

# MUMBAI CALLING

India's "Maximum City", Akanksha Singh discovers, is a cultural hub that delivers diversity and sophistication in unmatched measure

**T**his city is a lot of things. It's the birthplace of Bollywood, the cradle of Indian fashion and the country's largest city. If New Delhi is India's mind, then Mumbai is its soul. Home to everyone, from millionaires to aspiring artists, this is a metropolitan city rich with culture and charisma.

It's got swanky bars and dining options, but that's not what makes the "Maximum City" interesting. Its districts are perhaps best compared to New York's boroughs. The main town, lovingly called "SoBo" (South Bombay), is the old town. It is Mumbai's Manhattan — an amalgamation of old-world charm, with its ample Indo-Gothic and Art Deco buildings, and new-world high rises. From the neighbourhood of Colaba in the south to Mahim in the north, SoBo is home to several iconic Mumbai destinations, including Kamala Mills, a trendy food and drink destination in Lower Parel, and Kala Ghoda in Fort, an area full of historic art galleries, libraries, boutiques and eateries.

Across the Bandra-Worli Sea Link Bridge, there is Bandra — a once hip and up-and-coming area, much like Brooklyn. Bandra is culturally dense, young, and peppered with independent bookshops, galleries and bars.

With everything from high-street and couture to street markets and beyond, Mumbai is both a cultural destination and a shopper's paradise. We've rounded up a few must-dos for the luxury traveller.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES





**Left:** The Royal Opera House, Mumbai is India's only surviving opera house  
**Opposite page:** Rooftop bar Aer at Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai offers the best views of the city



**Above:** The Sea Lounge at The Taj Mahal Palace hotel  
**Right:** Cocktails at The Table



**Venture out on a sunrise cruise** The view of Mumbai's cityscape from the sea, complete with the row of palm trees and Deco buildings lining Marine Drive (aka Queen's Necklace), is wondrous. As the sun shatters over the sea and saffron hues of the sunrise fill the air, brightening the coastline, you'll hear the first rustles of the morning as the city awakes. Yacht Tours Mumbai (yachttoursmumbai.in) offers a variety of charter options.

As the morning fog lifts, you'll even see the sun as it peeks from behind the mountains at Mandwa, a quaint village just outside Mumbai, before rays trickle onto the skyline and the Gateway of India in Colaba. Trust me, waking at 5am to catch the sunrise at 6.30am is utterly worth it.

**Breakfast at Hotel Harbour View** A quaint hotel in a newly restored Deco building, Harbour View Hotel is an iconic Mumbai landmark. Previously a family-owned guest house, this heritage site offers sea-view rooms that look onto the city's Apollo Bunder harbour, where The Gateway of India, an arch monument erected to commemorate King George V and Queen Mary's 1911 trip to India, is located. The hotel's rooftop Bayview Cafe offers this view too, best enjoyed with a hot cup of chai and local akuri (scrambled eggs, Parsi style), a local delicacy.

**Take in a matinee at the Royal Opera House, Mumbai** Theatre is a pillar of Mumbai culture and the Royal Opera House, Mumbai has a suite of shows for you to take in, year-round. Completed in 1916, India's only surviving opera house, which reopened in late 2016 after 23 years of closure, features a famed Baroque façade and gilded interiors with velvet couches. It hosts an average of 200 performances annually. In addition to lectures and local performances, the 2019 season, between April and June, includes two stellar plays: the kid-friendly *Snow White and the 7 Dwarfs* and Heather Raffo's critically acclaimed *9 Parts of Desire*.

**Lunch at The Table** Taking third spot in the Condé Nast Traveller & Himalayan Sparkling Top Restaurant Awards 2018, The Table is a contemporary and elegant spot in the heart of Colaba (one of Mumbai's original seven islands, now reclaimed and integrated into one massive metropolis). With a globally inspired menu that boasts the finest ingredients – many of which come from the restaurant's farm in the nearby coastal town of Alibaug – and impeccably plated dishes, The Table offers a serene retreat from the hustle and bustle of the city. Be sure to book a table well in advance, and order the boneless chicken wings – bite-sized, succulent cubes of chicken served on a sticky honey-ginger glaze that will melt in your mouth.

**Shop local and international** Whether you're in the market for custom button-downs from Bombay Shirt Company, ethnic wear

PHOTOS: ROYAL OPERA HOUSE, MUMBAI; FOUR SEASONS HOTEL MUMBAI; THE TAJ MAHAL PALACE; THE TABLE



from Ritu Kumar, or effortlessly chic women's fashion at Bungalow 8, Mumbai's fashion has something for every palate, with stores dotting the city. Start from the flagship stores in Kemps Corner and make your way towards the Taj Shopping Arcade in Colaba for your fix of Dior, Louis Vuitton, Bvlgari and more. (Incidentally, according to Julius Baer's 2018 Wealth Report, Mumbai is the cheapest place in Asia to buy female luxury goods – although locals may not agree, citing the high luxury tax).

In addition to the street markets, including the most well-known one in Colaba, there is a selection of malls, markets and standalone stores in Fort and Kala Ghoda, the city's art district; be sure to stop by the dozens of boutique clothing and jewellery stores there.

**Afternoon tea at The Taj Mahal Palace hotel** The Mumbai skyline was forever changed in 1903 when industrialist Jamsetji Tata built The Taj Mahal Palace hotel. The heritage building in Indo-Gothic style, located right across the Gateway of India and the Colaba harbour, has hosted famous visitor after famous visitor. From jazz musicians such as Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong to the first families of the US such as the Clintons and the Obamas, anyone who's anyone stays in The Taj Mahal Palace when in Mumbai. Both the food and service are top-notch.

Afternoon tea at the hotel's Sea Lounge is an experience in itself. Apart from being a great venue in which to unwind and admire views of the Arabian Sea, the lounge offers a menu that is the perfect balance between classic local dishes – including the city's many street food dishes

– and continental fare remnant of British India. Opt for the Maharaja High Tea, with a bottle of bubbly, and just sit back and enjoy the soft live jazz.

**Sunset drinks at Aer at Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai** Aer prides itself on being an open-air bar with the perfect blend of ambience and service. Located on the 34th floor of Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai, the city's highest rooftop bar boasts unparalleled views of the "Maximum City", along with award-winning mixologists and a food menu to suit. Nibble on some cheese-less pizza (an in-house speciality) and toast the sunset with a Moscow mule, then watch Mumbai's nightlife unfurl from this much-sought-after vantage point.

**Discover Indian cuisine reinvented at Ziya** With an Indian menu that had been rejuvenated and reimagined by Michelin-starred Chef Vineet Bhatia, Ziya breaks free of convention and embraces creativity. Ziya, which means "radiance", breathes utter delight into simple, classic dishes. Everything, from the service to the gold-enshrined décor, is a treat to accompany your meal. Be sure to try the cranberry and goat cheese samosas, and the lamb guchchi korma with truffle oil.

Ziya – along with eminent Italian restaurant Vetro – is housed in The Oberoi, Mumbai, which is considered the gold standard in hospitality in India. With rooms that overlook the harbour and an executive club, The Belvedere, this hotel caters to both leisure and business travellers alike.