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Vol 5, Issue IV, Jan-Mar 2020

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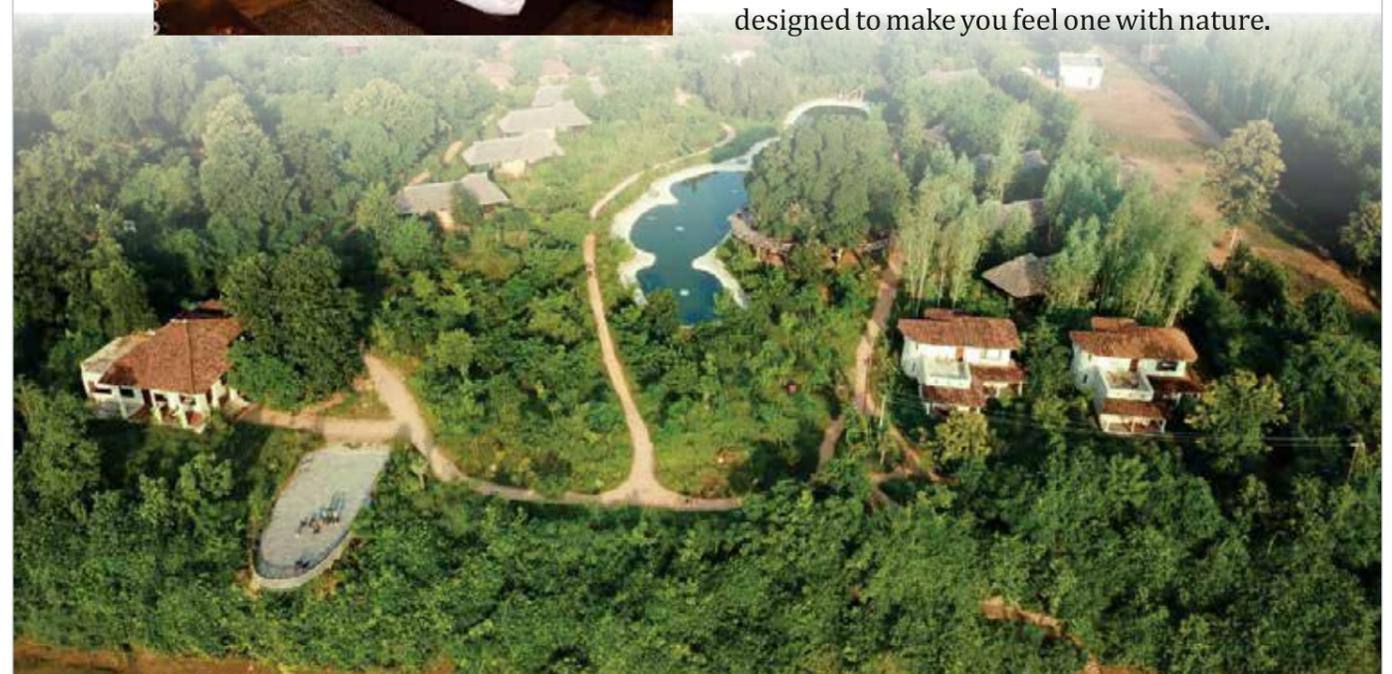
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VOL 5, ISSUE IV, JAN – MAR 2020

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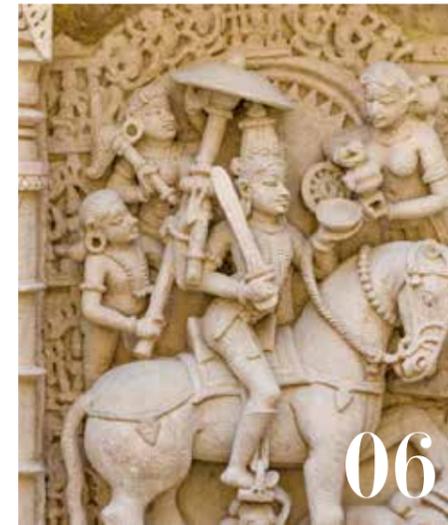
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COVER
Tribal woman, Bhuj, Kutch
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From the CEO

Dear Partners,

Gujarat has pride of place in the map of India as the land that produced its beloved son who became not only the 'Father of the Nation' but also a beacon of light for the entire world. The mere name of Gandhi draws a cross-section of people ranging from tourists and Indophiles to scholars and politicians.

As a curtain-raiser for the year 2020 we bring to you this special edition on Gujarat, a state that surprises you at every step.

Our Cover Story offers glimpses of the multiple facets of a state that makes exploring and discovering them a most rewarding experience. We take you on an inspiring journey across the length and breadth of India's westernmost stretches of land and sea.

Welcome now to India's "wild west", the final frontier for a confluence of cultures and crafts. This somewhat remote region of Gujarat presents a bewildering picture of a terrain that transforms itself dramatically – marshland turning, with the touch of a season, to a spectacular salt desert.

Witness the exuberance of the Gujarati spirit in their joyous celebration of festivals. The nine-night festival of the Goddess Durga keeps all of Gujarat awake in enraptured dance and music. The same joyous spirit soars to the skies during the kite festival which is a symbolic salutation to the sun god. Another irresistible invitation is to the night dance festival held against the backdrop of an ancient sun temple.

You will simply love the food of Gujarat. It is distinct in its flavours and taste from the rest of Indian cuisine. Who can resist its mouth-watering blend – sweet, sour, and hot, all effortlessly rolled into one. A taste of this exceptional cuisine will reveal that vegetarian food can be both delicious and complex in flavour.

Travel through Gujarat for a variety of curated experiences: eat your way through culinary trails, try your hand at the potter's wheel, discover traditional sports, visit heritage sites, stop to wonder at architectural marvels, take a luxury royal rail sojourn, and tee off on the finest courses.



Gujarat has something for everyone. All in all, it is a magnificent tapestry showcasing long-forgotten and little-known wonders to even a seasoned traveller.

Gujarat welcomes you: "Gujaratma padhaaro".

With warm regards,



Amit Prasad
Chief Executive Officer,
Le Passage to India

"I have watched the cultures of all lands blow around my house and other winds have blown the seeds of peace, for travel is the language of peace."
— Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

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Find out how the Pallavas' bustling seaport turned into the millennials' favourite hangout.

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Gujarat

A Treasury of Warmth, Charm, and Adventure

“Anybody who goes to a foreign country thousands of miles away, should have the strength to find peace in his or her own mind.”
– Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

If there is one state where you can see India in all its colours, it is Gujarat. There are three distinct regions: the industrial mainland (comprising North, South, and Central Gujarat), the Saurashtra peninsula, and magical Kutch – part desert, part marsh. Gujarat lies on the western coast of India with a coastline of 1,600 km bordering the beautiful Arabian Sea.

Its layered history, dating back to the ancient Indus Valley Civilisation and spanning centuries of successive Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic dynasties, along with its geographic diversity and strategic location has made Gujarat a melting pot of cultures and confluences.

This dazzlingly diverse state will delight those who love to take the road less-travelled as it reveals gems and meaningful journeys hidden from the tourist hordes. Among its national treasures, Gujarat counts the Asiatic Lion; the state is the last natural habitat of this majestic beast. Gujarat is replete with vibrant, colourful festivals. The most energetic of these is Navratri, or ‘Nine Nights’, held around

October/November. For nine nights in a row, sleep takes a backseat as the entire state is transformed into a fairground and millions of Gujaratis immerse themselves in celebration and dance.

We bring you special glimpses into this extraordinary land that is a grand celebration of life.



Archaeological Trail

Dholavira

In 1967-68, the ASI stumbled upon the archaeological site of Dholavira and found the largest Harappan city yet that preserved the extensive material remains of seven distinct cultural phases spanning a period of 2000 years – from development to maturity to decay. Not even the first-discovered sites of Harappa and Mohenjodaro can lay claim to such rare distinction. Located in the salt flats of the stunning Great Rann of Kutch, Dholavira was built in three tiers – divided into a citadel, and an upper and lower town. Historical records show trade with Mesopotamia; Dholavira was the link in the trade routes from the Indus Valley to the port of Lothal. One of the most significant discoveries in Dholavira was the town plan – an ancient marvel – that comprised a highly sophisticated network of stormwater drains connecting to a main artery, which in turn fed a reservoir. The other important find was a ‘signboard’ containing ten large Harappan pictorial letters. The IVC’s script is yet to be deciphered and continues to be one of the world’s great mysteries, making the Dholavira ‘signboard’ a discovery of great value. The site, which has been systematically excavated only since 1990, has yielded archaeological treasures such as terracotta pottery, beads, gold and copper ornaments, seals, fish hooks, animal figurines, tools, urns, and some imported vessels. It offers unique glimpses into the pioneering Harappan mind

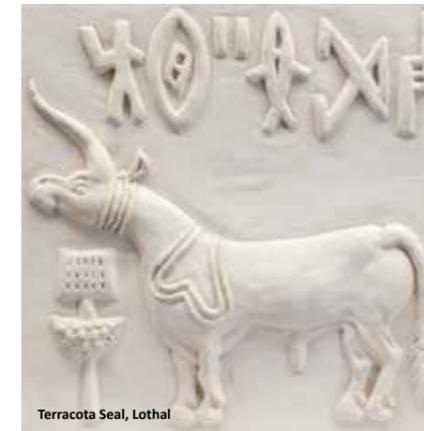
that created one of the earliest and best planned water conservation systems in the ancient world.

The journey to Dholavira is in itself breathtaking, taking you across the saline desert lands of the Great Rann, home to wildlife such as the chinkara gazelle, nilgai (the largest antelope in Asia), flamingos, and other exotic bird life.

Dholavira (discovered over a decade later) is estimated to be older than Lothal.



Pashupati Seal, watercolour depiction



Terracota Seal, Lothal



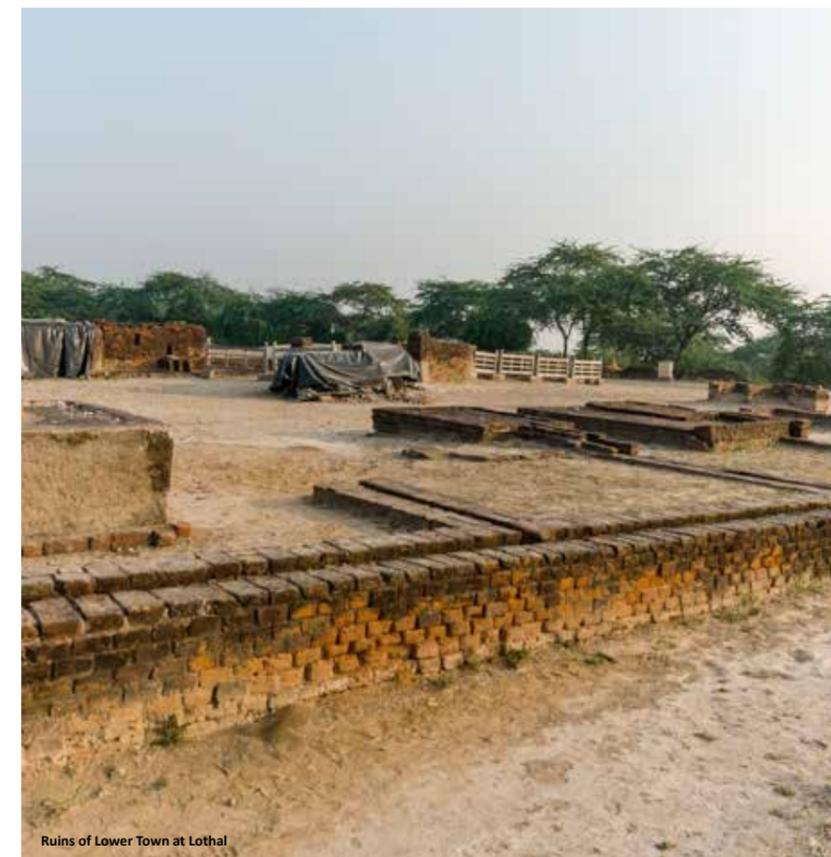
Terracota Seal, Lothal

Lothal

While the two great cities of Mohenjodaro and Harappa – of the ancient Indus Valley Civilisation (IVC) – were discovered in the 1920s in present day Pakistan, it was only in 1954 that the site of Lothal (“Mound of the Dead”), a once-flourishing port trading with Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Persia, was discovered along the Gulf of Khambat in Gujarat. The discovery of this great port – the only one of its kind – marked a milestone result in the search for the IVC’s legacy in India. The discovery of Lothal (along with hundreds of other IVC sites found strewn across Rajasthan, Delhi,



Terracotta Toys, Lothal



Ruins of Lower Town at Lothal

Haryana, and Gujarat) revealed the vast spread of the Bronze Age civilization beyond the Indus Valley. Lothal was excavated from 1955-1960 by archaeologist S R Rao of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). Lothal is said to date back 3,700 years and is home to what is believed to be one of the oldest docks in the world. The site is surprisingly close to Ahmedabad, just 85 km away. It is located along the River Bhogava, a tributary of the legendary River Sabarmati and only 30 km from the Gulf of Khambat.

Lothal was a thriving centre of trade and industry, famous for its advanced town planning, superbly constructed underground sanitary drainage system, and a remarkable precision of standardised weights and measures. The people of Lothal were experts in science, engineering, pottery, ornament-making, and metallurgy; apparently, the largest collection of archaeological artefacts from the IVC in India comes from Lothal, and among the most fascinating finds are their metal tools, weights, measures, seals, beads, and ornaments.

The Lothal site has been nominated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

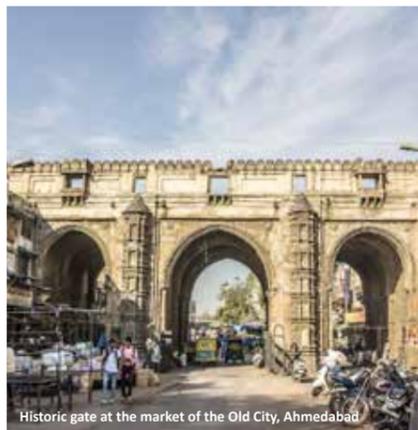
UNESCO World Heritage Sites

Ahmedabad

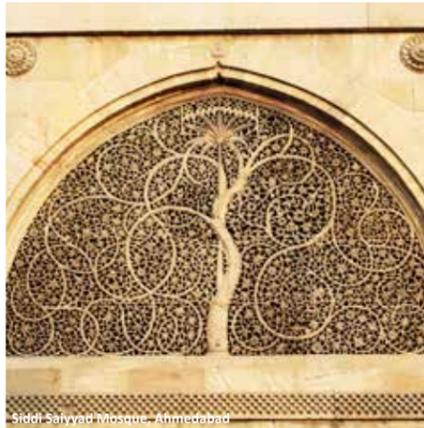
Gujarat's capital is Gandhinagar but, its premier city is Ahmedabad, 25 km away. Ahmedabad (Amdavad to locals) is named after its founder Ahmad Shah I, the Second Sultan of the Gujarat Sultanate, and is Gujarat's largest city. Ahmedabad, famed as a textile centre since the 15th century, especially flourished in British times and was hence called the 'Manchester of the East'. Ahmedabad's Old City is a maze of pols (residential areas designated by large gateways), mosques, wooden Jain temples, subterranean stone stepwells (called vav), and houses with ornately carved wooden balconies and window screens, and has some of the country's finest medieval Islamic architecture. Modern Ahmedabad, just across the River Sabarmati spanned by four bridges, is a showpiece of superbly designed contemporary architecture.

In July 2017, the Historic City of Ahmedabad or Old Ahmedabad, was declared India's first UNESCO World Heritage City.

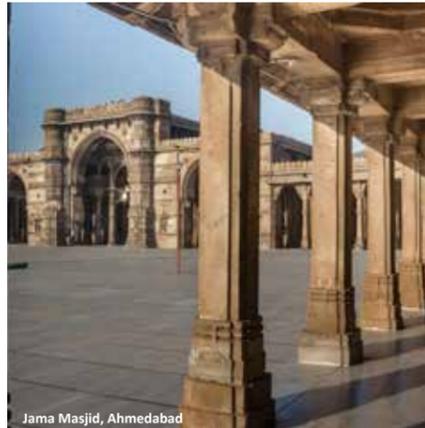
The superb Calico Museum was created in 1949 by the Sarabhai family (scientist Vikram Sarabhai, considered to be the father of the Indian space programme, and his danseuse wife Mrinalini Sarabhai) and is housed in their fabulous haveli (ancestral mansion). Calico is the premier textile museum of the country and houses a distinguished and comprehensive collection of textiles



Historic gate at the market of the Old City, Ahmedabad



Siddi Saiyyad Mosque, Ahmedabad



Jama Masjid, Ahmedabad



and artefacts. Its outstanding collection of Indian fabrics documents and showcases the history and technique of handcrafted textiles in India spanning five centuries.

For an introduction to the urban heritage of the Old City, take a Heritage Walk – your route will take you through winding lanes and you will see bird feeders and traditional rainwater collection systems. On the way take in iconic sites such as Swami Narayan Mandir, a fine example of Maratha and Jain temple architecture; the 90-year-old Doshiwada ni Pol which is a 40-room haveli with carved cherubs, gabled roofs, Gothic windows and zigzag wooden stairs – all overlooking a central courtyard; the dilapidated 15th-century Bhadra citadel; the magnificently domed 15th-century tomb complex Badshah no Hajira which houses the graves of Ahmed Shah I and his heirs; the Jama Masjid, a glorious yellow sandstone mosque built by Ahmed Shah II

in 1424; the Siddi Saiyyad Mosque that is renowned for its intricate stone latticework; and Teen Darwaza, a ceremonial gateway built by Ahmed Shah.

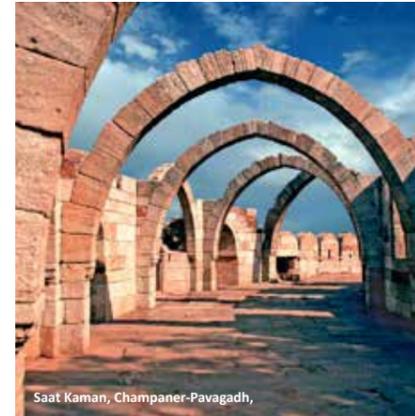
Le Corbusier (the renowned Swiss-French architect, designer, painter, urban planner, and writer) was invited to Ahmedabad in the mid-20th century by the mill owners to design their villas as well as some public buildings. The Sanskar Kendra, Villa Sarabhai, Villa Shodhan, and Mill Owners' Association Building were designed by Le Corbusier.

American architect Louis Kahn designed the IIM Ahmedabad.

The Premabhai Hall, Tagore Memorial Hall, and Institute of Indology were designed by B. V. Doshi, the noted Indian architect who worked under both Corbusier and Louis Kahn.

Ahmedabad has the unique distinction of being the only place in the world with buildings designed by two 20th-century architectural masters, Louis Kahn (American) and Le Corbusier (Swiss-French).

Ahmedabad's famous dining halls serve mouth-watering Gujarati thalis (traditional course platter) but for an even more immersive food experience, visit the recreated Gujarati village of Vishalla – here, lounge on charpais (a traditional woven cot) and feast on a thali.



Saat Kaman, Champaner-Pavagadh,

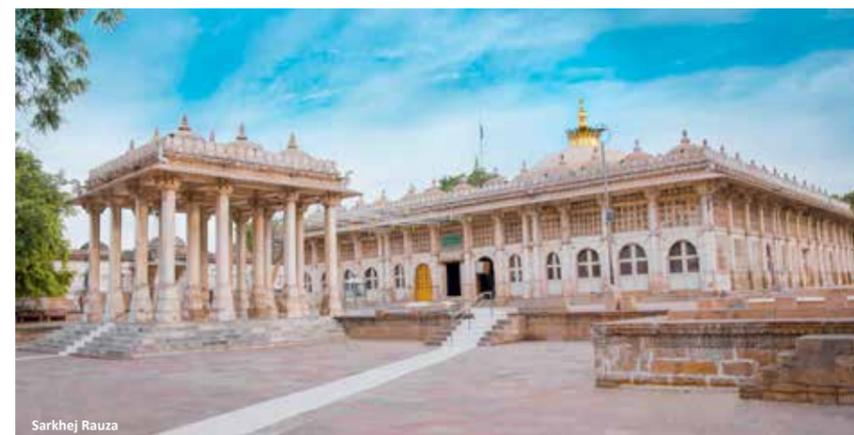
Around Ahmedabad

A little outside Ahmedabad lies the elegant Hutheesingh Jain Temple. The white marble temple, dedicated to the 15th Jain Tirthankara, was built in the late 19th century by Sheth Hutheesing, a wealthy merchant.

Around 19 km from Ahmedabad is the 16th-century Adalaj Vav in the quiet village of Adalaj. Built by Queen Rudabai of the Vaghela dynasty, the impressive five-storied stepwell was not just a cultural and utilitarian space, but also a spiritual refuge. It once served as a resting place for pilgrims and caravans along their trade routes.

It is the only stepwell in Gujarat with three entrance stairs. Adalaj is a spectacular example of Indo-Islamic architecture and design, with its intricate ornamentation and beautiful carvings of mythological scenes on its walls.

Lying to the southwest of Ahmedabad, on the north bank of an enormous reservoir built by Qutubuddin Ahmed Shah, the 15th-century Sarkhej Rauza group of monuments is an outstanding complex, blending Islamic, Hindu, and Jain



Sarkhej Rauza



Rani ni Vav, Patan

architectural styles to showcase unique craftsmanship and construction.

Kankaria Tank, lying south east of Ahmedabad, was begun in 1446 by Qutubuddin Shah. The 34-sided polygon is surprisingly large enough to resemble a circle. In the centre is a garden island, connected to the shore by a causeway. To the west of Kankaria are Armenian and Dutch tombs and graves (1615-1700) marked by obelisks, pyramids, and pavilions.

Champaner-Pavagadh Archaeological Park

Champaner, a medieval capital of Gujarat, is India's only complete and unchanged pre-Mughal Islamic city. Set amidst a spectacular landscape, it is a treasure trove of prehistoric (chalcolithic) sites, magnificent mosques, fortifications, religious buildings, residential precincts, and the remains of palaces, homes, and water works, from the 8th to 14th centuries CE. The Kalikamata and Lakushila temples at the summit of Pavagadh Hill see a steady stream of pilgrims throughout the year.

Champaner-Pavagadh's structures

represent a perfect blend of Indo-Islamic architecture that showcases a distinct style of art, carvings, and lattice work. Some of the complex's most stunning structures are Khapra Zaveri no Mahal, Amir ki Manzil, Saat Kaman, and Shahi Masjid.

The 'forgotten' city of Champaner-Pavagadh was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2004.

Rani Ni Vav (in Patan)

Anhilvada Patan was the glorious capital of the Solanki dynasty of Gujarat from 942-1304 CE, shining as a centre of trade, learning, and architectural achievements. Patan is also famed for its patola and mashru weaver communities. The woven patola sarees are known for their beauty and workmanship. The Salvis are the most famous weaver families of Patan, committed to protecting and conserving the dying art of hand-weaving.

This beautiful old town boasts Jain temples and carved wooden houses but is especially noted for the 11th-century Rani ni Vav. The exquisitely sculpted Rani ni Vav (Queen's stepwell) was commissioned by Rani Udayamati in 1063 in memory of her husband King Bhimdev I.

The steps begin at ground level, leading you down through several pillared pavilions to reach the deep well below. There are over 800 elaborate sculptures among seven galleries. The central theme is the Dasavatars, or ten incarnations of Vishnu, including that of the Buddha. These are accompanied by other religious and celestial figures.

Rani ni Vav was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2014.

Heritage & Architecture

Modhera

A little over 100 km from Ahmedabad, on the banks of the River Pushpavati in the Mehsana District, lies the village of Modhera. Here is the wondrous **Sun Temple**, dedicated to Surya, the Hindu Sun God. Known for its genius in design, execution, and construction, the magnificent 11th- century temple was built by King Bhimdev I of the Solanki dynasty of Gujarat. The sheer profusion of figures, religious and erotic, will leave you spellbound.

The three main components of the temple complex are two halls (shrine hall and assembly hall), and a reservoir. The halls have beautiful intricately carved exteriors and pillars. Absolutely breathtaking is **Surya Kund**, a deep, symmetrical stepped tank that has steps leading to the bottom and numerous small shrines. Interestingly, the entire Sun Temple and its pavilion seem

to rest on the spine of innumerable richly sculpted elephants set along the base. Modhera is also noted for the **Modhera Dance Festival**, an annual three-day classical dance festival, held here in the third week of January against the stunning backdrop of the Sun Temple.

Palitana

Located five kilometres from Bhavnagar (the city serves as a base to visit both



Palitana and the Velavadar National park) Palitana is one of the most sacred places of pilgrimage for Jains and is famed for its extraordinary cluster of **marble Jain temples** – over a thousand of them – that crown the twin summits of the **Shatrunjaya Hills**. The temples here have been built since the 11th century CE, though most of them date back to the 16th century, many having been destroyed by invaders in the interim. Exquisitely carved, the temples offer great views from the top. There are more than **3,500 steps** all the way up the four-kilometre path to the top! The main temple here is dedicated to **Adinath – the first Jain Tirthankara**.

Somnath

Located in the Junagadh District of Gujarat, Somnath is most famous for its grand Siva temple, the **Somnath Jyoturlinga Temple**. Once marvellously wealthy, the temple was originally built between 320-500 CE but

was plundered and destroyed several times for its treasures. The present structure of the shrine was completed in 1961. Built in the **Chalukyan** style, the beautiful sea-facing temple has an ambience of wonderful light and space. Especially worth experiencing here is the **aarati** (Hindu ritual of worship, in which the flame from wicks soaked in oil or clarified butter, or camphor, is offered to one or more deities, as adoration).

Ambaji

Amabaji is a tiny temple town. The heart and soul of this pilgrimage hotspot is the **Ambaji Temple**. The temple is rather unique in that the sanctum does not house an idol of the resident deity (**Amba – the ‘mother goddess’**) but a symbolic **yantra** (Shakti Visa Shree Yantra) – a gold-plated disc that has 51 sacred letters on it. The yantra is kept in a cave-like space known as the **gokh** and is dressed by the priests in such a way as to look like the mother goddess.

The **‘original Shaktipeetha’** (significant shrines and pilgrimage destinations in Shaktism, the goddess-focused Hindu tradition) is believed to be three kilometres away, in the **Ambaji Temple on Gabbar Hill**. Devotees can take a trolley service to the tiny open-air shrine in a few minutes or climb a flight of some 900 steps to the summit.

The other well-known temples in the area are the **five marble Kumbhariya Jain Temples** and the **Neminath Temple**.

Dwarka

Dwarka is considered to be one among the seven most sacred Hindu **teerthas** (pilgrimage sites and holy places in Hinduism as well as Jainism) and is believed to be the place where the beloved god **Krishna** settled with his Yadava clan after leaving Braj, where he once lived and ruled.

Also known as the **Trilokasundara Temple**, the Chalukya-style **Dwarkadheesh Temple** has been constructed with local stone. The aaratis performed here are quite special, paying obeisance to the beautiful black idol of Krishna. Behind the temple, the **River Gomti** flows into the sea. Nearby is a lighthouse that offers lovely panoramic views.



Marble carvings, Kumbhariya Jain Temple



Iranshah Atash Behram fire temple, Udvada

Other temples here include the **Siddheshwar Mahadev Mandir** and **Bhadkeshwar Mahadev Mandir**.

Udvada

Udvada is a pastoral town in coastal Gujarat, home to charming cottages and placid cattle. In Udvada stands the **Iranshah Atash Behram**, the spiritual centre for **Parsis and Zoroastrians**, believed to be their **oldest consecrated fire**, established here on October 28, 1742.

While the **fire temple** (the place of worship for Zoroastrians/Parsis) is off limits for non-Zoroastrians, the little streets and bustle of old Udvada are fascinating. You can explore the town’s heritage by way of its **old Parsi houses** that reflect a distinct culture. These quaint homes have double porches, little alleys running behind, with their own private wells. Only a tiny community of Parsis continue to live here.

Zoroastrianism, one of the oldest known monotheistic religions, was founded by Prophet Zarathustra some 3,500 years ago in Persia (ancient Iran) and was the dominant religion there until the rise of Islam in the 7th century CE. Faced with forced conversions, scores of Persian Zoroastrians (whose descendants are today called ‘Parsis’) fled to India, and arrived on the coast of Gujarat. Their honesty, diligence, and adaptability ensured that they were soon integrated into the fabric of Indian society. Today, this micro-community is famous for its industriousness, enterprise, generosity, sense of humour, delicious cuisine, and strong spiritual culture.

Navsari

Here is a little gem on the **Parsi pilgrimage** circuit of Gujarat. Navsari was the home of the **Iranshah** for 250 years. Today, this town, located on the southern Gujarat coast, is still



View of River Gomti and Dwarkadheesh Temple, Dwarka

home to the **Vadi Darb-e-Mehr**, believed to have been consecrated in 1151. It is the **oldest extant fire temple** outside Iran, as well as the oldest, and for some Parsis, the most venerable, revered initiation centre for **martab**, the qualification needed by priests to perform the higher liturgy.

Junagadh

With a name that means ‘Old Fort’, Junagadh lies in the **Girnar** foothills in the **Saurashtra** region of Gujarat, and is simply brimming with centuries of rich history and heritage spanning dominant periods of Jainism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, all of which left deep imprints on the city. From temples dotting the hills above to spectacular ancient stepwells down deep in the earth to a magnificent fort to a Gothic-style palace to elegant mosques and tombs to second-century Buddhist caves, Junagadh excites and impresses with sheer individuality no other place can match!

Dominating the city, the sprawling ancient **Uperkot Fort** is believed to date back to the reign of the Mauryan emperor Chandragupta Maurya around 320 CE. The fort is accessed through a narrow gateway with an ancient archway. The western wall inside the fort has two cannons (tope) named Neelam and Manek! Neelam Tope was cast in Egypt in 1531, and is 17 feet long.

Dating back to around 250 BCE, **Emperor Ashoka’s 14 Rock Edicts** are located on the route to the Mount Girnar Hills. The Edicts are carved into an enormous rock in the **Brahmi** script in the ancient **Pali** language. They contain moral and ethical (not religious) precepts for living a virtuous

life, respecting others, and creating a just society. The Rock Edicts in Junagadh are one among several that Ashoka had carved in stone across India when he renounced violence and converted to **Buddhism**. The ancient **Buddhist Caves** around Uparkot are actually three separate sites of rooms carved out of stone that were once used as Buddhist monks’ quarters. The Caves are decorated with artwork on the pillars and carvings of Buddhist spiritual motifs; each set of caves is divided by stories. The cave groups, with their intricately carved gateways, halls, sculptured pillars, and sanctums are classic examples of rock-cut architecture

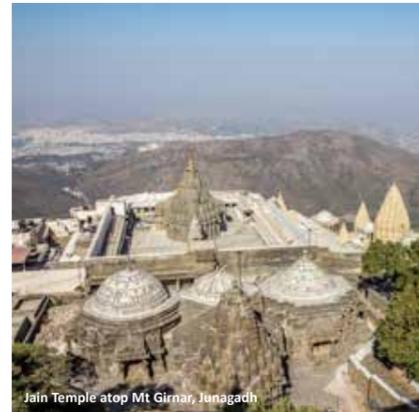
Recent excavations have brought to light more Buddhist footprints across Gujarat leading to little-known but culturally and historically significant sites such as Dev ni Mori, Khambhalida Caves, Vadnagar, Kadia Dungar, Siyot Caves, and Sana Caves.

To the east of the caves are two spectacular **stepwells** believed to date to the 11th century – **Adi-Chadi Vav**, which spirals down 100 feet to a broad well, and **Navghan Vav**, that plunges even deeper to 170 feet.

The 19th-century **Mahabat Maqbara** is perhaps the most bizarre structure in Junagadh. The tomb was built by Bahadur Khan III for his father Mahabat Khan II. Next to it is the intricate **Bahauddin Maqbara** (built 1878-92) with its graceful corkscrew towers. The 19th-century **Maqbara of Naju Bibi** shows off a distinctly indigenous Junagadh architectural style and sports a dome that can only be described as other worldly!



Mahabat Maqbara, Junagadh



Jain Temple atop Mt Girnar, Junagadh

Junagadh Palace, the mid-19th-century home of the nawabs of Junagadh, has a bazaar in front with Gothic arches standing next to Indo-Islamic gateways and surrounded by a European clock tower.

The 19th-century **Jumma Masjid** is almost ballroom-like, with its Gothic arches and chandeliers.

Girnar Hill dominates the skyline of Junagadh at 3,000 feet. The historic **Jain temple complex of Girnar** are 3,700 steps up the cliff, past a few caves, after a forest. The majestic complex looks like a 16th-century fortress clinging to the cliffside. The most architecturally striking structure here is the **Vastupala Temple**.

Siddhpur

Siddhpur has rows and rows of **palatial wooden 19th-century townhouses** – painted in subtle pastel shades and built three-four storeys high. Most of them were built by Gujarat’s flourishing **mercantile Muslim community**. Many of them now remain locked for a large part of the year, giving the town a deserted look.

Don’t miss the **Rudra Mahalaya**, also known as Rudramal, in Siddhpur. You can see the mystifying ruins of this 12th-century temple complex with tantric overtones.

Gondal

Situated in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat, the former princely state of Gondal still holds the air of a bygone royal era with its beautiful palaces and living spaces. It stands testament to the work of the great visionary ruler **Sir Bhagwatsinghji** who introduced tax reforms and compulsory education for women, and stopped the

practice of purdah (female seclusion) at a time when it was strongly practiced by royal families in the 19th century. To get an idea of Gondal’s fascinating history and progressive maharaja, visit the **Naulakha Palace**. And do go and see the **Vintage Car Collection**. The royals of Gondal also loved cars – their passion led to a grand collection of automobiles which are now displayed in the museum in the palace premises.

Morvi

Morvi may today be a bustling manufacturing centre noted for its **ceramic and clock-making** industries, but this town in Gujarat’s Rajkot district holds an astonishing array of built heritage – such as the Rajput-style **Willingdon Secretariat**, the engineering marvel of **Julto Pul** (suspension bridge), the **Green Chowk** (modelled on European town-planning principles), and the **Art Deco Palace** and **Nazarbag Palace**, among others. Morvi owes its rich architectural heritage to its erstwhile status as one of the most prosperous princely states in India, ruled by a progressive clan of **Jadeja Rajputs**. But hands down the most stunning of Morvi’s treasures is the breathtaking **Darbagadh Palace** – the sprawling 19th century structure overlooking the **River Machhu** was damaged in the 2001 earthquake but has been painstakingly restored by **princess Uma Morvi**.

Vadodara

Fondly called Baroda, Vadodara is acknowledged as the cultural capital of Gujarat. This distinction can be mostly credited to **Sayajirao Gaekwad III**, a



Maharaja Sayajirao University, Vadodara



Laxmi Vilas Palace, Vadodara



Shop selling Indian sweets, Vadodara

visionary ruler of Baroda State in the late 19th century. The Gaekwads, one of several powerful Maratha clans who rose to power in the late 17th century and established an extensive empire covering most of present day India, ruled over Baroda from 1721 to 1947. Sayajirao was truly progressive – he made primary education free and compulsory, abolished child marriage and

untouchability, constructed a railroad system, and began the iconic Bank of Baroda to promote commerce.

Sayaji Baug, opened in 1879 on the banks of the River Vishwamitra to offer Baroda’s people both recreation and education, stands testament to this great ruler’s vision. The 113-acre park boasts Grecian statues around the Victorian-style bandstand, deer in the large zoo, a botanical garden, an aquarium, a planetarium, and the History of Health Museum. But the real gem of Sayaji Baug is the **Baroda Museum and Picture Gallery**, whose treasures include an Egyptian mummy, the skeleton of a 71-foot blue whale, and art by European masters.

Sayajirao brought his eclectic influences to the impressive and dramatic **Laxmi Vilas Palace**, the home he built in 1890 and named after his wife. The palace is a fabulous blend of **East-West** architectural styles. The durbar room is lit by massive stained-glass windows illustrating stories from the epics! And the throne room is adorned with the beautiful art of the famous painter-royal from South India – **Raja Ravi Varma**. The Maharaja Fateh Singh Museum in the grounds has a collection too, of paintings by Raja Ravi Varma.

The **Old City** is home to the **Pratap Vilas Palace**, **Nazar Baug Palace**, **Tambekar Wada (a wooden haveli)**, **Nyayamandir Court**, and **Suryasagar Lake**.

The campus of the **Maharaja Sayajirao University** (1881) is replete with majestic buildings and small museums.

Nature & Wildlife

Thanks to its unique geographical location and diverse climatic conditions Gujarat has a diverse ecosystem that spans dry deciduous forests, majestic grasslands, unique saline deserts, wetlands, and marine ecosystems. These are home to some extremely rare wildlife and birds. The Asiatic Lion, found only in Gir, the Wild Ass in the Little Rann of Kutch, and the Black Buck, which is the only four-horned antelope in the world, are some of the valued species protected in Gujarat.

Here are some of the state's finest national parks and sanctuaries.

Sasangir

The **Gir National Park** holds the rare and proud distinction of being a wildlife sanctuary that is the 'only remaining habitat for the **Asiatic Lion**'. Most of Gir falls under the Junagadh District of Gujarat. This is one of the regions where the mighty Asiatic lion once reigned – from Southern Europe to Africa to Central India, until around a century ago.

In the early 20th century, the lion population fell due to a massive famine. The Nawab of Junagadh then undertook a huge project to save the few remaining Asiatic lions. Due to the Nawab's tremendous efforts to bring the lions back from the brink of extinction, Gir was

declared a lion sanctuary in 1965; and a National Park and Nature Reserve in 1974.

The Gir experience is of course fantastic for its close encounters with the majestic Asiatic lions but what also makes it special is that it has a very **large leopard population**, among several other species of animals. The forest is also a **birder's paradise**, home to over 250 varieties of birds.



Deep inside the **Gir forest** is the home of the **Siddi tribe**, descendants of African slaves, sailors, servants, and merchants who remained in India after arriving through the sea trade with East Africa and the Gulf around the 11-12th century or so.

Today, most Siddis live in Gujarat. Smaller populations are found in the states of Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh.

Having adapted remarkably over the centuries, the Siddis speak Gujarati and even eat Gujarati food. They retain their links to their African lineage by way of their music and dance.

Velavadar Blackbuck National Park

Once a part of the princely state of Bhavnagar, the sprawling grasslands of Velavadar, with their high populations of the Indian Blackbuck, were used as private hunting grounds, and grazing lands for the maharaja's cattle. A sanctuary was soon created to protect the Blackbuck, and Velavadar was declared a National Park in 1976. Situated near the Gulf of Khambat in Bhavnagar, the Park abounds with animal and bird life, and is the home of the beautiful and thrilling spiral-horned antelope or the Blackbuck, also the fastest Indian antelope, with its maximum recorded speed standing at 80 km per hour! Also here are the endangered Indian wolves, which hunt in packs in the forest. For birders, this is heaven – close to the coast are wetlands full of rare and beautiful endangered and migratory birds.



Male Blackbuck, Velavadar Blackbuck National Park, Bhavnagar

Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary

Around 65 km from Ahmedabad, the Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary lies on the low-lying plains between Central Gujarat and Eastern Saurashtra. The lake – Nalsarovar – and the wetlands around it were declared a bird sanctuary in 1969. The over 120 sq. km wetlands and the extensive reed beds and marshes are the perfect habitat for aquatic plants and animals. The wetland is made up of open waters, emergent vegetation, islets, and mudflats.

Every year, between November and February flocks and flocks of more than 200 types of migratory birds fly all the way from their nesting grounds in Central Europe to Nalsarovar, making an arduously long journey to escape the harsh winter of their nesting areas. They come here to find food, shelter, and warmth. During these four months water is abundant, as are fish, insects, and aquatic plants – making it a bird watcher's delight.

Little Rann of Kutch

Spread over 4,953 sq. km in the five districts of Kutch, Patan, Surendranagar, Banaskantha, and Rajkot in Gujarat, the Little Rann is the **largest Ramsar Wetlands Site**. It is also the only sanctuary

for the **Asiatic Wild Ass** in India. The Rann (meaning 'salt marsh') is an unusual, unique landscape that was once an arm of the Arabian Sea. As the land eventually separated from the sea, it became a vast plain of greys, blacks, and whites formed by salty mudflats and shimmering stretches of water.

The Rann is a seasonal marshland which is inundated with seawater that then dries up, leaving behind large patches of salt. The region is rich in natural gas. To protect and conserve the unique ecosystem, several wildlife sanctuaries and reserves have been established here. Apart from the Wild Ass, the Little Rann is also home to several other species of small animals and reptiles; and a birder's paradise, with several migratory birds flocking here in the winter months.

The Marine National Park

Declared as the first marine national park in India in 1982 the Park lies off the southern coast of the Gulf of Kutch in Jamnagar. It was established for the protection of threatened marine flora and fauna in the area.

Colourful coral reefs, mangrove swamp forests, mudflats, sea grass, sea weeds, and rocky shoals form the landscape of the shallow waters of the Marine National Park. This keeps land predators away from the water and also allows birds to nest and



Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary, near Jamnagar

roost here. During the monsoon, 30 different species of migratory birds make their home among the mangrove forests.

One of the most threatened birds, the great Indian bustard, and the Chowsingha, the world's only four-horned antelope is also found in certain protected areas here.

Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary

A short distance from Jamnagar, the Sanctuary has an incredibly diverse ecosystem in a small area. Established during the early 20th century, the Sanctuary is formed by two man-made dykes that separate fresh water from sea water, making it possible to observe species that belong to both ecosystems, and some that share both. The landscape also has marshes, mangroves, mudflats, salt pans, creeks, forest scrub, sandy beaches, and even farmlands. The diverse terrain is home to more than 220 species of resident and migratory birds, including globally threatened species.



Waterfalls, Saputara

Saputara

Saputara, Gujarat's only hill station, is located in the Dang, the least developed of Gujarat's districts. Charming and unpretentious, Saputara looks out to a lush green valley and is a lovely place to unwind, go trekking, or take gentle walks in the hills. The main attractions here are the **Saputara Lake, Echo Point and Townview Point, the tribal villages of the Bhils, Warlis, and Gamits, Hatgadh Fort, Pandava Caves, and the Saputara Museum.**

Gopnath Beach

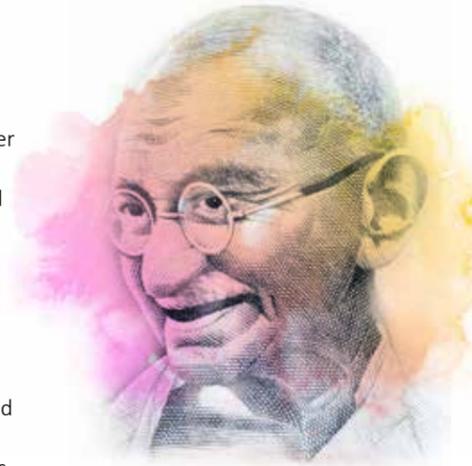
This low-key, relatively little-known beach (some 90 km from Bhavnagar) on the coast of the Gulf of Khambat, is encircled by limestone cliffs, fishing villages, and temples, and is home to plovers and oyster-catchers. Gopnath is also a great base for excursions to Palitana and Alang.

The Gandhi Trail

The **Gandhi circuit** in Gujarat, followed through museums and memorials, is one of the best ways to learn about the life and times of **Mahatma Gandhi**, the Father of the Indian Nation. Gujarat is not only the birth place of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi but was once also the site of several significant socio-political events, associations, meetings, and activities in the history of India's struggle for independence.

The 'haveli' where Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869 in **Porbandar** is one of the biggest highlights on this circuit. The room where he was born has been preserved just the way it was. A part of the house has now been converted into a museum and called the **Kirti Mandir**.

It was in **Rajkot** that Gandhi spent his childhood, and the family residence, now called '**Kaba Gandhi No Delo**', houses a small museum that exhibits a history of various events in Gandhi's life through pictures. Gandhi returned to Rajkot in 1939 to establish the **Rashtriyashala** to instil the idea of Swaraj (self-rule) during the country's fight for Independence. Today, the school imparts educational and



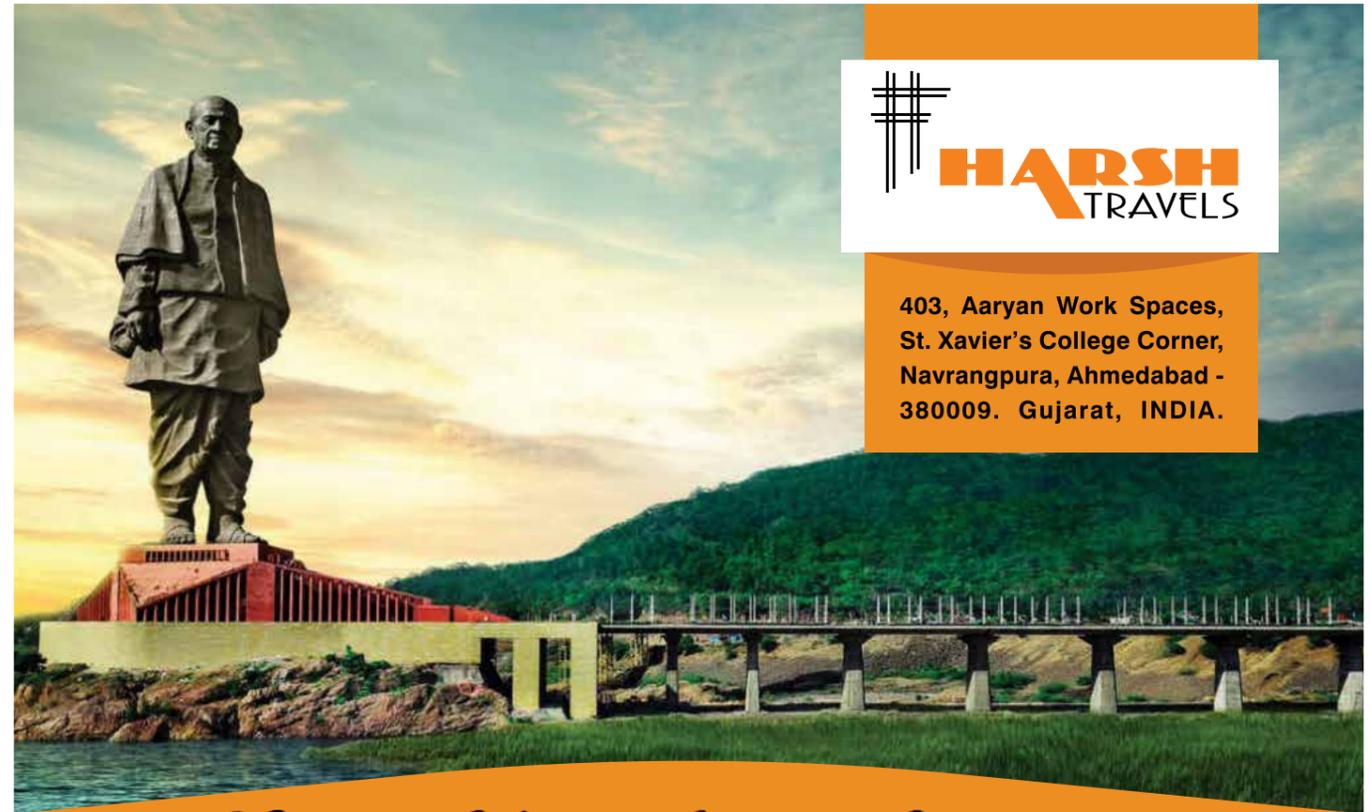
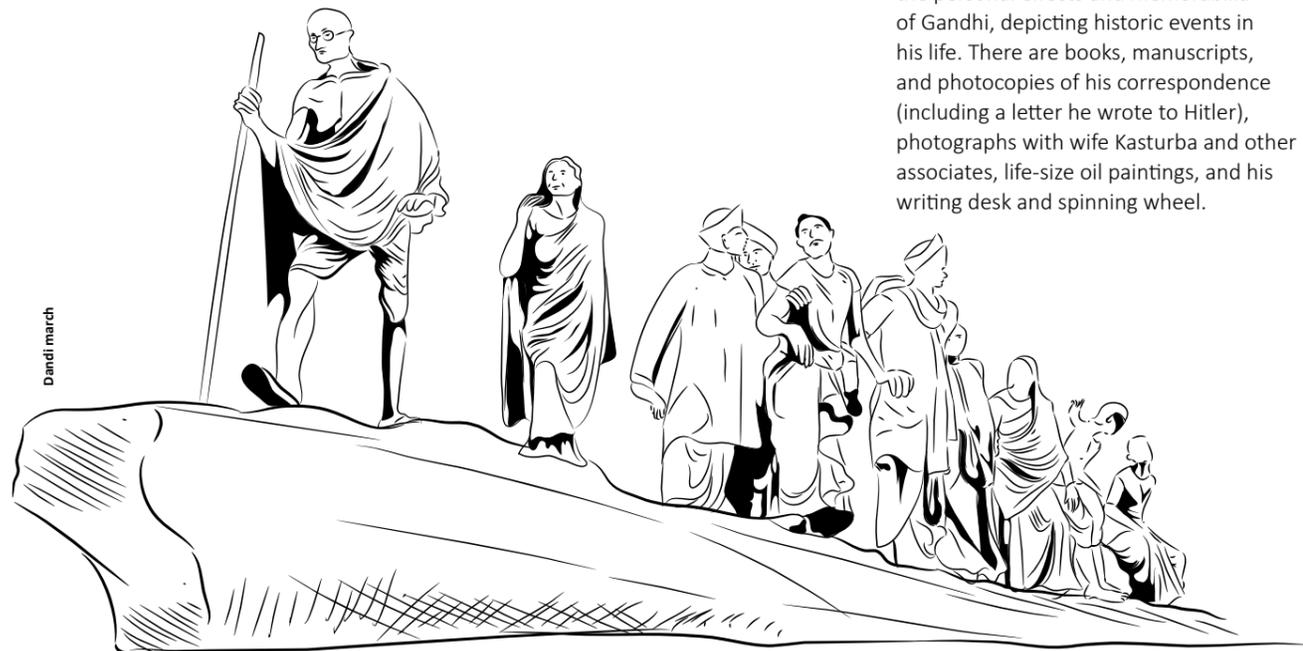
vocational training; interestingly it also popularised the art of single '**ikat**' weaving, a craft Rajkot is famous for.



Located near Surat, the seaside town of **Dandi** is the iconic site from where Gandhi began his famous **Salt Satyagraha (Dandi March)** in protest against the British Salt Law imposed on India. Dandi shot to worldwide prominence in 1930 when Gandhi marched from Sabarmati (Ahmedabad) to Dandi with a group of followers and volunteers to **protest against the imposition of a tax on salt**. Thousands of people participated, travelling on foot for 24 days from Ahmedabad to Dandi. At Dandi, he picked up a handful of saline mud and seawater, **symbolising the production of salt** in defiance of the British law. A memorial statue marks the historic event.

The **Gandhi Ashram and the Gandhi Memorial Museum** lie across the banks of the **River Sabarmati** in **Ahmedabad**. Established in 1918, the spartan and tranquil Ashram is where Gandhi lived, and from where he launched the famous Dandi March in 1930. Here, he learnt the art of spinning and weaving **khadi** (a kind of cotton fabric) – the experiment not only revolutionised a whole new way of producing homespun cloth, but also a way of life and thought.

The Museum in the Ashram houses the personal effects and memorabilia of Gandhi, depicting historic events in his life. There are books, manuscripts, and photocopies of his correspondence (including a letter he wrote to Hitler), photographs with wife Kasturba and other associates, life-size oil paintings, and his writing desk and spinning wheel.



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Traditional Arts & Crafts

Gujarat has a rich and colourful legacy of weaving and handicrafts. Its location on the western coast of India helped cultivate trade and commerce with people from across the Arabian Sea for centuries. Traders, invaders, colonisers, migrants, and refugees all have landed here with riches, skills, and enterprise that have become an integral part of the state's unique heritage. Discover the sheer diversity, range, and wealth of Gujarat's undying tradition art and crafts as we unveil some of its hidden treasures. We have identified the key crafts in each area/region mentioned here.

Surat

Sadeli (a form of marquetry design), Zari (silver or gold thread embroidery)

Sankheda (Vadodara Distt)

Colourful Wooden Furniture & Lacquer ware

Chhota Udaipur

Pithora Painting (highly ritualistic tribal art form done either to celebrate an auspicious occasion or call upon a revered tribal lord in times of trouble); the Dahod and Panchmahals Districts in the area are also home to tribal communities famous for their pottery, terracotta, and jewellery.

Surendranagar (Saurashtra)

Handloom weaving and textile embellishment; especially known for Tangaliya (a rare and unique weave that employs adding extra knots on the weft which create motifs and figures in a dotted pattern on the woven fabric); bandhej or bandhani (tie & dye), metalwork, stone carving.



Bandhani scarves

Jasdan (Rajkot Distt)

Brass embellished wooden chests and boxes; Rajkot District is also well known for its gold jewellery and silverware, meenakari style painted furniture, block printing, and screen printing.

Bhavnagar Distt

Sihore's (20 km from Bhavnagar) metal utensils; embroidery, beadwork, bird hangings, Botad's pottery, Palitana's metal-embossed woodwork and stonework, and Mahua's lacquer work.

Tribal woman doing embroidery work

Jamnagar (Saurashtra)

Bandhani (tie & dye); also known for its metal crafts, zari, and jewellery.

Dhamadka – Ajrakhpur (Kutch Distt)

Ajrakh block printing (an intricate art of resist block printing fabrics that uses a resist, mordant, or both by applying handheld wooden blocks with designs in relief)

Bhujodi (Kutch Distt)

Weaving (traditionally wool weaving, today cottons, Merino wools, acrylics and silks are used too); Bhujodi is also known for Rabari and Marwada embroidery, woodcarving, and other handicrafts.

Poshina (Sabarkantha Distt)

Terracotta horses; silver jewellery and tribal adornments.

Kutch

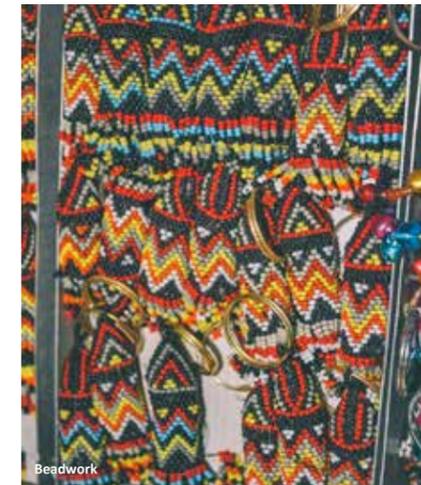
Rogan painting/printing: paint made from boiled oil and vegetable dyes is laid down on fabric using either a metal block (printing) or a stylus (painting); leather crafts, embroidery work.

Kutch, Saurashtra, Banaskantha, Patan

Applique and Patch Work



Rogan Art



Beadwork

Khambhat, Saurashtra, Rajkot, Bhavnagar, Amreli, and Junagadh

Beadwork

Patan

Patola: a double ikat (dyeing technique used to pattern textiles) handwoven silk saree.



Handmade colourful, embroidered clutch/bags for sale



Ajrakh block printing

Daman, Diu, Silvassa

Daman and Diu are seaside towns on either side of the Gulf of Khambat. Silvassa is located at the foothills of the Western Ghats. They are not really part of the state of Gujarat but deserve mention here for not only their geographical proximity to Gujarat but also for their popularity as the dearly beloved places for many Gujaratis to holiday in and unwind.

For over 450 years, the coastal enclaves of Daman and Diu on the Arabian Sea coast along with Goa and Dadra and Nagar Haveli – all far-flung – were ruled by the Portuguese. Today, Goa is a state while Daman & Diu and Dadra & Nagar Haveli are a new single Union Territory (effective January 26, 2020).

Thanks to the sea and three rivers, tiny Daman has a large waterfront, with two beaches (Devka and Jampore). **Moti Daman (Big Daman)** is the erstwhile Portuguese township with an old fort replete with ancient structures. The loveliest of these are the two churches of **Bom Jesus** and **Our Lady of Rosario** – both built in the 17th century. A walk through the old town will reveal colonial homes, churches, and official buildings. In **Nani Daman (Little Daman)**, visit the **Damao Pequino Jetty** and the **St Jerome Fort** that was built by the Portuguese in 1627 to keep the Mughals at bay.

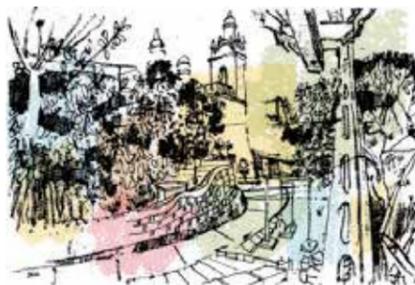
Lying off the coast of the Kathiawar Peninsula in the Arabian Sea, Diu is a small and peaceful island with abundant



Residential district, Diu



St Paul's Church, Diu



remnants of its Portuguese connection and history. Diu's entire **21 km coastline** is a beach, with some beautiful beaches to see.

The imposing 16th-century Portuguese **Fort of Diu** has a magnificent view out into the sea. The massive, well-preserved Fort is quite remarkable to explore, with its double moat, cannonballs, and a fabulous array of cannons on its ramparts. Part of the Fort also serves as the island's jail. Lit up at night, the Fort offers spectacular views of the **stone fortress of Panikotha** in the sea.



Diu Fort, Diu

In the **old quarter of Diu**, Nagar Seth's Haveli is one of the finest old houses. Nearby is the **Church of St Francis of Assisi**. The Gothic **St Thomas' Church**, which also serves as a museum, is another remarkable edifice.

Founded by Jesuits in the 17th century, Diu's **St Paul's Church** was completed in 1610. The beautiful Church has an elaborate neoclassical façade, and is considered one of the finest Portuguese churches in India.

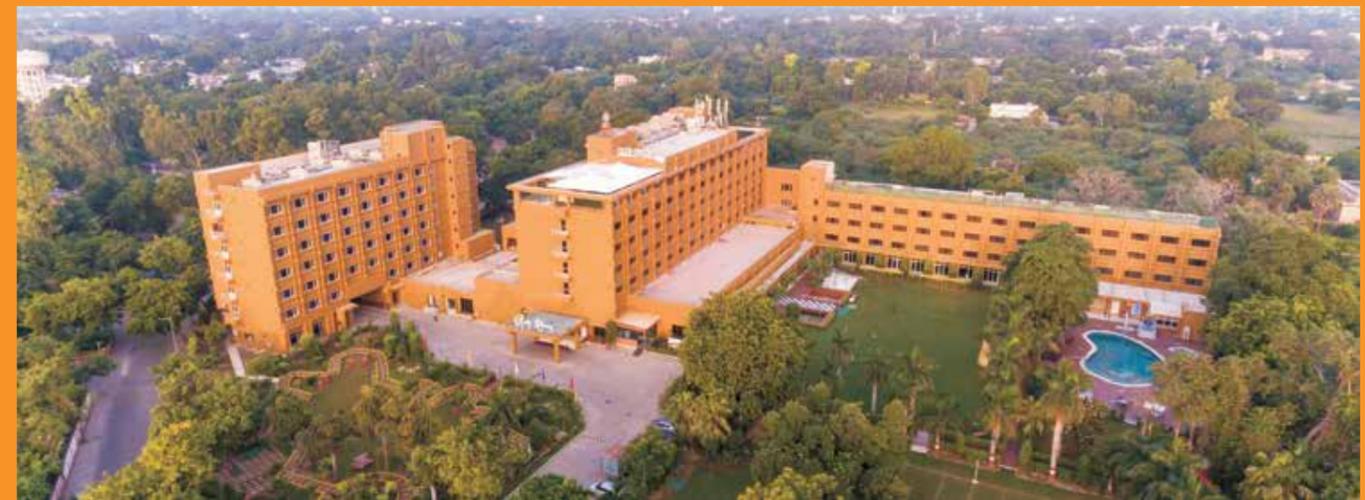
Explore the island's local bazaars to shop and experience street life in Diu.

Silvassa, the headquarters of the Dadra and Nagar Haveli district, although gradually growing into an industrial hub, attracts tourists with its still charming environs. Our Lady of Piety Church, the Lion Safari Park (for a rare glimpse of lions that aren't caged), Vanganaga Lake and Island Garden, and Pipariya Van and Hirwa Van Gardens are Silvassa's highlights.

For the detailed section on Gujarat's Kutch region, you can read our **DESTINATION** feature.

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Kutch

Lunar landscapes in India's wild west

“The desert, when the sun comes up. I couldn't tell where heaven stopped and the Earth began”
 – Tom Hanks



Great Rann of Kutch

Located between the vast deserts to the north that edge Pakistan and the shimmering Arabian Sea to the south, Gujarat's Kutch region in India's far-flung western border is the final frontier for a confluence of cultures and crafts.

This infinite stretch of largely barren and harsh desert landscape covers a little over 45,000 sq.km and is geographically one of India's largest and most distinctive districts. The name Kutch (or Kachchh) refers to how the the land alternates between wet (submerged during the monsoon season) and dry.

Image Courtesy: Gujarat Tourism



Indian Wild Asses, Little Rann of Kutch

Located between the vast deserts to the north that skirt Pakistan and the shimmering Arabian Sea to the south, Gujarat's Kutch region in India's far-flung western border is the final frontier for a confluence of cultures and crafts. This infinite stretch of largely barren and harsh desert landscape covers a little over 45,000 sq.km and is geographically one of India's largest and most distinctive districts. The name Kutch (or Kachchh) refers to how the land alternates between wet (submerged during the monsoon season) and dry.

Much of Kutch consists of seasonal wetlands known as the Rann (the word means 'salt marsh') – Great Rann of Kutch and the smaller Little Rann of Kutch. The intriguing Ranns are seasonal marshes that transform into salt deserts during the summer months. The Great Rann is also a breeding ground for flamingoes and the Little Rann is the only remaining natural abode of the endangered Indian Wild Ass.

The Great Rann, located in the far north, borders

Pakistan and occupies a part of the Thar Desert which also extends into Rajasthan. This geographical stretch explains the region's many migrant communities from bordering areas as close as Pakistan (Sindh) and the Marwar region of Rajasthan to those much further away including Persia (Iran).

Its historical significance apart, Kutch stands out for its unique natural wonders, fascinating mud architecture, and vivid, vibrant colours – most visible in the splendid attire of its people. The Kutch region, believed to have been inhabited for 4000 years or so, was an ancient centre of trade and migration with faraway lands such as Zanzibar, the Middle East, and Greece – the intermingling resulted in a unique ethnic blend of peoples and traditions that together produce some of India's finest handicrafts, especially textiles that are resplendent with bewitching embroidery and mirrorwork.



Tribal woman, Rann of Kutch

Bhuj, the capital of the former state of Kutch for nearly 400 years and now the headquarters of Kutch District, was ruled by the Jadeja Rajputs from 1540-1948. Bhuj's architectural treasures, its forts, palaces, cenotaphs, and old gates, stand testament to the city's position as the seat of power of this mighty dynasty. Today, it is a mix of the ancient and the modern and is the best base for exploring the spectacular Kutch region. Even with its dry, harsh, scantily populated terrain, and hot climate, Bhuj is supremely fascinating and a land of strange beauty.

Located in north-western Gujarat, Bhuj could be called an island of sorts with the Arabian Sea to its west, the Greater and Little Rann to the north and east, and the Gulf of Kutch to its south.

The road to Bhuj is flanked by hills – the Bhujiya Hills from where Bhuj gets its name – crowned with a fort's ramparts. The devastating earthquake that hit Bhuj



Sunset landscape, Great Rann of Kutch



Sunset, Great Rann of Kutch

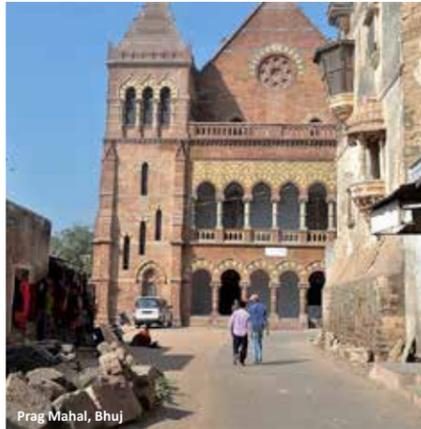
in January 2001 saw over 20,000 people die and scores more injured. Nearly two decades on, the scars remain. The disaster permanently changed something among locals, who divide their lives into before and after the earthquake.

Things to see in Bhuj include the Darbargadh Palace Complex, Hamirsar Lake, the two museums – Kutch Museum and the Bhartiya Sanskriti Darshan – and Sharad Baug Palace. From Bhuj you can also make a day trip to nearby villages famed for their crafts.

Mandvi, a little seaside town with a gorgeous beach just outside the town, lies 55 km southwest of Bhuj, on the southern shore of Kutch. For several centuries, Mandvi was a major seaport in Kutch, with trade links to South Africa, Zanzibar, Malaysia, China, and Japan. The town is famous for its cottage shipbuilding industry (going on since the 16th century) and batik work. Shipbuilding takes place on River Rukmati which runs through the town. Here wooden ships are still built by hand. The ships are small and exhibit a Dutch influence. Visit also the Mandvi Town Beach and the Vijay Vilas Palace (also called Mandvi Palace). Explore Mandvi town on foot to see its old architecture and fascinating bazaars.

The village of Moti Virani, some 55 km northwest of Bhuj, is a good base from which to explore Kutch.

Banni is around 20 km north of Moti Virani; with its grasslands ecosystem, it is a virtual haven for naturalists and birders: explore the wetlands of Chari Dhand and Baghera That, the marine fossil bed at the foot of Kiro Hill, the Fakirani Camps and



Prag Mahal, Bhuj



Camel driven cart transporting a Ganesha idol, Bhuj



Interior of Aina Mahal, Bhuj



Vijaya Vilas Palace, Mandvi

360-degree views of saline silt and suaeda. In the wet season, Banni is a flood plain. And in the winter, it hosts over 200 species of European and West Asian birds who migrate here.

You can also explore the Jathaveera thorn forest and the dried riverbeds at Layari and Sarannath, around 15 km from Moti Virani.

The Rann of Kutch, also called the Great Rann of Kutch mostly consists of the world's largest salt desert, running for 10,000 square kilometres. But what makes

it truly astounding is that the salt desert is underwater during the main monsoon season in India! For the remaining eight months of the year, it's a massive expanse of packed white salt!

The Great Rann lies to the north of the Tropic of Cancer (you'll pass through it and see the sign), at the top of the Kutch District. The Rann's northern edge marks the border between India and Pakistan. The Rann is best approached via Bhuj. Dhordo, located on the edge of the salt desert, is approximately an hour and a half north of Bhuj, and is being developed by the Gujarat government as the Gateway to the Rann.

The Rann begins to dry up in October every year, gradually changing to the bleak, isolated, and surreal salt desert. The tourist season runs until March. The best time to experience the desert is definitely the early morning or evening, otherwise the salt can be blinding. Take a full moon-lit night camel safari into the desert to soak up the magic of these salt flats that look like snow on first sight. Where the land and sky are indistinguishable.



Sunset, Mandvi Beach

The Great Rann of Kutch is a sensitive area, due to its proximity to the Pakistan border. Therefore, a permit is required to visit the salt desert. This can be obtained on the way at the Bhirandiyara village army checkpoint, about 55 kilometres from Bhuj.

While most people enter the Great Rann by way of Bhuj, it's also possible to approach from Khadir Bet to the east. Rising out of the desert, this island is home to the 5,000-year-old Indus Valley civilization site – Dholavira (see COVER STORY).

Hodka, located in the Rann of Kutch, is one of the 36 villages that are part of the UNDP and the Indian Government-sponsored Endogenous Tourism Project. The project encourages villagers to open up their homes to visitors so that they can benefit directly from tourism. A local NGO trains the villagers while creating employment and providing development to the villages. At Hodka, the villagers own and run a stunning rural resort – Shaam-e-Sarhad – fitted with lovely bhungas (circular mud huts with conical thatch roofs) as well as tents.

At the very edge of Kutch, some 120 km from Bhuj, lie the Black Hills of Kutch, also known as Kala Dungar. It is the highest point in Kutch. Kala Dungar's elevation of around 1,500 feet gives you unsurpassed views of the endlessly vast expanse of the Great Rann of Kutch all the way across to the Pakistani border. A vision in white that extends to the horizon and beyond and that is constantly shifting shades with the changing light. At the very top of Kala Dungar is an old and revered temple of Guru Dattatreya – here, the wild jackals of the hills are fed rice sweetened with jaggery twice every day! The old Lakhpat Fort (140 kilometres from



Lakhpat Fort



People travelling in Chakda, the Gujarati public transport

Bhuj) also provides a fabulous view of the Rann of Kutch.

The unusual, vast terrain of the Little Rann of Kutch is a salt marsh that features barren mudflats dotted with small islands (locally known as 'bets'). The Little Rann is most well-known for its Wild Ass Sanctuary – the last refuge of the Indian/Asiatic wild ass and the largest wildlife sanctuary in India. It stretches over almost 5,000 square kilometres. The bleak landscape astounds with its rich biodiversity and is an ecologically important area for wildlife and

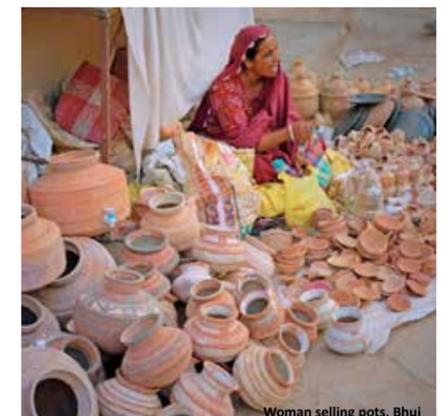
many local and migratory water birds such as cranes, ducks, pelicans, flamingos, and land birds such as sandgrouse, francolins, and the Indian bustards.

The sanctuary was established in 1973 to protect the endangered wild ass. Wild asses can run an average of 50 kilometres an hour over long distances!

The sanctuary is also home to other wildlife such as wolves, desert foxes, jackals, wild boars, jungle cats, desert cats, blackbuck, chinkara, nilgai, and snakes. Notably, the



Hodka Village, Rann of Kutch



Woman selling pots, Bhuj



area is the largest breeding site in the world for the magnificent Lesser Flamingo.

Despite being barely habitable, the Rann sees a lot of human activity. The region is rich in natural gas, the Indo-Pak border is heavily militarised, and there is traditional cattle-grazing, firewood collection, and salt panning (salt is harvested by local salt farmers known as Agariyas) going on.

The weather in the Little Rann is coolest from December to March, which is the peak winter season. The summer starts building April onward and can get unbearably hot so visiting isn't advisable then. During the monsoon season, from June to September, the Little Rann fills with water.

The sanctuary is open daily from dawn until dusk, except during the monsoon season. For the best wildlife experience and spotting, go on an early morning camel safari. Afternoon safaris are also possible. To really soak up the spellbinding atmosphere, camp out for a night on the Little Rann.

The Bajana Creek, where migratory birds appear during the winter is fantastic for birdwatching. Cranes, greater and lesser flamingoes, ducks, pelicans, and storks – all can be found here.

Numerous tribes live in villages around the

Little Rann; so take a guided tour through the villages.

Zainabad is located on the edge of the Little Rann and is the perfect gateway to this glorious marshland. Ornithologists and naturalists can make this their base. Dhrangadhra's 18th-century palace and darbargarh are worth visiting. There are also some elegant colonial buildings in the town. Jhinjwada Fort has some beautiful, intricately carved gateways. An old British salt-trading post was once in Kalaghoda.

Other colonial highlights are a cricket pavilion and bandstand.

Gujarat Tourism holds the Rann Ustav festival, which begins in October/November and goes on until the end of February. Set against the backdrop of



Salt farmers, Little Rann of Kutch



Tent City at Dhordo set up for the Rann Ustav

the Great Rann of Kutch, the Rann Ustav offers an opportunity to take in the natural and cultural heritage of the region. The music, concerts, jewellery, crafts, and communities make for interesting folk-tradition experiences.

The craft traditions of Kutch

In Kutch, you will discover crafts that are centuries-old but are as relevant now as they ever were. The rich and diverse creative traditions of Kutch thrive at the intersection of cultures and communities. As a border region, Kutch has been constantly absorbing cultures from the north, west, and east, and from across the seas over the centuries.

The arid climate and harsh terrain has compelled communities here to evolve an ingenious balance by converting resources into products for daily living. These gradually also became sources of employment, revenue, and recognition.

Kutch is dotted with villages of pastoral and nomadic communities who devised a rich tradition of handicrafts to add identity, colour, and ornamentation to their otherwise barren landscape. For a craft lover, Kutch is a treasure trove like no other, where each village has a different compartment of delights.

Kutch's traditional crafts include Ajrakh Blockprint, Bandhani (Tie & Dye, Batik Print, Bela Printing, Camel wool weaving, Embroidery, Kala cotton, Kharad Weaving, Knife Work, Lacquered Wood, Leather Art, Mashru Weaving, Metal Bells, Namda, Clay Pottery, Rogan Painting, Silversmithy, and Wood Carving.



Ruins of palace, Dhrangadhra



Traditional street shop selling colourful embroidery items, Bhuj



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The Gujarati Kitchen

A Banquet of Flavours and Textures

“One of the very nicest things about life is the way we must regularly stop whatever it is we are doing and devote our attention to eating.”
– Luciano Pavarotti

The cuisine of a state as geographically expansive and culturally diverse as Gujarat cannot really be classified as one single or complete entity. All the four major regions of Gujarat stand out for their own unique culinary styles. Kathiawar in the Saurashtra region is renowned for its dairy produce and pickles, Amdavad (colloquial for Ahmedabad) in Central Gujarat is known for dhoklas, theplas, and dhebras as grains are in abundance in this region. Surat in South Gujarat brings us the delicious undhiya, among other delicacies. The dry and arid region of Kutch will surprise you with its unique foods, the most well-known of which is the Kutchi Dabeli.

Using a little ingenuity, Gujarati cuisine is able to transform the simplest ingredients into superb delicacies in a subtle yet rich blend of flavours and textures. Complexity of flavour and texture and delicacy are the two hallmarks of Gujarati cooking. Most importantly, each flavour holds its own in perfect harmony with the others.

Like many excellent cuisines, Gujarati cuisine derives its uniqueness from the interplay between sweet (usually derived from jaggery instead of refined sugar), sour, and hot flavours; this marriage is one of the mainstays of the cuisine, combining all the strengths and making it so intriguing to the palate.

Although Gujarat is predominantly vegetarian (due to the influence of Jain vegetarianism) a fair proportion of Gujaratis are non-vegetarians. The state's Muslim and Catholic populations, along with a small Parsi community and a few of the coastal communities have each their own non-vegetarian fare. The erstwhile royal houses of Gujarat, who are traditionally non-vegetarian, too have great non-vegetarian recipes. All these communities have outstanding cuisines that are usually hard to find outside private homes.



Kathiawari Cuisine

The Kathiawar peninsula is part of the Saurashtra region. Sharing a border with the neighbouring state of Rajasthan has lent the cuisine strong influences of Rajasthani cooking. Kathiawari food is much hotter in comparison to the foods of other regions in Gujarat where sweet and sour flavours tend to mark the dishes.

Famous dishes include the sev tameta nu shaak, which is a curry prepared with tomatoes and chilli powder and topped with sev (tiny crunchy deep-fried noodles made from chickpea flour paste) and ringna no oroh – roasted eggplant peeled, mashed, and tempered in spices.

Surti Cuisine

Southern Gujarat's Surat city may be famous for its diamond business, but Surti food is itself a gem waiting to be explored. Since the region receives substantial rainfall, the cuisine uses plenty of fresh and seasonal local ingredients — fruits and green vegetables – to present elaborate and clever dishes that simply burst with flavour.

Surat's biggest contribution to the cuisine is without doubt undhiyu. Typically a winter special, undhiyu (which loosely translates to 'upside down') is a rustic casserole comprising seasonal vegetables. Traditionally, vegetables such as Indian flat beans, pigeon peas, potatoes, eggplant, purple yam, and green banana are mixed together with essential spices in an earthen pot. The pot is then covered and buried upside down in the hot muddy ground and

surrounded by coal. The coal allows it to slow cook, giving the dish an earthy, smoky flavour.

Surat is famous for delicious farsan such as khaman, khandvi, patra, dhokla, thepla and khakra. Surti locho is a steamed gram flour-based 'cake', a blend of spices, chilli, ginger, and garlic, is topped with sev, and served with hot chutneys.

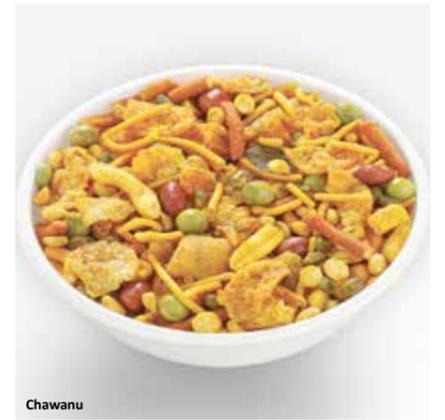
Ghaari: made on the day of Chandi Padvo (the last full moon day of the Hindu calendar), the deep-fried dish comprises



Farsaan



Gola (Ice candy)



Chawanu



Surti Sev Khamani

all-purpose flour stuffed with dried fruit, thickened milk, gram flour, and sugar.

The Surti Sev Khamani, a snack made with split chick-pea and topped with green chili and ginger chutney and sev, also makes use of pomegranate as a topping, illustrating the use of fresh fruit in a hot/savoury snack.

Then there is the wonderful ponkh – fresh, green, recently harvested sorghum, eaten while the emerald grains are still juicy, bright and tender. The unique ponkh is a winter specialty that can be roasted, steamed or cooked in other ways. Surti Ponkh is a delicacy that combines ponkh seeds with sugar balls, freshly-ground black pepper, sev, and pepped up with tangy lemon juice.

Amdavadi Cuisine

The Amdavadi's love for farsaan is legendary! Street food culture reigns king in Ahmedabad and offers a world of delights:

Khaman: a soft, fluffy piquant savoury cake made from chickpea flour and served with fried green chillies and often with a tangy tamarind and jaggery or date chutney.

Dhokla: a light, moist, tangy sandwich made of either rice or gram flour; it is steamed, then sprinkled with coriander leaves, coconut shavings, and served with a layer of mint-based chutney.

Khandvi: made of gram flour batter cooked to a thick paste, yoghurt, and spices all delicately rolled into bite-sized pieces and topped with toasted sesame seeds.

Khichu: a blend of rice flour, green chillies, cumin seeds, and salt that is left to simmer all day in a pot of water on a charcoal stove, lending it a deliciously smooth texture.

Samosa: crisp and crunchy paper-thin pastry stuffed with either minced mutton, dried green peas, potato or mung lentils, and spices, and served with a special sauce and fried green chillies.

Chawanu: beaten rice topped with grated raw papaya and a piquant masala.

Amdavadi pulao: prepared by mixing cooked vegetables with rice; yields a sweet aftertaste.

Kulfi: a dense and creamy frozen dairy dessert originating from the Indian subcontinent in the 16th century. Traditional flavours include cream, rose, mango, cardamom, saffron, and pistachio.

Golas: snow cones dipped in a colourful and delicious variety of syrups.

Jalebi: flour batter is deep-fried in pretzel or circular shapes and then soaked in sugar syrup.

Kutchi Cuisine

The largely barren and harsh desert landscape of Kutch may offer only limited ingredients and produce but its vibrant and resilient people have, over the centuries, developed their own brand of culinary



Thepla



Khakhra



Kadhi



Kutchi Dabeli

genius to extract interesting and absorbing flavours from whatever is available.

The dabeli is the quintessential Kutchi street food. Pao or bread roll is stuffed with a filling of potato, tamarind paste, jaggery, date, and masala. The pao is pan-roasted and then topped with sev, onion, spicy peanuts, and pomegranate seeds. Traditionally, dabeli is also layered with a garlic-based chutney before roasting. Other popular Kutchi dishes include bajra na rotla (Indian flat bread made of pearl millet), traditionally served with either the ringna no oroh, or yoghurt and garlic chutney; and Khaja, a dessert reminiscent of baklava.

Other popular Gujarati dishes

Perhaps nowhere else in India would you find a culture of snacking as fervently integrated into daily lifestyle as you would in Gujarat. Here is an assortment of farsaan and other traditional favourites:

Thepla: a flat bread made of wheat flour with masala and roasted on a pan.

Shrikhand: a soft and light dessert made using hung curd and sugar.

Dal dhokli: whole wheat flour diamond-shaped bits simmered in a pigeon pea lentil gravy perked with spices.

Kadhi: sweet, hot, and tangy yoghurt/buttermilk-based curry mixture thickened with gram flour and tempered with ginger and chilli.

Khichdi: mung lentils and rice cooked together with a dash of turmeric, black peppercorns, and salt, and served piping hot with a dollop of ghee.

Muthiya: a fist-shaped steamed savoury snack made up of wholewheat flour, gram flour, fenugreek leaves or bottle gourd, semolina, turmeric, and chilli powder.

Fafda: a fried crunchy snack made with gram flour, laced with carom seeds and black pepper.

Khakhra: wheat flour flat breads that are dry roasted until crisp and then topped with ghee and a spicy masala.

Basundi: sweet condensed milk, flavoured with cardamom, saffron, and nutmeg, with the addition of dried fruit.

Chakri: a spiral-shaped, spiky snack made from rice flour, bengal gram flour, and black gram flour mixed with ginger, chilli, and sesame seeds and deep-fried.

Patra: Colocasia leaves are first smeared with a paste of gram flour, jaggery, garam masala (blend of ground spices), sesame seeds, and tamarind. These leaves are then rolled into pinwheels, steamed, and later added to an aromatic and flavourful tempering.

Chaos: spiced buttermilk that combines mint leaves, coriander leaves, green chillies, and spices.

Athanu or pickle: the gunda-keri (clam berries and unripe mango) is a traditional favourite. Chhundo is a terrific hot, sour, and sweet mango preserve made with raw mango and spices. Gor keri is a sweet raw mango pickle that is wonderfully spiced with fenugreek and mustard seeds, and jaggery.

The Gujarati Platter

A Gujarati vegetarian thali (platter) is an experience, a feast in one plate – indulgent yet well-balanced. A typical thali will offer an appetiser, spiced buttermilk, Indian flatbreads, a salad, a variety of lentils or a yoghurt-based gravy dish, fresh assorted vegetable preparations, sprouted pulses, fresh yoghurt, pickles, savoury snacks, deep-fried breads, rice dishes, and sweet dishes. 🍽️



Kutchi dabeli

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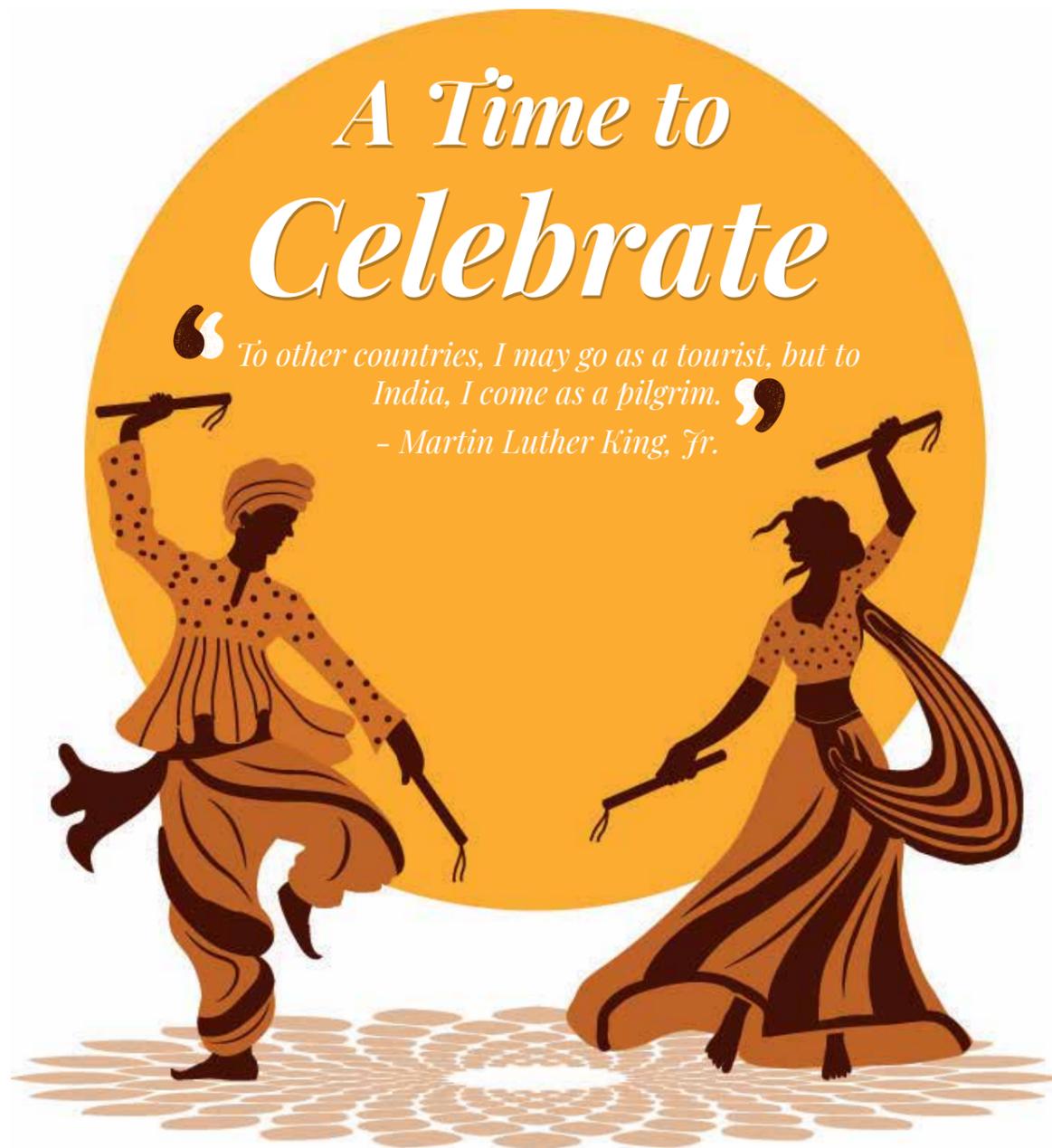
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Nine Nights of the Goddess Navratri

A Time to Celebrate

“To other countries, I may go as a tourist, but to India, I come as a pilgrim.”
- Martin Luther King, Jr.



RELIGIOUS FESTIVAL



SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER/ NOVEMBER according to the Hindu lunar calendar



ACROSS GUJARAT

The most energetic, flamboyant, and popular of Gujarat's innumerable festivals is Navratri, or 'Nine Nights', held around October/November.

For nine nights in a row, sleep takes a backseat as the entire state is transformed into a fairground and millions of Gujaratis gather in open spaces and immerse themselves in celebration and dance to salute the feminine divinity, referred to as Shakti.

The nine-night festival honours the Mother Goddess Durga/Shakti, in all her manifestations. Durga is the warrior form of Goddess Parvati, the wife of Lord Siva (the Supreme Being who destroys/creates, protects, and transforms the universe). Legend has it that Parvati took on the form of Durga to destroy the demon Mahisasura in a battle that lasted nine days and nine nights and came to an end with the beheading of Mahisasura on the tenth. The nine nights came to be known as Navratri, while the tenth day was called Vijaya Dashami, the day good triumphed over evil. Navratri is a time also to celebrate fertility and the monsoon harvest.

Garba, the iconic Gujarati dance form of Navratri, is an unforgettable sight to behold: thousands of people dance to



music in a circle whirling away till late into the night. The focal point of every garba circle is the small Goddess shrine erected by each community to mark the beginning of the festival. The garba is performed around a lamp placed in an earthen pot, the garbo, which symbolises the womb or the very source of life on earth.

The enchanting garba is danced by women only while in raas everyone joins in. Dandiya raas is the most captivating version, in which men and women strike beautiful lacquered batons, giving the dance its distinctive tempo. The music was traditionally acoustic comprising drums and singing, but most people now use amplified sound systems or even live bands with modern instruments.

Over the course of the nine days, prayers and rituals of worship take place in the mornings and are accompanied by fasting. Evenings come alive with social and cultural events and exchanges, with much feasting and most importantly, dancing. Gujarat takes its garbas very seriously. Dressing up in colourful traditional outfits is a must, especially for the women, who plan weeks ahead to put together different costumes for each night of the festival!

These nine nights of feverish dancing, foot-tapping music, fabulous midnight buffets,

and men and women in resplendent traditional attire swirling to the beat of the dhol (traditional hand-held drum) are reason enough to be in Gujarat for Navratri, often called "the world's longest dance festival".

Garba nights are one of the biggest events on Gujarat's cultural calendar. Garba nights can vary from enormously crowded, extravagant set-ups, giant stages, celebrity appearances, and easily accessible entry passes to more vibrant, exclusive, sophisticated, and upscale venues to which gaining entry may prove much more challenging and expensive. But definitely worth the effort.

Vadodara, the 'cultural capital of Gujarat', is one of the best places to experience Navratri and the most sought after location for celebrating Navratri. Navratri is traditionally a Hindu festival, but it's quite common to find people of other faiths too having fun with their friends at a garba.

Everybody moving and performing the same step in unison around a central emblem – this is the spiritual power and energy of garba, of the nine nights dedicated to the Mother Goddess.

Experience it only in Gujarat.



Dancers in traditional attire during Navratri



Idol of Hindu Goddess Durga for sale in parcel workshop for upcoming Navratri festival

Gujarat is replete with vibrant, colourful festivals and fairs. They hold an important place in the state's culture, illustrated by the many celebrations held around the year. A host of rural fairs and regional events are celebrated, combining social, cultural, and religious values and usually marking a change in season, harvest or a religious occasion. Dance, music, and food are almost always an integral part of these festivals and fairs.

Salutations to the Sun Uttarayan & the Kite Festival


 FOLK/SEASONAL
FESTIVAL


JANUARY 14-15


 ACROSS
GUJARAT

The Hindu festival of Makar Sankranti marks the day the sun begins its northward journey, signifying both the end of winter and the onset of the harvest season. An auspicious time of the year throughout India, Makar Sankranti is celebrated with great festivities, prayers to the sun god, feasts, and fairs.

In Gujarat, it is called Uttarayan. Uttarayan is a two-day festival with kite-flying at the core of its celebration.

Come Uttarayan, the skies of Gujarat are engulfed by a blaze of colourful kites from dawn until dusk. Across the state almost all normal activity comes to a standstill and everyone takes to the rooftops and streets to fly kites. A mosaic of kites, of different shapes and sizes, traditional and fantastical, all jostle for space; and 'competitors' battle each other as they try to cut their opponents' strings and bring down their kites. This is serious business!

For this excellent sport, kite-makers prepare the finest: strong resilient kite bodies with springy bamboo frames and kite-paper



Street hawker selling kites for Uttarayan



International Kite Festival, Ahmedabad

stretched to exactly the right tension. The kites (patang) are then attached to a spool (firki) of manjha, a special kite-string coated with a mixture of glue and glass to be sharp enough to cut the strings of rival kites. For a memorable experience visit Patang Bazaar, the 24-hour kite market in Ahmedabad's Old City.

The atmosphere is wonderfully festive as entire families gather on the rooftop; special foods and sweet dishes are prepared;

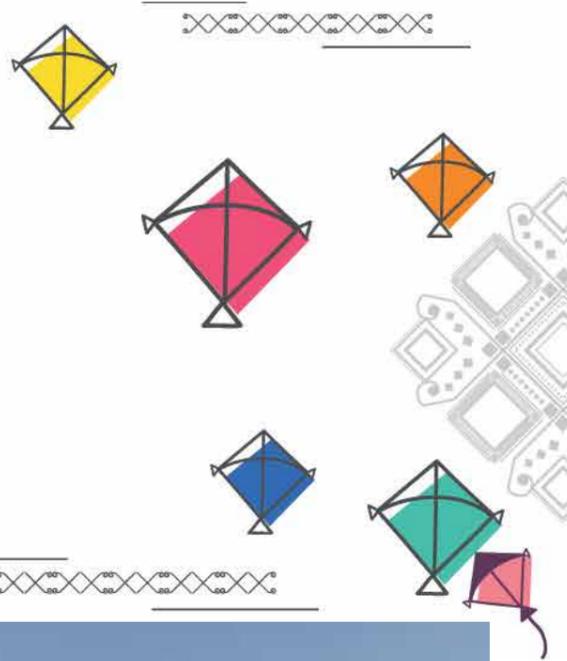
friends and neighbours congregate on the rooftops and terraces that offer the best vantage points to watch and fly kites.

After sunset, special paper lanterns called tukkal are attached to the kites and set adrift in the skies, illuminating the cityscape.

Since 1989, Ahmedabad, a UNESCO World Heritage City, has hosted the International Kite Festival in January as part of the official celebration of Uttarayan, gathering master kite makers and flyers from all over the world.

The Sabarmati Riverfront is a superb vantage point. From here, see thousands of spectacular and unusual kites – from box kites to high-speed sport kites to hand-painted kites – painting the skies.

The celebration of Uttarayan in the historic city of Ahmedabad is a collective social practice that exemplifies communal harmony. For this is an immersive cultural experience, a true celebration, one without borders, beliefs, and faiths.



Dances Divine Modhera Dance Festival


 CULTURAL
FESTIVAL


3 days in the third weekend of January after the conclusion of the Uttarayan festival


 SUN TEMPLE,
MODHERA


Sun Temple at Modhera lit up at night

The dark, breezy nights of January are lit by brilliant splashes of red, yellow, and green lights that illuminate the exquisitely carved **Sun Temple of Modhera**, creating a chiaroscuro effect.

The magnificent **11th-century** Sun Temple, dedicated to **Surya, the Hindu Sun God**, was built by **King Bhimdev I of the Solanki dynasty** of Gujarat, and is outstanding for its **genius in design, execution, and construction**. The sheer profusion of figures, religious and erotic, will leave you spellbound. The remarkable temple is so **scientifically constructed and positioned** that at the equinoxes, **the rays of the rising sun** illuminate the deity in the sanctum sanctorum of the temple.

It is against the ethereal backdrop of this architectural masterpiece that the annual **Modhera Dance Festival** is held. The mesmerising **classical dance festival** invites artistes and dance troupes from around India to perform during the third week of January every year. Organised by Gujarat Tourism, the three-day visual extravaganza celebrates dance, music, and art – reviving the state's glorious royal heritage, and recreating the ambience of centuries gone by. Performers set the stage on fire as they venerate and celebrate the rich living legacy of India's performing arts. The dance festival also draws connoisseurs of art and dance, and culture enthusiasts from within India and across the world.

Lights, colours, entertainment, glimpses of culture, and the wondrous setting of the ruins of an ancient temple make the whole experience simply perfect.

As you watch the dancers become one with the ambience and bring life to the sandstone figurines carved on the edifice of the temple, singing and narrating legends of a time gone by, you realise that the festival is indeed a fitting tribute to the glory and grandeur of India's history.



Gujarat Top Experiences

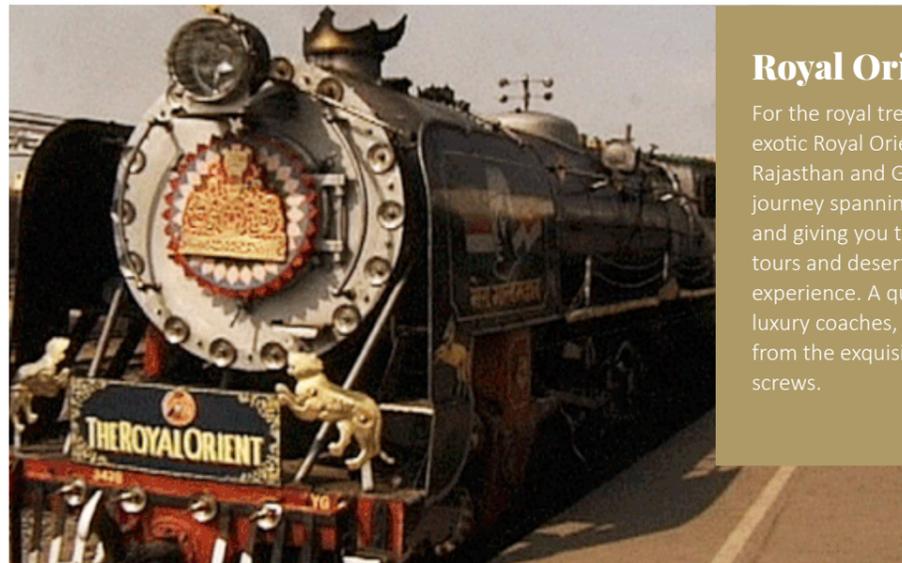
Golfing Holiday

If you're a golf enthusiast and looking for a great golfing holiday while in Gujarat, Ahmedabad, with its stellar courses, is the city to be in. The Kalhaar Blues & Greens has been designed by the world-famous American golf company Nicklaus Design (owned by the legendary golfer Jack Nicklaus). The superb 18-hole, 7425 yards, Par 72 layout, course, dotted with 14 lakes and white sand bunkers set against the backdrop of dramatic natural beauty boasts world-class accommodation and services.

Designed by golfing great Jeev Milkha Singh, the 18-hole championship golf course at the Kensville Golf & Country Club is a verdant oasis just outside Ahmedabad; it has hosted three European Challenge Tour events.

The nine-hole Par 36 golf course and a five-acre Driving Range with 13 bays at Gulmohur Greens Golf & Country Club is a 75-acre spread is a perfect weekend golf getaway.

Located between Ahmedabad and Sanand, the versatile and stunning Glade One is a nine-hole championship golf course that has been designed by the world's leading golf course design firm Gary Player Design.



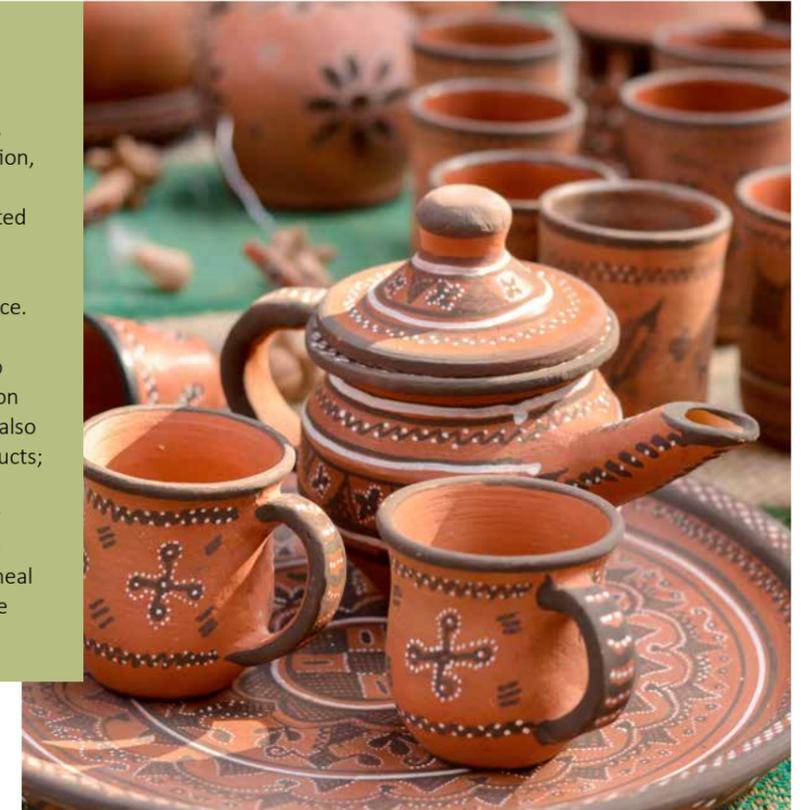
Royal Orient Luxury Train

For the royal treatment, take the luxurious and exotic Royal Orient, as it winds its way through Rajasthan and Gujarat on a spectacular journey spanning eight days and seven nights and giving you the pleasure of sight-seeing tours and desert safaris in a unique travel experience. A quaint locomotive that pulls 13 luxury coaches, its every detail is attended to, from the exquisite tapestry down to the brass screws.

BHUJ

Indus Valley Pottery in Artisan Studio

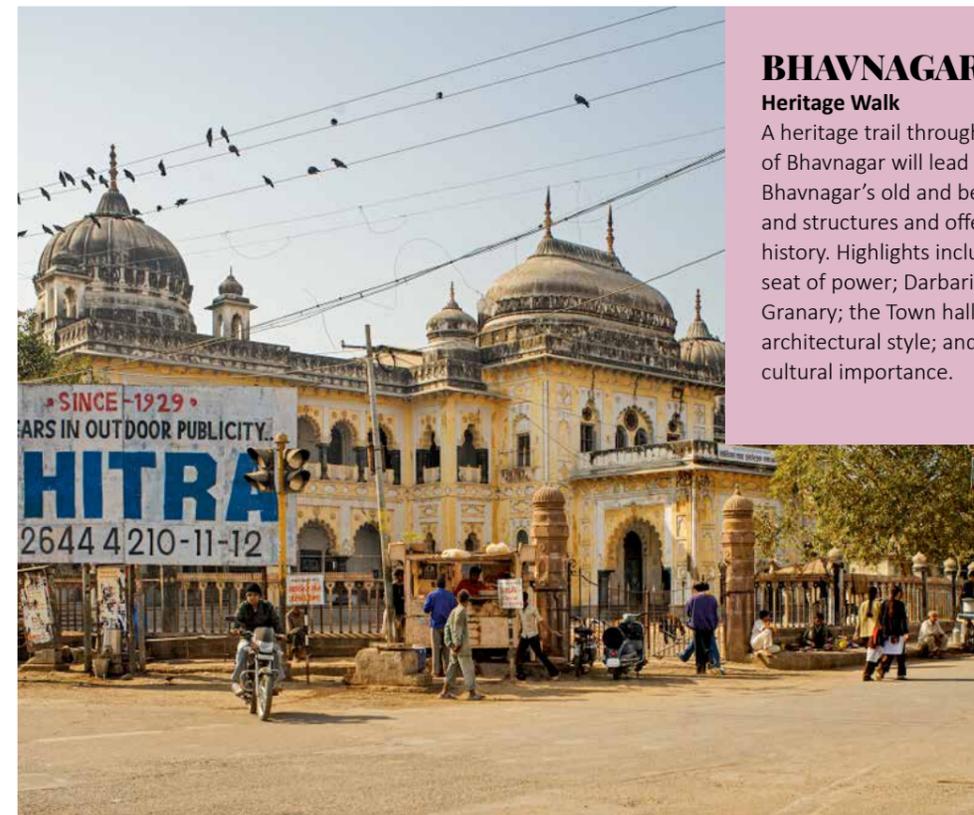
A three-day experience that brings to you, from the heart of the Indus Valley Civilisation, one of the most beautiful crafts – Painted Terracotta. Learn the ancient craft of painted pottery from master craftsmen of Kutch and visit the potters' village as part of this immersive and hands-on pottery experience. At the workshop, the history of the craft, culture, artisan, and master craftsmanship will be explained. Apart from your hands-on experience with the potter's wheel, learn also the technique of painting on pottery products; this is one of the unique traditions known only to the women potters in Kutch. A day visit to the potter's village to connect with the local culture along with a traditional meal is included. Stay at a 19th-century heritage homestay during the duration of the tour.



BHAVNAGAR

Heritage Walk

A heritage trail through the old city of Bhavnagar will lead you to some of Bhavnagar's old and beautiful heritage sites and structures and offer glimpses into their history. Highlights include Darbar Gadh, the seat of power; Darbari Kothar, the State Granary; the Town hall with its beautiful architectural style; and Ganga Deri with its cultural importance.



AHMEDABAD

HALF DAY EXPERIENCE HERITAGE TOUR

The tour focuses on the cultural, historic, and crafts heritage beyond the walled city, offering you a close and memorable visual experience. The tour will take you to see local artisanship at a Block Printing Workshop, a fascinating and remarkable collection of traditional and antique utensils at the Vechaar Museum in Vishalla, and a visit to the outstanding 15th-century Sarkhej Roza group of monuments, a site of architectural and spiritual significance.



EVENING HALF DAY TOUR

The tour looks at the medieval city's rich legacy of culture and architecture. Attractions include a visit to Dada Harir ni Vav, a superb 11th-century stepwell, workshop visit to observe the local art of Mojari (handcrafted embroidered leather shoes) making, shopping experiences in the bazaars of Manek Chowk, an old city square, and visits to Badshah no Hajiro, Rani no Hajiro, and Jumma Masjid – all three fine examples of blended architectural styles.

MORNING HALF DAY TOUR

The tour in the Old City focuses on the architectural heritage as well as the history, art, and culture of the area as it takes you through the narrow lanes of the walled city. Begin with an exploration of the 15th-century Bhadra Fort and Temple. Witness the morning aarti (a Hindu religious ritual of worship in which light, usually from a flame, is offered to one or more deities) here. Move on to visit three havelis (ancestral mansions): Mangaldas ni Haveli 2, a stunning wood-carved 300-year-old haveli, now restored and converted into a hotel comprising three fully furnished rooms; Mangaldas ni Haveli 1, a modern hotel in a renovated 150-year-old residential home comprising six rooms and a charming café; and Jagdeep Mehta ni Haveli, a typical old city pol (a cluster of houses that were usually inhabited by people and families linked together by caste, culture or profession) house with colonial design influences. Interact with the family here and try your hand at cooking an Indian recipe. Next, visit a Rogan Art Workshop to observe the process from start to finish and meet the artisans. Finally, meet the artists practicing a centuries-old art tradition at the Chitaras (Vaghari Community) Workshop and observe them as they use their skills to bring to life the Mata ni Pachedi – a rectangular cloth narrative scroll that is considered sacred, a temple of the Mother Goddess. Illustrations depict either mythological stories of the gods and goddesses or folk tales from the local community and motifs of local flora and fauna.



SABARMATI TRAIL

The tour acquaints you with the city of Ahmedabad on both sides of the River Sabarmati. Begin with a special Gandhi tour which includes visits to Kochrab Ashram and Gandhi (Sabarmati) Ashram, move on to see the Kalamkush Paper Factory introduced by Gandhi, attend the morning ritual at the iconic Swami Narayan Mandir (Shahibaug), and finish with a visit to Jain Gurukulam, a unique modern-day residential school for boys that follows the ancient Indian system of teaching and traditional education.



FOOD & HERITAGE WALK

Ahmedabad is legendary for its fine farsaan (snacks) and has a thriving street food culture. Explore this fascinating city with a guided walk that will combine food, history, and culture. Discover the built heritage of Ahmedabad as you visit its beautiful centuries-old pols and striking Islamic monuments. Witness and experience the walled city's vibrant living culture through its traditional bazaars and narrow lanes. From the start of the tour to its finish, you will get to sample and eat local delicacies at some of Ahmedabad's best and oldest eateries, most of which have been serving Amdavadis for almost two centuries now.

VADODARA

FOOD & HERITAGE WALK

Discover Vadodara, often called the "cultural capital" of Gujarat, with a guided walk that will explore not only its food culture but also its multi-layered history and heritage. Try local food and beverages at restaurants and street shops that are decades-old. Highlights of the walk include a visit to a landmark garden in the old city, a drink in a 100-year-old juice parlour, a quick bite in the area's oldest restaurant, visit to an old ancestral home to see its mural paintings, a walk past the city's administrative buildings, and finish with piping hot street food delicacies from a tiny stall.



CULTURE WALK

Another interesting guided walk will reveal some of the little known aspects of Vadodara's rich cultural legacy. Discover centuries-old Indian sports along with some historical facts at the 18th-century Dr Manikrao Jummadada Vyayam Mandir – an akhada (a place of practice with facilities for boarding, lodging, and training, for Indian martial artists) where people practise traditional sports, especially traditional wrestling. The akhada also houses a small museum of swords.



Woods at Sasan

Adventure and Indulgence on the Wild Frontier

“Live in each season as it passes; breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit, and resign yourself to the influence of the earth.”

- Henry David Thoreau

Woods at Sasan is an eco-conscious boutique resort on the edge of the Sasan Gir forest, the last home of the Asiatic Lion. The 38-key resort, rooted in biophilic design, offers a uniquely immersive experience of living and interacting with and within nature, through designer living-areas, each with a private outdoor terrace surrounded by lush green gardens. Whether you're interested in exploring the rare wildlife of the Gir Forest on safari or discovering the traditional lifestyles and handicrafts of local artisans or committed to a wellness program steeped in Ayurveda, the Sasan team creates authentic experiences tailor-made for you.

Accommodation

Four unique categories of stays, each handcrafted with local materials and designed to merge into the surrounding greenery. Floor to ceiling glass windows and doors offer an unmatched view of the surrounding Sasan Gir forest.

Woods Studios

Spacious and sustainably crafted with a private outdoor sitting area, that captures the morning sun.

Woods Studios + Terrace

A studio room with a private terrace overlooking the orchard and the Gir Sanctuary.

Woods Pavilions

A two-tiered stay, a porch facing a private garden, and an open-to-sky shower area is exclusive to this category.

Woods Villa

A private home in the orchard with 3 bedrooms and a bath each, a backyard plunge pool and personalised services.

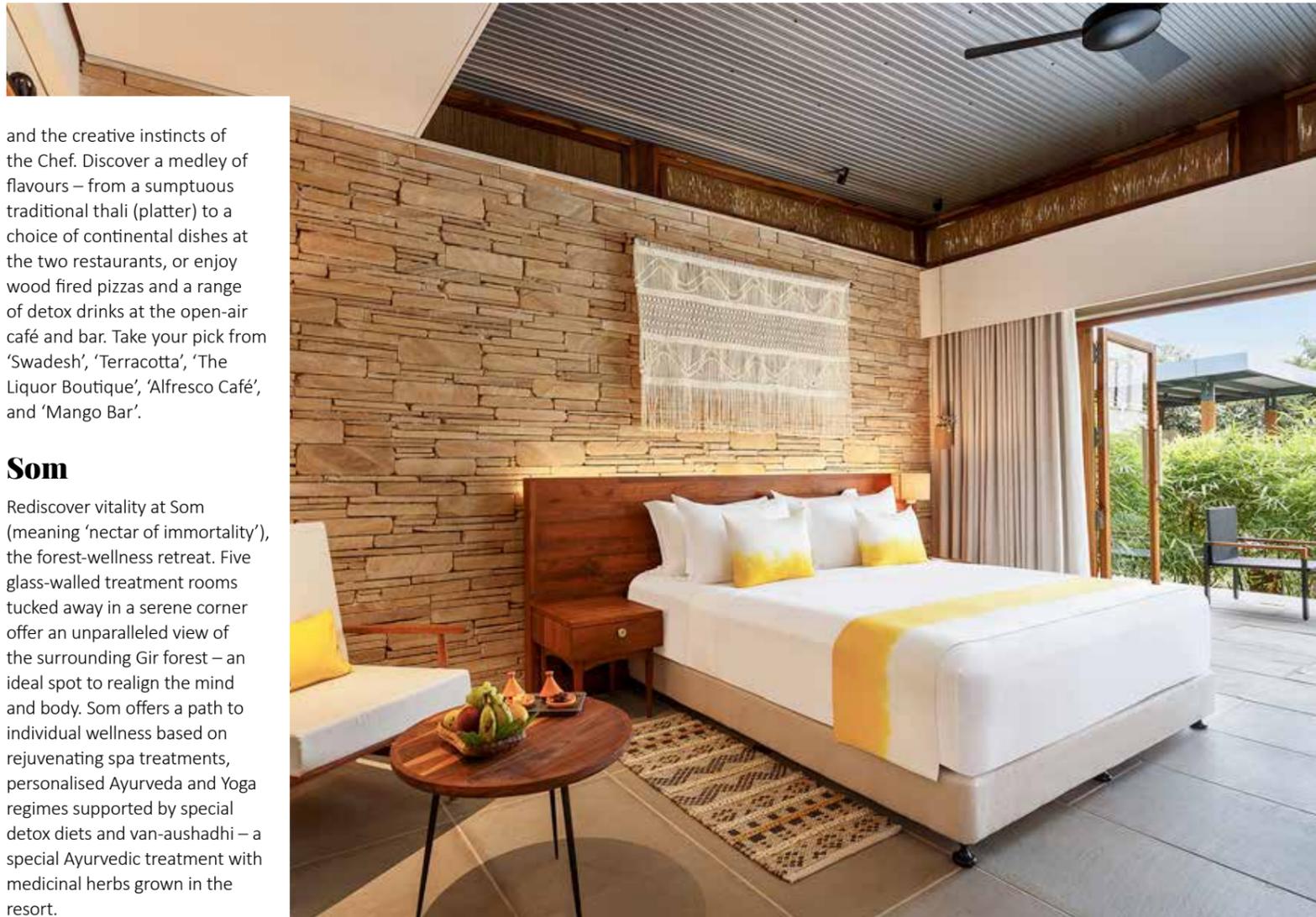
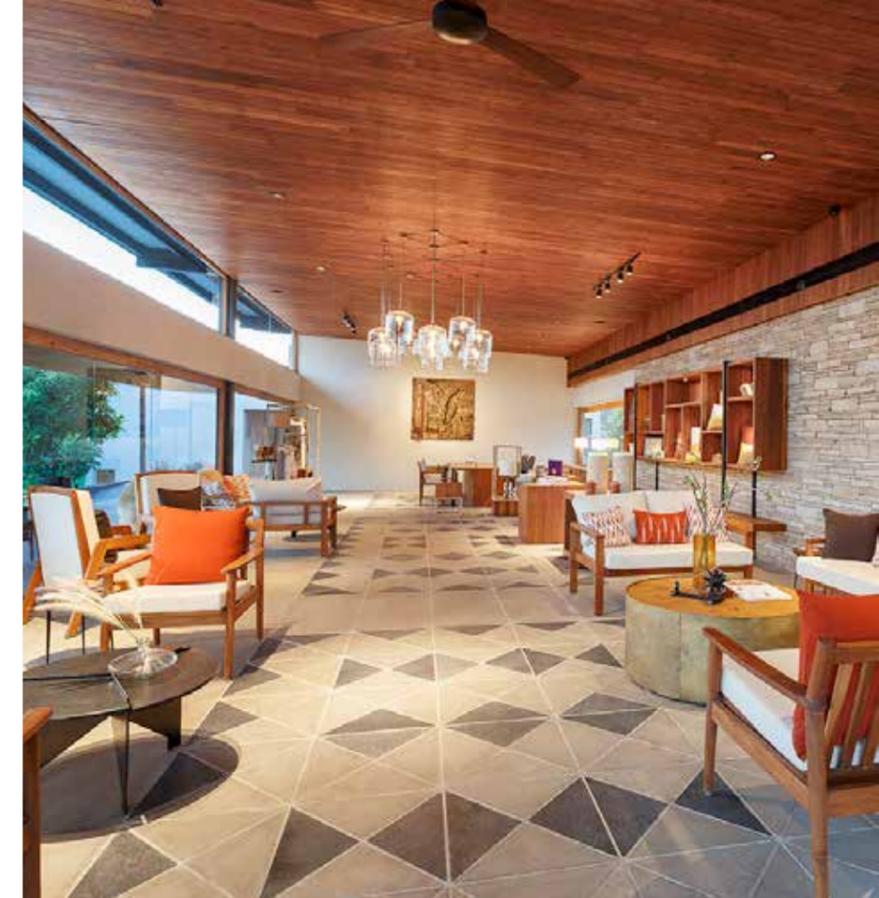
Dining

Explore a selection of seasonally varying dishes, inspired by the rich variety of regional produce

and the creative instincts of the Chef. Discover a medley of flavours – from a sumptuous traditional thali (platter) to a choice of continental dishes at the two restaurants, or enjoy wood fired pizzas and a range of detox drinks at the open-air café and bar. Take your pick from 'Swadesh', 'Terracotta', 'The Liquor Boutique', 'Alfresco Café', and 'Mango Bar'.

Som

Rediscover vitality at Som (meaning 'nectar of immortality'), the forest-wellness retreat. Five glass-walled treatment rooms tucked away in a serene corner offer an unparalleled view of the surrounding Gir forest – an ideal spot to realign the mind and body. Som offers a path to individual wellness based on rejuvenating spa treatments, personalised Ayurveda and Yoga regimes supported by special detox diets and van-aushadhi – a special Ayurvedic treatment with medicinal herbs grown in the resort.



Bespoke Affairs

The resort is an ideal venue for both personal and business gatherings. The verdant forest and natural landscaping provide the perfect backdrop for premier business events, prime product launches, intimate weddings and wedding photography or select family gatherings and events. Sasan offers four different venues: The Woods Social Hall, Terracotta Lawn, Swadesh Lawn, and Alfresco Poolside.

Experiences

Birdwatching amidst the raw beauty of the Gir forest and a safari to spot Asiatic lions are but a few samples of the fascinating experiences at Sasan. The Sasan team helps craft authentic experiences of the people and the place – be it a wood-fire-cooked ethnic lunch in the heart of the jungle, or a trip to the temple of Somnath, or a tour of the ancient city of Junagadh.

The resort naturalist belongs to the local community and has many an anecdote to share. An in-depth knowledge of the flora and fauna of the land and its culture offers guests a fascinating window into the heart of the land of Sasan Gir.

In-Resort Experiences

Nature Walk | Bicycle Tour | Vintage Car Ride | Pottery | Farming | Yoga & Meditation | Stargazing | Aqua Aerobics | Siddi Dhamaal Dance

Sasan Experiences

The Jungle Journeys

The Gir Safari | Devaliya Park Safari
Woods Safari Lunch: Ethnic flavours cooked in the jungle
Kankai/Banej: A melody of folklore and marvel

Cultural Flavours

Memories of Junagadh | Somnath Temple Tour
Tour of the Veraval Fish Market

Biophilic & Inclusive Design

Sasan is built on a mango orchard with around 280 mango trees, and the soil here is free of chemicals and bio-hazardous materials, making for an environment that is healthful and beneficial. The use of local stone for walls and paving, natural lime plasters, wood panelling, and bamboo based materials and products minimise concrete usage and reduce the resort's carbon footprint.



The Guest Stays are designed to catch the gentle rays of the rising sun and reduce exposure to the mid-day heat, an architectural intervention that contributes to approximately 26 per cent energy savings. The resort has also minimised plastic use by 90 per cent. Over 40 per cent of Sasan's staff are locals – as they grow, so does the local economy. Sasan also plays an active role in supporting and preserving local culture and crafts.

Local Flavours

Sasan creates and curates culture-authentic experiences in original destinations by working within the ambit of the local environment, its people and traditions, local cuisine, and special landmarks.

Kankai and Banej

Located on the banks of the River Shingavada, the site of the Shri Kankai Mataji Temple is associated with the ancient Indian epic Mahabharata. The Banej temple, dedicated to Siva, is surrounded by the forest and famous for its beauty. The journey to and fro gives you a chance to enjoy the wild beauty of the land.

Destination Lunch

The local cuisine of the Sasan-Gir is robust and reflects the soul of the people. The Destination Lunch offers the wholesome flavours of a traditionally prepared thaali served in a sun-dappled mango orchard. Enjoy this heart-warming meal of the land, prepared with fresh, organic local produce and served with traditional hospitality.

Somnath Darshan

The Somnath Temple, dedicated to Siva, is an ancient pilgrimage site located at the confluence of three rivers – Kapila, Hiran, and Saraswati. Enjoy this spiritual journey to the first of the twelve jyotirlinga shrines of Siva.

A Village Experience

The best way to experience the local culture of a place is via a short, scenic drive to a nearby village. A walk around the villages brings you to traditional homes where the locals are happy to include you in their daily activities – a chance to observe living tradition firsthand.

Junagadh - A Heritage Tour

The city of Junagadh at the foot of the



Girnar Hills is a confluence of Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, and Islamic influences through the ages. Rich in history, with a unique story of its annexation to India, Junagadh is an interesting study in architecture, historical artefacts, and nature. Enjoy this adventure trip into a historical city with spectacular landscapes.

An Open Air Barbeque

An open air barbeque on the lawns, under the night skies of the Sasan Gir – personalised to your choice, with a camp fire, music, and your own Chef and Butler. A delectable array of smoked and roasted dishes to preserve the flavour and inherent goodness of the food and served in the open, make for a memorable evening.

An Ethnic Lunch

A touch of native luxury with a curated and authentic Gujarati lunch served on the lawns. The experience is a trip down memory lane, with the four-course meal served on traditional brassware, against the backdrop of open skies and soothing flute music. Attended to by your personal Chef and Butler, enjoy this curated meal from the heart of Gujarat.

Lost Recipes of India

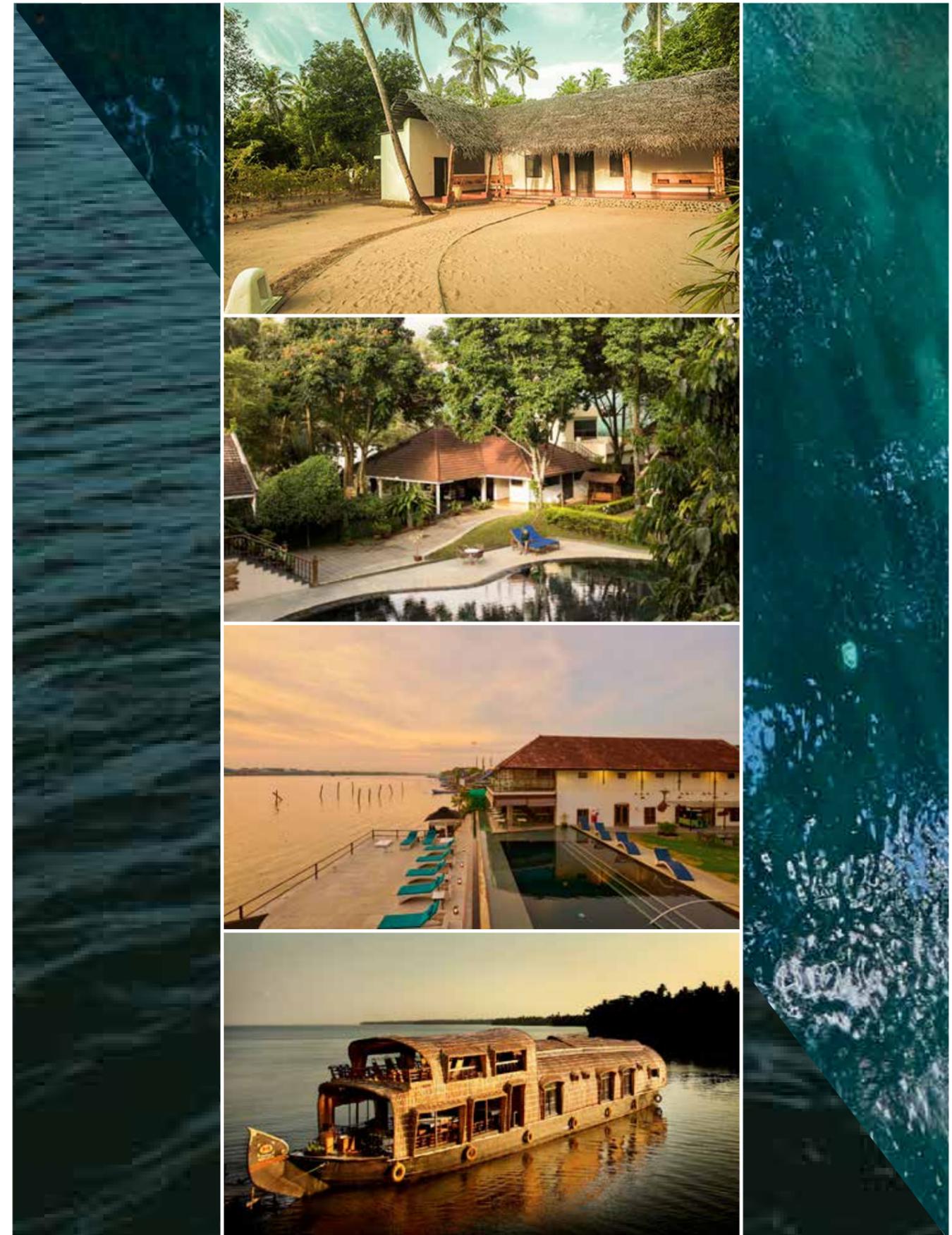
A trip down memory lane where lost recipes from Indian kitchens around the country are brought to your table and served in traditional earthenware by your personal Chef and Butler. Enjoy the delicate flavours under the open skies, against a bonfire, to the accompaniment of the flute.

A Wellness Breakfast

A power breakfast to start the day, served under crisp, clean skies. A wholly organic meal that starts with a cleanser, followed by micro-greens, cereal, choice of main course and freshly baked bread with a choice of fresh-plucked farm fruits. Served by your private Chef with an interactive session on nutrition and wellness, against the strains of a soothing morning raga.

On the House

- Yoga Sessions
- Bicycle Tours
- Little Bakers
- Star Gazing
- Farming Activities
- Siddhi Dance
- Nature Walks
- Vintage Car Tours
- Mocktail Making
- Movie Show
- Sun-down Tea



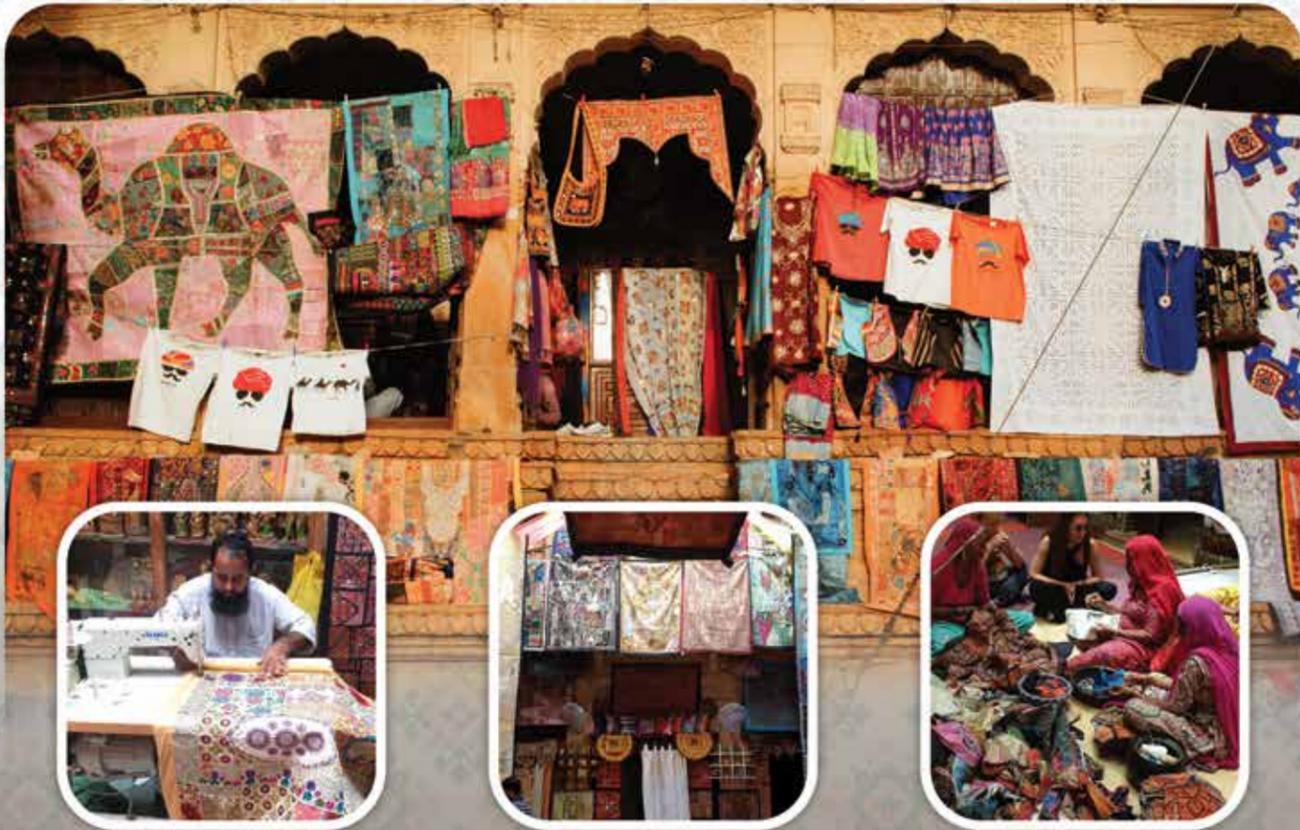
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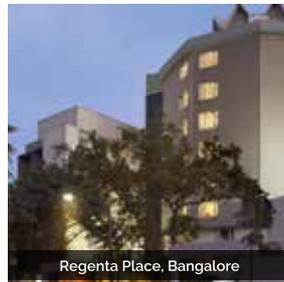
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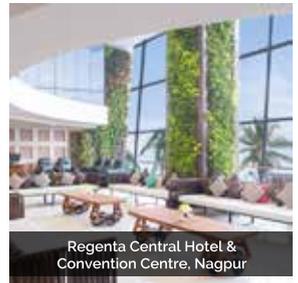
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