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Sharmila Tagore

After Aradhana, People Took Me Seriously

Vineet Kumar Singh

I Studied Medicine Only For Papa

Tillotama Shome.

I Was Thinking Of Quitting Acting

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I was blessed to earn a lot of fame and money

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Thinking You Are God Or A Superstar Can End Your Career

Salman Khan

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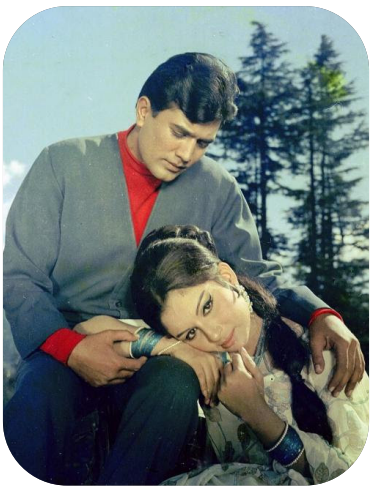
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Salman Khan Opens Up About His Insecurities: "I Will Suppress Them So Much..."

"Insecurity can be seen everywhere. But not in me. Maybe my insecurities are latent,"

Salman Khan is ready for his next big Eid release, **Sikandar**. The A.R. Murugadoss directorial also features Rashmika Mandanna as the female lead.
Ahead of Sikandar's March 30 premiere, Salman Khan appeared in an interview with NDTV. He touched on a range of topics during the interaction. One major highlight was when the superstar opened up about his insecurities. Salman Khan said, "Insecurity toh har jagah dekhne ko milti hai. Baas mere mei dekhne ko nahi milti hai. Insecurities hongi shayad latent. Abhi tak ubhar ke aayi nahi hai aur shayad aayengi bhi nahi kuynki itna daba ke rakunga unko ki marne ke baad bhi bolega ki ismei toh koi insecurities thi hi nahi. (Insecurity can be seen everywhere. But not in me. Maybe my insecurities are latent. They have not surfaced yet, and perhaps they never will because I will suppress them so much that even after I am gone, people will say, 'He never had any insecurities.') Salman Khan revealed that competition in the film industry was necessary. He said, "You should have that competition because competition se hi aapka growth hota hai. (Competition enables you to grow.) You need to keep on working on yourself every single day."Rashmika Mandanna was also present in the interview. She heaped praise on Salman Khan, calling him a "nice human being". The actress said, "There is a different aura that SK (Salman Khan) carries. But as an actor, he is like every one of us. He does the hard work, he thinks about the scenes, and he helps me out. Every time after finishing a scene, I go to SK and be like, 'Sir, how is it?'. And he will guide me right. You hear stories about him, but when you actually meet him, he is genuinely a nice human being."

"We don't think we are Gods. We've built ourselves because of the people who support us,"

Salman Khan, the undisputed star of Bollywood, is once again ready to grace the silver screen with his much-anticipated Eid release, Sikandar. In an interview with NDTV, the conversation took an interesting turn when Salman Khan's co-star, Rashmika Mandanna, made an observation about his persona. She noted that despite being one of the biggest names in the industry, Salman carries a relaxed aura rather than exuding the stereotypical "superstar energy". Responding to her remark, Salman Khan shared his perspective on stardom, making it clear that he doesn't view himself as a larger-than-life figure.

> ***Salman Khan On Stardom: Thinking You Are God Or A Superstar Can End Your Career***

"Superstars don't work," Salman Khan began, attempting to clarify how he and his contemporaries perceive themselves. "You'll never hear us calling ourselves superstars. You'll never see that in our films either," he added. He then referenced South Indian cinema's biggest icons, mentioning names like Rajinikanth, Thalapathy Vijay and Suriya. Salman Khan pointed out that none of them, despite their enormous fan base and influence, carry an air of superiority on set. "They will never ever give you that feeling that you're working with somebody larger than life," he explained. For Salman Khan, the key takeaway is that true stardom is rooted in the audience's love and acceptance.

"We don't think we are Gods. We've built ourselves because of the people who support us," he stated. He emphasized that the film industry is sustained by its audience, and it is their validation that determines an actor's standing. Salman Khan also issued a word of caution for those who let fame get to their heads. "The moment someone starts thinking of themselves as a God, as a superstar, their career will plummet," he warned. He also mentioned that the film industry today does not have such actors who call themselves "superstars." For someone who has been in the industry for over three decades, Salman Khan understands the weight of the "superstar" tag, yet he chooses to navigate his career with the same simplicity and approachability that Rashmika Mandanna so aptly described. As for his upcoming film Sikandar, helmed by AR Murugadoss, it stars Rashmika Mandanna in the lead female role. With a runtime of 2 hours and 20 minutes, the film is designed to cater to a broad audience. Backed by Sajid Nadiadwala under the Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment banner, the film boasts an ensemble cast, including Kajal Aggarwal, Sathyaraj, Sharman Joshi, Prateik Babbar, Anjini Dhawan and Jatin Sarna.



VICKY KAUSHAL'S TOP 10 HITS!!

Chhaava enters the Rs 500 crore (Rs 5 billion) club, and is the biggest hit of Vicky Kaushal's career so far.



01 Chhaava

Box office collection: Rs 520 crore+/Rs 5.2 billion+

Chhaava was always expected to do well but no one expected it to become such a biggie! The film has cemented Vicky Kaushal's status as a bankable star and one can expect his next releases to benefit, at least where the opening is concerned.



02 Uri - The Surgical Strike

Box office collection: Rs 245.36 crore (Rs 2.45 billion)

The film that first established Vicky as a commercial star was Uri: The Surgical Strike. It didn't just open well but also sustained for a good period. After this 2019 film, one expected Vicky to have many more big hits but the next one (Sam Bahadur) happened four years later.



03 Raazi

Box office collection: Rs 123.84 crore (Rs 1.24 billion)

Raazi arrived in 2018, a year before Uri, but was seen predominantly as an Alia Bhatt movie. Playing Alia's husband in a supporting role, Raazi was Vicky's first Rs 100 Crore (Rs 1 billion) Club film.

04 Sam Bahadur



Box office collection: Rs 92.98 crore (Rs 929.8 million)

Sam Bahadur did well despite releasing on the same weekend as the Ranbir Kapoor blockbuster, Animal. Getting rave reviews, the biopic came very close to being a Rs 100 Crore (Rs 1 billion) Club movie.

05 Zara Hatke Zara Bachke



Box office collection: Rs 88 crore (Rs 880 million)

One of the surprise hits post-pandemic, Zara Hatke Zara Bachke arrived with minimal promotion and still did quite well. It opened well and its chartbuster songs helped as well. As a small town boy-next-door, Vicky was accepted in the interiors too.

06 Bad Newz



Box office collection: Rs 66.28 crore (Rs 662.8 million)

Last year's Bad Newz featured one of the most successful dance songs in recent times, Tauba Tauba. Thanks to that, Bad Newz was a moderate success and kept Vicky's successful run intact.



07 Bhoot: Part One - The Haunted Ship

Box office collection: Rs 31.97 crore (Rs 319.7 million)

One of the last releases before the pandemic, Bhoot: Part One - The Haunted Ship was a horror film that covered some distance. Of course, those were the days when theatrical releases came with bigger expectations. Bhoot: Part One - The Haunted Ship was meant to be a franchise but half a decade later, there's still no Part 2.



08 Manmaziyaan

Box office collection: Rs 27.09 crore (Rs 270.9 million)

A love triangle co-starring Taapsee Pannu and Abhishek Bachchan, Manmarziyaan deserved to do better. Somehow, the Anurag Kashyap directorial disappeared after its initial run and Vicky didn't get the kind of recognition he should have got.

09 Raman Raghav 2.0



Box office collection: Rs 7 crore (Rs 70 million)

One of Vicky Kaushal's initial films, Raman Raghav 2.0 was primarily hinging on Nawazuddin Siddiqui, who was more popular back then. The film was a major flop at the box office though critics were left impressed.

10 The Great Indian Family



Box office collection: Rs 5.65 crore (Rs 56.5 million)

Vicky's most disappointing commercial film was The Great Indian Family, which came with a noble theme of national integration and religious tolerance.

John Abraham says he's never felt more safe in India: 'Probably, I come from a minority that no one has a problem with'

In a new interview, actor John Abraham said he belongs to a minority that no one has a problem with, adding that he is proud to be an Indian.

Actor John Abraham has expressed his national pride, addressing the notion that "minorities are not safe in India" in a recent interview. The actor vehemently dismissed this sentiment, asserting that he has never felt safer in the country.

Actor John Abraham has expressed his national pride, addressing the notion that "minorities are not safe in India" in a recent interview. The actor vehemently dismissed this sentiment, asserting that he has never felt safer in the country.



John on being a minority in India

During an interview , John was asked about his take on the whole debate around the feeling that "minorities are not safe in India".Responding the same, John said, "Probably because I'm an actor, people would argue and say, Hey, listen, listen. You're an actor. You know, people would probably like you or dislike you for other reasons. But I'm a minority. My mother's a Zoroastrian. My father's a Syrian Christian. And I've never felt more safe than in my country." He added, "I love my country, and I feel so safe in it. So, people who use that as a crucifixion excuse—I mean, I'm a living example. Probably, I come from a minority that no one has a problem with. I don't know... Who would have a problem with the Parsis? Talking about myself, I feel very safe in this country and I feel great about being Indian. I also feel that there's probably no one more Indian than I am. I've got this chip on my shoulder where I feel I carry the Indian flag everywhere".

John Abraham is back on screen with action-thriller The Diplomat which is based on a real-life incident. The film is directed by Shivam Nair of Naam Shabana fame and also stars Sadia Khateeb in the lead role. The project is based on the real-life story of Indian national Uzma Ahmad, who was brought back to India in 2017 after allegedly being honey trapped by a Pakistani man. She had revealed that she was made to marry at gunpoint and abused after she visited him in his country.

Soli Merwan Cama: The Visionary Producer Redefining Bollywood's Global Footprint

From Cannes to Streaming Giants – A New Era of Indian Cinema and Music Begins

In the ever-evolving landscape of Bollywood, where dreams and determination collide, a new visionary is making waves—Soli Merwan Cama. A trailblazing producer with an exceptional eye for storytelling, Soli is reshaping Indian cinema's global identity with his latest cinematic triumph, Kya Main Galat?. Backed by the powerhouse SMC Music Company, this thought- provoking music and film is poised to captivate audiences on the world's most prestigious stages, from the elite Cannes Film Festival to India's leading streaming platform, Hotstar.

A Maverick Producer with a Global Vision

Soli Merwan Cama is not just a producer—he is a disruptor, a trendsetter, and a force to be reckoned with. With an unrelenting passion for storytelling and an unparalleled ability to push creative boundaries, he is redefining Bollywood's presence on the international stage.vAt the helm of SMC Music Company, a dynamic force in the Indian entertainment industry, Soli Merwan Cama has curated a cinematic masterpiece that transcends cultural and geographical borders. Kya Main Galat? is more than just a music; it is a bold narrative exploring the complexities of societal norms, personal choices, and moral dilemmas—an artistic movement designed to ignite conversations worldwide.

From Punjab to Cannes: A Story for the World

Marking a historic milestone, Kya Main Galat? heralds SMC Music Company's grand entry into Punjab, seamlessly blending regional storytelling with a universal cinematic appeal. Under Soli Merwan Cama's visionary leadership, this music and film is set to make an indelible impact on international cinema.

As the music and film prepares for its grand debut at the legendary Cannes Film Festival, it is already turning heads, reinforcing India's position as a global cinematic powerhouse.

With its highly anticipated festival premiere, Kya Main Galat? is on course to reach millions through digital platforms, streaming on Hotstar and other leading global networks.

Bollywood's Next Power Producer?

With an exceptional knack for ground breaking storytelling, an innovative approach to filmmaking, and an ambitious global vision, Soli Merwan Cama is undoubtedly Bollywood's next powerhouse producer.

As he continues to break barriers and set new industry benchmarks, the world watches with anticipation—because this is just the beginning.

Brace yourself—Soli Merwan Cama and SMC Music Company are here to redefine entertainment, one masterpiece at a time.

‘John Abraham Doesn’t Take Off His Shirt’



‘I did not fall for box office pressures.’

Shivam Nair’s new film The Diplomat is doing **surprisingly well** at the box office, proving the director’s confident decisions. “Gradually over the years, I had to make compromises in everything I directed. But after The Diplomat, I have decided to make films the way I want to,”

After a slow start at the box office, The Diplomat has gathered momentum over the weekend.

Sir, we tried to make an honest film. I had a gut feeling it would work.

Don’t you think it was a mistake to release the film on Holi?

Sir, I know nothing about marketing strategies. I just made the film that I wanted to, the rest was left to the experts. I made the story without compromises. I did not fall for box office pressures. There is no romantic lead in my film, only one song, and John Abraham doesn’t take off his shirt.

I have admired your work since I saw Ahista Ahista in 2006.

That was my directorial debut. Imtiaz Ali had written the film and I had full control over what I shot. Gradually over the years, I had to make compromises in everything I directed. But after The Diplomat, I have decided to make films the way I want to. Before The Diplomat, Web series kept me busy, particularly Special Ops and Mukhbir.

When did you decide to make a film on the diplomatic crisis involving Ambassador J P Singh?

I was introduced to this through Uzma Ahmed. I was intrigued by his personality and his empathy for Uzma. It was a conscious decision to stick to the actual story and not fictionalise it. Most of what you see is fact, about 90 percent. Both JP and Uzma shared their detailed stories with us. The casting was a result of my growth as a filmmaker. John Abraham gave me creative freedom to make the film the way I wanted to.

How do you react to the film being seen as anti-Pakistan

I don’t think the film is anti-anything. It’s a story about a young woman who got conned and put in a dangerous situation and was rescued by a wise diplomat

If Border Is Anyone's, It Is Sunny Uncle



Sunny sir keeps me distracted from my morning sickness.

The 1997 hit Border is getting a sequel more than two decades later. But this time, filmmaker J P Dutta hands over the reins to elder daughter **Nidhi Dutta**. Nidhi takes over production duties while Anubhav Singh directs the multi-starrer.

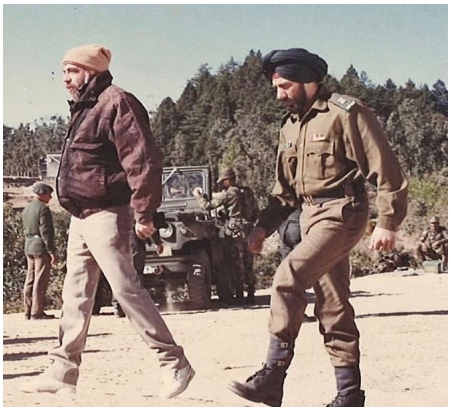
Nidhi, who is expecting a baby with Director Binoy Gandhi, chooses the production route to build her career, rather than become an actor like her mum Bindiya Goswami or a director like her father. "When I was young and people would ask, 'What will you be when you grow up?', I would say, 'I want to help Papa',"

What are your first memories of being on a film set? As a child, did you accompany your father on his sets?

It's not a very proud thing to say -- even though I am proud of it -- but my mom never really cared about us missing school. For her, birthdays were important. If it was Papa's or Dadaji (O P Dutta, who wrote the dialogues for his son's films)'s birthday, mom made sure we went on set, no matter where they was shooting.

My earliest memory of being on a film set was Kshatriya (1993), the film Dad made before Border (1997) But I properly remember going to Bikaner for Border.

We had gone for my birthday and celebrated with everyone in his tent. His tent was very close to where they had made the bunker and the trenches set in the middle of the desert. Mom was pregnant with Siddhi at the time but she also came. I remember Sunny (Deol) uncle in his costume and playing with me.



How old were you then?

I was nine.
I know so many people from film families, who say that 'Oh, our parents never brought work back home or they never discussed their work at home.' In my family, it was the opposite. Our dining table conversations would be movies. There would be no other conversation because everyone was working together.

My mom did the costumes for Border and Refugee. My dad was producing and directing. My grandfather was writing the dialogues. I remember when Papa came home after recording the Sandese Aate Hain song and playing it to Dadaji and mom.

Stars kids usually gravitate towards acting or direction. Why did you decide on production and script-writing?

Production came naturally to me. I started assisting Papa on Umrao Jaan. When I was young and people would ask, 'What will you be when you grow up?', I would say, 'I want to help Papa.' He is a one-man army. But he cannot give too much time to his creative process because he also produces. When Paltan came along, I felt things had to change.

So I suggested that he handle the creative aspect and I would handle this (production) side of things. I did that film single-handedly, bringing Zee Studios on board. From then on, he asked me to handle the business of the company. Coming to the writing part, I'm as shocked as everybody else is. When the story came to me suddenly, I decided to write it.

I think my grandfather has blessed me with his writing skills. So that's how Border 2 has happened.



What was your inspiration for Border 2?

My father and I had a meeting with the late Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat. We lost him in an helicopter crash a couple of years ago. When I first met him during Paltan, he had handed over 22 stories of soldiers that he wanted us to make movies on.

At that point, I was busy with Ghudchadi, which we produced along with T-Series. It is my husband Binoy Gandhi's first film as director.

I still remember my dad telling him, 'Sir, who will make these 22 stories? I'm 70.' General sir had looked at Papa and said, 'She will make them.' And I'm making it now. From those 22 stories, I was keen on making three of them as one film.

I started looking for writers who would weave the story together. Later, I decided to do it myself.

Why didn't you think about making a Web series with so many stories?

When it came to me, I didn't know how to start. These were different stories from different timelines. You can't bring them together.



How much is J P Dutta helping you?

He's here in Dehradun, as we speak, but isn't coming on set. He understands that a director needs space. He's giving Anurag (Singh, Border 2 Director) that open hand to make the film.



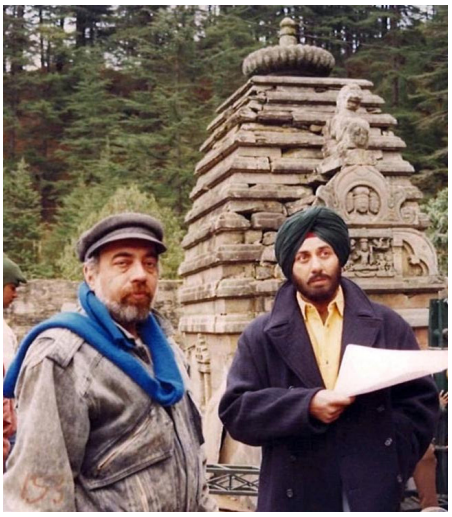
Was it difficult to convince Sunny Deol to be a part of Border 2?

I think after Dad, if Border is anyone's, it is Sunny Uncle's. So it was not about convincing him. It was about getting him on board and then all of us making the film in the best way we could.

Why did you decide on Anurag Singh to direct Border 2?

I think Kesari was the deciding factor for Bhushanji (Kumar, T-Series chairman and Border 2 Producer) and me. We needed somebody who understands not only Bombay and Delhi but all of India, understands what it takes to give you a film that will touch

every part of India. After watching Kesari and the song Teri Mitti Mein, you realise that the filmmaker knows his craft and his emotion.



Border was such a big hit when it released.

I remember going to the Screen Awards. I was about 10 or 11. We were walking the red carpet, which was covered on one side. The public had actually climbed on the opposite buildings to watch the red carpet. When we entered, people started screaming my father's name and 'Border'.

They sang Sandese Aate Hain.
We won the Best Story, Best Director and Best Film. I remember holding the three awards and walking out proudly.

You're producing Border 2 as well as expecting a baby. Is it tough?

I cannot even put into words the dream I am living now -- to bring both my babies into this world at the same time! This baby is growing up on a firing range, between all the blasting and gunshots and bullets! It's a Border baby, as the media has termed it correctly.

It's not tough because God has been kind and my health has held up. When a pregnant woman is at home, she has five-six family members taking care of her. I have 280 people taking care of me on set.

So how are you balancing morning sickness and Sunny Deol? :)

(Laughs) Sunny sir keeps me distracted from my morning sickness.



Tell us about Varun Dhawan in Border 2.

Varun is going to be the biggest surprise package of this film. I've known him through my husband and he's an absolute pleasure to work with. And too much fun!

Sunny Deol's Gadar 2 was a huge success. Are you expecting that kind of success?

I'm expecting more, God willing.



What is your favourite Bindiya Goswami film and J P Dutta film?

My mom's favourite movies would be Gol Maal and Shaan. For dad, nothing that tops Border. I also really love Kshatriya.



Tell us about working with Aishwarya and Abhishek Bachchan on Umrao Jaan.

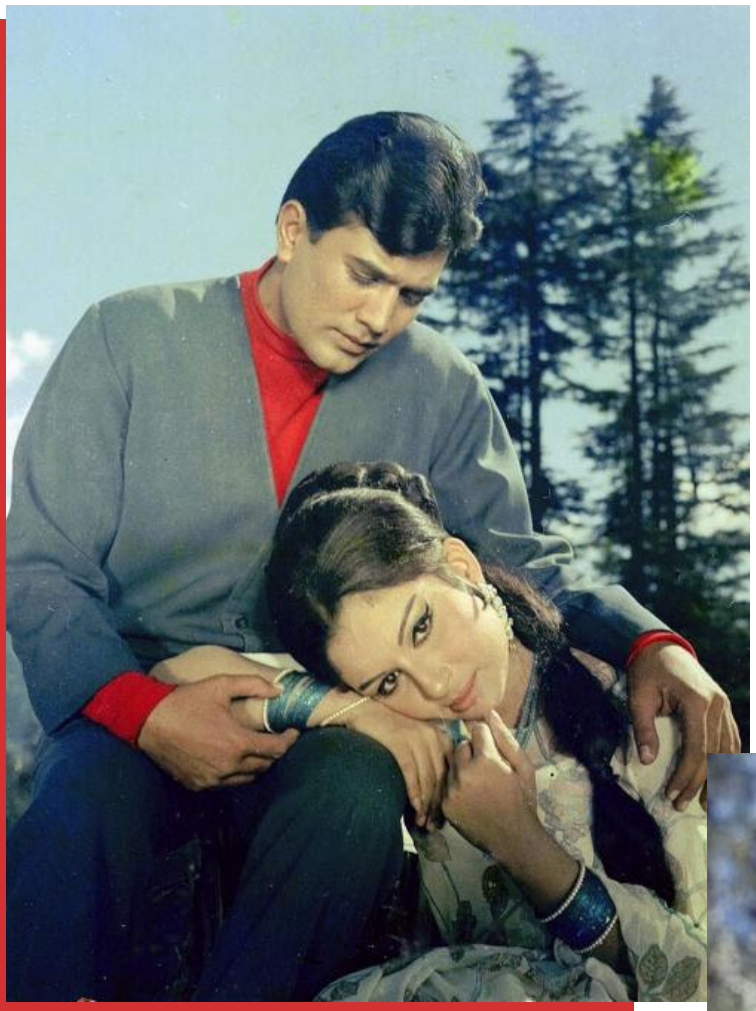
One wants to be a part of films which have powerhouse actors on set. This not only had Aishwarya but also Shabanaji (Azmi). Abhishek being a part of the movie was another green light for me because he's family.

He did a lot of bullying because I was an assistant and like a younger sister to him. My grandfather was supposed to make this film with Nimmi in 1979.

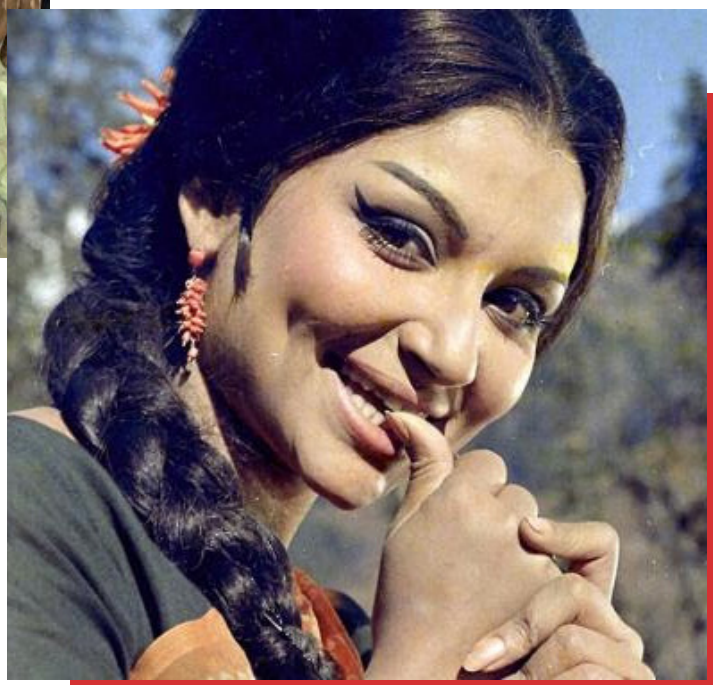
It never got made because another film on courtesans was getting made. But the story was very close to his heart. Few years later, Rekhaji's Umrao Jaan released. My grandfather asked Papa to direct it on the sets of LoC Kargil. I think it's a family norm; we don't say no to our fathers. So it had to be done.



‘After Aradhana, People Took Me Seriously’



‘Everybody was scared, especially with Rajesh Khanna playing a double role and playing my lover and my son.’ ‘It was quite a risky thing to do. That’s why they made me look so old.’



Shakti Samanta's Aradhana, starring Sharmila Tagore and Rajesh Khanna, released in 1969 and was a huge hit both in India and the Soviet Union. As the film re-released on February 28, Sharmila Tagore goes down memory lane and remembers some bitter-sweet moments from the film.

One of your most important films Aradhana is back in the theatres.

Yeah, I was taken as a serious actor in Hindi cinema after that. Before that, I did a lot of glamorous roles like An Evening in Paris and Kashmir Ki Kali. I also did Devar and Anupama before Aradhana which were very performance-oriented characters.

So it would be wrong to say that Aradhana was the first time when you were taken seriously by Hindi audiences.

But the depth of the audiences' appreciation.... I remember the first time the audience saw me as the old person in the jail and the entire hall started giggling.So there was immediate acceptance after that two minute scene. At the end, you could hear people sniffling. So then Shaktiji came back into the theatre and then, of course, rest is history. That moment was very defining. I managed to convince the audience.

Yes, you did...

There were lots of tears. But I think at that time, people liked this kind of emotion. I think people resonated with my character Vandana's grief and her loss. Today, I don't think people like crying at all... they don't want their actors to cry too much. I think people feel that they want to go to the movies to laugh, to have a good time, not to hear about other people's grief. Anyway, let's not judge others. I mean, I don't know, there must be a lot of other films that also make you cry. Maidaan was very good. But it wasn't a tearjerker as such. But you empathise and you feel for the character. You feel a lump in your throat.

Sharmila ji, when you were offered Aradhana, let's go back to that a bit. Was there any trepidation because you had to play an older woman?

No, no, I wanted to act in that. Shaktiji wasn't very convinced. I was very convinced that I wanted to do it. He got convinced when the film came out and people finally got around.



But you must have been very scared, suppose people...

Everybody was, especially with Rajesh Khanna playing a double role and playing my lover and my son. It was quite a risky thing to do. That's why they made me look so old. Shaktiji also took a risk. Let's say I was about 22 when I played Rajesh Khanna's character's beloved. So, I must be in my 40s when I become a single mother. They made me look much older to convince audiences. Otherwise, imagine Rajesh Khanna and I looking middle-aged that wouldn't have worked. I would have looked too young. So, to convince the audience, I had to look older and have grey hair and all.



What was Rajesh Khanna like at that point of time?

He was very good. I saw it recently. He's acted so well -- especially that second character, that youthful energy. He just lifts the second half totally -- the way he talks, it's just wonderful energy.

Oh, and the music by Sachin Dev Burman is just evergreen. It also lifted the film to another level altogether. Every song will continue to have a shelf life, but they are evergreen.

Shakti Samanta's rapport with S D Burman and his son R D Burman was unbelievable. Was Roop Tera Mastana in Aradhana composed by R D Burman?

Because Sachin Dev Burman was not well at that time..

And Mere Sapno Ki Rani. There's a story behind that?

Yeah, that was cheating. We had to shoot me and Rajesh Khanna separately. That was cheating. That was really not nice. If I had been there, it would have been that much better because it looked a little artificial.

If you had to change anything in Aradhana, would you do Mere Sapno Ki Rani in an actual train rather than in a studio?

Yeah, perhaps I would.
But that time it was... Either (Satyajit) Ray's Aranyar Din Ratri or that song in Aradhana. The dates were clashing. Manikda (Satyajit Ray)'s film was starting to finish. And this was just part of the film. So I think... Yeah, it was naughty of me.

It wasn't your fault. It wasn't as if you were playing truant or anything.

No, no. I mean, Shaktiji understood that. Because he knew that I couldn't say no to Manikda.



And Aradhana was released when the war with Pakistan had just started, right?

No, that was Amar Prem. The army had a premiere. And they must have known about the war during the premiere of Amar Prem. And the next day war was declared. The army chief, (General, later Fiel Marshal) Sam Manekshaw was there. He must have known about it. But he just wanted to cheer the army up.

So, between Aradhana and Amar Prem, you know my choice. But which one do you think is a better film?

I think Amar Prem. In Aradhana, the overriding emotion actually carries the film.

‘Parents At Home, Superstardom Stays Outside’



‘More than the shooting dabbas which we take with us, it’s about what’s going on in their school dabbas.’





Jyotika, who has done a slew of well-received Tamil and Hindi films, is thrilled about her foray into the OTT format with Dabba Cartel.

“Everything about Dabba Cartel was special. Firstly, the banner, Excel Entertainment, they are known for creating some of the best Web series,”

“The content is always top priority. Varuna is a character I haven’t played before. I think a common woman will resonate with it.”

"There was one more major incentive: The stalwart actress Shabana Azmi. I don't think anyone would think twice before wanting to share a frame with her. Not only is she a brilliant actor but she is also such a magnanimous personality. You feel so empowered just standing next to her.

"Her thought process and the way she works even today, she makes every effort to give her 100 percent to the character.

"I saw a language therapist with her at the shoot and was seeing the nuances, how dedicated she is even now. Even if you have a teleprompter, she doesn't refer to it. She prefers to mug her lines and say it with emotion," Jyotika says.

Jyotika has words of praise for another co-actor in Dabba Cartel: "I have always loved Nimisha Sajayan's work; The Great Indian Kitchen is one of my favourite works of hers. So sharing screen space with her, with my South buddy actor in a Hindi Web series, was extremely special. I made friends with Anjali Anand and Shalini Pandey at the shoot and I think all of us had a blast.

"Anjali and Shalini are such talented actors. I think just standing with all of them makes us a better actor. Growth is about working on good subjects, good characters and with good actors."



Married to superstar Suriya, what is it like having two superstars under the same roof?

"We leave the superstardom outside the door when we enter home, and we are just parents of our kids," she answers. "Prominence is definitely given to our children. More than the shooting dabbas which we take with us, it's about what's going in their school dabbas. One's dabba leaves at 6 am with him to school. The other one's dabba goes at lunchtime. So the discussions are more about what they are eating and how we are packing their food and sending it. "So we are parents at home, superstardom stays outside."



Which are Jyotika's favourite films?

"I have experimented with a lot of roles but I feel Mozhi is one of my favourite films. I play a deaf and mute girl. It's a milestone film for me. "There are a couple of films in my second innings, like 36 Vayadhinile/ There's also Raatchasi where I play the principal of a government school.

"Ponmagal Vandhal was against child rape, and I played a lawyer. "In Hindi films, I like my role of a mom in Shaitaan. I found her to be a very powerful mother. I also love my role in Srikanth where she is the wind beneath Srikanth's wings."

Jyotika compares the experience of working on OTT with feature films. "OTT definitely has longer hours of work but it's very interesting. We shoot about five-eight scenes in a day. It's quite similar to the South style of working.

"When I do women-centric films, which are under certain budget lines, we work in the same format. The pace is great and it's always nice to finish a film or a series quickly because you're still in the essence of the character. I feel the OTT format and the films in South work on a similar platform."



About her comparatively meagre output in Hindi, Jyotika says, "I started my career with the Hindi film Doli Saja Ke Rakhna, directed by Priyadarshan. Akshaye Khanna co-starred in it. But yes, the film didn't do too well at the box office, so I didn't see a lot of work coming up in Hindi. In fact, no work at all.

"Meanwhile, I had signed up for a South film, which happened to be my first Tamil film with my husband Suriya. That didn't fare too well either but somewhere, people recognised my work and I started getting a lot of films in South. "After 27 years, suddenly, there is a wave of a fusion of Hindi and South films, so work is being divided amongst actors equally. I think it's a great time for all the actors coming in together."

"My journey is nothing but growth. Whenever I have thought I need growth as an actor, I have switched languages. I have always chosen my films according to characters which are different from me. Especially in the last decade, which has been extremely different for me as a personality and which resonates with the people.

"I was extremely happy in the South. I have done some of my best roles there. I'm not sure if I would get those roles if I had worked in Hindi. "I got married and stopped working at 28. Then, I got back to films when I was 35. I did a lot of meaningful roles from the age of 35 to 45. And here I am in Hindi now, where I am again receiving a warm welcome, and getting some fabulous roles to play. So no complaints.

I am very happy with the way my career has shaped up." Jyotika will be seen next in Ashwini Iyer's next, co-starring Sonakshi Sinha.





When there is a money crunch in the industry, actors like us are the ones who face budget cuts.

‘All Your Money Goes In Keeping Up This Lifestyle’

Nikita Dutta gives us a new look in the SonyLIV show **The Waking of a Nation,** based on the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.

It's the first time she's not wearing make-up on camera. The actor, who's been entertaining us for 10 years now, tells **Patcy N/ Rediff.com,** "When we started the prep, for me, the battle was to first get comfortable with the way I was looking. I am not used to not having eyebrows done or no make-up, I had to make peace with all that."

How difficult was it for you to get into a character from the pre-Independence era?

It was difficult. When we talk about the '70s or '60s, we have grandparents and parents who have information and can help us. But we are talking about a time more than 100 years ago, so it was difficult to get information. Your only references are the reading material available in the public domain and sometimes, videos which are unclear. The research team, of course, makes the job easier for you. But you have to remember that people's emotions do not change.

You have such a glamorous image. Did you feel insecure seeing yourself in a de-glam avatar on the show?

I wouldn't say I was insecure.
Everybody who steps out is always done up; you rarely see people who have stepped out organically. You can be doing an intense workout in the gym but still when you come out, you will look fresh. This is the picture perfect world we live in. On the first day, Ram (Madhvani, Director) sir would not let me put any make-up on. From a very young age, we women start getting our eyebrows done, get manicures, facials... I started from the age of 16-17. I might not put make-up on every day but I will want to get my eyebrows done. When he told me no vanity, I instantly said yes. I assumed it would be easier. When we started the prep, for me, the battle was to first get comfortable with the way I was looking. My hair is naturally dark brown with highlights. Here, we coloured my hair jet black. I am not used to not having eyebrows done or no make-up, I had to make peace with all that. When we started shooting, I became freer and more comfortable in front of the camera. If I touched my face in the middle of the shot, I didn't have to worry that the make-up would smudge. Ram sir sticks to authenticity, and he would say, 'Sweat is gold, dirt is gold. We do not want to remove it.' I don't remember looking at the mirror in the middle of a shot.

How was it working with a National Award-winning director like Ram Madhvani? What is his process of working?

There have been so many firsts that I have experienced while filming for this. It's the first time I have done so many workshops. It's the first time we have been well informed about every detail about the show. Generally what happens is, whatever is happening on the back-end, it's a secret from the actors. On top of that, actors are very selfish; they only care about their characters. This is the first time we have been made to sit in pre-production meetings and explained how everything will go. We were told about every head of department and their process of working, every character, the entire script... I have never seen any production house work with this kind of punctuality. If we had dedicated 1 pm to 3 pm for a particular scene, it would get over by that time. He has a system of shooting 360 degrees, so you don't have to figure out where the camera is. Somebody told me that you get spoiled once you work with Ram sir, and that's right.



You made your debut in 2014 and it's been 10 years. How do you see your journey?

It's been eventful and a great learning experience. From the people I have worked with or the projects I have worked on, I have tried to push my boundaries. I am always competing with myself.

You have done films like Gold, Lust Stories and Maska but nothing has really worked for you. Is it difficult to get work in the industry?

It is disappointing when you have worked on something and that doesn't click with the audience. We are people who work for the camera, for the audience and want them to like what we are creating. If that doesn't resonate with them, there is a very big feeling of disappointment. But the one thing the industry has taught me is to be patient and not give up. That's why I have managed to last this long. I had to figure out everything myself during my journey. If a film doesn't work, what is your next step? If a film works, what is your next step? How does one approach people? How does one get in touch with people? It would have been simpler had somebody helped me.

How do you keep yourself level-headed when you don't have work?

You have to figure it out. This place has made me patient and stronger. You have days when you're really busy and don't have any time at all, and then you have a phase where you are suddenly so free.

You have to make peace with the uncertainty of this profession. Every show, every film has its own fate. What is in my control is to put myself out there in front of the camera and do my best. After that, it's not in my control. A strong support does help. In my case, I have a family that really backs me.

You are from a naval background. How did you decide on joining a beauty pageant?

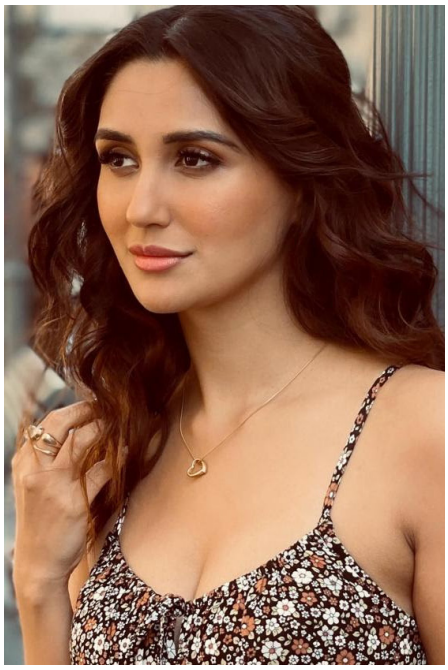
Yes, my father was in the Indian Navy. Defence forces are known to have beauty pageants. I was 18 when I won the Navy Queen. The next year, I participated in Miss India.



You wanted to run away from the sets of your first television show because it was too much for you.

In 2015, on my first TV show, I remember we had such long working hours. I used to be an anchor, host and worked as a VJ. The work, timings and people were a completely different set up back then. I have not connected to television for the last seven years but back then, there was a mentality that if you are playing a female lead, she has to drive the show and be in every scene.

I jumped into television without knowing what I was getting into. I remember working 68 days nonstop without a single day off. We would work about 14-15 hours a day. There was a point when I really thought of running away.



Is it expensive to maintain a star life?

Of course. All the money you make goes in keeping up this lifestyle. When there is a money crunch in the industry, actors like us are the ones who face budget cuts. Not the big actors. I feel that I need to do quality work and a lot of times, I have not cared about the money.

Quality has been my priority. It becomes difficult when you don't have a godfather, when things don't happen for you. You are competing against people who have an immense amount of money, power and support. You have to figure it out on your own. You want to be seen every single day coming out of the gym, wearing fancy clothes. I don't think that gets you work but I guess this is where you pick your battles.



Is it necessary to go under the knife? Have you tried it?

I think I've been looking the same all these years. It's a very personal choice, how you look and feel. I wouldn't judge anybody because at the end of the day, you are responsible for how you look and feel. I've done a show which didn't even need me to go to the salon. I'm very comfortable with the way I look. At the moment, I would not think about something like this but I will not judge anybody who goes under the knife.

You will be seen next in Jewel Thief with Saif Ali Khan and Jaideep Alhawat. Tell us about that.

All I can tell you is that it is complete.



‘I Studied Medicine Only For Papa’

‘Thanks to Chhaava’s success, I now have the creative freedom to pick and choose.’



“Now that success has finally come my way, it has broken every ceiling and the fruit tastes really sweet,”

You are a licensed doctor. Have you ever practiced medicine?

No, there was never time to start my practice. I maintained an attendance register similar to the one in college and as soon as I had minimum attendance, I would disappear.

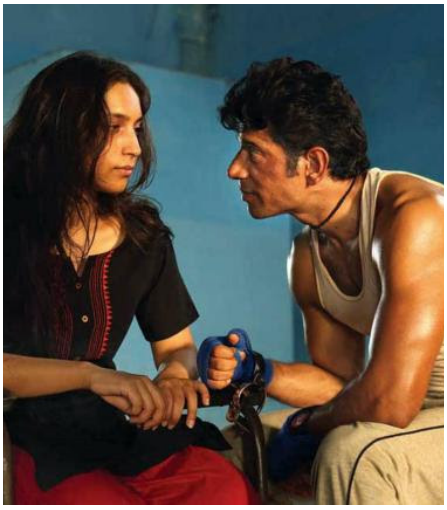
I find it strange when people say you should not plan your life. Arrey, everything around you is planned. Right now, I’m driving to town (south Mumbai) and this coastal road, these buildings around me, the city of dreams itself have all been meticulously planned from scratch, hai na?

As a child, I would wake up at 5.15 am and within an hour, would do my revisions. I scored 70-80 per cent in school.

If the plan was to get into medical school, why didn’t you pursue medicine as a career?

The plan was always to become an actor. Acting was what I wanted to do and I was studying medicine only for papa.

I had promised him that I would not leave my studies and to date, I have never started something and left it incomplete. You should always have a plan, set a timetable, and follow it with discipline



You have worked with Mahesh Manjrekar, Anurag Kashyap, Laxman Utekar and Reema Kagti.

Yet success and adulation has taken a long time coming. Weren’t you ever disillusioned?

No, woh kehte hain na, der aaye durust aaye (as they say, better late than never). (Laughs) Also, as I can see now, sabr ka phal meetha hota hai.

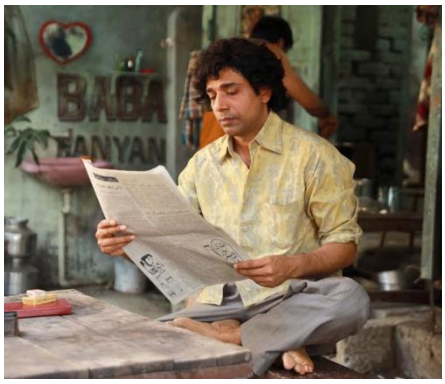
Now that success has finally come my way, it has broken every ceiling and the fruit tastes really sweet.

I’m shuttling between the promotions of Chhaava and Superboys of Malegaon and I couldn’t be happier.

My films may not have been hugely successful commercially but there is no denying that Ugly and Bombay Talkies were wonderful films and I got them when I was just a struggling actor. How can I not be grateful for that!

Then there was that knockout punch, Mukkabaaz.

Yes, in the wake of Chhaava’s success, I’m going to request the producers to re-release that film. Today, re-releases are doing well and Mukkabaaz should reach more people.



Tell us about Superboys Of Malegaon.

It was an amazing experience reuniting with the director, Reema Kagti, with whom I had done the sports drama Gold earlier.

The film is a celebration of cinema.

In the midst of poverty, hardships and a crisis, when people in a small town of Maharashtra are fighting over small things every day, some residents -- driven by pure passion, intent and a strong community feeling -- dare to dream big, creating a booming film industry in Malegaon.

It is a film that gives you the strength to hope and dream. And it showcases a different kind of friendship.

Tell us about your character.

Farooq Jafri was the screenwriter of films like Malegaon Ke Sholay and Malegaon Ka Superhero. He passed away in 2020.

He was an amazing guy who blossomed into a beautiful character on screen because he doesn't mince words and is so adamant.

A dialogue of his -- 'writer baap hota hai' -- has become very popular. Would you believe, it grew out of improvisation.

While performing a scene that was beautifully written, the words just slipped from my lips. Surprisingly, the line has caught on in a big way.

I thought it was apt because my character is a writer himself, fighting for his creativity, but now, people too are calling to say that they give expression to a writer's long-suppressed angst and passion.

\What else is on the cards?

Well, there is a show with Kabir Khan for Amazon Prime Video.
I'm playing the main lead.



There's also Jaat, a punch 'em action film with Sunny Deol and Randeep Hooda.

Yes, it is produced by Mythri Movie Makers, the producers of Allu Arjun's blockbuster franchise Pushpa.

I was in Hyderabad last week, shooting through the nights for Jaat. Since they have announced the film's release date, April 10, we have to hurry to make the deadline.

I did not sleep for 55 hours, but I'm not complaining. This is what I signed up for.

There is also a film with Anurag Kashyap?

Yes, it's too early to talk about it in detail but working with Anurag is always amazing because he never wants you to repeat a character, no matter how well received it is.

It's hard to believe that the actor who plays Danish Khan, Sardar's eldest son, in Gangs of Wasseypur, is the same guy who was cast as Vijay in Murabba, Anurag's directorial in the Bombay Talkies anthology.

Vijay, the naïve, small-town boy who goes to Mumbai with a jar of homemade murabba (mango preserve) and his father's dream of longevity to seek an audience with superstar Amitabh Bachchan, is again the polar opposite of Chaitanya Mishra in Ugly, who you absolutely cannot trust because woh bolta kuch aur hai aur karta kuch aur (he says something and does something else) and does not hesitate to betray.

Both Ugly and Bombay Talkies opened in 2013 and I was accepted in both films.

Five years later, he cast me as Shravan Kumar Singh in Mukkabaaz though I had never played a boxer before.

When it is Anurag, a new chapter unfolds for me as an actor with every film.

Will Chhaava's success change the direction of your career now?

I hope it brings along better offers and bigger opportunities.

But if you recall, even after doing the lead role in Mukkabaaz, I was happy playing second fiddle to a new girl in Siya.

I have two sisters and the subject of the film was close to my heart. As an actor, I felt it was my responsibility to raise my voice for it.

Also, I have decided that every year, I will do an indie film. It may well go against my mainstream image but if it is propagating an important social message and going to international film festivals with it, it would be well worth the effort.

It will only be 30-32 days out of 365 days and will challenge me as an actor.

Thanks to Chhaava's success, for which I have to thank all my directors, film critics and the audience who have placed their faith in me all these years, praised my work and supported me,

I now have the creative freedom to pick and choose.

WHY AYESHA JHULKA STEPPED AWAY FROM FILMS

'I've not been doing much work because I was not getting the kind of roles I want to do.'





Aamir Khan's 60th birthday had us **flashbacking** to many of his earlier films, among them the coming-of-age sports drama Jo Jeeta Wohi Sikandar.

We caught up with **Ayesha Jhulka**, who played Anjali, the girl-next-door with a secret crush on Aamir's Sanjay. Three decades have passed since, and Ayesha hasn't changed much. She's still the desi girl who, in the '90s, made not just Aamir but even Salman Khan, Mithun Chakraborty and Akshay Kumar's hearts beat faster. At the turn of the century, she found her real-life Romeo and settled down.

Since then, the actress has been seen on screen only occasionally. Ayesha says, "I was tired of the bubby roles and wanted to do something more meaningful, a shift that happens with every actress after a certain age."

Do people still walk up to you and talk about Jo Jeeta Wohi Sikandar and Anjali?

Oh yes, and along with Jo Jeeta Wohi Sikandar, Khiladi, Kurbaan, Dalaal and surprisingly, Balma too. The songs of these films are still very popular which, I guess, is why they live on.

Also, some of the characters I played, like Anjali, have stayed on in people's minds. (Laughs) Some tell me I still look the same which is sweet, but not really true because as you grow older, you grow up and your perspective of life changes.

How difficult was it for you to navigate the '90s when you were at the peak of your career?

Honestly, I was very young then and there was no premeditated plan that I followed which is how it happens now. I just went with the flow. My career was shaped by my dedication and my performances.

At the turn of the century, you cut down on work. Was it because of marriage?

Yes, I did get married, but that wasn't the reason. I was doing a mainstream romantic-action film called Run, produced by Boney Kapoor and Srideviji. But there was a shift, both personal and professional. I wanted time for myself and my family which I had been missing out on for almost 20 years because I was doing back-to-back films.I wanted to do all the things I never had time for, like art and travel. The film industry was going through a lot of changes with corporates coming in and not too many individual producers remaining in the race. I was tired of the bubby roles and wanted to do something more meaningful, a shift that happens with every actress after a certain age. So I took a step back but I did not quit acting. I was doing plays and films too, like Socha Na Tha, Umrao Jaan and Genius



Which roles have challenged you as an actor?

There was a film titled Amma in 2003 which marked editor Amitabh Shukla's directorial debut. It did not do well in the theatres but got a lot of critical acclaim. It was nominated for the National Awards. For me, it was interesting to experiment with a role which spanned from 20 to 60 years. I had lived through my 20s, 30s and 40s but to play someone in her 60s was something new.

Of course, the make-up had to be different and lining my face with wrinkles felt strange and awkward, but on the whole, Amma was an enjoyable experience. In 1997, there was a film called Vishwavidhaata with Sharad Kapoor playing father and son.

As Jai, he flees to Sharjah in a desperate bid to break away from the world of terrorism. There he undergoes plastic surgery and returns to India as Jackie Shroff. He remarries me, his own wife, and we have a son, Ravi, who is Sharad again.

The film didn't do well commercially but I enjoyed playing Radha who shows a lot of maturity and theraav (calm) even in difficult situations.

When these films didn't do well, was it disappointing and demotivating?

A film not doing well is not new. We have yet to discover the formula for a surefire hit. As an actor, you just choose from the scripts that come your way and then give the character your best.

You have no control over how the film is made, how it shapes up and how it is marketed. All these factors also have a role to play in its box office outcome. I never look back. For me, it has always been about moving forward.

In 2004, you did a Telugu film Jai, followed by the Kannada film Jackpot and an Odia film Rakate Lekhichi Naa. Was it because regional cinema offered more scope to showcase your histrionics?

I've acted in Telugu, Kannada and Bengali films in the '90s too when I was doing Kurbaan, Khiladi and Jo Jeeta Wohi Sikandar with Salman (Khan), Akshay (Kumar) and Aamir (Khan). It was a trend to experiment with regional cinema then and there were a lot of offers from the South and Tollyguage.

I picked from what I got and, in comparison to my colleagues, I didn't take on that many films outside of Hindi cinema. The idea was always to do something interesting irrespective of language.



Would you say OTT has helped actors evolve?

It has certainly given those like me a chance and the creative liberty to do something different. I did Tanuja Chandra's Hush Hush in 2022. It touches on taboo subjects like infertility, mental health, money laundering and child sex trafficking. My character, Meera Yadav, runs an orphanage and a child sex racket.

I was apprehensive about whether I could pull off this character which was so different from my usual roles but with Tanuja by my side, believing in me, I enjoyed the challenge. There was another series the following year -- JD Majethia and Aatish Kapadia's Happy Family: Conditions Apply, with Ratna Pathak Shah, Raj Babbar and Atul Kulkarni, which was a more familiar zone. It was in the running for four Filmfare OTT Awards, including Best Comedy Series.

Any recent projects you are looking forward to?

Dhanbad, an OTT series, whose shooting I have just completed.

I play a brutal village don which is again an unusual character for me, so the journey becomes more interesting. I've not been doing much work because I was not getting the kind of roles I want to do. It's okay to aspire to a higher level of human achievement instead of doing the same thing again and again.

The time is right now for good work but I aim for quality over quantity. So, even though a lot of scripts are coming my way -- I just heard an interesting narration yesterday -- I will go by intuition and the pleasure of acting when picking and choosing projects.

I've done a lot of work early on in my career. Now, I want to work at my own pace, do roles that make me feel good from within and not because I want to oblige somebody or because I want to do anything just to keep myself occupied. There are so many other things that also give me joy and I want to make time for them too



Just Because You Are An Actress Doesn't Mean...

'I was blessed to earn a lot of fame and money, more than I ever expected, and the time has come to share what I have earned with others.'

Ayesha Jhulka took a **step away from the movies** to do all the things she never had the time to when she was working in back-to-back projects as an actor.

The actor tells **Rediff.com** Senior Contributor **Roshmila Bhattacharya** about her life beyond the movies, saying, "When you are blessed with so many interests and talents, it's best to use them to bring you joy. It doesn't always have to be a job that supports you."

Your Instagram handle describes you as a 'culinary enthusiast'. What does that mean?

(Laughs) To answer that question, let's go back a few years.



Family and friends have always pointed out that I'm multi-talented. So one day, I decided to list out my interests and abilities, which I had not been able to explore since I was working back-to-back.

Acting is my profession, and it goes without saying that I love it, but even as a child, whenever I wandered into the kitchen and watched my grandmother or mother cook, I experienced a strange sense of fulfilment. I started experimenting with it myself and today, I enjoy healthy cooking since I'm very focused on fitness and staying healthy. Not the mundane dal-chawal stuff, I like to put together innovative dishes.

(Chuckles) I got my first compliment from my mother for a kathal ki sabzi. I had prepared because I had made the shakahari (vegetarian) jackfruit taste like mutton. When you paint, you play with colours on the canvas, right? Well, cooking for me is art on a plate.

That's a lovely turn of phrase. Have you ever thought of taking up this interest professionally?

I have a hotel with a restaurant in Goa. I set up the kitchen 12 years ago.

My mother always says that you don't need to learn cooking unless you are taking it up as a profession or because of some dietary compulsion, swaad ya to haath mein hoti hai ya nahin (You either have the flavours in your hands or don't). But since the hotel has a Greek theme, I learnt Mediterranean cooking.

Initially, I had no time since I was busy with my acting commitments and left it to my mother and my team to handle everything and keep the restaurant running smoothly. Even now, I don't cook on a daily basis but we have a lot of get-togethers at home. I usually make a dish or two and when, among 10 items on the table, mine is singled out, it definitely boosts my confidence.



Do you have a signature dish?

I like to experiment with a new dish every time, but if family and friends request a particular starter or dessert, I will repeat it. I love whipping up different kinds of healthy soup, salads and dips. Also, Punjabi dishes like chole-puri for which I make the masala myself.

Recently, I curated a 10-day food fest in a restaurant in Bandra (north west Mumbai). I interacted with a lot of people who would keep exclaiming, 'Oh, but you are so normal!' (Laughs) Just because you are an actress doesn't mean you can't be normal.

I would love to do more such food pop-ups in future and enjoy the work I have created. Cooking, like painting, is also a stress-buster. It helps me forget my worries and anxieties.

Is the interest in art fairly new?

No, even when I was in school, I always topped in art class. I guess I inherited this talent from my mother who has an art background. My bungalow in Lonavala has several of my canvases on display and I did the interiors of my Mumbai home myself.

I like working with large walls and glass, exploring different mediums, my art is very Bohemian and Mediterranean. For me, cooking, painting, interior designing and writing are my hobbies. Maybe someday, they will present me with an opportunity. Besides my hobbies, I've always wanted to work for animals and some eight-nine years ago, I started feeding stray dogs, cats and cattle in Lonavala. I fixed the sheds with food and water bowls because I believe by filling their stomachs, a lot of problems can be solved.



That's wonderful.

(Smiles) Yes, I have set up a kitchen where food is cooked everyday between 6 am and 10 am. This food is then taken in vans to these feeder points. There are about 50-60 of them across Lonavala.

My team cleans them every day and feeds the strays from 11 am to 6 am. When I visit Lonavala, I enjoy watching animals coming there and eating to their heart's content.

One dog was paralysed in an accident and couldn't walk, so we got him a cart-like contraption with wheels.

Through my foundation, SAM -- Spare A Moment To Make A Difference -- we are focused

on helping stray animals, senior citizens and the underprivileged; we also work for the environment. I was blessed to earn a lot of fame and money, more than I ever expected, and the time has come to share what I have earned with others.

If I am not mistaken, have you also directed a short film?

Yes, I did a course in editing at London's LFA. It's something I've always enjoyed. I wrote and directed the 20-minute film Little Pause, to understand how things work behind the scenes.

When you are an actress, you just waltz on to the set and are treated like royalty. But there was a hunger in me to go beyond that and experience the blood, sweat and the toil. The film was for the festival circuit and won 27 awards.



How much does having a supportive husband like Sameer Vashi help?

Of course, it helps.
Sometimes, you get lucky and find a wonderful life partner.



Would you now want to direct a feature film or an OTT series?

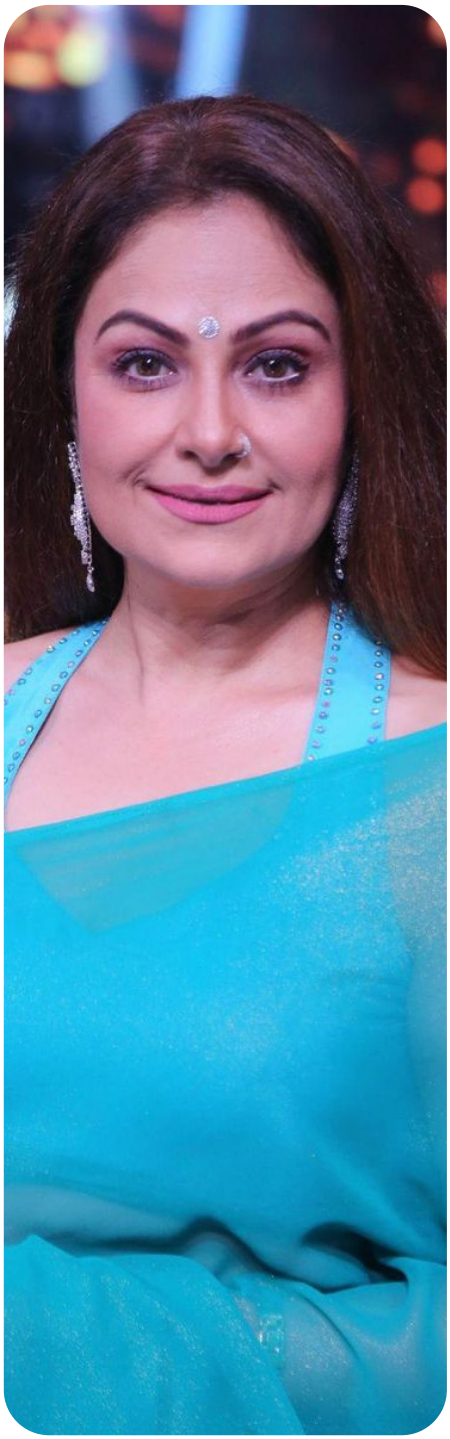
I haven't planned anything. When you are blessed with so many interests and talents, it's best to use them to bring you joy.

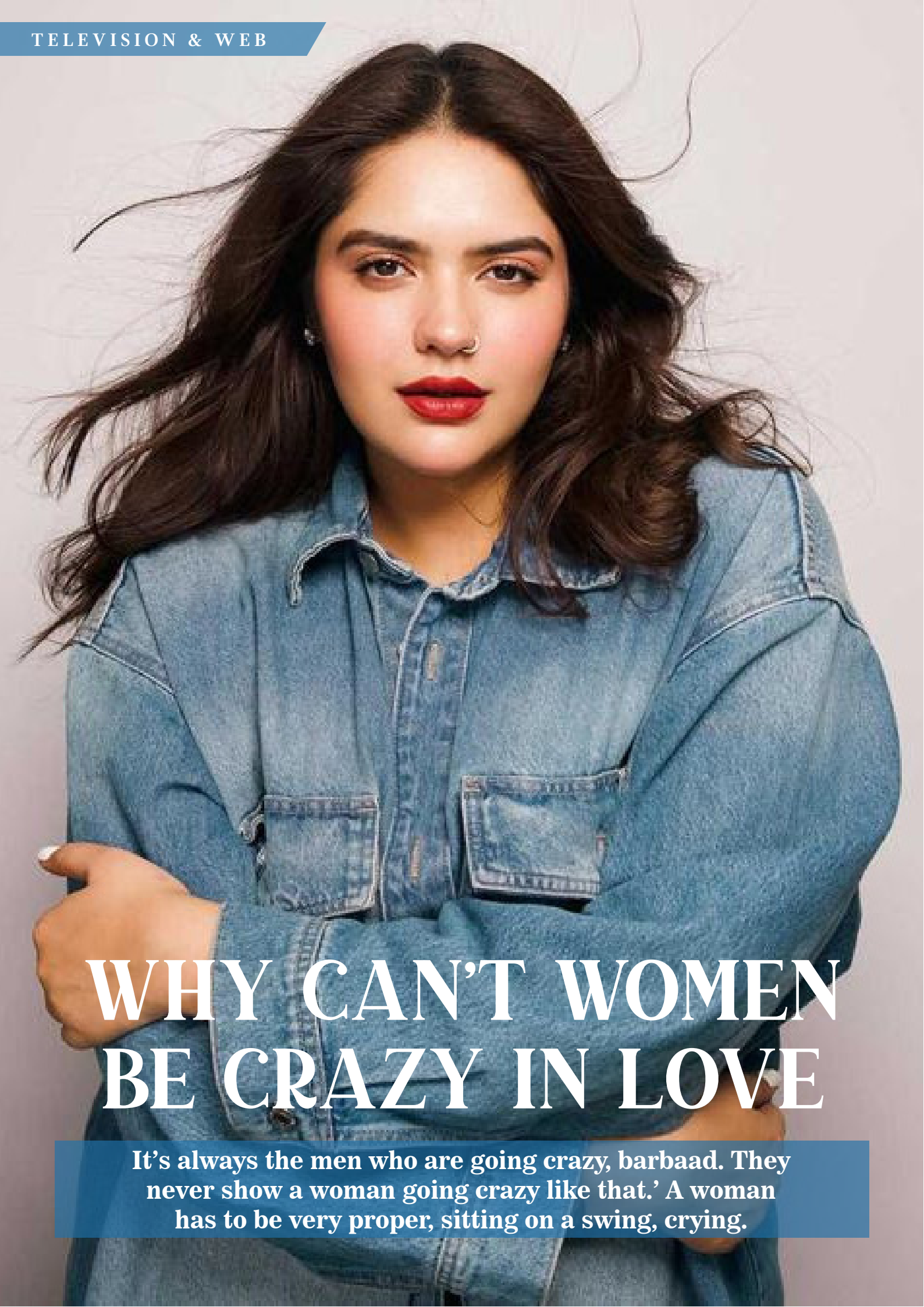
It doesn't always have to be a job that supports you. Writing, editing and directing are just creative outlets that bring me joy.

But you must also explain to your family who you are and what you want to do. My husband and I love to travel and often go away together. But over the years, I've realised that you also need to give each other space so you can lead your lives as individuals.

Thankfully, both of us are on the same page on this. Also, you should not have over-expectations from each other. I have friends who are so dependent on each other that they are unhappy when things don't happen their way.

But that's life and it doesn't always happen your way. At this point of time, I don't want to be tied down to anything, not even acting which is my pehla nasha. That is why I have refused many films and shows offering good money. It's hard to say no but I want to enjoy what I have earned and created. I want to do it now because who knows if I'll be able to do so 10-20 years from now.





WHY CAN'T WOMEN BE CRAZY IN LOVE

It's always the men who are going crazy, barbaad. They never show a woman going crazy like that.' A woman has to be very proper, sitting on a swing, crying.

Since her parents were associated with the film industry, **Anjali Anand** always knew she wanted to be a part of that world. Television became her launching pad before she seamlessly moved to the next level with the Dharma Productions film Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani.

She came into her own as one of the leads in the slice-of-life drama Raat Jawaan Hai and continued with another solid role in the crime caper Dabba Cartel. Anjali is proud of her unconventional looks, "I have never thought of myself as something different. Who wants to be standardly beautiful? Nobody. Standard beauty is not even beautiful anymore. I have not come here to break any beauty standards; I believe it will happen on its own."

In your last three outings, Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani, Raat Jawaan Hai and Dabba Cartel, you play different shades of a feisty woman. How similar is the real Anjali from these recent characters?

Now that I'm looking back, I'm thinking, oh, they were quite feisty. They've been rebellious. They would enter the room and command the room. I think that is one quality that maybe I have because that is what even Shibani (Akhtar, co-creator and co-producer) told me when she cast me for Dabba Cartel.

I just recently spoke to David Dhawan sir and he told me I saw you on screen and there was a spark. It is like you find yourself in a character and the rest just keeps happening on its own.

Dabba Cartel marks your third collaboration with screen legend Shabana Azmi after Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani and the yet unreleased Bun Tikki. How is she as a person?

I don't think there is someone luckier than me to be able to work with her for so many years continuously. We were not so close during Rocky Aur Rani because we didn't have scenes together. But whatever time we spent, it was really nice Then I met her at Dabba Cartel's reading and then at Bun Tikki's reading. It was so beautiful to have a familiar face. She's like a buddy to me. She doesn't seem like she's older or senior, she makes you feel so comfortable.

But once you start acting with her, you get scared again. She looks into your eyes and I don't think anybody else can do anything. You can just be frozen and try not to make a fool out of yourself. (Laughs)



Apparently you were the last one to join the cast of Dabba Cartel. What's the story there?

The show has been in the works since the lockdown. Everybody was on board. Workshops were done, readings were done, and they were ready to go on floor in four days. I was brought at the last minute. Shibani saw me in Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani and felt she needed to cast this girl in this part.

She secretly auditioned me. Everybody was telling her she's crazy for changing one of the main actors just four days before the shoot.

But she said, 'No, this is the right girl.' I remember I went for the reading and obviously Shabanaji was there, and the entire cast was there. I read from the fifth episode. I had not even read from the first episode. The first day of shooting was my scene.



You once said that you always had this vision to do movies. How do you look back at your journey from TV to the big screen?

The transition happened naturally. Right before lockdown, my television show got over. After that people said you have to wait for a big break to happen. I didn't listen to that. Whatever work comes to me, I take it up.

I don't worry about the size of the role. If it's good money or a good part, I will do it. The more I work, the more people see me, the more people know me, the more work I will get. It's just as simple as that. If I keep waiting for the better part, it's not going to come sitting at home.

I was in Bell Bottom for a passing shot. Bell Bottom was shot in the lockdown and they said that you will have to stay in Scotland for two months in a bubble.

I said, happily. Rather than staying in Bombay, I would rather stay in Scotland for two months. After that, the television calls stopped and I was getting approached for Web series and movies.

There was obviously a plan that I will do films but it was to do it much later, after I turned 30. But it happened when I was 28. When I got back from Scotland, I got a call for Rocky Aur Rani.

You have done a bunch of interesting things as an actor. From daily soaps to reality shows and Web series, films...



It's like being in a candy shop. Why should I not do all of it?

You once said that you want to play 'Lady Devdas'. What makes it such a fascinating character for you?

Yes! You see Guru Dutt as Devdas and you see all of these men being aashiq, premi in the movies. It's always the men who are going crazy, barbaad. They never show a woman going crazy like that. A woman has to be very proper, sitting on a swing, crying. Why can't women be crazy in love? We went there a little bit with Cocktail, with Deepika Padukone's character. Women are put in this box. I want women to be out of that box and be seen in a different light. That we also are crazy in love and we also have that passion.



What empowers you as an artist?

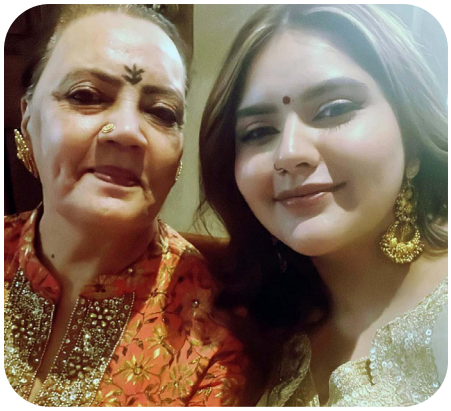
I like to observe people. Right now, I'm at my best friend's wedding and last night we saw someone dancing and I just wanted to imbibe what he was doing.

You have to be aware of your surroundings and love people and just accept people the way they are. In Raat Jawan Hai, I put a lot of my brother in me. The way he talks and the way he is.

Your Instagram has some lovely posts dedicated to your father. How old were you when he passed away?

I was eight. I was too young, so I have really spotty memories of him. In the past, there were no phones, so no photos or videos. I'm just happy that he was an actor and I get to hear his voice and see him in motion. He used to be a junior artist and my mom a dancer. He used to earn 10 rupees, she used to earn 20 rupees. She used to tell him, 'I will never date you.'

He bought a bike just to impress her. He would not leave her during shooting days. If she's gone for a song shoot, he'd be sitting on the pavement outside waiting for her. It's very cute, how aashiq he was.



You have spoken about how actors are often labelled as 'plus size'. In the industry that thrives on unrealistic beauty standards, how difficult was it to find your path?

I have never thought of myself as something different. Who wants to be standardly beautiful? Nobody. Standard beauty is not even beautiful anymore.

I have not come here to break any beauty standards; I believe it will happen on its own.

Does this noise bother you sometimes? Say social media for example, where anyone can say anything.

It does get overwhelming sometimes. I feel people are so stupid that they have so much time to think about other people and what they are doing, how they are looking... People should just let people be. Social media is like a monster that just keeps growing and not in a good way. But I think negative 2 per cent, 98 per cent is good only. The idea is to concentrate on what's good and block the rest.



Do you think there is a positive change when it comes to body inclusivity?

I don't know about body inclusivity but people still say I look dusky. But it's not their fault, it's how they're conditioned. We are told not to play outside otherwise it will turn our skin dusky. Our own parents tell us that. This generation being so aware, I think they have a very big responsibility of how they will teach the future generation. If we do that, there will be a lot of change in society. Otherwise, we will go backwards.

I cannot end this interview without asking you about the second season of Raat Jawan Hai. Any update?

(Laughs) It is already being written. I hope Dabba Cartel and Raat Jawan Hai have second seasons too.olutely loved it Raat Jawan Hai is such an underdog show. That show has given me a lot. It didn't get that popular but people who watched it have absolutely loved it



It Has Been A Box Of Surprises

‘My journey has just been so different. Each character has been so different.’

After making her presence felt in the Southern film industry with Arjun Reddy, Mahanati and a cameo in NTR: Kathanayakudu, **Shalini Pandey** made her Bollywood debut in Jayeshbhai Jordaar, then acted in Maharaj. Now in the Web series Dabba Cartel she gets to act with Shabana Azmi, Jyotika, Nimisha Sajayan and Anjali Anand.

"When I grow up, I'd like to be like Shabana ma'am, the way she carries herself with so much grace and dignity and the way she uplifts younger women,"

Were you not intimidated by the prospect of working with these formidable actresses? What was it like to work and interact with them?

I was very excited to work and meet these amazing women, especially Shabana Azmi. My mom has been the biggest fan of Shabana Azmi and she wished and hoped that I would work with her. I was very excited when I got to know that I'd be sharing screen space with her.

Also the opportunity to be working with such great actors. It was lovely working with these actors because you get to learn so much. They are all different people and we had so many stories to exchange. I got to learn so much from Shabana ma'am, from Jyotika, Nimisha, Anjali, and also male actors.

Everyone in the cast is so amazing. I wish I had more scenes with Gajraj sir (Gajrao Rao). It was lovely working with all these people.



Many of your sequences are with Shabana Azmi. What were your takeaways from associating with such an institution?

We all love Shabana Azmi.
We all admire her work. I have seen her work. I have loved her through my mum. The first movie that I saw of her was Makdee and I was a huge, huge fan, but I fell in love with her when I met her and I got to work with her.

When I grow up, I'd like to be more like her, the way she carries herself with so much grace and dignity and the way she uplifts younger women.

From Arjun Reddy to Dabba Cartel, how do you see your journey so far?



My journey has just been incredible. It has been a box of surprises. I just think I've grown as an actor. My journey has just been so different. Each character has been so different. I am so fortunate that I got to work with such lovely and different directors at such a young age. I am also looking forward to where this journey takes me from here. Dabba Cartel is such a special project, it's going to do wonders for me and I'm very hopeful for this show and the character.

In hindsight, how do you feel about your character tolerating so much toxicity in Arjun Reddy?

I play my character and I do not judge it. I'm an actor and I'm supposed to play different characters and that's what I thrive for. It was my first film. I'm grateful for Preeti because it changed my life and that was my stepping into the industry as an actor.



I Was Thinking Of Quitting Acting

I hadn't worked for three-and-a-half years. I felt the industry was based on who you knew. I didn't belong to a network.

Nearly 25 years ago, Mira Nair made a joyful film celebrating North Indian Punjabi and the NRI culture.

Monsoon Wedding won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival and introduced us to the charming, petite actress **Tillotama Shome**. She played Alice, the domestic help of a rich Punjabi family, who falls in love with the street-smart hustler PK Dubey (Vijay Raaz).

After the success of Monsoon Wedding, Tillotama spent a few years in New York honing her acting skills and then decided to return to India. She got work in international productions like Waiting City (2009), Gangor (2010) and Sold (2014) but they were barely seen in India.

During her years of struggle, Shome managed to get some challenging roles in Shanghai (2012), Qissa: A Tale of the Lonely Ghost (2013), A Death in the Gunj (2016) and Sir (2018). But it is only in the recent years that she has finally established her presence in films and OTT, with Web series like Delhi Crime (2022), The Night Manager (2023), Lust Stories (2023), Kota Factory (2024), Tribhuvan Mishra CA Topper (2024) and the recent Paatal Lok 2 (2025).

In February, Shome was at the Berlinale for the premiere of her new Bengali film Baksho Bondi (Shadowbox), directed by the couple Tanushree Das and Saumyananada Sahi. In one of the strongest performances of her career, Shome plays Maya, a lower middle-class woman struggling to keep her family, including husband Sundar afloat. The film has 19 producers attached to it, including Shome herself. "I had to be in my 40s to play these women in their 40s. You wouldn't have managed to explain that to me in my 20s and 30s.

I would have said, 'Just give me an audition. I will kill it. I will kill it. But your lived experience makes the deal real

Tillotama, in this complex role, you often just use your facial muscles to express emotions. How did you prepare for this role?

Tillotama: I find it very difficult to speak about preparation because it's different for different projects. In this case, when I met Tanushree and Somu, it wasn't suggested that I should act in it. They said they wanted my feedback with the script, so I read it with a hawk's eye. Then they said they wanted me to act in it. I was taken aback. But then they came home, and we spent five hours together.

In my mind, I still didn't know when and how the film would get made. In my career, in these last 25 years, it can take a long time from when I read a script to when the film gets made and the world sees it. Often, it can be five to six years from the time we first meet. So I didn't know if this film would get made. But I knew I liked Didi (Tanushree) and Somu, and I wanted to be friends with them. I could learn a lot from them. They had come at a time in my life, where I was thinking about what next. There was a curiosity in me.

I needed to understand processes in making a film that are invisible to actors and I had not experienced them. I had worked on amazing projects but never had this kind of friendship so early on with the filmmakers. It took us six years to make this film.

Tanushree: We had prepared so much for Maya's character, like her account book, her watch, Maya's playlist, photographs of all the women who made Maya, love letters exchanged between Maya and Sundar.

Tillotama: Kya homework karoge tum? Sara homework inhon ne kar diya tha.

Saumyananda: We prepped for so many years that when we started shooting, all the prep was done. We didn't have to discuss too much.

Tillotama: I finished shooting Paatal Lok 2 and within a few days, we were shooting this film. It was in February-March 2023.

When did they bring the script to you?



Tillotama: In 2018.

Then the pandemic hit us.

Tillotama: It was actually a most fertile time for us as friends. We became each other's lifeline. The film is about a caregiver, from her point of view. I was caregiving my mother. Tanushree was caregiving her father. Like Tanushree, my life and work are now in synch. I have learnt to accept that.

When I was younger, I wanted visibility, more and more work, because it was so far and few. I thought my chances were dying out with time. Now, I feel the opposite. What is the result of six years of knowing somebody, their family, their thoughts, their parents, where they came from, how they think, how they behave as people in critical moments? All the drafts they wrote of their screenplay over six years, to have the privilege to read them, to be invited into a room with the producer. And they were so secure and not egoistic that they give me a chance to be a producer as well. This opportunity to develop skills is important. It gave me a chance to understand what it takes to make a film. Then one can be angry about the right things. Otherwise, often you are angry because you don't have the full picture.

You referred to a time when work wasn't very frequent. But now you are very busy. When did it change?

Tillotama: It happened when the viewership changed with Sir (2018) coming on Netflix.

But even before that you had

acted in Konkona Sen Sharma's A Death in the Gunj (2016).

Tillotama: A Death in the Gunj came on Amazon Prime much later, even though it was made before Sir.

It was an important film for me because I played a certain class I don't usually get to play. Koko (Konkona Sen) saw me as who I am, while other people wanted to play safe, and cast me in a certain roles based on what they have seen. I remember Sir was going to open in theatres just when the pandemic hit, but you got a bigger audience on Netflix.

Tillotama: Yes, it was a game-changer. It allowed producers and TV studios to feel like they could make me a part of their shows.

Hindi Medium got made in 2017. You had a small role but you were hilarious in those scenes with Irrfan.

Tillotama: (Casting director and filmmaker) Honey Trehan cast me after he saw me in A Death in the Gunj. He said we have to cast this woman and place her in a social class that she belongs to. He told me it might help me break my image. It was a small role but I wanted to spend a day with Irrfan.

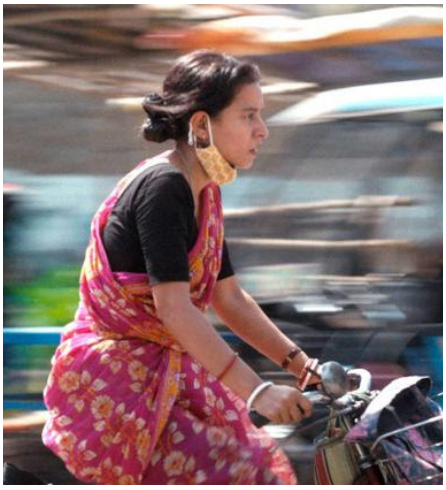
Anup Singh's Qissa: The Tale of a Lonely Ghost (2013) happened before but not many people saw it. It's such a beautiful film but even now, not too many people have seen it.

Tillotama: If it wasn't for Qissa I wouldn't be sitting here. For me, it was a film that made me not quit acting.

You were thinking of quitting?

Tillotama: Absolutely. I hadn't worked for three-and-a-half years. I felt the industry was based on who you knew. I didn't go to FTII (Film and Television Institute of India) and didn't belong to a network. I am a kind of person who keeps to myself. Most of the films I had worked on were international co-productions, small parts and the films were never seen or released in India.

Anup Singh offered me Qissa. We did the film that we wanted to make and it's irrelevant how many theatres it opened in. He taught me so much. He gave me tools I could use in every project after that. I have worked with other directors who have larger-than-life personalities but Anup introduced me to Chinese paintings, music, (Japanese master Yasujirō) Ozu's films. He realised I hadn't gone to film school and was craving for a sense of kinship. He became a library that you can walk in and read for as long as you want. I think that's what gave me the courage to be able to look at every woman that play, through the various lenses that Anup created for me.



You said you had no network when you returned to India from the US. But you have a nice network through Konkona's film. There is this group of actors (Kalki Koechlin, Vikram Massey, Gulshan Devaiah and even Baksho Bondi producer Jim Sarbh) and you all became friends.

Tillotama: We were already friends but we have grown up since then. We call out each other when we are not inspired by anyone's work. There's a lot of honesty in this friendship. A form of support which has been very vital in continuing. But I think Anup actually made me. It's like a dog who can sniff truffle; he gave me the ability to smell.

So as an actress you are now in a great space.

Tillotama: Yes, for sure.

Do you wear saris often? You were so comfortable in saris in Baksho Bondi, the way you rode bicycles or pushed things around. Then I was thinking even Ratna (Sir) and Alice (Monsoon Wedding) wore saris.

Tillotama: I am very comfortable and also because Didi had aged the saris. They were already worn by women, and it is a different feeling. When a woman has worn a sari, she leaves an imprint on it.

Tanushree: The pink nightie she wears in the film is actually my mother's nightie. She was going to throw it and turn it into pocha (rag).

I kept it aside.
I had five-six nighties but we chose this to go with the palette. So even though it is from real life, it is fitted and curated to work for cinema and the visuals.

Tillotama: I felt comfortable because the sari and nightie had been worn 100 times before. This is something that one is beginning to appreciate as one gets older. You are lucky enough to find and touch something, an object, a costume, a prop that has recorded the touch of many people before.

It's great that these roles are being written for a woman of your age and someone who has had life experience.

I feel after my mother's illness where I became a caregiver, it was great to get roles like in Delhi Crime, playing a woman who didn't want to have a child; Lust Stories,a woman who is ashamed of her desires; Tribhuvan Mishra CA Topper, a woman whose husband doesn't have time to listen to her needs; and Paatal Lok 2, a single mother who has to constantly deal with patriarchy. So I feel, thematically, I had to be in my 40s to play these women in their 40s. You wouldn't have managed to explain that to me in my 20s and 30s. I would have said, Just give me an audition. I will kill it. I will kill it. But your lived experience makes the deal real



IF SHAH RUKH KHAN CAN DO IT, I CAN TOO

My family are the mainstream audience and think I am wasting my time. Until I make a Rs 100 crore film, they won't be convinced.

Coming from humble beginnings without any ties with the movie industry, **Sohum Shah** lives by the philosophy: 'Jahan chah wahan raah (Where there's a will, there's a way).'

That's how he made his way from Sri Ganganagar in Rajasthan to Mumbai to pursue his acting dreams. Years later, he established himself as a notable actor and producer in Bollywood with titles like Ship of Theseus, Tumbbad, Maharani and Dahaad under his belt.

His latest film Crazxy sees him in experimental mode as he plays Dr Abhimanyu in a one-character suspense thriller. Sohum reflects on his journey as he tells "I started from zero, when we did not have any money at home. I left home to explore something new. But my mother thought I was going on vanvaas."

Crazxy is getting positive reception.

A lot of love is coming our way. People say it is such a gutsy movie, how did you make it? A one-character movie must have been challenging... People also talk about the tyre-changing scene. They loved it. Somebody told me, I was with you in that Range Rover. In Tumbbad also, we tried to achieve that the audience should feel the incessant rain once they step out of the cinema hall.



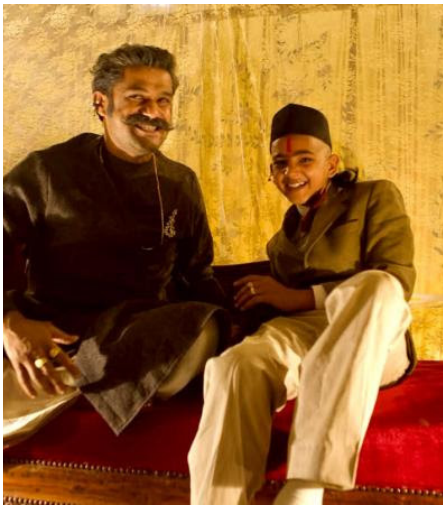
Your production house is responsible for backing unique content. What's the creative strategy?

I grew up watching Hindi cinema. I never had exposure to world cinema or literature. I came here, met a few people, liked their stories and thought I should make films. Slowly, it's becoming our brand with Sohum Shah Films. People now expect something atrangi with the films we make.

VIDEO: Why the English dialogue in Crazxy was 'very tough' for Sohum Shah.

You came to Mumbai from Rajasthan, without any prior experience in acting. What gave you confidence to take this leap?

I am from Sri Ganganagar. I am from a trading family; my father was a trader/broker. It's not about confidence but we say, 'Jahan chah wahan raah'. I think God has made us capable of making things happen in our life. It was in my destiny, and luck has favoured me.



Were you always inclined towards cinema?

Yes. I was a big fan of Shah Rukh Khansaab. He was my hope when I thought of becoming an actor. He was the only person at that time who came from Delhi, a complete outsider, and became successful in Bollywood. There's Akshay Kumar also. The industry used to be close-knit then. Only people related to the industry would get work. But SRK gave me hope. I told myself if he can do it, I can too.

Was it easy for you to leave your hometown behind and come to Mumbai for work without any filmi connections?

We didn't have much money at home. As a result, there were responsibilities on me. My acting dream was on the backseat. I wasn't sure if I could actually go to Mumbai and pursue my dreams. I fulfilled my responsibilities and created a safety net for myself. Then I came to Mumbai.

Your first film Baabarr came out in 2009 and it's interesting how you once credited Nawazuddin Siddiqui as your 'acting guru'. How did you two become friends?

Yes. Nawaz was also struggling at that time, so he would teach acting. I didn't come from NSD (National School of Drama) or FTII (Film And Television Institute Of India). I didn't have any theatre experience. Somebody suggested Nawaz's name and I contacted him. Interestingly, he came to Sri Ganganagar and stayed with me for a month. During that period, he taught me a lot about acting. We shot the film in Lucknow and Nawaz was present on set the whole time.



How did you get into production?

It happened on its own. Anurag Kashyap tried very hard to make Tumbbad. Guneet Monga also put in effort. People were trying to make this film happen since 2005 but studios would reject the idea. They would ask, who makes horror these days, why are there no item songs... Nobody wanted to make Tumbbad. When the script came to me, I thought it was such an Indian story. I immediately decided to make it.

Director Hansal Mehta, with whom you worked in Simran, recently said that the Hindi film industry needs a reset. As an actor and producer, what about Bollywood needs to change?



Bollywood should stop the process of star-making. We need real talent. We are living in times where audiences are not interested in watching stars. They want to see good content. As a producer, it is our responsibility to invest in good actors and stories that people can relate to.

Why Sohum Shah feels validated after the re-release of Tumbbad.

Nowadays, we are seeing content that is based on numbers, statistics, a star's market value and things like that.

How difficult is it to make films that are experimental?

Very difficult. So many people told me to directly release Crazxy on OTT. I refused. From the business point of view, it is tough to make these decisions. But I thrive on this. I have so much fun taking on such challenge

Does your personal philosophy 'Jaha chah waha raah' reflect in your business decisions?

Yes. I was someone who would travel 50-60 km just to see a film shoot. Today, it is because of my will power that I managed to have my own production house in Mumbai. I am making the films that I want to make. This is not less than a miracle.

How do people from your hometown look at your success?

They find it very nice.

I will tell you something funny. They have seen me in Ship of Theseus and Tumbbad.But the most fun they had was when they saw me in Maharani. It was easy for them to connect with that character. Their favourite work of mine is still Maharani.

Is it true your mother cried when you told the family about your acting dream?



Yeah. My business was set in my hometown. I started from zero, when we did not have any money at home. I left home to explore something new. But my mother thought I was going on vanvaas.

At what point were they convinced that you made the right decision?

They are the mainstream audience and think I am wasting my time. (Smiles) Until I make a Rs 100 crore film, they won't be convinced





‘When they took my name, I went numb.’

Before I went on stage, my dress got caught in my shoe! I said, stay calm. Then I started walking and was like, okay, now think of what you're going to say, quickly!

Bandish Bandits actor **Shreya Chaudhry** can't believe her luck. Not only is she living her dream but she's also making it count. She just won the IIFA award for Best Actress, her first win, and she's only getting started. "I feel like I have worked every day for moments like this."

Let's go back to that moment when you took that long walk on stage to collect your Best Actress award from Jaideep Ahlawat and Pratik Gandhi at IIFA. What was going on in your head?

For me, it was already such a big deal to be sitting in that audience, you know, and attending IIFA! It was my first IIFA ever, and my first nomination as well. That itself was a dream come true, plus to be amongst all these artists who I look up to.

Then when they took my name, I went numb. You won't believe it but before I went up onto that stage, my dress got caught in my shoe! So I was like, of course, aise toh hona hi hai (laughs)! I gathered myself and said, stay calm. Then I started walking and was like, okay, now think of what you're going to say, quickly!

You hadn't prepared a speech?

No! All of us actors, at some point in our lives, stand in our bathroom or in front of a mirror and act like we're getting an award and what we're going to say.

I've done that many times but at that moment, I had not prepared anything. So during that long walk, I was actually preparing my speech.

It was a big deal to be on stage and be handed an award from Pratik sir and Jaideep sir because I am a big fanAnd that too a Best Actress award! I feel like I have worked every day for moments like this.

You have dedicated the award to your mom.

Her contribution must obviously be immense but can you elaborate?





My mother has always been that silent fire. When I first told my parents that I wanted to be an actor, they were against it.

I remember having a conversation with them, asking them, please, let me do this, this is where I belong. Since the day they said, okay, go live your dream, it has been my mother who has been my support system. I can call her at any point when I'm feeling a little low or confused.

She boosts my morale.
You can't compare ma ka pyaar with anything. When I got the award -- my parents are not in town because my brother just had a baby -- when I told her that, Ma, I won an IIFA, it was just reminiscent of all the conversations and dreams we had woven together.

In my speech, I also dedicated the award to my niece and nephew because they are my lucky charms.

Your brother had twins?

No. His daughter was born during Bandish Bandits Season 1 and his son was born during Bandish Bandits Season 2, so they are definitely lucky for me.

Bandits Bandits gave your career a push but your presence gave the show a push just as much. Don't you think?

That's very kind of you to say.

But as an actor, I feel Bandish Bandits has given me a lot more than maybe I have given it. I have tried my level best to do justice to the character.

But to be with such a beautiful cast, Anand (Tiwari) and Amrit (Amritpal Singh Bindra) are responsible for wherever I am in my career today. Ritwik (Bhowmik) is not just a co-star, he's also a dear friend today.

We started our careers together in a way, dreaming about things.

Are you a singer yourself?

No, I'm not. I'm a bathroom singer.



How much of Tamanna are you? Like, are you a biker?

Actually, no, I'm not a biker. I learned how to ride a bike for Bandish Bandits.

I don't know how much of Tamanna I am because sometimes as actors, you end up giving a bit of your personality to a character. But I have learned a lot from Tamanna in season two.

At a time when she's popular and successful, she says, no, I will go back (to music school) and get things right. I want to educate myself. But it's not like she's this perfect or holier-than-thou person. She's a real person.

She makes mistakes. She's flawed. There was this advice that Anand gave me. It's a quote from Javier Bardem: 'You have to be your character's best defence lawyer.

So no matter what your character is doing, you have to believe in that 100 percent.' But I don't know how similar we are.

You have a glamorous image in Bandish Bandits, where you play a singer. But in The Mehta Boys, you have a less glam role and play a solid girlfriend.

I was shooting Bandish Bandits when I was offered Mehta Boys. It was very exciting to play two different characters.

They are both empowered women at their core but very different in their appearance, the way they talk and in the decisions they make.

In an Instagram post, there's a picture of an unrecognisable Shreya Chaudhry, where you are a plus size. How did you go from there to here?

I remember getting a message from a girl after Bandish Bandits Season 2, and she wrote she really connected with Tamanna's character, and it was a very long beautiful message.

But at the end of it, she wrote that she can never be Tamanna because of the way she looked.

I never want anyone to feel like that, so I took the decision to write about my journey. So I wrote about the struggles, health-wise, that I went through.

This was when I was in college and I used to be extremely overweight. It was affecting my health to a point where a doctor said that the only way for me to get better is to lose weight.

So it wasn't that I wanted to be an actor or look a particular way.

It was because at that time, my health was so affected that the only way out was to lose weight.



What was your weight then?

I was 86 kilos. So yeah, I was very big and it was unhealthy. Slowly and steadily, I realised that this is a lifestyle and if you just give it a chance, it really embraces you. Today, it's a part of who I am. I am a conscious eater.

I love food but I prefer eating healthy. I'm not very strict with myself. It's not like I don't have cheat days.

But I strike a balance because the feeling of being physically fit or feeling light on your feet is something that I will never take for granted because I have seen the other side of the spectrum as well.

How long did it take you to lose weight?

A good two years, I think. Initially, my goal was to lose 10 to 15 kilos and that took about a year-and-a-half because I don't believe in crash diets.

Those things don't work. You have to be consistent with your approach no matter what it is, so that took a bit of time.

Then, I decided that I wanted to be an actor, I started a lot of classes like kickboxing classes, dance classes, weight training...

I fell in love with all of these things. Even today, I love playing sports. I didn't play sports too much when I was growing up.

I love boxing and paddle ball. I'm absolutely addicted to paddle ball!

You have taken a picture with Hrithik Roshan.

Did you know him?

No. I don't remember very clearly but I think his second film had come out and he was doing some sort of a promotion.

A family friend knew somebody from his team and we just requested him for a photograph.

So it just happened by chance, it's not that I know him personally, I've always been a very big fan of Hrithik sir but sadly, have never met him since that day.

What are your fitness rules?

I avoid sugar.
I avoid dairy because I'm intolerant to that. I don't eat anything with preservatives on a normal day.

But on cheat days,
I'll have whatever I want. I just feel you must do portion control, then you can maintain a balance. Gigi Hadid said something really beautiful.

She said, eat the salad to stay fit and eat the burger to stay sane.

So that justifies my approach as well. And like I said, I'm a huge outdoor person and I love adventure sports. I love weight training.

I love going to my dance class. I love going on walks. I play with my dog. You have to put in a lot of hard work in this profession.

For instance, you may have to run in a scene, and there will be 30 takes of that, from all angles, dialogues etc, You have to be fit in order to do that. If you're unfit, you can't do a scene like that so many times.

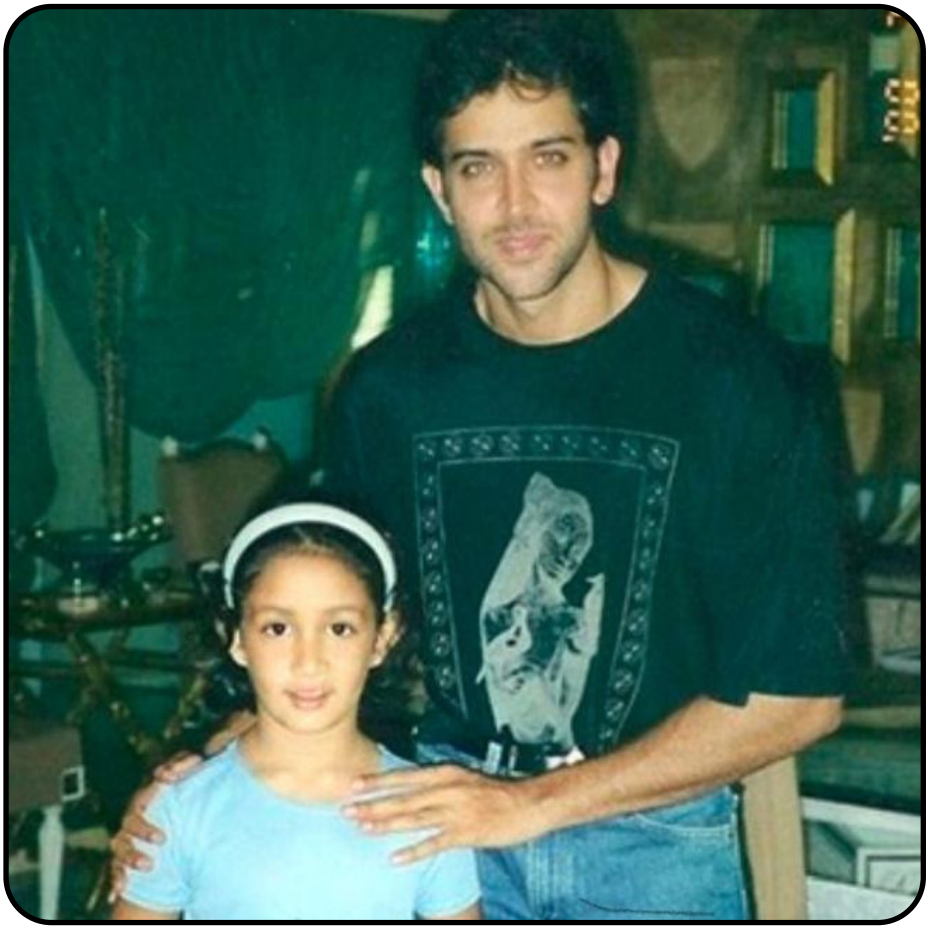
What's the first thing you do when you wake up?

It's something my mother recently introduced in my life. I drink haldi pani. It's her recipe, and it has haldi, honey, pepper and cinnamon.

Even when I'm traveling for work, I carry these ingredients with me. So no matter where I am, I start my day with haldi pani.

Do you have a ritual at the end of your day?

Not really. But I try to eat whatever I'm eating at least an hour-and-a-half before I go to bed.







The Actor Who Takes Your Breath Away In Paatal Lok 2

Life does not change in such a way that everything becomes easy. Struggle and hustle is there for everyone. The difference is that people have started knowing me.

Prateek Pachori plays the street smart, smooth talking fixer Bittu Rahman in Paatal Lok 2. He is a key character in the story and has played the role with raw sauciness that makes him stand out.

The dodgy hustler shares most of his scenes with lead character Hathiram Choudhury [Jaideep Ahlawat] and carries his role with an earthy realism.

He also featured in Panchayat and Dabba Cartel. The Jabalpur native who turned to acting because of Shah Rukh Khan. about his 10 year struggle in the film industry and the experience of working with performers like Raghubir Yadav and Jaideep Ahlawat.

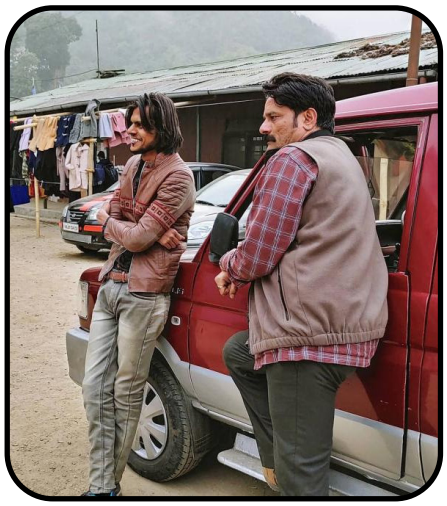
How did you get the key role of Bittu Rahman in Paatal Lok 2?

They wanted an actor from UP, MP or Bihar. I auditioned for it and had to enact the scene where Bittu Rahman and Hathriam Choudhary are talking across the table and I am telling him my life story.

Mine was a key character. I was told several actors had tried for this role, including some of my friends. I am sure many must have given good auditions, but sometimes luck also plays a role.

Have there been times when you have been locked for a role and someone else finally gets it?

Many times actors are locked and still don't get the role. I have been in Mumbai since 2015. There have been times when the agreement has been signed, but someone else has done the character. Bad production houses do that -- not the good ones.



What was the experience of shooting in Nagaland for Paatal Lok 2? Have you been there before?

I shot for 15 days in Kohima, Kalimpong and Darjeeling. I flew in and out according to the schedule of the shoot. I had never travelled to these places before.

The cream of the film industry was in Paatal Lok 2. Sudip Sharma, the show runner, Avinash Arun, director, Nikita Grover, casting director, Jaideep Ahlawat sir, Tillotama ma'am... Sudip is also a good co-actor. He does rehearsals with the actors and provides constant inputs about what we can do better.

What are some of your experiences of working with Jaideep Ahlawat? What are some of the memories that have remained with you?

The last scene where I am getting beaten up by him! The temperature was 4 degrees and the scene wasn't happening because our bodies were constrained due to the biting cold. Jaideep sir suggested how to go about it. He did it spontaneously and on the spot. We were able to crack it in 3-4 takes in about 2 hours.

Jaideep sir is involved in his character, but is equally invested in his co-actors because he wants the complete scene to be good. This is the sign of an accomplished actor. Jaideep sir never learns his dialogues. He reads and rereads the script over and over again and when the take happens he goes with the flow. Most of my shoots were with him. I spent just 1-2 days with Ishwak Singh and Tillotama Shome.



What did you do off the sets when you were not shooting?

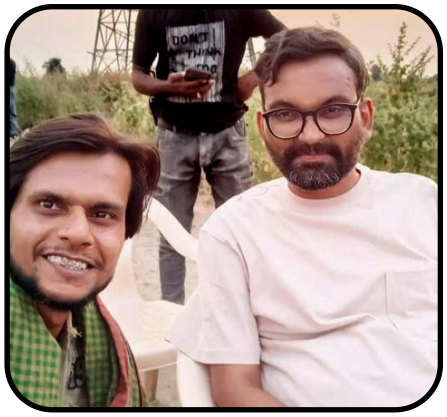
We used to watch the football World Cup. It also gave us time to enjoy Nagaland. I made friendships with some actors from Punjab, Rajasthan and Nagaland.

I got to spend a lot of time with Prashant Tamang [winner, Indian Idol 2007] who is such a good singer. He used to get a car, take me for a drive and sing songs. We would sing together. We also shared a room for two days. He is a fantastic guy.

You have featured in two popular shows Panchayat and Paatal Lok. How have perceptions changed towards you after Paatal Lok 2?

Life does not change in such a way that everything becomes easy. Struggle and hustle is there for everyone. The difference is that people have started knowing me. I have added some more followers on Insta and I got the film I am acting in right now without an audition. It is an untitled film directed by Richie Mehta. We are shooting in Agra.

Rest is the same because the film industry is unpredictable. You have to continue looking for work. You may be a star or a small actor, but the struggle is the same. The struggle never ends.



You are an engineer from Jabalpur who went to drama school. How did your journey begin?

I am the son of a government employee. My journey began in Jabalpur. After drama school, I got a grant and did plays in Jabalpur. I made the film Chausar Firangi in Jabalpur and showed it to my parents. They were happy to go to a theatre and see their son act in a film. The distributor promised it would be released in 90 theatres, but it was shown only in one theatre.

After Panchayat people recognised me when I went to the market or the bank with my mummy, but she used to say 'famous toh ho gaya, paisa kab kameyega?' She said you can pursue acting, but you should also open a shop on the side. I used to joke that I will open a kirana store!

People recognised me, but I didn't have money till 2021. I did not earn enough to buy nice clothes so even though people knew I was an actor, in effect I was quite poor! My mother passed away in 2023. She didn't see the recognition I am getting now and would have been very happy.



When did things improve?

I thought the field of acting was like this only, but the day I stopped thinking about money, I started getting money. At present, I have a stable middle class life. I used to stay with 6-7 batchmates when I came to Bombay, I now live in my own house with a batchmate.

Industry people also recognise me and don't have to go out looking for work. But the industry tends to typecast you and offers you the same kind of role. At times you have to look at your bank account and are forced to do those roles even if you don't want to.

Before Paatal Lok 2 I only got comic roles. To save your image you have to keep fighting with the norms set down by industry. Otherwise you will get typecast in the same roles like Asrani and Jagdeep sir who were such great actors.

What are some of the projects you are working on?

I did Dabba Cartel and Agra Affair. Hajamat, a series on Jio, will be released soon. Nishanchi, a film by Anurag Kashyap, and one with Vikas Behl featuring Wamiqa Gabi and Siddhant Chaturvedi.

I get calls for audition and still give auditions. Directors who have seen my work cast me directly.



What was it like working with Raghubir Yadav in Panchayat?

Raghubir sir is also from Jabalpur and we talked about the city. He is not just an actor. He is a package of art. One day in the vanity van, he made a basuri [flute] from straws and even played it.

It is unbelievable to have the opportunity to work with actors one has seen on screen since childhood. Seeing them you come to know what ease of acting means. They put so many inputs that are not in the script and elevate the scenes. They have so much experience which they incorporate effortlessly. They enrich and fill up the character to make it more convincing.



Why did you become an actor?

Shah Rukh Khan. I read his biography, I did theatre because he did, and then got to know about trained actors like Om Puri, Naseeruddin Shah, Irrfan Khan, Nawazuddin Siddiqui, Paresh Rawal, Nana Patekar. I saw all their films.Irrfan changed the acting style of India and developed a new theory. Gangs of Wasseypur brought a change in the entire film industry. Acting styles changed after Wasseypur. It brought realism which was good for actors like us

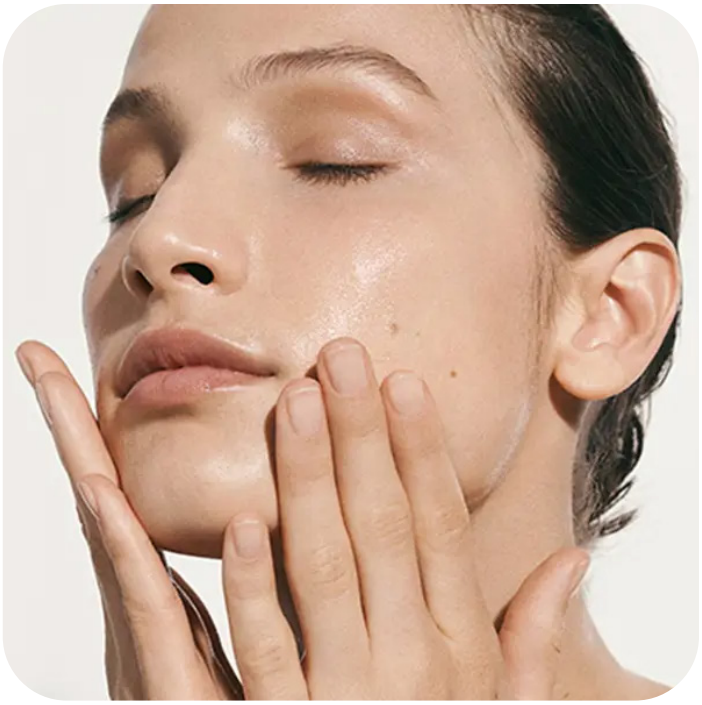
Summer Skincare Routine



Step-1

Effective Cleansing

In the summer, increased heat and humidity often lead to increased oiliness in the skin. Combat this by starting your oily skincare summer routine with a thorough cleansing. Try the Lancôme Mousse Eclat Hydrating Foam Cleanser, a gentle yet effective option that also provides mild exfoliation. This cleanser effectively eliminates dirt and impurities, unveiling a soft and radiant complexion. Suitable for all skin types, it's an essential step in maintaining a healthy skin during the summer months. Make sure to cleanse your skin twice daily.



Step-2

Toning

The next step of your morning summer skincare routine involves using a hydrating toner, such as the Lancôme Tonique Confort Hydrating Face Toner. This toner helps replenish moisture while balancing your skin's pH levels. Infused with gentle ingredients, it soothes and comforts the skin, leaving it refreshed and revitalised. By incorporating this toner into your regimen, you can ensure that your skin stays hydrated and nourished, combating the effects of summer heat and humidity for a healthy, glowing complexion.



Step-3

Include Antioxidants

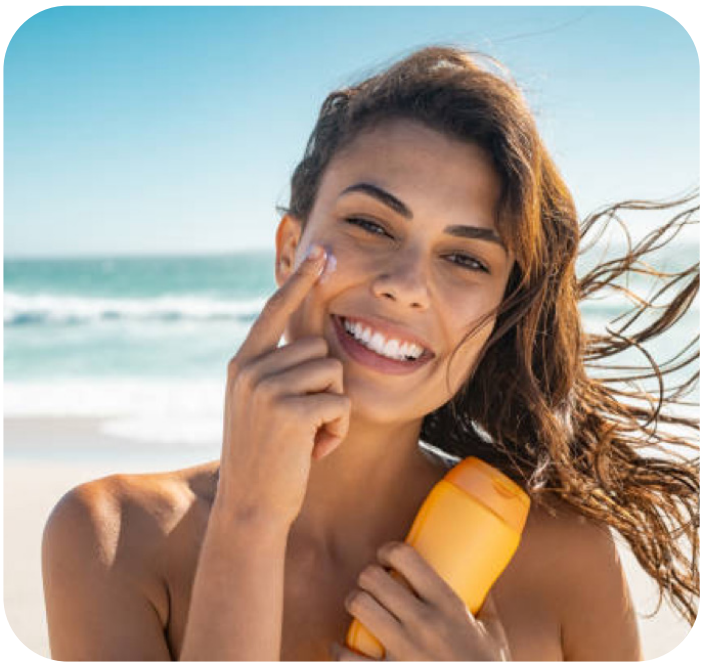
Follow it up by incorporating antioxidant-rich products, such as the Lancôme Advanced Génifique Youth Activating Face Serum which helps protect your skin from environmental stressors like UV rays and pollution. Its advanced formula also boosts skin's natural resilience and radiance, reducing the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles. Including this product in your summer daily skincare routine can enhance your skin's defence against any seasonal damage while promoting a youthful and vibrant complexion.



Step-4

Moisturisation

Prioritise moisturisation despite concerns about oily skin. Opt for a lightweight, fast-absorbing moisturiser like the Lancôme Rénergie Multi-Lift Ultra Day Cream. This cream provides essential hydration without feeling heavy or greasy on the skin. Look for oil-free or gel-based options that effectively replenish moisture while regulating sebum production if you're the one with an oilier skin type. Incorporating a suitable moisturiser into your routine can maintain optimal hydration levels, keeping your skin balanced, nourished, and protected throughout the summer months.



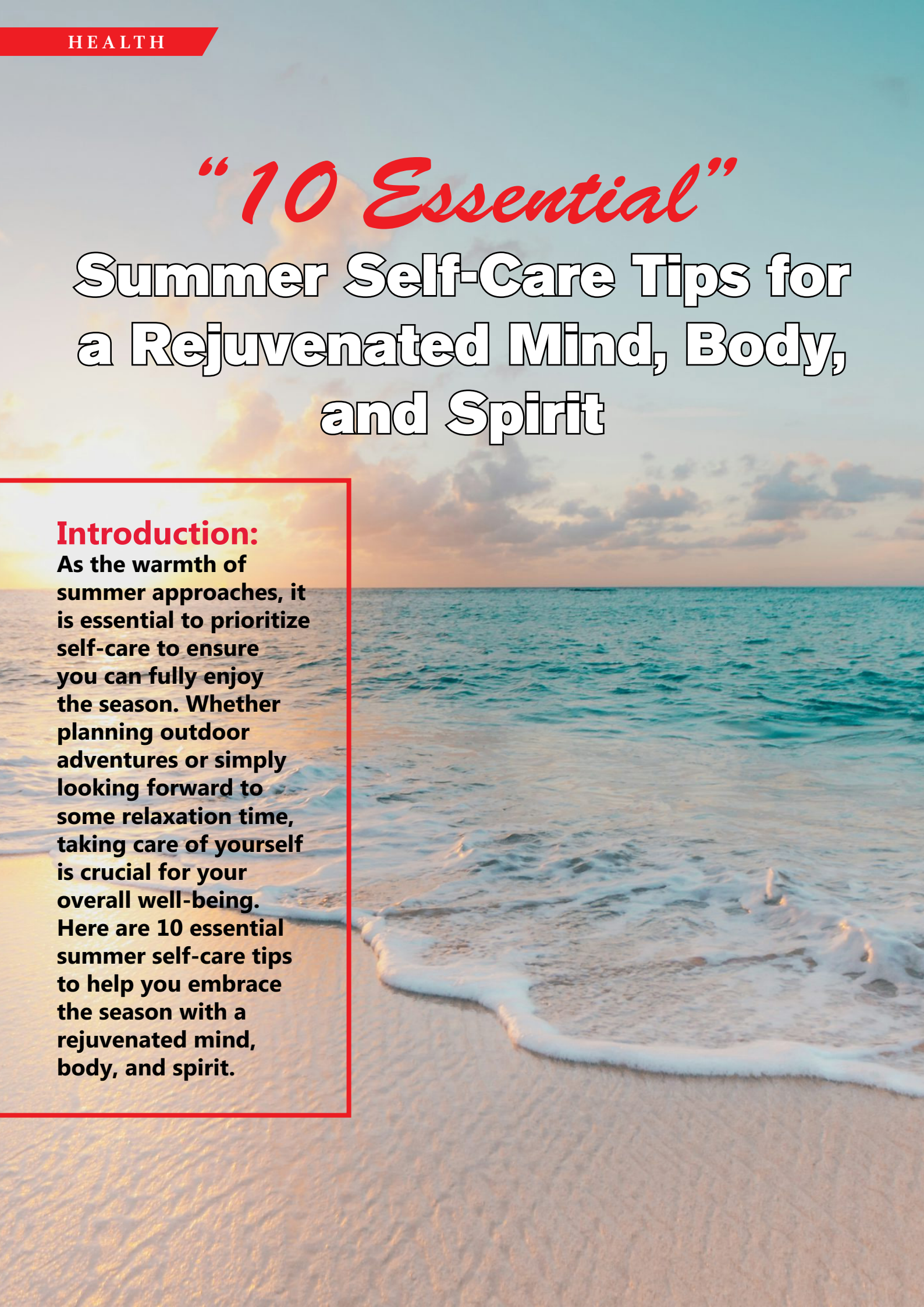
Step-5

Sun Protection

Emphasise the importance of sun protection for all skin types. Incorporate a lightweight sunscreen like the Lancôme UV Expert Aqua Gel Sunscreen into your routine. This innovative formula effortlessly absorbs into the skin, providing broad-spectrum SPF 50 PA++++ protection against harmful UV rays. Not only does it shield your skin from sun damage, but it also adds a radiant glow. Making sun protection a priority in your skincare during summer can safeguard it from premature ageing, sunburn, and other harmful effects of UV exposure, ensuring a healthy and luminous complexion throughout the season.

"10 Essential"

Summer Self-Care Tips for a Rejuvenated Mind, Body, and Spirit



Introduction:

As the warmth of summer approaches, it is essential to prioritize self-care to ensure you can fully enjoy the season. Whether planning outdoor adventures or simply looking forward to some relaxation time, taking care of yourself is crucial for your overall well-being. Here are 10 essential summer self-care tips to help you embrace the season with a rejuvenated mind, body, and spirit.

1. Stay Hydrated:
With the temperatures rising, staying hydrated throughout the day is vital. Ensure you stay hydrated by drinking ample of water and consider integrating hydrating foods like fruits and vegetables into your diet. Keeping your body adequately hydrated will help you feel more energized and focused, allowing you to make the most of your summer activities.

2. Protect Your Skin:
Sun protection is vital during summer to prevent sunburn and long-term skin damage. Utilize sunscreen with a high SPF before heading outdoors, and reapply it regularly, especially if you are swimming or sweating. Wearing protective attire, such as hats and sunglasses, can also aid in shielding your skin from the sun's harmful rays.

3. Prioritize Outdoor Exercise:
Take advantage of the longer days and warmer weather by incorporating outdoor exercise into your routine. Whether going for a hike, bike ride, or practising yoga in the park, spending time outdoors can boost your mood and enhance your physical fitness. Just be sure to choose activities you enjoy and stay safe by staying hydrated and wearing appropriate clothing and footwear.

4. Practice Mindfulness:
Summer is the perfect time to slow down and practice mindfulness. Find moments in your day to pause, breathe deeply, and truly appreciate the beauty of your surroundings. Whether enjoying a sunset, listening to the sounds of nature, or savouring a delicious meal, being present now can help reduce stress and promote a sense of calm.

5. Get Plenty of Rest:
Maintaining a healthy sleep routine is important for your overall well-being, even during summer. Aim for seven to nine hours of quality sleep each night to ensure your body and mind have time to rest and recharge. Create a relaxing bedtime routine and reduce screen time before bed to promote better sleep.

6. Stay Cool:
Beat the summer heat by staying calm and comfortable, especially during heat waves. Seek out air-conditioned spaces when temperatures soar, or use fans and cooling towels to remain comfortable at home. Refrain from strenuous outdoor activities during the hottest parts of the day and wear Featherlight, breathable clothing to help you stay cool. For more in-depth insights on improving your sleep quality, check out the link Unlock the secrets to better sleep and wake up feeling refreshed each day.

7. Connect with Nature:
Spending time in nature has numerous benefits for your mental and emotional well-being. Whether you are taking a stroll in the park, picnicking by the lake, or camping under the stars, immersing yourself in the beauty of the natural world can help alleviate stress and increase feelings of happiness and contentment.

8. Stay Flexible with Your Routine:
While routines can be beneficial, staying flexible and adaptable during summer is also essential. Embrace spontaneity and be open to trying new activities or experiences. Whether exploring a new hiking trail, attending a local festival, or enjoying a spontaneous road trip, allow yourself to enjoy the moment without feeling constrained by your usual schedule.

9. Nourish Your Body with Healthy Foods:
Summer brings bounty of fresh fruits and vegetables, making it the perfect time to nourish your body with nutritious foods. Incorporate plenty of colourful fruits and vegetables into your meals and snacks to support your health and well-being. From crisp salads to refreshing smoothies, there are endless ways to enjoy the bounty of summer produce.

10. Practice Gratitude:
Finally, take time each day to reflect on what you are grateful for. Whether it is the sun's warmth on your skin, the laughter of friends and family, or the simple pleasures of summertime, cultivating gratitude can help shift your perspective and elevate your overall happiness and satisfaction with life.

"Conclusion"
Summer is a time of renewal and rejuvenation, and prioritizing self-care can help you make the most of the season. By staying hydrated, protecting your skin, prioritizing outdoor exercise, practising mindfulness, getting plenty of rest, staying calm, connecting with nature, staying flexible with your routine, nourishing your body with healthy foods, and practising gratitude, you can ensure that your summer is filled with joy, relaxation, and well-being. Feel free to embrace the warmth of the sun and the beauty of the season and enjoy a summer filled with self-care and revitalization.



21 Summer Vacation Ideas for 2025

1. Where to get summer vacation ideas

Social media is your best tool for finding ideas for summer vacation. A quick scroll through TikTok or YouTube will show you destinations as varied as seaside towns, theme parks, and mountain resorts. You can tailor your search by destination to create tailored itineraries for your clients to provide a first-class experience. At RateHawk, our travel guides offer recommendations for beach getaways, tropical vacations, and the best cities to visit in the UK.

2. How to choose the best summer vacation spots

Everyone's travel needs are a little different. Families with young kids aren't likely to travel to the same destinations as friendship groups in their 20s or a couple going on their honeymoon. Always consider the specific needs of your clients when choosing places to visit in the summer. Different factors are important for certain travelers, from affordability to temperatures, crowds, and history. Ask your client for their top priorities to help them explore a range of popular destination options.

21 places of the best places to travel in summer 2025

Travel has never been more accessible than it is today. Almost 2.3 million UK tourists visited North America in 2023, with 85.7 million tourists from across the world visiting Italy in 2023. We're sharing a range of destinations to suit every budget and appetite, with activities to suit travelers of all ages. Whether you're planning a honeymoon, a family vacation, or solo travel, these 21 destinations are some of the most popular for summer 2025.



01 Puerto Rico

Where to stay: Hyatt Regency Grand Reserve Puerto Rico

Puerto Rico is one of the most popular Caribbean islands. It ticks all the boxes, from sandy beaches to picturesque mountains and ideal temperatures year-round. June is a great choice to avoid the crowds, with July to November being considered the low season. It's an outlier as a summer vacation destination as the high season is December to April when most American tourists visit. U.S. residents aren't required to have a passport to visit, and the casinos add an exotic feel to Puerto Rico's nightlife. You'll experience high temperatures in the mid-80s in August, while September typically has more rainfall. Popular destinations in Puerto Rico include Tortuga Beach, San Juan National Historic Site, and Cayo Icacos.

02 Florence

Where to stay: Hotel degli Orafi

Italy remains one of the most popular countries for summer vacations. It even features multiple times on this list of the best summer getaway spots. May to September offer the warmest temperatures but also the largest tourist crowds. Florence feels like stepping back through time as a Renaissance city with architectural masterpieces on almost every corner. It has several UNESCO World Heritage Sites and is undergoing a revival, becoming a contemporary city with its historic backdrop. It's suitable as a weekend getaway, a solo destination, or as part of a multi-city vacation through Italy. Places that are a must-see on any Florence itinerary include the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, the Uffizi Gallery, and Galleria dell'Accademia di Firenze. Plan to adventure through the city early in the morning to beat the heat and the crowds.



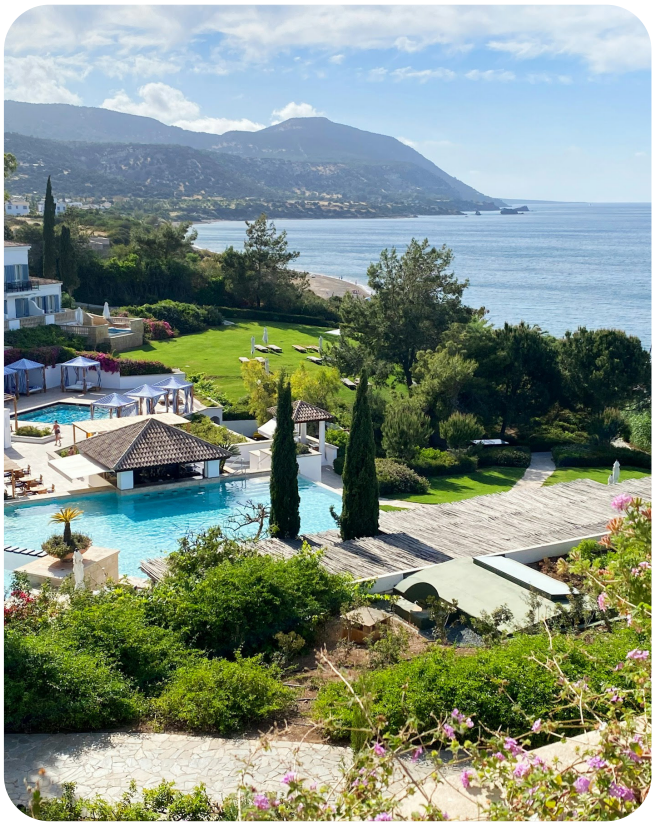


03 Machu Picchu

Where to stay: Sanctuary Lodge, A Belmond Hotel
Machu Picchu is a bucket list destination. It's a place everyone knows. The Lost City of the Incas is a UNESCO World Heritage site, and popular amongst adventure-seeking tourists and those fascinated by its archaeological significance. Guides are necessary to visit Machu Picchu with a ticketing system to impose a daily limit on tourists. Summer is the best time to visit Machu Picchu as it's the dry season. It offers the best hiking conditions for ticking the Inca Trail off your bucket list. Cusco, considered Peru's historic capital, is an ideal place to stay before or after climbing Machu Picchu. Other nearby towns include Aguas Calientes, a great spot to stop to acclimatize to the altitude before climbing Machu Picchu. You can take a train to Agus Calientes from Cusco, making it easy to explore all three places.

04 Cyprus

Where to stay: Royal Apollonia by Louis Hotels
Cyprus is a Mediterranean island often overlooked in favor of countries like Italy and Greece. While Cyprus is a great year-round destination, it offers slightly milder temperatures for those who can't deal with the extremely hot weather of places like Corfu. Must-see attractions include the Tomb of the Kings and Kourion Amphitheatre, two of Cyprus' most visited ancient sites. You can experience Cyprus like a local by exploring the seaside villages with scuba diving or sampling the best meze platters you'll ever taste. The Festival of the Floor is one of Cyprus' biggest summer celebrations with dancing, traditional music, and water-based sports.





05 Rio de Janeiro

Where to stay: Arena Leme Hotel

Brazil sits in the southern hemisphere, making the months of June to August some of the coldest in the year. However, its tropical climate means you'll still experience hot weather year-round. Spanish tapas are the most popular cuisine, with these restaurants being a great way to expand your horizons and test new foods. Any visit to Rio de Janeiro needs to include a visit to Christ the Redeemer, the iconic symbol of Brazil, Copacabana Beach, and the Centro district. New Year's Eve is one of the busiest times of the year, making the summer the best time to experience Rio de Janeiro with more competitive pricing.

06 Amalfi Coast

Where to stay: Hotel Aurora

The Amalfi Coast has been a popular location for summer vacations since the Roman era. This recommendation is everywhere you look on social media, thanks to its picturesque coastal views, offering a Mediterranean escape from reality. Sorrento is a small resort town that is famous for serving as inspiration for Byron and is a romantic destination. If you're looking for luxury, go no further than Positano, with its pink beaches and fashionable restaurants. Ravello is an Amalfi town that dates to the 5th century, a must-visit for history enthusiasts.





07 Barcelona

Where to stay: The Social Hub Barcelona Poblenou

Barcelona is unique as a summer getaway as it gives the option of a city break or a beach vacation. Spain's capital works as a weekend trip or as part of a multi-city European holiday. Famous for its nightlife, Barcelona's gothic architecture and old-school cuisine make it a city to visit at least once. Basilica de la Sagrada Familia is expected to finish its main construction in 2026, almost 150 years after its first stone was placed down. It's a must-see attraction for any Barcelona itinerary. Immerse yourself in Spanish culture by dining at a traditional tapas bar or visiting Santa Maria del Mar, a church built in the 14th century.

08 Paris

Where to stay: Snob Hotel

France was hosting the 2024 Olympics, making it one of the most popular travel destinations for that summer. Paris' extensive public transport network makes it easy to stay in the city and take a day trip to Disneyland Paris. It's essential to book ahead for any popular attractions this summer, from cultural experiences to theme park tickets. Paris is known for being the City of Lovers, but the cobblestone streets offer something for every traveler. It's a city that's alive throughout all hours of the day, whether you're watching the sunset along the Seine or discovering the city's famous music scene. The City of Lights requires a stop at the Eiffel Tower, where the lights sparkle for five minutes every hour from sunset to 1am. You'll see the lights twinkle best during the final showings.





09 Bali

Where to stay: FOX Jimbaran Beach Hotel

Bali isn't just for backpackers. This summer getaway destination is probably all over your social media. The best weather is during the dry spells of April to September with the tourist crowds arriving from July to August. It's a popular choice due to its affordability, making it ideal for solo travel and group trips. Bali is a holiday for adventure seekers and those who aren't afraid to test their fitness. Stay cool at Waterbom Bali, explore the Ulun Danu Beratan Temple, and get in touch with nature at the Bali Safari and Marine Park. If you want to detach from social media and have a digital cleanse, head on a yoga retreat to discover everything Bali and Indonesia have to offer.

10 Rome

Where to stay: The Independent Hotel

Rome offers some of the best dining experiences in the world. One of the most utilized cruise ports in the world, Rome is a vibrant city with its own unique charisma. Get up close and personal with ancient Roman artifacts, or tickle your taste buds with pasta freshly prepared in front of you. Must-see spots in Rome include the Vatican Museums, St Peter's Basilica, Palatino, and the Colosseum. You don't have to be a history fan to soak up the atmosphere of this ancient city with its awe-inspiring architecture. It's possible to have Rome as your base and explore other cities in Italy, including Pompeii, Florence, and Pisa.





11 Yellowstone National Park

Where to stay: Lake Yellowstone Hotel & Cabins
The popularity of the TV show "Yellowstone" has made the national park a must-see destination. The oldest national park in the USA, Yellowstone spreads across Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming. There are over 140 miles of shoreline for those who want to rent a boat with stagecoach adventures to experience the history of the national park. There's a range of accommodation options, from hotels within the Yellowstone National Park to nearby resorts. The National Park is spread out across 2.2 million acres, allowing you to spot wildlife, stargaze, and climb to the top of Mt. Washburn. You'll experience some of the most remote wilderness in the United States. It's a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

12 Vancouver

Where to stay: Executive Hotel Le Soleil
Looking for a city break that isn't New York or London? Try Vancouver. This Canadian city is easy to explore with public transport and is popular for families with kids. There are plenty of free things to do in Vancouver, including visiting Arbutus Greenway and Colbourne House. Must-see locations include Stanley Park, Science World, Capilano Suspension Bridge Park, and Granville Island Public Market. Escape the hustle and bustle of the city by heading to Kitsilano Beach along English Bay, which hosts the largest outdoor saltwater pools in the world.





13 Mexico

Where to stay: W Mexico City

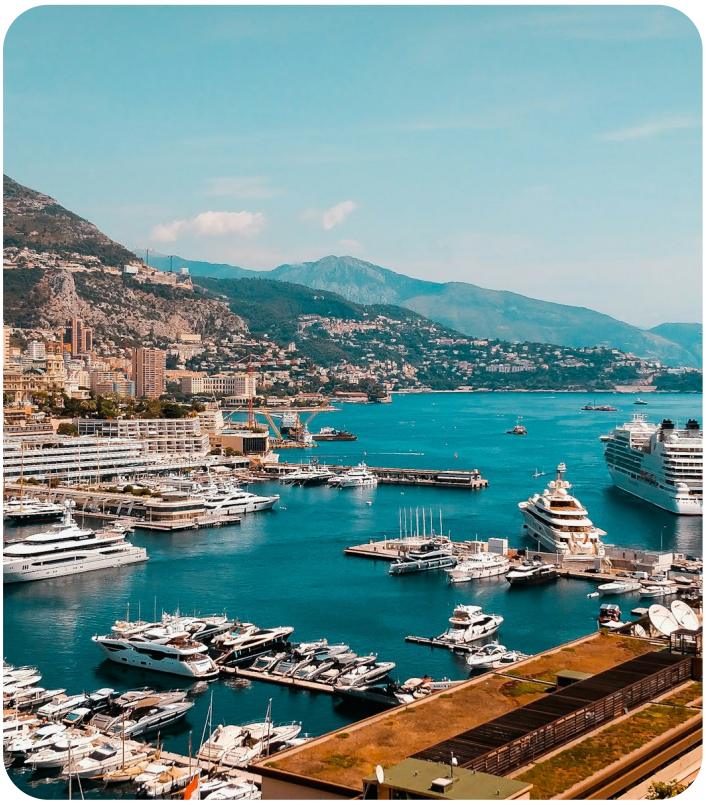
Mexico is unique as one of the few destinations that have fewer crowds during the summer. It's an ideal choice for travelers looking for an all-inclusive resort and a chance to experience the best of authentic Mexican cuisine. Explore the ancient Mayan ruins, relax on the tropical beaches, or sample traditional Margaritas alongside thirst-quenching craft beers. Several festivals are held in Mexico during the summer, including the Carnival of Veracruz, Guelaguetza, and the International Mariachi Festival. Cancun is ideal for a beach vacation with its exotic nightlife, while Oaxaca is best for those who want to explore Mexico's rich heritage and ancient ruins.

14 Charleston

Where to stay: Grand Bohemian Hotel Charleston, Autograph Collection

The picturesque streets of Charleston transport you to a bygone era of southern glamour. This U.S. city is considered an up-and-coming destination for international travelers. Although it's a small city in South Carolina, Charleston makes up for its size with local sites and culture. Charleston hosts several festivals throughout the year, focusing on jazz music, antiques, and the city's literary heritage. Whether you're an outdoor enthusiast or a foodie at heart, Charleston is guaranteed to steal your heart.





15 Monte Carlo

Where to stay: Fairmont Monte Carlo

Whether you're a fan of James Bond or live in the fast lane, Monte Carlo continues to fascinate travelers from around the world. While hotels in Monte Carlo demand top dollar, most tourists choose to stay in Nice and take the train into the Principality. The gorgeous views from the seaside look as if they're from an Old Hollywood movie, whether you're on a yacht or sipping an Aperol Spritz along the coast. Visit the Magnolia Plantation and Gardens, relax in the Waterfront Park, and take your Instagram pictures along Rainbow Row.

16 Morocco

Where to stay: Hotel & Ryads Barrière Le Naoura

Morocco is another destination that experiences its low season during the summer. If Marrakesh is on your bucket list, July and August are some of the best times to visit for more affordable flights and accommodation. Expect the coastal towns to be relatively busy with local tourists, but most of the main attractions will have moderate traffic. Book any outdoor activities for the morning and be prepared for the hot temperatures. The diversity of what Morocco has to offer makes it a metropolis, whether you're planning to trek mountains or work on your tan by the beach. Other cities in Morocco work considering include Casablanca, Rabat, and the famous, blue-washed town of Chefchaouen





17 New York City

Where to stay: Arlo SoHo

New York City is one of the most popular summer getaways for UK tourists, just as well-loved as the sunshine state of Florida. Over 1 million tourists visited from the UK in 2023, with the number expected to grow this summer. This urban landscape instantly captures your imagination as a focal point of the American Dream. Discover the history of America by visiting Ellis Island and the symbol of freedom by looking up at the Statue of Liberty. Plan a day trip to Coney Island, catch an outdoor concert, or see the city from above at the Top of the Rock. Other must-see locations include the Empire State Building, Central Park, and the Metropolitan Museum

18 South Africa

Where to stay: Hotel Sky Cape Town

May to October is considered the best time to visit South Africa, especially if you're planning a safari. You'll also get the best whale-watching opportunities during these months. While the summer is peak season, you can take advantage of the slightly cooler and drier weather, making animals easier to spot. Cape Town and Johannesburg are dynamic cities, while the Drakensberg Mountains put you at the heart of your own National Geographic documentary. Although June to August is the rainy season for cities like Cape Town, it provides the opportunity to explore South Africa on a budget. You'll also not have to deal with pesky mosquitoes during these months, as it's technically winter in South Africa. Kruger National Park is a popular choice for safaris, while Durban is ideal for whale watching.





19 New Zealand

Where to stay: Swiss-Belsuites Pounamu Queenstown

New Zealand is another popular destination in the Southern Hemisphere. Just like South Africa, you can take advantage of more competitive pricing and better offers by exploring this country from June to August. If you want a snow vacation this summer, check out Te Waipounamu, known as South Island, for some of the best skiing in New Zealand. The North Island experiences its highest rainfall from June to August, with most tourists heading for the South Island. Golden Bay and Abel Tasman National Park are worth adding to your itinerary. Book a cruise in the Bay of Islands to see dolphins up close or experience Maori culture in Taupo.

20 Tokyo

Where to stay: Hotel Chinzanso Tokyo

Wander through the streets of Tokyo and see what the future might hold. June to August is when humidity is at its highest in Tokyo, but you'll get to experience an array of local festivals, including Odaiba's "Tokyo Bay" festival with a firework display set against the city skyline. Immerse yourself in Japanese culture or plan a visit to one of its many theme parks, from Tokyo DisneySea to Sanrio Puroland and Tokyo Joypolis. If you're a fan of theme parks, Tokyo is where the adults can have fun with the most innovative and technologically advanced attractions. Pack an umbrella with your passport if you're planning to visit in June or July. These months are the rainy season in Tokyo.





21 Athens

Where to stay: Brown Kubic Athens Hotel

Greece remains one of the most popular countries in Europe for international travelers. It offers scenic landscapes with easy access to the seaside for tourists who want a diverse itinerary. Athens offers the perfect starting point to explore the most popular Greek islands, including Santorini and Mykonos. This city is reinventing itself around its ancient heritage, with the Parthenon and Acropolis at its heart. Visit the home of the original Olympic games or sample its iconic street food. There are plenty of free museums to explore, with day trips available to Nafplio, Delphi, Corinthia, and Mycenae.

March 2025

TAROT

Loveena Crystal Gaze

(Tea and Coffee Cup Reader, Tarot card reader)



ARIES
(March 21- April 19)

Universe has heard your prayers, and they are being answered. Have faith and trust that everything is working in your favour. Have positive thoughts. Business deals will yield positive gains.

Angel msg- Major changes for the better is in the works for your Career and personal life.

TAURUS
(April 20- May 21)

This is right time for you to move forward, take advantage of divine timing, and make your move. Financial stability is highlighted. Thank universe for blessings you with good opportunities in your Career.

Angel msg- All arguments and conflicts will be resolved.

GEMINI
(May 22- June 20)

Leave unhealthy situation, walk away from negative people, situations and enjoy new doors that open as a result. Accept and allow changes to happen. Abundance is coming your way.

Angel msg- Heaven is sending you divine love, to take away all your setbacks.

CANCER
(June 21-July 22)

Positive energy is Surrounding you, worst is behind you. Relax, Miraculous Solutions will appear in your life. Your dreams are blooming very fast. Stay Optimistic.

Angel msg- Angels are bringing miracles in your life.

LEO
(July 23- Aug 22)

Angels want you to be happy today and always. New dawn is coming in your life, taking away all delays, Setbacks in money, love relationship

Angel msg- Celebration time begins for you.

VIRGO
(Aug 23- Sept 22)

You have the power, don't descend, fly high. Be discreet about your Career and projects. Expect the unexpected, something wonderful will happen.

Angel msg- Let Universe bring Changes in your Career.

LIBRA
(Sept 23- Oct 22)

Heaven is working behind the scenes to help you, even if you don't see results yet. Universe sends special blessing just for you. Accept with open arms.

Angel msg- shift to new home is possible.

SCORPIO
(Oct 23- Nov 22)

Take care before signing important documents. A family property under litigation would work out in your favour Release your doubts to heaven

Angel msg- Your troubles and Setbacks are over.

SAGITTARIUS
(Nov 23- Dec 21)

Growth in your Career, your wishes have been heard. Travel for work will be beneficial. Deals will be finalized.

Angel msg- Parents need your care and attention.

CAPRICON
(Dec 22- Jan 20)

Work diligently towards fulfillment of a cherished ambition. Your dreams are blooming. Success in business ventures is indicated.

Angel msg- Give your cares and worries to Angels.

AQUARIUS
(Jan 21- Feb 18)

Your prayers for financial support have been heard. New avenues of income and Opportunities coming your way. Allow yourself to glow in the positive Aura of the universe .

Angel msg- Spread your wings.

PISCES
(Feb 19- March 20)

Money inflow is encouraging, look forward to new growth in your Career. Your dreams are blooming in the right direction. Hv faith.

Angel msg- Reach for your goals.

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