

World Class by Diageo Announces Its Top 20 Bartenders for India, Nepal & Sri Lanka

The top 100 competed in the Hop Scotch Challenge which encouraged them to use Johnnie Walker Black Label in three creative cocktail formats

India, February 23, 2026 - After over 800 entries and multiple competitive rounds, World Class by Diageo has concluded its Regional Finals across India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The Top 20 bartenders will now go head-to-head at the National Finals in Delhi on March 27, 2026, where one will be crowned World Class India, Nepal and Sri Lanka Champion for 2026.

For the Regional round, participants took on the Hop Scotch challenge, creating three cocktails with Johnnie Walker Black Label: a tall serve, a short serve and a ritual drink, all within six minutes. Rather than defaulting to classic formats, bartenders were encouraged to reinterpret the spirit in unexpected and creative ways, in line with the Whisky Experiments philosophy. Johnnie Walker has long been synonymous with craftsmanship, but today the brand is pushing boundaries to reimagine how whisky is experienced. Central to this evolution is its experimental approach, turning the liquid into a versatile medium for creativity, culture, and modern storytelling

Insights from the Regional Finals

Anchal Kaushal, Vice President of Customer Marketing, Diageo India, said, *“What really stood out at this stage was how deeply the bartenders were connected to their concepts. Many chose to showcase something personal — whether inspired by their hometowns or cherished memories — instead of relying on classic templates. It was exciting to see how each of them reimaged cocktails, transforming them into elevated creations worthy of a place on the menus of some of the country’s finest bars. Since the very beginning, that has been our mission with World Class: to raise the standard of cocktail culture by encouraging young bartenders to push creative boundaries.”*

“Across the regionals, it was lovely to see how talent is starting to respect, understand and showcase ingredients from their regions and terroir on a global stage like this. Bartenders incorporated elements like gundruk from Nepal and pineapple pachadi from the South into their drinks,” says **Vijeta Singh, Founder of Rare Ideas, and jury member of World Class India 2026.**

“We saw many bartenders from Tier 2 cities do very well this year, bringing strong ideas and individuality to the counter. As a jury, we actively encourage participants to present in the language they are most comfortable with as it allows their ideas to land with greater clarity and their personality to come through much more naturally,” says **Gagan Sharma, Director at Indulge India, and jury member of World Class India 2026.**

“At the Regional stage, it’s not just the jury interacting with participants. In Nepal and Sri Lanka, we also had previous country winners present, sharing their experience and offering practical guidance. That peer exchange adds another layer of learning to the process. As we move ahead with the Top 20,

we look forward to some more fun challenges where we'll see how the finalists apply everything they've absorbed so far," says **Vikram KU, jury member and Lead of World Class India, Nepal and Sri Lanka 2026.**

Across India's regional finals, bartenders brought inspiration and memories from their hometowns into both their drinks and the stories they shared while presenting them. In Nepal and Sri Lanka, this theme was combined with many of the participants' global exposure. South India also stood out for having the highest female representation at this stage.

The Regional Winners

Name	Outlet	City
Anshul Tiwari	The Bagh	Amritsar
Ankur Adhana	KAMEI	New Delhi
Chitra M	NOVY	Gurgaon
Rajneesh Barthwal	No Vacancy	New Delhi
Mukul Pandey	Misosexy	Chandigarh
Dishant Kanojia	1932 Trevi	Jaipur
Sarbani Mukherjee	Conversation Room	Kolkata
Laksh Tamang	2:Fifty9 The bar	Kolkata
Swastik Chattopadhyaya	ATM Bar & Kitchen	Kolkata
Manoj Singh Rawat	Mehico	Kolkata
Sher Singh Thakur	Copitas	Bengaluru
Aman Bansal	Lili	Hyderabad
Gracy Chourey	Soka Cocktail Bar	Bengaluru
Siddhesh Palande	The Bombay Canteen	Mumbai
Guruprasad Tripathy	Slink & Bardot	Mumbai
Uttkarsh Anthwal	Quinta Cantina	Goa
Dheeraj Bhatt	Quinta Cantina	Goa
Karan Dhanelia	Atelier V	Indore
Gunjan Lama	Beach House Bar & Dining	Kathmandu
Akash Rajapaksha	Colombar	Colombo

The Top 20 will now compete at the National Finals on March 27, where one bartender will be crowned World Class India, Nepal and Sri Lanka Champion for 2026 and go on to represent the region at the Global Finals later this year. In the lead-up, World Class will also host two cocktail festivals in March in Mumbai (March 14) and Delhi (March 28), inviting consumers to engage more closely with the platform and its bartending community.

For more details on the competition, please visit: <https://www.instagram.com/worldclassin/>.

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About Diageo India

Diageo India is among India's leading beverage alcohol (alcobev) companies with an outstanding portfolio of premium brands. A subsidiary of Diageo Plc., it is listed in India on both the National Stock Exchange (NSE) and the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) under the name United Spirits Limited (USL).

Headquartered in Bengaluru, Diageo India has one of the largest alcohol manufacturing footprints in India, with 36 facilities across the country. It manufactures, sells and distributes Johnnie Walker, Black Dog, Black & White, VAT 69, Antiquity, Signature, The Singleton, Royal Challenge, McDowell's No1, Smirnoff, Ketel One, Tanqueray, Captain Morgan and Godawan, an artisanal single malt whisky from India, bringing together global expertise and local pride to deliver innovative, world-class products and experiences to consumers. With a strong focus on driving positive impact on society, Diageo India has been working on collective action to improve livelihoods, champion Grain-to-Glass sustainability, responsible consumption, and nurture the alcobev ecosystem to contribute to India's growth agenda.

For more information about Diageo India, our people, our brands, and our performance, visit us at www.diageoindia.com. Visit Diageo's global responsible drinking resource, <http://www.DRINKiQ.com>, for information, initiatives, and ways to share best practices.

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