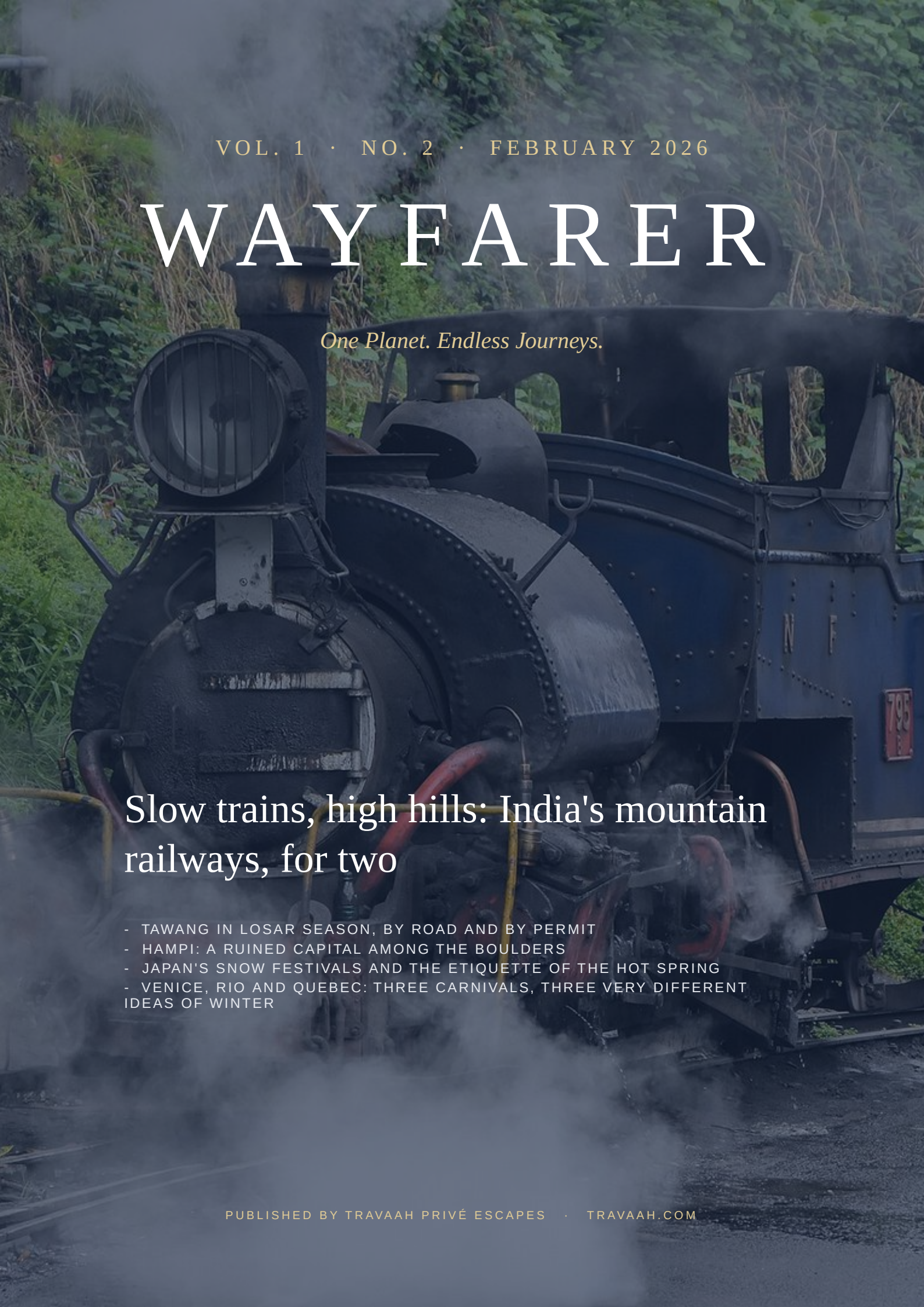
VOL. 1 · NO. 2 · FEBRUARY 2026

WAYFARER

One Planet. Endless Journeys.



Slow trains, high hills: India's mountain railways, for two

- TAWANG IN LOSAR SEASON, BY ROAD AND BY PERMIT
- HAMPI: A RUINED CAPITAL AMONG THE BOULDERS
- JAPAN'S SNOW FESTIVALS AND THE ETIQUETTE OF THE HOT SPRING
- VENICE, RIO AND QUEBEC: THREE CARNIVALS, THREE VERY DIFFERENT IDEAS OF WINTER

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EDITOR'S DISPATCH

Journeys for Two

A note from the editor

February's theme is journeys for two, and we have taken it in the widest sense. It can mean a couple, or two friends, or a parent and a grown-up child. What matters is that someone is beside you to say, look at that.

We have gathered stories where a shared pace is part of the pleasure: three narrow-gauge railways that were built to climb hills one patient curve at a time, a gondolier's oar, a loco pilot's long career. None of these stories is ours; each comes from published reporting, and we say so on the page, with the names and dates.

We have also been careful with dates. Carnival calendars, snow festivals and the Tibetan New Year are fixed to the moon or to local decisions, and we show which dates are firm and which are provisional. Please treat everything as a starting point, and confirm with the organisers before you book.

If you are planning a trip with someone this year, choose one place and stay long enough to forget the schedule. We would love to hear how it goes.

Choose one place and stay long enough to forget the schedule.

EDITOR'S DISPATCH

- *Gitanjali Gautam*

February is the month for travelling at the speed of conversation: a narrow-gauge train that takes five hours to climb a hill, a Himalayan monastery in the week of the Tibetan New Year, a masked street in Venice, a samba parade in Rio. This issue is about journeys that suit two people, and those who like company on the road.

DID YOU KNOW

The Darjeeling line, inscribed by UNESCO in 1999, runs on a two-foot gauge, among the narrowest in regular use.

TRAVEL TIP

In Venice, stay in Mestre on the mainland during Carnival and take the train in; it is usually calmer and cheaper.

DID YOU KNOW

Hampi has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1986.

DID YOU KNOW

The Sapporo Snow Festival began in 1950 with sculptures built by local students.

DID YOU KNOW

Tawang Monastery is generally described as the largest in India.

PLAN FOR WEATHER

Hill railways in India can be interrupted by landslides in the monsoon; check before you go.

TRAVEL TIP

At altitude, rest and drink water on the first day. If headaches continue, descend.

DID YOU KNOW

The first Quebec Winter Carnival was held in 1894.

Prices, timings, permits and visa notes are approximate - please verify before booking.

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How to read Wayfarer

RESEARCHED	Compiled from public sources; field verification pending.
PROPOSED	A commission, brief or concept - not a published story.
ILLUSTRATIVE	An example itinerary; check times and costs locally.
TEMPLATE	A format showing how offers appear; no real prices.

Choose one place and stay long enough to forget the schedule.

FROM THE EDITOR'S DISPATCH

Treat a festival as a community's before it is a visitor's.

FROM THE TAWANG FEATURE

A short thank-you to the crew is a small, genuine courtesy.

FROM THE LOCO-PILOT PROFILE

TRAVEL TIP

Buy carnival tickets only from official or verified sellers.

Prices, timings, permits and visa notes are approximate - please verify before booking.



COVER STORY

Slow trains, high hills: India's mountain railways

Three narrow-gauge lines, three UNESCO listings and one good reason to book the window seats.

RESEARCHED

Photo: Syed Sajidul Islam · CC BY-SA 4.0

THERE IS A PARTICULAR kind of travel that cannot be rushed, and India has three examples of it listed by UNESCO. The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway was inscribed in 1999, the Nilgiri Mountain Railway in 2005 and the Kalka–Shimla Railway in 2008, and in 2008 the three were brought together under the name Mountain Railways of India. All three were built in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to reach hill stations, and all three still do the job at the pace of a bicycle with a good tailwind.

The Darjeeling line runs on a two-foot gauge, among the narrowest in regular use. Its full route links Siliguri in the plains with Darjeeling, roughly 88 km away, climbing through tea gardens and forest and winding around the famous Batasia Loop. The Nilgiri line is shorter, about 46 km, from Mettupalayam to Udhagamandalam (Ooty), and uses a rack-and-pinion system on its steepest section. Kalka–Shimla, in the Himalayan foothills of Himachal Pradesh, is about 96 km long and passes through more than a hundred tunnels and hundreds of bridges; sources give different counts, so treat any single figure with care.

What suits two people is that the journey is the point. A narrow-gauge train in these hills is not fast, and the carriage is small enough that conversation is easy. You see the landscape change at the pace of a walk: tea terraces and mist on the Darjeeling line, eucalyptus and Nilgiri blue haze on the other, deodar and pine on the way to Shimla.

A few practical points matter more than any itinerary. Services change: parts of the Darjeeling line run as heritage steam or diesel excursions rather than as full end-to-end journeys, and landslides can interrupt any of these lines in the monsoon. Check current timetables and tourist services on the Indian Railways booking site and the relevant railway division before planning, and book early, because heritage services and the best coaches fill fast.

Pick one line and give it a base: two nights in Darjeeling, for instance, with the train as a half-day outing and the rest of your time for tea estates and walks; or Coonoor and Ooty on the Nilgiri line, with a day on foot in the tea country. Travelling in February keeps you clear of the monsoon and the summer rush, though mornings in the hills are cold and mist can hide views for days.

Think, too, about what the railways mean locally. Each is a working line as well as a heritage attraction, and it carries local passengers and goods. Be patient at stations, offer your seat, and buy tea or snacks from the vendors who depend on the traffic. And leave time at the end: a quiet afternoon after a long train ride is part of the trip, not wasted time.

At a glance

BEST TIME	Roughly October to March for clear air; February is cold in the hills
UNESCO	Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (1999); Nilgiri Mountain Railway (2005); Kalka–Shimla Railway (2008)
LENGTHS	Siliguri–Darjeeling about 88 km; Mettupalayam–Ooty about 46 km; Kalka–Shimla about 96 km
BOOKING	Indian Railways booking site; heritage and steam services have separate rules, so confirm before travelling
CHECKED	10 November 2026: inscription years against UNESCO; services and timetables must be re-confirmed

HOW TO REACH

Darjeeling, Ooty and Shimla hill railways

AIRPORT	Bagdogra (IXB) for Darjeeling, roughly 90 km from the hill station; Coimbatore (CJB) for Ooty, about 85–90 km from Mettupalayam; Chandigarh (IXC) for Kalka–Shimla (distances approximate).
RAILWAY	New Jalpaiguri (NJP) and Siliguri for Darjeeling; Mettupalayam (MTP) for the Nilgiri line; Kalka (KLK) for Shimla.
BY ROAD	Siliguri to Darjeeling takes roughly 3 to 4 hours by road; Mettupalayam to Ooty about 2 hours; Kalka to Shimla about 3 to 4 hours.
GETTING AROUND	Hill taxis, shared jeeps and walking in town centres.

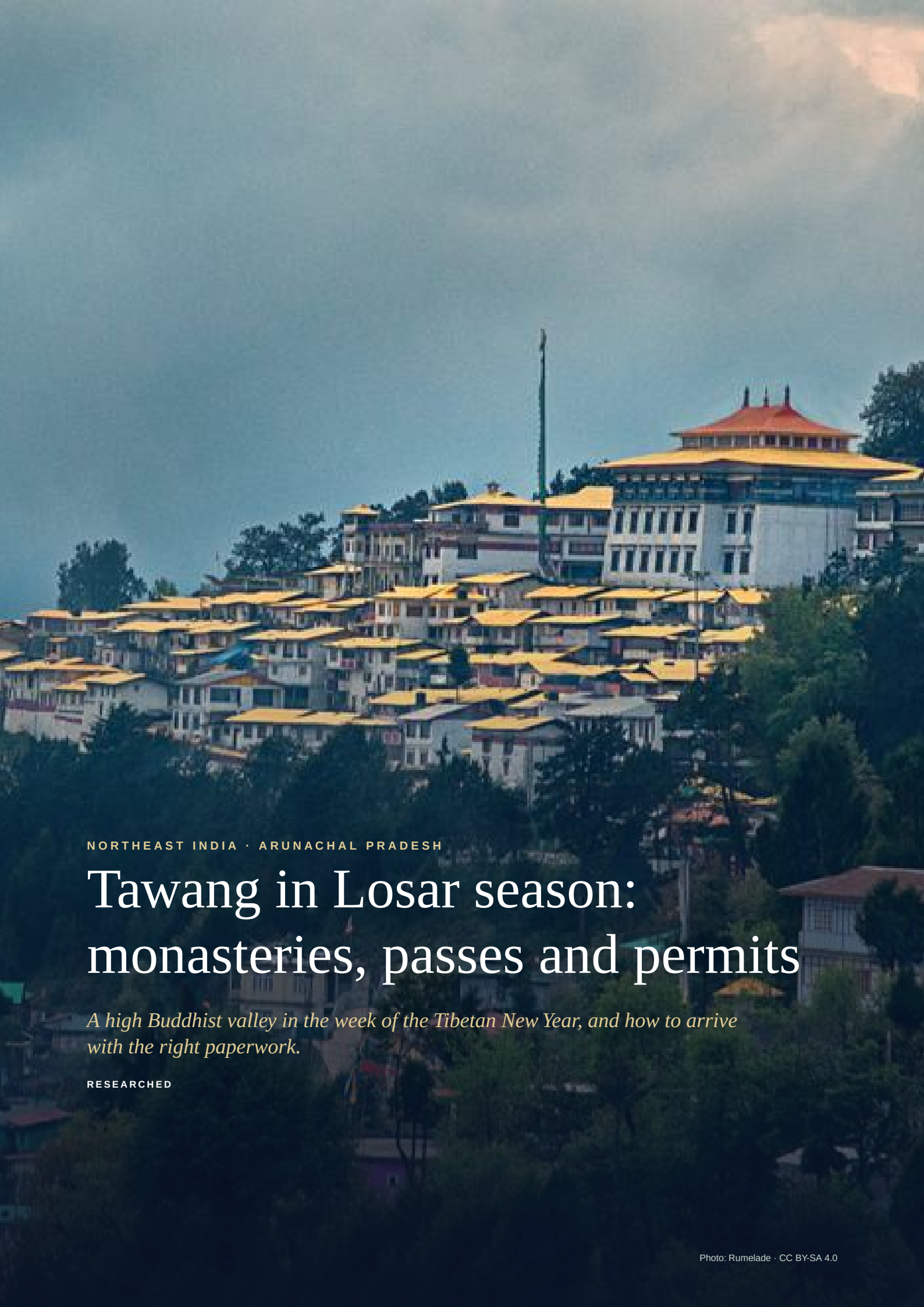
Distances approximate. Landslides can close hill roads and rail sections; check locally. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: UNESCO: Mountain Railways of India (whc.unesco.org); Indian Railways booking (IRCTC) (www.irctc.co.in)



Photo: Primejyothi · CC BY-SA 3.0

Prices, timings, permits and visa notes are approximate - please verify before booking.



NORTHEAST INDIA · ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Tawang in Losar season: monasteries, passes and permits

A high Buddhist valley in the week of the Tibetan New Year, and how to arrive with the right paperwork.

RESEARCHED

Photo: Rumelade · CC BY-SA 4.0

TAWANG, IN THE FAR north-west of Arunachal Pradesh, sits at about 3,000 metres on a ridge near the borders with Bhutan and Tibet. It is home to the Monpa people, to the largest Buddhist monastery in India and to a road journey that is half the point. The route climbs from the Assam plains through Bhalukpong, Bomdila and Dirang, crosses Sela Pass at over 4,000 metres, and drops into the Tawang valley. Most travellers spend two days on the road in each direction, and landslides or snow can add more.

Tawang Monastery, a Gelug-tradition monastery founded in the seventeenth century, dominates the town. Visitors are welcome to walk through the courtyard and prayer hall; the usual etiquette applies. Dress modestly, remove shoes and hats before entering prayer rooms, ask before photographing monks or ceremonies, and walk clockwise around shrines and prayer wheels.

February 2026 brings Losar, the Tibetan New Year, on 18 February, according to the dates reported for the Year of the Fire Horse. Monpa communities celebrate it with prayers, family visits and feasts, and monasteries hold ceremonies in the days around it. As with any religious festival, check with your hosts about what is open to visitors, and treat it as a community occasion before a tourist one. Dates and the form of celebrations differ between villages, so confirm locally.

Permits come first. Indian citizens who live outside Arunachal need an Inner Line Permit, which can be applied for online through the state government's e-ILP portal; approvals are often quick, but you should apply well ahead and carry printouts and photo identification, which are checked at entry points. Some areas, such as Bum La, need separate permission obtained locally. Foreign nationals need a Protected Area Permit and are usually required to travel through a registered operator; the process has changed over the years, so confirm with the Ministry of Home Affairs or the Arunachal tourism department before you book.

Cold is the other factor. Tawang in February is cold, and roads can be icy. Carry layers and warm footwear, allow an extra day for weather, and give yourself time to adjust to altitude: if you have headaches or breathlessness, rest and descend if symptoms persist. Many visitors find that two or three nights in Tawang, with day trips to nearby lakes and war memorials, is better than a rushed visit.

Stay in a homestay or locally run guesthouse where you can, eat where the locals eat, and buy handmade goods such as Monpa woollens and handmade paper from local makers.

At a glance

BEST TIME	March to October for clearer roads; February is cold, with snow on the passes
LOSAR 2026	18 February, as reported; confirm local celebrations
PERMITS	Indian citizens: Inner Line Permit through the state e-ILP portal. Foreign nationals: Protected Area Permit, normally through a registered operator. Confirm current rules with the state government.
ALTITUDE	Tawang is about 3,000 m; Sela Pass is over 4,000 m. Allow time to acclimatise.
CHECKED	10 November 2026: permit rules change; confirm on the official portal before you book

HOW TO REACH

Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh

AIRPORT	Tezpur (Salonibari, TEZ) in Assam is the nearest regular airport, roughly 320 km by road; Guwahati (GAU) is about 500 km. A helicopter service operates from Guwahati and Tawang (check status).
RAILWAY	No railway in Tawang. The nearest rail heads are in Assam, for example Rangapara North or Tezpur side; confirm station and onward transport.
BY ROAD	From Tezpur or Bhalukpong, the road via Bomdila, Dirang and Sela Pass to Tawang takes about 12 to 14 hours of driving, usually broken into two days.
GETTING AROUND	Hired taxis and shared Sumo vehicles; private driver recommended for the full route.

Distances approximate. Roads can be closed by snow or landslides; confirm daily. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Arunachal Pradesh e-ILP portal (official) (arunachalilp.com); Arunachal Pradesh Tourism (official) (arunachaltourism.com)



Photo: Chris j wood · CC BY-SA 4.0



INDIA · KARNATAKA

Hampi: a ruined capital among the boulders

A vast World Heritage site on the Tungabhadra, best seen on foot, by bicycle and in early light.

RESEARCHED

Photo: Ingo Mehling · CC BY-SA 4.0

HAMPI, IN NORTHERN KARNATAKA, was the heart of the Vijayanagara Empire, one of the largest cities of its time. The ruins spread across a landscape of rounded granite boulders and banana and paddy fields along the Tungabhadra river, and the Group of Monuments at Hampi has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1986.

It is a place that rewards slow moving. The Virupaksha Temple, still a working temple, anchors the old bazaar. The Vitthala Temple complex, with its famous stone chariot, is the best known of the monuments and opens in the morning; the official tourism listing gives roughly 8.30 am to 5.30 pm, though hours change. Further out, the Lotus Mahal and elephant stables, the royal enclosure and the stepped tank show the scale of the city. Do not try to see everything: choose two or three areas and give each a morning or an afternoon.

Two people can cover a great deal by bicycle or on foot, but heat is the constraint. February is pleasant, with warm days and cool mornings, yet the middle of the day is bright and hot, and there is little shade on the rocky paths. Start early, rest in the afternoon and go back out near sunset, when the light on the boulders is at its best. Carry water and wear a hat and sturdy sandals that are easy to remove at temples.

Across the river, the Virupapur Gaddi side offers guesthouses and cafes in a more relaxed setting. Crossing is by small boat, and timings depend on water levels and local rules, so ask your host before planning a late return. There is also a short walk or ride to Anegundi, an older settlement with village crafts.

Hampi is a living place, not an open-air museum. People live and farm among the ruins, and the temple is active. Ask before photographing people, keep to marked paths, do not climb on carved structures, and take your waste with you. If you hire a guide, choose one with a government-approved licence.

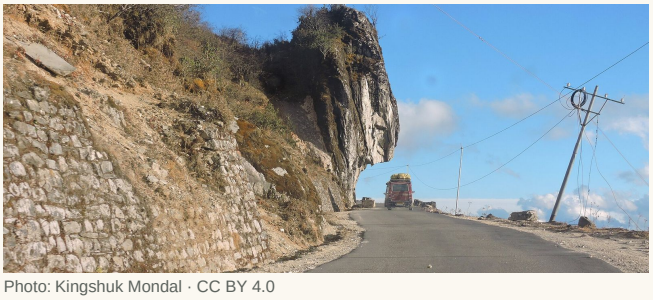


Photo: Kingshuk Mondal · CC BY 4.0

At a glance

BEST TIME	October to February for comfortable temperatures
HERITAGE	UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1986
ENTRY	Ticketed monuments; fees and hours change; confirm with the Archaeological Survey of India
RESPONSIBLE-TRAVEL NOTE	Remove shoes at temples; do not climb on structures; pack out waste.
CHECKED	10 November 2026: re-confirm hours, fees and boat services locally

HOW TO REACH

Hampi, Vijayanagara district, Karnataka

AIRPORT	Vidyanagar (Ballari) airport, roughly 35 km, with limited services; Hubballi (HBX) is about 140 km away (approximate).
RAILWAY	Hosapete (Hospet) Junction (HPT), about 13 km from Hampi.
BY ROAD	Hosapete to Hampi is about 30 minutes by road; Bengaluru to Hampi is roughly 340 km (about 6 to 7 hours).
GETTING AROUND	Auto-rickshaws, bicycles and scooters for rent, coracle and boat crossings.

Distances approximate; boat services vary with river levels. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: UNESCO: Group of Monuments at Hampi (whc.unesco.org); Karnataka Tourism (official) (www.karnatakatourism.org)



Photo: Sid Mohanty · CC BY-SA 4.0



ASIA · JAPAN

Japan's snow festivals and the etiquette of the hot spring

Sapporo's giant sculptures run from 4 to 11 February. Pair them with the quieter pleasures of Hokkaido in winter.

RESEARCHED

Photo: OKJaguar · CC BY-SA 4.0

HOKKAIDO IN FEBRUARY IS cold, clear and white, and it is Japan's snow-festival season. The best known festival is in Sapporo, where the 76th Sapporo Snow Festival runs from 4 to 11 February 2026. Its main site in Odori Park, a long strip of green in the middle of the city, is lined with huge snow sculptures and ice carvings, with a second site in Susukino's main street and a family-oriented site at Tsudome.

The festival began in 1950 with a handful of sculptures built by local students, and it has grown into one of Japan's biggest winter events. It is crowded, especially at weekends and in the evenings when the sculptures are lit. Weekday mornings are calmer. Dress seriously: snow boots with grip, layers and good gloves matter more than a camera.

Sapporo is also a base for quieter outings. Otaru, a port town on the coast, holds a winter lantern event in February with candles set along a canal. Yokote, further north in Akita, is known for its small snow huts called kamakura, typically in mid-February. Dates for these smaller events are set locally, so check each town's official tourism pages.

A winter journey in Japan often includes a hot spring, or onsen, and a few rules make it more comfortable. Wash thoroughly at the washing stations before entering the shared bath, and rinse off any soap. Do not wear a swimsuit, as most onsen are bathed in the nude; many have gender-separated baths, and some offer private ones. Keep the small towel out of the water, tie up long hair, and avoid splashing. Some onsen restrict visitors with tattoos, and policies vary, so ask in advance.

Getting around Hokkaido in winter requires planning: snow can slow trains, and flights are sometimes delayed. Allow buffer days and keep your plans flexible. Visa requirements depend on your passport, so check the Japanese foreign ministry's information before booking.



Photo: MIKI Yoshihito · CC BY 2.0

At a glance

WHEN	Sapporo Snow Festival: 4–11 February 2026
BEST TIME	Late January to mid-February for snow festivals; very cold
ENTRY	Visa rules depend on nationality; check the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs
RESPONSIBLE-TRAVEL NOTE	Follow onsen rules; keep voices low; avoid crowding sculpture areas.
CHECKED	10 November 2026: festival dates against organiser reporting; confirm all smaller-town dates locally

HOW TO REACH

Sapporo and Otaru, Hokkaido, Japan

AIRPORT	New Chitose Airport (CTS), roughly 45–50 km from central Sapporo (approximate).
RAILWAY	Sapporo Station; JR rapid trains link the airport to the city in under an hour, and Otaru is about 30 to 40 minutes by train from Sapporo.
BY ROAD	Expressways link Sapporo with Otaru and Chitose, but winter driving needs experience.
GETTING AROUND	Subway, trams and buses in Sapporo; walking in the festival areas.

Approximate. Winter weather can delay trains and flights. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Sapporo Snow Festival (official) (www.snowfes.com); Japan National Tourism Organization (www.japan.travel)



Photo: User:Nino Barbieri · CC BY-SA 2.5



AROUND THE WORLD

Venice at Carnival: a mask, a canal and a plan

The 2026 Carnival runs from 31 January to 17 February. How to see it without drowning in the crowd.

RESEARCHED

Photo: Giorgio Minguzzi from Italy · CC BY-SA 2.0

VENICE'S CARNIVAL IS AMONG the oldest and most photographed in the world. The 2026 edition runs from 31 January to 17 February and its theme, announced by the city, is Olympus, linking the carnival to the Winter Olympic Games hosted in northern Italy that year. Most of the major events take place from the second week onwards, and the festival ends on 17 February with a closing night on the water.

The mask is the point. Visitors in costume stroll in St Mark's Square and across the bridges, and the most elaborate outfits draw crowds of photographers. If you want to take portraits, ask politely first; many costumed visitors are happy to pose, but not all. For a quieter experience, go in the early morning when the light is soft and the streets are nearly empty.

Crowds are the main practical challenge. The last weekend of Carnival is the busiest, with long queues for waterbuses and bridges congested with foot traffic. Consider staying on the mainland, in Mestre, and taking the train in, or choose a weekday visit. Book trains and hotels early, and check the city's own pages for the official programme, which is announced in stages.

Venice has also been experimenting with a day-visitor access fee on selected days. The 2026 calendar of fee days was announced in December 2025 and covers spring and summer; check the city's official portal for the current list, as it can change. Overnight guests are exempt.

The city rewards slowness. Walk away from St Mark's and the Rialto into quieter districts such as Cannaregio or Dorsoduro. Try the fried carnival sweets, frittelle and galani, and sit down in a bacaro, a small Venetian wine bar, for cicchetti, the city's small snacks.

In February Venice is cold and damp, and streets near the lagoon can flood at high tide; boots are useful. Check the city's tide service when you arrive.



Photo: Rohit Sharma · CC BY-SA 4.0

At a glance

WHEN	31 January–17 February 2026; theme Olympus
GETTING THERE	Marco Polo Airport and Santa Lucia railway station; most visitors cross to the island by water bus or on foot
BOOK AHEAD	Hotels and trains fill for the final weekend; the last days are the busiest
ACCESS FEE	Applies to day visitors on selected days in 2026; check the city's official portal
CHECKED	10 November 2026: dates and theme against the city's carnival site

HOW TO REACH

Venice, Veneto, Italy

AIRPORT	Venice Marco Polo (VCE), roughly 13 km from the historic centre (approximate).
RAILWAY	Venezia Santa Lucia, on the island; Venezia Mestre on the mainland, a few minutes away by train.
BY ROAD	Cars stop at Piazzale Roma or the mainland; the historic centre is traffic-free.
GETTING AROUND	Walking and vaporetto (water bus); water taxis are expensive.

Distances approximate. Expect long queues at peak times. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Carnevale di Venezia (official) (carnevale.venezia.it); Venice access fee portal (official) (cda.ve.it)



Photo: Prof. Vikramjit Kakati · CC BY-SA 4.0

Prices, timings, permits and visa notes are approximate - please verify before booking.



AROUND THE WORLD

Rio Carnival: how to see the parade and stay safe

Samba schools, street blocos and a Sambadrome that holds tens of thousands. Plan early and buy tickets only from official channels.

RESEARCHED

Photo: Randal Sheppard · CC BY-SA 2.0

RIO DE JANEIRO'S CARNIVAL is a city-wide event with two faces. The first is the parade of the samba schools in the Sambadrome, a purpose-built avenue where each school presents a themed procession of floats, costumes and drumming before judges. The second is the street carnival, with neighbourhood groups called blocos parading and playing in public spaces across the city.

In 2026, the core dates are generally reported as 13 to 17 February, with some sources extending to 18 February and other post-carnival events. Sources are inconsistent on exact parade dates, so check the Rio city tourism office and the schools' league for the official schedule before booking. The top-division parades run across a few nights, and the highest demand is for Sunday and Monday.

Buy Sambadrome tickets only through official or clearly verified sellers. Counterfeit tickets are a known problem, and prices vary widely by sector. Know which sector you are buying, because seating and views differ, and plan to get to the venue early. Public transport and organised transfers are usually easier than taxis around the Sambadrome.

Street carnival is free but crowded. Go with a friend, keep valuables to a minimum, use a front pocket or a secure waist pouch for your phone, and agree a meeting point in case you are separated. Drink water and stay out of the sun in the middle of the day. Rio is a large city with real safety concerns, so follow local advice about areas and times.

Accommodation fills early and prices rise sharply. Stay near a metro line if possible, and book well ahead. Entry rules depend on your passport, so check Brazil's official consular guidance.



Photo: Diganta Talukdar · CC BY-SA 4.0

At a glance

WHEN	Core dates about 13–17 February 2026; schedules vary by source
TICKETS	Official or verified sellers only; beware of fakes
GETTING THERE	Galeão International (GIG) and downtown Santos Dumont (SDU); metro serves the Sambadrome area
SAFETY	Keep valuables minimal; travel with others; take local advice
CHECKED	10 November 2026: parade dates must be confirmed with the city and the league

HOW TO REACH

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

AIRPORT	Rio de Janeiro/Galeão International Airport (GIG), roughly 20 km north of the centre; Santos Dumont (SDU) is downtown (approximate).
RAILWAY	No long-distance passenger rail; the metro and suburban trains serve the city.
BY ROAD	Airport to the centre takes 30 to 60 minutes depending on traffic.
GETTING AROUND	Metro, buses and ride-hailing apps; metro stops near the Sambadrome.

Distances approximate; crowds change journey times. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Rio de Janeiro city hall (official) (www.rio.rj.gov.br); Visit Rio (official tourism) (visit.rio)



Photo: Udit Kapoor · CC BY-SA 4.0



AROUND THE WORLD

Quebec Winter Carnival: a snowman, an ice palace and a very cold week

Canada's oldest winter festival is held in Quebec City in the first half of February.

RESEARCHED

Photo: US Embassy Canada · Public domain

THE FIRST QUEBEC WINTER Carnival was held in 1894, with an ice palace, parades and a canoe race on the frozen St Lawrence River. After a long gap it was revived in the 1950s and has run annually since, with a snowman mascot called Bonhomme Carnaval who appeared in 1955. The festival is now one of the largest winter festivals in the Western Hemisphere.

The 2026 edition is generally reported for 6 to 15 February, spanning two weekends, though one source gives a late-January start; confirm with the organiser. Typical events include parades, snow sculptures, ice-canoe races, outdoor concerts and games on the Plains of Abraham, the historic park beside the old city. Bonhomme's Ice Palace is the centrepiece, and visitors can meet the mascot there.

Dress for serious cold. Quebec City in February is often well below freezing. Layers, insulated boots, a windproof outer layer and warm hands matter more than anything else. Many events are outdoors and run in the evening, so plan breaks in warm cafes. A hot drink is traditional; ask about the local seasonal sweet, maple taffy poured on snow.

The old city, Old Quebec, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is walkable in winter, though paths can be icy. Pair the carnival with a few quieter hours in the Château Frontenac area and the lower town's narrow streets.

Entry rules to Canada depend on your passport: visa-exempt air travellers usually need an electronic travel authorisation, and others need a visa. Check the Government of Canada's official pages.

At a glance

WHEN	About 6–15 February 2026 (confirm with the organiser)
BEST TIME	Carnival season is the coldest part of winter
ENTRY	Visa or eTA rules depend on nationality; check the Government of Canada
CHECKED	10 November 2026: dates not confirmed against the organiser's own site



Photo: Extreminatethejuice · CC BY-SA 4.0

HOW TO REACH

Quebec City, Canada

AIRPORT	Québec City Jean Lesage International Airport (YQB), roughly 15 km west of the centre (approximate).
RAILWAY	Gare du Palais, with VIA Rail services from Montreal.
BY ROAD	Montreal to Quebec City is roughly 250 km, about 3 hours by road in good weather.
GETTING AROUND	Buses, taxis and walking in the old city.

Winter road conditions can change journey times. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Carnaval de Québec (official) (www.carnaval.qc.ca); Government of Canada: visit Canada (www.canada.ca)

REAL STORIES FROM THE ROAD

From hunters to nest protectors: the hornbills of Pakke

In Arunachal Pradesh, members of the Nyishi community who once hunted hornbills now guard their nests.

PROFILE · FROM PUBLISHED REPORTING · NOT INTERVIEWED BY WAYFARER



Photo: Dasrath Shrestha Beejukchhen (Bablu) · CC0

Hornbills are among the most striking birds of the Eastern Himalaya, and for the Nyishi people of Arunachal Pradesh they have long had cultural significance. The upper beak of the great hornbill, in particular, was used in traditional headgear, and the birds were also hunted for food. As forests were cleared and hunting continued, hornbill numbers in parts of the region fell.

The Nature Conservation Foundation, an Indian conservation non-profit, describes on its website a programme it began in partnership with the Ghora-Aabhe Society and the Arunachal Pradesh Forest Department in 2011–12, in the Papum Reserve Forest next to Pakke Tiger Reserve. In the Hornbill Nest Adoption Programme, citizens, in India and abroad, adopt a nest by paying a yearly fee, and local people from the Nyishi community are employed as nest protectors who monitor and guard the nest

trees. The foundation describes this as a shared-parenting model, and notes that several of the nest protectors were once hunters.

Reporting by The Better India, a Bengaluru-based news site, and others quotes the forest officer in charge of Pakke saying hornbill numbers there rose by around 20 to 25 per cent after the programme began, while noting that there is no official census. Outcomes have not been formally measured, so these figures should be read as an indication rather than as a proven count.

For visitors, the lesson is practical. Pakke is a protected area with forest rules, and bird-watching is best done with a licensed local guide. If you want to support the work, adopting a nest through the foundation is one route; another is to stay with a locally run lodge and choose a guide from the community.

Nobody here is on show. Guides, protectors and village families are people with their own lives and decisions, so ask before photographing and respect rules at nest sites.

At a glance

VERIFICATION	Facts and figures are taken from the cited reporting and must be re-checked against the original before print.
REPORTED BY	Nature Conservation Foundation (programme page, undated); The Better India (feature, date to be confirmed)
PEOPLE NAMED	No individual protector is named here; reporting names the Pakke forest officer Tana Tapi
NOT INTERVIEWED BY US	This profile paraphrases published reporting. We have not spoken to the people named or to nest protectors.
TO FEATURE THEM PROPERLY	Approach the Nature Conservation Foundation and the Pakke Tiger Reserve office for consent, interviews and photographs.



Photo: Vikramjit Kakati · CC BY-SA 4.0

HOW TO REACH

Pakke Tiger Reserve and Papum Reserve Forest, East Kameng district, Arunachal Pradesh

AIRPORT	Tezpur (TEZ) in Assam, roughly 50–60 km from Seijosa; Guwahati (GAU) is the larger gateway (approximate).
RAILWAY	Rangapara North or Tezpur side in Assam (confirm station and onward transport).
BY ROAD	Seijosa, the gateway to Pakke, lies just across the Assam border and is reached by road from Tezpur.
GETTING AROUND	Hired vehicle and a licensed guide; confirm entry rules with the reserve.

Distances approximate. An Inner Line Permit may apply for Indian visitors; confirm with the state. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Nature Conservation Foundation: Hornbill Nest Adoption Program (www.ncf-india.org); The Better India feature (thebetterindia.com)

REAL STORIES FROM THE ROAD

Thirty-six years at the controls: Surekha Yadav

Described in Indian reporting as Asia's first woman loco pilot, she ended a long railway career in September 2025.

PROFILE · FROM PUBLISHED REPORTING · NOT INTERVIEWED BY WAYFARER



Photo: No machine-readable author provided. Mayur.thakare~commonswiki assumed (based on copyright claims). · Public domain

Journeys for two are often journeys by train, and behind every train is a driver. One of India's best-known loco pilots was Surekha Yadav of Maharashtra, reported in Indian media as the first woman train driver in Asia. According to reports in the Free Press Journal and elsewhere, she came from Satara, trained as an electrical engineer and joined the Central Railway in the late 1980s; sources give 1988 or 1989 for the start of her career.

Her career had a series of firsts. She was reported as the first woman to drive a suburban ladies' special on Central Railway in 2000, and the first woman to take the Deccan Queen through the Western Ghats between Mumbai and Pune. In March 2023, news outlets including Deccan Herald reported that she drove the Vande Bharat Express between

Solapur and Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus, the first woman to do so, and the Railway Minister publicly congratulated her.

She retired on 30 September 2025 after 36 years of service, according to The Hitavada's report dated 1 October 2025, which called it the end of a trailblazing journey.

Railways are a large employer, and their staff are often invisible to passengers. The next time you are on a long journey, a short thank-you to the crew and station staff is a small and genuine courtesy. If you ride heritage lines such as the ones in our cover story, remember that the people who run them are doing a skilled and demanding job.

At a glance

VERIFICATION	Facts and figures are taken from the cited reporting and must be re-checked against the original before print.
REPORTED BY	Free Press Journal (Mumbai), March 2023; Deccan Herald, March 2023; The Hitavada, 1 October 2025
PEOPLE NAMED	Surekha Yadav
NOT INTERVIEWED BY US	This profile paraphrases published reporting. Career dates differ slightly between sources, and we have left out private details.
TO FEATURE HER PROPERLY	Approach Central Railway's public relations office for consent, interviews and photographs.

HOW TO REACH

Mumbai to Pune via the Western Ghats, Maharashtra

AIRPORT	Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport, Mumbai (BOM); Pune (PNQ).
RAILWAY	Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (CSMT) in Mumbai; Pune Junction (PUNE).
BY ROAD	Mumbai to Pune is roughly 150 km by expressway, about 3 hours.
GETTING AROUND	Suburban trains, metro and cabs in Mumbai.

Approximate. Train timetables change; check the Indian Railways site. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: The Hitavada (1 October 2025) (www.thehitavada.com); Deccan Herald (March 2023) (www.deccanherald.com)



Photo: Arunachal2007 · CC BY-SA 4.0

REAL STORIES FROM THE ROAD

The oar and the licence: Venice's first woman gondolier

After centuries of an almost all-male guild, Giorgia Boscolo passed the exam and joined the gondoliers' register in 2010.

PROFILE · FROM PUBLISHED REPORTING · NOT INTERVIEWED BY WAYFARER



Photo: Saffron Blaze · CC BY-SA 3.0

Venice's gondoliers are one of the city's best-known and most traditional trades, with a guild whose licences have historically passed through families. In 2010, Al Jazeera and other outlets reported that Giorgia Boscolo had become the first woman to receive a full gondolier's licence, after more than eight centuries of the profession being almost entirely male.

According to the reports, she followed her father, Dante, who had been a gondolier for around forty years. She had completed a training course introduced by the city council in 2007 and passed a demanding exam; earlier reports in 2009 had noted that she passed the test, with her name added to the official register the following year. Reporting describes a course of several months and hundreds of hours.

Later reporting, including a feature published by the news aggregator inkl, has suggested that she remained the only woman licensed as a gondolier for many years. That detail should be checked against current records before it is repeated.

A gondola ride is a visit to a long craft tradition: the boat is asymmetrical, the oar rests on a carved wooden rowlock, and the route through the canals is learned over years. If you take a ride, agree the price and duration in advance, and consider the quieter side canals rather than the busiest routes.



Photo: Vikramjit Kakati · CC BY-SA 4.0

At a glance

VERIFICATION	Facts and figures are taken from the cited reporting and must be re-checked against the original before print.
REPORTED BY	Al Jazeera, 20 August 2010; Radio New Zealand, 15 August 2010
PEOPLE NAMED	Giorgia Boscolo; her father, Dante
NOT INTERVIEWED BY US	This profile paraphrases reports from 2009 and 2010; her current work and the number of women gondoliers must be confirmed.
TO FEATURE HER PROPERLY	Approach the Gondoliers' Association or the City of Venice's tourism office for consent and photographs.

HOW TO REACH

Venice, Veneto, Italy

AIRPORT	Venice Marco Polo (VCE), roughly 13 km from the historic centre (approximate).
RAILWAY	Venezia Santa Lucia station.
BY ROAD	Cars stop at Piazzale Roma; the historic centre is car-free.
GETTING AROUND	Walking, vaporetto and gondola ferries (traghetti) across the Grand Canal.

Gondola prices and routes are regulated; confirm the rate before boarding. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Al Jazeera (20 August 2010) (www.aljazeera.com)

REAL STORIES FROM THE ROAD

The soldiers who build the snow giants

Every February, Japan's Ground Self-Defense Force helps carve the largest sculptures at the Sapporo Snow Festival.

PROFILE · FROM PUBLISHED REPORTING · NOT INTERVIEWED BY WAYFARER



Photo: · CC BY-SA 4.0

The Sapporo Snow Festival began modestly in 1950 with a few snow sculptures built by local high-school students in Odori Park. It grew quickly, and in 1955 the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force started to help build the large sculptures, according to Japan's land ministry and an article on the Nippon.com website.

The military's involvement expanded over the years. Reporting says that around the late 1950s thousands of personnel were involved, and that the work counts as a training exercise. In years with little local snow, snow is trucked in from elsewhere to feed the construction. The festival has run every year since 1950 except in 2021.

A second site was opened at an Ground Self-Defense Force camp in a nearby district in 1965. The festival's own timeline and the ministry's history page give details of how the event has changed; the numbers of participants vary between sources, so they should be checked against official festival figures before quoting.

If you visit, walk early on a weekday if you can. The scale is clearest from a short distance, in daylight, and the sculptures are lit at night. And remember that the festival is the work of hundreds of volunteers, soldiers and city staff in very cold conditions; stay behind barriers, and do not climb or lean on the sculptures.

At a glance

VERIFICATION	Facts and figures are taken from the cited reporting and must be re-checked against the original before print.
REPORTED BY	Nippon.com, 'Matsuri Days: Sapporo Snow Festival' (date to be confirmed); Japan Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, History of the Festival (undated)
PEOPLE NAMED	No individuals are named; this is an institutional profile of the Ground Self-Defense Force's role
NOT INTERVIEWED BY US	This profile paraphrases published sources; figures for personnel and dates vary.
TO FEATURE THEM PROPERLY	Approach the Sapporo Snow Festival Executive Committee and the Ground Self-Defense Force's public affairs office.



Photo: ANKAN · CC BY-SA 4.0

HOW TO REACH

Odori Park, Sapporo, Hokkaido, Japan

AIRPORT	New Chitose Airport (CTS), roughly 45–50 km away (approximate).
RAILWAY	Sapporo Station, a short walk or subway ride from Odori Park.
BY ROAD	Expressway from the airport takes under an hour in good conditions.
GETTING AROUND	Subway and walking; Odori is a central station on the Sapporo subway.

Approximate. Winter conditions can affect timings. Distances approximate - verify.

Official sources: Nippon.com: Sapporo Snow Festival (www.nippon.com); Japan MLIT: History of the Festival (www.mlit.go.jp)

READER AND CONTRIBUTOR BRIEFS

Proposed commission: “The trip we took together”

A brief for a real reader or contributor. Not a published story.

PROPOSED COMMISSION · NOT A REAL STORY

What we want: a first-person account (800–1,200 words) of a journey taken with one other person: a partner, friend, parent or sibling. One place, one moment where the trip changed shape, and one thing you learned about the other person.

What we need: a true story; photographs you own, with permission to publish (and permission from anyone identifiable); and a trip recap (destination and dates, duration, route, budget range with currency and date, transport and accommodation, one thing you wish you had known).

Rights: you keep the copyright; we ask permission to publish and archive with credit and will show you the edited text before publication. Please do not send invented or composite stories. Write to us via the contact page.



Photo: Madhumita Das · CC BY-SA 4.0

FOOD, HERITAGE AND NATURE

The Taste of Travel: Venetian cicchetti and carnival sweets

Small plates, a glass of wine and fried dough: eating in Venice at Carnival time.

RESEARCHED

Venetian eating is built on small portions. *Cicchetti* are bar snacks served in a *bacaro* , a traditional wine bar: a slice of bread topped with salt cod, a skewer of seafood, fried olives, small sandwiches. They are meant to be eaten standing at the counter with a small glass of wine, and moving on to the next bar.

At Carnival time the sweets come out. *Frittelle* are fried dough balls, sometimes filled with custard or flavoured with raisins and pine nuts, and *galani* , thin ribbons of fried pastry dusted with sugar, are sold in pastry shops throughout the season. These are sweets of the season, and bakeries sell out on the busiest days.

To eat well, step away from the main squares. Prices near St Mark's are higher, and menus in the busiest places can be aimed at passing visitors. Ask where locals go, look for short menus, and be aware that restaurants can add a cover charge or service fee, which should be listed on the menu. If you are vegetarian, fish is common in the lagoon cuisine, so ask what is in each dish.

At a glance

SAY IT	“Un' ombra” is a small glass of wine, in Venetian bar slang; point and ask if unsure.
ETIQUETTE	In bars, order at the counter and check whether sitting costs extra.
VEG-FRIENDLY?	Possible with notice; confirm with the kitchen.

HOW TO REACH

Venice, Italy

AIRPORT	Venice Marco Polo (VCE), roughly 13 km (approximate).
RAILWAY	Venezia Santa Lucia.
BY ROAD	Car-free historic centre; Piazzale Roma for cars and buses.
GETTING AROUND	Walking and vaporetto.

Approximate. Distances approximate - verify.

FOOD, HERITAGE AND NATURE

Heritage Without Borders: Tawang Monastery

A seventeenth-century monastery on a Himalayan ridge, still home to a living community of monks.

RESEARCHED

Tawang Monastery is generally described as the largest Buddhist monastery in India and one of the largest in the world, and it belongs to the Gelug tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. It was founded in the seventeenth century by Merak Lama Lodre Gyatso, and its Tibetan name, Galden Namgyal Lhatse, is often translated as the celestial paradise in a clear night. It sits at about 3,000 metres above sea level above the town of Tawang.

The monastery is a working religious community, with monks living, studying and praying there. Visitors are welcome in the courtyard and in parts of the prayer hall, and a small museum holds manuscripts, thangka paintings and other objects. Rules on photography inside prayer halls differ, so ask a monk or caretaker.

Go in the early morning, when prayers are under way, and wear warm clothes: stone halls are very cold. Dress modestly, remove shoes and hats at the entrance, move clockwise around the complex, and do not touch sacred objects. If you want to donate, use the official donation boxes.

At a glance

ETIQUETTE	Dress modestly, remove shoes and hats, walk clockwise, ask before photographing monks.
CHECKED	Opening times and photography rules must be confirmed locally.

HOW TO REACH

Tawang Monastery, Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh

AIRPORT	Tezpur (TEZ), roughly 320 km by road (approximate).
RAILWAY	No railway; nearest rail heads are in Assam.
BY ROAD	About 12 to 14 hours' drive from Tezpur over Sela Pass, usually split over two days.
GETTING AROUND	Taxis and walking; the monastery is within a short drive or walk from the town centre.

Roads can be closed by snow; Inner Line Permit rules apply to Indian visitors. Distances approximate - verify.

FOOD, HERITAGE AND NATURE

The Natural Calendar: February

What to look for, where, and how sure we are.

RESEARCHED

Black-necked cranes in Arunachal Pradesh: these rare cranes winter in high valleys of the state, including in Tawang and West Kameng, usually from about November to March. They are sensitive to disturbance, so keep your distance and go with a local guide. *Predictable season; sightings vary with the year and conditions.*

Plum blossom in Japan: plum trees bloom from about late January to March in many parts of Japan, ahead of cherry blossom. *Season predictable; timing varies by region and year.*

Whales: several places are known for winter whale-watching, including the waters off Baja California for gray whales and Hawaii for humpbacks. Choose operators who keep to distance rules. *Season is reliable; individual sightings are not.*

Winter wetlands in India: the cool months are still the peak for migratory ducks and waders. *Numbers vary by site and year.*

FOOD, HERITAGE AND NATURE

Responsible travel: the hot spring, done well

A short guide to onsen etiquette for first-time visitors in Japan.

PRACTICAL · EVERGREEN

An onsen, or Japanese hot spring, is a shared and quiet space. A few habits keep it that way. Wash and rinse thoroughly in the washing area before entering the bath. Bathe without clothing, as swimsuits are generally not allowed in traditional baths. Keep your small towel out of the water, usually folded on your head or placed on the side. Tie back long hair so it stays out of the water, and avoid splashing or loud talking.

If you have tattoos, ask before you visit: some onsen restrict them, others allow covered tattoos, and some have private baths you can book. Do not photograph inside the bathing area. Drink water, and leave if you feel dizzy.

These rules are about shared comfort, not performance. If you are unsure, watch what others do, or ask the staff.

At a glance

ASK FIRST	Tattoo policy; private bath availability
DO NOT	Photograph inside the bath; wear a swimsuit in traditional baths

HOW TO REACH

Hokkaido, Japan (onsen towns near Sapporo, such as Jozankei)

AIRPORT	New Chitose Airport (CTS), roughly 45–50 km from Sapporo (approximate).
RAILWAY	Sapporo Station; buses run to Jozankei.
BY ROAD	Jozankei is roughly 30 km from central Sapporo, about an hour by bus.
GETTING AROUND	Buses and taxis; hotels often arrange transfers.

Approximate. Confirm onsen rules directly with each facility. Distances approximate - verify.

PRACTICAL TOOLKIT

The visa and document checklist

A one-page list to run through before you pay for anything non-refundable.

PRACTICAL · EVERGREEN

1. **Check the official source first:** use only the destination's government immigration or foreign ministry site, and be wary of look-alike agencies that charge much more.

2. **Passport validity:** many countries want at least six months' validity and blank pages; check each country's rule.

3. **Visa type and timing:** note whether you need a visa, an e-visa or an electronic authorisation, and how long approval takes.

4. **Permits within a country:** some regions need extra permits, such as Arunachal Pradesh's Inner Line Permit; apply through the official portal.

5. **Onward ticket and funds:** some countries ask for proof of onward travel or accommodation.

6. **Transit rules:** check whether any connection needs a transit visa.

7. **Health requirements:** check for required vaccinations or certificates.

8. **Insurance:** keep a copy of your policy and emergency number.

9. **Copies:** keep digital and paper copies of passport, visas and bookings, stored separately.

10. **Re-check before you fly:** rules change, so confirm again a week before departure.

This is a checklist, not legal advice. Always confirm with official sources.

PRACTICAL TOOLKIT

The 24-Hour Destination: Venice

One illustrative day. Hours, crowds and your own pace will change it.

ILLUSTRATIVE ITINERARY · VERIFY LOCALLY

Early morning: St Mark's Square before the crowds arrive, then a walk along the waterfront.

Breakfast: coffee and a pastry at a neighbourhood bar away from the square.

Mid-morning: a vaporetto ride along the Grand Canal, then a visit to the Rialto market area.

Lunch: cicchetti in a bacaro.

Afternoon: wander through Dorsoduro and Cannaregio, with a stop at a church or gallery of your choice.

Evening: an aperitivo near a canal, then dinner away from the busiest streets.

What to skip if short on time: the longest museum queues; see the outside of the major sights and spend your time on the water and in the back streets.

Prices, opening hours and fees are not listed here and must be confirmed locally.

HOW TO REACH

Venice, Italy

AIRPORT	Venice Marco Polo (VCE), roughly 13 km (approximate).
RAILWAY	Venezia Santa Lucia.
BY ROAD	Car-free historic centre.
GETTING AROUND	Walking and vaporetto.

Timings approximate. Distances approximate - verify.



Photo: Aravind Manickam · CC BY-SA 4.0

COMMUNITY

The Traveller's Lexicon: cafuné

A Brazilian Portuguese word for a very particular gesture.

LEXICON

Cafuné (Brazilian Portuguese; roughly “kah-foo-NEH”) is the act of running your fingers gently through someone's hair. It is commonly described as a word without a neat single-word translation in English.

It is a useful word for a month about travelling with someone, and a reminder that small gestures often outlast large itineraries. Like many such words, it is best treated as a nice piece of vocabulary rather than a symbol of a whole culture.

COMMUNITY

Travel Quiz: February

Five questions. Answers appear in next month's issue.

QUIZ

1. Which railway links Siliguri with Darjeeling?

2. Which river flows beside the ruins of Hampi?

3. In which Japanese city is the Sapporo Snow Festival held?

4. What is the theme of the 2026 Venice Carnival?

5. What is the name of Quebec Winter Carnival's snowman mascot?

Answers (for the editor's copy, reveal next issue): Darjeeling Himalayan Railway · Tungabhadra · Sapporo · Olympus · Bonhomme.

Answers to January's quiz: Assam · Jaipur · Vietnam · Torres del Paine · Tasmania.

COMMUNITY

Your turn: the best meal you shared on the road

Reader engagement idea for the next issue.

READER INVITATION

Tell us in 150 words about a meal you shared with someone while travelling: where, what, and why you still remember it. A selection may appear in the Readers' Pages, with your name, only with your permission.

COMMUNITY

The Traveller's Bookshelf

Three books to read beside someone.

RECOMMENDED READING

Venice by Jan Morris — a portrait of the city first published in 1960 under another title. Read it for the sentences.

The Snow Leopard by Peter Matthiessen — an account of a 1973 trek in the Himalaya, as much about grief and attention as about mountains. Read it for the stillness.

The Narrow Road to the Deep North by Matsuo Basho — a seventeenth-century Japanese travel diary in prose and haiku. Read it for how little it takes to make a journey.

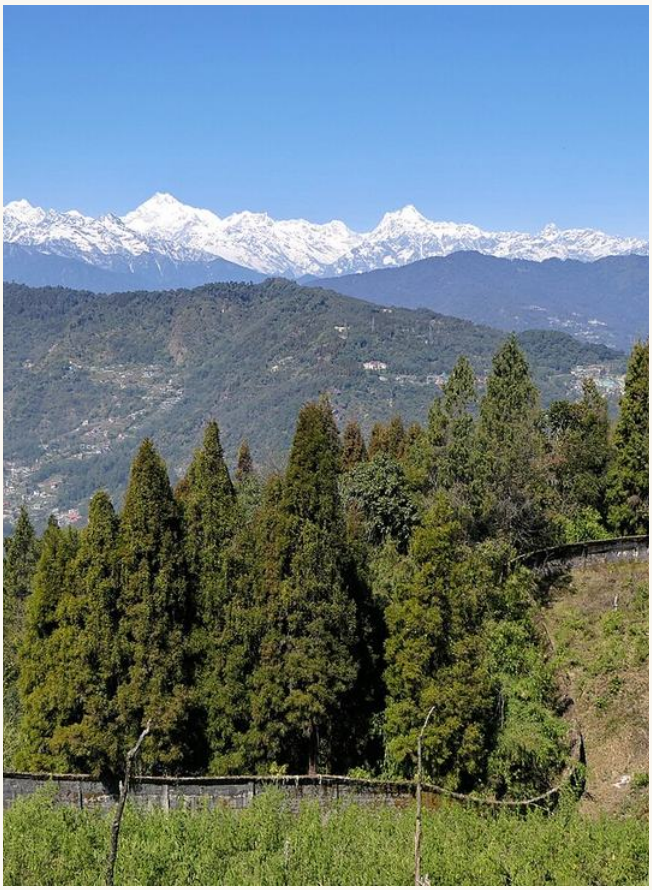


Photo: Dinesh Valke from Thane, India Derivative work: UnpetitproleX · CC BY-SA 2.0



Photo: Sourabh.biswas003 · CC BY-SA 4.0

Prices, timings, permits and visa notes are approximate - please verify before booking.

THE WORLD CELEBRATES

Festivals & events radar

Dates come from our festival guide and are approximate. Confirm with the official organiser before booking; lunar-calendar and annually announced events are provisional until confirmed.

NORTHEAST INDIA & INDIA

EVENT	WHERE	WHEN (APPROX.)	WHY GO
Losar (Tibetan New Year)	Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh, and Sikkim	18 February 2026 (Year of the Fire Horse)	Monastery ceremonies, family visits and feasts in Himalayan Buddhist communities..
Goa Carnival	Panaji, Margao, Vasco and Mapusa, Goa	13–17 February 2026; main Panaji parade 14 February	Parades and street celebrations led by King Momo, a Goan tradition..
Khajuraho Dance Festival (52nd edition)	Western Group of Temples, Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh	20–26 February 2026	Classical dance performed against a World Heritage temple backdrop..
Holi (Holika Dahan and Rangwali Holi)	Mathura–Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh, and across India	Holika Dahan 3 March; Holi 4 March 2026	The festival of colours, with Braj celebrations beginning days earlier..
Chapchar Kut	Aizawl, Mizoram	Week-long from 9 March 2026; main day reported as 13 March (holiday listings vary)	Mizoram's spring festival of dance and music..
Rongali (Bohag) Bihu	Assam	Begins 14 April 2026 (Goru Bihu); Assamese New Year 15 April	Assam's spring new-year festival, celebrated with Bihu dance and song..

ASIA

EVENT	WHERE	WHEN (APPROX.)	WHY GO
Sapporo Snow Festival (76th edition)	Odori Park, Sapporo, Japan	4–11 February 2026	Large-scale snow and ice sculptures along Sapporo's central park..
Tet (Vietnamese Lunar New Year)	Vietnam	17 February 2026; official holiday 14–22 February	Vietnam's most important holiday, with flower markets and family reunions..
Songkran (Thai New Year)	Thailand	13–15 April 2026 (some cities extend)	Thailand's water festival, UNESCO-recognised, with temple rituals and street celebrations..

EUROPE

EVENT	WHERE	WHEN (APPROX.)	WHY GO
Carnevale di Venezia	Venice, Italy	31 January–17 February 2026 (theme: Olympus)	Masks, costume and water shows, themed to the Winter Olympics year..
Keukenhof	Lisse, Netherlands	19 March–10 May 2026	One of the world's largest spring flower gardens..

AFRICA & THE AMERICAS

EVENT	WHERE	WHEN (APPROX.)	WHY GO
Rio Carnival	Sambadrome, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	Core dates 13–17 February 2026; some sources extend to 18 February	Samba school parades and street parties..
Quebec Winter Carnival	Quebec City, Canada	About 6–15 February 2026 (confirm with organiser)	Snow sculptures, parades and winter games..
National Cherry Blossom Festival	Washington, D.C., USA	20 March–12 April 2026; peak bloom is weather-dependent	A three-week festival around the Tidal Basin's cherry trees..

Prices, timings, permits and visa notes are approximate - please verify before booking.

OCEANIA & INTERNATIONAL

EVENT	WHERE	WHEN (APPROX.)	WHY GO
Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras	Sydney, Australia	Festival 13 February–1 March; parade Saturday 28 February 2026	A three-week festival ending with a night parade on Oxford Street..

THE TRAVEL BRIEFING

Format example

Dated developments up to 1 February 2026, with source links. Each is labelled announced or implemented. Re-confirm before relying on any of them.

IMPLEMENTED: India's first Vande Bharat sleeper train was flagged off on 17 January 2026 on the Kamakhya (Guwahati) to Howrah route, with commercial services beginning 22 and 23 January. Source: Business Standard and The Week, January 2026. www.theweek.in

ANNOUNCED: Venice published a calendar of access-fee days for day visitors in 2026, expanding the scheme to more days between spring and summer. Source: The Local Italy, 9 December 2025. www.thelocal.it

PROPOSED: Japan's ruling parties wrote a rise in the international tourist (departure) tax from 1,000 yen to 3,000 yen into the FY2026 tax reform outline in December 2025. Source: Travel Voice (Japan), December 2025. www.travelvoice.jp

ANNOUNCED: Mizoram officials said on 20 January 2026 that the week-long Chapchar Kut festival will begin on 9 March. Source: India Today NE, 20 January 2026. www.indiatodayne.in

IMPLEMENTED (phased): The EU's Entry/Exit System has been rolling out at external borders since 12 October 2025. Source: European Commission, Migration and Home Affairs. home-affairs.ec.europa.eu

Tell us where you are going next

WRITE	editor@travaah.com
CALL	+91 70022 09781
PLAN	travaah.com/planner
CONTRIBUTE	Send a story or photograph via the contact page



Photo: Original: Nina R from Africa Derivative work: UnpetitproleX · CC BY 2.0



Photo: KennyOMG · CC BY-SA 4.0



Photo: Ravi Dwivedi · CC BY-SA 4.0

Prices, timings, permits and visa notes are approximate - please verify before booking.

WAYFARER

One Planet. Endless Journeys.

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