

## #GENETICS

### A Single Human Ancestor

We all used to have brown eyes. Then, something strange happened around 10,000 years ago.



In 2008, a study led by Hans Eiberg from the University of Copenhagen claimed that all blue eyes link back to a single ancestor, who lived between 6,000 and 10,000 years ago. The concept has continually cropped up in

#### The Mutation

The research shows that the *OCA2* gene codes play a key role in the production of melanin, the pigment that colours hair, skin, and eyes. Eiberg's theory is that a mutation occurred between 6,000 and 10,000 years ago that switched on the ability for the gene to dilute brown eyes to blue. "Originally, we all had brown eyes," he said in 2008. "But a genetic mutation, affecting the *OCA2* gene in our chromosomes, resulted in the creation of a switch, which literally

#### The Combination

He refers to that 'switch' as a specific genetic mutation event, and believes that it only produced the first-ever blue-eyed human, thanks to the mutation of the regulating *HERC2* gene. The combination is the only known way eyes can turn blue (in contrast, red hair can happen for one of nearly a dozen reasons). That mutation remained in place for the next generation, meaning the reduced production of melanin in the iris allowed for the continued dilution of brown to blue. Since that multi-thousand-years-ago switch, the progression of blue-eyed humans has only pushed forward. Multiple research

papers concluded that the first mutation was probably somewhere in Europe, likely during the Neolithic expansion. The blue-eyed march continued as populations dispersed. Roughly 10 per cent of all humans have blue eyes, but that number varies wildly depending on regions, with Scandinavian countries having a higher propensity for blue eyes. "Deemed a neutral mutation," Eiberg says, "the eye-colour example simply shows that nature is constantly shuffling the human genome, creating a genetic cocktail of human chromosomes and trying out different changes as it does so."

# How do Crazy Rich Indians holiday?

Amit Kalsi of Experiential Travel Journeys has clients whose idea of a luxury vacation is visiting game reserves in Rwanda and Botswana. "Such a holiday for a family of four can cost Rs. 75 lakh, or more," he says. Included in this package are luxury tents that come with butlers, helicopter transfers, and in some cases, rent for satellite phones. Every other month, Kalsi sends his clients an email with captioned pictures of exotic locales such as Patagonia, breath-taking private islands in the Mediterranean Sea and remote chalets in the Swiss Alps. These are not 'deals on offer' but ideas to inspire them to travel.



A view of the Victoria Falls during the dry season.



Anjali Sharma  
Senior journalist & wildlife enthusiast

These days, vacations have moved beyond staying in luxury hotels and shopping for designer goods. One of Arti's clients wanted to visit Japan to watch the famous cherry blossoms in bloom. But she "didn't want to share her cherry blossoms with anyone," said Arti. She wanted it to be just she and her husband, who would savour the view. Arti tailor-made a seven-day walking trip, taking pains to find a secluded route. The holiday also involved stays in traditional Japanese homes, meeting with a soba noodle maker and a ceramic potter, to get a glimpse of the local culture. Lina Morarka dreams of Africa. The jewellery designer takes at least six holidays every year with her family, and their current favourite destination is the beautiful continent. They have visited it five times so far, albeit not for run-of-the-mill safaris. Their trips have involved spending time with a family of gorillas

in their natural habitat, seeing an elephant give birth and a pride of lions fighting over a kill. "Africa just pulls us in," said Kolkata-based Morarka. When not admiring the wildlife of Africa, the Morarkas work towards checking off their bucket list of '50 greatest restaurants' to eat at. "We have been to 20, which include *Gagagan* in Bangkok and a 40 course meal at *El Celler de Can Roca* in Spain, (which has been) voted the best restaurant in the world twice," said Morarka. "I have even tried *baty eye!*" The Morarkas' sojourns typify the kind of holidays India's super-rich take today. From renting footballer Cristiano Ronaldo's yacht for 25,000 Euros a day to taking a microflight over the Victoria Falls or going on a gypsy music trail in Hungary, luxury holidays today are less about the been-there-done-that destinations and all about unique curated experiences. Money is no object for the ultra-rich. "Five years ago, rich Indians were still finding their way, (but) now, their tastes have evolved," said Lovelace Arun of Panache World, a travel agency that creates handcrafted experiential trips to select places. "They are competing with the world to tell their (travel) stories." Arun says that her agency alone sends around 100 Indians every year on luxury holidays, abroad, and the number is only set to rise.



A view of the Victoria Falls during the dry season, Japan.

## #TRAVEL TALES

### Spending No Bar

Amit Kalsi of Experiential Travel Journeys has clients whose idea of a luxury vacation is visiting game reserves in Rwanda and Botswana. "Such a holiday for a family of four can cost Rs. 75 lakh or more," he says. Included in this package are luxury tents that come with butlers, helicopter transfers, and in some cases, rent for satellite phones. Every other month, Kalsi sends his clients an email with captioned pictures of exotic locales such as Patagonia, breath-taking private islands in the Mediterranean Sea and remote chalets in the Swiss Alps. These are not 'deals on offer' but ideas to inspire them to travel. Industry experts say that this

### Luxe Hotels are not all

Understatement wasn't the flavour for another of Shoma's clients, six people from a business family in North India, who had no qualms, spending Rs. 1.2 crore for a six-day trip to the world's party capital, Ibiza. Their extravagance included going above the usual rate of 1,000 Euros and spend-

The newlyweds' playlist and met them backstage. The groom visited the Audi and Porsche factories to learn how to handle their race cars. Once he was certified, a simulated race was organised for him at the Ascari race track, where he competed with other semi-professional racers. His wife attended a three-day workshop in France on how perfumes are made, worn and shopped for. The couple also visited a watch factory in Switzerland, where a custom-made watch was gifted to them, a wedding gift from a relative, who wanted them to receive it in the Switzerland factory. While on their honeymoon, only one dedicated staff member was allowed to contact the couple. She coordinated their flights and bookings. Their entire luggage shopping and items, that they didn't want to use, was shipped to their London flat after every stop.

Cappgemini's financial services analysis in 2018, and is the fastest in the world. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation has predicted that India will account for 30 million outbound tourists by 2020, a sharp rise from the present figure of 25 million. The same report says that Indian tourists don't scrim, they are among the world's highest spenders per visit, abroad and this spend is estimated to rise from the 2018 figure of \$23 billion to \$45 billion by 2023. Although, that was much before the pandemic, and has queered all calculations and preparations. Be that as it may, the study is an indicator of things to come.

Cristiano Ronaldo. At their hotel in Ibiza, each family member wanted a suite. They chartered a big plane for a 30-minute flight to another European destination, no small-sized plane for their daughter, and despite the short trip, they wanted champagne served on board. All this for 30,000 Euros.

### Customised Experiences

Their laundry was managed out of Chennai. Their clothes were washed and delivered to their next destination or if they did not need them, if they did for the next stopover. It was a logistical challenge and took the travel agent three months to plan. The choices of the ultra-rich are not very different from the lives of the characters fleshed out by Kevin Kwan in his bestselling novel *Crazy Rich Asians*. Some of them are over-the-top, some understated, but almost all of them are in search of meaning in *exclusivity*. But, as Arun says, "Some crazy rich Indians can beat crazy rich Asians any day." Closer to home, the super-rich of India choose from 'glamorous camping' in Ladakh to opulent 'palace' hotels in Rajasthan and from 'fancy train rides' across the peninsula to 'village art appreciation walks,'

## International Plastic Bag Free Day



Plastic pollution is a global catastrophe and sadly, it is a man-made one. Did you know that approximately 500 billion plastic bags are used on a global scale? Just think about how many of these bags will end up littered all over the planet. *International Plastic Bag Free Day* is dedicated to heightening awareness about these and very real and pressing issues brought about by this most regular of disposable carrying devices. We are reminded that those bags, that we pick up from the retailers, are used for an incredibly short time, usually under 25 minutes, and are then disposed of.

## Offbeat luxury

One such reinvention is 'off-beat luxury' that promises the traveller all the worldly pleasures along with a never-before-seen type of experience. Sample this. Your hand-crafted tents are pitched at an altitude of 11,800 feet somewhere in Ladakh and, as you sip your morning tea served by a personal butler, you gaze at some of the highest peaks in the region. Your day's activity could include a specially arranged polo match, rafting down the Zaskar river, lunch high in the Wari-La pass, and it could end with a visit by the village oracle. Dinner would include the finest wines, of course, and a meal prepared by acclaimed chefs. All that would come at a cost of about \$1,400 a night. "The purpose of the camp was to bring the hidden resources, the far-flung places in India to the luxury traveller," said Rajnish Sabharwal, chief operating officer of The Ultimate Travelling Camp, the company that runs the Ladakh camp. It also runs luxury camps in the northeastern state of Nagaland and in the south at the UNESCO world heritage site, Hampi, overlooking 14th-century ruins. "Ladakh was viewed as a backpackers' destination till 'glamping' began, five years ago. At the time, the most expensive hotel in the region was priced at \$250," Shoba Mohan, founder partner of RARE India told CNBC. Her company markets 63 properties that include palaces, luxury tents and wildlife lodges.



Patagonia.

## Designer Holidays

Mohan is a great proponent of experiential and outdoor luxury holidays. "To see a snow leopard in the wild is a luxury in itself," she said. The hotels that she markets are often set away from the 'repetitive and regular routes.' While the northwestern Indian state of Rajasthan continues to be a no-brainer, when it comes to selling a destination to the high-end traveller, with its palaces and forts and the concen-

tration of some of India's highest-priced hotels, people like Mohan are looking to market little-known destinations within the state. One such property is *Chitra Sagar*, a tented accommodation built on the banks of a dam, between the two big cities and tourist hubs of Jodhpur and Jaipur. The former royals, who own that place, personally look after the guests. The food served is from the repertoire of their family recipes, which includes a dish made with locally grown fenugreek, which is available only 15 days in a year. Today luxury is more curated and immersive. (You) hand-hold (tourists) through every stage of the experience," Karan Anand, head of relationships for travel company Cox & Kings, told CNBC. Experiences could range from a night walk by a trained herpetologist, when on a wildlife safari, a classical dance performance, specially choreographed for the guest or tea tasting with a sommelier, said those in the travel business.

## Sampling India's vastness

India's cultural and geographical diversity is what makes it compete with other countries also vying for the top-dollar-paying traveller, experts said. "India, as a destination, figures 8th or 9th on a well-heeled traveller's list, after he or she has done Africa," said Narayanaswamy.

## #EVENT

# A JAZZY EVENING IN JAIPUR

Jaipur's Clarks Amer came alive with the soulful sounds of AKODA, a French Reunionese Jazz trio on a Sunday evening. The band, touring India for 'Fête de la Musique,' captivated the audience with their unique blend of Creole rhythms and original compositions. Highlights included the enthusiastic participation of children from the Indian Women Impact NGO, who gained valuable exposure to French music and culture.



Valerie Chane Tef, Founder of the band.



AKODA performing at Clarks Amer.



Tusharika Singh  
Freelance writer and city blogger

As June bid adieu, the melodious strains of French Reunionese Jazz drifted through Jaipur's Clarks Amer, marking the month of World Music Day in a truly enchanting fashion. On the last Sunday evening of June, AKODA, a Bordeaux-based trio led by the charismatic pianist Valerie Chane Tef, mesmerized music lovers with their soulful tunes. Touring India under the banner of 'Fête de la Musique,' the band's journey began in Delhi on June 21 and concluded in Jaipur, with stops in Bangalore, Mumbai, and Kolkata. Featuring Thomas Boude on bass and Eric Perez on percussion, AKODA's performance was a celebration of their latest album, 'Nout Souk,' released in 2022, and their earlier work, 'Muzik pou to ker.'



A view of the audience.

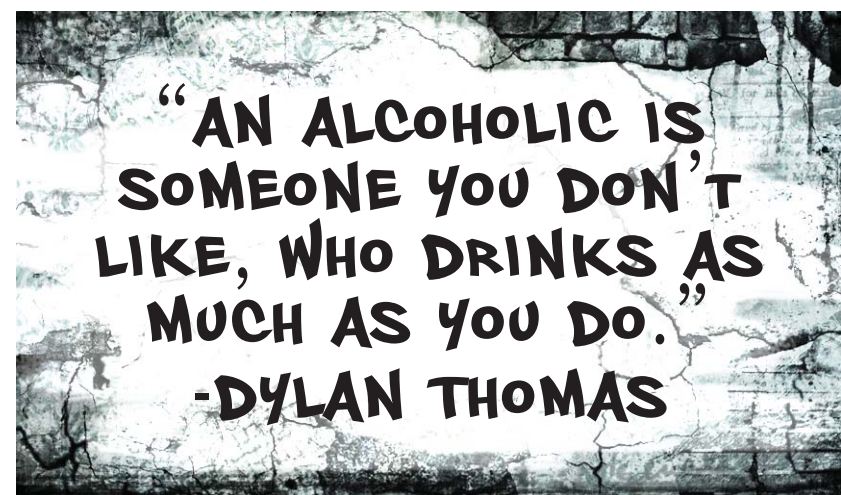
from 2019. Their infectious 'joie de vivre' made it a night to remember for the music lovers of Pink City. AKODA's performance drew from the rich musical traditions of Reunion, Guadeloupe, and Martinique islands, seamlessly blending these influences with their own invented language and distinctive Jazz style. Their music resonated deeply with the attendees, who could not resist shaking a leg and grooving to the foot tapping music. Despite the language barrier, the Jaipurites were swept away by the trio's vibrant rhythms and soulful melodies. From romantic ballads to energetic dance numbers, AKODA captivated the packed audience with their eclectic mix of Creole Jazz.



The attendees shake a leg to the jazzy tunes.

Valerie Chane Tef, pianist and composer from the Reunion island, began studying classical piano at the age of 7. However, it is Jazz and Creole music which lead her to her career. This was her third time in India and first time in Jaipur. She brought a captivating fusion of contemporary jazz infused with her rich cultural heritage. A unique highlight of the evening was the presence of children from the Indian Women Impact NGO, who have been learning French with Alliance Française Jaipur. This evening provided them with an enriching exposure to French music and culture. The event was organized by The French Institute in India and the Alliance Française Jaipur in collaboration with Clarks Amer.

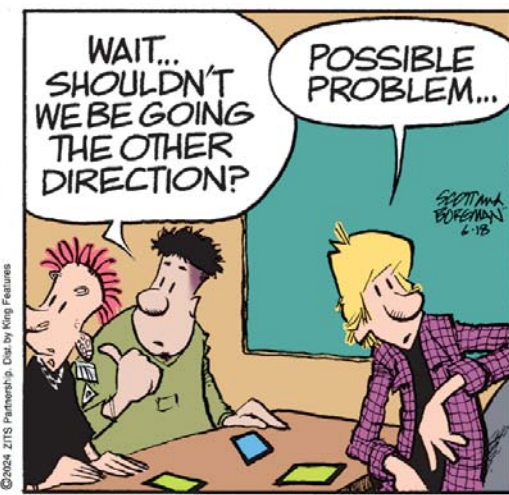
## THE WALL



## BABY BLUES



## ZITS



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman

