

**L**eaping dolphins, colourful starfish, sea lions resting on rocks and walrus lazing around are just some of the underwater creatures one gets to be up close with at the newly opened SeaWorld in Abu Dhabi. Not only is it the largest marine theme park in the Middle East, but it also houses the most number of species in any such aquarium in the world. Situated in Yas Island—home to parks like Ferrari World, Yas Waterworld and Warner Bros. World—SeaWorld is spread over five levels covering 1,83,000 sqm. Housing one lakh marine animals in eight distinct zones, the park offers an immersive experience into the lives of over 150 aquatic species thriving in the depths of the ocean. The natural marine environment has been recreated with rocks, coral reefs, caves, wave movements, simulated currents and even choppy waters.

The park's huge entrance immediately impresses visitors with its gigantic scale. Upon ascending escalators over two levels, guests arrive at the ticketing area before stepping into a vast space that recreates the ambience of a lush mangrove forest. At the centre of the park lies 'One Ocean' which connects all the zones.

From the polar region to the tropics, the world's largest multi-species marine life aquarium, SeaWorld in Abu Dhabi, gives a glimpse into the planet's oceanic depths

By PALLAVI PASRICHA



(Clockwise from above) Endless Ocean; Rocky Point; Microocean; visitors at the park



**SHOWS AND RIDES**

SeaWorld also hosts a range of shows throughout the day, offering entertainment and education. The traditional pearl dive show provides a glimpse into the Middle East's pearl diving industry, which was once a vital source of income in the region before oil was discovered. The Tropical Amphitheatre showcases the awe-inspiring acrobatics of dolphins, while the Rocky Bay amphitheatre presents a fun and educational show featuring sea lions, emphasising the importance of conservation.

For thrill-seekers, the park also offers an array of rides. Brace yourself for an exhilarating experience on the Manta coaster, the world's first zero-gravity flip ride that guarantees a hair-raising experience. Family-friendly rides like the Eel Racer in the Microocean area provide a slower pace with giant eel-themed coasters. Another notable attraction is the Jelly Plunge tower, which takes one up, and twists and turns.



A giant globe in the middle and a surround screen displaying marine life sets the tone for the wondrous experiences that lie ahead.

**Zooming in on zones**

'Abu Dhabi Ocean Realm', introduces one to the marine ecosystem of the Gulf. There are four pools where you can touch and see rays, sea stars turtles and invertebrates. Of the eight realms, the most fascinating is 'The Endless Ocean', which transports visitors to the heart of the underwater world. In the aquarium that teems with more than 68,000 animals, sardines swim gracefully, colourful fish dart around and nine shark species give a glimpse of the more menacing side of the ocean.

The Ocean Walk, which goes through an acrylic tunnel, takes you to a pod where marine life abounds. Be prepared to feel a sudden chill at the temperature-regulated Polar Ocean zone, where sea otters and walrus occupy pride of place. One can even pet a walrus in the two realms here that celebrate the Arctic and Antarctica—not to be missed here are the penguins.

At Rocky Point, which is

set up like the US's coastal Pacific Northwest area, one can watch seals resting, or even feed the sea lions resting on the rocks. Move on to warmer waters at the 'Tropical Ocean' where the flamingos and dolphins are the highlights. The Microocean is a vibrant zone where jellyfish and small sea life like plankton are magnified, giving visitors the illusion of being tiny as they pass through arches.

**GETTING THERE**

SeaWorld is 10km from the Abu Dhabi International Airport. The best way to get there from your Yas Island hotel is to use the Yas Express shuttle. **Cost:** A day pass booked on the official website costs AED 375 for adults and AED 290 for kids under 110 cm. At the gate, it costs AED 390 for adults and AED 310 for kids.

**Tech, Set, Go**

Whether you're a seasoned traveller or a novice explorer, these innovative portals and apps will simplify your itinerary-building process

By MAITHREYI SOOREJ

**A**re you tired of spending hours researching and planning your trips? Imagine having an intelligent assistant that generates personalised itineraries, recommends top attractions and provides expert travel suggestions—all at the touch of a button.

**1 Roamr**

The portal provides a template for creating multi-city trips, including day-by-day trip descriptions, photos of locations, activities and an embedded map. Enter your destination and start and end dates, and your trip style—relaxing, romantic, historic, outdoorsy or adventurous. In a few seconds, Roamr will generate a schedule with a short brief of each day's activities, accompanied by a map that updates to show the locations as you scroll through the itinerary. You can also view Google photos of each point of interest and access weather forecast and currency conversion information.

**2 iPlan.AI**

It is a mobile app that generates comprehensive itineraries for popular cities. You just have to provide the name of the place and the number of days you plan to spend there. You can also specify your free time on each day, travel companions (solo, couple, family or friends), and interests such as history, nature, shopping, sports, entertainment, food, art and culture. Additionally, you can select your budget as economy, normal or luxury. The app generates a day-by-day programme plotted on a map, displaying all the locations you may want to visit. Each includes additional details like average visit duration, estimated travel



time and available transport modes. You can also share the plan with friends or export it to Google Maps. The limitation of this app is that it can't build an itinerary for a multi-city trip or suggest offbeat places.

**3 Curiosio**

The website specialises in helping users plan custom road trips to major countries in the world. Powered by its own AI engine called Ingeenee, Curiosio leverages data from various crowd-sourced resources like Wikipedia, DBpedia, Wikivoyage, Wikidata, OSMNames and OpenStreet-Map to create schedules tailored to user preferences. One can refine their journey

by setting parameters such as starting and finishing points, round trip or one-way, preferred dates, number of travellers, type of vehicle, budget, and whether they want to explore popular or lesser-known places. Based on these inputs, the site generates multiple plans and routes, which includes a map, a day-by-day breakdown of destinations and activities, and clickable points of interest. Users can also share the itinerary with co-travellers, print it, or export it to Google Maps for navigation.

**4 Roam Around**

The website uses ChatGPT to help you plan your trip. Simply feed in your destination and the number

of days you have. Based on this, Roam Around will generate the itinerary in a simple format. While it lacks advanced features for refining or filtering results on the basis of budget, number of days, etc., it serves as a useful starting point.

**5 Vacay Chatbot**

The website offers curated options for experiences based on destinations and price ranges. The chatbot generates custom trip ideas, offers recommendations for hotels, restaurants and attractions, while also offering pre-set guides and prompt examples for ChatGPT to help customise your queries.

**QUICK TAKE**



**A BITE OF FUSION**

Embark on an epicurean journey at Alto Vino at Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield, which has launched a new menu of Italian-Mediterranean delicacies. From the tantalising Lobster ravioli bathed in a luscious saffron cream sauce to the classic slow-cooked Bolognese tagliatelle and the Arcani Palermo, the chef seamlessly blends Italian and Mediterranean influences. Seafood enthusiasts won't want to miss the pan-seared sea bass, adorned with a zesty lemon butter sauce. To conclude your gastronomic journey on a sweet note, enjoy the delightful Umm Ali and the luscious date pudding. You can also book an exclusive chef's table. Alto Vino, Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield. Price: ₹3,500+taxes



**HONG KONG CALLING**

In an effort to push tourist footfall, Hong Kong is giving away five lakh airline tickets for free. The offer is set to last till September. One can register via the websites of the Hong Kong Airport and the airlines—Cathay Pacific, HK Express, Hong Kong Airlines and Greater Bay Airlines. All tickets are round-trip economy class. Visitors will also be offered discounts on restaurants, shops, museums and more. Registration is now open for entrants from Australia, New Zealand, India, Nepal, Bangladesh and South Africa.

**From the Lord's Kitchen**



By RASHMI GOPAL RAO

**M**athura's Krishna was fond of curd, but down south, in Udupi, it is among the temporarily banned food items for him. So are vegetables such as beetroot, cauliflower and radish, for their *tamasic* nature. At the 13th century Krishna Mutt in Karnataka, where the dark-skinned god is worshipped as Bala Krishna, the deity is offered an elaborate meal of 14 delicacies. Earlier, the feast was prepared by members of the native Shivalli Brahmin community according to the principles of *Chaturmasya Vrata*, a period of austerity observed for four months, starting June.

It is the lord's own kitchen that has influenced the culinary culture of the region, now known as the Udupi cuisine. It is vegetarian—sattvik to be precise (does not use onion and garlic). "Udupi food draws inspiration from temple cooking. The flavours are marked by their impeccable balance. With a focus on vegetarian preparations and coastal influences, there is also an emphasis on fermentation," says Udupi-born Hari Nayak, Culinary Director, Sona, New York City. The Michelin-star restaurant is owned by actor Priyanka Chopra Jonas.

The masala dosa, which has been a representative of the south Indian cuisine, especially to the north of the Vindhyas, has its origins in the Udupi cuisine. Then there is the flavourful *huli*—sambhar made from Mangalore cucumber, pumpkin and a variety of local gourds cooked with lentils and freshly ground spices. The local GI-accorded *mattugulla*, a light green brinjal variant, is



(Clockwise from top) Masala dosa, goli baje, and tondekai cashew upkari

indispensable for the sambhar. "Use of native ingredients drove the cuisine's popularity," says Mangaluru-based Shriya

Shetty, Chef and Partner at Pupkins Hospitality.

The beginnings of 'Udupi restaurants' in Mumbai and Chennai, however, are rooted in tragedy. A massive flood in the region in 1923 forced many locals to move out and start afresh in the neighbouring cities. By the end of the 20th century, renowned chains like MTR, coupled with business acumen of the Shettys and Naiks transformed a religious ritual in a small town into the face of South Indian food.

Besides the flavoursome curries such as pineapple *menaskai* and *huli*, and snacks like *goli baje* (deep-fried balls of batter) and *chattambade* (lentil fritters), the cuisine also includes *kosambari* (a lentil salad with raw vegetables like carrot and cucumber), the delectable *tondekai cashew upkari* (ivy gourd stir fry), and raw jackfruit curry. "I continually seek to create modern interpretations of these dishes. For instance, I make a roasted pumpkin dish accompanied by a tangy pineapple *menaskai* sauce," says Nayak.

