



Where to Travel in 2026

The start of the New Year signals a good time not just to plan your travels but also to look for unusual destinations that are waiting to be discovered...

By Bindu Gopal Rao

Tehri Lake offers an exciting contrast with its vibrant water sports, including jet skiing, kayaking, and boating—making it a complete mountain getaway



Mithun Jha, Director-Sales and Operations, SNVA Traveltech (Travomint)



Rohit Kohli, Founder, Away&Co



Anurag Jain, executive vice president – APMEA, RateGain



Navneet Sharma, CEO and MD, Lion Group

We speak to experts in the hospitality, travel, and trade industries to help list 10 destinations that must be on your travel radar in 2026.

Jorhat

Jorhat is more than just a destination; it is a live narrative of Assam’s cultural, spiritual, and ecological legacy. Once the final capital of the Ahom kingdom, it reflects centuries of cultural refinement shaped by art, governance, and devotion. Located near the world’s largest river island, Majuli, this place offers a strong spiritual vibe. “Despite years of change and erosion, neo-Vaishnavite cultures here continue to be preserved. Here, time does not pass; it lingers in the aroma of freshly brewed

tea. In addition to this, the gracefulness of classical Sattriya traditions and the purity of the inhabitants create an experience that feels deeply rooted yet gently transformative. Today’s traveller seeks meaning over movement, and Jorhat has the capability to stand out as a destination that nurtures curiosity as well as consciousness,” says Mithun Jha, Director-Sales and Operations, SNVA Traveltech (Travomint).

Gurez Valley

Gurez Valley is a place where nature and history come together and silence speaks in powerful undertones. It was once an important route on the ancient Silk Road, connecting cultures, trade, and people. However, today, it remains a secluded



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Svata Katerina Resort is in the Czech Republic with a sparsely populated landscape



Anirudh Lakhotia, Director, Ivory Destinations Pvt Ltd



Sanjay Sharma, Sustainable Tourism Curator, Aramya Hospitality LLP



Nitika Khandelwal (IAS), District Magistrate of Tehri Garhwal, Uttarakhand



Alexia Laine, director, Courchevel Tourism Board



Lara Soldičić Vodarić, Director of Sales, Leisure & Corporate, Lošinj Hotels & Villas

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frontier that holds stories of both continuity and separation. “Its wooden houses, long winters and the ever-flowing Kishanganga River reflect a life in harmony with nature. There is a calmness at this place that makes people slow down and reflect. In 2026, Gurez will not merely be known, but it will be deeply felt, especially by travellers who are in search of authenticity, depth, and emotional connection,” adds Jha.

Chettinad

Chettinad, in Tamil Nadu’s Sivaganga district, is one of those places that quietly stays with you long after you’ve left. Once home to the Chettiar merchant community, the region is known for its grand mansions, homes that tell stories of a time when families here traded across continents and brought the world back with them. “But Chettinad isn’t just about architecture. It is equally about flavour. The cuisine here is bold, layered, and rooted in tradition, with recipes passed down through generations and meals that feel as much like a cultural experience as they do a culinary one,” says Rohit Kohli, Founder, Away&Co.

Dzukou Valley

Dzukou Valley feels like one of those places you almost don’t expect to exist - vast, quiet, and untouched in a way that’s becoming increasingly rare. Set high in the hills between Nagaland and Manipur, the landscape opens into rolling green meadows, gentle streams, and an overwhelming sense of stillness. “In the monsoon months, the valley transforms completely. Wildflowers blanket the hills, including the rare Dzukou lily, creating a landscape that feels almost surreal. And yet, what stays with you most isn’t just the beauty. It is the silence. Getting here requires a trek, and that’s part of what keeps Dzukou special. It naturally filters out mass tourism, making the experience feel more personal and more earned. The journey up, the changing views, and the quiet moments along the way all become as memorable as the destination itself,” explains Kohli.

Varanasi

Varanasi has been a major religious destination for years, but what is driving sustained growth now is the way pilgrimage is blending with culture-led travel. Travellers are coming for darshan and temple visits, but they are also staying for the full experience of the city, the Ganga Aarti, sunrise boat rides, ghat walks, devotional music, local food, festivals, and the everyday theatre of life along the river. “The continued expansion of organised aarti experiences across ghats, including newer daily evening aartis at Lalita Ghat after earlier additions at Namoo Ghat, shows that this demand is not new or temporary; it has

been building consistently and now requires wider visitor dispersal beyond Dashashwamedh Ghat because of crowd intensity. What is also notable about Varanasi is how strongly it performs in digital travel culture,” says Anurag Jain, executive vice president – APMEA, RateGain.

Gokarna

Gokarna, on the other hand, is emerging as a popular choice for travellers looking for a quieter and more offbeat coastal escape. Known for beaches such as Om Beach and Kudle Beach, it offers a slower pace, scenic beauty, and a more relaxed atmosphere

than many traditional beach hotspots. “What makes Gokarna stand out is that it offers the charm of a beach destination without feeling overly commercial. It fits well with the growing preference for places that feel more authentic, less packaged and more experience-led. In that sense, Gokarna is increasingly being seen as an underrated alternative to Goa, especially for travellers seeking a more laid-back and distinctive coastal experience,” adds Jain.

Narwar

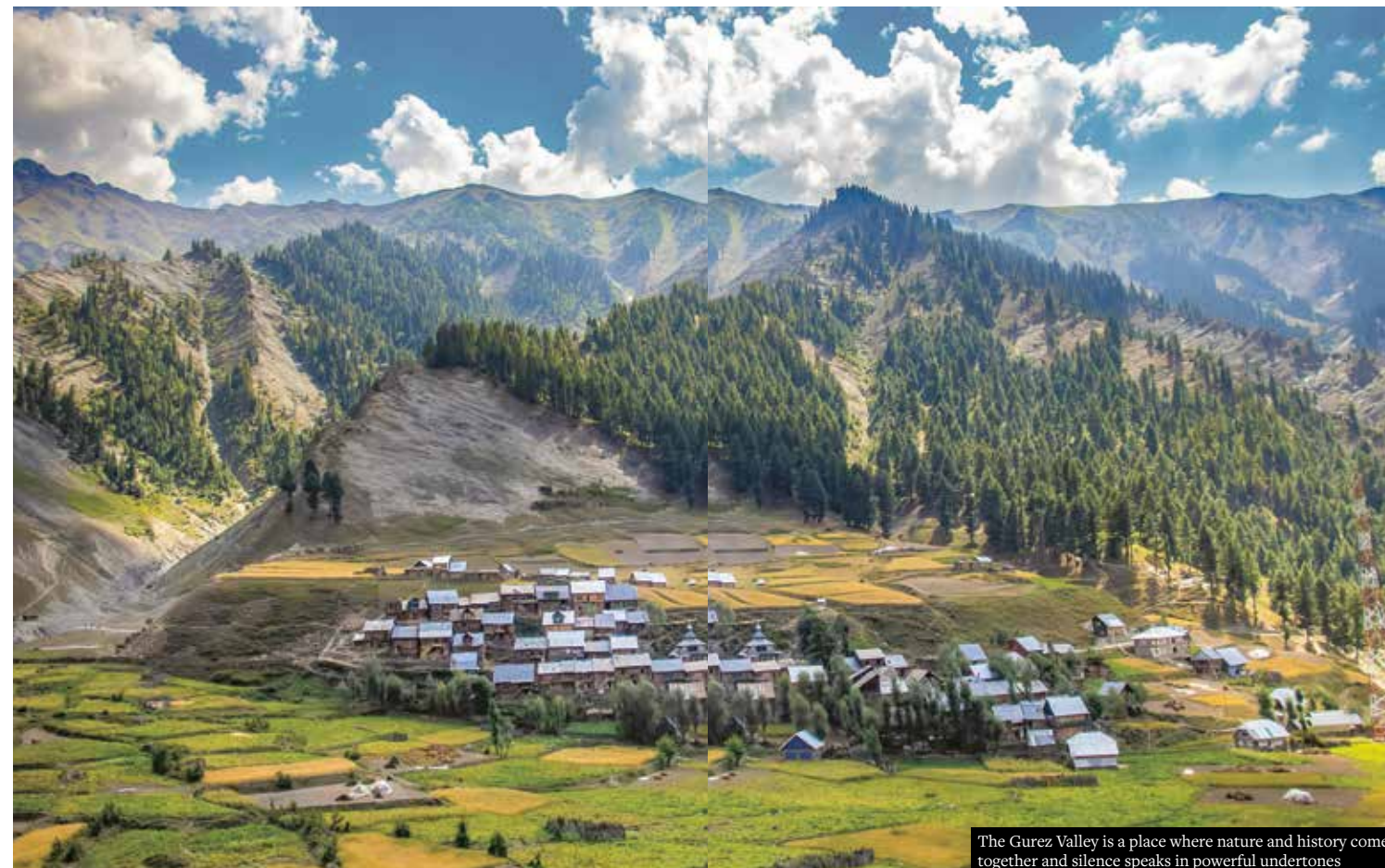
Narwar, located in the scenic Shivpuri district of Madhya Pradesh, is steadily emerging as one of central India’s most promising nature and wildlife destinations. Surrounded by lakes, forests and historic landscapes, the region offers a unique blend of wilderness, heritage, and slow travel that today’s experiential travellers increasingly seek. “At the heart of this emerging destination is the Narwar Lakefront Resort, a nature-focused property that has helped place Narwar on the modern tourism map,” says Navneet Sharma, CEO and MD, Lion Group. The destination’s appeal is further strengthened by its proximity to two of India’s most talked-about wildlife landscapes. Madhav National Park, recently gaining renewed attention as a tiger reserve, and Kuno National Park, globally recognised for the cheetah reintroduction programme, place Narwar within an exciting wildlife tourism corridor.

Guniyalekh

Guniyalekh is your zen between the tourism hotspots. A picturesque, old-world hamlet just seven hours from Delhi-NCR and a 45-min drive from hill stations like Bhimtal, Naukuchiyatal and Mukteshwar. A quiet yet connected location, Guniyalekh allows you to make quick day trips to these and many more destinations while giving you the opportunity to retreat to your base, which takes you back to what hill holidays were meant to be. Anirudh Lakhotia, Director, Ivory Destinations Pvt Ltd, says, “It is known for the ideal old-world hill station charm, with Himalayan views, greenery, peace, and solitude far away from the cities’ hustle. Known for Kumaoni cuisine, birdwatching, interacting with the local villagers, and just relaxing in your own space, is what this destination offers. The Chamomile Estate, where the air is scented with pine, is where time slows, and silence becomes a companion. This estate embodies a new language of Himalayan hospitality, one that is intuitive, wellness-led, and intimately personal.”

Kanatal

Kanatal, situated just two hours from Rishikesh in the serene hills of Uttarakhand, is still an unexplored and emerging destination, a must-watch for 2026. “From scenic mountain trails and immersive forest bathing treks to adrenaline-pumping mountain biking and jungle safaris, Kanatal caters to both thrill-seekers and mindful travellers. A perfect blend of adventure and wellness. Cultural explorers can enjoy Saur village tours to experience the local lifestyle of living or can trek to the revered Surkanda Devi Temple or opt for a convenient ropeway for transit. Just a short drive away, Tehri Lake offers an exciting contrast with its vibrant water sports, including jet skiing, kayaking, and boating—making it a complete mountain getaway,” says Sanjay Sharma, Sustainable Tourism Curator, Aramya Hospitality LLP.



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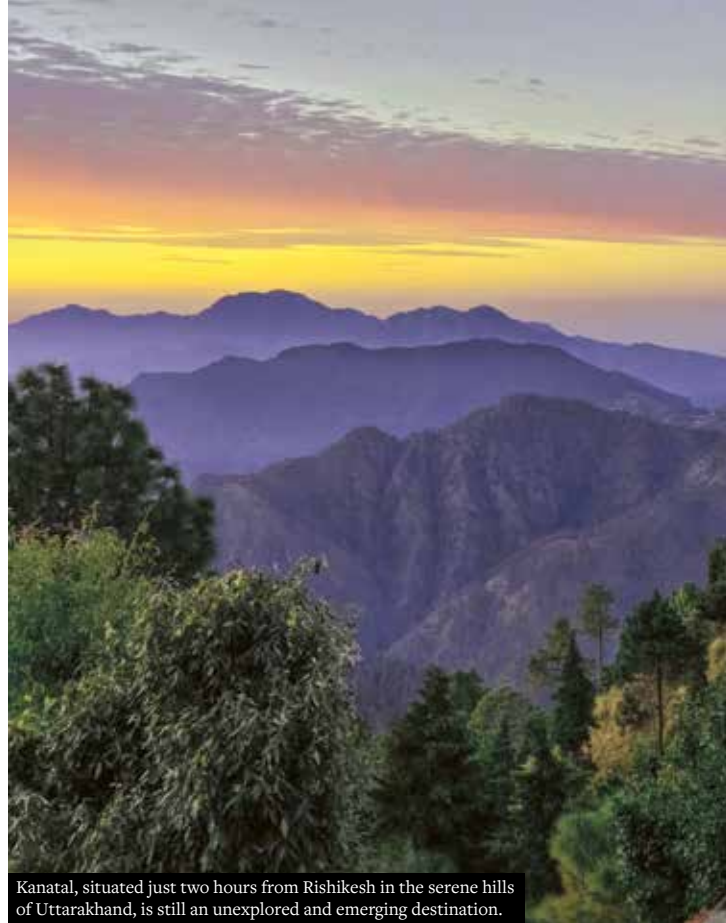
Tehri

Located in the Garhwal region of Uttarakhand, the district of Tehri has multiple locations that have often been overlooked and under the radar for most people visiting Uttarakhand. “Though close to Dehradun, the climate here varies from subtropical in lower areas to alpine in the higher altitudes of the district, which translates to pleasant summers and cold winters and moderate to high rainfall in the monsoon. It often snows here during the peak winter months, specifically from late December to February. It has the right mix of breathtaking locations and adventure activities, including water sports (parasailing and jet skiing at the Tehri Lake and Dam), treks, birdwatching, and safari destinations at the Kaudia National Park,” says Nitika Khandelwal (IAS), District Magistrate of Tehri Garhwal, Uttarakhand.

Looking Beyond

A peek at what’s trending internationally:

- The Albanian Riviera is where the Mediterranean still feels undiscovered. “With its clear waters, charming coastal villages, and a pace that is refreshingly unhurried, it offers a quieter alternative to the usual hotspots, ideal for travellers looking to experience Europe with a sense of ease, authenticity, and space,” says Kohli.
- Courchevel, France, is known for its winter ski scene but is fast emerging as a refined alpine summer destination. “Summer in Courchevel reveals a completely different side of the Alps, one that is slower, deeply connected to nature, and rooted in authentic Savoyard culture. Visitors can explore the mountains through hiking, gastronomy and village traditions while enjoying the same exceptional hospitality the destination is known for,” says Alexia Laine, Director, Courchevel Tourism Board.
- Lošinj Island, Croatia, is emerging as one of Europe’s most promising wellness destinations, celebrated for its healing microclimate, pristine Adriatic setting and century-old health tourism legacy. “Lošinj has long been recognised for its unique microclimate, clean air and natural biodiversity, which together create an environment ideal for wellness and longevity-focused travel,” says Lara Soldičić Vodarić, Director of Sales, Leisure & Corporate, Lošinj Hotels & Villas.
- The Vysočina Region (Highlands) enchants visitors with its untouched wealth, clean environment and numerous historical monuments, a region with three UNESCO sites, 90 minutes from Prague. “. The tranquillity of a sparsely populated landscape dotted with villages and small towns, protected areas and numerous nature reserves is unmatched,” says Abhilash K Ramesh, Executive Director, Kairali Ayurvedic Group.
- La Digue offers a slower, more intimate side of the Seychelles. “Here, the air is thick with the flavours of the Seychelles, the aroma of saffron and turmeric, and the richness of coconut curries. In 2026, it will resonate with travellers seeking leisure experiences shaped by simplicity, beauty, and a stronger sense of place,” says Sherin Francis, Principal Secretary, Tourism Seychelles.
- Watamu on Kenya’s coast is known for the white sands of Turtle Bay, the mangroves of Mida Creek and the coral gardens of Watamu Marine National Park. “It is ideal for travellers seeking a luxury beach escape that blends wellness,



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Shivani Tripathi, market manager India, Antarctica21

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heritage, and conscious choices,” says Fiona Ngesa, Deputy Director of Asia, Middle East and Oceania, Kenya Tourism Board.

- Antarctica is best experienced with intention, seamlessly, exclusively, and deeply immersive. “For a discerning, time-conscious traveller, a fly-cruise with a one-flight-one-ship operation is essential, especially in 2026 when precision and reliability matter more than ever. With just 76 guests onboard, Antarctica21 delivers a refined expedition, maximising both time and access,” says Shivani Tripathi, market manager India, Antarctica21. 🇮🇳