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Few things feel as relaxing as a summer retreat, and, in India, the season involves escaping to more hospitable climes and spending quality time with one’s family. Through ‘The Leela Moments’ — a part of ‘The Leela Getaways’, our summer promotions — you can enjoy a family holiday at any of our beautiful resort properties, in either Goa, Udaipur or Kovalam. The other packages include ‘Spa and Spiritual Journey’, at The Leela Palace Udaipur, ‘Ayurveda’, at The Leela Kovalam, and ‘Sights and Culture’, at the three charming resorts.

GVK’s work at the Mumbai airport will boost travel to the metropolis and make it a true gateway city

Let me also take this opportunity to congratulate GVK for their brilliant work at Mumbai’s refurbished international airport. The space constraints GVK had to work with — Mumbai’s airport, much smaller than those of other metros, like Delhi, Chennai, etc, offered little scope for expansion — made this an incredibly challenging project. As an Indian company that has built this world-class piece of infrastructure, GVK is going to inspire many other firms in the country. My compliments to curator Rajeev Sethi, who has conceptualised and designed the much-talked about Art Walk at the airport’s gorgeous T2 terminal.

Another recent development that has filled me with pride is the rave reviews earned by Le Cirque Signature, in Mumbai. An excellent beginning, I say, to the series of new fine dining restaurants that also includes — epicures, take note — the upcoming Le Cirque Signatures in Bangalore and Chennai.

Chairman’s Message

Padma Bhushan Captain C. P. Krishnan Nair
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CONTENTS

12 Luxe Effect
A selection of the season’s classiest watches and eclecticibles

18 Food
The hot trends currently shaping the world of gastronomy

24 Adventure
A biker’s account of a 36-day-long epic trip involving more than 8,000 km

30 Art
Curator and designer Rajeep Sethi talks about the art museum at Mumbai’s swanky airport

44 Books
How talented Indian graphic novelists are experimenting with the genre

50 History
Bangalore Walks is a fun and instructive way of exploring the city

56 Wellness
Experience the magic of Kalari massage at The Leela Kovalam’s Divya Spa

59 Snapshot
The Leela Goa offers an inviting playground for golfing enthusiasts
Time masters
Four suave watches that should be on your wishlist.

**PANERAI**

The Radiomir 8 Days GMT Oro Rosso is an exclusive special edition timepiece which pays tribute to the long history of Panerai by reinterpreting the classic Radiomir. The polished red gold cushion case encloses a dial derived from a rare model from the 1930s, with simple linear and dot hour markers; and the deep blue dial has a satin finish. The sapphire crystal caseback also offers a view of the movement.

**CORUM**

Corum's prestigious Admiral's Cup collection welcomes into its fold the complicated mechanism Caliber CO 100B. It finds a perfect setting in the iconic 12-sided case of the Admiral's Cup, born in 1960 and redesigned recently. The movement also boasts a double tourbillon, combined with a retrograde date and an ingenious time-adjustment device. The case of the Admiral's Cup AC-One Double Tourbillon is available in 18K red gold or grade-5 titanium.

**JAEGER-LECOULTRE**

Recently, Jaeger-LeCoultre revealed its mastery of the arts of engraving and skeletonising with a new limited-edition timepiece: The Master Grande Tradition à Quantième Perpetuel 8 Jours SQ, inspired by a Historical Grande Complication JLC pocket watch from 1928. The skeleton movement is decorated entirely by hand, while the rim of the timepiece is decorated with guilloché work and covered with translucent blue enamel. The openworked dial is housed in a 42mm 18K white gold case, while a sapphire crystal caseback also offers a view of the movement.

**CARL F BUCHERER**

This version of the traditional masterpiece the Manero ChronoPerpetual shows a perpetual calendar date display at 1 o’clock, day of the week at 6 o’clock, month and leap year at 9 o’clock, and moon phase at 3 o’clock. The case flaunts a fine rose gold, a concave bezel, a domed sapphire crystal, as well as a crown and chronograph with push-pieces of 18-carat rose gold.

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Luxe Effect
Eclectibles

From chic sunglasses to an iconic handbag, here’s our selection of the season’s desirables.

**CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN**

It’s time for fire hot red to take centre stage! Going red on the feet may just be the easiest way to incorporate the colour trend this season, and the ‘Jazzy Doll’ shoe by Christian Louboutin will help you do just that. In corazon suede, this braided T-strap style is delicate yet spicy, ideal for the most graceful of women who love to have a good time.

**FENDI**

In commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the brand’s celebrated Pequin pattern, Fendi Eyewear has introduced two limited edition sunglasses. The sophisticated styling of the all-new FS5299R and FS5208R eyepieces displays the iconic logo, which showcases the union of beauty and function, adorned in Swarovski crystals. The luminous pattern comes to life through a complex Swarovski crystal laser technique applied to a base that is covered in gold dust.

**TRUNKS COMPANY JAIPUR**

The rich purple Wine Trunk features two salvers for preparation of drinks, niches to place 12 wine bottles, space to encase wine glasses and three drawers at the center to hold personal wine-tasting tools and accessories.

Handcrafted in leather and suede, complemented by signature teakwood contouring, the bright wine trunk will help you add a streak of opulence and flair to your decor.

**MULBERRY**

A Mulberry icon, the Bayswater bag is a timeless classic that celebrates the very best of understated and delicate leather craft. It features the signature postman’s lock closure, and has a supple, brushed interior. The interior belted sides can be adjusted to give more space inside.

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The opulence and grandeur is normally associated with the royal rajawals of Rajasthan. Their refine taste exudes lavishly in their jewellery and some of its credit goes to Bharatam Rajmol Surana Jewellers of Jaipur, the royal goldsmiths since 1785. The queens and monarchs of that time trusted them most and they also stood true on their expectations and standards. The royal artisans at Suranas would infuse the royal prestige and personal desire to embody uniqueness in an unparalleled range of Kundan & Polki jewellery. They had been patronized with numerous royal families for their immaculate sense and adroit that stands Bharatam Rajmol Surana, an iconic name in the galaxy of royal jewellery.

For the last 25 years, the rich legacy of Jadur Jewellery is taken forward by Kevendra Surana, Saurabh Surana and Aarik Surana from their New Delhi showroom at Greater Kailash-2 with utmost responsibility by infusing the finest & authentic material and cutting edge technology for the creation of unique and distinctive pieces. Their commitment to quality, years of experience and mastery of craft is a true testament of Suranas brilliance as their brand has become Industry Standard of Excellence.

Ankit Surana, the creative director of Surana Jewellers, New Delhi has the same creative fervor as of his ancestors that has won him a great appreciation for his im& immacurate understanding and passion. With harmony and guidance of his father and grandfather, he is unveiling designs which beautifully combine traditional filigree and contemporary techniques. Heer passion for beauty with substance makes their jewels elite and culminates luxuriously on patron's expectations. Precisely, Surana jewellers keeps everything from vintage to modern designs in their beautiful treasure trove.

These masterpieces of jewels are showcased at Bharatam Rajmol Surana & Sons, M-26, Greater Kailash-2 Market, New Delhi-110048 Tel : +91-11-29217388, 29213672. Mob : +91-9716684006, 9811035534, email : surana@surana@hotmail.com
Christophe Gillino, The Leela Palace New Delhi’s Executive Chef, has transformed what could be just another standard-issue pave (prime grilled steak) of salmon with the addition of leek fondue, goat cheese, beetroot reduction and lentil risotto.

Food

Keep it simple

Chefs have had their share of nouvelle cuisine, fusion food and molecular gastronomy. Back to the basics is their new mantra, as they dunk gimmicks out of the window. “Simple dishes surprise people because it is hard to transform the everyday into the extraordinary,” says Mehrotra, who is widely considered the country’s most inventive interpreter of traditional cuisine. Not surprisingly, Mehrotra revels in turning even a most commonplace dish like baingan bharta (mashed smoked aubergine) into an experience by serving it in spiced cornetto cups with a goat cheese emulsion on top.

The Leela Palace New Delhi’s Executive Chef, Christophe Gillino, a Frenchman from Avignon who has spent many years in the kitchens of Alain Ducasse and Alain Senderens, calls this “thinking out of the box”. His silky and seductive bisque-bouille, which deconstructs the old-fashioned seafood soup, bouillabaisse,
with fish catch from the Bay of Bengal, is an example of a French classic presented in a way that is both wholesome and pleasing to the eye.

Chefs cannot change the way the ingredients look or taste just to make the presentation pretty. Accentuate the colours, but preserve the integrity of the ingredients with slow cooking, advises Gillino. “Pizza is the only thing you cook fast,” he says.

The tradition trap

The Leela Group’s Corporate Pastry Chef, Avijit Ghosh, who has trained at the famous Parisian school Le Notre, and is a brand ambassador of the chocolate brand Callebaut, shows how it is possible to turn around a traditional favourite — the pineapple pastry we all have grown up with — without altering the flavours it’s associated with. Ghosh could have kept serving it the familiar way, but he chose to make it a layered experience — vanilla sponge, pineapple mousse, vanilla sponge yet again, pineapple compote with cream, and a pineapple glaze on top. Here you get to taste pineapple in different textures, a more rounded experience on the palate.

“Old tastes, new forms” is the credo of the pastry chef. His black forest cake comes with a chocolate wraparound, and layers of vanilla mousse and cherries followed by chocolate mousse and cherries, and is garnished with cherries and gold leaf on top.

Taste comes first

You can get mustard off the shelf at any department store, but Mehrotra insists on getting kashundi (the slightly pungent mustard sauce Bengalis love to use) from a vegetable vendor in his East Delhi neighbourhood, who sells it in whisky quarter bottles. None of the international brands, the chef insists, taste as good as kashundi, which Mehrotra serves with capers.

Manish Mehrotra is widely considered the country’s finest interpreter of traditional cuisine.

Manish Mehrotra serves baingan bharta (mashed smoked aubergine) in spiced cornetto cups with a goat cheese emulsion on top.

The German ‘black forest’ kirschtorte (cherry cake) by Avijit Ghosh, the Leela Group’s Corporate Pastry Chef.

Mehrotra serves baingan bharta (mashed smoked aubergine) in spiced cornetto cups with a goat cheese emulsion on top.

Birdhichand Ghanshyamdas Jewellers

Art reincarnated...
along with his now-famous dish arbi (colocasia) bitterballen, a cheeky reinterpretation of the Dutch meat balls made with minced herf or veal.

“Taste is the base,” says Gillino, who employs the sous-vide technique. Sous vide allows Gillino’s team of chefs to cook meats at less than 68 degrees Celsius, which means each portion get uniformly cooked and retains its original flavours and juices, even if it is well-done. The technique saves money as well: meats tend to lose 30 per cent of their weight in traditional cooking methods; the loss with sous-vide is 15 per cent. It is the same concern for taste that makes Ghosh opt for Elle & Vire cream and butter, use quick frozen berries and purées from Europe, and settle for nothing but Arriba, the single-origin buttery milk chocolate from the north-west of Ecuador. The days of ‘fusion confusion’ are far behind us.

Think global, act local
A two-time James Beard-award winner, Sarah Stegner’s philosophy of “putting ingredients first” has earned Prairie Grass Cafe, the Chicago eatery she owns, a good measure of critical acclaim. Stegner was among the few who started a farmers’ market in the heart of the city about 15 years ago to provide access to local food, much before the expression ‘farm to fork’ and the ‘locavore’ movement became fashionable, and she continues to swear by the philosophy. “Local food, when fresh and well-handled, tastes vibrant and delicious. That is the principal reason I use local produce. It makes my customers happy!” says Stegner.

No place for angry chefs
Anger management is the new big thing in the world’s most prized kitchens. The state of mind of the people who cook for you makes a critical difference to what you get on your plate. The matter came up for discussion at the international chefs’ forum held in conjunction with the aforesaid Asia’s 50 Best awards. “Happy people cook meals that make people happy,” emphasised two renowned chefs, recalls Mehrotra, at the forum. Traditionally, chefs have revelled in being nasty and abusive to their underlings in the kitchen; for women, it has been worse — as Gordon Ramsay’s protege and chef-patron of Cafe Murano, Angela Hartnett, once said, a woman working in a restaurant kitchen has to live with not only four-letter words being hurled all around her, but also having her back slapped by the men. As chefs get more entrepreneurial, they are also becoming more sensitive towards their staff. “You can be a dictator, but you can’t be insulting,” Mehrotra says. “There’s a difference between discipline and abuse.” It’s no longer cool to be a chef from hell.
Last year, bike aficionado and photography enthusiast Om Vaikul set himself a daunting challenge: he would ride solo all the way up to the Himalayas from Mumbai. Here, he reminisces about the epic 36-day, 8000-km trip.

The motorcycle diaries

Last year, bike aficionado and photography enthusiast Om Vaikul set himself a daunting challenge: he would ride solo all the way up to the Himalayas from Mumbai. Here, he reminisces about the epic 36-day, 8000-km trip.

‘I didn’t choose it. It chose me’: this is what I often say about my relationship with motorcycling. My dream is to experience the roads of every Indian state, and, over the past 10 years, I have biked across Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Goa, and a little bit of Karnataka. I have covered almost every place in the radius of 500 km from my hometown, Mumbai. I have exhausted five motorcycles. The very first bike I owned was a Hero Honda Karizma, the second a Bajaj Pulsar 220F, the third a Hero Impulse. Then I got myself the mighty Kawasaki Ninja 250R. And then a Royal Enfield Thunderbird 500.

The last — with its 20 litres large fuel tank and tried and tested 500cc engine — I had bought specifically for my epic solo ride to the Himalayas from Mumbai, which I did in September-October last year. In these 36 days, where I biked across the mountain region, I quenched my thirst for photography. Seven states, nine valleys and nine mountain passes — I notched up a total 8000+ kms.

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Dangerous terrain
I entered Ladakh from Kinnaur side. My bike was pretty new, so I took it slow by exploring some offbeat places like Chail, Kufri, Solang, Narkanda before moving towards the Sangla Valley. This also helped my body adapt to the increasing altitude. From Sangla, I went to the Spiti Valley, about 75-80 km away: a mesmerising route.

At the start of the stretch, I was, quite aptly, welcomed with the sign “You are travelling on one of the most treacherous roads in the world” put up by the Border Roads Organisation. The tarmac route ends at the district Reckong Peo, from which begins an uneven dirt trail. It’s a single-lane road, so, if any vehicle comes from the opposite direction, then one has to get a little off the trail to pass. Moreover, the stretch runs parallel to a river, with you forever moving to a higher elevation — it’s a straight down. The towering mountains lean toward the road, at places washed away and caved in, for many miles. The tumbling debris from them can knock you out anytime.

An undefiled heaven
If 100 people head to Ladakh, a favourite of bikers, only one will go till the end of the Zanskar Valley, which is sandwiched between Kashmir and the Ladakh range. Nothing in the
Himalayas, I say, is as colorful as Zanskar — an amazing 330-km off-road ride from Kargil. You hardly find people here, and vehicles pass by only once in four-five hours. The only town in Zanskar is Padum, near the end of the valley.

Dining with the monks
Because the trip involved many stretches where there would be no civilisation, I had stocked up on biscuits and chocolates. I refilled my supply at villages where I could find stores.

Many homestays in the Himalayan region serve you excellent food. They cook with the utmost dedication and feed you generously. Sure, there are plenty of hotels, but nothing is more blissful than dining with a family there. One of my most memorable homestays was in Leh, where the house lady did not allow me, for each of the four days, to leave the compound until I had had a breakfast with them. During checkout, I was pleasantly surprised that they hadn’t charged me a single rupee for the food. In the Karsha Monastery, in Zanskar, I met an aged monk who insisted I wait there. I did not understand his language, but someone told me he wants me to have lunch with him. Boiled eggs, steamed white rice, boiled potatoes and some herbal tea — it was food served with love.
Airports spark nostalgia for Rajeev Sethi. A story he very rarely tells the world but decided to reveal to us, in a spontaneous moment, has to do with a certain Mrs Gandhi. Indira Gandhi, to be precise.

It was 1982, and India was hosting a peace conference to be attended by powerful heads from different countries, including some whose worldviews were not compatible. Mrs Gandhi was keen to keep them out of one another’s path, and invited Sethi to create spaces within the airport where they could be thus welcomed. “Mahatma Gandhi once said he wants a house with a room that has a lot of doors and windows left open to allow winds of the world to flow in and sweep him of his feet. That was the germ of the idea. I created spaces that were divided by these doors and windows, but on them, I placed sculptures of white pigeons since this was a peace talk.” Those were the days when the international airport could be shut down for a project like this just because the prime minister said so.

It was on the outer glass façade that Sethi wanted MF Hussain to paint the pigeons. Mrs Gandhi wasn’t sure. So she summoned her son Rajiv (Gandhi), who had nothing to do with politics then. She asked him if the painted pigeons would attract the real ones, who could end up colliding with the glass. “I won’t forget the scene. Mrs Gandhi was this imperious woman. But Rajiv nonchalantly dismissed her fear with a ‘Don’t be silly, Mummy’ comment.”

Humour aside, the Indira Gandhi International Airport project got Sethi a lot of international media attention. And, over the years, his firm Rajeev Sethi Scenographers has worked on several high-profile projects, to revive, restore and contemporise several traditional Indian arts and crafts, including performance arts — ‘Festivals of India’ in cities like London and New York that drew attention to the country’s heritage when the country wasn’t very influential on the global scene; jaw-dropping exhibitions like the spectacular ‘The Silk Road’ in the US, in the 80s, for which he gathered art, artefacts, textiles and cultural milestones from, aside from India, countries like China and Uzbekistan, the interiors of the Shah House, an opulent mansion in Mumbai, with its alchemy of arts, crafts, textiles and Indian architectural skills…. And what he considers his most significant ones: “When I was eight or nine, those Janmashtami jhakis I made, or when I reconfigured things in my house so that they were effortlessly integrated into the architecture or the landscape of the house,” he laughs, twirling a curl from a headfull, adjusting his beautiful blue shawl.

His most stunning work, though, has to be the art project or programme he has put together for the GVK-built T2 terminal, at Mumbai’s international airport, whose first phase opened recently. It is already being likened to a significant public art museum, the biggest India can boast of. It is a veritable feat of engineering and design, in which the past and the present merge, creating a visual symphony.

We are meeting at a mock-up studio in the traffic-ridden Andheri (East) suburb of Mumbai, where he put together the project with a young team and over 100 artisans and...
The first phase of the project, called Jaya He, has two sections. The first, Layered Narratives, encompasses the arrival area and has commissioned works from artists like Alexis Kersey, Jagannath Panda and Gulam Muhammed Sheikh that attempt to interpret Mumbai, with its high rises, slums and its overwhelming urban fabric.

The second section, Thresholds of India, stretches over a three-kilometre long gigantic wall and is thematically arranged, with art and sculptures spread across a U-shaped space that has a west and an east end. This is where you will encounter several centuries of India. Walk down the west end and you run into the first theme, India Elements, which personifies the Indian philosophy of panchabhuta. There are installations that represent space — constellations which can be simulated with lights so that they pulsate, and motorised chimes made of aluminium by a Pondicherry-based sound artist. The air segment has a signature piece by Sethi (he has over 20 signature pieces across the project), which has been inspired by Jaipur’s Hawa Mahal. The fire segment has sculptures created from handmade glass by Mumbai-based artist Kayur Patel, which mimic ice sculptures and look like lamps frozen in time. The water segment has an installation "For us, it is like breathing. We wear art, we live art, we are adorned by it," says Sethi with strings of water flowing down from spouts, which you can touch and play with to create music. From here, there is a smooth transition to the 'India global' section, featuring installations of old and new objects, brought together to represent the ever-changing Mumbai. Then there is a transition space in which architectural elements like pillars and brackets from the Art Deco era have been incorporated, after which begins ‘India Silent Sentinels’, with architectural elements of protection from traditional buildings — murals from the homes of the Koli tribe in Kerala, and totems from homes in the northeast India, set to the backdrop of beautiful textures of the Naga shawl painted on the wall behind. You then move past the self-explanatory ‘India Greets’ section, featuring painted theatre curtains, which were once part of the backdrop of traditional Marathi theatre and have been recreated for the airport by Mumbai-based artist Moreshwar Patil, besides a long stretch that has intricate works representing the lotus by Madhubani and Patachitra (Orissa) artists.

'India Greets’ continues to the east zone of the wall, which also hosts ‘India Seamless’, a set of installations that resulted from a unique collaboration between contemporary artists and craftspeople of Kashmir, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan and Bengal. Expect collaborative work by Pondicherry and Chennai artists, Krishnanagar pottery from Kolkata, and works by artists of the Patua community from West Bengal. But the most innovative and bizarre section has to be the ‘India Moves’ one. Taking the theme literally, Sethi’s team has put together raths, vahanas, palkhis, palanquins, boats and the mythical udan khatolas (ancient aircrafts), crafted by Sethi himself out of paper mâché and painted by artist Madhvi Patish along with her counterparts from Gond.

There are several artefacts strewn around the space — painted masks from Kerala, entire carved facades of traders’ homes from Gujarat…. but each one will bring India a little
bit closer to you without appearing clichéd. The lines between folk and contemporary art is blurred: folk art has been scaled up to such proportions that it loses its traditional context and becomes modern. Sethi, a man with infectious enthusiasm, says he never felt fazed by the scale of the project. He took it up because G V Sanjay Reddy, the vice-chairman of GVK Power and Infrastructure, told him he wanted an art project that “was completely crazy and driven by the crafts of India. You don’t hear young people talk like that anymore.” All the same, Sethi believes that India continues to be rich in art. “For us, it is like breathing. We wear art, we live art, we are adorned by it. The entire country is like a living museum. Even our streets — look at the graffiti or traditional signage that continues to be used. We just translated a bit of that in the airport.”

For the project, Sethi went on a shopping spree across the country, besides commissioning a few artists to come up with original works. In the next phase, the over 40 million air travellers who are estimated to pass through T2 every year will encounter a white automated peacock puppet flying a circle on the hour, and a wooden verandah from an old home that will have a contemporary installation of a woman weaving in and out of the columns. “I like the idea of a liminal space — neither inside nor outside,” he muses. In another jharokha, an artist will install cameras inside the shutters that will photograph travellers as they walk by and project their faces back on to the façade. Over 7,000 art objects, including antiquities procured form 27 states, will eventually be on display.

The second phase will also include installations on India’s fashion heritage and textiles — chintz, brocades, embroidery, et al — by 12 designers, to be placed near the baggage claim. “Between these rivers of bags, you will have this central catwalk celebrating India’s earliest cargo: textiles,” says Sethi.
The artisans who worked on the project were given iPhones and asked to make films and document their work, which will be accessible to visitors by clicking on to the artworks’ signages at the airport. “Each work, each piece has been digitally documented. We have done everything a museum would have done,” says Sethi.

Sethi calls T2 the new gateway of Mumbai. In every century, the entrance point to the city has changed. “Once it was Bassein, a port to the north of the city. No one goes there anymore. Then the British built the Gateway of India and now it is a monument. Mumbai needed a new gateway, a new entry point,” he says.

For Sethi, the journey of public art projects in unusual, non-gallery spaces like hotels and airports that began at The Leela Ambience Gurgaon (then Leela Kempinski) has brought him to T2. He fondly remembers the Leela project, the first of its kind in India, for which over 150 craftspersons had created several installations, while India’s best-known photographer, Raghu Rai, had shot several striking images of artisans that are now found in the rooms and suites.

“The Leela project began with a poem, like most others do,” he recalls. “At that time, Gurgaon was already on its way to becoming a concrete sprawl. The poem hoped that it wouldn’t… Raghu’s photographs documented what we thought would unfortunately be the last of the artisans to be seen in Gurgaon, before cement and concrete took over.” Sethi, who has worked abroad with legends like designer Pierre Cardin, mentored by names like Ray and Charles Eames and won the Padma Bhushan for his immense contribution to the crafts, design and art, says that The Leela Gurgaon project allowed him to explore art in a way he had never done before. “It was the first time in India that art was being made for a public space like a hotel. Not just bought, but commissioned and made. It helped me take the arts and crafts out of the hallowed spaces they had been consigned to. Art cannot shrivel and shrink into investment portfolios or disappear into godowns and galleries.”

Since then, Sethi has done several public art projects, but nothing, obviously, of the expansive scale of T2. He likens this art project in the middle of a city with very little space to “doing a heart transplant on a man who is on a treadmill and about to collapse”.

The Blue musical water fountain installation at T2

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For Sethi, the journey of public art projects in unusual, non-gallery spaces like hotels and airports that began at The Leela Ambience Gurgaon (then Leela Kempinski) has brought him to T2. He fondly remembers the Leela project, the first of its kind in India, for which over 150 craftspersons had created several installations, while India’s best-known photographer, Raghu Rai, had shot several striking images of artisans that are now found in the rooms and suites.

“The Leela project began with a poem, like most others do,” he recalls. “At that time, Gurgaon was already on its way to becoming a concrete sprawl. The poem hoped that it wouldn’t… Raghu’s photographs documented what we thought would unfortunately be the last of the artisans to be seen in Gurgaon, before cement and concrete took over.” Sethi, who has worked abroad with legends like designer Pierre Cardin, mentored by names like Ray and Charles Eames and won the Padma Bhushan for his immense contribution to the crafts, design and art, says that The Leela Gurgaon project allowed him to explore art in a way he had never done before. “It was the first time in India that art was being made for a public space like a hotel. Not just bought, but commissioned and made. It helped me take the arts and crafts out of the hallowed spaces they had been consigned to. Art cannot shrivel and shrink into investment portfolios or disappear into godowns and galleries.”

Since then, Sethi has done several public art projects, but nothing, obviously, of the expansive scale of T2. He likens this art project in the middle of a city with very little space to “doing a heart transplant on a man who is on a treadmill and about to collapse”.

’Silent Ways’ by artist Dilip Chobisa at T2
If one was to take a survey to find out how Goa is commonly perceived, the list of responses is bound to read like a description of some utopia—Stunning holiday destination, mesmerising beaches, curious history, dazzling range of music, partying hotspot, water sports unlimited, fantastic cuisine and culture hub. Indeed, India’s smallest state has something to offer for all kinds of travellers — be it families, honeymooning couples, backpackers, art connoisseurs, gourmands, history buffs, or adventure junkies — and, what’s more, it has something to offer during all seasons. The charm of Goa is hard to pin down, but here is our selection of the must-dos for those who want to get an authentic flavour of the destination.

Architecture

In Goa, the Portuguese built houses and monuments that reflect a style rarely found in the Indian subcontinent. The coastal state has homes dating back to the 17th century, which are still occupied by the present generation of the original owners. This beach paradise also has a rich minefield of historical landmarks, grand temples and stunning forts.

Menezes-Braganza house

Built in the 17th century, this rambling mansion located at Chandor in southern Goa is the former home of Luis De Menezes Braganza, who was involved in Goa’s freedom movement. Braganza inherited the house from Francis Xavier Braganza, who was not only knighted by Queen Maria II and King Ferdinand II of Portugal, but was also issued the royal coat of arms by the Council of Nobility in Lisbon. A couple of generations later, the house was split halfway and handed over to the two sisters in the family, who named them after their respective husbands — Menezes Branganza (west wing) and Braganza Pereira (east wing), and is still occupied by descendants of the families.

The Portuguese-style fascia with 24 windows, the longest in Goa, is an entry point to both the wings. The Petite Chapel, which is still in use, houses a nail of St. Francis Xavier, while the massive ballroom displays two chairs bearing the coat of arms gifted by the Portuguese king. The elegant heritage home doubles as an antique museum with its treasure of crystal, porcelain, paintings, period furniture and other antiques. It also houses the largest private library in Goa, boasting 5,000 books in English, French and Portuguese. There is no entry fee and tourists can visit the house any day between 9 am to 5 pm. For the maintenance of this grand heritage estate, there is a small box where you can leave money at your discretion.

Sacred sites

Goa has a legacy of sacred architecture that includes magnificent churches, temples and mosques. A unique feature of the Goan temple is the lamp tower or deepastamb—a seven storey lamp tower that stands in front of the main entrance and is lighted on special religious festivals. Another interesting aspect is the Christian and Mughal influences on its architecture.

The most important temples in Goa are of Lord Mangueshi, Goddess Shantadurga (Kavllem), Goddess Mahalaxmi (Bardez), Lord Gopali (Kandola), Goddess Mahakali (Mardol), Lord Chandreshwar Bhutnath (Paroda), Lord Damodar (Zambaulim), Lord Makkarkin (Canacona) and Goddess Shantadurga Kunkolkarin (Fatorda).

A trip to the gypsy-paradise would be incomplete without an experience of its magnificent churches. Old Goa, especially, is resplendent with churches, ruins and chapels of unrivaled architectural splendor — earning it the title of the ‘Rome of the East.’ From among a great number of gorgeous churches, one can visit the Basilica of Bom Jesus where the mortal remains of St. Francis Xavier are preserved in a silver casket that was wrought by Goan silversmiths around 1616, or admire the grandeur of Se Cathedral which is the largest church in India. Built to commemorate the victory of the Portuguese over a Muslim army in 1510, it features Portuguese

Promotion
Goa in the rain

Once you’ve had your fill of the sun, sand and surf coupled with its architectural treasures, a whole new magical experience awaits you. Monsoon is when nature thrives, the rain brings with it a scent of romance, and Goa takes on a more natural demeanour.

You can walk through flourishing paddy fields bordering empty, palm-lined roads or lounge at a local eatery with the roar of the ocean for company — it is an experience you will never forget. For those in quest of a break from the concrete jungle, Goa in the rain brings with it a whole new magical experience await others. The lower part of the fort is the central jail of Goa and is visible from the sea if you hire one of the many motor boats to go to the dolphin point. With its rich history, gorgeous façade, captivating tales surrounding it, secret features to explore and an exquisite view, Fort Aguada is ideal for an early morning walk, a day of adventure or a quiet evening watching the sunset.

Dudhsagar Falls

One of the most scenic cascades in India, Dudhsagar is listed as India’s 5th tallest waterfall — 220m in height. Originating high up on the river Mandovi’s watershed, the four-tiered waterfall takes a sharp plunge 2,000 feet down in the mountains of the grand Briganza Ghat. During the monsoon season, the splendour of the waterfall is a beautiful sight. Legend has it that the waterfall was once the abode of a beautiful princess who used to drink sweetened milk from a golden jug after bathing. One day, she was embarrassed on spotting a prince watching her, and poured the milk to form a curtain that hid her. Dudhsagar, literally means ‘Sea of Milk’.

The monsoon trek from Castle Rock railway station to the waterfall is the most popular way to reach the falls. At about 14 km long, the long trek offers amazing views of the valley, passing through eleven tunnels and two abandoned stations.

Sao Joao celebrations

No one loves the rain like the Goans do. Around the first week of June, coinciding with the arrival of the monsoon season, the festival of Sao Joao is celebrated all over the state. People of all ages jump into wells, streams and ponds to retrieve gifts thrown in by the rest of the village members.

The significance of the event lies in the Bible, which tells the story of John the Baptist as a foetus leaping for joy in his mother’s womb when she was visited by Mary who had just conceived Jesus. San Joao or St John the Baptist, later baptized Jesus Christ in the River Jordan. The jump into the well is to signify John’s jump of joy when he sensed the presence of Jesus Christ, even in his mother’s womb.

Like any other Goan fiesta, Sao Joao has an enchanting spirit of gaiety, colour and folklore. People dressed in colourful outfits from several villages meet near streams in carnival-like boats and floats, while the young and old sing and dance together with exquisite coronets of flowers on their heads.

Savoi spice plantation

Over 200 years old and covering an area of a hundred acres, the Savoi spice plantation is a stunning organic farm where guests can enjoy nature at its very best. Situated in the valley village of Savoi, 25 kms from Panaji, the plantation is reached by an enchanting drive from Ponda through the dense jungles.

Here, you can see and taste from a variety of plants, fruits and spices like pepper and clove plants, cinnamon, vanilla pods, lemon grass, enormous grapefruits, mangoes, jalapeno peppers, cardamom, basil and much more. The guides will educate you about the ways by which everything is processed for consumption. While on the tour, you can indulge in bird-watching and explore the cashew distillation unit. The tour comes to a close with a feast of Goan Saraswat cuisine, featuring food items like fried mussels, prawn and fish curries, stuffed crab, fresh vegetables from the plantation, yoghurt and fresh fruit. Guests can also stay in the farmhouse on the property.
Discover many shades of Goa.
And many hues of your heart.

Log on to www.goa-tourism.com
now for exciting packages!
A reinterpretation of the Mahabharata, a skewering of greed and materialism, superheroes enduring powercuts — 

Deepti Unni surveys how talented Indian graphic novelists are experimenting with the genre.

Sketch masters

George Mathen’s Legends of Halahala is driven entirely by visuals.
Amruta Patil’s Adi Parva is the first part of the trilogy retelling the Mahabharata. A further fillip to the genre was provided by Amruta Patil’s Kari (2007). A post-bildungsroman that followed the life and times of the protagonist and dealt with the themes of alienation, sexual orientation and urban angst, Kari was dark but accessible. Patil was soon toasted as the brave feminine voice of Indian graphic novels. But, even as critics were looking to categorise her work within the boundaries of the familiar, she had already moved from the urban landscape of her debut work to a new narrative of the Mahabharata, through the Parva trilogy. The first work of this retelling of the epic, Adi Parva, is out, and Saup tik Parva is scheduled to be released later this year.

Patil’s voice, from Kari to Parva, has changed tremendously — from an almost hipster, occasionally awkward, cool to one that doesn’t play to the gallery, effortlessly straddling the line between reverence and self-deprecation. Adi Parva’s art draws as much from Sandro Boticelli as it does from Indian silk screen prints, but the book is more textually led than visually, and its refusal to play by the perceived norms of graphic novels is perhaps its greatest strength.

But the genre, of course, isn’t just dead serious storytelling. Basu, who worked with Richard Branson’s Virgin Comics on the Devi anthology, a series that reimagined goddess Durga as a mythological superhero, recently (2013) released his own graphic novel, Local Monsters. The book subverts the stereotypes of the superhero genre by telling of the day to day lives of superheroes grappling, not with saving the world, but with paying electricity bills and negotiating with nosy neighbours.

"As someone who has moved cities often, I wanted to capture the essence of the struggle. The first year in any new city is hell, so I wanted to explore how a superhero handles power cuts and making rent on time alongside saving the day."

Taking yet another angle on traditional storytelling in comics is the acclaimed Bengaluru-based graphic novelist and artist George Mathen aka Appupen. Mathen’s first graphic novel, Moonward, satirised the greed, materialism and skewed relationships of contemporary society through the mythical world of Halahala.

Moonward was almost entirely visual, having as it did minimal narrative text, and Mathen’s second novel, Legends of Halahala, eschews words altogether. “I started by making murals and paintings in Mumbai, and I realised I wanted to..."
“I am not a writer — with words, I don’t have a clear voice — I am much more comfortable working with the visual medium.”

— George Mathen

tell stories,” says Mathen of his foray into graphic novels. “I was working in advertising, Bollywood production, and, then, in animation, and I saw there was no scope to tell my own stories. I am not a writer — with words, I don’t have a clear voice — I am much more comfortable working with the visual medium.”

Mathen was discovered by the Chennai-based publisher Blaft, which first saw his work online. Blaft has an interesting roster of writers and publications, from Tamil pulp fiction to Nigerian soayya (romance) books. Another independent publishing house encouraging talented artists and writers is the Bengaluru-based Manta Ray Comics, whose motto is ‘Amplify interesting voices’. Founded by mechanical engineers Pratheek Thomas and Dileep Cherian, the firm’s first offering, in 2011, was Hush, a non-linear, silent comic that dealt with the themes of violence and child abuse. Apart from bringing out printed comics, Manta Ray Comics has also been publishing online anthologies that feature upcoming artists. Their weekly full-page comic The Small Picture appears in the financial newspaper Mint every Friday.

At the same time, events like the annual Comic Con provide spaces, even if not very large ones, for these publishers to showcase their work to an audience that’s significantly more receptive. “In the last three years, Indian artists at Comic Con have gone up to about 15 from about five. And, in the last five years, more and more books are being sold online and at Comic Conventions than in bookstores,” says Jatin Varma, founder of the Indian Comics Convention, which has held four editions so far, in Mumbai, Delhi and Bengaluru. Varma set up Comic Con in 2011 as an experiment: “I used to publish a magazine called Random, which was similar to the iconic Mad magazine and we used to complain about having no avenues to sell or showcase it. Plus it was ridiculously expensive for comic fans to travel to international events.” Interest in the convention quickly grew, and today it’s a showcase not just for graphic novels, but also for movie and gaming merchandise, toys and even TV shows.

Though at present the Indian graphic novels industry isn’t so much an industry as a series of individual triumphs, there is hope that it will coalesce into a significant literary movement, with artists breaking out of the local scene and making their mark internationally.
The Bull Temple is one of Bengaluru’s oldest.

Walking enlightenment

From visiting ancient cave temples to learning about how the city’s famous gardens come to be, Bangalore Walks is a fun and instructive way of exploring the city.

By Akhila Ranganna

Bangalore Walks is a programme that enables you to go adventuring among fascinating stories connected to the history and culture of the city. It is the brainchild of Indian Institute of Management Bangalore graduate Arun Pai. Pai — who previously worked for consulting giant Arthur Anderson, and later as a venture capitalist — was inspired by a walking tour that he took in London in 2004. The following year, with a seed capital of Rs 10,000 Pai, started organising free weekend walking tours of Mahatma Gandhi (MG) Road. Three months later, a fee of Rs 500 per person was introduced, a rate that remains to this day. Thanks to word-of-mouth publicity, more than 15,000 people have been on these walks. Corporations such as IBM, Volvo and Accenture are among Pai’s clients, and his list of endorsers includes former Infosys chairman Narayana Murthy. There are four different types of walks on offer: The Green Heritage Walk in Lal Bagh, the Victorian Bangalore Walk on MG Road, the Traditional Walk in Basavanagudi and The Medieval Bangalore Walk. The Green Heritage, Victorian and Traditional walks happen on Sundays, and start at 7 a.m; The Medieval Bangalore Walk is a weekday walk for groups of 10 or more.

The Victorian Bangalore Walk

The only ‘history’ that most people would be aware about MG Road was that it was laid by the British and was originally christened South Parade. But did you know that the Trinity Church, which marks the beginning of the road, was where William Lambton stood when measuring the exact altitude of Bengaluru, as part of his historic venture, the Great Trigonometric Survey of India? Pai takes you through more such delightful trivia as he attempts to give a sense of what MG Road was before it morphed into the glass and concrete, traffic-locked jungle, and, through all this, a picture of 19th century Bengaluru. Close your eyes and be transported to the time Lord Cornwallis’ army marched down the area of MG Road to attack Sultan’s Bangalore fort in Kalasipalayam. Learn why most windows in the bungalows in those days had a wooden peak above them — to deter monkeys from sitting on them.

Bengaluru, according to Pai, is the only city in India where trees bloom for nine months a year, and its climate played a key role in attracting immigrant population. The Tamilians settled in Halasuru, then the British — Bengaluru
remains one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the country with a thriving expat population.

The Green Heritage Walk in Lal Bagh

Led by Vijay R Thiruvady, this walk delves into the fascinating history of how one of Bangalore’s most popular gardens came into existence. The famous Lal Bagh Rock, from where the walk begins, is actually a peninsular gneiss dating back 3000 million years. Thiruvady talks about how Lal Bagh originally began as an Islamic garden of red roses planted by Hyder Ali in 1760. It was further expanded by his son Tipu Sultan, who imported saplings from distant lands, and was then taken over by the British, after they defeated Sultan. Lal Bagh continued to grow with additions such as the Glass House (modelled after the Crystal Palace in London’s Hyde Park). Thiruvady’s passion is infectious as he transforms Lal Bagh into a treasure trove of compelling trivia. Check out the Palmyra Palm, on whose fan-shaped leaves, as per Thiruvady, old Indian manuscripts were written. Transport yourself 15,000 miles east to the island of New Caledonia, whose araucaria tree has made Lal Bagh its home. Suddenly, you view the place with a totally different perspective. And what makes this walk all the more special is the breakfast it ends with — at the iconic Mavalli Tiffen Rooms (MTR). “I cannot remember when I have had such a delightful time re-exploring a venue I thought I knew intimately,” said noted Indian playwright-actor Girish Karnad of the Lal Bagh walk.

The Traditional Walk in Basavanagudi

If MG Road reflects the city’s cosmopolitan present, Basavanagudi is the bastion of traditional Bengaluru. And as you walk through the parks, busy marketplaces, and temples, you get a sense of the real soul of the city. Visit an ancient cave temple, gaze at old-style houses, walk through narrow lanes with the smell of filter coffee surrounding you. Visit one of the oldest idli cafes in the city, surround yourself with the resplendent flowers on sale in the local market, and sample the local fare. Walk through the Bugle Rock park, full of greensery, bright flowers, colonies of bats and jaubering monkeys. And, finally, gaze at the magnificent Nandi in the Bull Temple (the bull who was the favoured mode of transport to Lord Shiva), one of the largest such statues in the world. Immerse yourself in the Bengaluru of yore, before it was hit by the IT boom: traditional and unhurried.

The Medieval Bangalore Walk

Did you know that the name ‘Bengaluru’ originated from ‘bende kaalu ooru’, meaning ‘the town of boiled beans’? Or that the city began life as a 16th century fort town? Legend has it that the feudal master, and man considered to be the founder of the city, Kempe Gowda, after witnessing the ‘miraculous’ event of a hare chasing a hound, concluded Bengaluru to be a holy place and built his mud fort there with nine huge gates. Walk through the Old City, the ‘pete’ (market) areas, still home to bustling clusters of wholesale markets, and relive the early days of the city.

For more details, log on to www.bangalorewalks.com or email on bangalorewalks@gmail.com. Bookings can be done on the phone (9845523360 / 9845068416), via email, or through the above website.

"I cannot remember when I have had such a delightful time re-exploring a venue I thought I knew intimately”

— Girish Karnad, Playwright and Actor
HOW WE GOT FERRARI TO SLOW DOWN.

When it comes to corporate events, there are few properties as stunning as The Leela’s. Our breathtaking venues combine legendary flair with state-of-the-art business infrastructure, making us a favourite with some of the leading corporates of the world. All you need to do is stop and take it all in.
Thousands of years ago, the exponents of Kalaripayattu, an Indian martial art, were using a host of healing techniques to keep themselves strong, supple and alert. Fusing this esoteric knowledge with contemporary luxury, Divya Spa at The Leela Kovalam is bringing the Kalari massage into vogue.

By Jaideep Dave

In 2010, I had travelled to Bengaluru to do a feature on mixed martial arts. I was writing about an academy which was running a brutal fight club on weekends — yes, inspired by that cult film, this was a place where all sorts of men, wrestlers, kickboxers, karate champs, and even untrained fellows, got together to indulge in no-holds-barred fights. The owner of this academy was a Bruce Lee-quoting, philosophy-spouting man adept in multiple fighting styles, including Kalaripayattu, considered one of the oldest of martial arts. I remember him talking eloquently about how his training in the Kerala martial art had taught him about the 108 vitals points of the body, how he would give his students, after their practice sessions or fights, a traditional massage that activated the vital points to help them recover or rejuvenate, how some of these points constitute the chakras.

Well, thanks to my recent trip to The Leela Kovalam’s Divya Spa, I finally got to understand first-hand this science and art of stimulating the body’s vital points (marma points) — to be exact, I got to experience what an authentic Kalari massage feels like. Kalaripayattu demanded a tough and supple body, and the warriors used Kalari massage to not just recuperate from aches and joint pain, but also to proactively improve one’s reflexes and strength. As one would expect, the doctors at Divya Spa — all of them learned in Ayurveda — recommend this massage especially to those keen on improving their flexibility and muscle tone. In Kalari massage, as with many other traditional Ayurvedic therapies, Prana (the life-giving force, according to Hindu philosophy) that flows through the networks of the vitals points in the body is dynamised, blockages for it cleared. From a purely materialist perspective, Kalari massage detoxifies the body and improves its blood circulation.

Offering an impressive selection of Ayurvedic treatments and relaxation programs, Divya Spa is an exemplum of a cozy retreat. From the point the pronounced lemon-grass scent of the place strikes your consciousness till the time the amicable staff politely check if they should call for a buggy to shuttle you back to the main hotel area, this is a spa that makes you

By Jaideep Dave

Divya Spa at The Leela Kovalam boasts eight elegant massage rooms.

Wellness
Enjoying the ocean’s susurrying sounds is a part of the massage experience.

The centre of its hospitable attention... If The Leela Group’s philosophy is tradition fused with contemporary luxury, Divya Spa perfectly embodies it.

The room where I had the massage—there are, at Divya Spa, eight elegant rooms with a fine touch of local decor—overlooked the Arabian Sea. Enjoying the ocean’s susurrying sounds is a part of the massage experience; though you also have the option of choosing from a wide range of instrumental music. Sitting on the chair, you either gaze at the beautiful beach or simply shut your eyes as one of the two therapists gives you a head and shoulder and neck massage, applying warm oil. This is followed by you shifting to the massage bed at the centre of the room, whereupon the session gets more vigorous. One of the most unique features of Kalari massage is witnessed when the therapists, one on each side and working in harmony, hold on to the suspended ropes above the bed and stroke your back rhythmically with their legs. My therapists, observing me throughout for the slightest signs of pain or discomfort I may possibly betray, frequently checked with me if the pressure was okay; only on two occasions did I have to ask them to lower the intensity. But there were also two moments—what with this being a massage meant for warriors and me being full of derring-do—where I asked them to up the Pascals a bit.

Multiple oils were used in this 90-minute Kalari massage. Dr Renjith R, who explained to me the philosophy on which the various offerings are grounded upon, says that these oils are a concoction of medicinal herbs. There are certain standard concoctions, of course, but depending on the guest consultation session/s — personalised luxury being the credo of the place — variations are introduced.

Guests can also enjoy taking a walk in the spa’s becalming herb garden, and learn about the plants’ salubrious properties. Even more noteworthy is the fact that Divya Spa offers, for those who are looking to ameliorate serious ailments, multi-day programmes, some of which go on for 28 days. The staff, in accordance with the holistic approach of Ayurveda, also advise guests to follow a diet regimen; the doctors give guests their recommendations as to what ingredients/foods they should be eating/particularly avoiding, and the chefs at the hotel’s The Cafe restaurant create customised, and quite tasty, dishes keeping the guidelines in mind.

For reservations at Divya Spa, please call +91 – 471 – 3051234, extension 4018, between 8 a.m. and 9 p.m.

A Kalari massage involves two therapists stroking the body rhythmically.
One of the most important scenes in the romantic comedy film ‘Because I Said So’ is when Diane Keaton (who plays Daphne Wilder) is being charmed by Tom Everett (Jason) at a restaurant. A potential suitor to Wilder’s daughter, Jason promptly orders the fungi misto mushrooms and a bottle of Castellare Chianti II Poggiolei—an illustration, if at all any is needed, of how famous and acclaimed this beautifully crafted bottle of reserve wine from Tuscany, Italy—is from the estate of Domini Castellare di Castellina—is. Blessed with an excellent climate, Tuscany is, of course, renowned for its wines. The principal grape grown in the region is sangiovese; food and wine pairing is of absolute importance to the Italians, and this varietal can be paired with an array of foods. Ruby red in hue, the grape has the ability to take on the characteristics of ripe cherry, and ages supremely well.

Castellare di Castellina has always been firmly committed to sangiovese. To quote from the history section of its website, which talks about the firm’s award-winning wines: “For 25 years it was only Castellare di Castellina… with the loyalty to the native vines for an authentic Chianti Classico wine, where the red ruby of the sangiovese is not humiliating by the black Cabernet or, even worse, from the wines of the South; with the Chianti Classico Reserve and the Special Reserve Vigna il Poggio always obtaining the maximum scores from the guides…”

Well, we at The Leela Group are proud to offer fantastic wines from Castellare di Castellina at both our Le Cirque restaurants, in New Delhi and Mumbai. But what is the story of the company? A couple of months ago, I interviewed Paolo Panerai—the media baron and man who acquired Castellare di Castellina in 1978—to find out more about the firm’s history, his vision, his favourite food-wine pairings, and more.

What caused you to take a plunge into the world of wines?

The story dates back to my stay in Bordeaux towards the end of the ’70s. I was a guest of Edmond de Rothschild, a major shareholder of Châteaux Lafitte and the richest member in the family of bankers. Also present were Emile Peynaud, the great philosopher of wine, Luigi Veronelli, the Italian wine critic and intellectual, and Maurizio Castelli, who later became an enologist in the company I started. I returned from the trip with a firm decision to invest in absolute quality and to make Castellare di Castellina (the first winery in our system, which also consists of three other world-famous ones: Rocca di Frassinello, Feudi del Pisciotto and Curra di Mare) a shining example of ‘Made in Italy’.

How would you describe Castellare wines to a novice?

It is a brand tied to the Chianti Classico land, famous for the world-class quality of its wines, a brand that has contributed hugely to making the territory famous. In the ’80s, when the French wines were ruling the roost, I Sodi di San Niccolò, the flagship wine of Castellare, was featured in the top 100 list of Wine Spectator; it’s a wine realised by using just native vines (85 per cent sangiovese and 15 per cent black malvasia). From that point, great results followed one another. In early 2000s, we got into a joint venture with Domain Baron de Rothschild, creating Rocca Di Frassinello, a winery located in Tuscany. Being environmental-friendly is important for us. Each year, the labels on our bottles feature a bird that is in danger of extinction, and we completely eschew using herbicides, pesticides and other chemicals.

What are some of your favourite wine-food pairings?

On our website, www.castellare.it, there...
is a section devoted to recipes from some
great chefs and restaurants, both Italian
and international, from Carlo Cracco to Sirio
Maccioni of Le Cirque. They have paired the
dishes, as, for example, beef tenderloin or
pigeon, with Castellare wines. They are typical
Italian and Tuscany dishes, and express the
deep elegance of the flavours of the cuisine.

For my own part, I love to pair Castellare
wines with boar — hunted in the shooting
ground in Rocca di Frassinello and cooked by
our chef Mrs Romy Ricci, who debones it and
stews it with wine and vegetable seasonings.

Could you tell us about how fashion brands
such as Valentino, Versace and Missoni
produce their own wines with your label? Valen
tino, Versace, Missoni and also Ferré,
Ferretti, Brioni, Blu Marine and Giambatte
ti Valli are our partners in a project called
Grandi Stilisti, a suite at the hotel Wine
Relais, where the rooms and suites have the names of the fashion designers.

The first harvest in Feudi del Pisciotto took
place in 2007, and the quality of the produced
wines was so good that I thought it fit to tie
them with the ultimate expression of ‘Made in
Italy’: fashion. Part of the proceeds from the
sales of these wines is used each year for the
restoration of one artwork chosen from the vast
array scattered across the island. We have now
also launched another fascinating wine, a 1,100
per cent Pinot Nero, which is fully produced in
Sicily. The bottle of this wine is dressed with
a label showing an artwork restored by the
project, namely, the sculpture ‘Le Eterni’ (which
also gives the name to the wine), by Giacomo
Serpotta, an 18th century genius of baroque
style.

Gurra di Mare is the other Sicilian winery.
Located in Menfi, it is small but unique in that
its vineyards run till the beach; the sea breeze
gives an unique flavor to the first wine from
the winery, the white wine Tirsat.

How do you go about adding new dishes at The Leela Palace
Chennai’s restaurants?
This is an elaborate process. First, we do a market study just to
understand the palate of consumers and the trends. Second,
a tasting session is held with a panel of culinary experts, with
equal emphasis on both taste and presentation. Finally, we
conduct a tasting session with employees.

Can you tell us the must-try dishes at the hotel?

**China XO:** The Peking chillie crab, Singapore Chillie Crab,
and dimsums; we have an expert from Singapore just for the
dimsums.

**Jamavar:** the Indian cuisine restaurant: the iconic dal jamavar
and rain-e-jamavar.

**Spectra:** the all-day multi-cuisine restaurant: sushi, sashimi,
and jumbo lamb crab cakes.

Which are the chefs from across the world you admire most?
From the chefs you have worked with, is there anyone you
look up to?
I respect Thomas Keller of The French Laundry, in California,
and the Sydney-based Tetsuya Wakuda, who specialises in
Japanese cuisine. The culinary master I admire the most is
Chef William Tan. He was my mentor when I was a budding
chef at The Westin Singapore. His ability to perform under
extreme pressure and his creativity are commendable.

What’s the most unusual dish you have consumed in your
life?
I have, in Australia, consumed bush food: witchetty grub (large
white larvae of moths that chew through wood and eat roots
or sap of certain trees and plants), kangaroo, crocodile, etc.

There are quite a few food/restaurant-related shows on TV
these days. Do you like any?
I enjoy watching Gordon Ramsay’s ‘Kitchen Nightmares’ (on
Fox Traveller).

What are your signature dishes?
Whole roasted baby lamb on a spit with kemara and garlic
stock, shiitake and truffle raviolli, saffron
citronette veloute and wakame
Butter poached prawns with
shio and chestnut broth, lemon,
roasted sea bass and garlic
roe, and grilled prawn.

**Chef Dharmen Makawana**

The executive chef at The Leela Palace
Chennai on the must-try dishes at the
hotel, eating native
Australian food, and
his role models.
What is the most impressive aspect of Bangalore?
The people. They are friendly, courteous, educated and well-mannered. Bangalore is amongst the most cosmopolitan cities in the world. And it has, of course, great weather — always balmy.

How often do you visit the city?
About 15 times a year.

What are the features you look for in a hotel when travelling? Large, airy and comfortable rooms, a good gym, restaurants with a good selection of wines, and courteous staff.

What do you like most about The Leela Palace Bangalore?
The sheer luxury. You are pampered and get everything at your beck and call.

What are your must-pack items? A laptop, a medicine bag, comfortable shoes, gym gear and a hand sanitiser.

What did you think of the food at the hotel? The best in Bangalore! With a good wine list to boot.

At your service, Sir

What makes the butlers at The Leela Palace Udaipur the best in the business?
Kamal Verma, team leader in the hotel’s butler services, sheds light on the art of delighting guests.

- Luxury is not only about providing superlative comfort; anticipation is one of the keys in exceeding the expectations of guests. If they have to always tell you, it’s not luxury. The butlers at The Leela Palace Udaipur are very proactive in understanding guest preferences.
- One of my strengths is helping my team create at least one special Leela Moment each day. A Leela Moment is when a guest is delighted or pleasantly surprised. Here’s an example. A certain Mr. and Mrs. Johnston, after staying with us, left for Delhi, for a night’s stay there. The next day, they were scheduled to leave for their home, in the UK. I was personally taking care of their stay at the hotel, so they called me to tell me that Mrs. Johnston might have forgotten her passport in the safe and that it needed to be sent to Delhi in the next 24 hours itself. It was very challenging, but I ensured that her passport reached her by next day noon. She was delighted with my effort; and the duo has pledged to be our guests for lifetime.
- The Leela Palace Udaipur is one of the most romantic places in the world and a preferred choice for honeymooners, and so we often get requests for romantic bath setups. Also in demand are sunset cruises. The other things we do include making special arrangements for dining, organising birthdays, anniversaries, etc.
- We don’t subscribe to one-size-fits-all philosophy, so we recommend the places to visit keeping in mind the guest’s interests and time he has, and, of course, the weather. Luckily, Udaipur has plenty to offer for all kinds of travellers.
- Some instances of guest feedback I have received: “a magician who made our stay charming”; “the reason for our return visit”, “a star who brightened our stay”; “best of the best”.
- My guiding motto, it goes without saying, is the one of the group “Atithi Devo Bhava” (Guest is God).
Accolades

India’s best new hotel

The Leela Palace Chennai has been declared the best new hotel in India by the Travel + Leisure India and South Asia Best Awards 2013. Travel + Leisure is one of the world’s most renowned magazines, and these awards — other categories included best honeymoon destinations and luxury trains — reflect the views of the thousands of readers who voted for their favourites.

Exemplary leadership

At the recent Asia Business Leadership Forum Awards, held in Dubai, Capt. C.P. Krishnan Nair was conferred the India-UAE Business Icon honour by His Highness Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, Chairman and CEO of Emirates Airline and Chairman of the Dubai Supreme Fiscal Authority. The award recognises Capt. Nair’s exemplary contribution to the India-UAE ties. The ABLF Awards pay a tribute to outstanding leaders who have played a significant role in the ‘Asia Shining’ story.

Guest Speak

Sabyasachi Mukherjee
Fashion designer

Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom
The President of Maldives

Rajiv Bajaj
Managing Director, Bajaj Auto

Valentina Guebuza
Daughter of the President of Mozambique

Dr. Farooq Abdullah
Union Minister of New and Renewable Energy

The Leela Palace Chennai
“I cannot describe the level of standard that is met by the hotel in order to ensure that we have a memorable stay. Superbly appointed rooms, absolutely divine food and fantastic service is what one will find here. Hats off!”

The Leela Palace New Delhi
“I have had a delightful stay, and the management has taken extremely good care of my delegation. The Indian hospitality is overwhelming.”

The Leela Goa
“When we wish to travel yet not be too far away from the warmth, comfort and care of home, we come to The Leela Goa. It has been yet another lovely stay. Once again, thank you all.”

The Leela Palace Udaipur
“Ever since I arrived, I have had a wonderful experience at the hotel. The staff has provided me with very good service and special attention. I would definitely like to visit again.”

The Leela Mumbai
“I have enjoyed fantastic service and excellent food here. My best wishes go out to all who work for Capt. Nair across all his hotels. Good luck for 2014.”
The Citrus at The Leela Palace Bangalore, in association with CNBC TV18 and Smile Foundation, recently hosted the event ‘CEOs can cook’. Six corporate honchos showcased their culinary skills, and cooked alongside underprivileged children — junior master chefs! — from the Mumbai-based NGO. Using at least one citrus-based ingredient, the participants rustled up some wonderful fare. Although Suhas Bhide, GM & Partner, IBM Global Delivery, offered fuss-free recipes and tips. The seed capital for Population First was provided by the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, and its board of trustees includes eminent personalities such as Rajashree Birla, Keshub Mahindra, Urvi Piramal, Deepak Parekh, Dr Indu Shahani and Jamshyd Godrej. Population First has been doing admirable work for more than a decade.

From empowering rural and tribal women to combating gender stereotypes, Population First has been doing admirable work for more than a decade.

Since 2002, the Mumbai-based Population First has been working towards reducing gender and other socio-economic disparities in India. The NGO has empowered rural and tribal women through its Action for Mobilization of Community Health Initiatives (AMCHI) programme. More than 2,500 women, from 66 villages in the Shahapur block, in Thane, have benefited from the various activities Population First has initiated, such as rural tourism and vermicomposting. The Leela has been Laadli, a nationwide campaign against pre-birth sex selection and gender equality. Initiated in 2005, its objective has been to bring about a mindset change in population at large and also to sensitise those who work in the media and advertising industries. Apart from running audio-visual and print campaigns, Population First has conducted workshops for journalists and script writers demonstrating how the media often tend to perpetuate gender stereotypes.

Group of Hotels is buying vermicompost offered by the women from the said villages for trees and plants in its properties, and so are quite a few other big corporate groups.

In Maharashtra, Population First also runs School in Development Program (SiDP), which encourages children to act as change agents, to solve the problems their village is facing. Some students might write letters to the village head complaining about their teacher’s absenteeism, and some may undertake variety of campaigns to promote sanitation and hygiene in the village. The children have been able to inculcate sanitation and hygiene habits among their peers and motivate the villagers to construct toilets and soak pits.

The NGO also organises a number of activities in colleges through its Change Makers Club, in collaboration with the NSS (National Service Scheme) and Women Development Cell; for instance, competitions where students make short films tackling issues like gender discrimination.

One of the more well-known initiatives of Population First is the Leela A Family Cookbook from the Leela Ambience Gurgaon, a star chef with Lufthansa Airlines. Kapur has been recognised by India Today as one of the country’s best. He has also been a judge on the hit shows MasterChef India and Junior MasterChef India. The book launch was hosted by Michel Koosman, General Manager, The Leela Ambience Gurgaon, at the hotel’s specialty Indian restaurant, Diya, and present on the occasion also was a panel comprising, among other names, food critic Vir Sanghvi and novelist Advaita Ghosh.
Millennium City

Anuja Chauhan, the undisputed queen of literary romance in India, gives tips on exploring Gurgaon.

What are the must-dos in Gurgaon for a traveller? Any visitor to the city cannot miss a trip to Kingdom of Dreams, a glitzy, over-the-top site that stages Bollywood musical extravaganzas, with a food pavilion modelled after different states of India. Also check if Epicentre at Apparel House has any stand-up comics performing, and follow it up with cosmopolitans at their lounge, Drift; here, I’ve managed to catch acts like The Vagina Monologues. Apart from these, I often take any visitors staying with me to Rajokri fields for trekking. It’s right behind my house and you can always spot a few scattered nilgai (the largest Asian antelope) here.

Tell us about the book nooks and coffee shops you frequent. I quiet like it when a bookstore, apart from just selling books, also creates a place for conversation and art; places such as Quill and Canvas in Galleria Market and South Point Mall very often host cultural events like book readings and exhibitions... Everything in Gurgaon is either overcrowded or absolutely deserted, so, ideally, I look for a coffee shop which is half-full and which also has Wi-Fi. One such place, where I catch up on my reading, is the coffee shop in Galaxy Mall in Sector 15.

What are your recommendations for culinary experiences? The multi-speciality restaurant Spectra, at The Leela Ambience Gurgaon, makes this really creamy mushroom risotto that is die for. You can also head to Café Delhi Heights in DLF Cross Point Mall for a casual meal; they serve some really nice Italian food and healthy smoothies. The staff there is really helpful and knowledgeable, and always recommend new dishes to try out. Plus, every TV can be tuned to a different channel, with a personal remote on each table.

The recently opened Cyber Hub, a boulevard with over 80 restaurants (and, apparently, 120 more to follow), too, is a great spot to get some grub; recently, I enjoyed a great meal at the Olive Bistro. Also try this place called SodaBottleOpenerWala, a Parsi joint with great character and décor.

Where do you like to shop in Gurgaon? There’s, of course, a plethora of malls in the city, but I usually visit Ambience Mall, since it is close to my house. It has your regular fashion staples, such as Mango, Zara and La Senza, among others. I also shop at Anokhi and Ritu Kumar for Indian wear, and Mora Taara for quirky décor items. And Galleria Market is great for silver jewellery.

For an off-beat experience, one can head to Sadar Bazar, in Old Gurgaon, where you can pick up old lanterns, fabrics and handicrafts. Plus, the sabzi mandi (vegetable market) there has a wide variety of fresh exotic vegetables like Brussel sprouts, asparagus, lemongrass, etc.

--- Interviewed by Akshita Nahar Jain

After having worked in advertising for over 17 years, Anuja Chauhan left her plum position at JWT India to pursue writing full-time. She is the author of The Zoya Factor, Barfi! For Bittora and Those Pricky Thakur Girls, and has written the screenplay for the film Pahalwa House.

Zooming in on Mumbai

I’ve been almost two years since I started working in Mumbai, after moving out of Vancouver, but it still feels like my adventure has just begun. I feel I have so much more to explore, and that I can make any dream come true here.

The idea to scope out the fashion and entertainment scene in Mumbai was suggested to me by Martin Prihoda, a photographer who, after shifting to the Indian city from Vancouver, was shooting for a variety of publications. At that point, I was already running my own studio, which I had started at 20; I was interested in doing more editorial fashion; and, sure enough, I have, in India, shot for magazines like Cosmopolitan, Harper’s Bazaar and Vogue. I have also done cover shoots for Forbes and Forbes Life.

The two cities — Vancouver and Mumbai — are a study in contrasts. Vancouver is quiet, whereas the roads of the latter are forever buzzing. Any foreigner, encountering Mumbai for the first time, is apt to find it somewhat surreal. During festivals, the streets abound with so much colour, music and joy that it all makes for an exhilarating spectacle. It’s a great city for entrepreneurs, and for artists and other creative types. My home is in Bandra, a beautiful suburb. In the evening, I enjoy talking a stroll by the seaside, at Bandstand, in the company of trees.

I’m inspired by the old architecture in the city. And I absolutely love Indian cinema. Whenever I’m having a dull moment, or a bad day where I just feel like walking away from work, I listen to a Hindi song or put on a Hindi movie. Really, that’s all I have to do to rejuvenate myself.

My most memorable moment in India has been eating sev puri for the first time — I instantly took to it. Most people who move here from the West have some trouble adapting to the spicy food, but not me. I was born in Iran, where people barely consume spices; nor is Canada a country of avid spice eaters. But, oddly, I have always loved them. “Toran, you’re not Indian,” my parents would reprimand me seeing me gorge on raw chillies. Well, now I can finally tell them, “See, it all makes sense now: I am Indian.”

--- As told to Simone Louis

Perspective

Iranian-born and Vancouver-based Toranj Kayvon is a talented fashion and portrait photographer whose work is now based in Mumbai. She was studying philosophy and sociology when she decided to drop out of university to pursue her passion full-time. In India, the 25-year-old Kayvon, who grew up on a steady diet of Fashion TV, has worked with a slew of renowned fashion and lifestyle magazines, from Vogue to Forbes Life. One of her major ongoing gigs is photographing community leaders who are doing stellar work in areas like human rights, animal rights and environmental sustainability. Her website is toranjkayvon.com
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