From the food we consume and the clothes we wear to the products we bring into our homes, sustainability is increasingly finding its place in everyday decisions. This World Environment Day, *DT Next* looks at three Chennai-based initiatives that are encouraging consumers to rethink ordinary habits through conscious alternatives

MINIMAL CHOICES, LASTING IMPACT

DHARSHINI

As conversations around climate change and environmental responsibility grow louder, sustainability is often perceived as something that demands sweeping lifestyle changes. Yet, for many individuals and businesses, it begins with something far simpler: the choices made every day.



Rice and tapioca straw

BON APPETIT

At first glance, in cutlery, straw may be a miniscule affair . But for Hepzi, the founder of Cafe Taupe in AnnaNagar , creating the smallest impact of sustainability in a dining experience can have a larger scale contribution. The Chennai-based café has also replaced conventional disposable options with paper-based packaging and edible straws made from rice and tapioca sourced from Kerala. While sustainable alternatives often come with higher costs, Hepzi viewed the decision as an investment rather than an expense.

"I thought, let me invest in something good and sustainable rather than spend on influencer marketing," she says. "The best influencers are your customers. If you keep them in your heart and mind, we win." For Hepzi, sustainability is not merely about reducing waste but also about creating a more mindful experience for customers. She describes the straw as the connection between a beverage and the person consuming it. "The straw connects the beverage and the consumer. It should be precious and pure," she adds.



Hepzi, founder, cafe taupe

Unlike conventional straws that end up in the bin after a few sips, the edible rice and tapioca straws can be consumed once the drink is finished. "When you're eating the straw as well, it feels complete. We finished the beverage and the straw together," she remarks.

Customers, she says, are often curious about the straws and eager to learn more about the idea behind them, proving that small changes can spark larger conversations around sustainability. Yet sustainability is not confined to what ends up on our plates or in our cups. Increasingly, it is also influencing what hangs in our wardrobes.



Bharath, founder, yuneekway

WHAT'S IN YOUR WARDROBE?

A year and a half ago, city-based thrift clothing, Yuneekway began in a modest 10x8-foot tiled room with an investment of just Rs 3,000. Today, the thrift store has grown into a thriving community for young shoppers seeking something increasingly difficult to find in the era of fast fashion: individuality. The idea emerged after the founder Bharath purchased an original Adidas track pants for just Rs 300. It sparked a simple question: why spend thousands on mass-produced clothing when high-quality garments already exist and can be given a second life?

"In today's fast-fashion world, you often see three or four people on the same street wearing the exact same outfit," the founder said. "Gen Z consumers want to stand out, not blend in." At first glance, thrift shopping may appear to be driven by environmental concerns. But Yuneekway's founders believe the reality is more practical.

"Affordability comes first, and sustainability follows it," they explain. "Most youngsters don't initially choose thrifting just to save the planet. They do it because it's affordable, unique and rare. But by making high-quality fashion accessible, sustainability becomes a powerful by-product."

The shift in attitudes has been dramatic. The founders recall a time when second-hand clothing carried a social stigma. Today, they say, thrift culture has become part of youth identity, with consumers actively seeking out vintage and pre-owned fashion. That changing mindset has helped Yuneekway grow from a small room into a 1,000 sq. ft. store in Kodambakkam, serving an expanding community of shoppers online and offline.

The store is also working to challenge one of the biggest misconceptions surrounding second-hand clothing: hygiene. Before reaching customers, garments undergo a detailed process involving sorting, washing, dry cleaning, stain removal, tailoring and ironing. The business currently supports six to seven local workers who handle the restoration process.

For first-time thrift shoppers, his advice is straightforward "You don't have to overhaul your entire wardrobe overnight. Find one unique piece and experience the quality for yourself. Sustainable shopping doesn't have to feel like a compromise; it can feel like a treasure hunt."

But sustainability does not end with food or fashion. It also shapes the spaces people live in and the objects they interact with every day.



Seagrass Chair

LESS IS MORE

One of the biggest misconceptions about sustainability is that it requires a complete lifestyle overhaul," they say. "We believe sustainable living starts with small, practical changes that fit naturally into everyday life."says Shruthi, the founder of Ombak life Kilpauk, a sustainable home decor store.

The brand works with natural materials such as banana fibre, water hyacinth, seagrass and rattan to create furniture, baskets, lamps, planters and home décor. The idea is simple: allow consumers to make environmentally conscious choices without fundamentally altering their lifestyles.

Many of Ombak Life's materials are sourced from agricultural by-products or invasive plant species that would otherwise go to waste. In the last two-and-a-half years alone, the company says it has helped remove more than 10,000 kilograms of water hyacinth from lakes in Tamil Nadu and Assam, giving the discarded biomass a second life through handcrafted products.

"Once people begin making conscious choices in one area of their home, they often become more aware of their consumption habits in other areas as well," she explains.

"We often prefer the phrase 'better for the environment' rather than making absolute sustainability claims," they say. "Sustainability is a journey, and very few products are perfect." That philosophy extends to customer interactions as well. Instead of encouraging unnecessary purchases, the company often helps customers repair existing products, such as restoring damaged rattan furniture, rather than replacing them altogether.



Banana Fibre and Sasal Lamp



If there is one message they hope consumers take away this World Environment Day, it is that "sustainability begins with intention ,the products we wake up to, sit on, work with and interact with every day matter, they say thoughtful consumption is one of the most powerful green tools available to us."

Shruthi Prakash, founder, Ombak lifestyle



Ilaiyaraaja pays tribute to SPB on birth anniversary

Music maestro Ilaiyaraaja paid an emotional tribute to legendary singer SP Balasubrahmanyam on his birth anniversary, describing him as an artist who could understand a composer's vision faster than anyone else.

Sharing a message on social media, Ilaiyaraaja celebrated his long-time friend and collaborator's extraordinary contribution to Indian music. "No one understood a composer's vision faster, and no one poured more focus into a song than SPB," he said.

Recalling their decades-long association, Ilaiyaraaja said SPB's absence had left a void in his heart and praised the singer's unmatched ability to grasp the emotional nuances of a composition. He noted that many of the male songs in his repertoire were sung by SPB not because of his popularity alone, but because of his exceptional talent and dedication.

The composer also hailed SPB's achievement of recording more than 50,000 songs, calling it a rare milestone in the history of world music. He further remarked that despite the emergence of several singers over the years, no one had come close to replicating SPB's unique combination of voice, artistry and commitment.

Concluding his tribute, Ilaiyaraaja remembered SPB not only as a legendary playback singer but also as one of his closest friends, saying his legacy would continue to inspire generations of musicians and music lovers.



Arya's *Ananthan Kaadu* set for June 25 release

The makers of *Ananthan kaadu*, director Jiyen Krishnakumar's upcoming political action thriller starring Arya, have announced that the film will hit theatres worldwide on June 25.

Arya shared the release date announcement on social media, confirming the film's theatrical debut later this month. Produced by S Vinod Kumar under the Mini Studio banner, the multilingual project has its story written by Murali Gopy, best known for *Lucifer* and *Empuraan*.

The film has been generating interest since the release of its title teaser, which paired intense action visuals with a powerful poem hinting at a rebellious protagonist determined to challenge oppression and inspire hope. *Ananthan Kaad*u features an ensemble cast including Regena Cassandrra, Nikhila Vimal, Indrans and Sunil. The film's technical team includes cinematographer S Yuva, music composer B Ajaneesh Loknath, editor Rohit VS Variyath and stunt choreographer R Sakthi Saravanan.

Title teaser of Lijomol Jose thriller *The One: Within You* out



The title teaser of *The One: Within You* introduces an interconnected thriller set across one Shivaratri night in the Western Ghats.

The makers have unveiled the film's title teaser, offering a glimpse into its suspense-filled narrative. Produced by Gopal Balakrishnan and Siva Ramanathan under the Harishni Pictures banner, the film is directed by Aathiran Rakkeppen.

Set in the Western Ghats near Coimbatore, the story unfolds over the course of a Shivaratri night and follows four strangers whose lives become unexpectedly intertwined through a series of events. The film explores themes of destiny, survival and human connection against a rugged natural backdrop.

The ensemble cast is led by Lijomol Jose, alongside Saravanan, Paval Navageethan and Namita Krishnamurthy in key roles. The supporting cast includes Geetha Kailasam, Praveen Raja, Rajeev Anand and Ganesan Kaliyamoorthy, among others.

The film's technical team features composer Ghibran, cinematographer Vinoth Raja and editor CS Premkumar. Art direction is handled by Srikanth Gopal, while MR Rajakrishnan serves as the audiographer and A Muthukumaran oversees the visual effects.

The newly released teaser hints at an intense thriller packed with action, mystery and emotional drama, while raising questions about how the lives of its central characters converge on a single night. Further updates on the film's release are expected in the coming weeks.

BUILDING SKILLS IN OPEN SEAS



MERIN JAMES

For 11-year-old Kumar Gururaja Bhat, sailing started as a birthday activity but quickly turned into something he wanted to pursue more seriously. In April 2024, just before his ninth birthday, he attended a two-day sailing course in Goa. "Kumar liked it a lot and wanted to continue. After that, we began looking for structured and continuous training instead of occasional exposure to the sport," says his mother, Suchitra.

That search led them to 24 Seven Sailing, a structured sailing academy founded by Captain Amish Ved, an aviator and high-performance sailor. Amish has designed the training system based on his experience in aviation and competitive sailing.



"I come from the aviation industry, where training is very structured. When I worked with young sailors earlier, I realised that structure was missing at the grassroots level. So I built a programme that starts from the basics and develops step by step," says Amish.

Kumar began training under the academy in Mumbai, where he spent several months on the water. "He was sailing five to six days a week, about three hours a day. During this period, he also took part in his first regatta and finished fourth. After that, he became very interested in sailing," says Suchitra.

The training is delivered by coaches within the academy, including coach Piyush Chavan, who later moved to Chennai as part of the programme expansion. In August 2025, 24 Seven Sailing expanded its operations to Chennai, using the facilities at the Royal Madras Yacht Club. "Chennai works well because sailing is possible through most of the year," says Amish.

With this shift, Kumar's training became more consistent. According to Amish, sailing helps children develop independence at an early age. "At eight or nine, they are making decisions on their own in the water. That builds awareness and confidence," he says.

Kumar's training in Chennai waters has helped him perform well at the Eurochallenge Stage I held in Porto Rotondo, Italy, in April. He finished fourth out of 45 boats and was tied on points with the third-place finisher, missing the bronze medal on a tiebreaker. "He has completed 220 days of Open Skiff sailing, spending over 800 hours on the water. Of this, 222 hours have been in Chennai. He has won one silver and three bronze medals at the national level and has competed in four international regattas across Europe and Asia. We will be travelling to Europe for the entire month of July, as he will compete in Eurochallenge Stage II in Warnemünde, Germany, in the first week, followed by the World Championships in Calasetta, Italy, in the last week of July 2026. We hope he continues to enjoy Open Skiff sailing for a long time," Suchitra adds.

The young boy has also attended sailing camps in places like Mandwa to gain exposure to different waters and race conditions. "As parents, we are just supporting him. We are giving him the opportunity. The interest and effort are his."

For Amish, the focus of the academy is to build a strong foundation through structure and repetition, so young sailors can progress steadily over time.

WHAT'S ON IN CHENNAI

SHOPPING TIME
Studio Trioss will host a curated pop-up featuring a diverse range of brands, from elegant Indo-western ensembles and chic casual wear to dapper menswear, fine jewellery, handcrafted footwear
and more.
Date and time: Till today, 11 am onwards
Venue: The Folly, Amethyst, Royapettah



MANGO MANIA
Taj Coromandel presents a specially curated showcase of delectable desserts, refreshing beverages and handcrafted treats dedicated entirely to mangoes.
Date and time: Till June 15, 10 am onwards
Venue: La Patisserie & Anise, Taj Coromandel

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