

# AMORE

LIFE & LEISURE

Summer Issue 2026

## SHADES OF BLUE

A House That Remembers the Sea

## GO BOHO

Decor for the joyful maximalist

## COOL COCKTAILS

Mixers with a zing

## RASEEL GUJRAL

Creating a home that's unmistakably yours

# TAORMINA

*Sicily's seaside jewel*

LESSONS FROM A LILY BULB



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“Is it possible for home to be a person and not a place?” asked Stephanie Perkins in *Anna and the French Kiss*.

It is a question that invites us to look at home differently. We tend to think of it as an address, a building, a collection of rooms. Yet perhaps home is something less tangible and far more powerful. Perhaps it is the feeling of being understood without explanation, welcomed without ceremony, and accepted exactly as we are. It is found in the subtle shift of a person’s posture when they walk through the front door, or the way a hand lingers for just a second longer on a shoulder.

It is knowing exactly when to offer a cup of tea without being asked, recognising when someone needs conversation and when they need quiet, understanding what remains unsaid. The child who heads straight to the kitchen after school. The grandparent settling into a favourite chair by the window. The partner who wordlessly moves aside on the sofa to make space. These rituals may seem ordinary, yet they are the threads from which belonging is woven.

Yes, love, in its most enduring shape, is rarely about grand gestures. It lives in these small, easily overlooked moments.

Perhaps the answer to Perkins’s question is that home is both a place and a feeling. A place may bring people together, but it is the care they show one another that transforms four walls into a sanctuary. And in a world that often feels hurried and distracted, there is something deeply reassuring about knowing that home remains the place where we are seen, understood and loved.

My hope is that wherever you are reading this, you are surrounded by a home that holds your story with the same quiet faithfulness.

*Amanda Joy*

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# an ode to Linen

Aeka is a planet- positive brand that consists of linen sarees and separates. The endeavour at Aeka was to empower the wearer to lend her personality and style to the garment.

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## editor's note



Dear Readers,

The colour of this issue is blue.

Not one blue, but many. The blue of sea glass and Delft tiles. Of old porcelain and washed linen. Of Mediterranean shutters, twilight water, and horizons that seem to promise another journey beyond them.

Perhaps that is why blue feels like summer.

It cools a room. Slows the eye. Invites contemplation. Bring enough of it into a home and, as one of our stories suggests, the house begins to remember the sea.

That spirit flows through these pages.

We travel to Indonesia, where traces of India still live in language, mythology and memory two thousand years later. We discover Japan's kissaten, where coffee is a philosophy and slowness is the point. We walk the cliff tops of Taormina, where the Greeks built a theatre and used a volcano as a backdrop.

Closer to home, designer Raseel Gujral Ansal reflects on what gives a house its soul. Elsewhere, you'll find books for quiet thinking, films for easy summer evenings, music inspired by water, and recipes and pantry staples that bring a little creativity back into the kitchen.

So linger awhile. Dip in where curiosity leads you.

*Shubhra*



*Samuel Shetty*

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# The **A** List

TRENDING RIGHT NOW



## TIFFANY STYLE STAINED GLASS LAMP WITH ANTIQUE BRONZE BASE

Designed to cast a warm ambient glow. A great accent piece for living rooms, bedrooms, or reading corners.



## PRIMEWORLD BLUE EMBOSSSED DESIGN WINE GLASS

Perfect for intimate dinners or festive gatherings.  
Set of 4.



## OCHRE MANGO CITRON RUM

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## BRASS HAND CRAFTED HORSE DOOR KNOCKER

Charming conversation-starter right at your entrance.



## STRUTT COASTAL INDIGO CANVAS PASSPORT COVER

Canvas passport cover in a coastal indigo print with neatly finished compartments for travel essentials.



## BARE NECESSITIES SOAK IT UP NATURAL MOISTURIZER

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## SUPER SPROUT STICKS BY KLAU

India's first super sprout-based snack, made with 47% sprouted moong and jowar.



## PAPER PLANE DESIGN VAN GOGH ART COLLAGE WALLPAPER

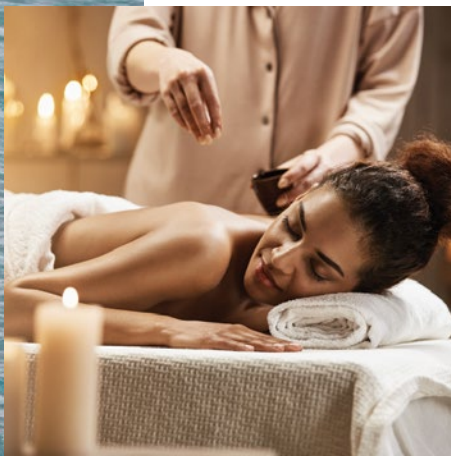
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CHANGES HOW  
YOU *Breathe...*





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The Best Things Anyone  
Ever Said About The

# COLOUR BLUE

“

The blue of the sky  
is one of the most  
special in the world,  
because the colour  
is deep but see-  
through both at the  
same time.

– Cynthia Kadohata  
American children’s writer



**There are connoisseurs of blue just as there are connoisseurs of wine.**

- Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette  
French author



**Blue colour is everlastingly appointed by the deity to be a source of delight.**

- John Ruskin  
English writer



**Blue is the closest colour to truth.**

- Steven Tyler  
American singer



**Blues is a tonic for whatever ails you. I could play the blues and then not be blue anymore.**

- B. B. King, American blues guitarist



**Blue jeans are the most beautiful things since the gondola.**


- Diana Vreeland  
American fashion editor



# AMORE



## WHAT'S THE EASIEST WAY TO MAKE A LIVING ROOM FEEL COOLER DURING SUMMER?

 *Aditi, Ahmedabad*

Lighten what feels visually heavy. Swap thick cushions and dark throws for breathable cottons and linens in pale or washed-out tones. Keep surfaces slightly emptier than usual—summer rooms feel best when they can “breathe.” Mirrors help bounce light around, while sheer curtains soften harsh sunlight without blocking it entirely. A bowl of limes, a trailing plant or even a blue ceramic vase can subtly shift the mood from warm and crowded to calm and airy.

## HOW DO I STOP MY BEDSIDE TABLE FROM LOOKING CLUTTERED?


 *Devika, Kochi*

A bedside table works best when it holds only what you genuinely reach for at night. Keep the essentials—a lamp, book, water glass—and group smaller items like lip balm or jewellery in a shallow tray or bowl. Add one softening element: a tiny vase, framed photograph or candle. Avoid stacking too many books or chargers in sight; visual calm matters in a bedroom. Think of your bedside not as storage, but as a small pause at the end of the day.






## WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO MAKE A BATHROOM FEEL MORE STYLISH WITHOUT RENOVATING?

 *Ritika, Gurgaon*

You don't need a full makeover to change the mood of a bathroom. Start with textiles: a good bath mat, fresh towels and a fabric shower curtain instantly soften the space. Swap harsh lighting for a warm-toned bulb, and add one beautiful detail—a ceramic soap dish, a small stool, or a tray for candles and skincare. Peel-and-stick tiles or removable wallpaper can also transform a dull corner without upsetting your landlord. The trick is to focus less on fixtures and more on atmosphere.




## WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO CLEAN WINDOW BLINDS?

 *Meher, Pune*

Window blinds should be dusted weekly or fortnightly to prevent dust build-up, given a damp wipe down every one to three months, and deep cleaned once a year. Always start by dry dusting with a microfibre cloth or a vacuum brush attachment, wiping horizontal slats across and vertical slats downward. For durable faux wood, vinyl, or aluminium blinds, follow up with a damp cloth and mild washing-up liquid, ensuring you dry them thoroughly. Real wood blinds should never be soaked and instead require a barely damp cloth or wood polish to prevent warping, while fabric, roman, and roller shades should be treated gently with a vacuum on low suction and carefully spot-cleaned with a mild detergent to avoid damaging the material.

## WHY DO MY INDOOR PLANTS ALWAYS DIE EVEN THOUGH I WATER THEM REGULARLY?

 *Kabir, Hyderabad*

Too much kindness is often the problem. Most indoor plants suffer more from overwatering than neglect. Before watering, check if the top inch of soil actually feels dry. Make sure pots have drainage holes, and avoid placing plants in dark corners just because they "look nice" there. Start with forgiving varieties like pothos, snake plant or ZZ plant—they tolerate missed waterings and low light surprisingly well. Healthy plants are less about constant attention and more about understanding what they truly need.



**Got a burning home decor dilemma or a kitchen conundrum you need advice on? Send your queries to [amore@puravankara.com](mailto:amore@puravankara.com) with your name and city, and you might see your question featured in the next issue of Ask Amore!**



*M M Javed*  
Men's Designer

YOUR LUXURY WEAR SPECIALIST

# DECORATE

IDEAS & INSPIRATION ON HOW TO MAKE  
YOUR HOME A BEAUTIFUL SANCTUARY





*“Your home should be about you,” says Raseel Gujral Ansal*



# RASEEL'S Reflections



meet Raseel Gujral Ansal at Casa Paradox Luxe, her design studio on the outskirts of Delhi, where the air feels quieter somehow—like your lungs have more room to breathe. The studio is expansive and elegant, alive with unexpected splashes of colour, each corner animated by a sense of ease and creative possibility. She is much the same—fresh, spontaneous, and entirely at ease without a script, answering questions as they come, with a candour that feels both natural and rare.

Over nearly four decades, she has shaped some of India's most distinctive homes, building deeply personal worlds that reflect the people within them. Fittingly, her name—Raseel—carries a softness, a fluidity that mirrors both her presence and her design philosophy. She prefers not to see questions in advance. What unfolds instead is instinctive, honest, and deeply considered, much like the homes she creates.

There is a moment, very early in the conversation, when the word democratic shifts quietly in meaning.

“I've always been democratic,” she says. “I like to listen.”

And then, with the calm certainty of someone who has spent decades building spaces—and relationships that last just as long—she adds: “But now I can afford to be a little more authoritative.”



Eye's Right wallpaper from Inscape collection of Casa Pop (An art furniture and home brand from Raseel Gujral Ansal)

## THE PINTEREST PROBLEM

If there is one thing that has fundamentally altered the design brief in the last decade, it is this: access. Endless, overwhelming, indiscriminate access.

"Pinterest," she says, without ceremony, "has changed the brief, which is good and bad. Mostly bad."

Clients arrive armed with image references that are beautiful in isolation, but not always in conversation with each other. The result is a mix of influences that can pull a space in too many directions.

"I don't believe in buffet design. Everything must follow a certain palette, a language. You can layer later. But the bones must hold."

And yet, she acknowledges the upside. Visual exposure has given clients a vocabulary. "At least now they can point to something and say, this is what I think is contemporary. This is what I think is classic."

## DESIGNING PEOPLE, NOT SPACES

For Raseel, a home does not begin with walls, or even with light. It begins with the people who will inhabit it.

"Do they collect? Do they read? What is their lifestyle?" she asks. "You build a story around that."

In apartments especially—those open, adaptable canvases—this becomes crucial. With thoughtful planning and structural flexibility, even a standard layout can feel deeply personal.

"So long as there is freedom to interpret, there is no reason for any space to feel the same."

Her own instincts lean towards generosity: fewer rooms, larger volumes, higher doors, cleaner sightlines. Space, in her world, is more than square footage—it is perception.

"I'm a space junkie," she smiles.

## BUILDING FOR THE WAY WE LIVE

As Indian cities evolve, so do the homes within them. "India isn't one uniform experience," she observes. "Light, weather, lifestyle—they shift dramatically across regions."

She sees exciting possibilities in homes that allow for usable outdoor spaces, integrate greenery meaningfully, use materials connected to their surroundings, and balance global aesthetics with local sensibilities. "Sustainability," she reflects, "is also about designing spaces that naturally feel comfortable."

## THE OPEN KITCHEN CONVERSATION

One design choice she approaches with nuance is the open kitchen—popular, aspirational, but not always suited to Indian living.

“In certain lifestyles, it works beautifully,” she says. “But it has to align with how you actually use your home.”

In many Indian households, where cooking is central, active, and aromatic, the kitchen carries a different energy—one that may benefit from a degree of separation. As with everything else, her answer returns to context: design should follow life, not the other way around.

## WHY OUR HOMES FEEL SO SERIOUS

There is a certain earnestness to many Indian homes—a desire to get everything right. But where is the lightness? The spontaneity? The wit and the wink?

“It’s about confidence,” she says. “The confidence to express yourself.”

Homes often reflect a desire to impress rather than express. The most memorable spaces, she believes, come from personality.

“If you’re interesting, your home will be interesting.”

Sometimes that personality shows up in the smallest ways—a playful object, an unexpected piece of art, a personal detail that makes you smile.

## QUICK NOTES FROM A DESIGNER WHO TRUSTS HERSELF

- Fabric she loves: Chiffon
- Overrated word: “Minimal”
- Colour combination to retire: Turquoise and orange. With exceptions, of course.

“I’ve never designed through a rulebook,” she says. “And I never will.”

In the end, what stays with you is not just what she says—but how well she lives it.

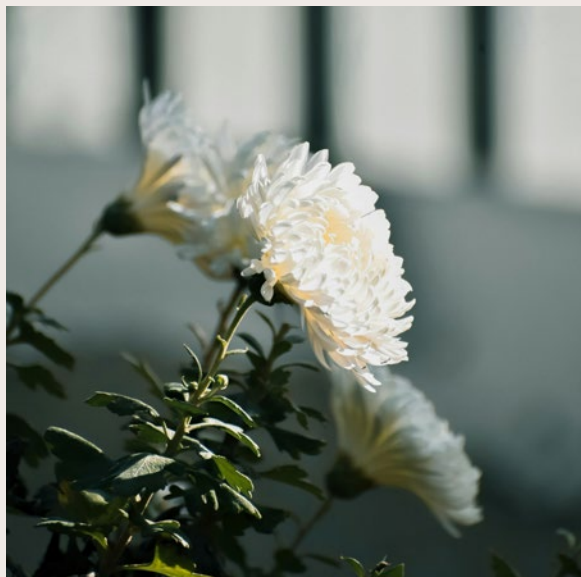
*Raseel Gujral Ansal spoke to Amore Editor Shubhra Krishan*

## A SENSE OF SUMMER

Ask her about summer, and the answer is instinctive, rooted in feeling.

“White,” she says first. “Plants indoors. Linen. Sandalwood.”

And then, almost as an afterthought: “A beautifully laid table with cold food. Effortless, relaxed.”



**Raseel Gujral Ansal** is a leading voice in Indian luxury design, with nearly four decades of work spanning architecture, interiors, furniture, and lifestyle. Founder of RGA Design and co-founder of Casa Paradox Luxe, she is known for creating deeply personal, culturally rooted spaces that balance global sophistication with an Indian soul. Daughter of the legendary artist and architect Satish Gujral, she carries forward a rich artistic legacy, shaping contemporary design through storytelling, craftsmanship, and original glamour.

# BLUE

## A House That Remembers the Sea

Blue is not a colour for walls alone. It is a mood, a temperature, a direction. Bring enough of it into a house and the house begins to feel like it knows where the sea is.





# 01

## INDIGO BLOCK-PRINTED COTTON CUSHION COVERS

Made in Bagru or Ajrakh, where the dye goes into the cloth rather than sitting on top of it. Every wash deepens rather than fades. Stack two on a sofa and the room instantly sings summer.



# 02

## A LARGE CERAMIC BOWL IN COBALT BLUE

On a dining table or kitchen counter, holding fruit. The best ones come from Jaipur's blue pottery tradition, where the glaze is the colour of a clear sky at noon.



# 03

## LINEN CURTAINS IN WASHED FRENCH BLUE

This particular blue of old French toile and faded denim evokes nostalgia. Unlined, so light comes through, and the room feels like it is always early morning.





# 04

## A DELFT-INSPIRED TILE TRIVET OR WALL PANEL

The Dutch spent centuries painting blue scenes of harbours, windmills, and fishermen onto white tin-glazed tiles. One piece on a windowsill or under a bowl brings 400 years of craft into the room.

# 05

## HAND-BLOWN GLASS BOTTLES IN SEA GLASS COLOURS

Collected or bought, arranged on a windowsill where the light hits them. Aqua, pale green, salt-washed blue. Turns ordinary afternoon light into a work of art.



# 06

## AN INDIGO SUMMER QUILT

On a bed or folded over a chair, they look like something the sea washed up and you were lucky enough to find.



07



## BLUE AND WHITE PORCELAIN JAR.

It has been traded across the world for five centuries because it belongs everywhere and looks eternally elegant.

08

## A LARGE-SCALE WATERCOLOUR OF THE SEA

The kind where the water is suggested rather than painted. Hung on a plain white wall with no frame or a simple thin one. The room doesn't need to be a beach house for this to work.



09

## DEEP TEAL BOLSTERS ON A WHITE COUCH

Teal sits between blue and green, which means it reads differently in different lights, sometimes the sea at midday, sometimes the sea just before a storm.



# 10

## MOROCCAN ZELLIGE TILES IN BLUE MOSAIC

Even a small panel brings the geometry and colour of Fez into a room. And if you go bold enough to cover an entire wall, you invite the summer in.

# 11

## A TERRACOTTA POT PAINTED IN MEDITERRANEAN BLUE

Planted with something trailing and green. The combination of that particular blue against terracotta against green is one of the oldest and most beautiful things in domestic life.



# 12

## DENIM BLUE LINEN NAPKINS OR A TABLECLOTH

Not for special occasions — for every meal. Linen softens with every wash. In denim blue it looks effortless, slightly borrowed from somewhere Mediterranean, and makes an ordinary table feel considered.



# 13 A VINTAGE MAP OF ANY OCEAN

Framed, large, with the cartographer's decorations intact; the sea monsters, the compass roses, the Latin inscriptions. Hung in a study, a corridor, or a bedroom wall, it gives the room a travel-happy vibe.



# 14 A HAND-KNOTTED RUG WITH INDIGO ACCENTS

Persian, Turkish, or Moroccan. The older the better, because the natural indigo dye in old rugs fades to the exact blue that no synthetic can replicate. Even a small rug under a coffee table anchors the whole room.



# 15

## WEDGWOOD BLUE SHELF

It makes everything placed in front of it look beautifully cool.

# 16

## BLUE GLASS LANTERNS — ONE OR A CLUSTER

Moroccan or Syrian glass lanterns in cobalt and turquoise, hung at different heights or clustered on a low table with candles inside. At night, they throw small pools of blue light that make a room feel exquisite.



# 17

## BLUE AND WHITE STRIPED TOWELS

These flat-woven, fast-drying towels look beautiful folded or hanging. In a bathroom they replace the need for any other decoration.



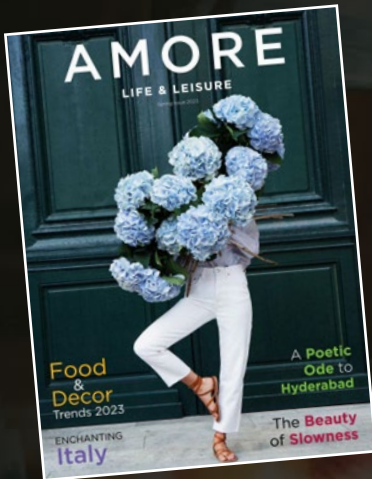
BLUE IS  
WHERE  
MEMORY  
OF THE SEA  
LIVES.



BRING IT  
HOME.

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# SELF

TAKE TIME TO NURTURE THE MOST IMPORTANT  
PERSON IN YOUR LIFE—YOU!



# The Paper Trail

## One Woman's Quiet Revolution

How a homemaker's chance encounter with an ancient craft became a business built with purpose — beautiful things made without harming a single tree

BY NANCY GUPTA

If I look back now, my journey into entrepreneurship feels less like a plan and more like a quiet unfolding.

For thirteen years, I was a homemaker — deeply immersed in family life, routines, and the small rhythms that make a house a home. And yet, somewhere within that comfort, there was a persistent whisper: the urge to create something of my own. Not just anything. Something that mattered.

That whisper found its voice quite unexpectedly.

One afternoon, while browsing sustainable business ideas online, I stumbled upon the art of handmade papermaking. The concept felt almost magical — creating paper without felling a single tree. Simple, yet quietly revolutionary. I began experimenting at home, learning through trial and error, working with whatever tools and materials I could gather.

But I quickly realised something crucial. If I wanted to build something lasting, this couldn't remain a hobby. That realisation led me to the Kumarappa National Handmade Paper Institute in Jaipur, where I trained in traditional techniques of making paper from cotton rag waste.

That experience changed everything.

Handmade paper, I discovered, is not merely a product — it is a process steeped in patience,

skill, and deep respect for resources. Watching discarded cotton transform into beautiful, tactile sheets was profoundly moving. It wasn't just sustainable; it was meaningful. And in that moment, I knew I had found something worth building a life around.

In 2018, I founded Papernest with a simple intention: to revive this traditional craft and bring it into everyday life. I began with journals and stationery that blended handmade paper with contemporary, functional design. I didn't want people to admire handmade paper from a distance. I wanted them to use it, live with it, write on it.

The journey, however, was far from straightforward.

Building a business around a slow, artisanal craft in a fast-paced digital world comes with its own particular challenges. Handmade processes take time; the market demands speed and scale. There were moments of doubt — stretches when I questioned whether I was on the right path.

“

*Handmade paper, I discovered, is not merely a product — it is a process steeped in patience, skill, and deep respect for resources.*



# PAPER NEST

TREE-FREE PAPER PRODUCTS



NOTES



Go  
Green  
Go  
Paper

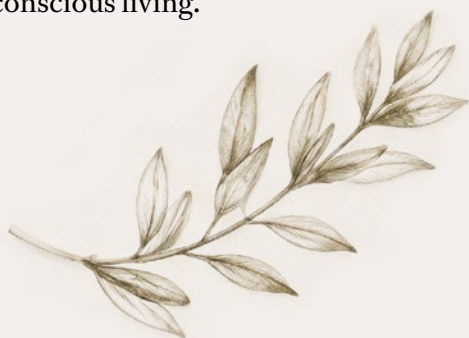


But I stayed with it.

Rather than setting up a large factory, I chose a different route. Papernest operates through a job-work model, collaborating with skilled artisans – many of whom carry generations of knowledge in papermaking and bookbinding. We work remotely, which keeps the business lean and flexible while continuing to support artisan livelihoods. It is a model that feels right, both practically and ethically.

Over the years, Papernest has grown organically. What began as a small personal venture has expanded into corporate gifting and now reaches customers around the world. But growth, for me, has never been purely about scale – it has always been about staying true to purpose.

Sustainability sits at the heart of everything we do. Our paper is made from cotton rag waste and agricultural residues, making it entirely tree-free. In doing so, we not only reduce dependence on wood pulp but also divert waste from landfills. Every product becomes a small, tangible act of more conscious living.



And yet, Papernest is about something even quieter than all of that.

In an increasingly digital world, we are slowly losing touch with the simple act of writing. There is a certain depth to putting pen to paper – it invites you to slow down, to reflect, to sit with your own thoughts. Through our products and workshops, I hope to gently bring people back to that experience.

Nine years into this journey, I have come to understand that building a business doesn't have to be aggressive or hurried. It can be slow, intentional, and still deeply fulfilling. There have been challenges – learning the digital landscape, managing everything independently, constantly adapting – but each step has taught me something I couldn't have learned any other way.

Papernest, to me, is not just a brand. It is a reflection of my own journey – of starting over, of learning something entirely new, of building something with purpose. It is about finding balance: between work and life, between growth and peace.

If there is one thing I have learnt, it is this: you don't need to have everything figured out before you begin.

Sometimes, all you need is the courage to take that first step – and the willingness to see where it leads.

For me, that step led to Papernest. A small but meaningful attempt to create, sustain, and inspire.

## MAKE YOUR OWN PAPER AT HOME

Making paper at home is a wonderfully tactile way to recycle scraps into something beautiful. Here is how to get started.

You will need:



4–5 sheets of used paper from old notebooks or office waste (avoid shiny or coated paper; newspaper is best avoided as the pulp is weak)



A small container for soaking



A tub slightly larger than your mould



2–3 pieces of cloth for transferring sheets



An old towel to absorb excess water



A blender (to be used under adult supervision)



### STEP 1

**Prepare the pulp.** Tear the paper into small pieces and soak in water for a few hours. Transfer to the blender with enough water to cover, and blend to a smooth pulp. Do not overfill the blender.

### STEP 2

**Pull the sheet.** Fill a large tub with three to four inches of water and stir in the pulp. Assemble your mould (the frame with a mesh screen) and deckle (the frame without mesh) together, mesh-side down. Submerge the frame and lift it slowly, mesh-side up, allowing the pulp to settle evenly across the surface. Hold the frame level, let the excess water drain back into the tub, then carefully remove the deckle. Adjust pulp quantity to achieve your preferred thickness.



### STEP 3

**Remove excess water.** Place a damp cloth on an old towel. Flip the mould face-down onto the cloth so the paper sheet transfers onto it. Press a small dry towel gently against the mesh to squeeze out remaining water, then slowly lift the frame away. If the sheet sticks, tap or lift the edges carefully. Leave to dry completely before peeling away.



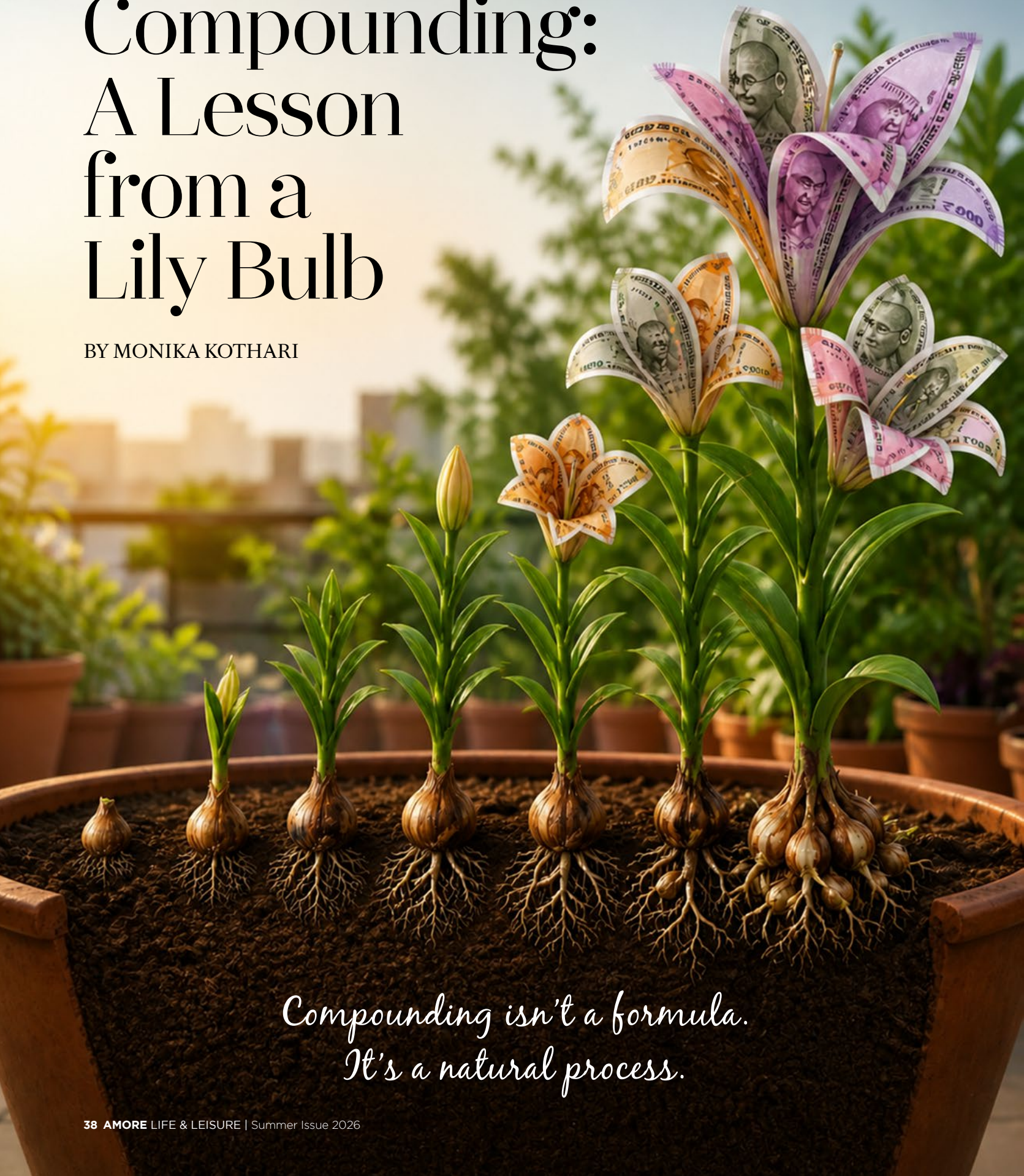
Nancy Gupta: Building Papernest has been a journey of passion, purpose, and perseverance. Handmade paper brought challenges, but each one strengthened our commitment to sustainability and craftsmanship. By reviving traditional techniques and supporting artisan communities, we continue creating tree-free, eco-conscious products.

Paper Nest

<http://www.papernest.in/> | <https://www.instagram.com/paper.nest/>

# The Quiet Power of Compounding: A Lesson from a Lily Bulb

BY MONIKA KOTHARI



*Compounding isn't a formula.  
It's a natural process.*

**M**ost people think compounding is highly mathematical—Excel sheets, CAGR, percentages, returns.

But honestly, it became far clearer on my terrace garden—more than any finance book ever managed.

I planted a simple lily bulb in Autumn 2022 while redoing my garden.

Autumn passed. Winter slipped away. By Spring 2023, my patience was wearing thin—nothing was happening. No flowers, no visible growth, nothing that made me feel, this is beautiful, this is worth it. Just leaves.

And, if I'm being honest, this is the phase where most of us—myself included—start questioning everything.

*Is this even growing? Am I doing something wrong? Should I change something?*


What I didn't see then—and what we often miss with investing—is that the real work was happening underground.


That one bulb was multiplying quietly. No noise. No validation.


Then, slowly, things changed. One lily appeared. A year later, there were multiple plants and two lilies. And now, in 2026, there are over twenty plants and nine lilies.


Same pot. Same plant. Same starting point. Just time—and the basics done consistently: water, sunlight, fertiliser.



 **AUTUMN 2022**  
Planted the bulb.

 **SPRING 2023**  
Just leaves. No flowers.

 **SPRING 2024**  
Multiple plants. Two lilies.

 **SPRING 2026**  
Over twenty plants. Nine lilies.

That's when it truly struck me: this is exactly how compounding works.

In the early years, it doesn't look like growth. It looks like nothing. It can even feel like a waste of time.

Which is why we grow restless. We keep checking our investments, changing strategies, rebalancing, shuffling—simply because we need to see something happening.

But compounding is rarely visible until patience is tested.

In fact, if I had kept digging up that pot every few days to check whether the bulb was growing, I would have destroyed the plant. And that's precisely what we often do with money. Constant checking. Constant doubt. Constant interference. Your capital is that bulb.

Time—and regular SIPs—allow money to multiply. But behaviour decides whether it survives long enough to do so. Compounding isn't about finding the perfect investment. It's about staying invested long enough—without sabotaging the process.

And that part? Very few people have the patience for. Are you one of them? When did you start investing?



**Meet the Writer**

Helping individuals and families design a life where money supports freedom. Financial planner, founder, and storyteller at Betaa Capital. Instagram: @betaacapital, LinkedIn: Monika Kothari

# MY 15-MINUTE HEALTH MAKEOVER

Just the act of charting out my next day's meal made me see patterns I had been too busy to notice before.

BY CHETNA SRINIVASAN





I love it when someone asks what I do to keep fit at 60. But the last time someone asked me that question and I told them the answer, they said I must also share my secret with others. Because what I do is so simple. So doable. So here I am, telling you what worked for me. And while I am no doctor or nutritionist, I believe it will work for you, too.

At 40, I was almost always tired. The famous 3-pm crash, the permanent feeling of running on more willpower than nourishment. Not ill. Not depleted enough to see a doctor about. Just – flat. Every afternoon, like clockwork, the energy would drain out of me like water through a cracked pot.

Then I happened to meet a friend’s friend. I forget her name, but let’s call her Shilpa. We were sitting in the colourful environs of Dilli Haat, munching

on hot mirchi pakodas and sabudana vadas. ‘I don’t think I can have dinner now,’ I said. Shilpa, who at 48 looked like she had just stepped off a magazine cover, said, ‘I know, I am full too. But I’ll have my oatmeal at about 8 pm.’

The mention of that particular time, 8 pm, got my attention, and I asked her if she always followed a set schedule for meals. Her response was what set me on the path to better health.

She said, ‘I do not go by the clock, but I do plan my meals a day in advance. Just 10 minutes in the evening, to decide what I am going to eat the next day. So for today, I knew I was meeting you guys, and kept space for a snack. This helped me plan the rest of my meals better.’

It made so much sense to me that I went back home and pulled out a notebook. Just the act of charting out my next day’s meal made me see patterns I had been too busy to notice before.

## THE PATTERNS WE MISS

I was skipping breakfast or eating it so late it was practically merging with lunch. My fruit intake was, if I’m honest, almost zero. I was drinking chai and calling it hydration. And dinner was whatever



was quickest, usually heavy, usually too close to bedtime, and I was sleeping on it like a stone.

The notebook made it visible. When you write down what you plan to eat, you see the gaps with a clarity that no amount of vague resolution can produce.

So I began to rearrange things. Small shifts, nothing dramatic. I moved fruit to mid-morning, when I'm at my desk and energy is beginning to taper – a banana, a handful of pomegranate seeds, whatever was in the fridge. I added a glass of water to each meal I wrote down, which sounds laughably simple until you realise you've been mistaking thirst for hunger for the better part of a decade. I started planning lighter dinners deliberately: a khichdi with ghee, a bowl of curd rice with a pickle, moong dal with roti. Food that would settle quietly rather than sit heavily.

Lunch became the meal I actually looked forward to building – a proper dal, sabzi, some curd, a small

katori of salad. Because I had thought about it the night before, I had usually soaked something, or had the vegetables cut, or at least knew what was in the fridge. The decision fatigue that used to hit me at 1 pm – standing in front of the fridge, exhausted before I'd even begun – simply disappeared.

## THOSE 15 MINUTES ARE GOLD

What no one tells you about planning your meals is that it is not really about food at all.

It is about attention. The act of sitting down each evening and asking yourself: what does my body need tomorrow – that question, asked sincerely, changes your relationship with yourself. You stop treating food as a problem to be solved between other problems. You start treating it as something that deserves a few minutes of your actual thought.

I still do it every evening. After dinner, before I reach for my phone. Ten, sometimes fifteen minutes. I write it by hand – there is something about the physical

act of writing that makes it feel like a commitment rather than a wish. I plan where the fruit goes. I plan my water. I think about what I want dinner to feel like: light enough to sleep well, warm enough to feel cared for.

Sometimes I change my mind entirely the next day and eat something different. That's fine. The planning isn't a cage. It's a conversation I have with myself, quietly, while the rest of the house is winding down.

And somewhere in that conversation, I found my energy again.

## MY KITCHEN CHANGED, TOO

For years, I was what you might call a full-pantry person. My shelves were stocked, my fridge was never empty, and I bought vegetables every other day out of habit and a vague sense of responsibility. And yet, on any given evening, I would stand in front of all that abundance and feel oddly stuck. There was plenty, but nothing felt ready. Things would quietly go soft at the back of the fridge. Half a bottle of something would be used once

“Lunch became the meal I actually looked forward to building – a proper dal, sabzi, some curd, a small katori of salad.”



and forgotten. I was spending without thinking, storing without planning, and somehow still not eating well.

Meal planning fixed this in a way I had not anticipated.

When you know on Monday that Wednesday's lunch is going to be rajma chawal, you buy exactly the rajma you need. When you have written down that Friday dinner is khichdi, you do not buy unnecessary vegetables that will sit and wilt. You shop with a list that has logic behind it, not just instinct. My grocery bills came down noticeably. More importantly, almost nothing goes to waste now. My fridge holds less and delivers more.

There is a particular satisfaction in a lean, purposeful pantry that a full one never gave me. Everything in it has a reason to be there. Everything gets used. And every rupee spent on food is actually going towards nourishment, not towards good intentions slowly decomposing in a crisper drawer.

*Total planning time the evening before: twelve minutes.*

*Total impact on my energy, my sleep, and how I feel in my own skin: more than twenty years of good intentions ever managed.*





# KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

A Consumer Protection Primer

BY SHIRIN KHAJURIA

# M

Most of us have, at some point, faced a disappointing purchase or service experience. Perhaps a newly purchased smartphone stopped working within a week, an insurance company refused to honour a legitimate claim, a builder failed to deliver a home on time, a coaching institute fell short of its promise of a “100% placement guarantee”, or medical treatment did not meet expected standards.

While many such disputes are resolved through a simple letter or email, others remain unaddressed because consumers often perceive legal action as complicated, expensive or time-consuming.

This is precisely what the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 seeks to address. At its core, the law protects consumers from unfair trade practices, defective goods and deficient services, while providing an effective mechanism for the redressal of disputes with commercial entities.

India first enacted consumer protection legislation in 1986. However, rapidly evolving consumer markets exposed gaps in the earlier framework. Consequently, the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 was replaced by the Consumer Protection Act, 2019.

The current framework is designed to provide simple, accessible, cost-effective and expeditious remedies through Consumer Commissions. It also empowers the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) to investigate unfair trade practices and pursue class-action remedies. In addition, the Act introduces the concept of product liability, provides for penalties and imprisonment in specified circumstances, and promotes the settlement of disputes through mediation.



### WHO IS A CONSUMER?

A “consumer” is a person who purchases goods or avails services for consideration, whether paid, promised, partly paid or partly promised. However, the definition excludes persons who obtain goods for resale or commercial purposes (Section 2(7)).

### WHAT CAN YOU COMPLAIN ABOUT?

A consumer complaint may arise when goods or services fail to meet what was promised or what could reasonably be expected. Common categories include:

#### DEFECTIVE GOODS (SECTION 2(10))

A product may be considered defective if it suffers from shortcomings in quality, quantity, performance or standard. For example, where a vehicle repeatedly develops defects and the manufacturer or seller refuses to replace it or provide a refund, consumer forums have granted refunds, interest and compensation for mental agony (Hindustan Motors Ltd. v. N. Siva Kumar (2000); (Maruti Udyog Ltd. v. Sushil Kumar AIR 2006).

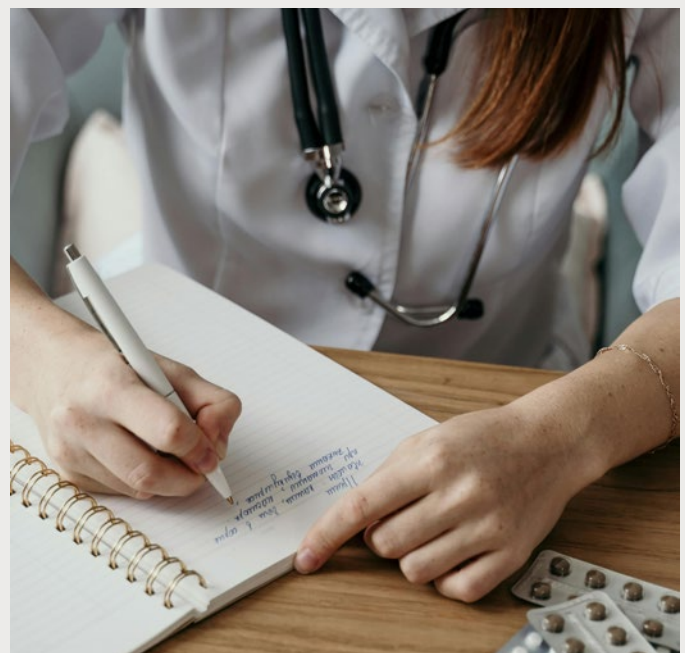
#### DEFICIENCY IN SERVICE (SECTIONS 2(11) AND 2(42))

A deficiency arises when services fall below the standard reasonably expected by a consumer. This may include a faulty salon treatment, negligent handling of a courier consignment, delayed delivery, or incomplete services.

In one case involving a defective salon treatment, compensation was awarded for loss of modelling opportunities and mental agony (ITC Ltd. v. Aashna Roy, 2026). Similarly, liability has been imposed where carriers or couriers lost consignments or delivered incomplete goods (Patel Roadways Ltd. v. Birla Yamaha Ltd., 2000).

#### MEDICAL NEGLIGENCE

Medical services also fall within the ambit of consumer protection law. The “Bolam Test” was accepted by the Supreme Court which held that where treatment falls below accepted and reasonable medical standards, it may amount to a deficiency in service for which compensation can be claimed (Jacob Mathew v. State of Punjab, 2005).



More recently, the Supreme Court clarified that proceedings for medical negligence may continue against the legal heirs of a medical professional (Kamud Lall v. Suresh, 2026).

### UNFAIR TRADE PRACTICES (SECTION 2(47))

Unfair trade practices include misleading advertisements, false claims, overcharging beyond the Maximum Retail Price (MRP), failure to provide proper billing, and other deceptive business practices intended to mislead consumers.



### BEFORE FILING A COMPLAINT: ATTEMPT RESOLUTION

As a matter of prudence, consumers should first attempt to resolve the issue directly with the seller or service provider.

A written communication—whether by email or formal notice—should clearly set out the grievance, the relief sought (such as a refund, replacement or compensation), and provide a reasonable period, typically 15 days, for a response. Many disputes are resolved at this stage without the need for formal proceedings.

### HOW TO FILE A COMPLAINT BEFORE THE CONSUMER COMMISSION

One of the key advantages of the consumer protection framework is that consumers can represent themselves. Engaging a lawyer is not mandatory.

#### 1. Limitation

A complaint should ordinarily be filed within two years from the date on which the cause of action arose.

#### 2. Jurisdiction

##### Pecuniary Jurisdiction

The appropriate Consumer Commission depends upon the value of the claim:

- District Commission: Up to ₹50 lakh
- State Commission: ₹50 lakh to ₹2 crore
- National Commission: Above ₹2 crore

##### Territorial Jurisdiction

A complaint may generally be filed where the consumer resides or where the opposite party carries on business.

#### 3. Preparing the Complaint

The complaint should clearly set out:

- Details of the complainant and the manufacturer, seller or service provider
- Nature of the transaction
- Details of the defect, deficiency or unfair trade practice
- Relevant dates and events
- Relief sought, such as repair, replacement, refund, compensation, interest or any other appropriate direction

#### 4. Supporting Evidence

Consumers should attach invoices, receipts, warranty documents, correspondence, photographs and any other relevant evidence. Proper documentation is often critical to the success of a claim.

#### 5. Filing the Complaint

Complaints may be filed online through the e-Jagriti portal (<https://e-jagriti.gov.in>) or submitted physically before the appropriate Consumer Commission.

#### 6. Fees

The prescribed fee is nominal compared to conventional civil litigation and is currently capped at ₹7,500.



**Shirin Khajuria** is a Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India, an accredited Mediator and Trustee of Nivaaran: Mediators of Supreme Court of India

# INDULGE

A CORNUCOPIA OF LIGHT & LOVELY FLAVOURS,  
CURATED TO SERENADE YOUR SENSES



# Agave Awakening

A lighter, more refined way of drinking takes shape in India



here is something quietly pleasurable about the way tequila arrives in a glass these days. Not slammed, or chased. Just tall, unhurried, and sparkling, a Paloma catching the afternoon light, or a Picante building its warmth slowly, sip by sip.

India has come a long way from the lemon-and-salt ritual. Tequila has found a new language here, and it suits us rather well.

You notice it at the country's most interesting bars, where agave spirits now anchor menus the way single malts once did. You notice it at home too, where hosting has grown more considered, where someone has actually thought about what goes into the glass, and why.



That shift in thinking is precisely where Sepoy & Co. found its opening. Founded by Angad Soni in 2018, the brand arrived with a quiet proposition in a market crowded with overly sweet, artificial mixers: clean, low-calorie blends made with real ingredients, designed to flatter the spirit rather than flatten it. The timing, it turns out, was impeccable.

Sepoy's Pink Grapefruit Soda is now being used to build Palomas across more than 20 of India's top bars, while also finding its way into home refrigerators via retail and quick commerce. People are recreating bar-quality drinks in their own kitchens, and doing so with genuine ease.

Numbers tell part of the story. Tequila consumption in India has nearly doubled over the past year. But the more interesting change is in attitude. Drinkers are asking where their spirit comes from, what it tastes like when it is allowed to breathe, and how to build a drink that feels balanced rather than just cold.

Two cocktails capture this moment particularly well. The Paloma has become a modern staple: light, citrus-forward, and endlessly returnable. Built with tequila and a well-crafted grapefruit soda, it is the kind of drink that needs nothing proved. Fresh, generous, and effortless, it moves as naturally from bar to terrace as it does from afternoon to evening.

The Picante is its more intriguing companion, citrus with a whisper of heat, a cocktail that stays with you. Popularised at Soho House London, it has found a following among Indian drinkers who like flavour that opens up rather than announces itself. Sepoy's Yuzu Jalapeño Soda was made for exactly this: citrus brightness edged with restrained warmth, the kind of combination that makes



**BOTH ARE HIGHBALLS AT HEART.  
ICE, SPIRIT, MIXER.**

The simplicity is the point. A well-made highball is honest about every ingredient it contains, and as palates sharpen, that honesty is increasingly what people are reaching for.

## The Paloma

CITRUS-FORWARD,  
AND ENDLESSLY  
RETURNABLE.



## The Picante

CITRUS WITH A  
WHISPER OF HEAT,  
A COCKTAIL THAT  
STAYS WITH YOU.



## MAKE IT AT HOME

### PALOMA

#### Ingredients:

45 ml tequila, Sepoy & Co. Pink Grapefruit Soda, fresh lime, ice, pinch of salt (optional)

#### Method:

Fill a tall glass generously with ice. Pour in the tequila, top with Pink Grapefruit Soda, and finish with a squeeze of fresh lime. A light salt rim sharpens the citrus beautifully without overpowering it.



## MAKE IT AT HOME

### PICANTE

#### Ingredients:

45 ml tequila, Sepoy & Co. Yuzu Jalapeño Soda, fresh lime juice, 1 slice green chilli, ice

#### Method:

Muddle the chilli lightly with lime juice at the base of the glass. Add ice and tequila, then top with Yuzu Jalapeño Soda and stir once. The heat should arrive as an afterthought. Let it build.



Summer is the right season for drinks like these: bright, undemanding, and made for slow evenings with good company. Mix one, set the table, and let the afternoon do the rest.

# A TABLE IN BLUE

Summer tables don't need much.

A bowl of citrus. Cold drinks sweating in the heat. Linen that creases beautifully. Blueberries scattered almost carelessly across a tart.

Blue works especially well in summer because it cools everything around it. Deep cobalt ceramics, pale washed linens, hand-blown glass—suddenly even a simple lunch feels slower and lighter.

This table is built around easy things: fruit, herbs, chilled textures and shades of blue that catch the light differently through the day.

## BLUEBERRY & CITRUS RICOTTA TOASTS

Thick slices of toasted sourdough layered with ricotta, fresh blueberries, orange zest, mint and a little honey. Serve slightly messy, with berries spilling onto the plate.

The ricotta keeps things cool and creamy; the citrus sharpens everything up.

### What you need

- Sourdough
- Ricotta
- Blueberries
- Orange or grapefruit zest
- Mint leaves
- Honey
- Sea salt

### To serve

Use blue-and-white ceramic plates and small linen napkins in washed indigo.





# DIY *Delicious*

## FIVE PANTRY HEROES YOU SHOULD STOP BUYING—AND START MAKING

**H**ere's a mildly rebellious idea: you don't actually need to keep buying jars and bottles of everything you use: ketchup, sauces, that fancy spread you reach for twice a week. Most of these can be made at home—in small, fresh batches, exactly to your taste, and at a fraction of the cost.

And the best part? It's actually fun. A little stirring, a little simmering, a bit of "taste and tweak"—and suddenly your kitchen feels less like storage and more like a creative space.

Here are five pantry staples—with clear, no-fuss measurements—that deserve a homemade upgrade.



# 1 Sun-Dried Tomatoes

Tiny, chewy,  
flavour grenades

## You'll need:

- 4 cups firm tomatoes (halved or sliced)
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 cup olive oil (for storing)
- 3–4 garlic cloves (optional)

## How to:

1. Sprinkle salt over tomatoes.
2. Sun-dry for 3–5 days or oven-dry at the lowest setting (80–100°C) for 6–8 hours.
3. Once shrivelled, store in a jar. Cover with olive oil and add garlic.



**Use it:** Pasta, sandwiches, salads—  
or just snack on one and feel fancy.



# 2 Tomato Ketchup

The glow-up your fries deserve

## You'll need:

- 5 cups chopped ripe tomatoes
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup vinegar
- 1 tsp salt
- 4 garlic cloves
- 1 small cinnamon stick
- 3 cloves



## How to:

1. Cook everything together for 20–25 minutes.
2. Blend till smooth.
3. Strain (optional), then simmer again till thick and glossy.



**Taste tip:** Add a pinch of chilli powder if you like a kick.

# 3 Peanut Butter

Creamy, nutty, and ridiculously easy

## You'll need:

- 2 cups roasted peanuts
- ½ tsp salt
- 1–2 tsp honey (optional)

## How to:

1. Blend peanuts till crumbly → then creamy (takes 3–5 minutes).
2. Add salt and honey. Blend again.



**Texture trick:** Add 1–2 tsp oil if you want it silkier.



# 4 Chilli Garlic Sauce

Your instant flavour fix

## You'll need:

- 1 cup red chillies (fresh or soaked dried)
- ½ cup garlic cloves
- ½ cup vinegar
- 1 tsp sugar
- 1 tsp salt

## How to:

1. Blend everything into a coarse paste.
2. Cook on low heat for 5–7 minutes till slightly thick.



**Shortcut:** Add a splash of water if too thick while blending.



# 5 *Chocolate Walnut Spread*

Dessert disguised as a pantry staple

## You'll need:

- 1 cup roasted walnuts (skins removed)
- 2 tbsp cocoa powder
- ¼ cup sugar
- 2–3 tbsp milk (or as needed)
- 1 tbsp oil or butter

## How to:

1. Blend walnuts till smooth.
2. Add cocoa, sugar, milk, and oil. Blend till creamy.



**Make it richer:** Add a few squares of melted dark chocolate.

# Why This Feels So Good

- You make small batches → always fresh
- You control flavours → exactly how you like it
- You skip fancy pricing → quiet savings

And somewhere between blending peanuts and simmering tomatoes, you realise this isn't effort—it's a little everyday joy.

*Your pantry doesn't need more brands.  
It just needs a bit of you.*



# Water- recipe!

The world's oldest summer meals, starring water.

Long before electrolyte powders, probiotic drinks and “summer wellness bowls,” global kitchens already understood how to eat in extreme heat. Across geographies, people created meals around water, to cool the body, stretch ingredients, and aid digestion. Let’s sample some.



COOLING.  
NOURISHING.  
TIMELESS.





01

## OCHAZUKE, JAPAN

Japan's ochazuke is built on a simple, soothing idea: warm tea poured over rice.

Green tea or light broth is ladled onto rice and topped with seaweed, sesame, salmon, pickles or plum. The result is somewhere between a meal and a pause.

Simple enough for late nights, hot days.



02

## NAENGGUK, KOREA

Korean summers can be brutally humid, and naeng-guk—a chilled soup-like dish—offers relief through cold broth, cucumber, seaweed and ice-cold water. Startlingly refreshing, tasting clean, salty and sharp all at once. Served icy cold, it feels less like eating and more like cooling the body from within.

# 03

## PAKHALA BHAAT, ODISHA

Perhaps India's most elegant summer rice dish, pakhala is made by soaking cooked rice in water overnight until it turns lightly fermented and pleasantly tangy. It is eaten cold, often with curd, fried aubergines, mashed potatoes, green chillies or crispy badi.

In Odisha, it is cultural memory. Farmers once relied on it during punishing summers because it cooled the body.





04

## SUAN MEI TANG, CHINA

Not quite a dish, not quite a dessert, this traditional Chinese summer drink is made by simmering smoked plums, berries hawthorn, rock sugar and water into a tart, cooling tonic. Served cold, it is deeply restorative during heatwaves. The flavour is smoky, sour and unexpectedly addictive—closer to an old remedy than a soft drink.



05

## AJOBLANCO, SPAIN

Before gazpacho became globally famous, southern Spain had ajoblanco: a cold blend of water, almonds, garlic, olive oil and bread. Served chilled—often with grapes or melon—it is creamy without cream, rich without heaviness. The water turns dense ingredients into something fluid and summery.

# CHILLED TOMATO AND WATERMELON GAZPACHO

**Prep time:** 15 minutes (plus cooling time)

**Servings:** 4

## INGREDIENTS

- 500g ripe tomatoes, roughly chopped
- 400g seedless watermelon flesh, cubed
- 1 small cucumber, peeled and chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, deseeded and chopped
- 1 small shallot, finely minced
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- A handful of fresh mint leaves
- Sea salt and freshly cracked black pepper to taste

## METHOD

- Place the chopped tomatoes, watermelon, cucumber, bell pepper, shallot, and garlic into a high-powered blender.
- Blend on high until the mixture is completely smooth and liquid.
- With the motor running on low, slowly drizzle in the extra virgin olive oil and vinegar. This creates a beautifully smooth emulsion.
- Season generously with sea salt and black pepper, then throw in most of the mint leaves, pulsing just a few times so the herbs are finely flecked through the soup.
- Pour the gazpacho into a glass container and chill in the fridge for at least two hours before serving.
- Serve in chilled bowls, garnished with a few tiny cubes of cucumber, a drizzle of olive oil, and the remaining mint leaves.

### CHEF'S TIP:

For a silkier texture, pass the blended soup through a fine-mesh sieve before chilling to remove any remaining tomato seeds or skin fragments.

# TRAVEL

WHERE ARE YOUR DREAMS  
TAKING YOU THIS SEASON?



An aerial photograph of Taormina, Sicily, showing the town built on a cliffside overlooking the sea. The town is densely packed with buildings, and the sea is a deep blue. In the background, there are mountains and a clear sky.

# TAORMINA, SICILY

The Town That Sits Above the World

By Shubhra Krishan

# W

hen the second season of *The White Lotus* aired – all golden light and cliffside decadence, the San Domenico Palace draped in bougainvillea above a shimmering Ionian sea – my phone lit up with messages from friends who knew I had been there. Is it really that golden? Is the water truly that blue?

The show got the beauty right. What it couldn't capture was the scent of orange blossom and jasmine competing with sea salt, the way the Sicilian sun feels like a physical weight on your shoulders as you wander the Corso, or the particular quality of silence inside the Greek theatre just before the light changes. Television has its limits.

## THE DRAMA OF THE APPROACH

The seduction begins long before you reach the gates. The drive from Catania is a forty-five-minute cinematic sequence along the A18. To your left, the Ionian Sea glitters with an almost impossible intensity; to your right, Etna looms. At 3,350 metres, she is a constant, brooding presence, wearing a plume of smoke like a casual accessory. It is a reminder that this island operates on geological time, not human time.



## A VOLCANO WITH A VINTAGE

Most treat Etna as a day-trip checkbox, but she deserves more reverence. If you approach through the northern wine country, you'll find villages carved from black lava stone and vineyards of Nerello Mascalese. The soil is so mineral-rich that the wine tastes of smoke and ancient secrets – elegant, light, and utterly haunting. High on the slopes, the world turns into a moonscape of black basalt and cold, sulphurous air. On a clear day, the view stretches to the Aeolian Islands, and you feel, quite beautifully, like a very small creature on a very large, still-breathing planet.



## THE THEATRE OF THE GODS

Taormina itself clings to a ridge two hundred and fifty metres above the surf. It is a pedestrianised sanctuary of amber stone and flower-draped balconies where views ambush you at every turn. You turn a corner and the sea is there, hammered silver in the morning light; you turn another and Etna is framed perfectly between two medieval walls. The Piazza IX Aprile is the town's living room—a terrace above the water where, at golden hour, the light becomes almost unreasonable.

But the crown is the Teatro Greco-Romano. Built by the Greeks and refined by the Romans, it uses the volcano and the sea as a permanent backdrop. Standing in those upper tiers, you realise that audiences have been watching the same sun set behind the same peak for over two millennia. It is a staggering continuity that makes the modern world feel like a brief interruption.



## LIVING THE MYTH

Of course, one cannot ignore the San Domenico Palace. That 15th-century convent turned Four Seasons icon is exactly as authoritative as it looked on screen. Even if you aren't staying, the terrace bar is essential. Sip a Negroni as the shadows lengthen over the water and you'll understand why every storyteller eventually finds their way here.

# SICILIAN SENSORY DELIGHTS

If you go shopping – and you should – look for hand-painted Sicilian ceramics from Caltagirone or Santo Stefano di Camastra, where the real majolica tradition lives, bold with yellows and blues and painted lemons.



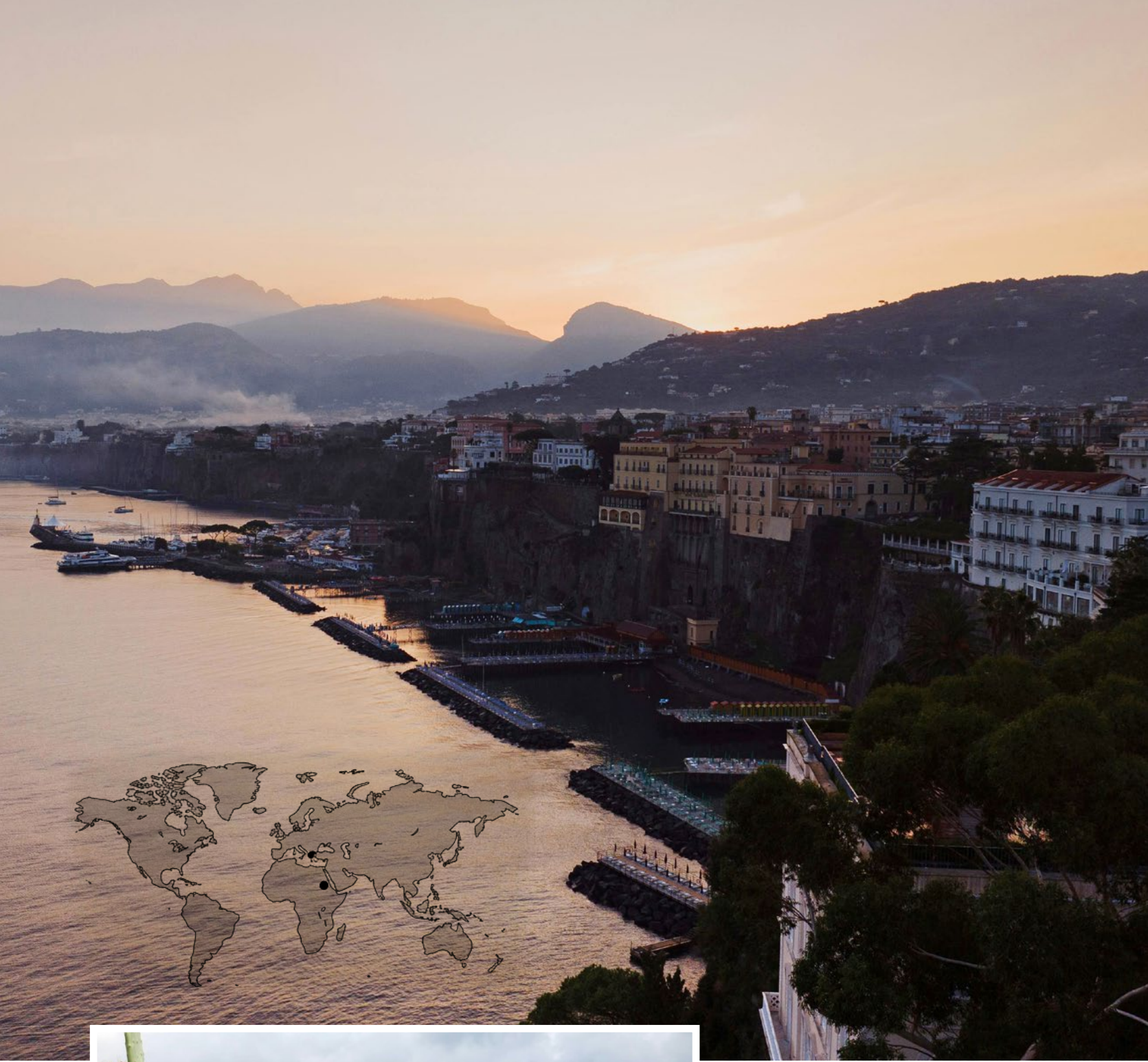
Taormina eats with a sense of ceremony. Beyond the main thoroughfare, seek out the side streets for arancini heavy with Bronte pistachios, or pasta alla Norma—a tribute to aubergine and salted ricotta that is as much a part of the landscape as the Greek stone. Before you leave, find a jar of pistachio cream to take home. It is Sicily in a spoonful.



**Pasta alla Norma**



**Pistachio cream on toast**



## A TIMELESS SEDUCTION

Go in May or September, when the town breathes a little easier. Taormina was beautiful long before the cameras arrived, and it will be beautiful long after the next cultural moment has moved on. The Greeks weren't subtle; they recognised a masterpiece when they saw one. They built a theatre on a cliff, looked at the view, and decided it was the perfect place for a tragedy. They were right then, and they are right now.

# INDIA & INDONESIA

Two Countries, One Ancient Soul



# 01

## GUESS THE MAIN RELIGION IN BALI

You said Buddhism? No. Islam? Wrong again. It is Hinduism – practised by nearly 87% of the island's population, though Indonesia itself is a Muslim-majority nation. There are over 4,600 Hindu temples in Bali alone. The offerings outside every home are changed daily. Saraswati Puja is a public holiday. And Nyepi – the Balinese Hindu new year – is the only day in the world when an entire island of four million people goes silent. No lights or vehicles. Even the airport shuts.



# 02 THE NATIONAL AIRLINE IS A HINDU GOD

Garuda – Vishnu’s divine eagle – is both Indonesia’s national emblem and the name of its national carrier, Garuda Indonesia. The country’s word for language – bahasa – comes from the Sanskrit *bhasha*. Rivers carry names from the Ramayana: the Serayu river in Java is said to echo the Sarayu of Ayodhya. Indonesian men are named Wisnu and Surya. And the word for temple – *candi* – derives from *Chandikagriha*, a Sanskrit name for the goddess Durga.



# 03

## SITA WOULD NOT RECOGNISE HERSELF HERE

The Ramayana arrived in Indonesia roughly 2,000 years ago and the Indonesians promptly rewrote it. In the Kakawin Ramayana – the old Javanese version – Sita is bold and strong, fighting the Asuras in Lanka rather than waiting to be rescued. Ravana is a complex, almost sympathetic figure. Rama is shown as fallible. Hanuman, meanwhile, is a superstar, appearing in shadow puppet shows, temple dances and Odalan festivals across the archipelago, one of the most beloved characters in Indonesian performance tradition.

### DON'T MISS THIS:

At Pura Uluwatu in Bali, the Kecak fire dance, performed at sunset on a clifftop above the Indian Ocean, retells the Ramayana with 50 bare-chested performers and actual flames. One of the great live performances on earth. Book ahead; it sells out every single night.



# 04

## THE MONEY IS CALLED RUPIAH

From the Sanskrit rupya – silver. The same root that gave India its Rupee. Two countries, one ancient word for wealth, an ocean between them that was never really a barrier, only a road.



# 05 THERE'S A SHIVA TEMPLE THAT RIVALS ANGKOR WAT

The Prambanan complex in Yogyakarta was built in the 9th century, dedicated to the Trimurti, with the central Shiva temple rising 47 metres – the tallest ancient structure in all of Indonesia. It is the second largest Hindu temple complex in Southeast Asia, after Angkor Wat. It has 240 temples. Its walls are carved with the entire Ramayana. And unlike Angkor, you can walk right up to the stones.

**DON'T MISS THIS:** The full moon Ramayana Ballet is performed in an open-air theatre on the Prambanan grounds, May through October. It is theatrical, atmospheric, and frankly unmissable.





# 06

## THE COUNTRY IS LITERALLY NAMED AFTER INDIA

Indonesia. Indo – from Indus. The subcontinent’s name, stamped onto an archipelago of 17,000 islands. Before that, Sanskrit scholars called it Suvarnadvipa – the Island of Gold. And Yavadvipa – the Island of Java – appears in the Ramayana itself, mentioned as a land of great riches beyond the sea. Indian astronomers were writing about Indonesia two thousand years before the first tourist arrived with a carry-on bag.

# 07



## THE SHADOW PUPPETS HAVE AN EPIC CONNECTION

Wayang Kulit – Indonesia’s ancient shadow puppet theatre, using hand-carved buffalo-hide puppets, draws its repertoire almost entirely from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The puppet master, or dalang, is considered a priest. The show traditionally runs from midnight to dawn. And here’s the astonishing part: the Balinese performances are conducted in Kawi – an ancient Sanskrit-derived language that most Balinese cannot speak in daily life, but know by heart from childhood, from decades of watching. The characters: Rama, Sita, Arjuna, Krishna, same as ours, rendered in leather and lamplight, speak a dead sacred language to an audience that understands every word. UNESCO called it a Masterpiece of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

**DON'T MISS THIS:** Yogyakarta’s Sonobudoyo Museum runs a shortened Wayang Kulit show every evening, designed for visitors. Worth every minute.



# Kissaten

## Japan's Old-World Coffee Ritual

A kissaten is a traditional Japanese coffee house, but calling it a café doesn't quite do it justice.



**T**he world tends to associate Japan with matcha, and for good reason. The ritual of Japanese tea, with its choreography and calm, has travelled far beyond the country's borders.

But for those who don't quite take to matcha's earthy sharpness, Japan offers an equally rich alternative. Coffee has its own deeply rooted culture here, and the *kissaten* sits at its heart.

A *kissaten* is a traditional Japanese coffee house, but calling it a café doesn't quite do it justice.

Walk in, and the first thing you'll notice is the mood: low lighting, wooden interiors, perhaps a hint of cigarette smoke lingering from another era, and almost always, soft jazz playing somewhere in the

background. There's no rush here. No laptops clattering. No takeaway cups.

Instead, expect to sit down, order slowly, and be served coffee that has been made with almost meditative care—often hand-ground, brewed one cup at a time, and presented with quiet precision.

### COFFEE AS A PAUSE

*Kissaten* began appearing in the early 20th century, inspired by Western coffee houses but shaped by Japanese sensibilities. The first café opened in Tokyo in the late 1800s, and over time, these spaces evolved into something uniquely local.

They became what sociologists might call a “third place”—neither home nor workplace, but somewhere



in between. A place to read, think, meet quietly, or simply be alone without feeling alone. In a country known for speed and efficiency, kissaten offer something rare: permission to slow down. They remind you that a cup of coffee can be more than a caffeine fix. It can be a moment of solitude, a gentle conversation, or simply an hour where nothing much happens, and that's the point.

In their early years, they even offered something quietly radical: a neutral ground where young men and women could meet outside rigid social expectations. Writers, students, and thinkers gravitated here, giving kissaten a slightly intellectual, slightly bohemian air.

### THE COFFEE ITSELF

At a kissaten, coffee is treated with respect bordering on devotion.

Beans are often ground fresh for each order. Water is poured slowly, by hand. There's no automation, no haste. The process is deliberate, almost ritualistic.

What you get is not just a cup of coffee, but a carefully constructed experience—one that reflects Japan's larger cultural instinct for precision and detail.

### WHAT'S ON THE MENU

Food at a kissaten is simple, nostalgic, and comforting.

You'll often find the classic "morning set": thick toast, butter, eggs, and coffee. There's Napolitan pasta (a distinctly Japanese take on spaghetti), sandwiches, and old-school desserts.



### A STEP BACK IN TIME

Many kissaten feel frozen in Japan's mid-20th-century period right down to their furniture, crockery, and music. And that is their charm. Younger visitors, tired of uniform global cafés, are drawn to their character, their texture, and their sense of stillness.

## INSIDE JAPAN'S KISSATEN CULTURE

### Watch the Mood

Paolo from TOKYO – Kissaten & Japanese Coffee Culture. <https://www.youtube.com/@PaolofromTOKYO>.

A beautifully shot introduction to everyday Japan—his café videos capture the rhythm, etiquette, and quiet charm of kissaten.



### READ FOR DEPTH

#### Coffee Life in Japan – by Merry White

A thoughtful exploration of how coffee—and kissaten—became woven into Japanese social life. Insightful, without being heavy.



### FEEL IT IN FILM

#### Hakodate Coffee

Gentle and atmospheric; coffee becomes a thread connecting strangers and their stories. (Apple TV)





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