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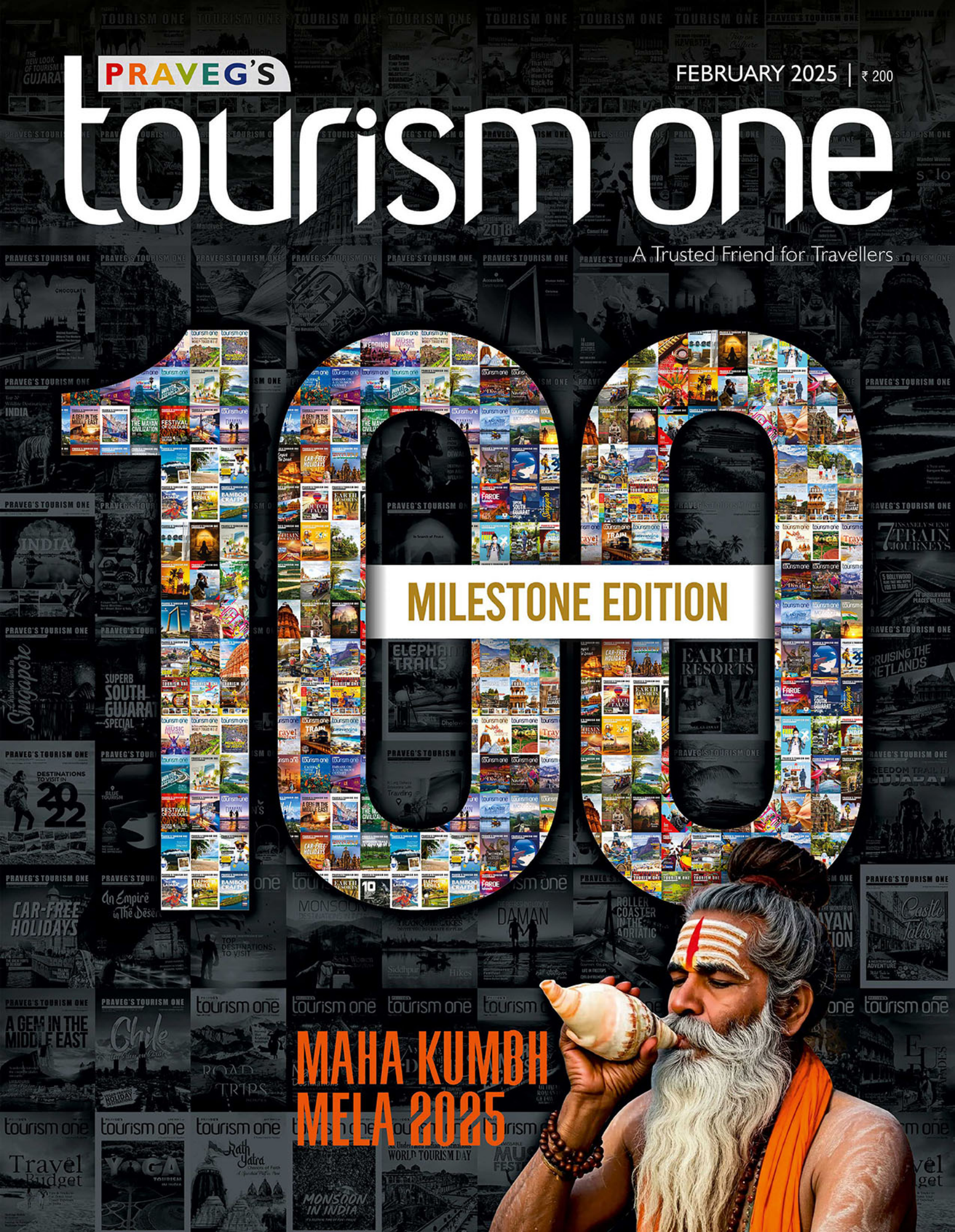
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tourism one

A Trusted Friend for Travellers

MILESTONE EDITION

MAHA KUMBH
MELA 2025



MILESTONE EDITION 100 & THRIVING

As Tourism One proudly marks its 100th issue, we find ourselves aligned with a monumental event—Maha Kumbh 2025, where 65 crore pilgrims have gathered in less than two months, reaffirming its status as the world's largest spiritual gathering. Just as the sacred ghats of Prayagraj witness millions taking a holy dip at the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati, our journey, too, has been one of exploration, discovery, and unwavering dedication to the world of travel. As devotees celebrate faith, tradition, and spirituality, we celebrate a milestone that reflects our commitment to bringing India's rich heritage and boundless journeys to our readers.

Maha Kumbh 2025

For Tourism One, this grand event inspired two insightful features. Travel writer Indrani Ghose takes us through her personal experience at the Sangam, offering a first-hand glimpse of the festival's vibrance. Meanwhile, our staff writer Umang Sharma presents an informative overview of Maha Kumbh, encapsulating its significance in Hindu culture. His feature—structured like an infographic—highlights key dates, rituals, major events, travel tips, environmental considerations, and the extensive facilities set up by the Uttar Pradesh government for pilgrims and tourists alike.

Sustainable Tourism

As travellers, we share a responsibility to protect the destinations we explore. This year, National Tourism Day served as a reminder to tread lightly and travel responsibly. In this issue, Umang Sharma explains the essence of sustainable tourism and provides actionable tips on how travellers can support local communities, minimize their ecological footprint, and ensure a lasting positive impact on the environment.

Springtime Indulgences

With winter bidding adieu, the 40-day transition into summer—our vibrant spring—brings a delightful culinary experience. India's festival calendar aligns perfectly with seasonal changes, and this period is marked by the joyous celebrations of Holi and Maha Shivratri. Welcome the warmth with a refreshing glass of Thandai, observe a Maha Shivratri fast with the delicious Rajgira Paratha, and celebrate spring's sweetness with a Flourless Honey-Almond Cake.

Travel Love: The Gypsy Couple

This edition marks the return of our much-loved interview feature. Meet Rishabh & Nirali—better known as The Gypsy Couple—who turned their arranged marriage into a shared journey of global exploration. From bustling cities to remote hideaways, their travel stories are a testament to love, adventure, and discovering the world together.

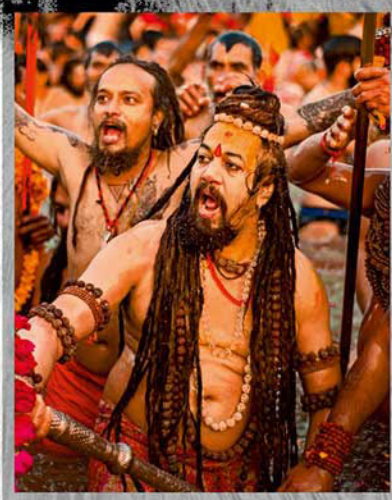
India's Wetland Wonders

For nature lovers, contributor Mahek Siddiqui curates a list of India's most breathtaking wetlands. These biodiversity hotspots are perfect for birdwatching, serene getaways, and a closer connection with Mother Nature.

Here's your February issue of Tourism One. Dive in, explore, and share your thoughts with us! 



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MAHA KUMBH MELA 2025

A Spiritual Odyssey

By UMANG SHARMA, Staff Writer

The Maha Kumbh Mela, set to take place in Prayagraj from January 13 to February 26, 2025, is not just a festival; it's a monumental event in Hindu culture that draws millions of devotees from around the world. This gathering, recognized as the largest religious congregation globally, embodies the essence of spirituality, tradition, and community. The sheer scale of participation reflects the deep-rooted faith and devotion that binds people across diverse backgrounds.



Significance In Hindu Culture

The Maha Kumbh Mela holds profound significance in Hinduism, symbolizing the victory of gods over demons during the mythical Samudra Manthan (ocean churning). It is believed that drops of nectar fell at four sacred sites: Prayagraj, Haridwar, Ujjain, and Nashik. The confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati rivers at Prayagraj is considered a powerful site for spiritual cleansing and liberation (moksha). Attendees come to immerse themselves in these holy waters, seeking purification and divine blessings. This ritualistic bathing is not just a physical act but a spiritual journey that connects individuals with their faith and heritage.



Key Dates and Rituals

The 2025 Maha Kumbh Mela spans 44 days, featuring several key rituals known as Shahi Snans (royal baths). These sacred bathing days are pivotal moments when millions gather to cleanse their souls. Important dates include:

- **Paush Purnima Snan, January 13, 2025:** This auspicious day marks the beginning of the Maha Kumbh Mela, symbolizing the start of a month-long period of spiritual observance.
- **Makar Sankranti Snan, January 14, 2025:** Celebrated as a significant solar festival, this day is believed to bring prosperity and is one of the most important bathing days during the Mela.
- **Mauni Amavasya Snan, January 21, 2025:** Known for its spiritual significance, this day attracts millions for a holy dip, as it is believed to enhance the benefits of purification and penance.
- **Vasant Panchami Snan, February 10, 2025:** This day marks the onset of spring and is celebrated with rituals that honour Goddess Saraswati, adding a cultural dimension to the spiritual experience.
- **Maha Shivratri Snan, February 26, 2025:** Concluding the Mela, this day is dedicated to Lord Shiva and is considered highly auspicious for devotees seeking blessings and spiritual fulfilment.

These rituals are accompanied by spiritual discourses, chanting of hymns (bhajans), and various cultural performances that enrich the experience. Each date is steeped in astrological significance, believed to enhance the spiritual benefits of participating in these sacred rites.



Major Events and Activities

Beyond the bathing rituals, the Maha Kumbh Mela offers a vibrant tapestry of events and activities:

- **Cultural Performances:** Traditional music, dance, and folk art performances celebrate the rich heritage of India. These performances not only entertain but also educate attendees about various cultural narratives.
- **Spiritual Discourses:** Renowned saints and spiritual leaders share insights on Hindu philosophy and spirituality. These teachings often inspire attendees to reflect on their own spiritual journeys.
- **Yoga and Meditation Sessions:** Pilgrims can participate in sessions aimed at enhancing physical and mental well-being. These practices are integral for those seeking inner peace amidst the bustling environment of the Mela.
- **Craft Bazaars:** Visitors can explore local handicrafts and traditional items at various stalls set up around the mela grounds. These bazaars provide a unique opportunity to support local artisans while taking home a piece of cultural heritage.



Travel Tips

Practical Advice for Attendees

- **Packing Essentials:** Bring comfortable clothing suitable for varying weather conditions, toiletries, spiritual texts, and any personal items you may need.
- **Health and Safety Tips:** Stay hydrated, especially during long days at the event. Be mindful of your belongings in crowded areas.
- **Cultural Etiquette:** Respect local customs during rituals. Observing silence during prayers or being mindful when taking photos can enhance your experience.

Environmental Considerations

Sustainability Efforts

The organizers are committed to minimizing environmental impact through various initiatives. Waste management practices will be implemented to ensure cleanliness throughout the event. Additionally, eco-friendly accommodations will be promoted to support sustainable tourism.



Facilities Created by the State Government

To accommodate the influx of visitors expected to reach approximately 400 million, the Uttar Pradesh government has invested significantly in infrastructure and facilities:

- **Sanitation and Hygiene:** Over 70 billion has been allocated for sanitation projects to ensure cleanliness throughout the event. This commitment reflects a dedication to providing a safe environment for all attendees.
- **Safety Measures:** Advanced security measures will be in place, including AI-enabled cameras and dedicated personnel to ensure safety. The focus on safety ensures that pilgrims can engage fully in their spiritual journey without concern.
- **Transportation Enhancements:** Indian Railways has increased train services to facilitate travel for pilgrims. This logistical support will make it easier for devotees from across India to participate in this grand event.
- **Mobile Apps:** The "Mahakumbh Mela 2025" app will assist visitors with information on key locations, events, and amenities. This technological integration aims to enhance visitor experience by providing real-time updates.

Final Thoughts

As preparations continue for this grand event, the Maha Kumbh Mela stands as a testament to India's rich cultural heritage and spiritual legacy. Whether you seek spiritual rejuvenation or cultural immersion, this festival promises an unforgettable experience that resonates with the heart of millions. Plan your visit to witness this extraordinary celebration of faith! 🙏



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Journey to
the Sangam
FROM DOUBT
TO DEVOTION
OUR JOURNEY
TO THE SANGAM

By Indrani Ghose

A father's dream,
a daughter's hesitation, and
a journey that became
a spiritual awakening

"Aren't you going to take a dip?" my 81-year-old father's question crackled through the phone, carrying the weight of centuries-old tradition. While millions watched the Maha Kumbh unfold on their screens, he dreamed of immersing himself in the sacred waters of Prayagraj.



The Unexpected Pilgrimage

Our immediate response? A resounding "No!" The thought of navigating through an ocean of humanity was daunting enough, but what worried us was Baba's health. With a bad knee that required crutches, how would he navigate the crushing crowds at this once-in-144-year gathering? The image of him manoeuvring through Prayagraj's packed streets and Ghats with crutches was unnerving.

But if there's one thing about my father, it's that he doesn't let go of his dreams easily. And, well, I'm hardly the most obedient daughter! After much debate, Arunabha and I found ourselves huddled over travel websites, planning the trip despite our initial hesitation. We targeted Magh Purnima Snan, a particularly auspicious bathing day, even as ticket prices soared. Our budget-friendly solution? Enter through Varanasi and exit via Ayodhya.

His persistence led us to craft an ambitious pilgrimage spanning three sacred cities: Varanasi, Prayagraj, and the newly-built Ram Mandir in Ayodhya.

The Master Plan

February 7th – Fly from Bangalore to Varanasi

February 10th – Take Vande Bharat to Prayagraj (for Magh Purnima Snan on February 12th)

February 13th – Head to Ayodhya

February 14th – Fly back to Bangalore

We were patting ourselves on the back for our smart itinerary when reality struck like a thunderbolt. On January 29th, news channels blazed with reports of a stampede. Excitement turned to anxiety—had we been too ambitious in choosing Magh Purnima? Could we manage the crowd with Baba?

But, as always, my father surprised us. With remarkable grace, he said, "Don't worry—if things look bad, I'll stay back. You two can take the dip." His unexpected flexibility lifted a massive weight off our shoulders.



VARANASI: Where Wisdom Finds You

Varanasi, our first stop, unfolded like a living scripture—ancient temples, mystical Ghats, and the quiet wisdom of Sarnath's Buddhist relics. Yet, some of the most valuable insights came not from priests or guides, but from strangers over breakfast at our hotel.

Between sips of chai and bites of paratha, we discovered that nearly everyone around us had crafted elaborate multi-city pilgrimages. Some were covering two cities, others three, flowing like an invisible current between sacred sites. Our fellow travellers, seasoned pilgrims, shared practical wisdom:

Beware of VIP visits—Boating services get cancelled.

Roadblocks are common—Expect detours of 5–6 km.

Prayagraj-bound vehicles from Varanasi face jams—Plan accordingly.

It was as if the universe had sent us scouts, lighting our path forward.

Prayagraj: Where Dreams Meet Destiny



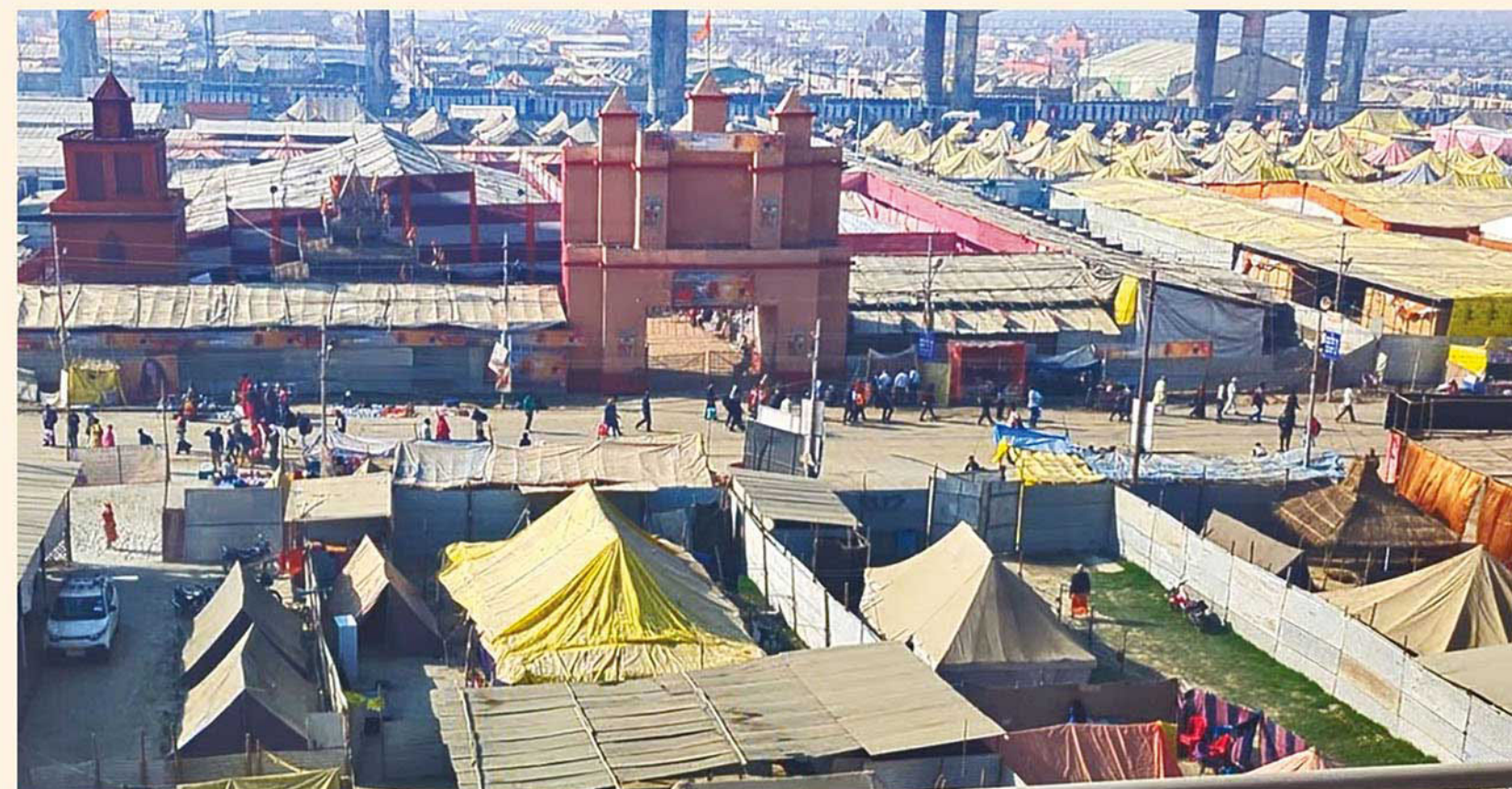
Arriving in Prayagraj, we were immediately struck by the unexpected kindness of strangers. Though our hotel was four kilometres from the station, a network of helpful coolies, policemen, and cheerful e-rickshaw drivers ensured we reached without a hitch. By lunchtime, we were settled, strategizing the crown jewel of our journey—the dip at Triveni Sangam.

Following the hotel staff's advice, we hired bikers to take us to the Boating Club at dawn. But just as the river changed its course, so did our plans. Upon arrival, we were met with disappointing news—all boat services had been cancelled for the day. Fellow pilgrims, returning with resigned faces, advised us to seek alternative Ghats.

And then, another small miracle. Our biker guides, instead of abandoning us or hiking their rates, offered to take us to another Ghat—a rare display of honesty during such a massive event.

They led us to Arail Ghat, located across Triveni Sangam, choosing a spot that would be gentle on Baba's condition. The mere 800-meter walk to the Ganga felt surreal, as if stepping into another realm. By 7 AM, bathed in the golden light of the rising sun, the moment felt charged with an unspoken energy.

And then—Baba, who had struggled with his limp for months, suddenly picked up pace, practically running towards the Ghat! It was as if faith itself had taken over, transcending age and ailment.



Magh Purnima: The River of Humanity

The true test came on Magh Purnima morning. By then, Arunabha and I had experienced first-hand what it meant to move with the masses. All vehicles, even bikes, were stopped two kilometres from the bathing site. Yet, what could have been chaos became an orchestrated flow with the silent understanding between millions of pilgrims—no pushing, no shoving, just thousands walking with singular devotion.

It felt like witnessing two rivers—one flowing towards the Ghat, eager and anticipating, the other returning, faces tilak-adorned, eyes filled with a quiet peace. There was no need for aggressive policing—just gentle but firm reminders to keep moving, to make space for others.

When we finally stepped into the water, it wasn't just a ritual; it was a surrender, an acceptance of something greater than ourselves. In this sacred choreography, we completed our Magh Purnima Maha Snan with surprising ease.



Beyond the Dip: Faith, Fate, and Kindness

In 2017, UNESCO recognized Kumbh Mela as an Intangible Cultural Heritage, and it's easy to see why. Months of meticulous preparation had ensured security, medical facilities, lost-and-found centres, and even changing rooms for women—all working seamlessly. Every possible calamity had been foreseen, every rescue operation planned in advance.

Looking back, I realize that our journey wasn't really about "planning" at all. It was a series of divine interventions, with helping hands appearing at every turn. Our pilgrimage to the Sangam was a reminder that in an age of digital darshans and virtual tours, there remains something ineffably powerful about physical presence in sacred spaces. Through my father's dream and determination, we experienced not just the convergence of holy rivers, but the coming together of human resilience, unwavering faith, and the boundless generosity of strangers.

We had set out for a dip in the Sangam, but what we truly found was the power of faith. In the end, what seemed like an overwhelming challenge became a profound reminder that some journeys are meant to be taken on faith alone. **10**

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**PRAVEG'S
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Embrace Sustainable Tourism on

NATIONAL TOURISM DAY

By UMANG SHARMA, Staff Writer

**CELEBRATING RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL
AND CULTURAL APPRECIATION**

Every year on January 25, India celebrates National Tourism Day to honour the country's rich cultural heritage and the vital role tourism plays in its economy. This day serves as a reminder of the importance of sustainable tourism practices that not only benefit local communities but also preserve the environment for future generations. With a focus on responsible travel, National Tourism Day encourages individuals to reflect on their impact as tourists. It's a call to action for travellers to engage meaningfully with their destinations, fostering a sense of responsibility and awareness about the effects of tourism. Let's delve deeper into the significance of this important day.

Did You Know?

The global sustainable tourism market is projected to reach USD 3.35 trillion by 2024 and is expected to grow at a CAGR of 15% from 2024 to 2031, indicating a significant shift towards eco-friendly travel options.



The Significance of Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism is defined as tourism that takes into account its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts. It aims to meet the needs of visitors while ensuring that host communities benefit economically and socially. By promoting sustainable practices, we can protect natural resources and cultural heritage for generations to come, ensuring that tourism

remains viable and beneficial for all stakeholders involved. The principles of sustainable tourism include environmental sustainability, socio-cultural sustainability, and economic sustainability. These principles guide travellers and businesses alike in creating a more responsible tourism industry, fostering connections between visitors and local communities.

Did You Know?

International tourist arrivals reached 98% of pre-pandemic levels in January-September 2024, with approximately 1.1 billion arrivals recorded during this period, showcasing a strong recovery in global tourism

Tips for Travelers to Support Local Tourism Initiatives

Travelers play a crucial role in promoting sustainable tourism, and there are several practical ways to make a positive impact during their journeys. Here are some tips for supporting local tourism initiatives that can enhance your travel experience while benefiting communities.



Choose Eco-Friendly Accommodations

Opt for hotels and lodges that prioritize sustainability by using renewable energy sources and minimizing waste. Look for certifications like Green Key or EarthCheck that indicate a commitment to eco-friendly practices. Staying in such places not only reduces your carbon footprint but also encourages more businesses to adopt sustainable measures. Supporting these accommodations helps foster a culture of environmental responsibility within the hospitality industry, ultimately leading to a more sustainable travel experience.



Engage with Local Communities

Participate in community-based tourism activities that allow you to interact with locals and learn about their culture first-hand. This could include workshops on traditional crafts, cooking classes, or guided tours led by community members who share their stories and insights. Engaging with locals enriches your travel experience by providing deeper insights into their way of life while creating lasting memories. Moreover, it ensures that your visit contributes directly to the local economy, helping communities thrive.



Support Local Businesses

Dine at local restaurants, shop at artisan markets, and hire local guides to ensure your spending benefits the community directly. Choosing locally-owned establishments helps keep money within the community, fostering economic growth and job creation while enhancing your overall travel experience. Additionally, you'll likely enjoy more authentic experiences when you engage with local flavours and traditions that reflect the region's unique identity. Supporting these businesses also encourages them to maintain their unique cultural offerings, preserving the essence of the destination.



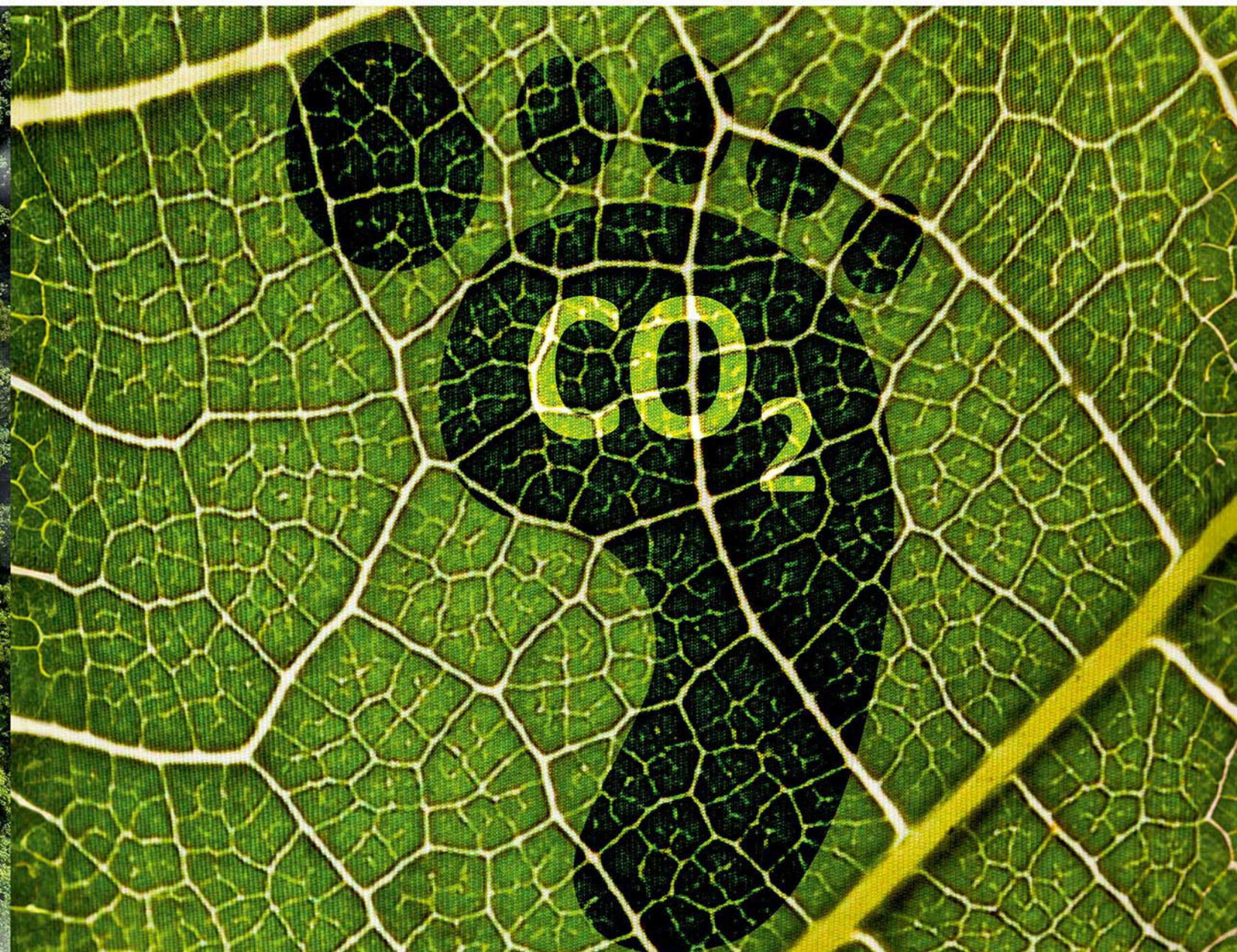
Respect Cultural Practices

Be mindful of local customs and traditions when visiting new places to ensure respectful interactions with residents. Educate yourself about the cultural significance of sites you visit to avoid unintentional disrespect or misunderstandings that could harm relationships between visitors and locals. Simple gestures like asking permission before taking photos or dressing appropriately can go a long way in showing respect for local cultures and traditions. This awareness enhances your travel experience while fostering goodwill between visitors and residents, enriching both parties' understanding



Reduce Waste

Carry reusable items like water bottles, bags, and utensils to minimize plastic waste during your travels. By reducing single-use plastics, you contribute to cleaner environments in tourist destinations while helping protect wildlife from pollution caused by discarded materials. Many areas are now facing significant waste management issues due to tourism; your efforts can make a difference in preserving these beautiful locations for future visitors. Small changes in your habits can lead to significant positive impacts on the environment and promote a culture of sustainability among fellow travellers.



Offset Your Carbon Footprint

Consider carbon offset programs when booking flights or accommodations to mitigate your environmental impact while traveling responsibly. Many airlines and travel companies offer options to invest in projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, such as reforestation or renewable energy initiatives that benefit global sustainability efforts. Offsetting your carbon footprint is an effective way to take responsibility for your travel-related emissions while supporting projects that create positive change in communities around the world. It's an empowering choice that aligns with responsible travel practices and encourages others to follow suit.

Did You Know?

The fastest-growing demographic in sustainable tourism is the 15-25 age group, often referred to as Gen Z, who are particularly interested in travel that supports local communities and minimizes environmental impact.

NATIONAL Tourism Day

On National Tourism Day, various programs, seminars, and workshops are organized across India to highlight the unique experiences offered by different regions. These events aim to showcase how tourism can be a force for good—promoting economic growth while safeguarding cultural and natural heritage. From cultural performances to eco-tours, there are numerous ways for travellers to engage with local traditions on this day. Participants are encouraged not only to enjoy these experiences but also to reflect on their role in supporting sustainable practices throughout the year. As we celebrate this day, let's commit ourselves to making responsible choices that benefit both travellers and host communities alike.

CONCLUSION

As we celebrate National Tourism Day on January 25, let us embrace the principles of sustainable tourism and commit to making responsible choices during our travels. By supporting local businesses, respecting cultures, and minimizing our environmental impact, we can enrich our travel experiences while positively contributing to the communities we visit. Together, we can ensure that tourism remains a force for good, fostering economic growth and cultural preservation for generations to come. Let's make every journey count! 🌍

Flourless HONEY-ALMOND CAKE

A Sweet Slice of Romance

Light, delicate, and naturally sweet, this Flourless Honey-Almond Cake is a heart-warming treat that embodies love and warmth. The richness of almonds and the golden sweetness of honey create a luxurious, melt-in-the-mouth texture—perfect for sharing with your special someone. Whether enjoyed with tea or as a Valentine's dessert, this gluten-free indulgence is a celebration of love in every bite.

Ingredients

Cake:

- 1 1/2 cups whole almonds, toasted (see tip)
- 4 large eggs, at room temperature, separated
- 1/2 cup honey
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

Topping:

- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1/4 cup sliced almonds, toasted (see tip)



Tips for the Perfect Cake

For whole almonds, bake at 350°F for 7–9 minutes. For sliced almonds, toast in a dry pan over medium heat for 2–4 minutes until fragrant.

Let eggs sit at room temperature for 15 minutes, or place them in lukewarm water for 5 minutes before using. This ensures a lighter cake texture.

The cake can be stored in an airtight container at room temperature for up to a day. Add honey and almonds just before serving for maximum freshness.

A delightful, fuss-free cake that's rich in love and flavor - perfect for making sweet memories this Valentine's Day!

Method

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F (175°C). Grease a 9-inch springform pan, line the base with parchment paper, and grease the paper.
2. In a food processor, grind toasted almonds into a fine meal.
3. In a large mixing bowl, beat egg yolks, honey, vanilla extract, baking soda, and salt until smooth. Stir in the ground almonds until well combined.
4. In a separate bowl, whisk egg whites until foamy and doubled in volume, but not stiff. Gently fold them into the almond mixture using a spatula.
5. Pour the batter into the prepared pan and bake for 25–28 minutes, or until golden brown and a skewer inserted in the centre comes out clean.
6. Cool in the pan for 10 minutes, then run a knife around the edges and remove the side ring. Allow the cake to cool completely.
7. Before serving, drizzle honey over the cake and sprinkle toasted sliced almonds for a delightful crunch. 🍯

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RAJGIRA PARATHA

A Fasting Favorite

Rajgira Paratha is a wholesome and nutritious flatbread, specially prepared during Mahashivratri and other fasting days. Made with rajgira (amaranth) flour, mashed potatoes, and aromatic spices, this gluten-free delight provides sustained energy and is easy to digest. Enjoy it with curd or vrat-friendly sabzi for a fulfilling fasting meal.

Ingredients

- 2 cups rajgira atta (amaranth flour)
- 3 green chillies, finely chopped
- 1 cup boiled and mashed potatoes (about 2 medium-sized potatoes)
- 2 tbsp coriander leaves, chopped
- 1 tbsp ghee
- 2 tbsp curd
- Salt to taste
- 2-3 tbsp water, as required



Pro Tips

Handle with care: Rajgira flour is crumbly, so roll parathas between parchment paper for ease.

Moisture matters: Adding curd and mashed potatoes helps bind the dough, making it pliable.

Cooking tip: Cook on medium heat to avoid burning while ensuring even cooking.

Serving suggestion: Pair with fresh yoghurt or vrat chutney for a flavourful experience.

Method

1. In a bowl, mix rajgira atta, salt, green chillies, coriander leaves, mashed potatoes, ghee, and curd.
2. Gradually add water and knead into a soft dough.
3. Divide the dough into 5 equal portions and shape into smooth balls.
4. Roll each ball gently, using parchment paper or a plastic sheet to prevent breakage.
5. Heat a tawa or skillet over medium heat.
6. Place a rolled paratha on the hot tawa and cook until bubbles appear. Flip and cook for a few seconds.
7. Apply ghee and cook until both sides develop brown spots.
8. Serve warm with curd or vrat-friendly sabzi.

Enjoy a divine and delicious Mahashivratri with Rajgira Paratha! 🍯

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THANDAI

A Holi Delight

No Holi celebration is complete without a chilled glass of Thandai! This aromatic and refreshing beverage is a traditional favourite during the festival of colours, offering a perfect balance of richness, sweetness, and cooling properties. Made with nuts, seeds, and fragrant spices, Thandai not only keeps the body cool but also enhances the festive spirit with its delightful flavours.

Ingredients

- 20 almonds
- 10 cashews
- 15 pistachios
- 1½ tbsp poppy seeds
- 1½ tbsp melon seeds (magaz)
- 1½ tbsp fennel seeds (saunf)
- 4 to 10 black peppercorns (adjust to taste)
- 12 green cardamoms
- 1-inch cinnamon stick
- 1 pinch saffron (optional)
- 20 rose petals (or 1 tbsp gulkand)
- 4 cups (1 litre) full cream milk
- 5 to 6 tbsp sugar (adjust to taste)
- Chopped nuts & saffron for garnish



Pro Tips

Soaking Nuts: Always soak nuts well for a smoother, creamier texture. Short on time? Use hot water for an hour.

Poppy Seed Substitute: If unavailable, replace with extra cashews for a similar creamy consistency.

Adjusting Spices: Skip black pepper for a milder taste; saffron can be reduced if preferred.

Make Ahead: Prepare a day in advance for deeper, well-infused flavours.

Clay Pot Infusion: Rest the prepared Thandai in a clay pot for an hour to enhance its earthy aroma.

Method

1. Soak almonds, cashews, and pistachios in water for 4 hours or in hot water for 1 hour. Similarly, soak poppy and melon seeds separately.
2. Peel almonds and rinse all soaked ingredients. Blend them with poppy seeds and melon seeds.
3. Add fennel seeds, black peppercorns, cardamoms, cinnamon, saffron, and rose petals to the blender.
4. Grind everything into a coarse paste. Pour ½ cup milk and blend again until smooth.
5. Bring 4 cups of milk to a boil, add sugar, and mix well.
6. Turn off the heat and stir in the blended paste.
7. Let the mixture cool, then refrigerate for at least 4 hours or overnight.
8. Stir well and strain using a fine sieve before serving.
9. Pour into glasses, garnish with chopped nuts and saffron, and enjoy chilled!

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SAFER INTERNET DAY 2025

By UMANG SHARMA, Staff Writer

Build a Secure Digital World

Safer Internet Day is an annual event celebrated on the second Tuesday of February to promote safe and responsible internet use, especially among children and young people. On February 11, 2025, Safer Internet Day will be celebrated under the theme "Together for a Better Internet," highlighting the need for collective efforts to ensure a secure and equitable digital environment. Originating in 2004, the initiative has expanded to include approximately 170 to 200 countries, addressing the growing need for internet safety due to increasing cyber threats. Safer Internet Day emphasizes the ongoing commitment to making the internet safe for everyone, particularly children.

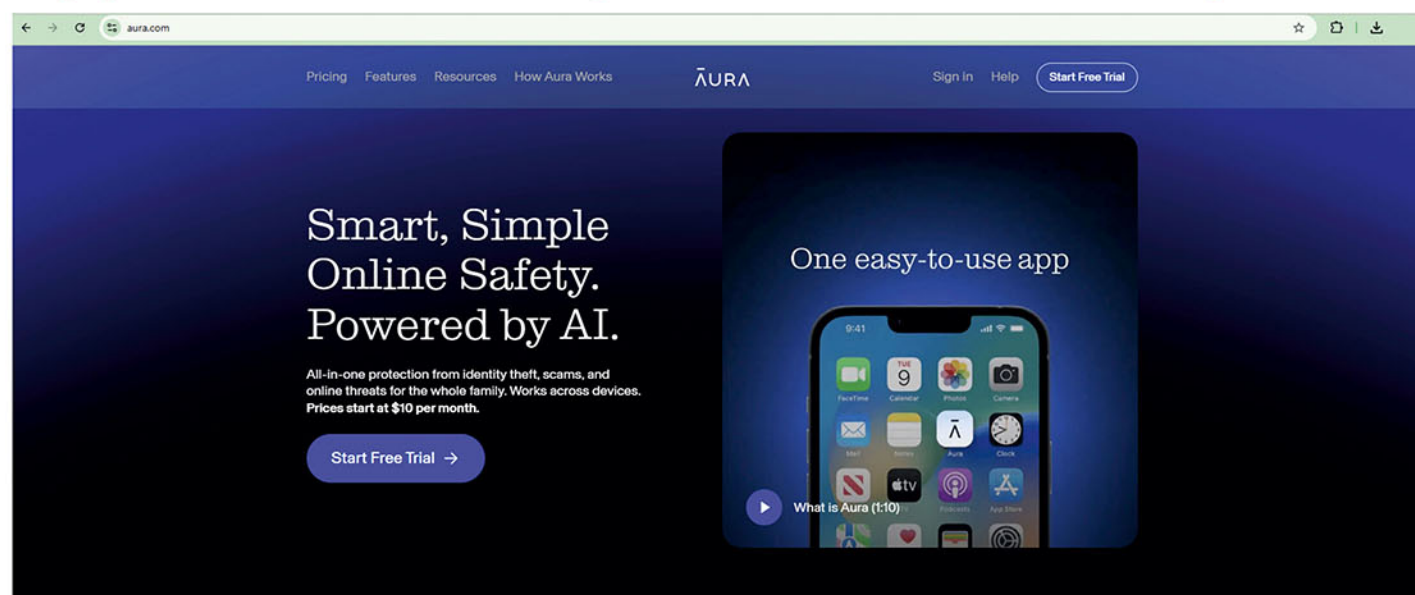


The Importance of Safer Internet Day

The significance of Safer Internet Day lies in its comprehensive approach to online safety, focusing on protection, empowerment, and involvement. Protection involves safeguarding vulnerable groups, especially children, from cyberbullying and harmful content, as well as protecting personal data and preventing identity theft. Empowerment equips individuals with the knowledge and tools to navigate the internet safely and responsibly, promoting digital literacy and teaching users how to avoid online scams and misinformation. Involvement emphasizes the importance of collaboration among parents, educators, industry professionals, and policymakers to promote a safer internet for all.

As travel becomes more accessible, using the right tools can greatly enhance the experience. Here are some apps that can help individuals stay safe on the internet and during travel:

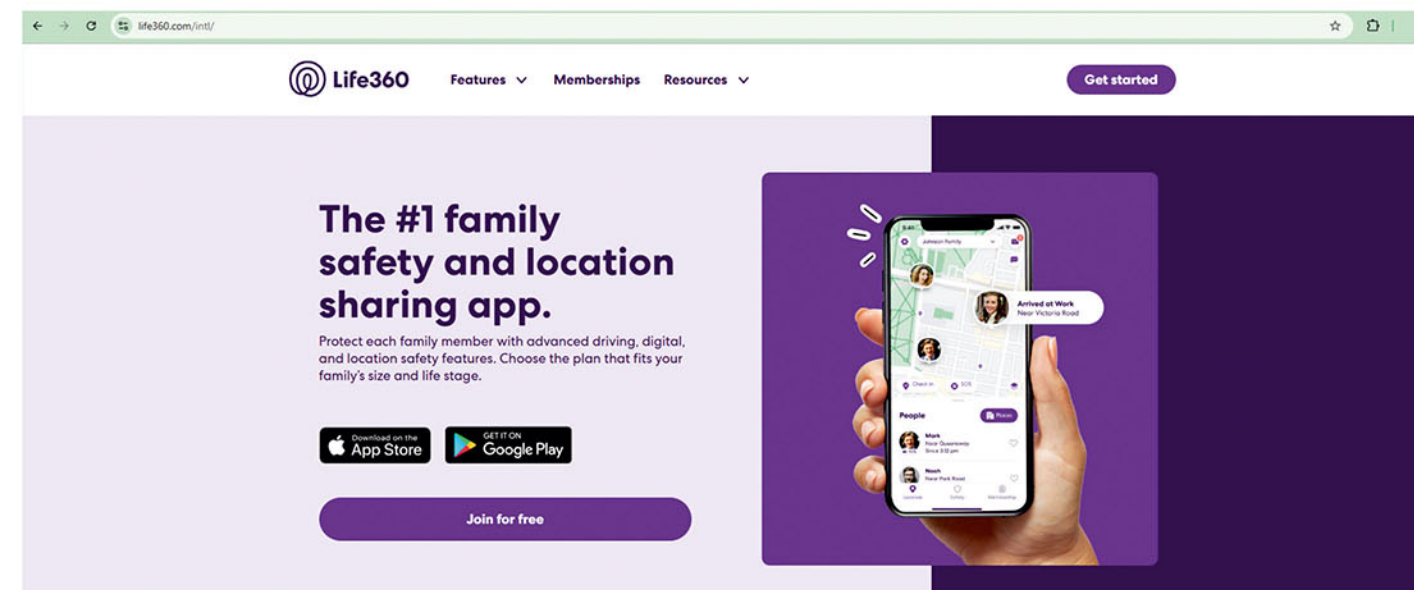
Apps for Protecting Your Online Privacy



Aura

Aura is a comprehensive digital security solution that provides parental controls, identity theft protection, antivirus, a virtual private network (VPN), and password management. This application alerts users to instances of cyberbullying and diligently monitors online activities, ensuring a safe digital environment for children. By offering a suite of security features, Aura aims to protect users from a variety of online threats, making it an essential tool for maintaining digital safety. With its wide array of functionalities, Aura provides peace of mind by actively safeguarding personal and family information online.

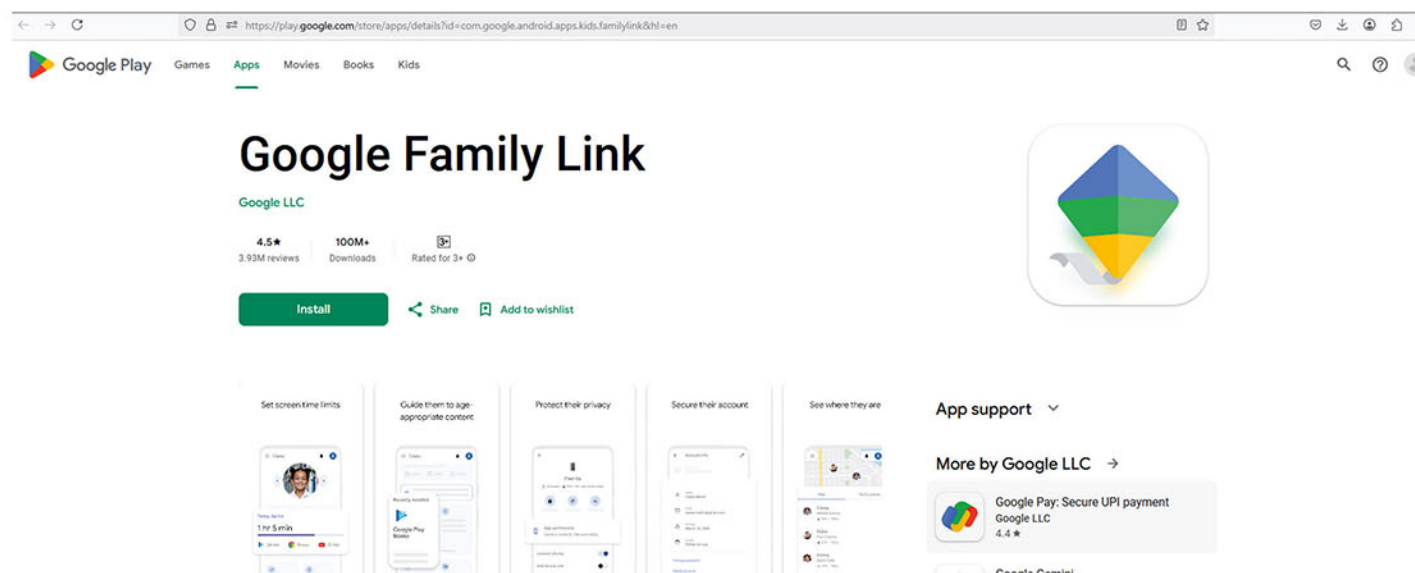
<https://www.aura.com>



Life360

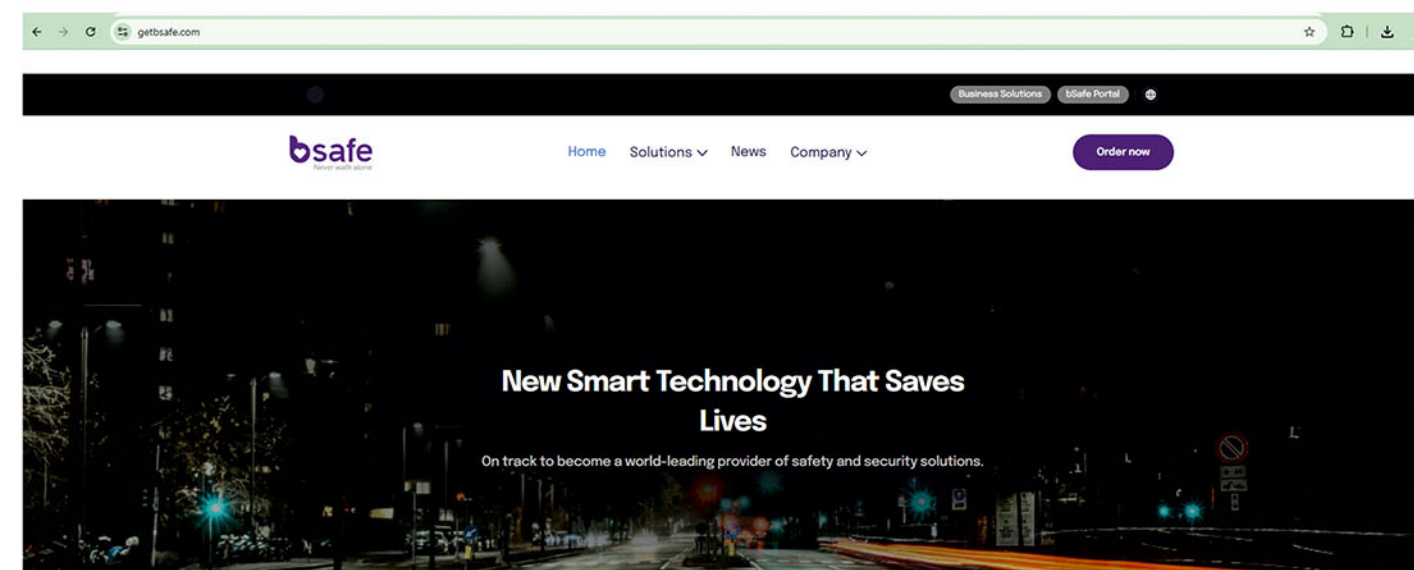
Life360 is a family locator application that enhances safety by enabling family members to share their locations with one another, promoting a sense of security and connectivity. In addition to location sharing, Life360 includes features such as driving safety reports, which monitor driving habits and provide feedback to improve safety on the road. The app also offers emergency alerts, allowing family members to quickly notify each other in case of urgent situations or distress. By providing these comprehensive safety features, Life360 gives families added peace of mind, knowing they can stay connected and aware of each other's whereabouts and safety status.

<https://www.life360.com/intl>



Google Family Link

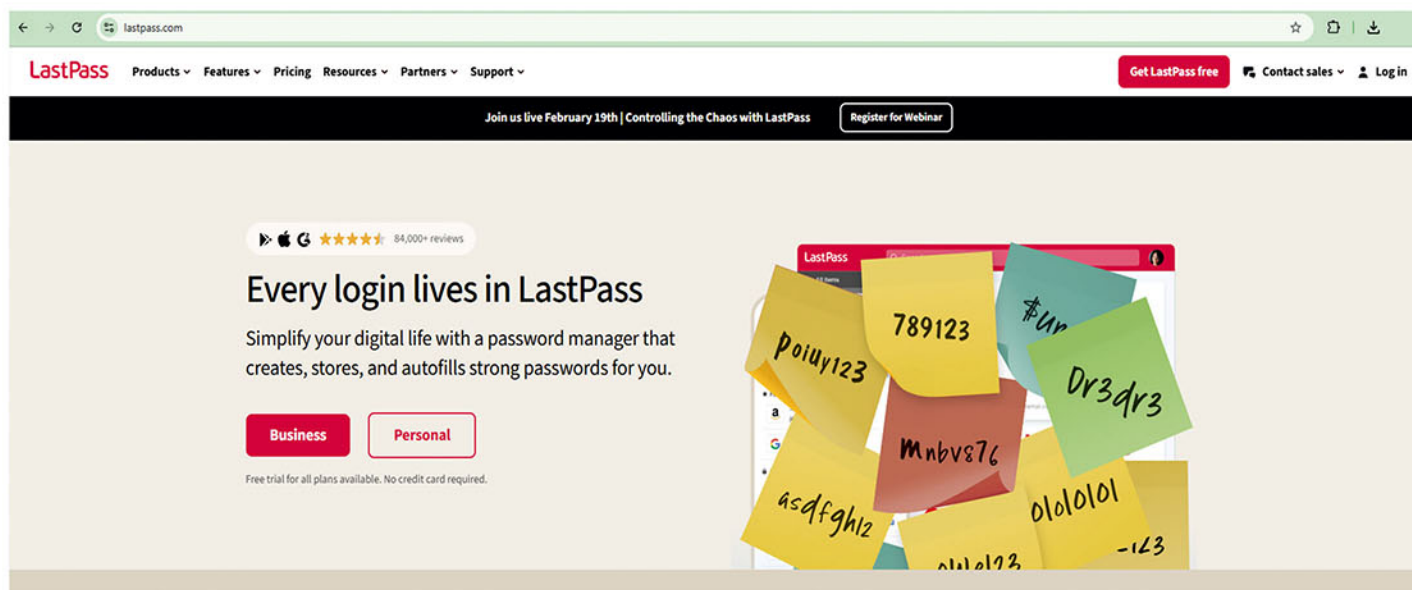
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bSafe

bSafe is an emergency safety application that allows users to send alerts with their location to trusted contacts in times of need, ensuring rapid response in critical situations. The app includes a voice-activated emergency alert feature, enabling users to discreetly call for help without using their hands, adding an extra layer of security. bSafe also offers a fake call option, which helps users escape uncomfortable or potentially dangerous situations by simulating an incoming phone call. By providing these diverse safety tools, bSafe empowers users to take proactive measures to protect themselves and seek assistance when needed. This app is particularly useful for individuals who prioritize personal safety and want a reliable way to alert their contacts during emergencies.

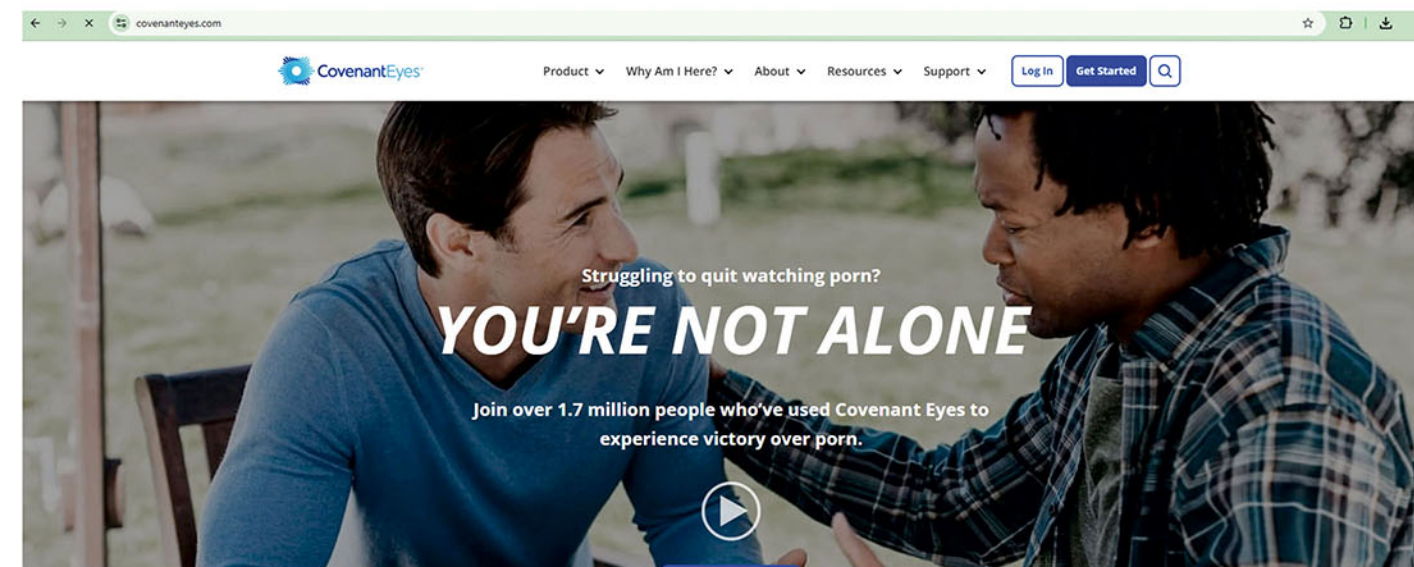
<https://www.getbsafe.com>



Password Manager (LastPass)

LastPass is a password management tool designed to help users create and securely store complex passwords, enhancing their online security across various platforms. The app offers features like password generation, which creates strong, unique passwords to protect against unauthorized access. It also provides an autofill function, streamlining the login process while maintaining high-security standards. By using LastPass, users can protect themselves from cyber threats and ensure that their online accounts are safeguarded with robust, hard-to-crack passwords. This password manager simplifies the process of maintaining strong security practices, making it easier for users to protect their digital identities.

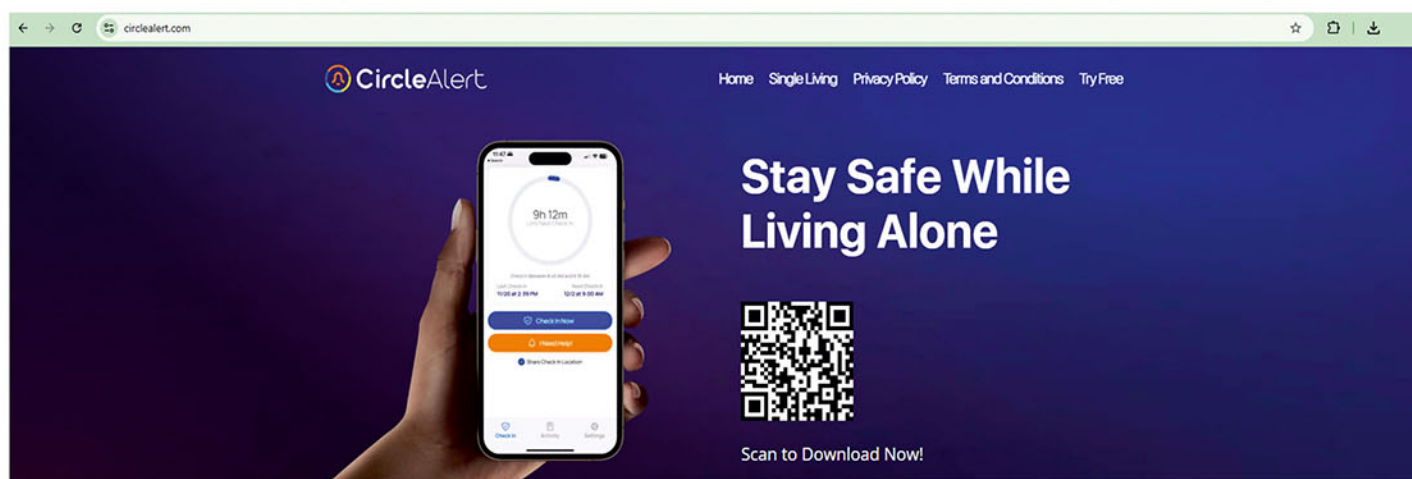
<https://www.lastpass.com>



Covenant Eyes

Covenant Eyes is an accountability application designed to help users avoid inappropriate content online and promote responsible internet behaviour. This app monitors internet usage and sends detailed reports to accountability partners, providing support and encouragement for users striving to maintain online integrity. By sharing internet activity with trusted individuals, Covenant Eyes creates a system of accountability that helps users stay on track and avoid potentially harmful content. This application is particularly useful for those seeking to cultivate responsible online habits and maintain a safe digital environment.

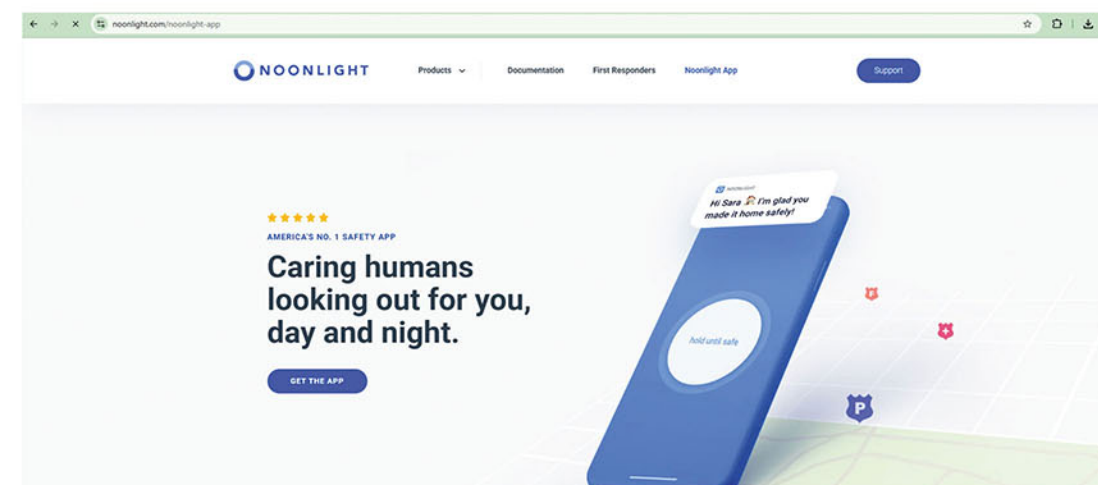
<https://www.covenanteyes.com>



Circle Alert

Circle Alert is a safety application that allows users to quickly alert their friends or family members in case of an emergency, ensuring a swift response when it matters most. With just a few taps, users can send a pre-set message along with their current location to designated contacts, providing them with crucial information to facilitate immediate assistance. This app is designed to be user-friendly and efficient, allowing for rapid communication during critical situations. By enabling quick and easy alerts, Circle Alert helps users feel more secure and connected, knowing that their trusted contacts can be informed and ready to help at a moment's notice. This tool is particularly valuable for those who prioritize personal safety and want a reliable way to reach out for help in emergencies.

<https://circlealert.com>



Noonlight

Noonlight is an emergency response application that connects users with local authorities when they feel unsafe, providing a discreet and reliable way to call for help. Users can discreetly alert emergency services by simply holding down a button until they feel secure, ensuring that assistance is readily available without drawing unwanted attention. This feature is particularly useful in situations where speaking or making a call might not be possible or safe. By offering a direct line to emergency responders, Noonlight enhances personal safety and provides peace of mind, knowing that help is just a touch away. This app is ideal for individuals who want a discreet and effective way to summon assistance when feeling threatened or insecure.

<https://www.noonlight.com/noonlight-app>

Summing Up

safer Internet Day is a vital reminder of the importance of online safety in our increasingly digital world. Utilizing the right apps is essential for enhancing both convenience and security during travel. By incorporating these applications into daily routines, individuals can significantly minimize their risk of cyber threats while maximizing the benefits of the internet. 📱



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GYPSY COUPLE

The Sky is No Limit for Lovebirds

By JAYESH PUROHIT, Staff Writer

Rishabh & Nirali are lovebirds, explorers and awesomeness personified. A made-in-heaven duo, the two have found a common interest in travelling to live their lives together forever. Passionate about globe-trotting, Rishabh and Nirali discovered and created themselves by travelling the world shoulder to shoulder.

This batty couple loves to explore different destinations, geographies, and cultures. To get the best value for their eye-popping adventures, they stay as locals and mingle with the natives to imbibe the community's lifestyle, customs, and socio-economic structure.

After every trip, they begin to make plans for the next one. Look at their bucket list for the coming few years: Machu Picchu trail, the Amazon rainforest, trekking up Mt. Kilimanjaro, an igloo stays somewhere around the North Pole, being certified Sky Divers and the ever elusive (and very expensive) Antarctica. This bucket might overflow with a few more destinations.

Speaking exclusively to Tourism One, the beanpole Rishabh and bubbly Nirali share their secrets of life and travels. Read this interview and get to know the challenges the couple faced, their thoughts on glamping in India, how they explore life in league with each other, the idea of religious and spiritual tourism, and a SWOT analysis of tourism in India.

Gypsy Couple is an intriguing name for your Instagram handle and website. Please narrate the story behind this name.

We had an arranged marriage setup where we were introduced by our respective families and brought together by the hands of fate. During the limited time we had together before deciding to spend our lives together, we figured out the one thing we wanted to do together – Travel. On our honeymoon, the idea of starting a blog and documenting our journey as a new couple germinated. A little-known trivia introduced us to the word Gypsy – a community of nomadic tribes who are said to originate broadly from what is modern-day Gujarat & Rajasthan. Add us, a newlywed couple, and Gypsy Couple were born.

Even if yours was an arranged marriage, you share a similar passion for travelling. Do you think it was destiny or you came to this decision by mutual consent?

Destiny plays a big part in everything. As rightly pointed out, ours was an arranged marriage, which means we were strangers the first time we met. In our ensuing conversation,

we quickly figured out that we were as different as two people could be, except for our shared interest in travelling. That said, we hit it off well and although we weren't sure how it would all work out, we decided to share our passion for travel and traverse the road called life together.

What is the meaning of exploring life together?

As two strangers tied together by the strings of fate called arranged marriage we decided not to take a shortcut in knowing about each other. Instead of taking it as a quiz, we needed to revise the answers. We decided to take every trip as a way of learning more about each other. Over time, we've figured out that we weren't just learning about each other, but we were learning a bit about ourselves as well. A lifelong course we both signed up for - one in which no one gets to fail.

Tell us about the challenges you both faced during your travels as a couple.

For the first few years, the challenge was coming to terms with the fact that we were now a couple. Travelling as an individual vs travelling as a couple are very different. One needs to pre-empt the needs of one's partner in several situations to make them feel more comfortable. And that goes both ways. Decision-making is no longer last-minute whims – be it what you want to eat or even where you want to go. Being very different people in terms of choices made the challenge even tougher.

Once we understood how the “we” thing works, the rules changed. Now, we had to find ways to help challenge our partner to get out of their comfort zone and try new places and things. We might be passionate travellers, but comfort zones exist in various sizes and shapes.

To summarize, the first few years went into helping establish comfort zones, and the next few went into destroying them. As we say, the challenge continues.

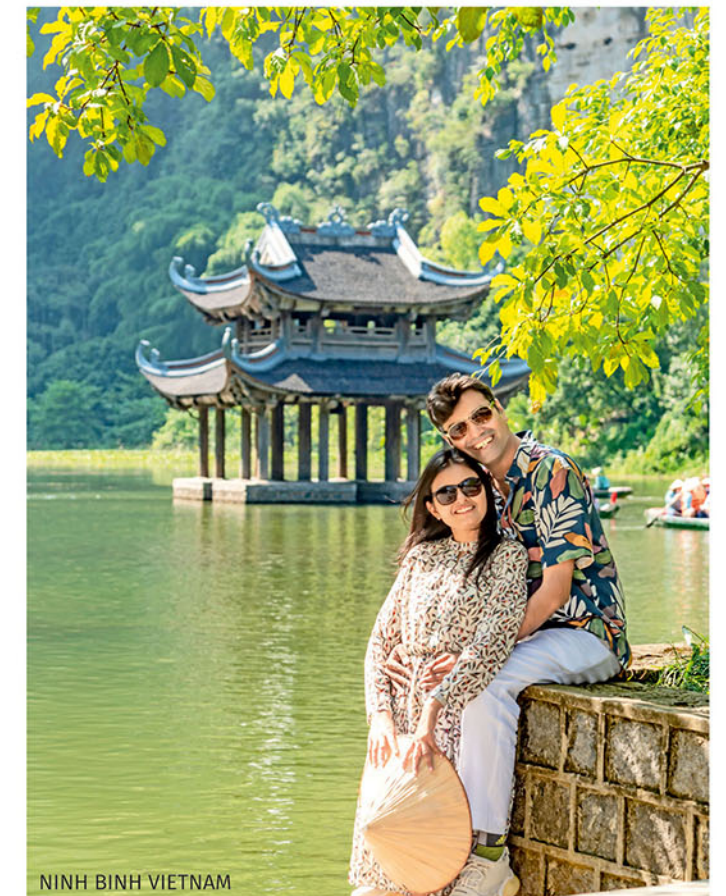
Your thoughts on glamping in India - present and future.

Over the years, we have explored almost all the accommodation options, which the industry has to offer. Our expertise in luxury travel has a way of surprising us with the breadth of options available for anyone wanting an experiential travel experience. Glamping is luxurious camping. Although the experience at its core is different, it seeks to offer the best of both worlds. A campsite steeped in luxury – offering you all the raw experiences the destination has to offer while taking care of your needs – in style. One of the most popular options, luxury tents, offers air conditioning, an en suite

bathroom and possibly everything you might expect from a hotel room - including a hot tub. Other options include tree houses, Geodesic domes and the likes. There is a lot of interest in the market for these kinds of experiences, and our take is that it offers a vastly different experience from a standard hotel room. As travellers evolve, the need for experiential travel can only increase. Glamping can take up a big part of it as people start moving beyond the cities off the beaten road.

More than 60% of tourism in India is associated with religious and spiritual tourism. Share your thoughts on spiritual tourism in India concerning the development of religious shrines like Varanasi, Ayodhya and others.

A lot of family trips we've taken over the years have been to destinations with religious significance. On a broader note, as a secular country, we have a lot of Gods we worship and hence, a lot more scope in developing religious and spiritual tourism. That said, there is a lot of scope for these destinations to be marketed better. A lot of destinations do not have proper infrastructure in place. For people to come in,



NINH BINH VIETNAM

SAFER INTERNET DAY 2025

there needs to be places to stay, to eat and possibly to unwind at the end of the day.

Furthermore, there needs to be storytelling woven into the fabric of the destination. Why limit ourselves to a destination and not think bigger – an entire circuit? Why not trace the life of Lord Shree Ram? From His birth to His Vanvaas to His rescuing Mother Sita. Maybe, this can benefit not just our tourism, but also improve ties with our neighbours (Sri Lanka). We have a whole bunch of mythology associated with various places across the Indian subcontinent, some even further.

We believe there is a need to know more about the history of the spiritual destinations. A Wikipedia page or a hastily written note on a travel brochure cannot cover the small nuances, endless trivia and snippets of the life of the mythological figures we are visiting the destination for. A curated experience at any spiritual destination can be life-changing for sure.

You both have travelled across the length and breadth of this earth. Based on your experience and observations, please analyze tourism in India

Tourism in India is an enigma and not for beginners.

Strengths – The sheer diversity of choices in terms of Geographies, Culture and Food makes it equivalent to a continent compressed in a country. There's simply everything for everyone. The people here are, on the whole, welcoming to tourists and Tourism is still one of the biggest employers for various parts of the country.

Weakness – India is a complex. Infrastructure can be improved. Even the most popular tourist destinations and attractions are relatively unmanaged. Civic sense broadly is lacking, which makes it even harder for tourists, especially foreigners to adjust to it in the short time they're here.

Opportunities – In the last few years, there has been a significant push in terms of infrastructure. Road connectivity is improving. Accessibility is improving, be it by sea, land or air. There is a big push to highlight Indian culture, differentiating us from generic travel destinations. Given the clout India commands on the diplomatic stage today, the world and its citizens have their eyes on India, once again, which can be a big push for tourism. With our pitch for the Olympics and FIFA World Cup, we might also be the stage for the two biggest sporting events in the world.

Threats – As we are improving so are our neighbours. It's a zero-sum game after all, with everyone vying for the same pie. Any change in the socio-political environment of the region would have significant repercussions.



Which domestic and international destinations did you visit more than once? Why?

Three Domestic destinations we've visited more than once in no order are as follows:

Kashmir – We have visited Kashmir individually, with family and together. No one needs an excuse to visit a place that is truly heaven on earth. We were there with our families when Betaab Valley was just a shooting location. We were there when Gulmarg didn't have its gondolas. We were there during the tulip season and also when the apples were ripe. We've heard the stories of the locals and experienced their warm hospitality as they fed us, took us to their homes and accompanied us on the long ride on the dal lake. However, many times we may visit this beautiful destination we long to go back.

Ladakh – A very different landscape from Kashmir but no less beautiful. We've visited it in two different seasons and we plan to at least visit it once in each season. Spring is for apricot blossoms, summers are for the valleys, autumns are beautiful everywhere, and winters are for the snow leopards. Although the summary does not do justice to the many things on offer, most people only need one to book their tickets.

Madhya Pradesh – The heart of India - literally and figuratively. It has Nature, Heritage, Wildlife & Spirituality and everyone's invited. We've been on several trips but it still feels undiscovered. Experience the Narmada Aarti in Jabalpur, go on a walking safari in Satpura, and Listen to the poetic stories sung by the boatmen in Bhedaghat. Spend the night gorging on heavenly food in Indore, and delve into spirituality at Amarkantak and Ujjain. The list goes on, calling us back. 📍

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INDIA'S WETLAND WONDERS

By Mahek Siddiqui

Connect with Nature at Beautiful Biodiversity Destinations

Every year on February 2nd, the world celebrates World Wetlands Day, a time to recognize the critical role wetlands play in maintaining ecological balance, supporting biodiversity, and combating climate change. For nature lovers and wildlife enthusiasts, wetlands offer a unique opportunity to witness vibrant ecosystems teeming with life.

India is home to many wetlands of international significance, known as Ramsar sites, each playing a vital role in preserving flora, fauna, and migratory bird populations. From vast marshlands to serene coastal lagoons, these diverse landscapes provide a sanctuary for countless species.

In this article, we'll explore two of India's most famous Ramsar sites, celebrated for their breathtaking biodiversity and stunning natural beauty. Then, we'll turn our focus to some incredible wetlands in Gujarat, bringing the magic of these ecological treasures closer to home. Whether you're an avid birdwatcher, a photographer, or simply someone seeking a tranquil escape into nature, these destinations promise an unforgettable experience.

VEMBANAD LAKE, KERALA

SUNDARBANS

An Enchanted Mangrove Wonderland



The Sundarbans in West Bengal is the collective name for the largest mangrove forest in the world, spanning both India and Bangladesh. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, this vast wetland is one of the most biodiverse regions on the planet and a designated Ramsar site of immense ecological importance.

The Sundarbans is best known as the realm of the elusive Royal Bengal tiger,

which has adapted to life in the mangroves, swimming effortlessly between islands and navigating dense, waterlogged terrain. Beyond the tigers, the region teems with wildlife, including saltwater crocodiles, spotted deer, Gangetic dolphins, and over 260 species of birds, such as the vibrant kingfishers and majestic white-bellied sea eagles.

Exploring the Sundarbans is a one-

of-a-kind experience, with boat safaris weaving through twisting tidal creeks, dense mangrove tunnels, and remote islands, offering breathtaking glimpses of this untouched wilderness. Whether you're a wildlife enthusiast or a nature lover, the Sundarbans is a must-visit wetland wonder, where land and water merge in an awe-inspiring dance of biodiversity.

VEMBANAD KOL

Kerala's Serene Backwater Haven



Stretching across the heart of Kerala's backwaters, Vembanad Kol Wetland is the largest lake in the state and one of India's most significant Ramsar sites. It's a vital lifeline for the region that supports a rich ecosystem, sustains local livelihoods, and serves as a crucial habitat for diverse flora and fauna.

Famous for its tranquil beauty and interconnected waterways, Vembanad Lake is home to over 20,000 waterbirds,

including migratory species like the garganey duck, whiskered tern, and black-tailed godwit. The wetland also supports a thriving population of otters, crabs, and freshwater fish, making it an ecological hotspot. Moreover, beyond its wildlife, Vembanad is central to Kerala's traditional culture, with communities relying on its waters for fishing, coir production, and rice farming in the

unique below-sea-level paddy fields of Kuttanad.

A visit to Vembanad isn't complete without a houseboat cruise, where you can glide through serene backwaters, passing lush coconut groves, quaint villages, and vibrant birdlife. For all the avid birdwatchers, photographers, or anyone seeking a peaceful retreat, Vembanad Kol Wetland offers a picturesque escape into nature's tranquility.

KHIJADIYA BIRD SANCTUARY

Gujarat's Hidden Avian Paradise



Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary is a unique Ramsar site where freshwater meets saltwater, creating a diverse habitat that attracts a stunning variety of birdlife. It's located near Jamnagar in Gujarat and spreads across six square kilometers. As the name suggests, it's a haven for both migratory and resident birds, making it a must-visit destination for birdwatchers and nature enthusiasts.

Khijadiya is home to over 300 bird species, including the Dalmatian pelican, black-necked stork, greater flamingo, and Indian skimmer. The mix of mudflats, marshes, and mangroves provides the perfect feeding and breeding ground for these birds, while the surrounding grasslands support jackals, mongoose, and other small mammals. The sanctuary also plays a

crucial role in conserving Gujarat's fragile wetland ecosystems.

Visitors can explore Khijadiya's scenic trails, observation towers, and boating routes, offering up-close encounters with its spectacular bird population. Add it to your bucket list if you're a birdwatcher or nature-lover who wants to experience something off-beat and memorable.

NALSAROVAR BIRD SANCTUARY

A Picturesque Wetland Wonder



Located just 64 kilometers from Ahmedabad, Nalsarovar is home to Gujarat's largest wetland bird sanctuary and a designated Ramsar site. Spanning over 120 square kilometers, this vast lake and marshland provide a serene refuge for migratory birds, making it one of the best birdwatching destinations in India.

Every winter, over 250 species of

birds flock to Nalsarovar, including the gorgeous greater flamingo, pelican, painted stork, demoiselle crane, and rosy starling.

The shallow waters and surrounding grasslands create the perfect habitat for these birds, while the region's local communities, the Bharwad and Padhars, coexist harmoniously with nature, offering

boat rides and insights into their traditional way of life.

A visit to Nalsarovar is incomplete without an early morning boat ride, where you can glide across the tranquil lake, watching flocks of birds take flight against the golden sunrise. The breathtaking beauty and biodiversity make it a must-visit for all, especially if you're a seasoned or novice ornithologist.

THOL LAKE

A Tranquil Paradise



For a truly off-the-beaten-track experience, you must go to Thol Lake Wildlife Sanctuary, a stunning Ramsar site that's just a short drive from Ahmedabad city. It features a shallow freshwater lake, spread across 7 square kilometers, surrounded by lush wetlands and grasslands, making it an ideal habitat for both migratory and

resident birds.

Thol is home to over 150 bird species, including the Sarus crane, greater flamingo, Eurasian spoonbill, and Indian spot-billed duck. The lake's peaceful waters and rich biodiversity attract thousands of birds in winter, creating a mesmerizing spectacle for visitors. Apart from its avian residents,

the sanctuary also shelters jackals, blue bulls (nilgai), and other small mammals.

The best way to experience Thol's beauty is with an early morning visit when the lake shimmers under the golden sunrise and birds take flight in breathtaking formations. It's a serene spot to connect with nature, away from the hustle and bustle of the city.

WADHVANA WETLAND

Gujarat's Lesser-Known Avian Retreat



Located near Dabhoi in Gujarat's Vadodara district, Wadhvana Wetland is another Ramsar site that's an important wintering ground for migratory birds from Europe, Central Asia, and beyond. This picturesque wetland, formed around the Wadhvana Reservoir, offers a tranquil escape for birdwatchers and nature lovers alike.

Wadhvana is home to over 200 bird species, including the greater flamingo, ferruginous duck, open-billed stork, and osprey.

The wetland's shallow waters and surrounding grasslands provide the perfect habitat for these birds, making it an essential stopover along

their migration routes. The area also supports a variety of aquatic life and small mammals, contributing to its rich biodiversity.

A visit to Wadhvana is best enjoyed during the winter months when the wetland transforms into a lively birdwatching paradise. It's a hidden gem worth exploring.

RANN OF KUTCH

A Mesmerizing Wetland of Salt and Serenity



One of Gujarat's most iconic travel destinations, the Great Rann of Kutch stretches across the western frontier of the country, bordering Pakistan. It's among the Global 200 ecoregions of the World Wildlife Fund, which means it's one of the most biologically outstanding habitats in the world, receiving concentrated conservation efforts from the WWF. Moreover, India has pledged to designate 1.1 million hectares of the Rann of Kutch wetland as a Ramsar site, while Pakistan has designated 566,375 hectares.

Of course, most visitors know of the expansive white salt desert that hosts the annual Rann Utsav every winter, a cultural festival celebrating the region's art, music, and traditions. But in addition to this, there's also the Little Rann of Kutch, home to the Indian Wild Ass Sanctuary, the last refuge of the endangered Indian wild ass (Ghudkhur).

It also serves as a crucial wintering ground for migratory birds, including flamingos, cranes, pelicans, and raptors. Visitors can explore the Rann's stunning landscapes through jeep safaris,

watching wildlife thrive in this seemingly barren yet ecologically rich habitat. When it comes to a luxurious yet eco-friendly stay, the Praveg Resort Dholavira is a great option that offers easy access to all the key attractions nearby, including the Dholavira UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Whether you come for the thrill of spotting rare wildlife, the magic of a full-moon night over the salt flats, or the vibrant local culture, the Rann of Kutch is an unforgettable wetland wonder unlike any other.

So, the next time you feel the urge to just get away from it all, don't hesitate to go explore one of these wetland wonderlands that are home to some spectacular biodiversity, not just in India but in the world. From the mystical mangroves

of the Sundarbans to the serene backwaters of Vembanad; from thriving bird sanctuaries to the otherworldly landscapes of the Rann of Kutch, these destinations are the perfect place to reconnect with nature and witness the delicate balance of life.

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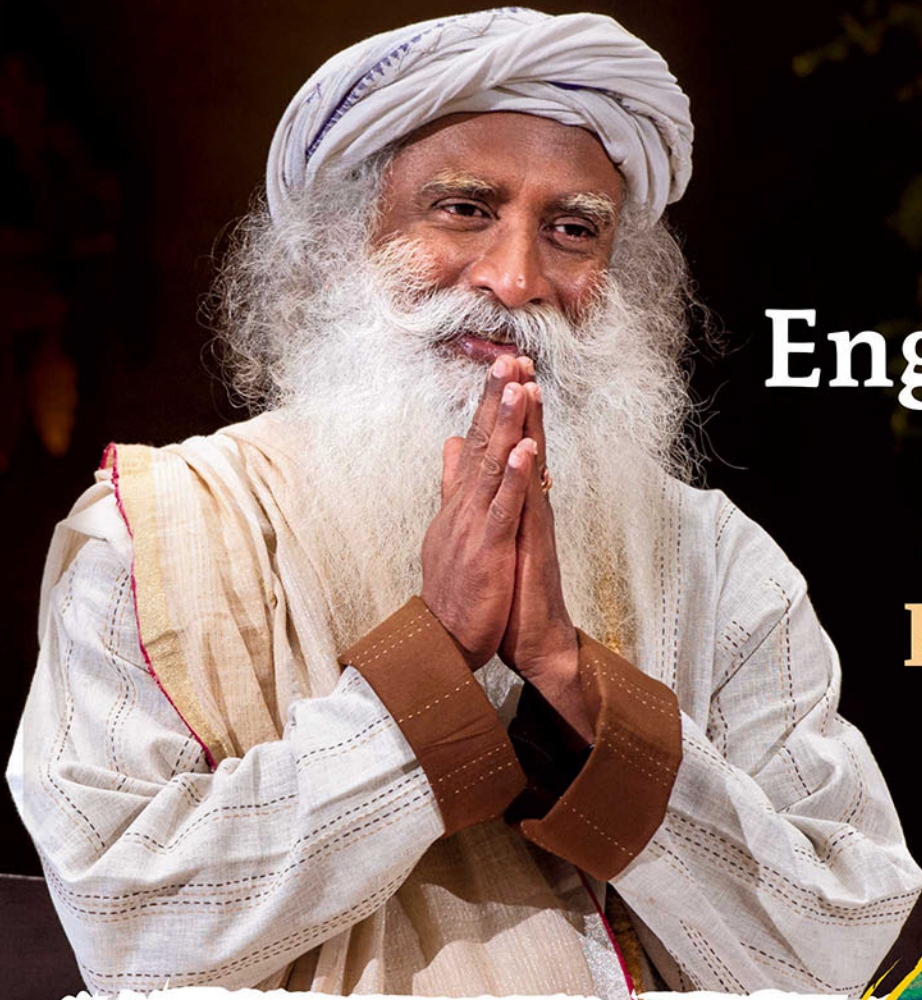
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