

Glittering Aphrodisiac

When it comes to jewellery, India has a range so vast that it can match any preference or suit any taste. In a one-of-its-kind story, we take you to the best places to admire and buy ornaments for any occasion, along with a photo essay showcasing pieces by some of India's best jewellery brands. Welcome to the Jewellery Trail.

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o traveller can dispute the sensual appeal of jewellery. But if jewellery hotspots in India are mapped, the result will be a dense lattice that could baffle even conceptual labels like Meshu (by Rachel Binx and Sha Hwang who churn out minimalist, mesh-like geometric ornaments inspired by travel routes). The obvious reason: India epitomises diversity, and has always guarded towns that have either mothered jewellery trends—both classic and amalgamated design philosophies—or inspired them.

Places like Jaipur—with its royal gold tales—drew unmeasured attention and were optimally explored, while others, like Cuttack—with its fragile silver narratives—secretly shunned fame and stayed quaintly untouched.

Jewellery designer Renu Oberoi sums this up and says, “India is famous for traditional jewellery which is both intricate and exotic. Each region has its own special craftsmanship, uniqueness and style. Recently, many artists are experimenting with fusion styles that merge traditional designs with contemporary ones.” So if you have the will, the way and the time to travel and collect a bag of off-beat jewellery anecdotes, it’s time to start your glittering travel with a few trend blends.

For contemporised imperialism—when traditionalism and nobility merge

seamlessly with modernism—you get jewellery studded with gemstones, set in either silver or gold. To find this, most designers pick Jaipur, a marvellous melting pot of antiquated and aristocratic cultures. Shaheen Abbas, who’s behind a collection for Gehna Jewellers, says, “Jaipur is one of the first places that will pop into your head when you think of jewellery.” It’s true, and Suraj Popley, MD of Popley Eternal, says, “Jaipur is a charming and attractive city, especially for those who love ancient heritage and exquisite jewellery that is contemporary yet conventional.” Designer Malini Agarwalla of Malaga agrees. “Jaipur is a classic city to visit and the influences of Rajputana and Mughal craftsmanship are visible in each unique piece,” she adds.

Little wonder then that for years, Viceroy, lords, princesses and even

celebrities such as Jackie Onassis and Mick Jagger have added it to their Indian travel itinerary! Tarang Arora, CEO of Amrapali Jewels, describes a few finesse-oriented techniques the city is famous for. “Jaipur is known for *jadau* (a Mughal style of jewel embedding in soft gold), *theva* (embossing using gold sheets and molten glass from Pratapgarh), *kundan* (polished coloured gemstones set in 24-carat gold), *minakari* (colourful enamel setting introduced by Raja Mansingh of Amer) and *partash* (embossing and engraving style combined with traditional *Jadai* work),” he says. The evidence is visible all over the city.

To lay your hands on some fine pieces, fossick through Jaipur’s pulsating bylanes and markets (Johari Bazaar, Tripolia Bazar, Haldion ka Rasta, Maniharon Ka Rasta and Surajpol Bazaar). Popley, in fact, selects Johri Bazaar as the go-to place in Jaipur.

New age jewellery designers like Kolkata-based Eina Ahluwalia and Jaipur-based Aavriti Jain and Siddharth Daspan of Dhora (the brains behind the Dream Catcher pendant or Punk Rani necklace), suggest a few other jaunts too. Ahluwalia says, “Jaipur is a big hub for stone-cutting and great for *polki*. A walk down M.I. Road is a great place to start. Explore Amrapali, The Gem Palace, Jewel Emporium, and many other stores

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Uncut diamond and pearl earrings, blue *minakari* *hasli* and moonstone and vintage emerald *kada* from ESTAA, *minakari* *kada*, *navratna pachi kada* and uncut diamond ring from MALAGA BESPOKE, checkered jumpsuit and jacket from PERO BY ANEETH ARORA, brocade jacket from MYOHO BY KIRAN & MEGHNA

PREVIOUS PAGES

Uncut diamond *kadas* from GEHNA, *navratna kada*, blue *minakari* ring, pearl and emerald Nizam necklace and red *minakari* and pearl choker from GOLECHA JEWELS, Baroque pearl and emerald studs from RENU OBEROI, Nizam pearl necklace from GANJAM, crushed shirt and draped pants from 11.11/ELEVEN ELEVEN, printed jacket from MYOHO BY KIRAN & MEGHNA, embellished jacket from KRISHNA MEHTA, scarf woven into the hair from PERO BY ANEETH ARORA, luggage from GLOBETROTTER





at Chameli Bazaar.” The 1852-established The Gem Palace, in fact, has a permanent window at the Metropolitan Museum in New York with its Rajasthani Haveli (age-old house) milieu.

Jain and Daspan of Dhora say, “You can also pick pretty costume jewellery from Gopalji ka Rasta and Chameliwala Market. You can’t miss Jaipur if you are a fan of jewellery. No matter what kind of jewellery you are looking for, you will find all in this city.” You can look beyond Jaipur, of course. Old Delhi, Meerut and Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh), and Ahmedabad (Gujarat) are some, and Daspan suggests the flea-market-like Pahar Ganj in New Delhi.

Abbas, on the other hand, dreams of grabbing *maang tikkas* and Islamic jewellery, which she could pass on to her six-year-old daughter as “heirloom pieces,” from Lucknow. Chetna Srivastava, a professor and jewellery connoisseur based in Lucknow, believes that one “must visit the Chowk area for Awadhi jewellery with Islamic touches, Hazratganj for traditional shapes and Geetanjali Jewels for other gold jewellery.”

Mother and daughter-in-law designer duo Sandhya and Jasmine Shah of Just Jewellery, which creates interesting costume pieces using black *jadar* (another name for *kundan*) with semi-precious beads, say Ahmedabad is good for semi-precious stones and Meerut for precious *kundan* jewellery.

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Kundan and pearl choker, *minakari* bracelets and blue *minakari* ring from GOLECHA JEWELS, temple-inspired gold necklaces, *kamarbandhs* and gold *kadas* from GEHNA, red *minakari* uncut diamond ring from ESTAA, uncut diamond and pearl *jhumkas* from ROOPA VOHRA, *kundan* anklets from JUST JEWELLERY, checkered scarf used as turban and green checkered shirt from PERO BY ANEETH ARORA, tie-and-dye maxi from URVASHI KAUR

It’s not just about the North of India, of course. The Dravidian style has come forward with a new-world zeal, and erstwhile Maharajas’ havens like Mysore (Karnataka), Chennai (Tamil Nadu), Hyderabad (Telengana) and Cochin or Kochi (Kerala) remain at the top of the list for stately shapes and pearly forms. Naraen Tejwani, managing director of Pranda Jewelry—a luxe jewellery brand from Thailand—strongly recommends the Mysore ‘gold experience.’ “Mysore has always been famous for its talented *karigars*. The old *Navapashanam* (an elixir of ‘nine poisons’ in *Siddha* medicine) method of soldering and polishing jewellery using Ayurvedic herbs is still used by the *karigars* here. It is a treat to watch them work.”

Another throbbing spot is the Nizam rulers’ fascinating nucleus, Hyderabad. Malini Agarwalla of Malaga says, “Hyderabad, the age-old hub for fantastic pearls, is still renowned. It will give pearl-lovers something really special to put on their itinerary.” Invest in one or two gleaming neckpieces, *kamarbandhs*, brooches, earrings and armlets. After satiating yourself with their wistfulness, lap up colossal gold pieces from this belt. Or the famed mango *mala* (a paisley-form neckpiece traditionally studded with emeralds and rubies) from this city.

Temple jewellery, the pride of a number of aristocratic families, was initially popularised by temple dancers and is still used in classical dance forms like Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi. Agarwalla of Malaga says, “The combination of gem settings and metal ornamentation makes this jewellery unique. If a traveller were to first visit Chennai and explore from there, the types of jewellery that go hand-in-hand with traditions will dazzle her.” Experts also add that temple jewellery jumps out more at you because of its complexity—studded figurines and temple architecture (*gopuram*) set in gold with diamonds, emeralds, rubies and pearls.

To buy this form of jewellery, walk into one of the many well-known gold shops and souks in Chennai and Kochi.

You could go to smallish jewellery shops in Theagaraya (T.) Nagar, Gopalapuram and Mylapore in Chennai. These shops also customise traditional items. In Kochi, must-visit shops include Malabar, Jos Alukkas, A. Geeri Pai and a few others. You’ll find plenty of variety and modern pieces in both these cities.

Now, from the South, let us whoosh to the East for wispy, handmade, super-traditional or artsy-tribal designs. Jewellery from West Bengal is almost always crafted out of gold, precious stones, silver, brass and zinc alloys, and even terracotta (red clay), while Odisha, Assam and the other North-East states either have silver or, as Kolkata-based Ahluwalia says, “beautiful and big jewellery made out of seed beads.” Ahluwalia feels that the “best jewellery *karigars* are from Bengal, with their expertise in detailed hand craftsmanship.”

Arunima Bhaumik, head of design for 1889-born jewellery brand Ganjam, points at the same hotspot in the East. “For a lover of gold and handcrafting, Kolkata and its surrounding areas are a must-visit,” she says. Big names like P.C. Chandra, Senco Gold, Sawansukha Jewellers, Anjali Jewellers, Ratnagiri, M.P. Jewellers, Shyam Sundar Co., B.C. Sen and others have Indian-esque gold designs, and you should consider a classic *tikli* (hair accessory), *kaan* (ear decoration), *hunsuli* (neckpiece) or *mantasha* (bangle).

Both Ahluwalia and Bhaumik also pick Odisha for its silver jewellery. Bhaumik says, “Traditional gold working in filigree (wire-work) and *nakashi* or repoussé can be seen in the stunningly intricate and lightweight jewellery of these areas.” To gasp at them, camp at Bhubaneswar and then hop to Cuttack (some 25 km away). Describing the time-honoured artwork further, Agarwalla says, “Greek-inspired filigree work, known as *tarakashi*, is popular in this part of East India, and visitors to Odisha will be able to see it applied not just in jewellery but also in many artefacts.”

But if you want to go a tad dramatic, scout for classical dance form Odissi’s



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Pearl and diamond bracelet and pearl and diamond starfish ring from RENU OBEROI, uncut diamond ring from GEHNA, uncut diamond *kadas* from GHANASINGH, emerald and pearl *mala* and South Sea pearl *mala* from ESTAA, Hyderabad *thewa* earrings, turquoise and *polki* necklace and coral and *kundan* necklace from ROOPA VOHRA, muslin pinstripe shirt and calf-length skirt from NISHKA LULLA, crochet jacket from NOT SO SERIOUS BY PALLAVI MOHAN

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(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT)

Blue *minakari* *hasli* from ESTAA, *kundan* and pearl choker from GOLECHA JEWELS, uncut diamond and pearl *jhumkas* from ROOPA VOHRA, *kundan* and *jadau* hair pins from JUST JEWELLERY, scarf from PERO BY ANEETH ARORA, *jadau* earrings from MALAGA BESPOKE



MODEL **MARIETTE VALSAN** STYLING ASSISTANT **AASHNU GANDHI** MAKE-UP & HAIR ASSISTANT **REENA DUTTA**

stocky silver designs. About them, Bhubaneswar-based Sangita Mahapatra-Gosain, a renowned Odissi classical singer and professor of music, says, “Filigree is very delicate and it can break while dancing, so bigger pieces are used with less intricacy.” Its best bit: Hushed metal character that matches ethnic dressing sensibility. Shop for these gorgeous tangibles at Bhubaneswar or Cuttack-based jewellery stores—Khimji Jewellers, Lalchand, Epari Govindam, Syndicate Jewellers, H.M. Jewellers, Epari Sadashiv & Sons, Chandrakant Jayanti Lal, Swarna Alankar, and others. Popping into the state government emporium, Utkalika, and blink-and-you’ll-miss-them silver shops in Market Building (Unit I Market) would also be worth your while. When in Cuttack, Mahapatra urges you to visit these little-known silver shops tucked in the bylanes of Naya Sarak and Chowdhury Bazaar.

But if your choice is the suddenly in fashion tweaked geometric style—which is also called ethnic-chic—you need to move beyond the traditional. This subdued, simple everyday jewellery is about creating something big and bold for festivities that can be broken into two pieces. Bhaumik from Ganjam calls this “an interesting mix of influences that reflect the uncertain nature of the times.”

Jain and Daspan add, “Fusion is definitely big. People are gravitating towards eclectic styles, such as the pairing of *kundan minakari* with neon

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Uncut diamond *kadas* and gold and *moti kada* from GEHNA, vintage emeralds, uncut diamonds and moonstones *kada* and red *minakari* and uncut diamond ring from ESTAA, *navratan pachi kada*, *navratan* neckpiece and *jadau* earrings from MALAGA BESPOKE, uncut diamonds and emerald necklace from GHANA SINGH, tunic from RYNDIA BY DANIEL SYIEM, silk trousers by CHARU PARASHAR, striped jacket from PERO BY ANEETH ARORA

beads.” They also feel that ‘raw stones’ are “incredibly chic and are wonderful for playing up a Bohemian look that is fit for a walk at the beach or at a music festival.” Bhaumik also says that the use of coloured stones in jewellery in an unabashed and uninhibited fashion is on the rise. She says, “This can be seen across all types of jewellery. From large and exotic single gems, used as the centrepiece of a product, to clusters of smaller gems creating patterns or a multicoloured palette, gemstones fit in everywhere.” This colourful aspect also links with another trend—marine life and creatures from the natural world in patterns and motifs. The most popular motifs, says Bhaumik, are elephants, tigers, snakes, butterflies, parrots, crabs and seahorses.

Although a lot of travellers still focus on perfect-for-weddings costume and semi-precious shapes with *jadau*, filigree, South Indian or even classical designs, that shouldn’t stop you from picking up a few geometric pieces. One can’t mention geometric without talking about diamonds, of course. According to jewellery experts, mixed metals such as yellow and white gold are now being used more frequently, but diamond jewellery remains an inseparable part of a woman’s ensemble and holds a special place for Indian royalty. Popli marks Surat for its diamond polishing and cutting expertise, and suggests that if you travel there, visit the back lanes of the Mahidharpura diamond market, where stones worth millions of rupees change hands every day. You can find all kinds of diamonds here, from big solitaires to scraps and powders. Surat, in fact, is a vibrant town and has a perennial festive atmosphere, with tea and snacks making the rounds at regular intervals.

If you can’t make it there, head to Zaveri Bazaar in Mumbai, which remains one of the most popular jewellery hubs in the country. This ‘jewellery souk,’ as Popli calls it, just north of Crawford Market, is full of variety and tourists can find hundreds of small jewellery shops selling precious stones, uncut jewellery,

gold, silver, brassware and even platinum. It is also very crowded, but you can expect a full day of fun and learning.

If you were to ask any jewellery aficionado, she would still put the heritage styles at the top of her list. It is because of this high demand from Indian and international tourists for traditional pieces that jewellery designers and brands are going back to the roots. Bhaumik says that there is definitely a “revival of sorts in traditional and heritage jewels that celebrate craftsmanship and intricacies of Indian aesthetic. People are looking for pieces that are unusual and individualistic as well as adaptable,” she says.

If you’re strapped for time, rummage through your mother’s, mother-in-law’s or grandmother’s jewellery boxes for heirloom pieces. You’ll probably find something that looks like it belongs in 2014. Abbas for Gehna says, “These timeless designs are the new vintage pieces of tomorrow. But you cannot contemporise them more than five percent or they will lose their look and feel. For instance, I wear my grandmother’s bangle with *Ayat-al kursi* (*dua*) inscribed in Arabic as it is. It must be more than 100 years old.” There are many women travellers like her. Everywhere you look—from the busy streets of New Delhi to the quiet lanes of Shillong—women are pairing modern clothing with vintage chunks. Or layering tiny ringlets with different pieces in gold. Or mixing small delicate pearls with grunge clothes. The juxtaposition of heirlooms with a modern punch of style is one way, but, says Ahluwalia, mixing vintage pieces together is also a great idea. She says, “Try design with detail, as opposed to simple, clean lines. Go for Byzantine, baroque and other opulent looks. Stack rings, bracelets or necklaces and wear thick chain necklaces with big earrings.” In short, like the places you will visit on the Jewellery Trail, jumble your jewellery. If you’ve managed to get just the piece you want, point others in the same direction. If not, pick a new destination from here. **D**