES, EACH GLOWING UNDER KILOMETRES OF FAIRY LIGHTS

But Germany is, of course, where the European Christmas market was born. Across its cities, from Berlin to Nuremberg, Dresden to Munich, markets range from grand and urbane to quaint and folkloric. Each one tells a story steeped in centuries of winter tradition. Munich's Marienplatz dazzles with a 100-foot tree aglow with 2,500 candles, while choirs perform daily from the Town Hall balcony. Stalls overflow with gingerbread hearts, hand-carved toys, and steaming mugs of glühwein. In Berlin, the capital of Christmas markets, more than sixty spread across the city. The WeihnachtsZauber at Gendarmenmarkt, one of Europe's most beautiful squares, is a sensory spectacle with artisans demonstrating crafts, opera singers performing under open skies, and lights shimmering against neoclassical façades. At Charlottenburg Palace, another market re-creates the elegance of the Biedermeier period with carriage rides and period décor, offering a nostalgic glimpse into 19th-century Berlin. Dresden's Striezelmarkt dates back to 1434, making it Germany's oldest Christmas market. Here, bakers craft the famous Dresden Christstollen, a buttery, fruit-laden bread dusted in sugar, whose name gives the market its own. A 14-metre wooden pyramid spins slowly at the center, surrounded by the world's largest nutcracker.

SCANDINAVIA: MELLOW AND MAGICAL

Head north and Christmas changes tempo. In Scandinavia, it's quieter; less about show, more about the soft glow. "I've been to my fair share of Christmas markets across Europe, from Germany's storybook squares to Vienna's imperial courtyards, but Stockholm surprised me," says Loveleen Arun, founder-director of Panache World. "Sweden doesn't just celebrate Christmas. It lives it." In the old town of Gamla Stan, she recalls, the cobbled streets turn into a living Advent calendar. "Every evening, a different window, door, or courtyard opens to reveal something new: sometimes a storyteller, sometimes a choir, sometimes a child reading a poem. It's simple, human and magical." And then there's the Julbord, Sweden's Christmas feast. "It's a ritual more than a meal," she says. "Pickled herring, gravlax, mustard-glazed ham, potatoes, meatballs, sweets — served in candlelight, with laughter and tradition.

Further north, in Finland, Christmas unfolds as a dream of snow and starlight, says Bhawna Rao, curator and co-founder of Encompass Experiences. "This year, I'm travelling with five

ITALY ADDS A TOUCH OF MAGIC TO THE HOLIDAYS WITH LAUNCH OF THE ESPRESSO MONACO — A FESTIVE NIGHT TRAIN LINKING ROME AND MUNICH FOR CHRISTMAS

families to Santa's homeland, where pine forests, husky rides, and the Northern Lights bring back a sense of pure wonder." In Rovaniemi, at the edge of the Arctic Circle, Santa's Village glows under the aurora borealis. Children post letters to Santa; adults sip hot chocolate by roaring fires. "We wanted to create an experience that reconnects families — to wonder, to nature, to warmth," Rao says. "And for parents, it's as much a rediscovery as it is for the kids."

OLD TRADITIONS, NEW OFFERINGS

In Rome, the Christmas World event, now in its fourth edition, transforms the gardens of Villa Borghese into one of Europe's largest holiday villages — a 50,000-square-metre wonderland of ice rinks, carousels, international performances and artisan stalls. This year, over 300 artists are set to perform, bringing the Christmas spirit of cities around the world to the Eternal City.

Italy is adding further touch of magic to the holidays with the launch of the Espresso Monaco — a festive night train linking Rome and Munich just in time for Christmas, taking passengers overnight through snow-dusted Alpine valleys, awakening in Germany's capital of Christmas markets. Onboard, holiday décor and themed dining cars serving Italian winter specialties and cosy sleeper cabins promise charm and comfort. This elegant journey will blend nostalgia with sustainability, as the Espresso Monaco offers a slower, more soulful way to travel.

Meanwhile, in Courchevel, Christmas takes on a distinctly haute montage flavour. The French Alps' most glamorous resort replaces traditional market stalls with pop-up boutiques, Michelin-starred dining, and illuminated alpine villages. This December, the resort's six villages, from the storybook Courchevel Le Praz to glamorous Courchevel 1850,

shimmer with festive light installations, open-air performances — especially significant as the resort readies for its 80th anniversary celebrations in 2026.

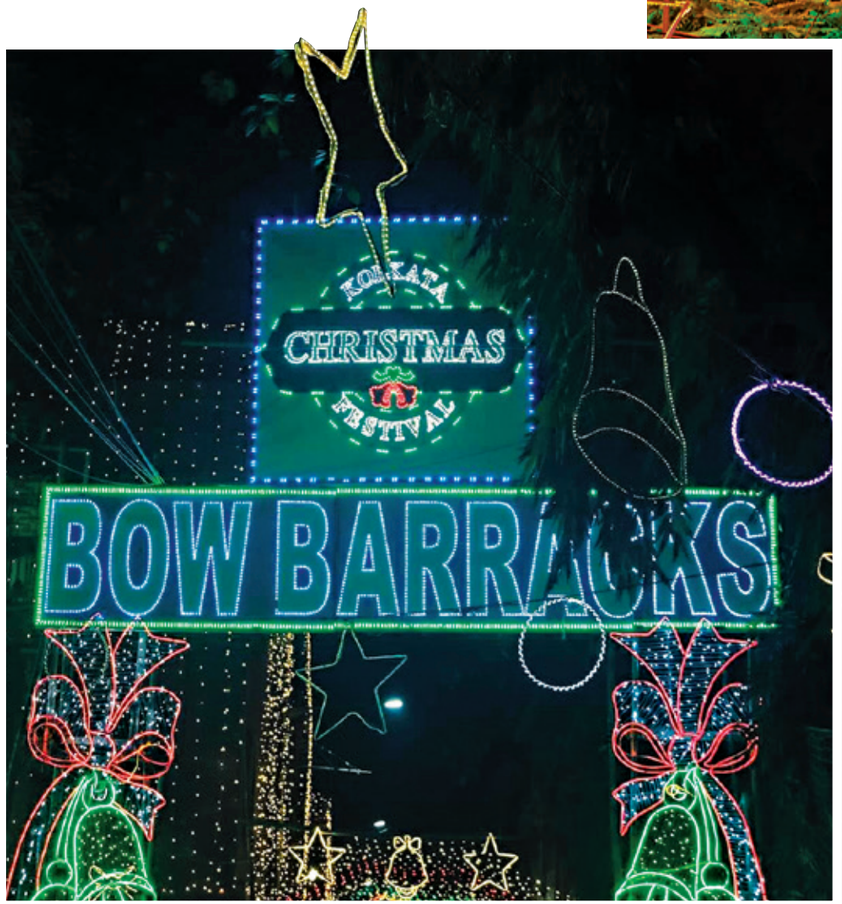
THE LURE OF THE SEASON

According to a recent Cox & Kings report, Europe's winter allure is steadily drawing more Indian travellers than ever before. "More Indians are discovering that Europe in winter isn't just more affordable, it's more authentic," says Karan Agarwal, director at Cox & Kings. A seven-night itinerary that costs ₹2.3–₹2.6 lakh in summer drops to around ₹1.5–₹1.8 lakh in winter. Airfares are ₹25,000–₹35,000 cheaper on average. "The math is simple: less crowd, less cost, more value," he adds. But numbers are only part of the story. "Traveller satisfaction for European winter holidays is actually 8–12 per cent higher than for summer trips," Agarwal notes. "People feel they've experienced something real. Streets glow under fairy lights, locals reclaim their cities,

and travellers find themselves sipping wine in neighbourhood cafés, not rushing from landmark to landmark."

So, Europe in winter is the best way to slowdown and soak in the essence of the season. Whether it's sipping glühwein beneath the spires of Vienna, watching advent windows flicker to life in Stockholm, or sledding through the forests of Lapland, the spirit of Christmas here is fairylike.

"MORE INDIANS ARE DISCOVERING THAT EUROPE IN WINTER ISN'T JUST MORE AFFORDABLE, IT'S MORE AUTHENTIC," SAYS KARAN AGARWAL



KOLKATA'S HIDDEN WONDERLAND

With just few days to Christmas, Bow Barracks in central Kolkata buzzes with Anglo-Indian cheer – cakes baking, wine brewing, homes aglow in festivity. **Ayandrali Dutta** takes us through the best

Tucked away from Kolkata's city chaos lies a pocket of history — the yellow and red by-lanes of Bow Barracks designed by none other than Halsey Ricardo, who also designed the Howarh bridge. To those who know the city, the sight is unmistakable; to newcomers, it's a discovery of one of Kolkata's most charming enclaves — home to the Anglo-Indian community. This English-speaking minority traces its roots to both British and Indian ancestry, preserving a unique cultural blend that defines the neighbourhood's spirit.

The name 'Barracks' harks back to the early 1900s, when these brick quarters were built to house British soldiers during World War I. Today, the same streets transform into a festive dreamscape every December. As Christmas approaches, Bow Barracks bursts into life. The air hums with the timeless tunes of Bob Dylan, John Lennon and Elvis Presley, weaving a spell where nostalgia and modern spirit meet in perfect harmony. Fairy lights drape every balcony, and the scent of freshly baked cakes and homemade wine. "I've been singing here since 2000, when our Christmas celebrations first began," says Francis Yee Lepcha, a musician and long-time performer at the festivities. "The Anglo-Indians have a deep love for music and dance — and it shows. By the 23rd, the whole place swings to jazz, laughter and joy."

Among the must-visit spots is Barua Bakery, tucked in a cosy corner, famed for its rich fruitcakes and the rare winter delicacy, Chhanar Cake — a soft, creamy delight unique to Kolkata

SANTA COMES RIDING A RICKSHAW

At Bow Barracks, the air is sweet with the aroma of homemade wine and cinnamon cookies, as Anglo-Indian and Christian expat families return home to celebrate. And when Santa finally appears, it isn't on a sleigh but a hand-pulled rickshaw, waving cheerfully as he weaves his way through the glowing lanes — a heartwarming sight unique to Christmas in Kolkata. "Christmas at Bow Barracks even today is not clinical, there is an unmistakable sense of community. Bow Barracks feels like a pocket of old-world Calcutta where time has politely refused to move on. During my growing up days in the 70s and 80s, this was the place which felt like a "foreign place" to us. There was a Christmas tree, huge and decorated; a live Santa and there was laughter, music — stuff that we only read in the story books," adds Navpreet Arora, founder Fun on Streets, a renowned Heritage Guide of Kolkata.

At the heart of it all stands a towering Christmas tree beside the grotto, where locals gather to pray and celebrate. For one magical week, Bow Barracks becomes a living postcard — a place where time slows down, music unites hearts and the spirit of Christmas truly comes alive.

BAKES, BREWS AND BARRACKS BLISS

As Christmas approaches, Bow Barracks comes alive with food stalls run by local residents, each offering a taste of the season. Though the number of Anglo-Indian families has declined over the years, the community's festive spirit thrives, enriched by new neighbours and diverse flavours. Among the must-visit spots is Barua Bakery, tucked in a cosy corner, famed for its rich fruitcakes and the rare winter delicacy, *Chhanar* Cake — a soft, creamy delight unique to Kolkata. Don't miss their signature Wine Cake, infused with homemade wines fermented from apple, grape and ginger, alongside fragrant rum, fruit and walnut cakes. Navpreet jumps with happiness as she adds, "The first sign of Christmas being round the corner was the sight of dry fruits soaked in rum standing tall at the window sills at Bow Barracks. I used to go the Barracks for my English tuitions, we would eagerly look at the jars thinking of the yummy cakes which we would get later. Then there was the echo of carols, the strumming of the guitars, the little fairy lights strung across balconies."

One of the unique brew at the Barracks is their home-made wine, their time-honoured tradition, a preparation that begins as early as January, when families start fermenting grape and ginger blends in their own kitchens. These recipes, passed down through generations, remain unchanged — preserving a signature taste that is both rich and sweet. By December, bottles of this homemade wine are ready, steeped in warmth and flavour. Its popularity is such that every batch sells out long before Christmas arrives, a testament to the enduring charm and craftsmanship of Bow Barracks' festive spirit.

But what makes Bow Barracks truly special is its spirit of giving. For over a decade, residents have celebrated with the neighbourhood's less privileged children — hosting feasts, raffles, and street parties funded by the community itself. For those who know the city well, will know that Christmas in Bow Barracks is not just a festival , it's an emotion. Christmas or 'Boro Din' as fondly called at the Barracks has always had a vibe that cannot be expressed in words.

For those who know the city well, will know that Christmas in Bow Barracks is not just a festival , it's an emotion

WHAT MAKES BOW BARRACKS TRULY SPECIAL IS ITS SPIRIT OF GIVING. FOR OVER A DECADE, RESIDENTS HAVE CELEBRATED WITH THE NEIGHBOURHOOD'S LESS PRIVILEGED CHILDREN — HOSTING FEASTS, RAFFLES, AND STREET PARTIES FUNDED BY THE COMMUNITY ITSELF

WHISPERS BY A WOOD-FIRE

In a quiet Himalayan village, chef Prateek Sadhu's NAAR isn't just a restaurant: it's a story of memory, belonging and the taste of coming home, says **Vernika Awal**

Delhi's winter used to be something I looked forward to — the soft gold of the morning light, the smell of roasted peanuts in the air, the way the city would seem to slow down just a little. But that romance has long worn thin. The air that once felt crisp now burns the throat; the haze that once looked poetic has turned poisonous. Each year, the season that once brought warmth and nostalgia now feels like a burden.

So, this year, as a birthday gift to myself, I decided to leave. To breathe again — freely, deeply, without the dull weight of smoke sitting on my chest. The best thing about Delhi, I often say, is that it's the gateway to a myriad of escapes. The mountains are only a few hours away, and my husband and I rarely need an excuse to get behind the wheel and chase that first glimpse of cedars and clouds.

This time, our compass pointed toward Kasauli, a familiar hill town I've always loved for its gentle pace and colonial calm. But my journey wasn't to Kasauli itself. It was to a small village an hour beyond it, a place most maps don't bother naming: Darwa. A scattering of homes, a handful of locals, and an expanse of silence.

And yet, it is here that Prateek Sadhu, one of India's top chefs, chose to build something truly extraordinary — NAAR.

I've known Sadhu for some years now: first through his food, and then as a friend. His cooking has always struck me as deeply personal, the kind that carries its memories quietly: like family heirlooms. He doesn't just plate ingredients; he composes emotions. When he cooked during his NAAR residencies in Delhi, each course felt like a page from his story — vivid, precise and intimate.

But this trip to Darwa felt different. It wasn't just about tasting his food, it was about understanding it, in the landscape that shaped it.

NAAR means "fire" in Kashmiri, and the name fits in more ways than one. Fire as an element, fire as memory, fire as renewal. Sadhu's journey from Baramulla, the home he left behind in 1990 to some of the world's greatest kitchens and back to these mountains, is a story of rekindling, and finding one's way home through the language of food.

When we finally arrived at NAAR, I felt an almost childlike quiet. The restaurant sits within Amaya, a retreat nestled deep in the hills, and blends so seamlessly with the landscape that it feels less built than grown. Two wooden huts make up the space — the salon, and the main dining room.

"The salon is where we let guests arrive slowly," Sadhu said, smiling as he led us in. "We want them to feel the mountain

IN THE TWO YEARS SINCE NAAR OPENED, PRATEEK SADHU AND HIS TEAM HAVE TURNED A QUIET MOUNTAIN VILLAGE INTO ONE OF INDIA'S MOST TALKED-ABOUT DINING DESTINATIONS. AND YET, NOTHING ABOUT IT FEELS INVASIVE OR OUT OF PLACE

before they taste it." It's a space designed like a warm living room — leather chairs, soft rugs, the faint scent of pine and smoke. There's a view from every corner, even the dishwashing area. "Why should my team not have beauty while they work?" he said, adding that incidentally, this dishwashing area is one of his most favourite across NAAR.

Our evening began with cocktails made from foraged ingredients: apple peels, smoked pine cones, banana extract. Each drink tasted distinctly of the forest, ingenuity and care. They set the tone for what followed: a 15-course dinner that unfolded like a story whispered over embers.

The absolute highlights of the dinner were *askalu,* a Himachali doughnut reimagined with lamb for meat-eaters and wild mushrooms for vegetarians: a perfect conversation between local memory and modern craft. *Sundarkala*, a buckwheat noodle broth inspired by the Tibetan communities of Munsyari, arrived next: smoky, soulful and with the kind of comfort that would flood in memories of childhood, if you grew up in the hills and bowls of noodle soup were essential to you.

Then came a bite-sized toast layered with mustard cream and dehydrated beetroot for vegetarians and, as Sadhu said, 'barely cooked trout' for non-vegetarians — delicate, fleeting, yet an explosion of flavours that make the dish impossible to forget.

But it was the rice porridge *galho*, a quiet marriage between Kashmir's *ver pulao* and Nagaland's *congee*, that stayed with me. A dish so simple, yet so full of warmth, that it felt like an embrace from the land itself. The porridge was married to a yakhni gravy with stuffed morels for vegetarians, and some of the most delightfully cooked pork belly for non-vegetarians. At our table, we ate in total silence — savouring the marvel of intricately-thought cooking in front of a sky full of stars, and NAAR's resident dogs lounging next to a wooden fire that you could see just a short distance away.

Each course was restrained, deliberate, and deeply evocative — food that didn't demand attention but held it gently. Outside, the November wind hummed through the trees. By the time dessert arrived, the moon had risen full and red, washing the valley in a soft, silvery light. I sat by the window, watching its reflection ripple through the mist.

Chef Sadhu came by and asked, "Was it good?"

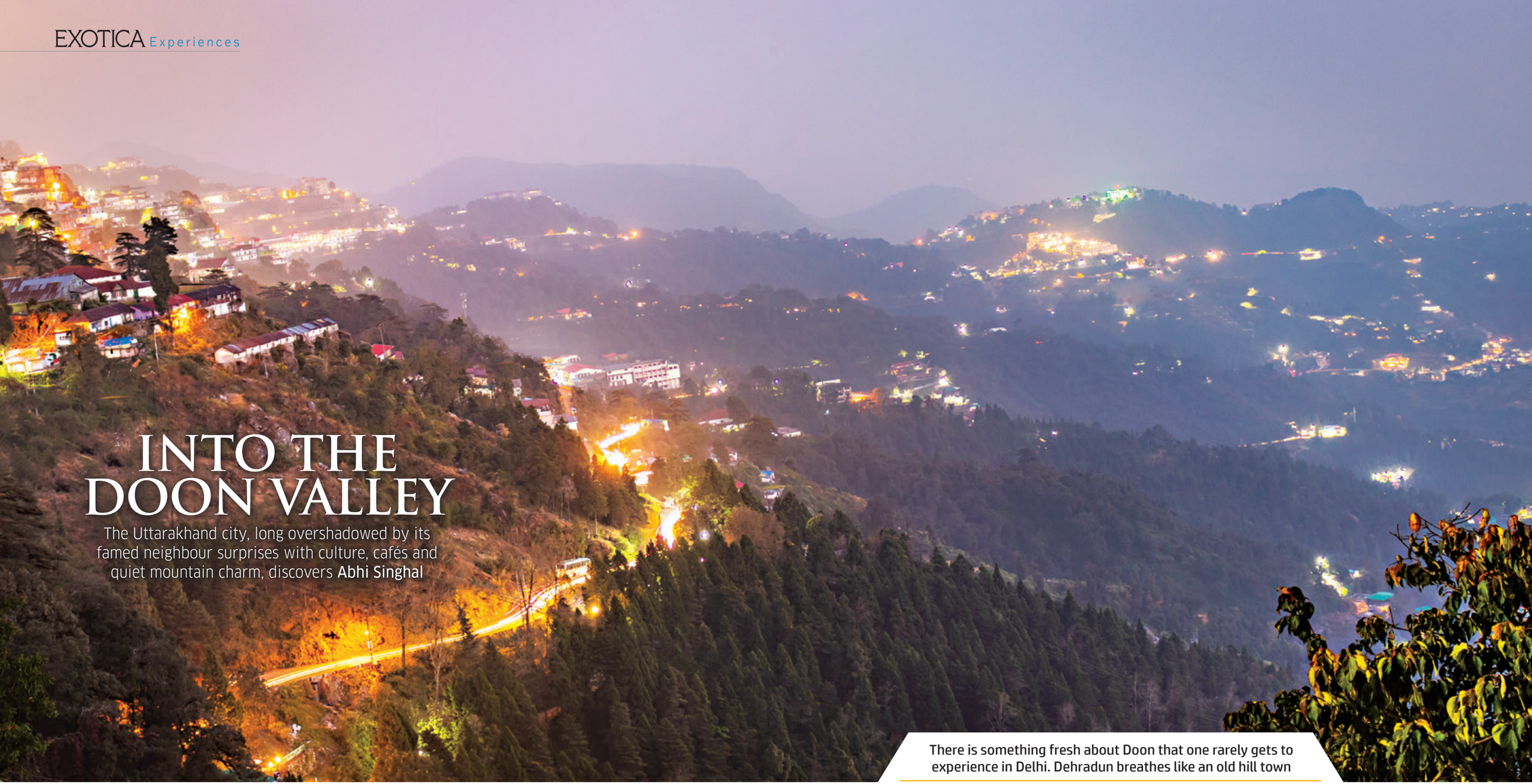
I smiled, because how do you answer that? Good felt too small, too pedestrian. What I wanted to say was that the meal felt like a memory rekindled, like something familiar I hadn't realised I'd been missing. It felt like his courses wanted to tell stories: the kind that we've always known of, but never really remember.

In the two years since NAAR opened, Sadhu and his team have turned a quiet mountain village into one of India's most talked-about dining destinations. And yet, nothing about it feels invasive or out of place. The rhythms of the hills remain untouched; the restaurant simply hums along in harmony. "The mountains were always calling," he said softly as the fire dimmed. "It just took me a while to answer."

As I looked out over the valley, the night air was sharp with pine, and the silence was punctuated by crackling wood. I understood what he meant. Some journeys are about escape. But the most meaningful ones, which change you quietly from within, are about returning home.

A KITCHEN IN THE MOUNTAINS

NAAR means 'fire' in Kashmiri, and the name fits in more ways than one. Fire as an element, fire as memory, fire as renewal. Sadhu's journey from Baramulla, the home he left behind in 1990 to some of the world's greatest kitchens and back to these mountains, is a story of rekindling, and finding one's way home through the language of food. The restaurant sits within Amaya, a retreat nestled deep in the hills, and blends so seamlessly with the landscape.



INTO THE DOON VALLEY

The Uttarakhand city, long overshadowed by its famed neighbour surprises with culture, cafés and quiet mountain charm, discovers **Abhi Singhal**

There is something fresh about Doon that one rarely gets to experience in Delhi. Dehradun breathes like an old hill town

There is a reason why Dehradun is a hub of many festivals. The gentle weather and the easy pace of this foothill destination makes it a perfect host for celebrations of every kind. Whether it's literature, music, culture or food, something or the other is always unfolding in the valley. It was for this reason that I chose a literary festival for an excuse to spend more time exploring this city.

Mountains have always called to my soul. Even as a child, travelling to hill stations with my family felt like a ritual that everyone around us seemed to participate in. Each summer or long weekend was an excuse to escape the plains and slip into the comfort of the hills. Mussoorie, more often than not, was our major pit stop. Back then there were fewer tourists, more mountains and an abundance of clean air.

For Delhiites, Mussoorie was the undisputed favourite, consistently ranking at the top of every travel list. Yet, to reach Mussoorie, one must always cross Dehradun. I passed through countless times but rarely stopped to explore. This time, things were different. I planned a trip to Dehradun itself, left Delhi early in the morning and arrived in Doon later that afternoon.

Instead of hurrying uphill, I checked into a hotel near Ghantaghar, right in the heart of the city, ready to let Dehradun reveal itself in its own unhurried way. As I stepped into the city, Dehradun greeted me with a warmth that felt almost like a hug. People rushed along the pavements, travellers in cars bearing DL, UP, and countless other RTO numbers cruised past, heading to Mussoorie for the weekend. Yet, there was something fresh about the city that one rarely gets to experience in Delhi. Call it a

FOR ME, THE SESSION TITLED 'WRITING INDIA – MAPPING THE SOUL OF A NATION' RESONATED DEEPLY. IT WAS THOUGHTFUL AND ENRICHING AND QUICKLY BECAME MY FAVOURITE OF THE FESTIVAL

subtle *pahadi* charm, despite its capital status, Dehradun breathes like an old hill town.

FESTIVE CITY IN BLOOM

There is a reason why Festival tourism makes for a big draw for tourists. It serves like an anchor around which you can weave your own travel tale. For me, it was the Dehradun Literature Festival. Hosted at Doon International School, the festival was an experience brimming with warmth and creativity. It opened on Children's Day and embraced the theme *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* – Voices of Unity, celebrating diverse perspectives and the immense power of shared narratives. The venue hosted stalls, sessions, readers and young students out to dig deeper into the world of books and meet their favourite writers. The inaugural ceremony began with the traditional lighting of the lamp by the dignitaries and was followed by a virtual keynote address by the beloved author Ruskin Bond.

WRITERS AND CONVERSATIONS

During the festival, I crossed paths with some incredibly talented writers, including those whose work revolves around travel. The sessions were strong, and the panels offered a remarkable landing into the world of contemporary literature. Celebrated authors like Akshat Gupta, Vishal Bhardwaj, Rekha Bhardwaj, Suvir Saran, Sam Dalrymple and many more graced the panels, drawing the audience deep into conversations, reflections and immersive storytelling. New voices like Jaya Kishori also took to the stage, leading young attendees and children through their unique journeys into the world of expression called writing.

Since travel has always been a source of excitement for me, I caught up with traveller and writer Sean Doyle, and he shared his favourite places in India with me. He expressed his love for Varanasi, Haridwar, Calcutta and Pushkar. He spoke on how these places came to be special in his life, why the *ghats* of Benaras remain his favourite and why it was impossible not to feel their allure... The evenings came alive with the celebrations at the Aadyam Stage, adding music, performance and warmth to the literary atmosphere.

EVENINGS MADE FOR WANDERING

Daytime in Dehradun can be quite hot and humid, so I reserved most of my city explorations for the evenings. Dehradun is wrapped in a generous sprawl of cafés, each offering a slightly different mood. You can enjoy time with friends, family or simply your own company, and the city gives you plenty of places to settle into.

THE TEAFE WITH A VIEW

Among the many cafés I visited, Tapri — The Teafe on Rajpur Road — stands out effortlessly. Located opposite St Joseph's Academy and spread across the fifth floor with a rooftop terrace above, Tapri is more than a café.

ELLORA'S: A SWEET DOON LEGEND
Ellora's Melting Moments Bakery on Rajpur Road is legendary, with renowned personalities like Shilpa Shetty, Sanjeev Kapoor, Anupam Kher and many more having visited it. People queued patiently for pastries, cookies and chocolate items.

AT ELLORA'S, I WENT STRAIGHT FOR THEIR VEGETARIAN CROISSANT AND A MUSHROOM PATTY AND FOUND IT TO BE ABSOLUTELY DELICIOUS. I ORDERED AN ORANGE SLUSH AT WHIM AND REALISED THAT A SLUSH IN A MOUNTAIN CITY CAN INSTANTLY BRIGHTEN YOUR DAY

It is a mood, a vibe and perhaps even a little sanctuary. The interiors reflect luxury and comfort – grand and yet unpretentious at the same time. With pool tables, foosball and hookah on the tables, it's the kind of place where time slips away. Climb a few stairs and you reach the rooftop. This is where Dehradun opens up beneath you. If during the day, the hills appear majestic and calm, at night, the city becomes a tapestry of lights, flickering like a constellation at its brilliant height. The food at the Teafe is worth your time and money, and a meal for two costs around INR 1,200. Do try their veg momos – they come with a *pahadi* taste.

While on a cafe sprawl, do try out the Chai Sutta Bar, Jakhan. The food is consistently good and the atmosphere welcoming, making it a convenient and pleasant stop for tea lovers and casual diners alike.

CELEBRITY-LOVED BAKERY

For a taste of something sweet and indulgent, Ellora's Melting Moments Bakery on Rajpur Road is unmissable. The bakery is legendary, and its reputation is evident in the steady crowd it draws. Renowned personalities like Shilpa Shetty, Sanjeev Kapoor, Anupam Kher and many more have visited, adding to its fame. Aesthetically pleasing the space is packed with some of the tastiest food you can find in the city.

Dehradun, for me, unfolded like a story I had passed by for years without ever turning the page. A city I once viewed only as a gateway to Mussoorie revealed itself as a destination rich with warmwth, creativity, flavour and gentle mountain charm. And as I left the city, I realised it had given me far more than just a weekend escape and a memory I know I will return to again.

SIKKIM'S HIDDEN ESCAPE

With a long road and a warm homestay welcome, Uttarey in West Sikkim is a village that feels like home, says **Manjulika Pramod**

A few months ago, I took an early morning flight from New Delhi to Bagdogra, knowing that the rest of the travel would be a long one on the road. The 165 km journey through winding hills can not be predicted in hours. With hairpin bends, pockets of mist and unexpected rain, the drive turned out to be a thrilling one.

By the time I reached this village on the Indo Nepal Border on the extreme west side of Sikkim (Gyalshing district), the sun had already set and it had grown pitch dark. At one point, even Google maps gave up on the directions. Had the driver not been a local, my nerves would have frayed. Apprehensions began to grow, but the moment Sukhbir Limbo — the owner of Iklaitsum Homestay — welcomed our group of friends with warm smile and traditional rituals, I regained my state of calm.

A hearty local meal and neat, no-frills room reassured me that signing up for the first Sikkim Rural Tourism Meet in Uttarey was the right choice.

Nestled in the pristine corners of India, Uttarey — a storybook village in West Sikkim — ended up making a permanent home in my heart. What began as a trip with moderate expectations, turned out to be one of the most humbling and unparalleled experiences of the year, fortifying the quiet strength of sustainable tourism and rural heartlands of our country.

It was only in the morning that I got to witness the sublime beauty of my surroundings. The first rays of the sun dazzled the drawings in my room and as I stepped outside, I was greeted by the black mountains standing tall. As I sipped the local black tea, I

NESTLED IN THE PRISTINE CORNERS OF INDIA, UTTAREY — A VILLAGE IN WEST SIKKIM — ENDED UP MAKING A PERMANENT HOME IN MY HEART. WHAT BEGAN AS A TRIP WITH MODERATE EXPECTATIONS, TURNED OUT TO BE ONE OF THE MOST HUMBLING EXPERIENCES

RURAL TOURISM MEET WAS ALL ABOUT LOCAL CULTURE — VIBRANT DANCES TO TRADITIONAL CUISINE, INDIGENOUS CRAFTS AND COMMUNITY-LED TOURISM INITIATIVES

admired the fresh snow from the day before.

The homestay was wrapped in lush greenery with calming views of mountain ranges, valleys, streams and the colourful houses below. It was hard not to feel excited and adventurous. After all, Uttarey is known as the gateway to adventure tourism in Sikkim.

After breakfast, I made my way to the venue of the Sikkim Rural Tourism Meet (supported by the World Bank). The event marked the debut of paragliding and hot air ballooning, adding an adventurous chapter to Uttarey's offbeat charm.

From vibrant local dances to traditional cuisine, indigenous crafts to community-led tourism initiatives, and a no-compromise attitude towards keeping plastics at bay made it inimitable. Conversations with homestay owners, artisans, and the locals introduced me to several intriguing aspects of Sikkim — the state butterfly is the vibrant Blue Duke, Noble orchid is Sikkim's state flower, Rhododendron qualifies as the state tree as the state blooms with 40 species of rhododendron from April to mid May in Sikkim, there are nearly 1,900 registered home stays across Sikkim, and three communities — Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalis — with their traditions and harmonious relationship with nature shape Uttarey's distinctive cultural heritage.

Uttarey is small in size but an absolute paradise for nature lovers. Its quiet rhythm is meant to be explored on foot. Unless you are a trekker, expect no grand sights or must-see attractions. However, there will be several fulfilling moments when you stumble upon pretty hillside homes, streams, waterfalls, suspension bridges, monasteries, rhododendron farms, and local biodiversity.

Next day was reserved for Uttarey's local charms. I walked to Kagyu Gumpa Monastery, a serene Buddhist monastery which offers a bird's eye view of Uttarey. I followed this with a visit to the Tenzing-Hillary Memorial Park to be inspired by the mountaineering legends and a peaceful afternoon at the Trout farm.

A fun photo stop at the quirky building in the form of Titanic ship is a must-do. The evenings in Uttarey were spent in my cozy homestay over chit-chats, eating boiled eggs, Maggi noodles and tea, followed by warm, home-cooked Sikkimese meal. Every night, I also looked forward to the stories that only locals know.

For the unhurried travellers, Uttarey and its surroundings have many nature-inspired offbeat offerings. Travellers often spend a week here as the homestay owners arrange trips to Khangchendzopnga waterfalls, Mainebass waterfall, Chhangey Twin falls, Singshore Bridge, Chhanyatal, Rock Garden, and keep them engaged with strolls through villages, forested paths, rhododendron woods, bird watching, nature camping and local cooking workshops.

My third day in Uttarey will always be memorable — I achieved a personal milestone by completing a five-hour trek to Phoktey Dara, starting from Chewa Bhanjyang at 3,000 metres. The trail began at the Indo-Nepal border, where one is sure to have fun by standing with a foot in each country. This is the favorite spot of adventurers which leads to rugged, scenic vistas and a real taste of trekking. The hardcore trekkers come for the breathtaking views of the — Mt. Everest, Dhaulagiri, Makalu and Lhotse in the west, and Khangchendzonga, Pandim, Kabru, Narsing and Rathong gleaming in the east.

Uttarey is a year-round charmer except the monsoons (June to September). The upcoming months are perfect for experiencing a quiet Himalayan winter and signing up for Chewabangang, Phoktey Dara, Singalila, Phalut, Lavi, and Gochala treks.

If you are visiting Uttarey, Pelling (30 kilometers away) is unmissable for its most amazing views of the Kanchenjunga ranges. I also visited Pelling Skywalk, one of India's highest glass bridges, Pemayangtse Monastery, and Rabdentse Ruins, stopping en route to admire the spectacular Singshore Bridge — one of Asia's highest suspension bridges.

Some places feel like home when you arrive — Uttarey is one of such. Leaving this postcard-perfect village wasn't easy after three delightfully refreshing days of mountain clam, Sikkimese flavours and authenticity.

TREKS WITH BEAUTIFUL VISTAS

Uttarey is a year-round charmer except the monsoons (June to September). The upcoming months are perfect for experiencing a quiet Himalayan winter and signing up for Chewabangang, Phokteydara, Singalila, Phalut, Lavi, and Gochala treks. My milestone was completing a five-hour trek to Phoktey Dara starting at 3000 metres.

VIGNETTES FROM THE AUTOMOTIVE FUTURE

Kushan Mitra recently attended the latest edition of the Japan Mobility Show in Tokyo, and he found that Japanese carmakers are doing some very interesting things

HELD IN TOKYO, THE JAPAN MOBILITY SHOW (EARLIER KNOWN AS TOKYO MOTOR SHOW) IS A PROOF OF HOW JAPAN IS STILL A TOP INNOVATOR IN THE PASSENGER VEHICLE AND TWO-WHEELER WORLD

Tokyo is one of the great cities of the world. It is also thanks to a combination of a weak Yen and instant tax refunds, as it makes Japan one of the best places in the world to go shopping. But that is a story for another time. I had travelled to Tokyo to attend the Japan Mobility Show, the new avatar to the former Tokyo Motor Show.

The show was a highlight of how Japan is still a top innovator in the passenger vehicle and two-wheeler world. I was invited to attend the show by Honda Motor Company but I did make a visit to several of the stalls. Some of the highlights of the show are as below.

HONDA SERIES 0 α

The Honda Series 0 is their big move towards electric mobility. The Series 0 Sedan and SUV with their unconventional design elements took to the stage for the first time in Japan, but it was the latest member of the family, the Series 0 α that took centre stage. This new vehicle will be a big deal for Honda, as it will be exclusively manufactured for the world at their Tapukara plant in Rajasthan. First impressions were that the designers have done a spectacular job, this car really does stand out from the crowd, especially from the rear, with its taillights. The car is more than a concept. The Honda executives told us that it is very close to production and should be launched in early 2027.

THE HONDA 'SUPER-ONE' IS ACTUALLY CLOSE TO PRODUCTION AND HAS REAR DOORS UNLIKE OTHER MICRO-ELECTRIC VEHICLES ON THE MARKET. THIS LOOKS VERY COOL, AND A CAR LIKE THIS MAKES A LOT OF SENSE

HONDA SUPER-ONE EV

Japan is the home of the 'Kei' Car; these are vehicles that are under 3.4 metres in length and have to adhere to extremely strict dimensions and weight norms. And it was only inevitable that the electric 'Kei' car would make its debut at the how, not just from Honda but other carmakers as well. The 'Super-One' is actually close to production and has rear doors unlike other micro-electric vehicles on the market. This definitely looks very cool, and I would completely believe that a car like this makes a lot of sense. With limited power and limited range, perfect for urban commuting and small and convenient to park. But is there a larger market for such cars in India?

SUZUKI VISION E-SKY

The Suzuki stand was full of innovative new concepts — I particularly liked the 'MITRA' autonomous delivery vehicle — not just because of its name.

There was also a four-legged robot, that functioned as a mechanical horse, a mobility assistant to the differently abled and elderly But the big thing for the carmaker was the Vision e-Sky, their concept 'Kei' car. The Japanese carmaker has been at the helm of 'Kei' cars for several decades — the WagonR was created as one.

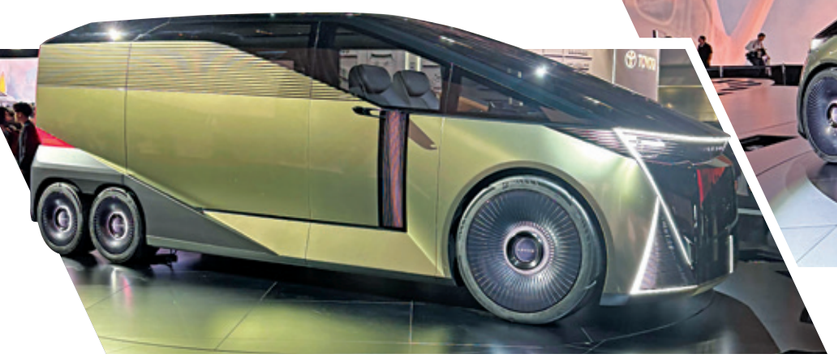
But this new concept from Suzuki is quite futuristic, sustainable materials in the interiors and a single-spoke steering concept. However, Toshihiro Suzuki, the CEO of Suzuki Motor Corporation pretty much ruled out this car coming to India.

BMW X7 'NISHIKI LOUNGE' EDITION AND MINI ACEMAN JCW

Just because it was a Japanese show didn't mean that foreign manufacturers didn't come to play and BMW was there in force with the almost Maybach inspired 'Nishiki Lounge' edition of the X7 SUV with absolutely stunning milky-way themed interiors and the all-electric MINI Aceman JCW, that showcased BMW's progress in performance electric vehicles.

LEXUS LS CONCEPT

This was by far and away the most radical concept of the entire Japan Mobility Show. The Lexus 'Luxury Sedan' is not a sedan anymore, instead it has been transformed into a six-wheel behemoth — a 'luxury space' as Lexus calls it now. The interiors of this vast new concept vehicle seem larger than some small apartments — a completely luxurious space. Lexus did not stop there, they also showcased a three-wheel 'personal mobility' vehicle. Looked ridiculous, but maybe these are the future.



ON DISPLAY WAS THE CENTURY SEDAN, THAT AKIO TOYODA, CHAIRMAN OF TOYOTA MOTOR CORPORATION USES HIMSELF

CENTURY COUPE CONCEPT

Century might not be a brand that you have heard of before, but this previously Japan only brand that actually sits above Lexus showcased an incredible new ultra luxurious 'Coupe-SUV' concept designed for a single passenger and a driver and had reverse sliding doors and an interior inspired by traditional Japanese craftsmanship. Also on display were the Century sedan, an extremely luxurious sedan that Akio Toyoda, Chairman of Toyota Motor Corporation uses himself as well as the Century SUV, a vehicle that could challenge the likes of the Rolls-Royce Cullinan.

TOYOTA KIDSMOBILE

This was the cutest concept. The kids car of the future as imagined by Toyota, a fully-automated robotic vehicle and a twist on the toy cars that children play with.

LAYER UP & STEP OUT

Winter is a mood — cosy, confident and undeniably chic. Nothing defines that mood better than a well-chosen jacket. The right jacket doesn't just protect you from the chill but also elevates your entire look. We've handpicked a selection of jackets that will seamlessly refine your winter wardrobe and ramp up your look.

PLAYFUL PRINTS — LOUIS VUITTON

If you love experimenting with prints and patterns, Louis Vuitton's reversible jackets offer the best of both worlds. You can switch between motifs and neutrals depending on your mood.

CHIC AND TAILORED — CHANEL

For a polished, fashion-forward take, Chanel's belted jackets offer a sophisticated look. The cinched waist and refined detailing give a classy feel, giving you a chic with minimal effort look.

MODERN ESSENTIALS — COS

For sleek bombers and refined funnel-neck jackets, COS is your go-to. The brand's clean design language and high basics make winter dressing feel effortless. With COS having recently opened its first store in India, exploring its carefully curated outerwear has just become easier.

CLASSIC BLACK LEATHER JACKET — ZARA

Head to Zara for a well-curated collection of leather and faux-leather jackets. From sleek minimal cuts to edgy biker shapes, there's something for every mood.

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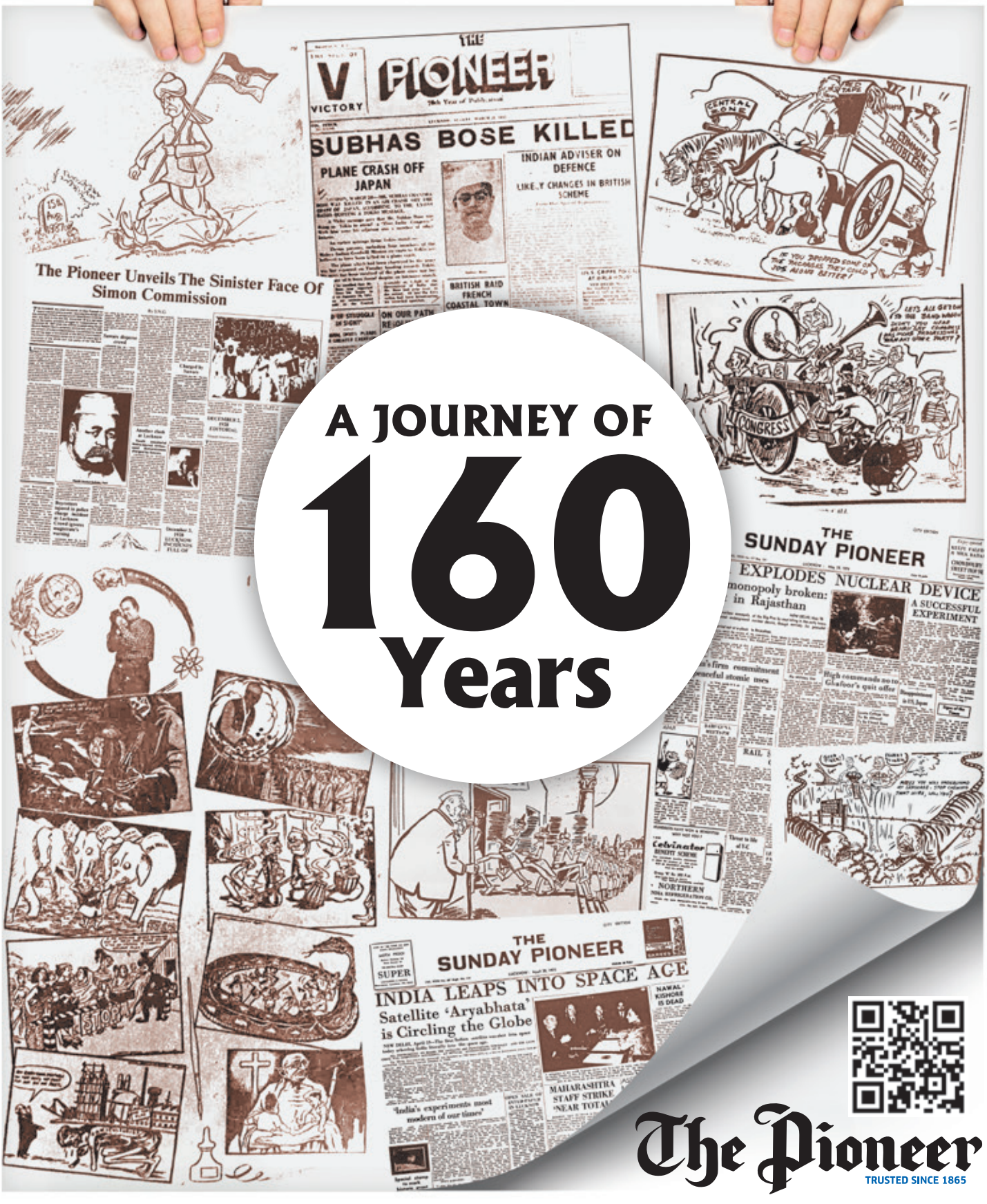

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