

# TODAY'S traveller

CORPORATE, BUSINESS, AVIATION, LUXURY & LEISURE TRAVEL MAGAZINE

APRIL 2026 - ₹100

WINE ROADS  
OF TUSCANY

GLOBAL  
DESTINATIONS  
HOTLIST 2026

BIRDING  
THROUGH  
THE HIMALAYAS



Reinventing Sterling:  
A Transformation Built to Last

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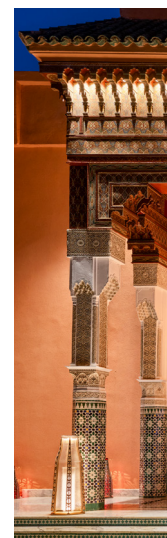
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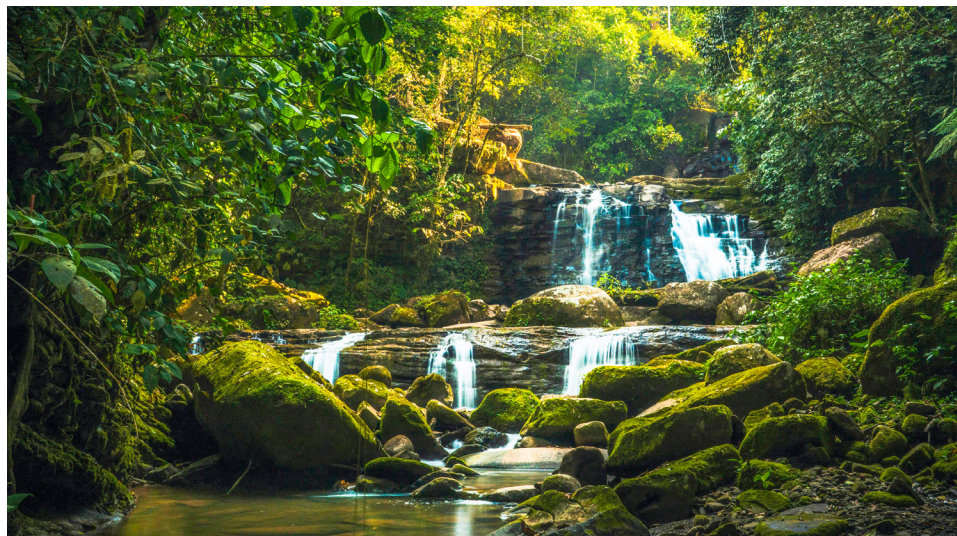
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# STERLING: A TRANSFORMATION BUILT TO LAST FOR THE NEW INDIAN TRAVELLER



After a decisive transformation, Sterling is emerging as one of India's most dynamic hospitality brands; reimagining stays through immersive experiences, destination-led design and a sharply defined growth ambition

TT BUREAU

**A**s Indian travel becomes more intent-led and experience-first, hospitality brands are rethinking growth and engagement. Sterling's evolution reflects that shift, from business-model reinvention and portfolio expansion to destination-led experiences, contextual design and a technology ecosystem designed to make hospitality more seamless, responsive and human.

### HOSPITALITY BEGINS WITH INTENT

A quiet but decisive shift is reshaping hospitality: travellers are choosing destinations with clearer intent. That intent may be rest, family bonding, wellness, spiritual connection, discovery, or simply the desire to step away from routine. Increasingly, purpose shapes the journey as much as the place itself.

That shift has widened the role of hospitality. A hotel has become a gateway to experiences, a facilitator of journeys and a curator of memories.

For Sterling, this has meant redefining its role in the travel ecosystem. The brand has moved from being a stay-led company to an experience-led platform built around how Indians travel. Its strategy reflects structural shifts in behaviour: the rise of multi-generational holidays, the blending of leisure with wellness and spirituality, the growth of short breaks, and the increasing preference for more localised, immersive journeys.

"The guest journey now begins well before arrival. In that moment of inspiration, execution and excellence matters," Vikram Lalvani, MD & CEO, Sterling Holiday Resorts points out.

### REINVENTING STERLING: A TURNAROUND WITH PURPOSE

Sterling today occupies a distinctive place in Indian hospitality, combining long-standing brand trust with contemporary agility.

"I genuinely think it is worthwhile to understand how we transformed the whole business. It is a role model case study, and it has been done by the entire team. Where we were five or six years ago, versus where we are today, and the pace at which we have moved, makes it a case study in its own right", says Vikram Lalvani.

Today, Sterling operates across 77 resorts in 64 destinations, with over 3,800 operational keys across hills, beaches, wildlife reserves, pilgrimage centres, heritage towns and waterfront destinations. The company crossed ₹5 billion in revenue in FY25, maintains EBITDA margins above 32%, and continues with a debt-free balance sheet.

"At Sterling, operating leverage is engineered into the business model. As the portfolio expands, shared capabilities across brand, technology, distribution and central operations create rising efficiency across the network. That allows scale to translate into stronger margins, greater predictability and higher quality growth", says Krishna Kumar, CFO at Sterling whose trusted role is to keep the business processes predictable and yet scalable.

In Vikram Lalvani's view, "scale matters when it is matched by relevance, coherence and alignment with different travel occasions."



Sterling's expansion is powered by research-led market selection and an asset-right model. The brand has expanded across Rajasthan, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and key wildlife belts, while also building presence in spiritual and cultural destinations such as Ayodhya, Guruvayur and Rudraprayag.

### BEYOND THE ROOM: PERSONALISING THE JOURNEY

Today's traveller is looking for connection. Sterling's response has been Discoveries & Experiences (D&E), a structured platform that makes experiences central to the stay and anchors guests more deeply in place.

In Wayanad, this may mean rainforest trails, plantation walks and ziplining. In wildlife destinations such as Corbett, Kanha, Pench, Tipheshwar, Thekkady and Sariska, the experience extends to safaris, guided nature encounters and community engagement. In places such as Athirappilly, Anaikatti, Sakleshpur and Godavari, the emphasis shifts to birding, river trails, forest bathing and slower nature-led exploration.

For Anupam Dutta, CMO at Sterling, this begins with clarity of intent. Entrusted by Vikram Lalvani with the responsibility of building the brand and keeping it relevant for guests, partners and internal teams, he sees direction as essential.

"So, for example, we don't pick up a destination and then try to squeeze into it a story", says Anupam Dutta.

Anupam Dutta further added, "We already know, over the next two to three years, broadly where we want to go, driven by consumer demand and what we believe the market can realistically absorb."

One of his ideas is What-A-Trip, Sterling's journey-led format that connects destinations into circuits and lets guests explore a region through curated itineraries.

"Travel today is rarely single-purpose. Guests are looking for layered journeys, not isolated stays," Vikram Lalvani notes.

### SPACES WITH SOUL: THE ART OF CONTEXTUAL DESIGN

Sterling's design philosophy is rooted in context and shaped by place. Each property is conceived as an extension of its surroundings, whether that means a mountain resort opening to expansive views, a waterfront property dissolving into the landscape, or a heritage-inspired space drawing from local architecture.

Its design language often begins with something observed or lived in the destination itself. In Kodaikanal, the culture of cycling through winding mountain roads inspired cycle-themed suites at Sterling Kodai Valley. In Puri, the storytelling tradition of Pattachitra art shapes the tone in the suites. In Uttarakhand, the geometry and symbolism of Aipan art appear in the living spaces and rooms at Sterling Nainital, creating rootedness.



Vikram Lalvani Flanked by His Leadership Team

“Design should do more than look attractive. It should help the destination reveal itself gradually to the guest”, says Balasubramaniam J, EVP Projects at Sterling, reflecting on his team’s constant engagement with each region and its nuances.

### **FLAVOURS OF PLACE: WHEN DINING BECOMES STORYTELLING**

Food remains one of the most powerful ways to connect with a destination, and Sterling has brought cuisine closer to the centre of its hospitality narrative. Across its network, the brand has developed destination-inspired dining concepts that reflect local culinary identity. Restaurants such as The Malabar in Wayanad, Amo Odisha in Puri, Slate & Pearl in Kodaikanal and Katha at Sterling Jaisinghgarh Udaipur are conceived as expressions of local culture.

Menus are shaped by regional ingredients, traditional recipes and evolving guest preferences, creating a balance between authenticity and accessibility.

“Food is often the most immediate bridge between a guest and the spirit of a place. It is a strong indigenous pull factor, which is why I personally look into the development of our speciality dining venues”, says Vikram Lalvani, working closely with his F&B production team, which studies every aspect of the guest experience before the final menu reaches the table.

Sterling’s food strategy has become increasingly data-informed. Guest reviews and feedback are analysed closely to refine offerings and sharpen relevance. Today, food and beverage contributes approximately 26% of total resort revenue, supported by curated dining experiences, celebration-led formats, breakfast-in-the-pool concepts and farm-to-table initiatives such as Soil to Soul.

### **TECHNOLOGY WITH PURPOSE**

For Sterling, technology supports relevance, responsiveness and sharper decision-making across the hospitality journey. The company combines guest insight research with large-scale Net Promoter Score tracking to identify emerging preferences, decode sentiment and refine decisions.

Vikram Lalvani frames the role of technology with clarity: “Technology is most valuable when it sharpens human capability and frees teams to focus on reassurance, service and relationships.”

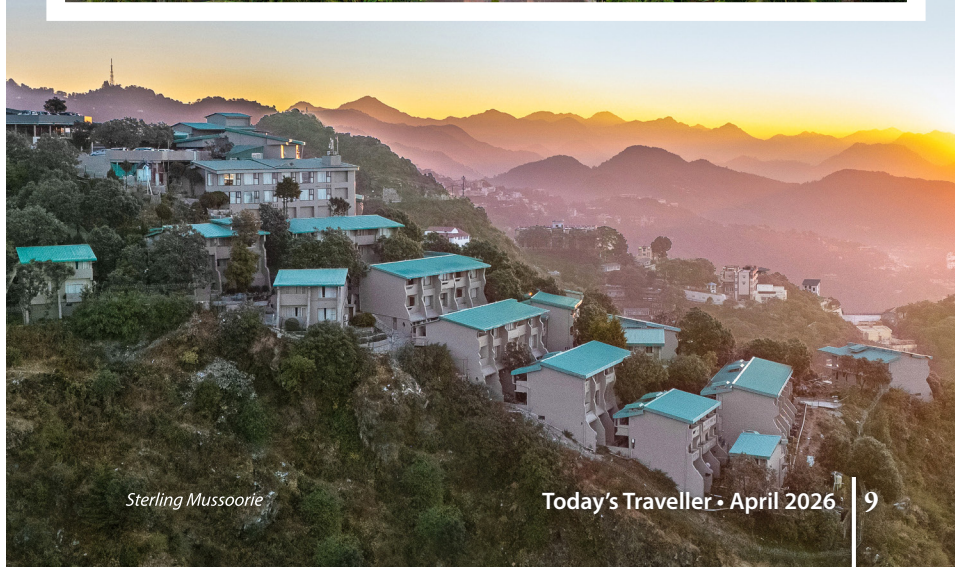
On the guest side, Merlin, Sterling’s AI-enabled chatbot, helps travellers with resort and destination information, making discovery easier. Its AI voice layer operates 24x7, supporting the reservation journey from enquiry to follow-up. WhatsApp extends that flow by bringing reminders and payment prompts into one connected interaction.



*Sterling Lake Palace Alleppey*



*Sterling Puri*



*Sterling Mussoorie*



Team Sterling at Sterling Kodai Valley

Behind these touchpoints sits a growing intelligence backbone: a data lake architecture supported by prompt-led AI workflows. This gives teams a unified view across guest queries, reservation inputs and service signals, enabling faster, sharper and more consistent responses.

Technology also strengthens Sterling's commercial reach. Through Sterling ONE, an industry-first partner platform developed entirely in-house, travel agents, corporates, and TMCs gain faster, more transparent access to inventory, contracted rates and confirmations.

Surej Hassan, SVP & Head of Revenue at Sterling, says, "Revenue grows when you build a network of properties that can be linked through a simple click. If you ask most B2B customers what they want, the answer is simple: ease of doing business."

Surej Hassan adds, "Today, we have about 8,000 partners online, and around 400 corporates directly connected to Sterling."

### GROWTH WITH A LARGER PURPOSE

As travel expands, so does the responsibility to ensure growth remains sustainable and inclusive. Through Sterling SANKALP, the company has built a framework around environmental responsibility, community engagement and long-term sustainability. Its initiatives include solar and energy-efficient systems, rainwater harvesting, reduction of single-use plastics through in-house bottling, EV charging infrastructure and more effective waste management.

Sterling's approach also supports local value creation through employment, sourcing and regional craftsmanship. Programmes such as Soil to Soul deepen that connection by enabling guests to engage with local agriculture and ecosystems in ways that build awareness while supporting livelihoods.

On responsible growth, Vikram Lalvani is clear, "Growth has to leave something positive behind, for the destination, for the community and for the people who experience it."

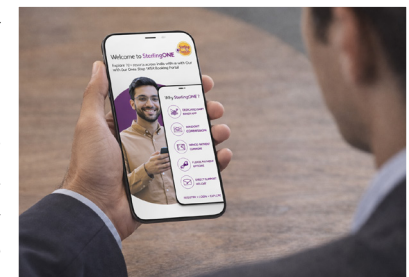
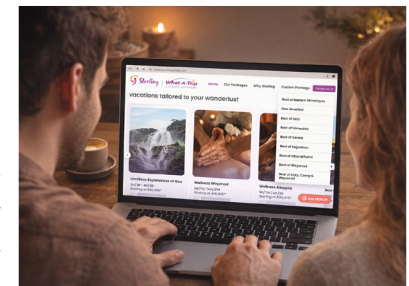
### HUMAN AT HEART

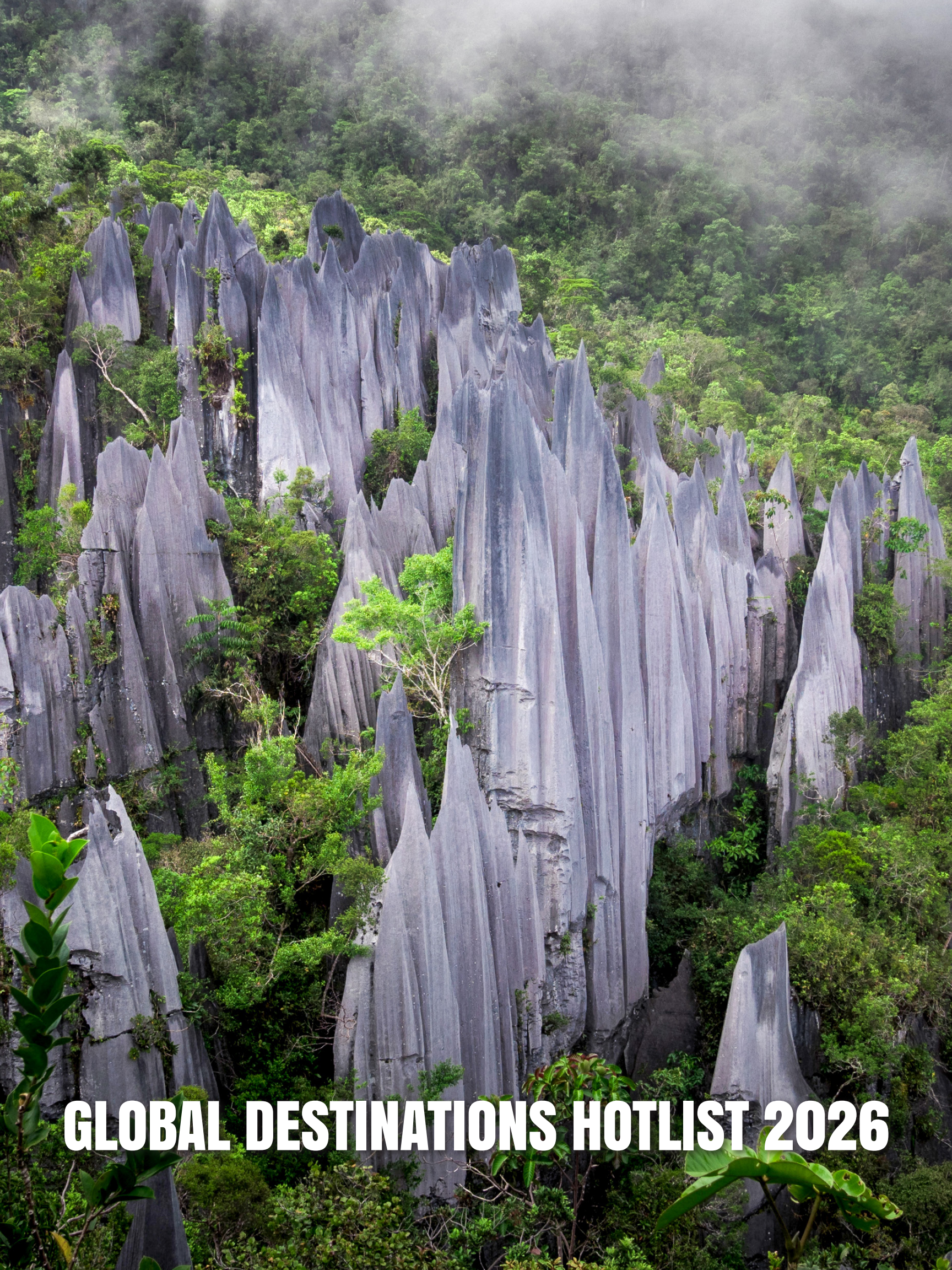
At the heart of Sterling's journey is a people-first culture, rooted in the belief that service grows stronger when people feel empowered. Sterling has built an organisation that is open, informal and collaborative. A first-name culture reduces hierarchy and encourages interaction, while inclusivity and shared ownership foster belonging.

That culture is reflected in the guest experience as much as in the workplace. Local hiring enables properties to reflect the culture and character of their destinations while contributing to regional development. Employees are encouraged to grow through leadership programmes, skill-based training and cross-functional exposure.

At the heart of it all is one simple principle Vikram Lalvani returns to most often: "We treat others the way we would want to be treated." This belief shapes how Sterling engages with both guests and its people.

In hospitality, the brand is ultimately delivered at the front-line. Recognising and empowering those who serve defines how guests feel. Sterling's signature warmth flows from this philosophy when people feel valued, they create experiences that make others feel the same. That is what defines Sterling today and will shape its journey ahead.





**GLOBAL DESTINATIONS HOTLIST 2026**

# TODAY'S TRAVELLER GLOBAL DESTINATIONS HOTLIST 2026

Rare landscapes, raw beauty and experience-led journeys make these destinations the most compelling escapes of 2026

**KAMAL GILL**

**W**e travel as much to discover ourselves, as we do the world. This search is more pronounced today than ever before. Today's Traveller Global Destinations Hotlist puts together the most exciting destinations of 2026 ahead of the curve: still under the radar, yet already delivering the kind of rare, deeply experiential travel that travellers now crave.

This 2026 hotlist by Today's Traveller leans into discovery of every kind— testing our fear quotient, appetite for thrills, aptitude for mind games, resisting the unknown and ability to take that leap of faith.

We seek desert art in ancient landscapes, icefjord voyages under Arctic light, remote islands with mystic cultures, valleys where rivers, swamps and brilliantly coloured birds thrive under a blue sky, and wildernesses where luxury feels raw but far more intimate.

The common thread is not only the roller coaster kind of high you get from thrill-fear experiences but the wonder of newness. It is also the feeling of getting there before the rest of the world starts talking too loudly about it.

### **VISUAL THEATRE AT ILULISSAT & DISKO BAY, GREENLAND**

Greenland is no longer the stronghold of expedition travel. Around Ilulissat and Disko Bay, the Arctic surprises with stunning visual theatre: vast sculptural icebergs, the UNESCO-listed Ilulissat Icefjord, smaller-ship sailings, whale-friendly waters and the kind of long, luminous summer light that makes artists and poets of us all.

What makes it especially aspirational is the mix of surprise and trepidation. You are not simply seeing ice. You are moving through one of the planet's most overwhelming natural theatres by boat, on foot, and even by scenic flights above the icefjord.

**Why it is on the hotlist:** Because the Arctic and its experience-led itinerary is finally within reach of the avid traveller, and Ilulissat offers one of the most visually arresting, still relatively accessible-level ways to enter that dream-rich world.

### **BAYAN-ÖLGII AND THE GOLDEN EAGLE FESTIVAL, MONGOLIA**

Western Mongolia is no easy luxury, which is exactly why it is one of the most coveted destinations. A transformational journey in every sense of the word, it finds expression the Golden Eagle Festival at Bayan-Ölgii. This festival brings together Kazakh



*Siwa Oasis. Image Courtesy: Magnificent World*

eagle hunters, tribal horsemanship, traditional dress and a living culture that remains dramatically photogenic without even a whisper of touristy-propaganda.

Beyond the festival, the Altai landscape showcases immense glaciers, vast blue skies and a kind of raw frontier beauty that makes the whole journey almost mythical.

**Why it is on the hotlist:** Because experience-driven travellers are increasingly chasing authenticity with raw edges, and western Mongolia offers exactly that—rare culture, dramatic scale and emotional impact.

### **THE STARK BEAUTY OF GREAT BASIN NATIONAL PARK, NEVADA**

To remain practically undiscovered in a country defined by its blockbuster national parks is no easy feat, yet that is the precise



*Golden Eagle Festival at Bayan-Ölgii, Mongolia. Image Courtesy: Fadhil Abhimantra, Unsplash*



Upper Svaneti. Image Courtesy: Wander Lush

power of the Great Basin. Set along the Nevada–Utah border, a landscape of incredible contrasts showcases high alpine peaks rising above desert basins, and thousands of subterranean passages where sinks, streams and limestone forms take you into another world. The Lehman Caves introduce another dimension — an underground world of delicate formations that feel improbably intricate against the starkness above ground.

Walking trails through pristine lakes and scenic stretches take you across sagebrush-covered foothills and the high grounds of Wheeler Peak. The bristlecones found beneath tall pines are among the oldest living organisms on earth, their weathered forms carrying a stark, almost poetic beauty.

Yet it is the night that defines the Great Basin. Designated an International Dark Sky Park, it offers some of the clearest stargazing in North America. The Milky Way dominates the skyscape, stretching endlessly with an intensity that resets one’s sense of scale. The park delivers something rare: the feeling of encountering a landscape that still allows discovery to feel personal.



Great Basin National Park. Image Courtesy: Travel Nevada

**Why it is on the hotlist:** Because it offers the luxury of silence, scale and solitude, turning remoteness into one of America’s most memorable travel experiences.

#### **MEDIEVAL MOOD AT SVANETI, GEORGIA**

Svaneti has the sort of beauty that looks right out of an alien movie set: stark, dark, Caucasus peaks, emerald green valleys, glacier-fed streams, stone villages, ancient rural rhythms, and medieval towers that still dominate the skyline.

Upper Svaneti’s UNESCO recognition rests on exactly this striking combination of mountain scenery and tower-house settlements, while Ushguli, at about 2,200 metres, adds that edge of altitude, and a strange feeling of having reached the last frontier of Europe.

The destination is a big draw for travellers who are looking for grand and culture-led experiences, that are not as yet over-curated.

**Why it is on the hotlist:** Because it delivers epic mountain magic, untouched cultural lifestyle, ancient architecture, isolation and old-world atmosphere in a way that feels both natural and deeply touching.

#### **CAVES AND ROCK ART AT CEDERBERG MOUNTAINS, SOUTH AFRICA**

Far removed from South Africa’s celebrated safari circuits, a visit to the Cederberg in the Western Cape unfolds a landscape of elemental drama— burnt red rock cathedrals, wind-eroded arches, and deep valleys that seem to hold time in suspension. This is a place of awe and contemplation.

Ancient San rock art in deep caves and overhangs, as well as fossils of primitive fish dating back 450 million years, add a story that stretches back thousands of years. By day, the terrain invites slow exploration—hiking through fynbos, tracing geological forms that feel surreal and rock climbing

routes around the spectacular Krakadouw and Tafelberg peaks. By night, the sky takes over. With near-zero light pollution, the stars arrive in overwhelming clarity, turning the wilderness into a celestial theatre. An amateur astronomical observatory, open to the public, helps to read the sky.

Lodges here lean into restraint—low-impact, forward-design, and deeply rooted in the land. The experience is all about an immersion, where landscape, history and stillness create something profoundly atmospheric.

**Why it is on the hotlist:** Because South Africa's next chapter lies in its lesser-known wildernesses, offering raw landscapes with a refined, experience-led edge.

### **SALT LAKES AND THE ORACLE AT SIWA OASIS, EGYPT**

Siwa is the Egypt, which travellers long for—those who prefer mood over monument counts. Yes, there are archaeological ruins and the historic aura of the Oracle, but the modern seduction of Siwa lies in its sparkling blue salt lakes, spring-fed stone pools, date palms, the eerie desert silence and the vast sweep of the Great Sand Sea.

The destination feels remote, elemental in its basic appeal and curiously attractive in a low-key way. Siwa has that as-yet-unexplored profile that positions it as a contemplative Egyptian escape, one where swimming, desert drives and long nature walks do as much of the talking as Egypt's rich history.

**Why it is on the hotlist:** Because Siwa offers a fresher, and experience-rich side of Egypt that still feels niche, poetic and beautifully isolated.

### **SURF AND SAVANNAH AT SUMBA, INDONESIA**

For travellers who have done mainstream island travel and want something different, Sumba is a thrilling answer. The island is shaped by roaring wild surf, never ending savannah, white beaches, local village life, megalithic tombs and the heritage of co-existing Marapu belief systems.



*Kaggamma Nature Reserve*

Sumba's appeal lies in the stark contrast: one moment horses on the sand, the next a village ceremony, followed by a deeply secluded wellness stay with an untamed Indian Ocean backdrop.

**Why it is on the hotlist:** Because it offers the kind of barefoot-luxury-finds-living-cultural experiences that many travellers seek, but rarely find in a destination that still feels genuinely undiscovered.

### **SALTA & THE PUNA, TRAIN TO THE CLOUDS, ARGENTINA**

Northwest Argentina feels like one of South America's choicest secrets. Salta introduces the contours of genteel living and colonial character into the journey before the landscape turns surreal as the route climbs straight up into the Puna: a high-altitude desert, white salt flats, volcanoes and the celebrated Train to the Clouds experience.

This is not the Argentina renown for its tango rhythm or Patagonian fame. It is the stranger, drier, higher and far more unexpected, with serious visual payoff and a growing appeal for travellers who want altitude and style in the same itinerary.

**Why it is on the hotlist:** Because it offers a stunning experience of one of the boldest landscape shifts in Latin America. From a celebrated rail journey to a high-desert aesthetic - the journey is both cinematic and uncommon.



*Surfing at Sumba, Indonesia. Image Courtesy: Oidonnyboy, Pexels*



Scuba Diving. Image Courtesy: Raja Ampat Biodiversity Nature Resort

### MONASTRIES AND CRANES - PHOBJIKHA VALLEY, BHUTAN

Bhutan has never sought travel fame, and Phobjikha proves why. This wide glacial valley is one of the world's most green and serene landscapes, known for its wetlands, monastery-led stillness and the annual arrival of black-necked cranes in winter.

It is the kind of destination where the atmosphere does the talking: cold crisp air, long nature walks, contemplative monastery views and an emotional recharge that travellers seek. Bhutan's own tourism positioning leans into being a sanctuary of inner peace, and Phobjikha embodies that better than almost anywhere.

**Why it is on the hotlist:** Because gentle, spiritually textured travel is sought after, and few places deliver this mood with such authenticity.

### MARINE DRAMA AT RAJA AMPAT, INDONESIA

Raja Ampat has gone beyond a name that instantly excites divers. Spread across more than 1,500 islands, cays and shoals, this archipelago offers marine drama on an almost operatic scale, with crystalline water, karst islands and a world-renowned underwater ecosystem.

Yet its real luxury is remoteness. Days here are shaped by boat journeys, reef encounters, quiet beaches and eco-grounded stays that keep the atmosphere intimate.

**Why it is on the hotlist:** Because aspirational island travel is shifting away from obvious beach clichés and towards places that feel extraordinary, visually surreal and accessible.

### BOAT SAFARIS AND TROPICAL FORESTS AT LOANGO NATIONAL PARK, GABON

If the jaded traveller finds the classic safari overly familiar, Loango is the dramatic reset. This is where lush rainforest, blue lagoons, sandy beaches and rolling savannah collide, creating one of Africa's most stunning wildlife landscapes.

The park's appeal lies in its untutored charm, its unpredictability and its layered ecosystems: boat safaris, beaches, tropical forest walks and the surprise of spotting hippos, crocodiles, birds, buffalos, elephants and gorillas within the same journey.

New developments framing low-impact luxury stays are bringing Gabon on to the map in 2026 without spoiling its raw beauty.

**Why it is on the hotlist:** Because it feels like one of the last truly surprising wildlife frontiers, and because luxury here is increasingly tied to immersion rather than spectacle.

### PLACES WHERE TRAVEL CAN STILL SURPRISE

What defines the Global Destinations Hotlist 2026 is not obscurity for its own sake. It is the rise of destinations that feel emotionally charged, aesthetically strong and experience-led.

These are places where travel can still surprise: where art appears in the desert, cranes redraw a valley's mood, ice becomes architecture, and an island or plateau or forest lodge can make a seasoned traveller feel gloriously the first to discover it



Gangtey Monastery, Phobjikha Valley. Image Courtesy: Bhuta Grace Travel

*Master of complications*

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**FRANCK MULLER**  
GENEVE

# THE MOST DESIRABLE NEW LUXURY CARS OF 2026

Aston, Bentley, Ferrari, Lamborghini and Gordon Murray have wealthy buyers watching with serious interest

**CHANDRUTPAL DAS BORO**

For wealthy buyers, 2026 is shaping up to be a thrilling year for wealthy automotive aficionados. Not because there will be more fast cars, but because several of the most talked-about machines sit at the top echelons of the market due to their rarity, presence and desirability matter as much as raw speed.

This year looks especially strong at the sharpest end of the automotive world, with 5 brands each having a model drawing serious attention, and every one appeals for a different reason to the collector.

There's something here for every kind of rich-car appetite: the headline act, the insider's pick, and the near-mythical one. 2026 is shaping up nicely.

## **BENTLEY SUPERSPORTS: OVER RS 10 CRORE (EST.)**

The new Supersports gives Bentley a very different tone. Rear wheel drive, a twin-turbo 4.0-litre V8 making 666 PS and 800 Nm, a widened rear track, an electronic limited-slip differential and a titanium Akrapovič exhaust move it well beyond the usual luxury





Image Courtesy: Automobili Lamborghini

coupe brief. Bentley has also limited it to 500 cars, which gives it the sort of scarcity buyers at this level expect. The name already has weight, and the new version makes the most of it by feeling more focused and more serious than many would expect.

This doesn't mean you'll miss out on the brand's signatures. Bentley still brings elite craftsmanship, badge power and a sense of richness inside the cabin, but the rest of the car points in a much tougher direction. That balance works well.

Buyers who like Bentley but want less softness now have an option that feels leaner and more alive. In a market full of refined luxury machines, Supersports has an edge that should help it leave a stronger mark.

### LAMBORGHINI FENOMENO: OVER RS 35.6 CRORE

Fenomeno goes in the opposite direction and makes no attempt to calm itself down. Lamborghini says it will build only 29 units, with over 1000 horsepower, more than 350 km/h and a 0 to 100 km/h time of 2.4 seconds. It sits in the Few Off line, which already tells buyers where it belongs. At this level, tiny production numbers matter as much as huge output, and Fenomeno has both. Before one even gets into the design, the basic facts already place it in serious collector territory.

The styling finishes the job. Hard lines, exposed carbon and full V12 drama give it instant presence, and that matters because wealthy buyers still respond to cars that look rare at first glance. Fenomeno does not aim for understatement, and that is exactly the point.

Some buyers want elegance. Some want engineering purity. Then there are those who want the car that dominates the room before it even starts. Fenomeno is built for that audience, and it should land very well with them.

### FERRARI LUCE: RS 8 CRORE AND ABOVE (EST.)

Ferrari's first electric car, the Luce will be one of 2026's defining launches. Reuters has reported that Ferrari plans to reveal its new model in October 2026 and expects deliveries to start at the same month. The Italian automaker has said it has been preparing for this shift for years. That gives the car much more weight than a normal model launch.

A first electric Ferrari is not entering the market as a side note. It arrives as a major moment for one of the



Image Courtesy: Ferrari



Image Courtesy: Aston Martin

world's most powerful automotive brands. That alone will create huge interest. Wealthy buyers are not only looking at a new EV. They are looking at a landmark Ferrari, and landmark Ferraris always attract attention, curiosity and serious money.

The appeal also lies in timing. Buyers at this end of the market like being first into a new chapter, especially when the chapter is likely to be remembered. If Ferrari gets the design, cabin and sense of occasion right, this could become one of the year's most desirable purchases without much effort at all.

#### **ASTON MARTIN VALHALLA: RS 10-12 CRORE**

Valhalla is Aston Martin's follow-up to the hardcore Valkyrie. It is a mid-engined plug-in hybrid supercar with 1,079 PS, a 350 km/h top speed and a run capped at 999 cars. Deliveries have already begun, which changes the feeling around it. This

is no distant promise or long-running tease. It is now a real flagship, entering real garages, and that makes it much more compelling for buyers who like their rarity backed by actual access.

The real pull lies in the way it changes Aston Martin's image. The brand has long sold elegance, polish and grand touring glamour. Valhalla keeps the glamour, but adds far more intent. It looks tighter, lower and harder-edged than the firm's usual road cars, and that makes it stand out at once. For luxury buyers, it offers something fresh by offering an Aston that feels more urgent, more technical and much closer in spirit to the sharpest modern supercars.

#### **GORDON MURRAY AUTOMOTIVE T.33: RS 14 CRORE**

The new T.33 sits apart because it does not rely on noise or spectacle. Gordon Murray Automotive presents it as a two-seat supercar built around low weight, compact dimensions and a naturally aspirated V12. The whole run sold out quickly, and recent road testing has pushed it back into live 2026 conversation. Those two facts already tell buyers a lot. Demand is there, and the car now feels close enough to touch rather than something floating in the distance.

Its attraction lies in how measured it is. T.33 has clean lines, careful engineering and a very different sort of confidence. It does not need oversized aero or wild styling to prove that it matters. That gives it a more discreet form of status, which seasoned collectors often value highly. In a deep garage, this is the car that signals taste rather than theatre. It may not grab the room in one second, but it is exactly the kind of machine people keep coming back to.

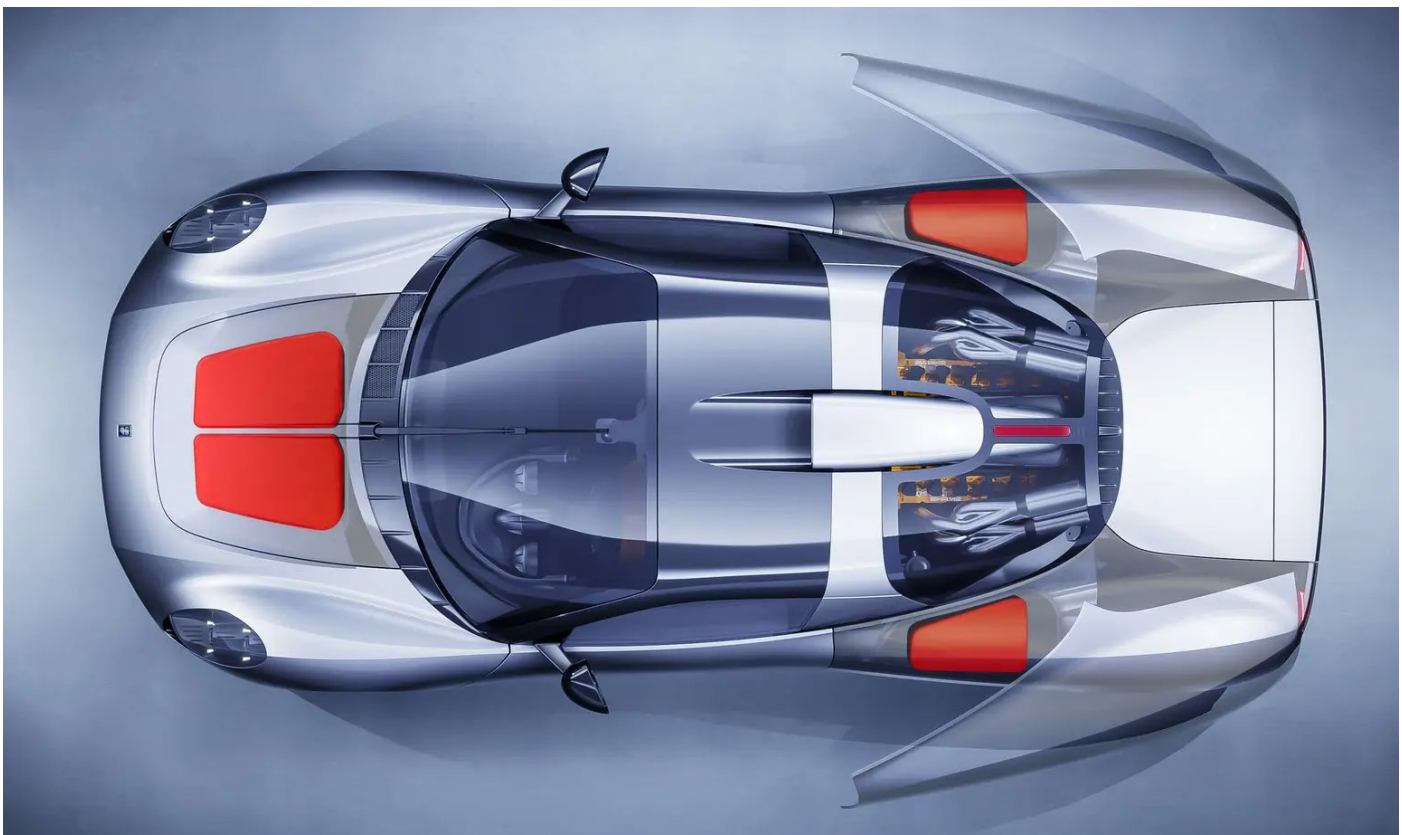


Image Courtesy: Gordon Murray Automotive



# Traditional Wonders

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# FOG, FLOWERS AND THE FORAGERS OF MADAGASCAR

A fragrant trail through Madagascar reveals how beauty depends on forests, foragers, and a fragile balance

TT BUREAU

**M**ist rises off the Namorona River and slips through the rainforest carrying something green, floral and faintly creamy in the cold air. Beyond the official boundaries of Ranomafana National Park, Madagascar, ylang-ylang flowers blossom in hidden groves. Moving through that scented haze are the people who know how to read it best, master foragers, known locally as “sniffers”, whose work ties flower, forest and livelihood into one fragile chain.

This journey is built around that hour before sunrise. It is meant for travellers who know perfume as a luxury and now want to see where it begins. The morning starts in a rainforest camp scented with ylang hydrosol, then shifts to a climb with expert foragers and a copper still where the finest oil fraction begins to condense. What first appears to be a refined wilderness escape reveals deeper layers of scent, labour and ecology.

## RANOMAFANA AND THE FOREST EDGE

Ranomafana National Park stretches across roughly 43,000 hectares in Madagascar’s south-eastern highlands, about 400 kilometres from Antananarivo. Hills fold into one another. Clouds cling to ridges. The Namorona cuts through vine and rock in fast white flashes.

The park was established in the early 1990s, after the rediscovery of the greater bamboo lemur and the discovery of the golden bamboo lemur pushed this forest into the conservation spotlight. Centre ValBio followed, creating a base for work on lemurs, frogs, forest systems and communities. The model was ambitious, protecting the core forest while encouraging alternatives to tavy, the slash-and-burn agriculture that has shaped rural Madagascar for generations.

Outside the protected core, pressure remains. Trees are still cut for fuel, timber and fields. Poverty and market access decide





*Nosy Be Distillery. Image Courtesy: Ortnosybe*

a great deal. That is where ylang-ylang becomes important. In the buffer zone, it offers a high-value crop that can sit inside agroforestry systems instead of demanding another clearing.

### THE FLOWER BEHIND THE FANTASY

*Cananga odorata*, better known as ylang-ylang, is not native to Madagascar. It travelled through Indian Ocean trade routes after leaving Southeast Asia, then settled easily into island agriculture. Farmers recognised its value quickly. In some seasons, those drooping yellow blossoms could rival or out-earn vanilla.

Its name is often translated from Tagalog as “flower of flowers”, and perfumery has treated it that way for decades. In 1921, Ernest Beaux used ylang as part of the floral heart of Chanel No. 5, helping give the fragrance some of its velvety softness. Extra-grade ylang sourced from Comoros and Madagascar still matters in fine fragrance.

Comoros, especially Anjouan, built much of its economy around the flower through small stills and export networks. Madagascar developed its own strong ylang regions, particularly around Nosy Be. Ranomafana tells a quieter story. Here, the trees grow among coffee, banana and subsistence crops, in working landscapes where scent, farming and wildlife sit close together.

### WHY ONE OIL BECOMES FOUR

Perfumers do not treat ylang as one stable material. Distillers collect it in fractions, and timing changes everything.

The first cut is Extra, usually drawn in the first hour or two. This is the brightest, lightest and most prized portion. Then comes First, or Grade I, still floral but fuller and rounder. Second, or Grade II, turns deeper and heavier. Third, or Grade III, is darker again, more forceful than elegant.

Too much Grade II can push a fragrance towards soap. Too much Extra can throw it off balance. The glamour of perfumery may live in Paris, but the judgement begins here, beside a wood-fired still at the forest edge.



*Bamboo Lemur. Image Courtesy: National Parks Association*



*Ylang-ylang Foraging. Image Courtesy: Unido.org*

### THE PEOPLE WHO SMELL BEFORE THEY SEE

Around Ranomafana, ylang trees do not stand in neat plantation rows. They rise through mixed plots, shaped by slope, weather and available light. That makes the foragers essential.

Most come from ylang-growing families. Their training starts early. Blossoms that are too green smell sharp and grassy. Flowers left too long turn soft, dense and faintly overripe. The ideal point lies in a narrow band between the two. The petals are twisted open but not tired. The colour leans gold. The scent lifts with something jasmine-like before settling into a warmer creaminess.

You follow them out before sunrise. Dew catches on boots and baskets. The track climbs through fog. Then one of them stops, closes her eyes and inhales. A tree appears through the mist, half-hidden and heavy with flowers. Up close, the air shifts at once. You are shown how to twist and pinch each blossom without bruising it. Done properly, it leaves the stem with a tiny click and a rush of fragrance that lingers on the fingers.

### FROM BLOSSOM TO STILL

Timing is crucial. Flowers picked at dawn begin losing volatile compounds quickly if they sit too long in the heat or sun. The aim is to get them into the still within 24 hours.



*A Ylang-ylang Forager. Image Courtesy: Dreamstime*

The distillery is compact, coppery and immaculate. Fresh flowers tumble into the chamber in a yellow rush. Fire is lit beneath. Water begins its slow work. Then the first hydrosol appears, carrying a glimmering film of oil on top. That first fraction is Extra.

What smelled beautiful in the grove becomes sharper and more concentrated in the still room. As distillation continues, the oil grows deeper and darker. The distiller watches each stage closely, knowing the smallest shift here may matter later to buyers in Grasse, Paris or New York.

### LUXURY WITH A LEDGER

The journey is imagined as low-volume and high-value, yet part of the spend supports co-operatives that commit to no new forest clearing for ylang, replanting programmes and fuel-efficient stove schemes that reduce pressure on firewood. Around Ranomafana, that is central.

Research around the park has shown a clear pattern. Where families can earn through tourism or forest-compatible crops, deforestation tends to slow. Where those options weaken, trees fall. Ylang-ylang will not solve every pressure facing the landscape. Even so, it sits at a rare intersection of ecology, luxury and market value.

### FOUR DAYS IN THE FOG

The itinerary to hunt ylang-ylang unfolds with measured confidence. Day one begins by helicopter, descending over rainforest ridges to a lantern-lit camp beside the Namorona. Day two starts at 4.30 a.m. with coffee and mofo gasy before the dawn forage, then moves to the distillery and a perfumer-led blending session.

Day three brings a lemur walk linked to Centre ValBio, followed by a canopy route and a riverside spa ritual. Day four closes with a banquet by the river and a hand-blown bottle containing a prototype scent, accompanied by a provenance card naming the villages, co-operative, distiller and conservation work linked to it.

### WHAT REMAINS

Back home, the fragrance would open floral-green and bright, then soften into warmer notes of vanilla, vetiver and musk. Yet the bottle would not be the real point.

Beauty here has a visible chain of custody, which is the knowledge that one takes from this adventure. The groves are real. The labour is real. The forest pressure is real, too. In Ranomafana, scent becomes traceable. Luxury becomes answerable.



*Nosy Be Distillery, Madagascar. Image Courtesy: Ortnosybe*



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Chandelier, La Mamounia, Marrakech

# A CENTURY OF SPLENDOUR: LA MAMOUNIA, MARRAKECH

For travellers and tastemakers alike, La Mamounia still stands as Marrakech's grandest expression of hospitality

TT BUREAU

Few hotels wear the passage of time as elegantly as La Mamounia. Set within Marrakech's medina, opposite the Koutoubia Mosque, the storied property has completed a century as one of the most enduring luxury hospitality benchmarks in the region. Since opening in 1923, it has held its place by understanding the value of continuity, atmosphere and quiet evolution.

Its origins are tied to the historic gardens once gifted by Sultan Mohammed Ben Abdallah to Prince Moulay Mamoun, giving the hotel a foundation that is both regal and deeply rooted in Marrakech's own narrative. That sense of place remains essential to La Mamounia's identity. It is not merely a luxury hotel in the city, but one of the institutions through which the city has long been experienced.

## THE LANGUAGE OF BEAUTY

Architecture has always played a defining role in that appeal. La Mamounia's visual language combines Moorish design with Art Deco influences shaped by Henri Prost and Antoine Marchisio. Over the decades, that blend has given the hotel a distinctive character, one that feels grand without becoming theatrical. It has also made the property a magnet for cultural and political figures across generations, reinforcing its place within Marrakech's wider cultural and hospitality landscape.

The most recent chapter in its evolution came with the 2023 centenary renovation led by Patrick Jouin and Sanjit Manku. Carried out in two phases, the work introduced a new reception, gallery, VIP lounge and the Majorelle Bar, while refining a number of public areas. The changes were not conceived as a

dramatic reset. Instead, they followed the hotel's long-standing approach of preserving the spirit, improving the experience, and modernising with restraint.

### A STEADY HAND AT THE HELM

That measured sensibility aligns with the leadership of General Manager Pierre Jochem, who has been associated with La Mamounia for more than 12 years. His international career spans a number of landmark addresses, including The Oberoi, New Delhi, The Imperial, New Delhi, The Pierre, New York, Raffles, Singapore, and the Palace Hotel, Beijing.

Having spent a significant part of his career in India, Jochem brings a grounded understanding of the Indian traveller, something that has helped inform the hotel's approach to the market. His tenure has been marked less by large-scale repositioning than by operational refinement and a steady sharpening of guest experience, while also strengthening La Mamounia's engagement with India.

### THE TABLE, AS THEATRE

Food and beverage remain central to the hotel's present-day relevance. The culinary line-up includes Simone Zanoni at L'Italien, Jean-Georges Vongerichten at L'Asiatique, Pierre Hermé, and the long-established Le Marocain under Chef Rachid Agouray. Together, these outlets position La Mamounia as more than a place to stay. It functions as one of Marrakech's established dining destinations, drawing both resident guests and local patrons. That matters strategically, supporting guest spend, extending the hotel's social energy beyond overnight stays, and ensuring continued resonance with international and local audiences alike.

### STILL THE GRAND ADDRESS

The scale of the property also contributes to its stature. La Mamounia comprises 209 rooms, 71 suites and three private riads, alongside a 2,500 sq. metre spa and extensive gardens planted with more than 700 orange trees. In 2023, it was awarded three Michelin Keys and named Best Hotel in Africa, affirming its place within the global luxury conversation.



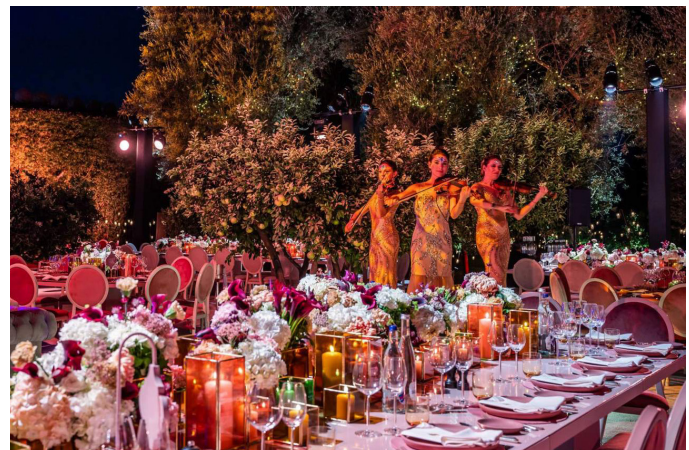
*Indoor Swimming Pool, La Mamounia, Marrakech*



*Pierre Jochem, General Manager, La Mamounia, Marrakech*

For Indian travellers, Marrakech is comfortably within reach, thanks to one-stop connections via Gulf and European hubs, placing the city roughly 9-12 hours away from key Indian gateways. That ease of access, combined with the city's layered cultural appeal, continues to draw growing interest from luxury and experience-led Indian travellers.

Within Morocco itineraries, La Mamounia remains one of the destination's defining stays. For travel professionals, it offers a rare combination of legacy, consistency and a product that evolves with care, preserving its identity while remaining current.



*Violinists at La Mamounia, Marrakech*



*L'Italien par Simone Zanoni, La Mamounia, Marrakech*

# JOURNEY TO THE WORLD'S LAST BLADE MASTERS

Forged with fire, blood, wax and memory, these blades preserve the survival of a dying craft

TT BUREAU

**A**cross three continents, a dwindling circle of master metalworkers practises techniques that once armed emperors, sanctified sacrifice and adorned Renaissance princes. Their furnaces, forges and obsidian-knapping grounds are endangered by disappearing raw materials and rigid apprenticeships. For the ultra-high-net-worth traveller, these workshops are portals into living heritage where lineage matters more than branding.

This is not a shopping journey for blades. It is a route through Kyoto, Oaxaca and Florence, stitched together by aviation and palazzo suites yet grounded in smoke, sweat and the fear of cultural extinction. At each stop, a final-generation artisan folds, flakes or casts biography into an heirloom that cannot be reordered or replicated.

## DYING HAMMERS, LIVING STEEL

Traditional blade-making was never designed to scale. In Japan, tamahagane is born in a clay tataru furnace, in which iron sand and charcoal are fed for days to create a bloom of mixed-carbon steel. One modern cycle may consume around 10 tonnes of iron sand and 12 tonnes of charcoal to yield roughly 900 kilograms of tamahagane, much of which is rejected by smiths in favour of only the purest fragments.

Renaissance Italy demanded an equally exacting process in lost-wax casting. A master shaped the object in wax, encased it in clay, fired the mould so the wax burned away, then poured molten bronze, often an alloy of 90% percent copper and 10% percent tin, into the void. The mould could be used only once. Failure meant losing both model and shell; success produced an object that could never be repeated in the same way.

*Apolinar Aguilar Velasco, Bladesmith. Image Courtesy: Dick Keis*

Today, such methods survive only in slivers: a few licensed Japanese swordsmiths, specialist Tuscan foundries still working in *cera persa*, and Indigenous keepers across Mesoamerica who understand what volcanic glass can do to flesh, ritual and memory. Luxury here is access to a technique that may die with the current master, and the means to fund another apprenticeship or smelting season.

### **KYOTO: THE TAMAHAGANE SANCTUM**

Kyoto is often framed as an archive of shrines and lantern-lit alleys. In the hills beyond the city, a tiny number of forges still work with tamahagane, the traditional iron-sand steel used for katana, wakizashi and ceremonial blades.

Near Kameoka, one forge has become known for opening its doors to outsiders. Under the supervision of a licensed swordsmith, guests craft small kogatana blades using the same sequence employed in full-sized swords: heating, hammering, annealing, clay application and quenching. A blade of roughly 15 centimetres may pass through *hidzukuri*, *yakinamashi*, *tsuchitori* and *yakiire*.

The rarity is sharpened by the numbers. In 1989, the Japanese Swordsmith Association counted about 300 registered swordsmiths. Within less than two decades, that number had dropped to around 188, while the average age rose, and few younger candidates completed the required five-year apprenticeship. Even after that, a demanding national certification exam still stands between apprentice and recognised master. Tamahagane itself is finite, with only a handful of authorised *tatara* furnaces operating, often once a year.

Inside the forge, the master selects fragments of the latest *kera*. High-carbon material becomes the edge; lower-carbon pieces strengthen the spine. The myth of “a thousand folds” gives way to multiple folding cycles, often beyond ten, to balance carbon and reduce impurities, later revealing flowing *jihada* patterns in the polish. Clay is painted thicker along the spine and thinner on the edge, controlling cooling and creating the luminous *hamon*.

After the forge, Kyoto offers a mix of centuries-old *ryokan* of *tatami* rooms, paper walls, cedar baths and *kaiseki* dinners. Months later, the finished *tanto* arrives in paulownia wood, carrying steel and time.

### **OAXACA: BLOOD, GLASS AND SPIRIT**

From Kyoto’s iron sand, the route arcs to Oaxaca, where stone rather than steel historically carried ritual force. Obsidian, formed when silica-rich lava cools so quickly that no crystals can grow, gave Mesoamerica one of its most potent materials for blades, offerings and exchange. Properly knapped, its edge can be sharper than surgical steel.



*Yanagiba Knife. Image Courtesy: Richard Iwaki, Unsplash*



*Japanese Expert Swordsmiths. Image Courtesy: Noriko Hayashi*



*Tamahagane Knife Making Process*

Ethnohistoric and archaeological evidence records obsidian blades in autosacrifice: controlled bloodletting from the tongue, ears or soft tissue, with blood collected on paper and offered in smoke. Popular imagination dwells on imperial spectacle, yet many such rites were intimate and domestic. Some scholars even regard obsidian itself as a form of earth blood, volcanic and underworld-born.

Precision matters here. The Tzotzil are Indigenous Maya people of Chiapas instead of Oaxaca, so any genuine collaboration demands regional specificity and community consent with Tzotzil partners or with Zapotec, Mixtec or other Oaxacan knowledge keepers.

The luxury lies in intimacy and trust. In a farmhouse courtyard beside milpa fields of maize, beans and squash, an elder lays out obsidian nodules and explains how birth signs or totems may be translated into blade form.

You watch percussion give way to pressure flaking, with antler or bone teasing away tiny shards until the edge is almost invisible.

At dawn, the completed blade is taken to a modest altar between field and farmhouse, dressed with maize, gourds and copal. The rite is softened for the present day with a shallow



*Bronze statue by Donatello. Menkin Al Rire. Image Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons*



*Mesoamerican Obsidian Knife. Image Courtesy: Sage Goddess*

prick at the base of the palm, enough to bead blood along the obsidian's edge. The blade is washed in spring water and considered awake. It will live as a relic, a vow and a reminder.

Accommodation here is textured. Adobe walls, woven blankets, clay pitchers and food rooted in maize, beans, squash and local memory.

### **FLORENCE: BRONZE, WAX AND DISCRETION**

The final chapter unfolds in Florence. Here, bronze and gold once wrapped power as elegantly as Kyoto steel or Oaxacan glass. Lost-wax casting, used for more than five thousand years, reached sublime refinement in Renaissance workshops producing jewellery, bronzes and weapon fittings for courts and collectors.

In a working Tuscan foundry, wax is modelled, sprued, encased, fired and replaced by molten bronze. You carve a cameo in wax, perhaps a family crest or heartbeat line translated into a rondel dagger pommel. The mould is fired. Bronze is poured. The shell is broken. The wax life of the object disappears forever.

Afterwards comes the Vasari Corridor, built in 1565 by Giorgio Vasari to connect Palazzo Vecchio and the Pitti Palace. Roughly 750 metres long, it reopened to the public on 21 December 2024 after years of closure and restoration, with tightly controlled timed access.

Emerging into the Boboli Gardens, the newly finished dagger is pressed briefly into vineyard soil at a palazzo estate, sealing not conquest but stewardship.

### **THE LAST CUT**

By then, the route's lesson is clear. The ultimate luxury here is participation in the fragile systems that keep such knowledge alive: apprenticeships in Kyoto, fair community contracts in Mexico and craft continuity in Florence.

In the end, the sharpest status symbol may be invisible. Not the blade itself, but the fact that one more dying hammer has been allowed to ring a little longer.

What lingers after the journey is more than mere ownership but proximity to disappearance. These blades carry fire, blood, wax and memory, yet their greatest value lies in what they preserve: the chance for an old craft to survive one more generation.

# CARTIER

The panther, the symbolic animal of Cartier, made its first appearance in the Maison's collections in 1914. Louis Cartier was the first to tame the mythic animal.



# BIRDING THROUGH THE HIMALAYAS

Across India, Nepal and Bhutan, birdwatching turns the Himalayas into a slower, sharper, more intimate way of travelling

**M GOUTHAM**

**T**he Himalayas, vast and beautiful, is a biological hotspot with around a thousand bird species that call it home. It is a biological mosaic that harbours ecosystems all the way from snowcapped peaks to marshes and temperate forests. To hike across these lands is to pause and take in this treasure of land and life unfolding before you.

## **SANDAKPHU-PHALUT, INDIA**

The Sandakphu-Phalut route runs along the Singalila Ridge in West Bengal's Darjeeling district, where thick bamboo, oak, magnolia and rhododendron forests rise towards the two highest points in the state, Sandakphu at 3,630 metres and Phalut at 3,600 metres. On clear days, travellers can look out towards Kanchenjunga and catch Everest, Lhotse and Makalu in the far distance.

This trek, which begins at Manebhajan, is one of the most popular treks in the Eastern Himalaya. The trail alternates between forested stretches and exposed sections of the ridge as you trek towards Phalut, crossing several villages.

For birders, this trek works because the changes in bloom and elevation will also be reflected in the bird species that you can look forward to seeing. Singalila is one of the most popular birding spots in the region, especially in the flowering seasons. This stretch is home to birds such as Scarlet Minivet, Kalij Pheasant, Blood Pheasant, Satyr Tragopan, Fire-tailed Myzornis

and Golden-breasted Fulvetta. The birding goes hand in hand with the trek as you take in the myriad sounds of the forest and scan the trees and undergrowth for the usual suspects.

Spring is when this trail is at its best. Rhododendrons flare across the slopes between March and May, and the forest comes alive with movement. The park is shut for tourists during the monsoon, but the post-monsoon season, from late September to early December, brings clearer skies and thus better visibility.

## **CHITWAN NATIONAL PARK, NEPAL**

Chitwan is of Nepal's subtropical Terai, a world of grasslands, sal forests, wetlands and river systems, making for a unique experience in anyone's Himalayan birding journey. This National Park, which officially records having 544 bird species, offers the luxury of rich birdlife without the physical demand of trekking. Chitwan National Park is also home to Beeshazari Tal, a wetland that is Ramsar-listed, underscoring its importance on an international scale. Chitwan also offers options for jungle walks, canoe rides, Jeep drives, and resort-style stays.

Riverbanks, reedbeds and floodplains of the National Park create space for storks, kingfishers, herons, raptors and winter visitors, while the grasslands give the park some of its most prized names. One can also spot winter birds such as waterfowl, pintails, bar-headed geese and cormorants, and the broader season from October to March is widely considered the strongest window for general wildlife travel.



*Birds at Chitwan National Park. Image Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons*

### **ANNAPURNA CONSERVATION AREA, NEPAL**

The Annapurna Conservation Area spans 7,629 square kilometres and is home to 523 bird species, along with remarkable botanical and mammal diversity. It is Nepal's largest protected area and the country's most diverse and popular trekking area, offering everything from short three-day walks to long, demanding routes.

Annapurna lives up to its reputation with the sheer diversity of the experiences it can provide. In the forests are lush and rhododendron-heavy in the south, especially around Ghorepani, where some of the world's largest rhododendron stands are found.

Elsewhere, the terrain opens into valley systems, village belts and higher, harsher country where the mountains feel close and the air more austere. Birding here comes with an unusually strong human backdrop. The forest is never entirely separate from settlement, food, footpaths and lived mountain culture as the region is home to Gurung, Magar, Thakali, Manange and Loba communities.

Rare and threatened birds in Annapurna Conservation Area include globally critically endangered species like White-rumped Vulture and Red-headed Vulture, sighted along the Modi Khola and in watershed forests. Other vulnerable species spotted here include White-rumped Vulture, Wood Snipe, Cheer Pheasant, Satyr Tragopan, Nepal Wren Babbler (Nepal endemic), among a wider richness of birdlife.

Annapurna's great appeal lies in its flexibility. It works equally well for travellers who want an easier route, such as Poon Hill, with rewarding scenery and manageable walking.

That range allows birding, village life, mountain food, and culture in one journey. Planning is also fairly well organised, with ACAP permits and route rules such as guides and TIMS cards adding structure to the entire experience.

### **EAGLENEST WILDLIFE SANCTUARY, INDIA**

The Eaglenest Sanctuary in Arunachal Pradesh's West Kameng District covers 217 Kilometers and comes under the Eastern Himalaya biodiversity hotspot. Arunachal's Forest Department calls it a Birders Paradise. This is the destination for readers who do not mind trading ease for intensity; it has a frontier atmosphere and uncertain roads. Eaglenest's fame comes from its diversity; it is astonishing how much habitat is packed into this one rugged landscape.



*Image Courtesy: Tamilanban Subramanian, Pexels*



Rufous Necked Hornbill  
Image Courtesy: Animalia

Much of Eaglenest's mystique rests on rarity. The official site links the sanctuary closely with the Bugun community and Bugun Liocichla, the bird that helped fix Eaglenest in the imagination of the global birding world.

The sanctuary is also known for sightings of rare birds such as Bugun Liocichla, Blyth's Tragopan (colourful pheasant), Chestnut-breasted Partridge, Temminck's Tragopan, Ward's Trogon (iridescent), Beautiful Nuthatch, Yellow-rumped Honeyguide, Hodgson's Frogmouth,

Snow Partridge and hornbills and a broader richness of birdlife that shifts with elevation and forest type.

### **ROYAL MANAS NATIONAL PARK, BHUTAN**

The Royal Manas National Park is Bhutan's oldest protected area. The National Park showcases the country's greener side, very different from the alpine image often attached to Bhutan.

This 1057 square kilometre gem has also entered UNESCO's tentative list, with its diverse

ecosystem that includes tropical and subtropical forests, grasslands and wetland-linked zones.

The National Park also hosts 430 species, along with a strong concentration of threatened and restricted-range birds, including hornbills, the critically endangered White-bellied Heron, the endangered Pallas's Fish-Eagle and Rufous-necked Hornbill.

Grassland areas are home to the critically endangered Bengal Florican. Forest canopies ring with the calls of Great and Wreathed Hornbills, the iridescent Ward's Trogon, and the striking blue-black Beautiful Nuthatch. Rarities like the Malayan Night Heron and Black Baz can also be spotted in this region.

### **THE LUXURY OF BIRD WATCHING**

What these journeys finally offer is not only species richness, but a different way of being in the mountains. Birding by its very nature makes travellers walk slower, notice the weather, the sky and the trees more keenly. Here, a great day may be defined by a call heard in fog, a silhouette on a ridge, or a few seconds of movement in dense undergrowth. This is an activity where excitement and patience walk hand in hand.

That may be the deepest luxury in Himalayan bird travel. Not speed, not scale, not even rarity alone, but the chance to move through extraordinary landscapes with enough attention left to hear them properly.





**VACHERON CONSTANTIN  
GRAND LADY KALLA EDITION**



*Baby Orangutan with Mother. Image Courtesy: Noel SNPR, Pexels*

# STANDOUT EXPERIENCES ACROSS BORNEO

Borneo offers rare holiday encounters: pygmy elephants, orangutans, and one of the world's largest underground cave chambers with millions of bats

## TT BUREAU

In Borneo, you step into a part of Southeast Asia that feels far bigger and wilder than a typical island holiday. The world's third-largest island is shared by Indonesia's Kalimantan, Malaysia's Sabah and Sarawak, and Brunei, and each part brings a different mood to the journey.

You can trade a standard coastal break for rainforest adventures, river safaris rich with wildlife, vast cave systems, treetop walks and remote jungle lodges. It is the kind of destination where travel still feels like discovery, with every region offering a new landscape, a new rhythm and a stronger sense of exploration.

### **MALAYSIAN BORNEO — SABAH: BORNEO'S WILD TRIPLE PLAY**

In Sabah, Borneo gives you the kind of holiday that can change your mood beautifully without ever feeling disjointed. If you want a mountain adventure, you can take on Mount Kinabalu, Malaysia's highest peak and one of

Southeast Asia's most celebrated climbs. The two-day trek carries you through mossy cloud forest to the 4,095-metre summit, where the reward is a sunrise floating above a vast sea of clouds.

If a river safari is more your pace, the Kinabatangan offers one of Borneo's most memorable wildlife experiences. Dawn and dusk cruises take you quietly along the river past proboscis monkeys, hornbills, crocodiles, orangutans and even Bornean pygmy elephants, turning the journey into a slow-moving wildlife spectacle.

If you prefer a land-based safari, Danum Valley brings you into ancient lowland rainforest with remote lodges, scenic forest walkways, night drives and exceptional wildlife watching. And if you want to end on a completely different note, Sabah can even take you into the blue waters of Sipadan, where protected coral walls, schools of barracuda and turtle-filled reefs add a marine chapter to the journey.

## **MALAYSIAN BORNEO — SARAWAK: SLOW-BURN ADVENTURE**

Sarawak is Malaysian Borneo's slower-burning adventure, and Gunung Mulu National Park is its star attraction. This UNESCO-listed wilderness is known for jagged limestone pinnacles, cathedral-like caverns and dark rivers reached by longboat and jungle boardwalk.

Here, Deer Cave opens like a huge stone amphitheatre. It is named after the sambar deer that once entered to lick the mineral-rich rocks, while shy barking deer, or muntjac, still live in the surrounding rainforest. At dusk, millions of bats stream out into the sky. Guided treetop walks, cave trips and multi-day treks allow travellers to choose anything from a gentle experience to a much more demanding expedition.

Closer to the coast, Bako National Park near Kuching is the city's wild little secret. Only an hour away, it offers clifftop trails, pocket beaches, mangroves and excellent wildlife watching. You can spot proboscis monkeys feeding in the mangroves and bearded pigs along the forest edge. It is perfect for a day trip or an overnight stay when you want nature without committing to a full expedition.

Kuching itself is the kind of city where travellers often stay longer than planned. Its riverfront promenade is perfect for golden-hour walks, while Chinese shophouses and mosque domes share the skyline. Heritage streets connect temples, museums and old bazaars through a self-guided trail. From Kuching, travellers can continue deeper into Sarawak's story, either to Niah Caves, where 40,000-year-old human remains, and rock art add an archaeological layer to the rainforest, or into jungle routes that pass longhouses, rivers and dense green silence.

## **BRUNEI BORNEO — STILTED WATER VILLAGES, RAINFORESTS, TREETOP WALKWAYS**

Brunei is Borneo's quiet counterpoint, and Ulu Temburong National Park is its green heart. Spread across 50,000 hectares of



*Rhinoceros Hornbills, Ulu Temburong National Park. Image Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons*

pristine rainforest, it is reached by speedboat and longboat, and visitor numbers are carefully controlled so the jungle still feels properly wild.

A dawn climb up the treetop walkway brings one of Brunei's finest moments: mist drifting over endless forest, birds calling from every direction, and the rare pleasure of seeing a vast rainforest panorama almost entirely to yourself.

Back in Bandar Seri Begawan, the mood shifts gently towards culture. Kampong Ayer, often called the world's largest stilted water village, is a centuries-old community of timber houses, schools and mosques built over the Brunei River and linked by wooden boardwalks and water taxis.

## **INDONESIAN BORNEO — KALIMANTAN: SUNDA CLOUDED LEOPARDS, BROWN RIVERS AND FLOATING JETTIES**

Tanjung Puting National Park is Kalimantan's iconic experience and shows Borneo at its most expansive. Travellers take a traditional wooden kelotok houseboat along the Sekonyer River and watch orangutans at feeding sites such as Camp Leakey. The journey has a soft, immersive rhythm, with evenings spent on deck under the stars and mornings waking to the sounds of the forest.



*Ray Light & Rock Formation at The Beach of Bako National Park. Image Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons*



*Pygmy Elephants, The Kinabatangan River. Image Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons*

Beyond Tanjung Puting, Kalimantan appeals to travellers who enjoy long river journeys and huge, uninterrupted landscapes. Rivers run for days past peat swamp and lowland forest, while small villages and floating jetties offer glimpses of everyday life. Lake Sentarum National Park, with its seasonal lakes and flooded forests in the upper Kapuas basin, adds mirror-like waterways, fishing communities and remarkable biodiversity to inland journeys.

These forests are also part of the range of the Sunda clouded leopard, a beautifully patterned wild cat found only on Borneo and Sumatra and considered one of the flagship species of the island's remaining rainforests.

Further east, Dayak territories in East Kalimantan offer longhouses, forest walks, bridges and wildlife watching, with river travel linking Indigenous heritage and rainforest life. Then the mood changes completely in the Derawan Islands, where coral reefs, turtle encounters, manta-rich channels and the stingless jellyfish lake at Kakaban provide a slower, more relaxed island experience after days spent on brown jungle rivers.

### **ORANGUTANS: BORNEO'S MOST POWERFUL TRAVEL STORY**

In Borneo, the wildlife moment most likely to stay with you will be seeing an orangutan. Found only in Borneo and Sumatra,



*Kampung Ayer Water Village. Image Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons*

these red apes give the island a rare emotional pull. Watching a mother move quietly through the treetops with her young is one of those moments that lingers in the mind.

In Sabah, many journeys begin at the Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre, where rescued and orphaned orangutans learn forest survival skills before returning to a semi-wild life. That first meeting often leads travellers deeper into the Kinabatangan and Danum Valley, where river safaris and rainforest walks offer the chance to see them in truly wild surroundings.

In Sarawak, Semenggoh Nature Reserve near Kuching offers a more intimate but still conservation-led experience. In Kalimantan, Tanjung Puting adds even more drama through multi-day kelotok riverboat journeys between forest camps. By the end of the journey, Borneo often comes to mean one thing above all else: orangutans.

### **TRAVEL EXPERIENCES THAT MAKE BORNEO FEEL DIFFERENT**

What makes Borneo unforgettable is the way every day can feel completely different. One morning, you might be climbing Mount Kinabalu in Sabah. Next, you could be descending into the vast caves of Gunung Mulu, walking Brunei's treetop skywalk, or drifting past rainforest on a kelotok in Tanjung Puting.



*The Limestone Pinnacles of Mount Api in Gunung Mulu National Park. Image Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons*

# HOMAGE TO EPIC WARRIORS MINUTE REPEATER

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A softly blurred enamel scene brings Alexander and Bucephalus to life on the battlefield.

The 18K white gold case and buckle carry the distinctive Macedonian pattern of spear notches

# ICELAND AND ANTARCTICA: UNTAMED AND EXTRAORDINARY

Iceland's dramatic trails and Antarctica's icy frontiers prove adventure travel can feel wild without feeling uncertain

## TT BUREAU

Adventure travel still trades on extremes, but it is increasingly shaped with more care. Travellers want landscapes that feel elemental and remote, though they also want the complexity handled well. Few journeys reflect that shift more clearly than summer trekking in Iceland's Highlands and expedition cruising in Antarctica.

One unfolds on foot across geothermal valleys, rhyolite mountains, black volcanic stretches and green glacier-edged corridors. The other plays out at sea, where an expedition vessel heads towards a great frontier. Different experiences, same instinct: to go far, with expertise quietly holding the frame together.

### ICELAND'S BRIEF WINDOW OF ACCESS

From June through September, Iceland's Highlands open into a hiker's playground, revealing multi-day routes across colourful

mountains, geothermal terrain and green valleys. The season is short, usually running from late June through early September, with peak departures concentrated in July and August. That is why many trekkers are planning ahead for 2026.

Interest is building around signature routes such as Laugavegur, alongside guided departures that streamline the experience by handling transfers, meals and luggage moves. In Iceland, where conditions can turn quickly, that support is less about luxury than about rhythm. Wind, rain and sharp temperature shifts are common even in summer, so gear matters almost as much as fitness.

"Summer trekking in Iceland's wilderness means exploring one of the wildest landscapes on Earth," says Rebecca McCall, Product Manager at Arctic Adventures. "At Arctic Adventures, we're preparing every route, guide, and detail to make sure our travellers experience the unforgettable trails safely and comfortably."





*Iceberg Sightseeing, Antarctica. Image Courtesy: Dylan Shaw, Unsplash*

For most travellers, the practical questions are simple: how many days they have, which landscapes appeal most, and whether they prefer camping or huts. Guided trekking is concentrated around Laugavegur, which runs between Landmannalaugar and Þórsmörk, and Fimmvörðuháls, which links Skógar and Þórsmörk. Departures in July and August often fill first, especially for those with fixed dates or a clear format preference.

Planning ahead also allows trekkers to prepare properly. Waterproof layers, broken-in hiking boots, warm thermal base layers, trekking poles and a daypack with dry bags remain standard essentials. On some multi-day guided treks, heavier gear is transported separately between camps, allowing hikers to move with a lighter daypack.

### **THE TRAILS THAT DEFINE THE HIGHLANDS**

The Laugavegur Trail remains Iceland's most celebrated multi-day hike. Running 55 km, or 34 miles, from Landmannalaugar to Þórsmörk, it usually unfolds over four days and is loved for the speed with which the scenery changes. Geothermal terrain gives way to rhyolite ridgelines, then black obsidian stretches, then greener valleys lower down. That variation makes the trail a favourite with both first-time trekkers and repeat walkers.

Guided departures on Laugavegur now span several styles, from traditional camping itineraries to hut-based options and specialised departures such as women-only groups.

Fimmvörðuháls offers a more dramatic conversation between glacier and volcano. The trail runs between Eyjafjallajökull and Mýrdalsjökull glaciers, linking Þórsmörk Valley with the village of Skógar on the South Coast. The area drew worldwide attention in 2010 during the Eyjafjallajökull eruption, and the route remains a reminder of how actively Icelandic landscapes are shaped. Some travellers hike it as a standalone trek, while others add it as an extension to Laugavegur, finishing near Skógafoss waterfall.

Travellers looking for stronger isolation often head to the Westfjords. In the Hornstrandir Nature Reserve, one of Iceland's most remote trekking regions, there are no permanent settlements, only steep mountainsides, sea cliffs, wide fjord views and wildlife that includes Arctic foxes. Guided hikes here range from shorter multi-day introductions to harder backpacking routes that cross valleys and coastlines and pause near abandoned settlement sites.

Beyond the headline routes, there are shorter options as well. Landmannalaugar remains known for hot springs and colourful rhyolite terrain, while Kerlingarfjöll offers hikes through steaming geothermal valleys and vivid mineral slopes.



*Volcanic eruption at Geldingadalir, Fagradalsfjall. Image Courtesy: Toby Elliott, Unsplash*



*Humpback Whale Sighting. Image Courtesy: Derek Oyen, Unsplash*

## ANTARCTICA'S NEXT CHAPTER

While Iceland's trekking season is taking shape on land, another story of remote travel is unfolding at sea. Polar Latitudes Expeditions has announced the addition of a new expedition vessel, Discoverer, to its fleet. Previously known as Exploris One, the ship will begin sailing Antarctic voyages in the 2026 to 2027 season and will replace Seaventure.

The move marks an important step in the company's strategy to shift from chartered vessels to owned ships, giving it greater control over the expedition experience and onboard offering.

"By replacing a chartered vessel with one that we own, we strengthen our ability to shape the expedition experience from start to finish," says Anders Kristensen, Chief Commercial Officer at Polar Latitudes Expeditions. "This allows us to refine every aspect of the journey, from expedition planning to onboard learning, ensuring travellers experience Antarctica in the most immersive way possible."

Built at Finland's Rauma shipyard, Discoverer comes with a strong polar legacy. It has sailed under several names, including Silver Explorer and Prince Albert II. A major refurbishment in 2023 introduced upgraded guest accommodations, modernised technical systems and redesigned public spaces.

Ahead of its Antarctic debut, further enhancements are planned to align the vessel with the company's small-ship expedition philosophy focused on deeper exploration, expert-led learning and responsible travel in fragile environments.

## WIDER HORIZONS

Beginning with the Antarctic season of 2026 to 2027, Discoverer will operate all previously scheduled departures planned for Seaventure. Guests already booked on those voyages will sail aboard Discoverer in equivalent cabin categories. The vessel will also allow Polar Latitudes to expand its Antarctic departure calendar, adding more sailings during peak travel months. Among the highlights is the company's iconic Crossing the Antarctic Circle itinerary, a milestone voyage sought after by expedition travellers.

When not operating in Antarctica, Discoverer will also sail for sister brand Heritage Expeditions. In early 2027, the vessel is expected to move into new territory, navigating through Chilean fjords and bringing Patagonia into the company's expedition portfolio for the first time.

That expansion comes as interest in expedition cruising and polar travel rises among Indian luxury and adventure travellers seeking once-in-a-lifetime journeys to remote destinations such as Antarctica and the Arctic. With small ships, expert expedition teams and immersive wildlife encounters, Polar Latitudes is positioning itself around an informed, experience-led style of exploration.

For founder John McKeon, Discoverer represents a clear next step. "We have had many successful seasons with Seaventure, and we are grateful for the journeys we have shared," he says. "At the same time, Discoverer represents the next step in our long-term vision of building one of the most comprehensive expedition cruise programmes in the industry. There is much more to come."

## THE NEW SHAPE OF ADVENTURE

Iceland's Highlands and Antarctica remain very different propositions, one led by trail, the other by ship. Yet both now reflect the same truth about modern adventure travel. The draw is still raw beauty and distance, but the journeys increasingly succeed because the planning behind them is sharper and more exacting than ever.



# GREAT PENMANSHIP

While the art of penmanship is all but dead, this special edition pen by Mont Blanc is sure to revive it. Designed as a tribute to Jimi Hendrix, this pen gives out a distinctly retro vibe with its stylish black cover. The rollerball tip uses water-based ink that makes writing sharper, clearer and more vibrant.



# HOLIDAY PLAYBOOK OF THE LUXURY TRIBE

Crowded airports are out. Private terminals, helicopter transfers and cold-weather escapes are firmly in

TT BUREAU



Image Courtesy: Alen Kajtezovic, Unsplash

**W**hen Delhi's pavements begin to shimmer, and the mercury sits stubbornly above 40°C, India's luxury travellers are not waiting for the monsoon. The country's ultra-high net worth individuals are stepping through private terminals, boarding long-range jets, and continuing by helicopter into landscapes where the air is cooler, the light softer, and summer feels like somebody else's season.

For today's UHNWI, flying private has moved well beyond business necessity. It now shapes the way leisure begins, bringing ease, discretion and a far greater command over time. The shift is backed by numbers. Global private jet departures reached an all-time high in 2025, around 35% above pre-pandemic levels, with leisure now accounting for nearly half of all private flights. Commercial flying, meanwhile, has grown more crowded. Global passenger traffic in 2024 rose by more than 10% over the previous year, while load factors touched record highs. Private aviation removes that friction at its source.

The appeal lies in the ease. A long-range jet leaves Delhi or Mumbai and flies direct to a gateway such as Auckland, Calgary, Punta Arenas or Zurich. At the other end, the traveller steps into a discreet FBO, where a helicopter is already waiting.

That final 40 to 90-minute sector, often on a Bell 407 helicopter cruising at around 240 km/h, replaces hours of road travel. What it offers goes beyond saving time. It allows the journey to end with ease, privacy and perfect timing.

## A SOUTHERN ALPS INTERLUDE

In New Zealand's Southern Alps, June offers a complete reversal of the Indian summer. Queenstown records average daytime highs of about 8°C, with nights dropping to freezing or below. For UHNWI families leaving behind heat and haze, the contrast is immediate.

Blanket Bay leads the way—one of New Zealand's signature luxury lodges on Lake Wakatipu near Glenorchy. Matakauri Lodge perches on a peninsula with panoramic glass walls and private decks, as Minaret Station carves isolation from tussock plateaus and private peaks.

The route is elegant. Private jets land in Auckland, connect to Queenstown, then dispatch helicopters to the lodge cluster. Road transfers drag 45 minutes; rotors deliver direct helipad landings and aerial drama over peaks and lakes.

From above, Blanket Bay, Matakauri Lodge and Minaret Station reveal their alpine signatures—stone, glass and tussock set against the Southern Alps. Once settled, helicopters unlock heli-ski runs, Routeburn hikes, Fiordland flights and Mt Aspiring safaris, before evenings ease into wine cellars, lakeside tubs and fireside hush.

## COOL AIR OVER LAKE LOUISE

The Canadian Rockies offer another kind of relief. In Lake Louise, July brings daytime temperatures in the mid to high teens, while nights drift towards 5°C. Meadows flower beneath peaks that still hold late snow.

The Post Hotel & Spa is a Relais & Châteaux gem tracing back to a 1942 ski lodge, where wood-panelled cabins, roaring fireplaces and a saltwater pool define quiet luxury. Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise rises nearby with turreted grandeur and glacier-gazing balconies, while Baker Creek Lodge adds rustic stone hearths and alpine seclusion.

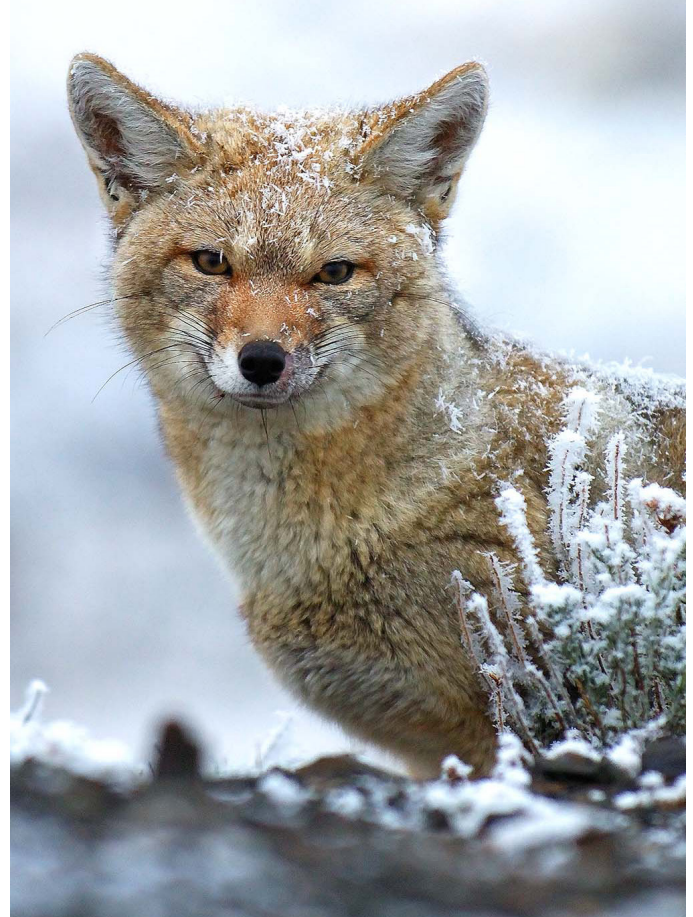
Guests arriving by private jet in Calgary can continue by road or choose the more seamless option. The 180 to 200 km transfer to Lake Louise shrinks to under an hour by helicopter, replacing the highway with turquoise lakes and glacier-lined ridges. Once settled in, the stay can be shaped around heli-assisted picnics, glacier walks, scenic charters and, in winter, powder days that end in cedar hot tubs and indulgent dinners.

### **PATAGONIA, SHORTENED BEAUTIFULLY**

Patagonia appeals to a different kind of luxury traveller, one drawn to remoteness without rough edges. In Torres del Paine, December temperatures usually peak around 12 to 13°C and can fall to about 4°C at night. Winds are common, the light stretches deep into the evening, and the weather changes quickly.

Set within this dramatic landscape is Explora en Torres del Paine, an all-inclusive wilderness lodge near Salto Chico. Heated pools, saunas, outdoor hot tubs and carefully designed rooms deliver comfort without diluting the feeling of isolation. Nearby, Tierra Patagonia and Awasi Patagonia match this pedigree with panoramic suites and private glacier guides.

More than 40 guided explorations are included, spanning long hikes, glacier viewpoints and rides on the lodge's Patagonian horses. The challenge has always been access. Punta Arenas, a common gateway, lies around 360 km away, and the drive usually takes about five hours.



*Patagonian Culpeo fox. Image Courtesy: Tierra Patagonia*

For a UHNWI arriving by private aircraft, that is where the aviation ecosystem proves its worth. Helicopters and chartered turboprops can compress that final stretch dramatically, turning a lengthy overland transfer into a far shorter aerial approach. In a region of glaciers, fjords and icefields, the route itself becomes part of the spectacle.

### **ST. MORITZ AT ROTOR SPEED**

Then there is St. Moritz, one of the world's enduring addresses for the international elite. July may be called summer, yet



*Lake Wakatipu, Glenorchy, New Zealand. Image Courtesy: Blanket Bay Luxury Lodge*



*Grey Glacier, Torres del Paine National Park, Chile. Image Courtesy: Tierra Patagonia*

average highs of around 16°C and lows near 6°C keep the mood distinctly alpine. Evenings still need a wrap. Glaciers remain in view.

At its heart stands Kulm Hotel St. Moritz, the grande dame that helped define winter tourism and still carries the confidence of old-world luxury. Historic salons, a major spa and refined dining make it a natural choice for travellers who value pedigree as much as service.

Its real advantage, though, is access. Kulm is around ten minutes from Engadin Airport in Samedan, a high-altitude

airfield used largely by private jets and helicopters. Zurich to St. Moritz by road usually takes 3.5 to 4.5 hours. By helicopter, operators quote around 50 to 90 minutes.

There is also the Carlton Hotel St. Moritz, an elegant Leading Hotels gem with lake-view suites, Michelin dining and a spa. Nearby stands Badrutt's Palace, the landmark grande dame boasting indoor/outdoor pools and direct heliport access.

### **HOW THE ULTRA WEALTHY NOW ARRIVE**

What makes these journeys possible is the charter network behind them. Global firms such as Air Charter Service, which has an India operation and arranges over 10,000 charters a year worldwide, position themselves as one-stop specialists for private jets and helicopters. Indian players serve the same market with an emphasis on bespoke routing and reduced friction.

For luxury travel planners handling UHNWI clients in India, it is a straightforward formula. Long range jet to the right international gateway, helicopter for the final dramatic sector, and a lodge or hotel that understands privacy, discretion and precision.

Private aviation is not without consequence. Analyses of private jet traffic into European holiday airports estimate around 526,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> from 117,000 flights in a single year, averaging about 4.5 tonnes per sector. The more thoughtful answer is restraint. Use the aircraft to save time and unlock access, then slow the journey down. Stay longer. Walk more. Explore deeply.

For affluent Indian travellers, this is becoming a far more precise way to move through the world. The appeal lies in how smoothly private aviation combines comfort, discretion and access to places commercial travel cannot reach as elegantly.



*Blanket Bay Luxury Lodge, New Zealand*

# WHY? TO GET A STEP AHEAD OF DISEASE.

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# BRAZIL'S WILD AMAZON IS PURE MAGIC!

Find your dream destination in the wild Amazon, Brazil. Get your fill of rainforest drama and the kind of wildlife encounters that stay with you

**JEET BHATTACHARYA**

**T**he Brazilian Amazon does not ease you in. It arrives all at once: warm air heavy with moisture, a chorus of insects vibrating through the trees, birds slicing across the canopy with sudden, theatrical calls, and rivers so vast they feel less like waterways and more like worlds of their own.

For many travellers, that first moment in the Amazon is almost impossible to describe. It is not only beautiful. It is immense, untamed and deeply humbling. Brazil holds the largest share of the Amazon rainforest, making it the great heart of this extraordinary ecosystem, and standing at its edge, one feels the full force of its scale, mystery and magnetism.

The Amazon rainforest is far bigger than one country; the total size of the forest is 6 million km<sup>2</sup> (2.3 million sq mi). It stretches across northern South America and touches nine political territories, yet Brazil contains around 60 per cent of it, which makes it the centre of the Amazon journey for most travellers. In Brazil, this immense rainforest spreads across the northern part of the country and is tied closely to the Amazon River basin, the largest drainage system on Earth.

## WHY THE BRAZILIAN AMAZON FEELS UNLIKE ANYWHERE ELSE

A question every traveller has in mind when they visit the Amazon in Brazil is, "Why is it like a different world in itself?" Well, the Brazilian Amazon changes the rules of travel. In much of the region, rivers are the roads.

Nature is the main event here, and that is precisely the appeal. The Amazon is the largest tropical rainforest on Earth and one of its most biologically rich regions, home to astonishing numbers of plant species (the most common of them are Huasaí palm, Walking palm, Rubber tree, and the Brazil nut tree), birds, mammals, reptiles and freshwater fish. Every outing carries an element of surprise, and that feeling of possibility becomes part of the thrill.

## MANAUS: YOUR FIRST STEP TO THE RAINFOREST

Manaus is where most Amazon adventures start. This city seems to be caught between the untamed wilderness and city life. Located approximately 1,450 kilometres inland from the Atlantic coast on the north bank of the Negro River, deep

*Female Jaguar Resting. Image Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons*



within the forest, is the capital of the state of Amazonas. Due to its location, it has long been a significant river port and provides travellers with a useful and cultural gateway to the larger Amazon.

Manaus started out as a Portuguese fort in 1669. During the rubber boom, the city became famous, and the Teatro Amazonas became its most famous building. Today, it is still the main entrance to the Brazilian Amazon and an important scientific centre where INPA is located.

The Meeting of the Waters is the most memorable sight. It is where the dark Rio Negro runs next to the sediment-rich Solimões before they finally merge. This is a vivid symbol of Manaus itself: part city, part rainforest, and completely dramatic.

The easiest way to get to the Amazon from Manaus is to fly into Eduardo Gomes International Airport and then take a boat along the Rio Negro River. People usually leave the city on Amazon river cruises, boat trips, or pre-arranged transfers to lodges. Manaus is the perfect place to start this kind of trip. There are ecolodges in the forest nearby and river trips that start there.

### **LIFE ON THE RIVER: AMAZON'S REAL MAIN STREET**

The Amazon River in Brazil is not just a landscape; it is the road for the people living inside the forest, the rhythm for travellers looking for peace, the workplace for fishermen, and for many communities, the very centre of daily life. In this vast watery world, boats transport people, fruit, fish, fuel, medicine, and

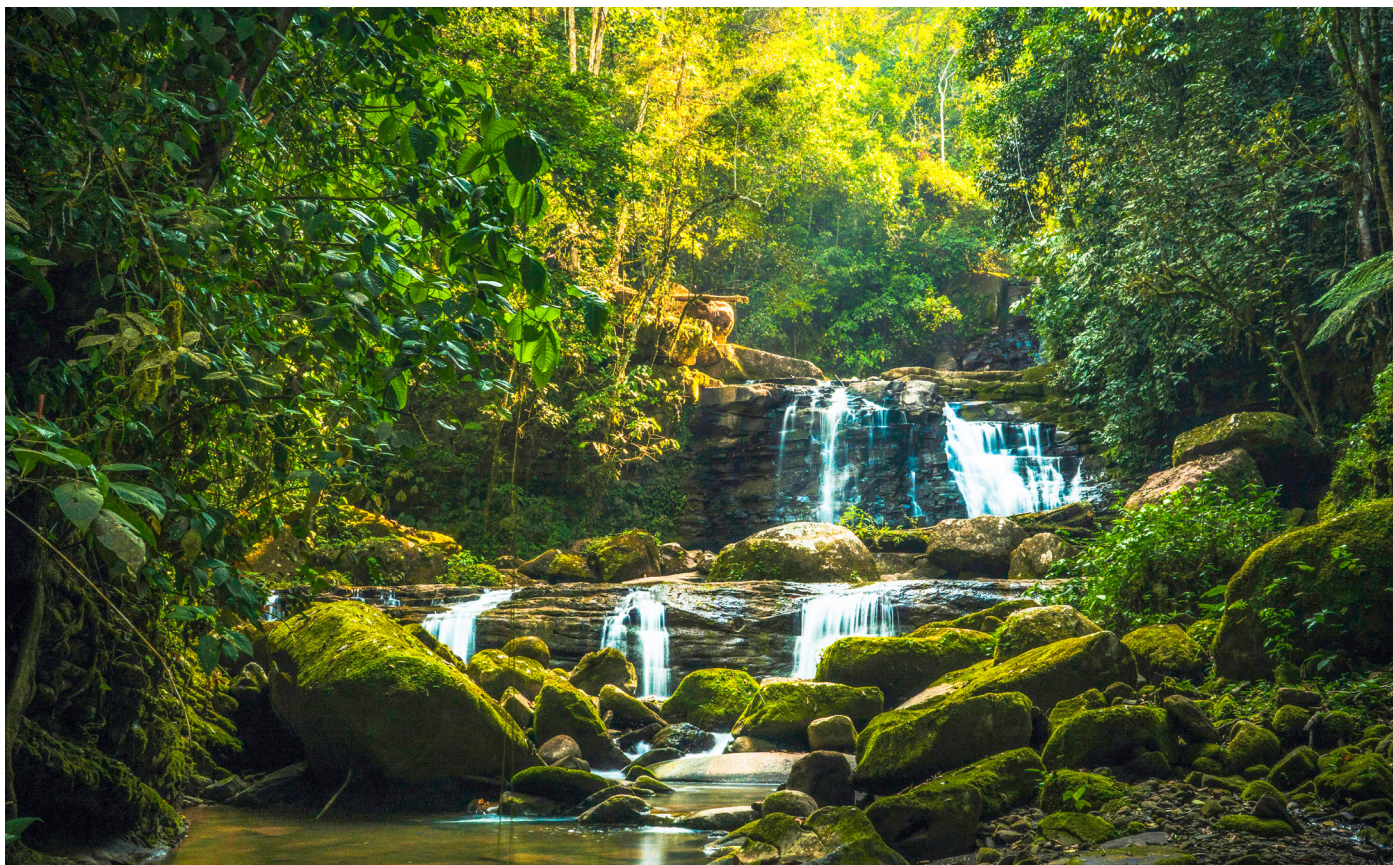


market goods. They also naturally carry people's chatter and the vibe of the locals. Giving in to the river's pace and following its lead is what it means to travel here.

One of the most beautiful things about life on the Amazon River is when the forest awakens with birdsong and far-off movement. At dawn, the Amazon appears silent and silver, shrouded in gentle mist. By nightfall, it becomes awesome, reflecting streaks of violet, rose, and gold across an endless sky. This constantly shifting river world, where a new mood emerges every hour and a new secret is hinted at around every corner, has a captivating quality.

Among the main rivers in Brazil that connect with the Amazon are the Madeira River, the largest tributary, stretching over 2,000 miles and linking the Amazon with the Mamoré river system; the Negro River, or Rio Negro, the world's largest blackwater river, famed for its dark, acidic waters that meet the Amazon near Manaus; and the Japurá River, also known as the Caquetá, which flows out of Colombia through Brazil before joining the Amazon. Together, these rivers shape one of the most extraordinary water networks on earth.

Because of all the above reasons, travelling here is truly beautiful. Travellers, when they experience this, always say that nothing feels rushed, the experience unfolds gradually, and those who are prepared to move with patience, curiosity, and wonder will reap the greatest rewards.



*Waterfall in The Amazon Forest. Image Courtesy: Bill Salazar, Pexels*

## WILDLIFE MOMENTS THAT MAKE THE JOURNEY UNFORGETTABLE

Wildlife in the Amazon is like a treasure preserved in the forest. It appears in glimpses, and that is exactly what makes it so thrilling. One moment, you will hear many birds singing in the forest; the next, a scarlet macaw cuts across the sky in a blaze of colour. As you explore more, you will see Toucans sit high in the treetops like tropical ornaments, and below, herons standing in the shallows with such striking stillness that you will question whether they are real or just a replica.

As you keep moving along the Amazon River, you will come across gorgeous pink river dolphins, breaking the surface so suddenly that they seem almost unreal before slipping away again inside the water. Many native and indigenous monkeys swing effortlessly overhead, sloths cling to branches with sleepy grace, and tiny frogs gleam on damp leaves like living jewels.

One of the most fascinating creatures of the Amazon is the jaguar. They are rarely spotted yet always remain part of the atmosphere. That is the real wonder of Amazon wildlife. It is not simply the variety, but the suspense. The forest always seems to be hiding one more colour, one more call, one more secret.

## FOREST IMMERSION, YOUR WAY

Where you stay in the Brazilian Amazon is part of the story. Accommodation is more than just a place to stay; it's a way to see the forest.

Luxury jungle lodges are great for travellers who want to get away from their daily life, all without giving up comfort. They make it easier to get into the wild by combining guided tours with high-end service.

Rustic eco-lodges are great for people who want something simpler and closer to nature, with fewer frills and a more direct connection to the forest, thanks to lantern light, river sounds, and early mornings.

Community-based stays often make the biggest impression because they can be meaningful for travellers who are interested in local traditions, cultural exchange, and forest knowledge that has been passed down through the years. The level of comfort is usually low, but the sense of connection is often unmatched.

## AMAZON DAYS WITHOUT A MAP

What makes days in the Amazon so memorable is that they are completely unplanned. A guided jungle walk may start the day. Naturalists use tracks, bird calls, medicinal plants, and survival stories passed down through local communities to explain the forest. Later, a canoe goes into narrow waterways, where every bend feels alive because of the mirrored reflections, overhanging branches, and sudden bursts of sound.

One of the quiet pleasures of the area is birdwatching at sunrise, especially when the river is calm, and the forest is just starting to wake up. By the afternoon, travellers might try to catch piranhas or visit riverside and Indigenous communities to learn more about how closely life is tied to the rhythms of



*Pink River Dolphin Catching Fish. Image Courtesy: Lucia Barreiros Silva, Pexels*

land and water. The mood changes when it gets dark. Caimans, insects, and the charged stillness of the riverbank can be seen on night safaris. Some places even showcase river beaches during the dry season, which are great for a cool swim.

The Brazilian Amazon doesn't just fade away. It stays with you in flashes of river light, birds singing at dawn, and the forest's huge presence. It has depth, drama, and a rare sense of wonder for travellers who want more than just a regular getaway. The Amazon is wild but also strangely graceful. It changes how you think about travel long after the trip is over.



*Scenic Amazon Waterfall with Swimmers in Tropical Setting. Image Courtesy: Leonardo de Jesus Couto, Pexels*

# WINE ROADS OF TUSCANY AND UMBRIA

Tuscany and Umbria introduce first-time travellers to Italy's wine culture through vineyards, cellars and food

## TT BUREAU

Italy is a country where wine is inseparable from memory, agriculture and identity, shaped over centuries. A wine journey here is not simply a chain of tastings. It is an entry into cultivated landscapes, old towns and communities that continue to live closely with the vine. Together, they show how wines are deeply rooted in the places that produce them.

For first-time travellers, Tuscany and Umbria are ideal places to start. Side by side, they teach something essential about Italian wine: it is never only about what is in the glass, but also where it is poured, what is served beside it and the landscape that shaped it.

### CHIANTI

Chianti is where many Tuscan wine journeys begin, and for good reason. Chianti is one of the useful bases for wine exploration in the area, with the market square and easy access to estates. Chianti is home to vineyards like Antinori nel Chianti Classico, which shows Tuscany in a more contemporary architectural side, while vineyards like Castello di Volpaia and Badia a Coltibuono reveal the more historic side of the region, inseparable from abbeys, castles, and cellars.

Chianti Classico is a natural first stop for first-timers; it's a wine with acidity and structure that pairs amazingly with *pici all'aglione*, pecorino, grilled meats, salumi and truffle dishes. Other famous wines of Chianti include Chianti Rufina, which can be paired with roast meats and aged pecorino; the softer and fruitier Chianti Colli Senesi that can be paired with pastas and pizzas; the spicy Chianti Colli Fiorentini, Chianti Colline Pisane, and Chianti Montespertoli.

### MONTALCINO AND MONTEPULCIANO

Montalcino and Montepulciano together capture the nobler, slower side of southern Tuscany, where wine, food and architecture seem to belong to the same old-world rhythm.

Montalcino is best enjoyed unhurried, with ample time scheduled for cellar visits, long lunches and views that stretch across the countryside. Its most famous wine, Brunello di Montalcino, is known for its depth and character, with notes of dark cherry, plum, spice, leather and tobacco. It is usually paired with boar ragù, roast meats, game stews and aged Pecorino. Rosso di Montalcino offers a younger, fresher expression, pairing easily with simpler roasts, sausages and mushrooms.





Arnaldo Caprai. Image Courtesy: IL Baro, Flickr

Montepulciano is a town synonymous with steep lanes, grand palazzi, and cool underground cellars. It is one of Tuscany's most rewarding food-and-wine towns. *Vino Nobile di Montepulciano* is made for hearty Tuscan food; it pairs beautifully with Florentine steak, wild boar ragù, roasts, meaty pasta, porcini risotto, cured meats and aged cheeses such as Pecorino and Parmigiano. Rosso di Montepulciano, on the other hand, is better suited to be had with pasta ragù, grilled sausages, roast chicken and milder cheeses, while *Vino Nobile Riserva* works especially well with roasts, game and mature cheeses.

### SAN GIMIGNANO

San Gimignano offers the white-wine counterpoint to Tuscany. With its medieval towers and hilltop skyline, it is among the most photogenic towns in Italy. One of Italy's historic white wines, Vernaccia is crisp, structured and distinctive, with citrus, apple and subtle almond flavours. It is usually paired with seafood, lighter pasta dishes, vegetables and simple appetisers.

Yet San Gimignano is not only about Vernaccia. The area also produces reds, rosato and Vin Santo, giving the town a broader wine identity. The reds pair well with charcuterie, firm cheeses, richer pasta dishes, red meats and game. Vin Santo, meanwhile, is the traditional sweet finish, best enjoyed with biscuits, dried fruit, mature cheeses or pâté.

### MONTEFALCO

Montefalco is Umbria's great red-wine stronghold, perched high above the valleys and often called the balcony of Umbria. Estates such as Scacciadiavoli, Arnaldo Caprai, Benedetti & Grigi and Benincasa reveal different sides of Montefalco, from polished cellar visits to more intimate, landscape-led encounters.

Its signature wine, Sagrantino di Montefalco, is known for dark fruit, plum, blackberry, woodland spice and cocoa. Grechetto, on the other hand, is fresh and structured, with citrus and almond notes that work beautifully with grilled vegetables, fish, shellfish and mild cheeses.



Wine Cellar. Image Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons

Montefalco also offers Montefalco Rosso, which pairs well with stuffed pasta, roast meats, steak and medium-aged cheeses, while the fuller-bodied Montefalco Bianco is suited to pair with soups, risotto, fish, white meats and cured meats; and the traditional Sagrantino Passito, best enjoyed with aged cheeses, biscuits, cakes and dark chocolate.

### ORVIETO

Dramatically poised on volcanic tufa cliffs and crowned by one of Italy's most remarkable cathedrals, this town is worth the journey even before the first glass is poured. The area is best known for Orvieto Classico and Orvieto Superiore, whites based largely on Grechetto, Procanico and other local grapes, with notes of lemon, apple and flowers lifted by crisp acidity. These wines sit naturally beside lighter dishes and bring the region a welcome sense of ease alongside Umbria's more serious reds.



Wines are Often Paired with Various Food Items. Image courtesy: Rachel Claire, Pexels



*Aerial Pano San Gimignano. Image Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons*

The area also produces Rosso Orvietano, fuller in style and better suited to cured meats and richer plates, while the nearby Lago di Corbara DOC adds another layer to the local wine map with more structured wines that deepen the town's appeal for curious travellers

### **PERUGIA, TORGIANO AND ASSISI**

The Perugia, Torgiano, and Assisi area shows another side of Umbrian wine travel, one where vineyards, olive groves, spirituality and everyday life feel seamlessly intertwined. Torgiano has a proud wine history and is known for its respected Sangiovese-led reds, including Torgiano Rosso Riserva.

Assisi adds a sense of stillness and spiritual beauty. Assisi Grechetto is one of the area's most recognisable whites and is commonly paired with seafood, vegetable-based first courses and light appetisers, while Assisi Rosso offers a fuller counterpoint that sits more naturally with cured meats, pasta and more robust plates.

Perugia, meanwhile, brings urban energy and serves as a gateway to the surrounding Colli Perugini vineyards. Around the city, Colli Perugini Rosso DOC pairs well with roast red meat, game and pappardelle, while the wider appellation is known for fresh, approachable wines that suit traditional Umbrian food.

### **FOR THE SELF-GUIDED TRAVELLER**

The key, though, is not to try to do everything at once. These are regions best approached slowly, so resist the temptation to cover every famous town in a single trip. Choose one or two bases and allow the landscape, food and cellar visits to unfold at a gentler pace.

Try to limit yourself to two wineries or estates a day, take your time and enjoy the experience. Pre-book wherever possible, and

favour lunch-inclusive visits, which naturally slow the day down and make the wines easier to appreciate.

Spring and autumn are the best times to attempt the trip. Visiting between April and June will reward you with greener hills, flowers and gentler weather, while September and October offer golden light and richer food suiting the harvest season.

Tuscany and Umbria are only the beginning of Italy's vast wine map, and that is precisely why they make such a fine starting point. They show you how Italian wine begins to make sense, one hill town, one table and one glass at a time.



*Oak Barrels Used to Age Certain Wines. Image Courtesy: Lorenzo, Pinterest*



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# KANDLA SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE

Kandla Special Economic Zone bearing the distinction of being the first SEZ in the Asia-Pacific region, was inaugurated by Late Prime Minister Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri on 7th March, 1965 as an Export Promotion Zone which was seamlessly converted into a Special Economic Zone in 2006. KASEZ has been awarded as "First Green Industrial City of India" in Platinum Category for the year 2021-2026, under IGBC Green Cities rating for existing Cities in industrial cities category. This zone is home to 281 exporting units providing employment to over 28,000 persons.

Kandla Special Economic Zone offers opportunity to set up new manufacturing units in various sectors such as engineering, pharma and chemical, Textiles, timber and plywood and new emerging technologies including E-Vehicles and their accories. 36.92 Ha (100 Acres) is being developed into 75 plots of size ranging from 2800 sqm to 6300 sqm which is an opportunity ready to be seized by investors.

## BENEFITS AVAILABLE/SALIENT FEATURES:

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- Single window clearance concept.
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- Well connected to NH 8-A, Railway Station- 2km away.
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2. Both basic custom duty as well as IGST on goods for development, maintenance and authorized operation of SEZ units.
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More than 25 Ready to move Factory Buildings & Warehouses are available in Kandla SEZ, Vacant land/plots are available in Adani Port SEZ, Sterling SEZ, Dahej SEZ and other SEZs in Gujarat. Kandla SEZ also Notifies available space from time to time on website.

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# BEFORE THE FLAVOURS FADE

In the quieter corners of India, where food follows weather, memory and ritual, a different kind of loss is underway. It slips away softly, one dish at a time

TT BUREAU



The most intimate food stories are often the ones slipping quietly out of everyday life. A porridge no longer stirred at dawn, a bitter green left unpicked in the monsoon, a fermented batter abandoned because it asks for patience, a smoked relish remembered only when an elder mentions it in passing.

Across the country, dishes once tied to harvest cycles, temple offerings, mountain winters, desert survival and community feasts are fading from daily life. When a local preparation vanishes, something larger goes with it: the knowledge of a landscape, the rhythm of a season, the taste of a people's relationship with place.

For travellers, this is where India becomes more compelling than the sameness of standard menus. Beyond the restaurant circuit lies another India, fragrant with wood smoke, wild leaves, sour grains, hand-pounded spices and recipes carried in memory rather than cookbooks.

### WHEN FOOD FOLLOWED THE LAND

There was a time when India's kitchens answered directly to the land. Coastal tables leaned on kokum, fish and coconut and salt-heavy air. Desert communities turned bajra, buttermilk and hardy pods into sustaining meals with quiet brilliance. In the hills came fermentation, barley, ghee and smoked meat, while forest belts drew flavour from tubers, wild mushrooms, mahua and gathered greens.

In Rajasthan, raabdi, a fermented pearl millet gruel cooled in earthen pots, offered relief in fierce summers. In Kerala, pezhukkal turned yams and coconut into monsoon comfort. These were not novelty dishes, but lived responses to place.

Recipes belonged not merely to states, but to altitude, rainfall, temple customs, trade routes and agricultural wisdom. Today, as menus become more standardised and city palates more driven by convenience, that diversity is under strain. Butter chicken travels farther than chains. Paneer tikka gets more room than patrode. Distinct food memories risk fading into one broad, familiar blur.

### FORGOTTEN PLATES, POWERFUL STORIES

Some of India's most compelling dishes are not entirely gone, but they are no longer secure. They survive in villages, seasonal kitchens and the memory of older cooks.



Karkidaka Kanji, Kerala. Image Courtesy: Indiamart



Arbi Patta Pakoda. Image Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons



Mutton Khur Soup. Image Courtesy: Sloka Reddy, Pinterest

In the Northeast, khura soups enriched with chhurpi carry a Himalayan tang. In Kerala, karkidaka kanji, the medicinal monsoon porridge made with rice, herbs and restorative ingredients, once nourished families through the lean, rain-heavy season. Today, it is more likely to be remembered than routinely prepared.

Coastal Karnataka still holds on to patrode, colocasia leaves layered with spiced rice paste, rolled and steamed. In Himachal, sidu, with its fermented wheat dough and gloss of ghee, remains a mountain comfort food, especially alongside aktori, soft potato-and-spinach pancakes of home kitchens rather than hotel buffets.

Further inland, Chhattisgarh offers bafauri, steamed gram dal dumplings that prove how light and satisfying traditional food can be. In central India, millet-based dishes such as bhanje speak of older grain cultures that once shaped daily diets.

Each one reveals something larger: a survival strategy, a climate response, a ritual code or an inherited understanding of nutrition. They are edible maps.

### WHERE TRADITION STILL TASTES REAL

If these dishes survive at all, it is because some kitchens still remember. A grandmother in Himachal kneads the sidu dough and leaves it overnight because that is how it should be done. In Odisha, temple kitchens continue to prepare poda pitha with the care of an offering. In the Northeast, meats still meet smoke in ways city kitchens cannot imitate, while fermented ingredients develop flavours that refrigeration has nearly edited out of daily life.

In Chhattisgarh, bafauri persists in homes that still value steamed, oil-light cooking rooted in tradition rather than trend.

What moves you about these kitchens is their lack of performance. They are not preserving heritage for applause. They are doing it because food still means continuity. Only instinct, repetition and belief.

### WHEN INGREDIENTS VANISH, RECIPES FOLLOW

A recipe rarely disappears alone. It takes its ecosystem with it.

India's indigenous rice, local millets, bamboo shoots, native gourds, wild greens, dried fish, kokum, timbur and forest tubers all belong to food cultures shaped over centuries. When farming changes, hybrids dominate, pesticides erase edible weeds, and younger generations stop recognising what grows around them, the ingredient base begins to thin.



*Elderly Indian Woman Cooking. Image Courtesy: Apurva Chandwadkar, Pexel*

That is why many forgotten foods cannot be revived fully in a generic way. They belong to soil, humidity, smoke, vessels, local grain behaviour and to the cook who knows, by smell alone, when a batter has fermented enough.

### **A REGIONAL TASTE TRAIL WORTH TRAVELLING FOR**

For travellers willing to go beyond the obvious, India's forgotten food map is one of the most rewarding routes in the country.

In Kashmir and Ladakh, barley-based dishes such as paba, served with buttermilk or rustic accompaniments, speak of altitude and endurance. Dried stews built around preserved ingredients remind you that winter once dictated the pantry.

In Himachal and Uttarakhand, sidu, chainsoo, jhangora preparations and bhatt-based dishes reveal a cuisine of mountain intelligence: hearty, frugal and full of character. Rajasthan and Gujarat tell another story, where bajra raabdi and ker-sangri reflect a cuisine sharpened by scarcity and skill.

In Bengal and Odisha, pithas, posto-rich preparations and temple foods balance comfort with ceremonial depth.

Maharashtra and Goa offer old Saraswat preparations, toddy-fermented breads and dry fish chutneys that still carry the humidity and salt of the coast. Further south, Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu continue to hide treasures in plain sight: jackfruit steamed in leaves, patrode, old gruels, yam dishes and native vegetable preparations.



*Food Cooking in Bamboo Tubes. Image Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons*

Then there is central and tribal India, where mahua-linked food cultures, forest mushrooms, smoked chutneys and coarse grains create one of the country's least understood yet most original food landscapes.

### **WHY THESE FLAVOURS FADED**

Urban life rewards speed, not soaking, fermenting, pounding or slow simmering. Aspirational eating has often pushed rustic foods to the margins, branding millets and village dishes as backwards until the wellness industry gave them a new gloss. Standard restaurant menus prefer familiarity. Packaged masalas flatten nuance. Local agriculture shifts towards commercial viability. Wild ingredients lose both habitat and audience.

Many young Indians inherit pride in food culture, but not always the time or training to cook its most regional forms. Once a dish slips out of routine, revival becomes harder.

### **THE RETURN OF THE OLD TABLE**

Yet all is not lost. Across India, chefs, home cooks, boutique stays, regional food festivals and culinary archivists are beginning to restore what was nearly sidelined. Heritage menus are turning attention towards mountain grains, temple sweets, old ferments and foraged ingredients. Social media has also become a place where recipes such as sidu or bafauri find new audiences.

They do not treat regional food as costume. They honour it as living knowledge, relevant and delicious.

### **A REGION, REMEMBERED THROUGH TASTE**

What is slipping away is not only food, but a way of knowing place through taste. To find these dishes is to find a deeper, quieter India, one still speaking through grain, smoke, leaf and fire. That may be the most memorable journey of all.



*Bajre Ki Khatti Raabdi. Image Courtesy: Euphoric Delights, Facebook*



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