

October - December 2015

A high-end quarterly magazine

**PRAVEG'S**

# TOURISM ONE

Published by PRAVEG Communications Pvt. Ltd. | [www.praveg.com](http://www.praveg.com)

Vol.: 1 | Issue: 4 | Pages: 60 | ₹ 200

## Maharashtra - The Spiritual Powerhouse

### 58 Visa-Free Countries For Indian Travelers

### Vibrant Gujarat International Travel Mart to promote Gujarat as the world-class tourist destination



## The Wonderful West



Glorious Gujarat



Mesmerizing Madhya Pradesh



Glamorous Goa



Royal Rajasthan

PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE | October - December 2015



Capturing wilderness







PRAVEG'S

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October - December 2015

## *The world is yours*

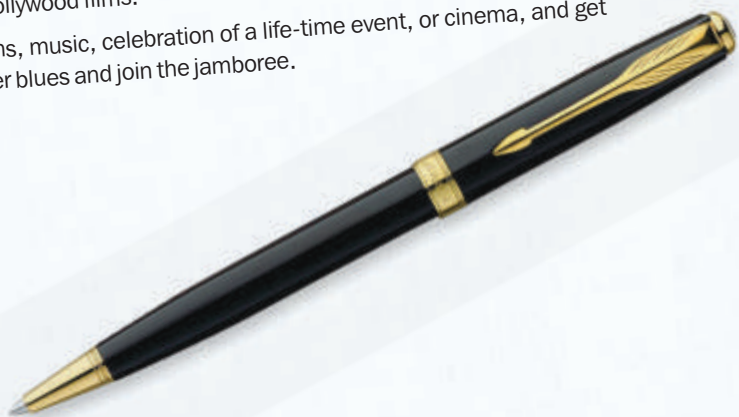
'Let your passport be filled with colors'. Well, dearth of inspirational quotes appear on Internet that may have tickled your wanderlust. The sepia-tinted photos of far-away lands and those rousing quotations have surely enticed many globetrotters out there. However, is it that simple? Can we just 'Pack our bags, book a ticket and go traveling?'

In spite of intense urge to explore the distant lands possessing turquoise beaches and curvy roads, the idea of 'spontaneous travel' is a bit oxymoron for us. The reason is traveling on Indian passport is a carefully devised procedure involving proofs of address, salary slips, letters of employment and bank statements and what not.

Nonetheless, if the thought of applying for a visa intimidates you, why not start with countries that have relaxed immigration rules? Oh yes! There are 58 nations that offer either visa-free or easy visa-on-arrival travel to Indian Passport Holders. If wedding is on the cards and you are looking for pleasant places to add some more strokes of romance, we present you 'a list of visa-free countries' to arrange for a last-minute and hassle-free romantic trip in a 'Yashraj-film' like set-up.

If not overseas, immerse in the culturally-rich home-country. The soothing and spellbinding breeze of winter in India makes it the best time to trip on culture. So whether you're looking for a reason to party, or end the year on a meaningful note, we have it all. Celebrate local customs during Diwali, commemorate the victory of good over ill through the hymn of Goddess Durga or get carried away by the Goa Trance beats, each of these festivals offers a unique way of experiencing a destination and bonding with like-minded folks. To uplift the festive season, walk through the street markets of Mumbai and go bargain fanatic or just grab a bucket of popcorn, sit back and enjoy the ride with our suggested list of road-trip Bollywood films.

Take your pick from traditions, music, celebration of a life-time event, or cinema, and get ready to drown out the winter blues and join the jamboree.





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# TOURISM ONE

*October - December 2015*

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Published & Printed By



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TITLE CODE NO: GUJENG01171/06/1/2014-TC

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**Have some suggestions for us?**

Go ahead and send us your ideas, valuable opinions or topics you would like to see more coverage on

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**Printed and Published by**

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**Printed At:**

Le Griffé Offset Pvt. Ltd.  
3, Lower Ground Floor, Popular House,  
Ashram Road, Ahmedabad - 380009



Dudhsagar Waterfall



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# Maharashtra

## The Spiritual Powerhouse

*Maharashtra has some of India's major pilgrimage centres. It has such sacred places for Hindus including three Jyotirlinga shrines, two Shakti Peethas, the entire Ashta Vinayak Yatra, the revered Vitthala shrine at Pandharpur, and the Rama temples of Nashik and Ramtek. The Sai Baba shrine at Shirdi is one of India's biggest religious draws. The Gurudvara at Nanded is among the most important Sikh pilgrimage places. The Atash Behram at Mumbai is one of the most sacred Parsee fire temples in India. In addition to this, there are many ashrams and meditation centres.*

Story by ANIL MULCHANDANI  
Pictures by DINESH SHUKLA



## MUMBAI

The capital of Maharashtra, Mumbai is India's top cosmopolitan city. Here you can find Hindu and Jain temples, mosques and dargahs, churches, Zoroastrian fire temples and synagogues. Mumbai's Hornimun Circle, formerly Elphinstone Circle conceived in 1860 as a centrepiece of the new developments of Mumbai, is surrounded by churches like the Cathedral Church of St Thomas on Tamarind Street. Considered to be the oldest British building in Mumbai, this is a simple but charming church in Classical and Gothic styles. Construction began on the church in 1672 but it remained unfinished after the death of Governor Augnier till 1718, when it was finally opened to visitors. The church has white-washed interiors with polished wooden furniture and brass, and ornately-carved gravestones of British parishioners. Nearby, Keneseth Eliyahoo Synagogue was built by the Sasoon family in the 1880s and is one of the much visited Jew religious places in the city. It has an Indo-European facade with ornate balconies. The interiors are beautifully decorated with well-preserved decorations and attractive stained glass windows. The Mahim Church was originally a



Siddhivinayak Mandir



UNESCO World Heritage Site, Elephant cave



Cathedral Church



Haji Ali Dargah





Pandharpur Ghats

## NASHIK AND AURANGABAD

Maharashtra's major pilgrimage destination, Nashik saw a great flowering of temple architecture in the 18th century. It is believed that Lord Rama spent much of his 14-year exile period at Nashik and in the nearby forests on the Gujarat-Maharashtra border. The Kala Ram Temple near Ramkund is built in blackstone with an 82-ft high conical *Shikhara*. Other temples like Rameshwar and *Muktidham* also have fine carvings.

Near Nashik, Trimabkeshwar Temple is said to have ancient origins. The temple covers one of the 12 *vyotirlinga*. The temple is set on a large paved platform. It has carvings on the wall and *shikhara*. It is located near the source of the Godavari, a sacred river.

Among the temples built during the Seuna Yadav rule, the Gondeshwara Mahadev is an architectural classic in black

tower that gives it a Byzantine appearance, a row of cusped arches that leads to the main shrine with a ritual circumulatory around it. Inside the city of Pune, the 18th century Ram Temple follows a more typical Maratha style, rather like the 11th-13th century temples of Maharashtra, with a conical *shikhara* with niches and roof-like projections of the surface depicting various deities. There is a wooden hall in front of the shrine. The Maratha Lal Mahal, Kasba Ganpati, Nana Wada, Nagar Vachan Mandir, Belbag, Tulsibag and Amruteshwar Mandir are other temples of Pune.

Pune is a spiritual tourism hub because of Osho's ashram from where he preached during 1974-1981. It attracted 30,000 visitors per year. Today, Osho Meditation Resort at Pune continues to be an iconic centre for meditation, yoga and spiritual discourses.

South from Pune, Mahuli near Satara is the Vishveswara Mahadeva temple in the 18th century Maratha style with an ornate conical *shikhara* tower. In front of the temple is a deepmala or lamp tower with niches for thousands of lamps.

Further south in Satara district, Wai by Krishna River is the place where temples were built in the 'Hemadpanti' style of architecture, which uses huge stone slabs. There are four temples Chakreshwar, Chimneshwar, Kauteshwar/Harihareshwar and Kaleshwar near Brahmanshahi Ghat.

Another historical temple, the Mahalaxmi Temple at Kolhapur is said to

have been built by the Chakukya rulers and extended during the Yadava period. The temple exterior is profusely carved and the mandapa has a finely carved ceiling.

On another route that leads to Solapur, Pandharpur is one of the revered pilgrimage sites in Maharashtra. Set on the banks of the river Bhimarathi also known as Chandrabhaga, it is hugely visited for ritual bathing and prayers at the Vithoba Temple.

The Ashta Vinayak Darshan begins at Moreswar temple of Moregaon, about 50km from Pune. From here, pilgrims are expected to cover Siddhatek, Pali, Mahad, Thevur, Lenyandri, Ozar and Ranjangaon before returning to Moregaon. On the Konkan coast, Ganpatipule is a beach with a Ganesh temple having *Swayambu* or self-emerging idol.



Trimbakeshwar temple in Nashik



Mount Mary Church, Bandra



Parvati Temple



Portuguese church and is hugely visited. Mazagaon is famous for its churches. The basilica of 'Our Lady of the Mount Church' also known as the Mount Mary Church is located in Bandra, and is hugely visited by Catholics and other Christians. The Church of St. John the Evangelist, better known as the Afghan Church at Colaba commemorates the dead of the war in Kabul.

Take the ferry from Colaba to Elephanta Island, the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Elephant cave temples are set on an island offshore from Mumbai's eastern seafront. The most famous sculpture is the massive statue of Shiva with three faces on the front wall of the columned hall of the Shiva temple in cave-1, dated to the sixth century. This powerful statue called Mahesamurthi is described as 'The Creation of a Genius' by Percy Brown, the world renowned art historian.

One of the most famous temples of Mumbai, the Mahalaxmi Temple was built in 1831 by Dhakji Dadaji (1760-1846), a Hindu merchant. The Siddhivinayak Mandir, originally built as a Ganesh shrine in 1801, has evolved to become one of the grandest temples in Mumbai.

The 'Haji Ali Dargah' on an islet in Mumbai's Worli bay area attracts 40,000 devotees on important days.

## PUNE

Like Mumbai, Pune being the cantonment and monsoon capital of the British Bombay Presidency, also has colonial churches like the 'St Mary's Church'. The Ohel David Synagogue in Pune was built in 1863-67 by the Late David Sassoon who was also responsible to build the Sassoon Hospital in Pune and many other such philanthropic works. It is built using red bricks.

As the Peshwas, Brahmin commanders under the Maratha Chhatrapatis became

hereditary rulers in the 1700s and early-1800s, they patronised the building of temples and secular structures across Maharashtra especially at their headquarters in Pune, a city divided into neighbourhoods called peths. The architecture of the period drew from many influences existing in India in that period. The colourful Parvati temple, on a hill south of Pune, for instance was built by Peshwa Baji Rao, one of the greatest Maratha heroes after Shivaji, in an Indo-European style with an onion-shaped dome over a

Mahalaxmi Temple, Kolhapur





stone located at Sinnar in Nashik district. This Shiva panchayatana (five-shrine temple), dated to the 11th century AD, has a shikhara (tower) with has a distinct vertical band rising upwards along each of its angles like a spine or quoin. Though there are damages to the temple, it is still among the most complete and best preserved of the temples of this period in Maharashtra. The walls have sculptured scenes from the Ramayana and detailed figures of deities, maidens and mythical beings. The Gondeshvar temple stands on a moulded and stepped platform. The main shrine to Lord Shiva is entered by a portico leading to the mandapa or assembly hall, a pavilion for the stone-bull that was Shiva's vehicle Nandi, and the main shrine. In the four corners are shrines with porticoes dedicated to Surya, Vishnu, Paravati and



Shirdi Temple



Ganesh. All the shrines face each other. Head from Nashik to Ellora. Near Ellora, Daulatabad was once Devagiri with the headquarters of Seuna Yadav dynasty (also spelt Sevuna Yadava). Credited with developing the Marathi culture from the mid-9th to the early-14th centuries, they patronised many temples that were erected

including the Hemadpanthi temples named for Hemadpant, a prime minister in the Suena Yadav court from 1259 to 1274 who is said to have been a diplomat, an administrator, an architect, a poet, and a theologian and scholar. The mortar-free construction of the Hemadpanthi temples like Tulja Bhavani *Shaktipith*, Amruteshwar



Pilgrim's progress to Shirdi



temple and Aundha Nagnath *Jyotirling* temple used blackstone and lime.

Grishneshwar Temple at Ellora has one of the 12 *Jyotirlingams*. Ellora has 34 temple and monastic caves including one of the largest rock-cut ancient temples dedicated to Kailasha.

Paithan, about 56km south of Aurangabad, is hugely visited by pilgrims for its Godavari ghats, the birthplace of Nimbarka who was the founder of the Nimbarka *Sampradaya* tradition of Vaishnavism and the shrine of the Marathi saint Eknath.

Further along the Godavari, Nanded is one of the holiest places of pilgrimage for Sikhs. Guru Nanak Dev travelled through Nanded on his way south, while Guru Gobind Singh spent his last days in this city.

## RAMTEK

Ramtek has one of the most important Rama temples. It is said that Hindu sage Agastya's *ashram* near Ramtek was disturbed demons. He approached Lord Rama who vowed to rid the area of the demons. The present temple is believed to have been built by the Vidharba ruler, Raghuji Bhonsale, after his victory over fort of Deogarh in Chindwara.

Ramtek also has a historical Jain temple and is also associated with Kalidas, who wrote his epic, *Meghdoot*, at this site.



## IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF LORD RAMA

**Ayodhya:** This temple town is revered as the birthplace of Lord Rama. Among the scores of temples on the river bank the most striking is the Hanuman Garhi, set in the old fort of Ayodhya. A climb of about 76 steps leads to its gilded interiors. Nearby is Darsrath *Bhavan*. Expectedly, most of the temples and ghats are dedicated to Rama, Sita and Laxman. The Kanak *Bhavan* at a

short distance from the river is a palatial complex with a temple. The Ramkatha Museum has grand images and ancient texts. Like the rest of India, Ayodhya is modernising and everywhere you find signs of coaching classes, new schools and computer courses.

**Allahabad:** Lord Rama himself praised this spot for its spiritual powers, which can uplift mankind and that he is believed to have stayed at the *ashram* of the Bharadwaj Rishi here. Valmiki and Tulsidas praise this place in their works. Lord Rama, Lakshman and Sita crossed the Yamuna River, and there is a reference to Lakshman constructing a boat to cross the river. There are many places on the banks of the Yamuna related to the exile period of Shri Ram like Akshay Vat, Sita Rasoi (Jasra Bazaar), Rishiyan (the abode of Rishis), Murka (Hanuman Mandir).

**Chitrakoot:** From Allahabad, the road runs 128km southwest to Chitrakoot, the pilgrim town along the Mandakani, between Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

According to the Ramayana, Lord Rama lived on the Kamadgiri Mountain near the Mandakini River and it is believed that his brother, Bharat, came to this site to entice him to return to Ayodhya and rule Koshaldesha, the kingdom of the Kaushala dynasty to which they belonged. When Rama refused, Bharata asked for his footwear, which he placed on the throne of Ayodhya. Below the hill sacred to devotees or Rama, the Hanuman Dhara is a natural spring that flows over an image of



Hanumana. The river shores, hill and town are full of temples and *ashrams*. A boat ride from Ramghat offers a delightful view of the riverfront temple town.

**Ramtek:** Lord Rama is said to have spent time at Ramtek.

**Nashik:** Nashik is said to be Panchavati, the forests where Rama, Sita and Lakshman built their home during their exile period.

**Sabridham:** In the forests of South Gujarat, Sabridham is said to be the place where a tribal woman offered fruits to Lord Rama.

**Anegundi:** Anegundi near the World Heritage Site of Hampi is believed to be the Kishkindha, the kingdom which Sugriva and Bali were fighting to control when Lord Rama intervened. Anjanadri hill, the birthplace of Hanuman, and the mountain Rishimuka are the other places near Anegundi associated with Ramayana.

**Srirangam:** The sacred island of Srirangam is one of the most important pilgrimage sites in Tamil Nadu. The Ranganatha Temple, one of the largest temples in the state, enshrines an idol that devotees believe was given by Lord Rama to Vibhushan who brought it to this site on the Kaveri River.

**Tiruppullaani:** This site near Ramanathapuram is said to be where Lord Rama stopped on his way to Rameshwaram.

**Cape Calimere:** The highest point of this cape, at an elevation of 4 m, has the shrine of Ramarpatham. A stone slab bears the impressions of two feet, revered as the place where Rama stood and looked out to Lanka.

**Rameshwaram:** One of the holiest places of Hindu pilgrimage, this is the place from where Rama is said to have built a bridge, across the sea to Lanka. ■





## Mumbai: Bliss for the bargaining fanatics

**S**hopping is certainly fun, but cherry on the cake is when it is cheaper. That's where street shopping comes into the picture. And when it is about "street shopping", you just can't ignore the buzzing city of Mumbai.

Mumbai has a lot to offer to the visitors - whether it's sightseeing, dining, or experiencing the unique culture of this city. However, any visit to the city is incomplete without shopping. Vendors bring latest collection at wholesale prices from manufacturing units and sell at throwaway prices. Ask for anything and it is available, be it thrifty or luxury. The city offers cheapest, fun, entertaining and everything you could possibly think of to turn the shopping bug in you on.

So let's leave credit cards and grab some cash to have a virtual tour of the unending roadside stalls and explore Mumbai's famous shopping hubs including Crawford Market and Fashion Street along with Lokhandwala Market, Hill Road and Linking Road in suburbs.

The most populous and buzzing city is a treasure-trove for the tight-fisted shoppers

**'Oh! I am feeling low.  
I need a shopping therapy'**

—  
If you just need a reason to shop,  
typecast yourself as an utter shopaholic.



## Fashion Street

As the name suggests, Fashion Street is the market for trend-setters. If you're the one who loves to grab the eyeballs through your ultimate fashion sense, visit Fashion Street. The live market is generally brimming with the college students, teenagers and fashion-freaks. It is renowned for the latest collection of shorts, jeans, tees and cargos for boys and girls. Besides garments, you can also find some stylish jewelries and footwear here. But hang on... mastering the art of bargaining is a 'protocol' to enter the lane of Fashion Streets. This art gives you an immense pleasure of cracking some really cool deals. Sometimes, almost half of the quoted price! All you need to do is... just ask half of the price, haggle a bit and then walk away with attitude. In most cases, you'll get it on your price. The pleasure of sealing amazing deals will double your shopping experience. Not to mention, Fashion Street is for those who love to change their wardrobe every three months. So if you're looking for quality, let's check out some other options for you.

### LOCATION

The vibrant lane of Fashion Street is seated near Church-gate Station

### WHAT TO BUY

Prefer buying casual stuffs

### STREET TIMINGS

Saturdays and Sundays are over-crowded. So if you're planning to spend some really good time here, visit the street during weekdays between 12:00 pm to 4:30 pm.



## Colaba Causeway

Colaba Causeway is a unique market in its own way. Here, shopping is a celebration. Meander along the road and you will find out everything and anything you could possibly think of. Be it clothes, jewelry, artifacts, posters, knick-knacks and do you like to engrave your name on a grain of rice? Well, that's available too. The market evidences many local, tourists and foreign visitors because of its location i.e. proximity to Taj Mahal Hotel. Comparing to other markets, Colaba Causeway is a bit expensive. You can notice the board of 'Fixed Price' on many items. But you never know, if you bargain well, the perks are all yours.

### LOCATION

Colaba, South Mumbai

### WHAT TO BUY

Artifacts, Jewelries, Brass items and Clothes

### STREET TIMINGS

Everyday from morning until night



## Crawford Market

One of the most ancient markets – Crawford Market has been a hotspot for buying overseas brands before liberalization. If you want to experience the local market, Crawford Market is where Mumbaikars come for their all day-to-day requirements. Yes, the wholesale market is popular for spices, imported food items, condiments, households, souvenirs and what not. Housed in the historic and beautiful colonial building, Crawford Market has dedicated outlets for produce, fruits, vegetables, daily necessities. At the other end, the market has a separate pet animal market, which sells every type of breeds of cats, dogs, kittens, songbirds, fish and parrots. Many international brands of snack foods like biscuits and chocolates are available in the market. Besides household items, luxury items such as makeup and perfume shops offer both local favorites and international brands. The market also holds garment stalls outside the building, which offers variety of clothes.

### LOCATION

Lokmanya Tilak Marg, Fort Area, South Mumbai

### WHAT TO BUY

Vegetables, Fruit, Flowers, Food items, Fish, Birds, Pets

### STREET TIMINGS

Everyday from morning until night, except Sunday (Only morning hours for Sundays)



## Hill Road

Before the evolution of mall culture, Hill Road and Linking Road were the shopping place for most collegians. As you walk down the Hill Road, the clumsy traffic slowly gets transformed into the colors and horde of shoppers, sellers and peddlers. The peddlers are also significant part of the market as they offer prominent brands of every segment in quite low price. So if you want to fix yourself with some trendy fashion like garments, bag, denims and so on at a substantially low price, head to Hill Road. Surprisingly, behind every bunch of peddlers exists sophisticated shops of original brands and both get good number of customers.

### LOCATION

St. Peter's Church, Bandra

### WHAT TO BUY

Ready-made Garments, Indian Wear, Fabrics, Accessories, Footwear

### STREET TIMINGS

The street stalls and vendors show up on the street after 4pm. However, branded shops are open all day. Plan for a peaceful shopping on Monday afternoon as Saturday-Sunday are chaotic.





## Chor Bazaar

Chor Bazaar, as its name, has quite an interesting story attached to it. Existed from more than 150 years, the original name of the market was 'Shor Bazaar' meaning noisy market. However, British mispronunciation gifted it a new name. Soon, stolen goods made their way into the market, resulting in living up to its new name 'thieves market'.

Navigate through the jam-packed streets, you will find everything from ordinary to extraordinary here. Be it glassware, instruments, lamps, brassware, Bollywood posters, miniature cars, ceramics as well as automobile parts to mobile phones along with many more exclusive and bizarre items. Also, evidence the second-hand clothes' market here.

### LOCATION

Mutton Street, Near Mohammad Ali Road, South Mumbai

### WHAT TO BUY

Bronze Items, Antiques, Vintage Items

### STREET TIMINGS

Everyday from 11 AM to 7.30 PM, except Friday. The Juma Market is held on Fridays.



## Linking Road

Linking Road is a fun shopping place for the ladies. Yes, it has all to make you go oniomaniac – trendy clothes, fashionable jewelries and top of all, ample scope of bargaining. Like Hill Road, Linking Road also has odd mix of stalls and brand stores. So if you're looking for branded clothes or explore the street-shopping experience of equally-trendy clothes, Linking Road is worth-visiting. Besides shopping, Linking Road is also a foodies' paradise. When confused as to what to buy and what to leave, take a munching-break either at famous food chains like McDonald's or savor the spicy bite at street food stalls.

### LOCATION

Waterfield Road Intersection, Linking Road, Bandra

### WHAT TO BUY

Indian Traditional Clothes, Bags, Belts, Shoes

### STREET TIMINGS

Everyday from 10.30 AM to 10.00 PM

## Lokhandwala Market

Lokhandwala Market consists of a long stretch of roadside stalls, stores and shops. Take a stroll at the famous suburb in Western Mumbai, and you will find a string of designer boutiques, variety of footwear and shops selling brand-replicas. If you want household knick-knacks, clothes or accessories, this is the place for you.



## Tips for shopping

- ✓ Carry comfortable footwear as walking along a huge stretch of road will only give you more choices
- ✓ Visit markets post 3-4 pm as all street stalls will be set up by that time
- ✓ If planning for extensive shopping, choose weekday shopping as weekends are over-crowded
- ✓ Know that bargaining skill is a significant factor in street shopping
- ✓ Trial rooms are unavailable, so be sure of your size and keep room for alterations
- ✓ Do not expect guarantee or exchange
- ✓ Ensure quality of clothes before buying as most apparels are usually export-rejects



# Tourism Ireland India launches Game of Thrones digital campaign

October, 2015 - Tourism Ireland has launched a digital campaign in India to promote the stunning locations of Northern Ireland where the hit TV series Game of Thrones™ has been filmed.

The 4-week social media campaign, which targets Indian fans of the award-winning series, will run across Facebook and Twitter and shows the fictional world of Westeros bleeding into the real world. The campaign uses image content for fans to share, to celebrate the show and its filming locations in Northern Ireland.

The competition, which is being run in partnership with HBO, will invite fans of Game of Thrones™ to answer three questions on the show and the filming locations in Northern Ireland. The prizes for the campaign will include a 4 Days Game of Thrones™ inspired holiday to Northern Ireland as well as exclusive Game of Thrones™ merchandise. The competition is being hosted on [www.ireland.com/en-in](http://www.ireland.com/en-in) and is scheduled to run until 15th November 2015.

Beena Menon, India Representative, Tourism Ireland said, “Fans of the Game of Thrones™ series from across India are now familiar with locations such as Dark Hedges in County Antrim and Cairncastle. Our goal through this campaign is to reach out to the fan base of the series in India and showcase the stunning locations in Northern Ireland and encourage Indian travellers to experience the beauty of Northern Ireland as well as the local cuisine, restaurants and hospitality of the warm and friendly Irish people.”

- Tourism is the island of Ireland’s largest indigenous industry; responsible for in excess of 4% of GNP in the Republic of Ireland and employing approximately 200,000 people.
- In 2014, the island of Ireland evidenced an estimated 8.6 million overseas visitors, delivering revenue of about €4.26 billion. Overseas tourism business accounts for 59% of all tourism revenue.





## Got an Indian passport?



# Here's a list of 58 visa-free countries...

*"The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page"*

*Quite an exciting saying for those who want to explore the world. Okay! We know it's not that easy. Sometimes, it is responsibilities that hold you back. Sometimes, it is like money is not your honey. But for those ardent travelers, who defer going to the distant owing to the tedious and complicated visa processes, we have a list of countries that need either no visa or offer tourist-friendly visa-on-arrival facility.*

*Oh! Yes, you read it right! Out of nearly 200 nations in the world, Indians have 58 visa-free countries. That's almost a fourth of the planet. So what are you waiting for? Go through the list and revise your 'Places to travel' list.*

### Hong Kong

Condition: Up to 14 days

Visa not required



Southeastern China's enchanting city of Hong Kong knows how to make you dance. The city, rather 'party capital of Asia', is the destination for the party-animals who love to explore effervescent night-life culture of the city. So if you are the one, be ready to explore the British-style pubs, night cruise over Victoria Harbor, hotel bars or hipster hang-outs and nightclubs. If not these, stroll in the fizzy and happening streets with the locals and discover the exclusivity of the place. Lan Kwai Fong, Soho, western part of Wan Chai, Lockhart Rd, Nathan Rd, Minden Rd and Knutsford Terrace are the epitomes of fine dining and sophisticated drinking brimming with diverse, discerning and fun-loving population.

*Indian passport-holders can enter Hong Kong with a valid travel document for a period up to 14 days without a visa. For more than 14 days' stay, Visa or entry permit is required. As long as you exit Hong Kong within 14 days, frequent visit in a short duration is possible.*

*To get into Hong Kong, an Indian traveler needs following documents:*

1. *Passport with minimum 6 months validity and 2 blank pages*
2. *Return ticket to show that you're going back within 14 days*
3. *Proof of employment/self-employment*
4. *Hotel bookings for the 1st night*
5. *An international credit card and some foreign currency*



## Mauritius

Condition: 60 days

Visa not required



Mauritius has all you want during your vacation time. The fascinating island life adorned with a soothing touch of history, traditions, thrill, spas, sports and shopping. Mauritius is an ideal blend of Asian, African and European charms. Just carry your passport, and indulge in the world where Hindu temples rest next to the Catholic Churches, samosas and tea are inseparable and the widely-spoken languages reflect the multi-cultural influence like Creole, English and Cantonese. The must-do list at Mauritius is – Experience the divinity of the Shiva statue at sacred lake of Grand Bassin. Also, make your body move with the uniqueness and cultural richness of the local music of Mauritius - Séga.

*Indian citizens are eligible to enter Mauritius without visa for a maximum stay of 60 days, provided they hold:*

1. Valid passport
2. A valid return or onward ticket
3. A confirmed booking for accommodation
4. Sufficient funds to meet the cost of stay

## Macau

Condition: 30 days

Visa not required

The erstwhile Portuguese colony of Macau possesses exquisite architectural heritages. An evening walk along the road with incense-scented shrines and temples is an experience of million-dollars. Portuguese is a widely-spoken language in Macau intermingles with local Mandarin and Cantonese crowd from Mainland China.

*Compared to Hong Kong, Macau is a bit easier for Indian citizens. The travel documents required are:*

1. Passport with minimum 6 months' validity and 2 blank pages
2. An international credit card and some foreign currency

*It is always a good idea to be ready with answers on hotel accommodation and return ticket. Free entry is allowed as many times as possible provided you exit Macau within 30 days.*





**Fiji**

Condition: 120 days

Visa not required



An apt place for adventure-seekers, Fiji is an archipelago, consisting of over 300 islands. A country in the South Pacific, reflects various shades of blue through its diverse landscapes, lagoons and beaches. The rocky landscapes make it a place for eco-activities starting from mountain-climbing and zip-lining along with exploring the world of sea through coral-diving. The prominent islands of the country include Vanua Levu and Viti Levu. Besides these islets, most part of the country is uncrowded.

*Carry following documents while traveling to Fiji:*

1. A passport with validity of at least 6 months from the date of entering Fiji
2. Return or outbound tickets
3. Confirmation of accommodation
4. Copy of latest bank statement
5. Re-entry/entry visa to a country other than Fiji

**Jamaica**

Condition: 14 days

Visa not required

Feel the magic of marvelous sceneries of rainforests, mountains and beaches. A Caribbean island nation is famed for its British colonial architecture. Jamaica is believed to be the birthplace of a music genre – Reggae. Negril is one of the most famous places in Jamaica that offers unique thrilling activities like diving and snorkeling. The easy-going culture, music, and cuisine of Jamaica are few of the many attractions for the tourists.

*Travel documents required to get into Jamaica:*

1. Valid passport
2. A valid return or onward ticket
3. A confirmed booking for accommodation
4. Sufficient funds to meet the cost of stay





## Cook Islands

Condition: 31 days

Visa not required



The beautiful archipelago located in the South Pacific lies southwest of Tahiti. The Cook Islands consist of 15 unique islets. The best place to drench into solitude and leisure, the destination has everything from blue lagoons to prosperous reef, which has made it famous for scuba-diving. Avarua, the capital city, is recognized for white-coral churches. The leisure-seekers can visit Avarua's Saturday Market to find out the tunes of dancers, beats of traditional Polynesian drummers and shine of black pearls to sarongs.

Carry following documents if you're planning to explore the beauty of Cook Islands:

1. Adequate financial means to support stay
2. Valid tickets for return journey
3. Passport valid for a period of at least six (6) months beyond the contemplated period of stay

## Dominica

Condition: 90 days

Visa not required

Dominica, different from Dominican Republic, is a craggy island nation distinguished by geothermal hot springs. Ideal for those who want to sit alone facing the sea-waves and occasionally experience the snorkeling. Breathtaking beaches, hiking trails and rainforests describe the exquisiteness of Dominica as a perfect tourist destination.

Enter Dominica with following travel documents:

1. Valid passport
2. A valid return or onward ticket
3. A confirmed booking for accommodation
4. Sufficient funds to meet the cost of stay





## Grenada

Condition: 90 days

Visa not required



One of the most picturesque island countries of Caribbean Sea, Grenada is described as the 'Spice Isle'. The mountainous main island hosts variety of nutmeg plantations. The beautiful Caribbean islands of Grenada offer much to

tourists in the form of waterfalls, beaches, spice gardens and historic forts.

The pleasant weather and soothing soggy aroma make you want to stay back in the country for the rest of your life.

*Indian tourists can travel visa-free in*

*Grenada for up to 90 days, but must show*

1. *Proof of sufficient funds to cover cost of their travel*
2. *Valid passport*
3. *A valid return or onward ticket*
4. *A confirmed booking for accommodation*



## Maldives

Condition: 90 days

Visa not required

Discover various shades of Blue at the tropical nation in India Ocean - Maldives. Composed of 26 coral atolls, Maldives is a place to explore the underwater life. The crystal-clear water offers the scenic marine life. Bright-colored tropical fish, magnificent caves and coral walls are some of the attractions of this blue paradise.

### Documents required:

1. Valid passport
2. One latest passport-sized colored photograph
3. Confirmed reservation of the hotel
4. Valid tickets for onward destination or confirmed return tickets
5. Photo copies of important documents such as bank statements



### The list doesn't end here...

Countries like Bhutan, Ecuador, South Korea (Jeju), Nepal, Antarctica, Seychelles, FYRO Macedonia, Svalbard, Haiti, Montserrat, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Vincent & Grenadines, Trinidad & Tobago, Turks & Caicos Islands, British Virgin Islands, El Salvador, Tuvalu, Micronesia, Niue, Samoa, Vanuatu, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Thailand, Timor Leste, Iraq (Basra), Jordan, Comoros Islands, Cape Verde, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Sao Tome & Principe, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Georgia, Tajikistan, St. Lucia, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Guyana, Nauru, Palau – are also within the reach for those who want to go global. ■

Disclaimer: Visa rules given here are only indicative & are updated on best effort basis. Please refer to the respective country's official website to know about the complete and accurate requirements.



# MAJESTIC MONUMENTS IN MADHYA PRADESH

The northern districts of Madhya Pradesh have some of India's signature monuments – the fort and palace of Gwalior, the medieval palaces and temples of Orchha, and the elegant temples of Khajuraho. Some great forts crown the Vindhya hills of Bundelkhand.

Story by ANIL MULCHANDANI  
Pictures by DINESH SHUKLA

GWALIOR FORT



## GWALIOR

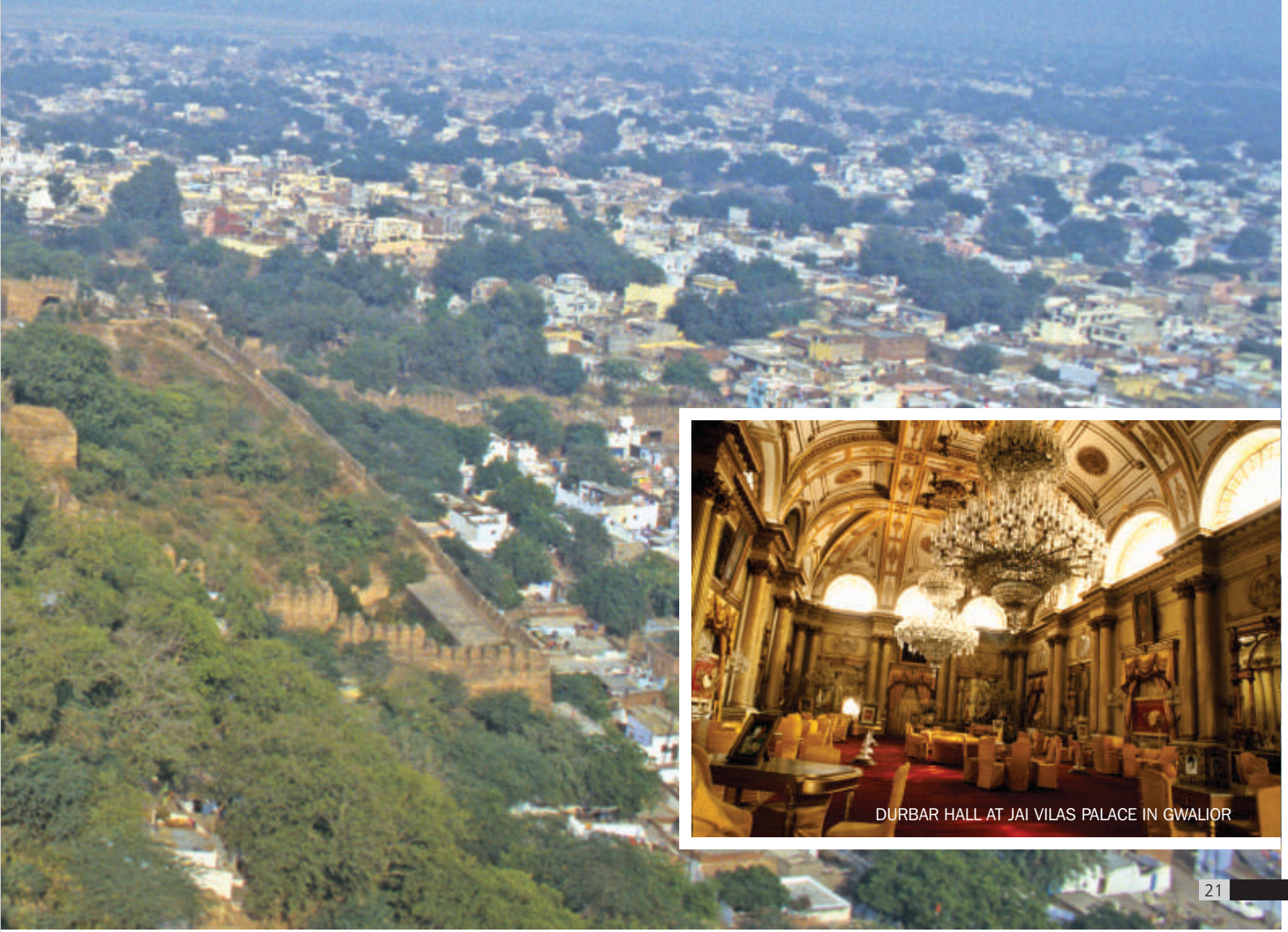
The major city of northern Madhya Pradesh, Gwalior was one of the most affluent princely states of India. Its *Maharajas*, belonging to the Maratha Scindia dynasty, were known for their flamboyant lifestyle, bejewelled palaces, fleet of Rolls Royce and other vintage cars, stables of elephants and horses, steam engines, extravagant viceregal dinners, royal tiger shoots and grand lifestyle. They were also known for their encouragement of education and local industries, establishment of hospitals and their judicial systems. The *Maharajas* were also among the premier princes with the Nizam of Hyderabad, the Maharaja of Mysore, the *Maharaja* of Baroda and His Highness of Kashmir to receive the full complement of a 21-gun salute in the Delhi *Durbar*.

The city is dominated by the majestic Gwalior Fort, certainly one of India's greatest hilltop forts. Gwalior owes its name

to the sage Gwalipa who is said to have cured the Rajput ruler, Suraj Pal of leprosy around the 10th century. The Parihar Rajput rulers were routed by Iltutmish's siege of Gwalior in the 13th century after which the act of Johar or death of dishonour was performed by them and the fort was taken by the Tomar Rajputs in 1398. It was during their reign that Gwalior saw its golden age of medieval architecture and affluence with the zenith, when Man Singh Tomar ruled in 1486 studding the fort with palaces and temples that earned the title of a pearl in

the necklace of the castles of Hindustan to the fort during Babar's rule. After his death, Gwalior fell to the Mughals and when the Mughal empire decline in 1754 AD. The

ORCHHA TOWN



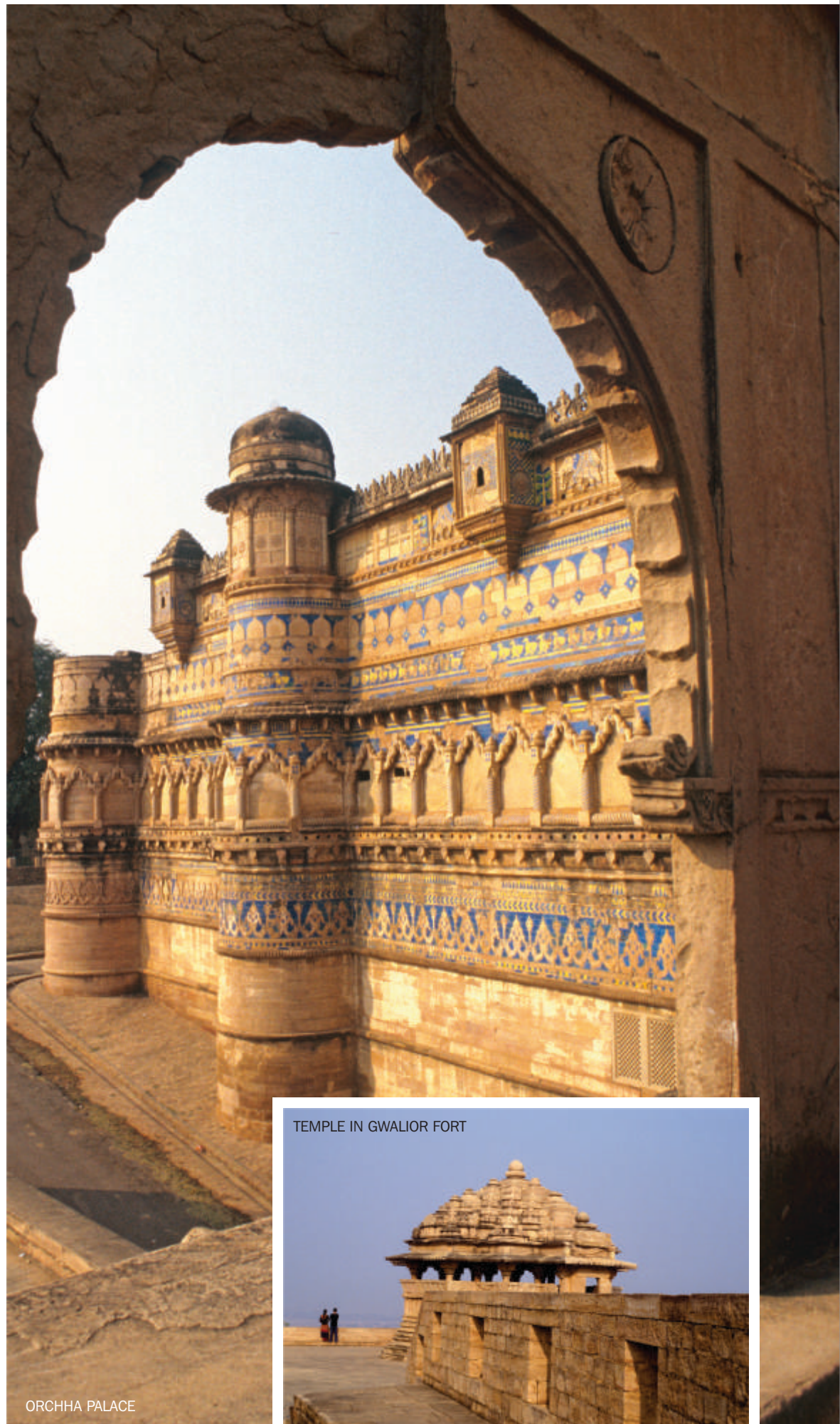
DURBAR HALL AT JAI VILAS PALACE IN GWALIOR



Scindias carved out an independent kingdom with the fort as their seat of power.

On the way to the fort, you can see Jain sculptures, set deep into the rocks, depicting the Jain *tirthankaras*. There is an archaeological museum at the Gurjari Mahal built in honour of Mrignayni, the Gujar girl who became a favourite queen. Salabhanjika, the piece de resistance of the museum, is a carving of a maiden called the 'Mona Lisa of India'. The highlight of the fort is Man Mandir Palace, encrusted with mosaics depicting mainly faunal themes inlaid into blue, yellow and green tiles. This palace is an architectural beauty with ornamented parapets and cupolas. Other impressive palaces include the Vikramaditya Mahal, Karan Mandir, Jahangiri Mahal and Shah Jahan Mahal. The Sas-Bahu Temple is a pair of 11th Vishnu Temples. The Teli-kamandir is an eight century temple with Garuda, the eagle mount of Vishnu at the entrance. The citadel has a graceful gurudwara, in honour of Har Gobind, the guru who was imprisoned here.

A royal residence, the Jai Vilas Palace, was built in 1875 after Maharaja Jayaji Rao Scindia's friend Colonel Filose returned from a Gwalior state-sponsored Europe tour with plans of great palaces and a huge collection of the finest furniture, tapestries and decorations from the countries he visited. See the museum collection of miniatures, Persian rugs, ornaments, cut-glass including a crystal swing for Lord Krishna idols, Louis-the-XVI furniture, erotic prints and sculpture, curious exhibits like the poison-testing place, stuffed tigers and other



ORCHHA PALACE

TEMPLE IN GWALIOR FORT



princely memorabilia. Visit the Darbar hall, which has a crystal staircase, hallways, two of the largest chandeliers in the world weighing more than three tons and decorated with gold, sumptuous furniture, and one of the largest handmade carpets in India.

Those interested in classic music should not miss the Sarod Ghar, the beautiful ancestral home of the Bangash family, which includes musical virtuosos like Ustad Hafiz Ali Khan and his son Ustad Amjad Ali Khan. The Sarod Ghar is a museum tracing Gwalior's rich musical legacy from Tansen, who performed in the court of Moghul emperor Akbar to the invention by Gulam Ali Khan Bangash of the sarod, to the present exponents of music, and instruments donated by famous musicians.

You must also visit the sixteenth-century Tomb of Ghaus Mohammed, an Afghan prince who helped Babur take Gwalior fort, which is a local shrine. The tomb is a fine specimen of early Moghul architecture and a popular local shrine. In the same gardens

is the tomb of Tansen, one of the 'Nine Jewels' of Emperor Akbar's court.

The *chhatris* of the Scindias with their frescos and detailed carvings are also worth seeing. The Scindias influence is seen everywhere in Gwalior from these cenotaphs to palaces like the Jai Vilas and Moti Mahal to schools and colleges named after them. A great way to end a day in Gwalior is with the sound-and-light show at the fort.

#### ORCHHA

65 km from Gwalior, there is a turn-off for the Jain temple covered with summit of Sonagir, very important for Digambar Jains. Shortly after this comes Datia, with the

Narsingh Dev Palace standing in the north of town.

It is an architectural marvel and has breathtaking views from the upper storeys.

30km after Datia, you can visit historical Jhansi in Uttar Pradesh. A short drive from Jhansi brings you to Orchha with architectural gems lying scattered across a scrubby countryside like secrets that have only recently entered the itineraries of the many visitors to Central India.

The Raj Mahal, started by Rudra Pratap and completed by Madhukar Shah, is one of the most impressive examples of Bundela architecture with domed roofs, pavilions and tiled courtyards. Inside the chambers, see mirror inlay and murals on the walls and ceilings, some of the best depict tales from the Ramayana, the



LAKSHMINARAYAN TEMPLE AT ORCHHA





avatars of Vishnu, life in the royal courts of Orchha, hunting scenes, riverside views, dancing figures, festivals and processions. Rai Praveen Mahal, which has an assembly hall and apartments, set in nearly laid out lawns called Anand Mahal, was once the residence of a concubine.

In the fortified palace complex, the Sheesh Mahal is now a heritage hotel run by MPSTDC. Next to it, Jahangiri Mahal was built by Bir Singh Deo for the official visit of a Mughal emperor in the seventeenth century. Its façade reflects the Hindu and Muslim styles of Akbar's Mughal India, and is decorated with turquoise tiles. The palace has elegant hanging balconies, balustrades, onion domes, arches, jali-screens and windows. From here, you can see the pointed *shikharas* of the Chaturbuj Mandir, which has an imposing archway, a beautiful balcony and other features.

The legend of this temple combines with that of the Ram Raja Mandir. The Chaturbuj Temple is said to have been built to house the idol of Rama brought by the Rani from Ayodhya. However, the idol could not be lifted from the spot, where she first set it down in her palace. That's residence of Rani became the Raja Mandir. According to local lore, the Raja decided to move out to Tikamgarh leaving Ram as the Raja of Orchha, which could not have two kings!

From this temple, walk through the Moghul-style ornamental garden to Hardaul ka Baithaka, a grand eight-pillared pavilion with cooling systems said to be the only ones of their kind in India.

KHAJURAHO TEMPLE





Drive out of the town centre to the Lakshminarayan Mandir that crowns a rocky hillock. It has murals of the Bundela school showing scenes from the life of Lord Krishna.

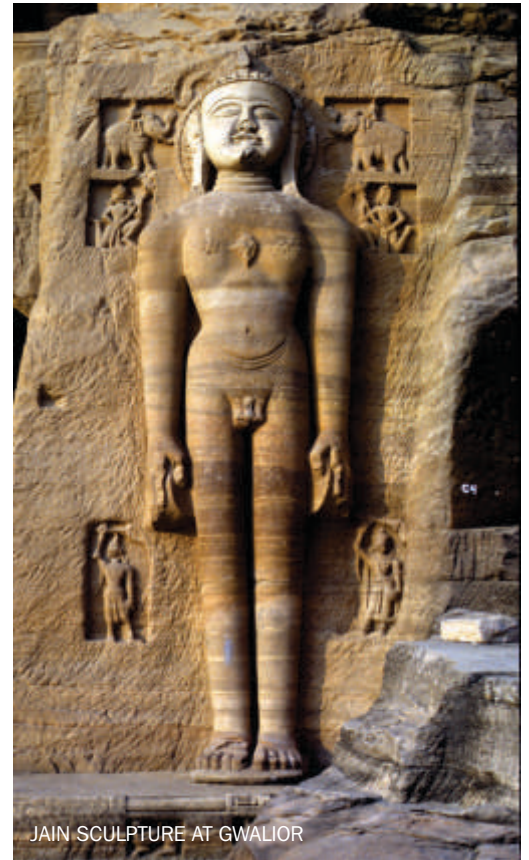
In the evening, there is a good view from the *chhatris*, a cluster of 14 cenotaphs erected as memorials to Bundelkhand's former rulers with their domes and spires standing out against the horizon. The cenotaphs cluster along the ghats on the Betwa River and can be seen at their best from the narrow bridge across the river.

#### **KHAJURAHO**

From Orchha, take the highway for Khajuraho, which has some of the best-known temples of India. The temples are famous for their sensuality and forthright eroticism, architectural details and fine workmanship. Built in the 10th to the 12th century period, they are great achievements of the Chandella dynasty. The Western Group has the beautiful Kandariya Mahadeva, Vishvanatha and Lakshman temples set in landscaped gardens. The Eastern Group of Temples has some excellent sculpture. Jain Temple Road offers access to Parshvanath Temple, dominating the walled enclosure of the Jain Group, which has some fine sculpture of Brahma, Sarasvati, Vishnu and Kama. The museum here has Jain sculptures. South from here are some more temples that should be visited.

#### **BUNDELKHAND FORTS**

Khajuraho can make a good base to visit a number of Bundelkhand forts in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. Ajaigarh is a fort that rewards those who make the difficult journey to it with



JAIN SCULPTURE AT GWALIOR

wonderful views and a peaceful setting. Kalinjar, about 20km onward from Ajaigarh, has one of the oldest forts in India. Located on one of the last spurs of the Vindhya range, it has mind-blowing views, the well-preserved Raja Mansingh palace, a rock sculpture of Bhairava and a tank with bathing ghats. There are many interesting stone relics in the fort complex. Continue north from Kalinjar and turn east for this important Vaishnavite pilgrim centre, a very pretty spot to photograph boats, *ashrams* and ghats along Mandakani River. ■



EROTIC CARVINGS AT KHAJURAHO

THE JAI VILAS PALACE OF GWALIOR





# A NEW LOOK AT GOA

*Goa is not just about the coast – it is also about river cruises, spice plantation visits, nature treks in the hills and wildlife spotting. We describe a journey through*

Story by ANIL MULCHANDANI  
Pictures by DINESH SHUKLA

From the 1960s, Goa has been known as a beach destination. Tourists flocked there for some fun, partying, sunbathing and swimming in the tropical waters. With the opening of luxury beach hotels like Taj Fort Aguada Resort, Goa also became a beach holiday destination for the rich and the famous. But Goa is not just about lazing on beaches that line its 106km coastline. It has lush green hills, spectacular waterfalls, wildlife sanctuaries, bird rich lakes and creeks, rivers like the Zuari and the Mandovi, historical temples and churches, Portuguese colonial buildings, superb old houses and mansions, and bustling markets. Inland Goa offers river cruises with cultural shows onboard, visits to spice plantations and fruit orchards, and nature treks in the hills. Here, we look

at a Goan holiday away from the touristic beaches.

## THE SCENIC HERITAGE OF NORTH EAST GOA

At the northeastern boundaries of Goa, Bicholim and Sattari talukas have a rich scenic heritage. As you go east from the popular beaches like Baga past Arpora, you come to Naroa. It makes a base to visit some famous Hindu temples like Saptakoteswara Mandir, which is tiny but beautiful with attractive natural surroundings in a narrow green valley. Nearby is the Mayem Lake, which has wooded shores that can be good for watching birds. From Mayem, go east to the towns or Sanquelim or Sankhali, and visit the Aravalem Falls, which are spectacular in winter after the rains. A short distance from the waterfalls is a cluster of rock-cut cave



Aravelam Falls





Jeep safari at Mollem

### SAFARIS IN EAST GOA

From Valpoi, travel south to Mollem, which is the entrance to the Bhagwan Mahaveer Wildlife Sanctuary on the eastern border of Goa. This sanctuary with the Mollem National Park at its core has luxuriant tree growth. You can hire an open vehicle near the entrance for a wildlife viewing drive to see gaur or Indian bison, which is Goa's State Animal, sambar, barking deer and wild boar. The sanctuary is also home to leopards and there are reports of tiger coming here too. At night, scaly anteater, slender loris, small Indian civet, porcupine and flying squirrel are active here. The sanctuary has many other points of interest. The Devil's Canyon is a beautiful geological rock formation. The Dudhsagar Falls, one of India's tallest waterfalls, also lies in beautiful forest. The best views of the waterfalls are from the train going from Collem Railway Station to Karnataka but you can also approach by jeep or on foot. Dropping about 600m along the face of the cliff, Dudhsagar gets its name, which means the River of Milk from the white foam created by the force of the cascade as it falls in tiers, forming pools on the way.

A short drive from Mollem brings you to Tambdi Surla's Mahadev Temple. This Shiva



Aravelam Cave Temples

temples that locals associated with the Pandavas. These caves are believed to have been Buddhist monasteries but today house Shiva cave temples. From the waterfalls, travel to Valpoi, which is the headquarters of Sattari district. To the east of Valpoi, the Western Ghats are rich in flora and fauna. The most interesting area

is the Mhadei River Valley, which has many birds like Malabar grey hornbill, Nilgiri wood pigeon, blue-winged parakeet, small sunbird and white-bellied blue flycatcher. It is very rich in reptiles like geckos, skinks and snakes. The forests are also good for spotting butterflies and moths.

New resorts have developed in this area like Wildernest Resort and Rustic Retreat.





Temples near Ponda

temple was built in the 12th-13th century period, when Goa was ruled by the Kadamba dynasty and is the oldest surviving temple in the state. The temple is an architectural gem with reliefs and sculptures on the shikhara roof, including Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva with their respective consorts. Tambdi Surla is a birdwatchers paradise. The fig trees here abound with fruit eating birds like hornbills, green pigeons, barbets and the gorgeous-looking Malabar trogon, while forests nearby offer opportunities to sight rarely seen forest birds like Sri Lankan frogmouth and Indian pitta. Vernal hanging parrot, brown-capped pygmy woodpecker, flameback, flowerpecker, gold-fronted leaf bird, oriels, chestnut nuthatch, Indian pitta, Asian fairy bluebird, scarlet minivet, forest wagtail, velvet fronted nuthatch and scops owl are some of the birds you could see during forest walks. Backwoods Camp is a good place to stay near the Tambdi Surla temple and it offers birdwatching walks in the forest. There are many resorts and camps that have come up near Mollem.

From Mollem, travel west to Bondla Sanctuary, which has a zoo surrounded by forests. The forests are very good for watching butterflies, birds, small mammals like giant squirrel and tree frog.

### TAKE A SPICE PLANTATION TOUR

From the Western Ghats, the road goes through laterite hills towards Ponda. The plantations around Ponda, like Tropical, Savoia, Sahakari, etc, are open for tourists. The spice plantation tour begins with an



Orchards and Spice Plantations

introductory talk followed by a walk through fruit orchards and spice gardens. During the stroll, a guide gives information about all the plants you pass starting with cardamom and pineapple, then going up to see the cinnamon, nutmeg, banana, breadfruit, cashew and star apple. At the top you see jackfruit and mango trees. The tour usually ends with watching men swinging among the areca palms to harvest betel nuts. The tour usually includes a Goan lunch. You can buy spices, dry fruits, berries and medicinal herbs at the plantation shops.

### TAKE A TEMPLE TOUR OF GOA'S HINDU HEARTLAND

Between Priol and Ponda are some spectacular temples, most of them built in the 18th century. Among these Shri Mangesh Temple attracts the most tourists among all the Goan temples. It is set on a wooded hill just off the main highway. Dedicated to Mangesh or Magueshi, an incarnation of Shiva, it has a lingam brought here from Cortalim, when the original 16th century temple was threatened by Portuguese conquests. Housed in a small 17th century temple earlier, the temple in its third generation was built in the mid-18th century on land donated by an influential Hindu family. A gateway leads from the roadside to a paved path brought us to a water tank. It is said to belong to the older version of the temple. The highlight of the temple is its lamptower, built in Indian Baroque style, which is white with painted images, surrounded by small structures and a tulsi vrindavan. A colourfully painted elephant on wheels stands in front of the characteristic Goan temple, which is white and yellow in colour. A portico leads to the hall, hung with chandeliers. The lingam is behind a carved silver screen and shares the hall with shrines of Ganesh and Parvati. There are a number of other temples worth visiting like Shri Mahalsa, Nangueshi and Shri Lakshmi.

### VISIT THE CHURCHES AND CONVENTS OF OLD GOA

From Ponda, travel west to Old Goa or Velha Goa, which has impressive churches and convents. It is considered as one of the best clusters of Renaissance architecture in the world. The cluster includes the Se Cathedral, which is one of Asia's finest cathedrals, the Church of St Francis of Assisi and Basilica of Bom Jesus, also



Piedade Village Church at Divar



known as the spiritual hub of Goa because it houses the tomb of Saint Francis Xavier. The holy hill of Monte Santo has chapels, convents and a Christian art museum.

### TAKE A BOAT RIDE ON THE MANDOVI

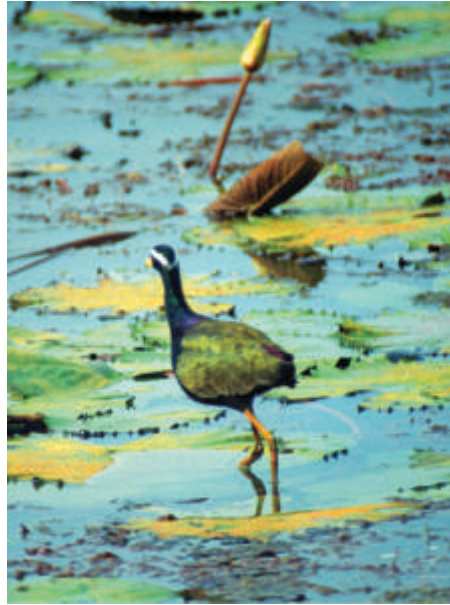
From Old Goa, you can hire a boat to tour the islands on the Mandovi River estuary. Chorao lies in the Dr Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary and as you pass the island, you can watch birds and fishes along the mangrove forested shores and mud banks. Divar Island has a village with good looking houses. Many of the men from Divar go to work abroad so you see more women here. The road goes up to the top of the hill, where the 'Church of Our Lady of Compassion' is perched and offers superb views.

### WATCH BIRDS AT CARAMBOLIM

Return to Old Goa and drive towards Panaji. You can take the route past Carambolim lake next to Karmali Station. This expanse of water, covered with water hyacinth and lilies, is excellent for birdwatching. Stroll along the lakefront to spot waterfowl like purple moorhen, waterhen ducks and herons among the vegetation.

### TAKE A SUNSET CRUISE AT PANAJI

As evening approaches, the river cruise from Santa Monica Jetty is one of Goa's most lively experiences. Board the boat the jetty as it sets out on the river. The boat is equipped with a snack and drinks bar. As the boat goes out on the water, you are treated to stage performances of Goa's famous folk dances as well as modern



entertainment on a stage. Passengers are also invited to join in the fun. Catch the last of the sunset from the deck of the boat. Dinner cruise and moonlight cruises are also arranged at night. Apart from these, you can also join nature cruises like dolphin-spotting in the sea and crocodile spotting on the rivers.

### ENJOY THE RELAXING BEACHLIFE IN SOUTH GOA

From Panaji or Panjim, the road goes down to beautiful beaches of South Goa like Arossim, Cansaulim, Benaullim, Colva, Majorda and Mobor. The palm-lined golden beaches support a variety of facilities for tourists like sun decks, beer and seafood shacks, beach view restaurants, massages, yoga lessons and water sports like parasailing and jetskiing. Some of Goa's most luxurious resorts like Taj Exotica, Leela

Goa, Park Hyatt, Kenilworth, Majorda, Ramada, etc, are set facing these beaches.

South Goa's villages like Colva, Madgaon, Chandor, Loutolim and Rachol are worth-visiting for their churches, Portuguese buildings and attractive old houses.

### VISIT THE PREHISTORIC SITES OF RIVONA

As you travel south from the villages, you come to the rice-farming hamlet of Rivona. Hidden away in this hamlet are two Buddhist caves carved out of a laterite outcrop. In the 7th century, Buddhist monks would have used these cells. A little further ahead, one of western India's most important prehistoric art sites is situated on the banks of river Kushavati, spread over 500 sq meters, the rock art comprises of depictions of animals and some human figures.



### DISCOVER A PARADISE BEACH AT PALOLEM

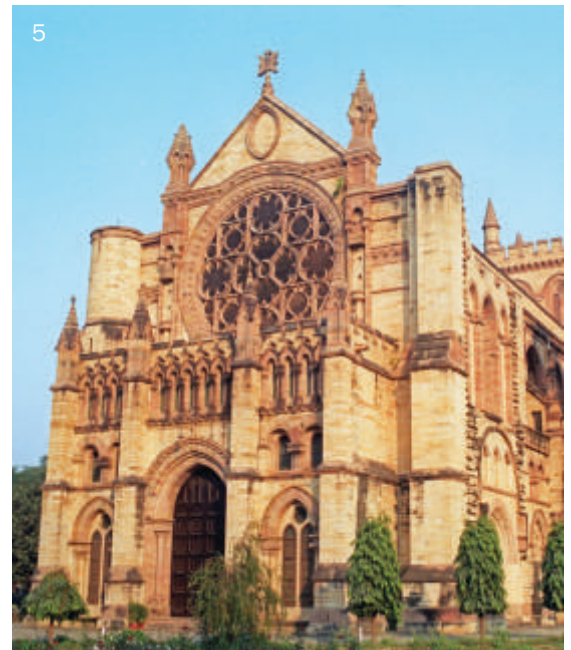
From the prehistoric site, you can drive to the coast and visit some lesser known sites like the Cabo de Rama Fort and Agonda beach. At the southern end of Goa, Palolem is a true paradise beach – a perfect curve of golden sand lined with palms, stretching from forests, rocky outcrops and boulders at one end to Canacona Island at the other. Sea eagles can be seen flying over and dolphin spotting is frequent. It has a cosmopolitan mix of eating places from affordable shacks to stylish restaurants. Walk southward from here to Patnem, which is a less crowded beach. The LaLit Golf & Spa Resort Goa is a plush resort at Canacona. ■



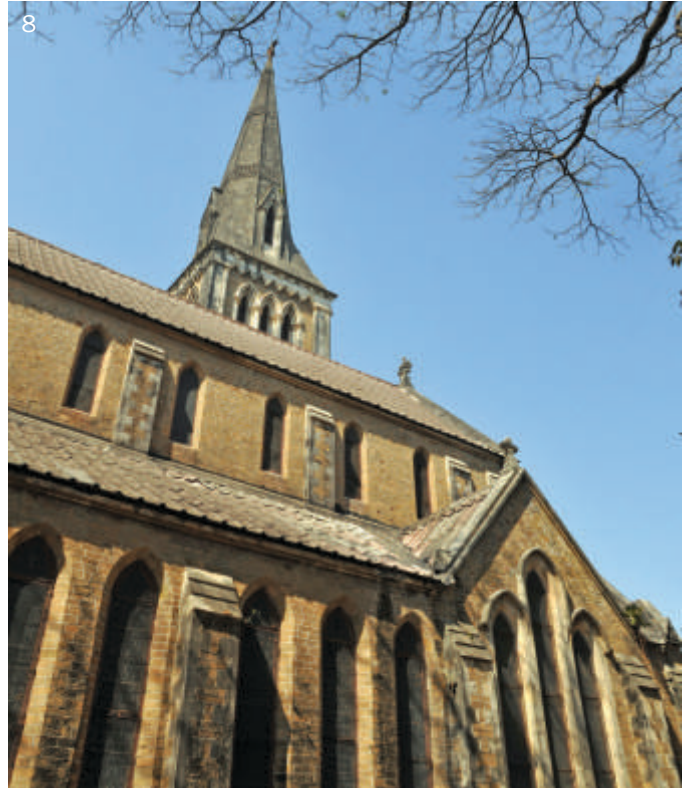


# CHRISTIAN HERITAGE TOURISM IN INDIA

Christianity is the third largest religion and has a long heritage in India. It was established in South India by the 6th century AD. The arrival of the Portuguese, followed by other European colonial powers like the British, the Dutch, the Danish and the French, and also Armenian traders, brought various denominations of Christianity to India. The photo-feature introduces us to a variety of churches in India from the British-built Anglican churches in the hills to two of India's biggest Roman Catholic pilgrimage centres – the Basilica de Bom Jesus at Velha Goa and Basilica of Our Lady of Good Health at Vellankani. **Photo feature by DINESH SHUKLA**







### 1. The Church of St John in the Wilderness in Himachal

The British built impressive churches in the Himalaya hill stations, like their summer capital of Shimla. The Church of St John in the Wilderness at Upper Dharamshala in Himachal Pradesh was built in 1852. This grey-stoned church has superb stained glass windows and historic brass plaques.

### 2. Shillong Cathedral in Meghalaya

Shillong, once called the Scotland of the East, was a hill station for British residents of the tea growing and petroleum producing state of Assam. Since Meghalaya is a Christian-majority state, there are 33 church districts or "Parishes" in the Shillong Archdiocese. Shillong's 'All Saint's Cathedral' was built in 1902 to replace an older 1870s church. It has a cemetery with British memorials.

Bagh area, which has many Victorian monuments, St Andrew's Kirk, consecrated in 1818, has a towering church steeple and contains magnificent carvings.

### 4. The Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church at Ranchi, Jharkhand

The Christ Church at Ranchi is the headquarters of the The Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church denomination in India. The Church was established on 2nd November, 1845 by four German Missionaries with professional expertise in the field of education, theology and economy, sent by Rev. Fr. Johannes Evangelista Gossner of Berlin. It bears the marks of a cannonball attack during the 1857 Mutiny. The church declared its autonomy on 10th July, 1919.

### 5. All Saints Cathedral at Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh

### 3. St Andrew's Kirk at Kolkata, West Bengal

Kolkata has some of the most visited churches of India. Huge crowds of Christians and non-Christians gather at the churches of Central Kolkata for the Christmas Mass. In the BBD

One of the grandest churches in India, the All Saints Cathedral of Allahabad was built between 1877 and 1893. This cathedral was designed by William Emerson, Architect of the Victoria Memorial and other iconic monuments of India. The interior of this impressive church is lined with marble from Rajasthan. The fine marble latticework is one of the attractive features of the church.

### 6. The Shrine of St Jude at Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh

The devotion to St. Jude Thaddaeus, one of the Twelve Apostles of Jesus, was practically unknown in India before a chapel was built at Jhansi. About 35 years ago, the chapel was replaced by this shrine.

**7. Pachmarhi church in Madhya Pradesh** Pachmarhi was a hill station in the Central Provinces with churches that served the British in its Cantonment area. The colonial period church near the golf greens of Pachmarhi has beautiful Belgian stained glass windows.

### 8. Afghan Church in Mumbai, Maharashtra

The Church of St. John the Evangelist, better known as the Afghan Church is an Anglican Church with a 58m high tower at the northern edge of Colaba. It was a monument built to commemorate the dead of the First Afghan War and the disastrous 1842 retreat from Kabul. Memorials from the Anglo-Afghan Wars can be seen in this church.









14



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### 9. St. Mary's Church in Pune, Maharashtra

One of the oldest churches of the Deccan, St. Mary's Church was built in Pune to serve the spiritual needs of soldiers posted in the Poona Camp. Being a garrison church, it has memorial stones and plaques that commemorate many British military leaders.

### 10. Christ Church at Mahabaleshwar, Maharashtra

Mahabaleshwar was a summer sanatorium and hill retreat of the British Raj and has many typical British hill station structures including 19th century churches.

### 11. Bom Jesus Cathedral at Daman, Daman & Diu Union Territory

Daman was a Portuguese colony from the 1500s to 1961 with the main Portuguese township headquartered at Moti Daman. The old Portuguese buildings are enclosed within a massive fort by the Damanganga. Moti Daman has well-preserved churches like the good-sized Bom Jesus Cathedral with a richly carved entrance. The interiors

are also beautifully decorated with woodwork and house an ornamental altar.

### 12. Church of Our Lady of Piety at Silvassa, Dadra & Nagar Haveli Union Territory

Once a Portuguese enclave, Silvassa has the Church of Our Lady of Piety. The highlight of the church is the painting of the Last Supper.

### 13. Anglican Church at Surat, Gujarat

From the 1600s, British, Dutch and other European factories thrived at Surat, but in 1800 its administration passed on to the British. Christ Church was constructed in the 1820s with the blessings of Mount Stuart Elphinstone and the District Magistrate of Surat, John Morrison. This church was consecrated as Surat's Anglican Church during the visit of a Bishop.

### 14 & 15. The Church of St Paul at Diu Island, Daman & Diu Union Territory

Diu Island was conquered by the Portuguese who built a majestic fort on the island in 1535. The grandest of the island's

churches, the Church of St Paul, was built in the 1600. This church has an impressive Gothic façade, which was largely rebuilt in 1807. The lovely interiors feature a superbly carved wooden altar, statues of the saints and fine woodwork.

### 16. Basilica de Bom Jesus at Velha Goa, Goa

Velha Goa is Goa's main Christian spiritual centre mainly because of the Basilica de Bom Jesus. This cathedral is sacred to Roman Catholics all over the world because it houses the mortal remains of Saint Francis Xavier. Built in 1594, this is a grand Baroque church with a majestic three-tiered façade.

17. The marble and jasper tomb of St Francis Xavier took the Florentine sculptor Foggini 10 years to build. Housed in the Basilica de Bom Jesus at Old Goa, the tomb has bronze plaques depicting scenes from the life of Goa's patron saint who was canonized in 1622.

18. The reliquary at Basilica de Bom Jesus contains the relics of St Francis Xavier.









26



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28

The Santa Cruz Cathedral Basilica at Fort Kochi is one of the eight Basilicas in India. Basilica is a title given to some Roman Catholic churches. It is one of the most impressive churches in India. The foundation stone of the Santa Cruz church was laid on May 3, 1505, the feast day of the 'Invention of the Holy Cross', hence the magnificent edifice when completed was named Santa Cruz. In 1558, Pope Paul IV, raised the Santa Cruz Church to the status of a Basilica. Destroyed during the Dutch and British control of Kochi, the Cathedral was rebuilt in the late-1800s and was consecrated on November 19, 1905 by Dom Sebastiao Jose Pereira, Bishop of Damao.

**25. Our Lady of Lourdes Cathedral at Thrissur, Kerala**

Our Lady of Lourdes Syro-Malabar Catholic Metropolitan Cathedral at Thrissur is one of the largest churches in Kerala. Erected in the 1870s and '80s, the church features an Indo-European facade with pink spires.

**26. St Joseph's Cathedral at Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala**

The St. Joseph's Metropolitan Cathedral at Thiruvananthapuram was built in 1873. It was rebuilt in the 1900s with a Gothic facade and a bell tower. The cathedral has a statue of its patron St. Joseph with the child Jesus in the middle of the facade and a statue of Jesus with hands raised atop the tower.

**27. Basilica of Our Lady of Good Health at Velankanni, Tamil Nadu**

Velankanni is one of the country's biggest Catholic pilgrimage centres. It has been chosen as one of the heritage cities for HRIDAY scheme of Government of India.

**28.** Velankanni town is famous for its Roman Catholic Church called Basilica of Our Lady of Good Health.

**19.** The ornamental Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament at Basilica de Bom Jesus is one of the centres of attraction.

**20. Se Cathedral at Velha Goa, Goa**

The magnificent renaissance style Se Cathedral in Old Goa was built to be the largest of its kind in Asia in the 1560s. The intricately detailed interior has a 76 ft long central nave with a gilded high altar dedicated to St Catherine.

**21. Rosario Cathedral at Mangalore, Karnataka**

Mangalore had a Portuguese factory in the 16th century. In the 1500s, the Portuguese built the Church of Our Lady of Rosary of Mangalore, well-known as Rosario Cathedral, which was the first Roman Catholic Church of Dakshin Canara in Karnataka. The church was the main centre of devotion for devotees who revered the image of Our Lady of the Rosary believed to have been found at high sea by fishing people. Destroyed in the 1700s by Tipu Sultan, the cathedral was rebuilt in the 1800s and largely reconstructed in 1910.

**22. St. Philomena's Church in the city of Mysore, Karnataka**

The 20th century St. Philomena's Church in Mysore is a cathedral built in Neo-Gothic architectural style. The spires that take inspiration from the Cologne Cathedral in Germany make it one of the tallest churches in Karnataka.

**23. St Francis Church at Fort Kochi, Cochin, Kerala**

Occupied by the Portuguese Empire in 1503, Kochi in Kerala was the first of the European colonies in India. It was the headquarters of the Portuguese before they shifted base to Goa. The Portuguese spread Roman Catholicism in India starting from Kochi and Goa. The Portuguese built the St Francis Church in the 16th century. Earlier in wood, the bricks and mortar facade with a tiled roof was erected later becoming a forerunner for other Indo-European style churches. The Dutch took over Kochi or Cochin, and this became a protestant church later taken over by the British.

**24. The Santa Cruz Cathedral Basilica at Fort Kochi, Cochin, Kerala**









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29. According to traditional beliefs, this is an area of three miracles – the appearing of Virgin Mary carrying child Jesus before a slumbering shepherd boy, the curing of a lame buttermilk vendor, and the saving of Portuguese sailors from a tempest in the Bay of Bengal.

Our Lady of Good Health is popularly known as the "Lourdes of the East" because millions of pilgrims flock to Velankanni hoping for a miracle. The Shrine Basilica at Velankanni contains three chapels, Our Lady's Tank, Church Museum, Priests' Residence, Offering Center, Stations of the

30. The Basilica of Our Lady of Good Health at Velankanni is Gothic in architectural style. The façade is painted white and is crowned by a striking red-tiled roof.

31. The Catholic Basilica devoted to

Cross, Stations of the Rosary and Shrine Mega Mahal. The southern side was extended in 1928 and the northern in 1933.

32. Cotton thread ritual at Velankanni.

33. Velankanni on the east coast of India.

34. Velankanni after dark.

35. Zion Church at Tharangambadi, Tamil Nadu Nagapattinam district in Tamil Nadu is called the District of Churches because of its many impressive churches at seaside towns like Velankanni and Tharangambadi which was a Danish colony called Tranquebar from 1620 to 1845.

36. The beautiful Zion Church, at Tharangambadi, opened in 1701, is the oldest extant Protestant church in India.

37. Zion Church was mainly used by Europeans and New Jerusalem Church was erected in 1707 for native Tamil Christians of Tranquebar. ■

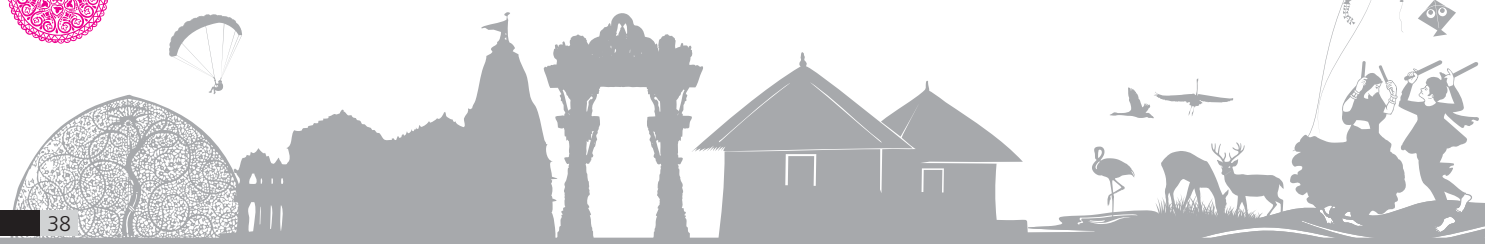




**VIBRANT GUJARAT  
INTERNATIONAL  
TRAVEL MART**

**to promote Gujarat as  
the world-class tourist destination**

Gujarat is an abode to nature's untapped beauty. From the wonderful wetlands to the salt-encrusted wilderness, profound valleys to sky-scraping peaks, arid grasslands to flourishing forests, the unique feature of Gujarat's tourism is there is something for everyone. Tourists come here to indulge in the cultural diversity, relish various fairs and festivals, experience the delectable delicacies and take home the warm memories to cherish for a lifetime. The energetic efforts of Gujarat Government have fueled growth in the total influx of tourists in the state.





To promote the vast bouquet of tourist destinations of Gujarat internationally and complement the highly successful promotional campaign 'Breathe in a bit of Gujarat' featuring Mr. Amitabh Bachchan, Government of Gujarat and Tourism Corporation of Gujarat Limited in association with FICCI are organizing 4th edition of the Vibrant Gujarat International Travel Mart (VGITM), a Global Travel Exposition on 19-21 February 2016 at Mahatma Mandir, Gandhinagar, Gujarat (India).

VGITM is designed to facilitate business interactions among travel professionals from Gujarat and across the world, thereby unleashing significant business opportunities between Gujarat-based travel fraternity and International travel trade.

It will act as a one-stop solution for over 1000 key tourism product sellers and more than 2500 tourism professionals to meet, showcase their tourism products, interact with the key stakeholders of the industry and create brand awareness. The event is anticipating participation of over 100 foreign tour operators (FTO) and 200 domestic tour operators (DTO).

Special features of the event include the buyer-seller meet, B2C meetings and the travel exposition. With participation of travel professionals from States other than Gujarat, VGITM as the Global Travel Exposition will strive to reinforce the thrust provided by the highly successful "Incredible India" campaign of the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

The meticulously-planned event will house 'Thematic Zones', spread over 10,000 sq.m. area. Separate areas will be classified as per tourism

product category like Accommodation (Hotels, Villas, Spas, Home Stays), Tourism Organizations, IT/Technology Companies, Tourist Attractions & Entertainment, Tour Operators, Tour/Travel Associations, Training/Recruitment Organizations, Adventure Travels, Business Travel, Business Tourism, Youth Tourism, Rural Tourism, Spiritual Tourism, Beach Tourism, Safari Tourism, Heritage Tourism, Eco & Sustainable Tourism, Wedding Destinations, Destination Management Companies, Medical

Tourism and Event Management Services.

To encourage participation, the event will be loaded with exclusive attractions like power-packed inaugural session addressed by the Hon'ble Chief Minister and Hon'ble Minister of Tourism, Government of Gujarat, organization of FAM TOURS for foreign and domestic tour operators, special Home-stay Pavilion with participation of registered home-stay establishments as well as presence of national & international media.

**On the whole, VGITM is composed to give a major boost to the state's travel industry.**

#### **BENEFITS TO EXHIBITORS**

- An exclusive business-networking forum
- Platform for interaction with foreign/domestic buyers
- Booth(s) at the exhibition to showcase tourism products
- Pre-fixed B2B meetings with the foreign buyers
- Invitation to hosted inaugural dinner

#### **WHO WILL ATTEND**

- International Tour Operators & Travel Agents
- Indian Tour Operators & Travel Agents
- Hotels, Resorts and Spa Owners
- Health Care Institutions, Investors and Financial Institutions
- Ministry of Tourism, Government of India
- Tourism Organizations and State level Tourism Associations
- Regional Tourism Boards
- National and International Airlines
- Road Transport Organizations
- National and International Media
- Members from Chambers of Commerce and Industry
- National Tourism Organizations from key originating countries

#### **B2C Meeting Attractions**

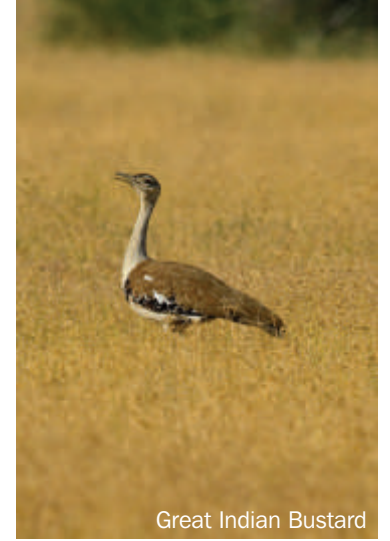
- Handicraft Pavilion & Shopping Zone
- Food Court
- Cultural Zone - Live Performances
- Edutainment Zone - 3D Shows, Quiz, etc.
- Photo Corners
- Competitions - Photography, Poster, Quiz, etc.
- Laser Show at Heritage Monuments
- Celebrity Visits





From the Desert National Park in the west to the lakes of Keoladeo Ghana National Park to the east, Rajasthan has an exciting range of birdwatching areas. Rajasthan is home to endangered birds like the White-backed Vulture, the Great Indian Bustard and the Lesser Florican. In winter, large flocks of birds from Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, China and Siberia gather at lakes dotted across the State of Rajasthan. November to March is the peak period for birdwatching in Rajasthan.

Located near the town of Bharatpur, the Keoladeo National Park is India's most famous bird sanctuary. In an area of just 29 sq km, this national park has lakes, marshes, grasslands and patches of mature forest. Designed to be a



Great Indian Bustard

habitats for birdwatching can also be covered by cycle rickshaw. The early morning hours are very good for watching birds, and in the evening you can see owls, night herons and nightjars. You could also see mammals like Deer, Antelopes, Jackal, Otter and Fishing Cat. The Indian Rock Python is one of the star attractions of Bharatpur – they can often be seen basking at midday.

Sariska to the north and Ranthambore to the south of

# RAJASTHAN

## A BIRD-WATCHERS' PARADISE

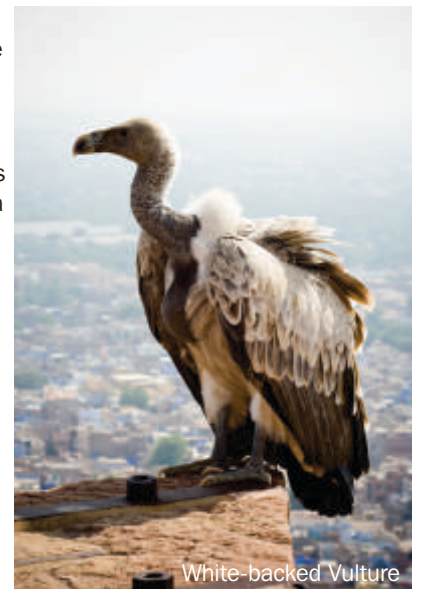
Story by ANIL MULCHANDANI  
Pictures by DINESH SHUKLA



Indian Roller

duck shooting reserve, it has varying depth wetlands that create habitats for different birds. During the rainy season, 15 species of wetland birds - Herons, Ibis, Cormorants, Spoonbills and Storks can be seen nesting on the acacia trees. In a good monsoon year, it is a magical sight to see over 20,000 birds nesting in the park. Birdwatching is most exciting in winter, when birds from Europe and northern Asia come to this park, which falls on the Central Asian flyway.

Since the park is not very big, it is easy to explore on foot or by bicycle. The excellent network of trails through a cross-section of



White-backed Vulture





Bharatpur are well-known for Tiger but can also be rewarding for birdwatching. The five lakes of Ranthambore Tiger Reserve are good for Waterfowl, while the deciduous forest also has a long list of birds.

From Bharatpur, travel west to the city of Jaipur, which has some good parks like Ram Niwas and also the lake at Jal Mahal, which can be nice for birdwatching. Walk to Nahargarh Fort and Nahargarh Biological Park, where you may see the globally-threatened White-naped Tit. The Grass Nursery Farm near Jaipur is a breeding area for birds.

blackbuck antelope and flocks of cranes. Tal Chhappar lies on the migratory path of Demoiselle Cranes, Bar-headed Geese, European Roller and other birds. It is an excellent area to see birds of prey like Imperial Eagle, Short-toed Eagle, Laggar Falcon and Buzzard. A large number of



White-throated Kingfisher, Keoladeo Ghana National Park



Teals at Ranthambore

About 90km from Jaipur, Sambhar Lake is the largest salt water lake in India. This enormous lake can cover 190 sq km in a well-flooded year when thousands of flamingos can be seen. Pelicans, Geese, Cranes, Ducks and other birds can be seen in a good rainfall year. The best time to visit is from October to March.

From Sambhar, you can drive to the saline depression of Tal Chhappar Wildlife Sanctuary, known for its large herds of

Jaisalmer, Khichan is a village full of ornate havelis. This is one of the best places to see huge flocks of Demoiselle Cranes. The Cranes are especially attracted to Khichan because the villagers put out grains for birds to feed. At the wetlands of Khichan, you could see Ducks and wading birds, and the surrounding fields can yield sightings of desert birds.

West from Khichan, Jaisalmer is the main town for visiting the Desert National

Parque. This national park is especially important as the habitat of the endangered great Indian Bustard. The Desert National Park comprises of sand dunes, low bushes, grasslands and small patches of trees. The best area to watch birds is Sudasari. A camel ride here is the best way to see Bustard, Bushchats, Coursers, Larks, Warblers and Finch. Plenty of birds of prey like Falcons, Eagles and Buzzards can be seen. Miajalar is a good area to see the winter visiting Macqueen's Bustard.

Southeast of Sudasari, the wood fossil park at Aakal has 180 million year old wood fossils. This park is also good for watching interesting desert birds like Sandgrouse and Desert Lark. Chinkara or Indian Gazelle, Desert Fox, Desert Hare and other mammals are also seen in the park.

From Jaisalmer, on the road to Mount Abu, you can visit some good bird sites. Jawai Dam on the Jodhpur – Abu Highway is especially good for waterfowl. It is an excellent water body for seeing the Saras Crane, one of the world's tallest flying birds. Spoonbills, Ibises and Ducks are plentiful. In winter, large flocks of bar-headed geese



Cranes at Khichan





are an attraction of Jawai Dam, which has a large crocodile population. The rocky areas around the dam are populated by Leopard, Hyena And Antelope.

Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary and Mount Abu Wildlife Sanctuary are both among the best places for birds of the Aravalli scrublands. Kumbhalgarh Fort commands a magnificent view of the Aravalli hills and the plains. The scrub-forests around the fort offer opportunities to see globally-threatened birds like White-naped Tit and Green Avadavat. The forest drive is good for spotting Grey Jungle Fowl, Spurfowl and Painted Francolin. Mount Abu is Rajasthan's main hill station but it also a rich biodiversity. There is a variety of plants in Mount Abu. The sanctuary also supports good birdlife – Grey Jungle Fowl and Red Spur Fowl are plentiful, and the Green Avadavat and White-naped Tit are possible sightings. The areas around Trevor Tank and also the Salim Ali Tower are productive for



Flamingos at Sambhar Lake

birdwatchers. Mount Abu also harbors Sloth Bear, Leopard and Sambar.

From Mount Abu, continue to Udaipur, which is one of Rajasthan's top tourist draws. Udaipur is a city of lakes – you can see birds at most of the lakes here. The scrub jungle of Sajjangarh is also worthwhile as you could see some endangered and threatened birds.

East from Udaipur, the road goes to Kota, where you can take a Chambal River

Cruise – very good for bird, Turtle and Crocodile watching. South Eastern Rajasthan has many bird-rich lakes – Alaniya Dam, Bardha Dam and Ramsagar Dam are delightful places to watch birds. The Saras Crane regularly breeds in Kota district. The Chambal River is the breeding area for the globally-threatened Indian skimmer. ■



Keoladeo Ghana National Park





# ইহুবেহেচ দুর্গা পূজা

'Ashche Bochor Abar Hobe'

The season of Sharad is fondly awaited in the Eastern India. Besides the golden sunshine and clear blue skies, it brings with it the aroma of victory as the festival of Durga Puja is celebrated in this time of year.

After the dreary monsoon, the biggest festival in West Bengal, Tripura, Orissa, Assam and other parts of the East India is finely in harmony with the soothing environment that uplift the spirit of festivity.

Durga Puja, the celebration that marks victory of Goddess Durga over the demon Mahishasura, is one of the prominent festivals rejoiced in entire India. However in Eastern India, it is more than just a festival. It is the time to savor cultural extravaganza and devotion through the highest degree of enthusiasm and energy. The eye-

catching cultural carnival attracts floods of tourists from all over the world.

The 5-day grand festival, commencing on the 6th day and ending on 10th day of Navratris, displays vivid colors of traditions

that surpass all other festival by quite a distance. Among all attractions of the festivity, the number of intricately-designed gigantic pandals act as a real marvel. Kolkata alone

erects approximately 2000 pandals during Durga Puja. Replicating famous monuments like palaces of Rajasthan, Taj Mahal or Parliament House are work of excellence in such a short period of time. The best thing about the pandals is that any design will be used only once and no design will be repeated again.

## Interesting Stories behind Durga Puja

As per the mythological story, Lord Rama conjured Goddess Durga to bless him with strength and power to win the war against King Ravana as Goddess Durga is believed to be the symbol of mighty powers of all Gods to thrash demon Mahishashura. Lord Rama offered his prayers in the month of Ashwin (6th month as per the Bengali calendar and September-October month as per the Gregorian calendar), which is why this time is referred to as 'Akabondhon'. Since then, Durga Puja signify the conquest of good over bad. According to mythological tales, the goddess was born to rid the gods of the cruelty of Mahishasur. As no man could kill Mahishasur because of a boon, a woman had to destroy the evil.

According to one more story attached to the emergence of Durga Puja, Goddess Durga is permitted to visit her mother for 9 days every year by Lord Shiva. Durga Puja is, thus, a celebration of her visit. On the 10th day, immersion of Goddess Durga's idol in river is believed to be the symbol of her return to kailasha.

## Crafting the Idol

The ostentatious rituals begin months ago with crafting of the idol of Goddess Durga. The whole process of collecting clays to ornamentation is a sacred process, carried out with the detailed rites and rituals. The idol for Durga Puja contains five idols – Goddess Durga accompanied by Lord Ganesh, Lord Kartik, Goddess Laxmi and Goddess Saraswati. The idols of Lion and demon Mahishasura are also part of the grand statue.

On the holy day of Akshaya-tritiya, the first step of sculpture-creation is taken by collecting clay, which should come from the

River Ganges. The distinctive element of the process is – using soil from the house of a sex worker to create the idol. It is believed that the soil 'punya mati' in front of the house of prostitutes is virtuous as people leave their virtues and purity outside the door while visiting sex-workers. One of the important events in sculpture-crafting is 'Chakkhu Daan', which literally means donation of the eyes. On Mahalaya or first day of the puja, the eyes of the sculptures are painted. The artisans fast for a day before painting on the eyes. It takes almost six months to craft the idols

## Preparations & Celebrations

The preparations for Durga Puja extend the celebrations by months. In tune with the festive season, the city of Kolkata decked up with energy and enthusiasm of people busy in merry-making and festivities. These 5 days are dedicated to endless celebration by doing whatever they like to do – family gatherings, enjoying the taste of many traditional and new delicacies, endless chat sessions, and pandal hopping to evidence the many forms of Goddess Durga.

People experience new avatar of Kolkata – the city that never sleeps. The lightings, decorations and pandals at every possible venue give it a new look altogether. The hustle-bustle of people to shop new things for their house, themselves and for their near-dear ones is a matchless aspect of the celebration. The time of the year when best possible discounts are available and the markets brim with bargain-hunters. The 5-day celebration is like a mass fashion show. One gets to see everything from various forms of traditional clothes to latest trends in the world of fashion, new brands, accessories and designs.

The idols are taken for immersion on Vijaya Dashami day.

With that, the five-day exuberant filled with delight and cheerfulness comes to an end. Married women smear the idol to bid farewell to the goddess. People offer each other sweets and gifts with promise of coming back soon by saying 'Ashche Bochor Abar Hobe'. ■







## Here are 5 Bollywood films that inspire you to travel !

'Movies' is a world of imagination. It acts as a parallel planet, where many people get transported to live vision of film-makers through the dynamic characters, captivating sights or interesting plot of story. Stories have always been an alluring element for the humankind. From the very early age, children grow up listening to the stories from their parents/grand-parents (Well, for those who enjoyed childhood during 90s as Cartoon channels have occupied the slot nowadays).

Of course, another essential feature of any film is its set-up. Some films just epitomize locations. It's like you fall in love with the way particular location has been featured in the film. For example, 'Kahaani' – a 2012 Indian mystery thriller film romanced the city of Kolkata with intricate shots of Howrah Bridge, Durga Puja and Victoria Memorial and interestingly handholds the narrative further down to the back alleys of the city. It was featured so beautifully that Kolkata is a known city for you after the film.

While there are few movies that fuel wanderlust in you with every re-watch, not just with gleaming locations, but with the evolution of character led by some kind of expedition. With this idea in mind, we have brought together a list of Bollywood films (post 2000 releases) that will make you want to board the next plane to experience the same journey portrayed in the films.





### QUEEN (2014)

One of the blockbusters of 2014, Queen is a beautiful film depicting the concept of solo-traveling. The journey of a woman (played by Kangana Ranaut), who finds her new self after a solo-journey to **Paris** and **Amsterdam** sure to become an inspiration for those who want to go-solo but just couldn't bring themselves to do it. Solo-travelling extends new horizons. Imagine a city totally unfamiliar to you with equally-unknown people and their culture. What do you think your behavior will be like in a strange place all alone without anyone by your side? Do you think you will be the same as you are in your day-to-day life? The answer is – No. New lessons will mold your behavior. Traveling with companion can deepen relationships but going solo teaches you how to love your own company. So give it a try and challenge yourself to discover new perspectives.



### Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara (2011)

Friends and a road trip sound so crazy and exciting. If you've watched this film, you must have related yourself with one of the four lead characters (played by Hrithik Roshan, Abhay Deol, Farhan Akhtar and Katrina Kaif). The trip of three school-friends turns into fun and entertainment in the beginning, adventure in the middle part and self-liberating towards the end. Bringing a new concept of Bachelor trip, Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara turns the clichéd concept of casino and handover to an epic road journey idea. Taking a break from mechanical routine to go on a road journey to new cities, enjoying never-seen festivals, being part of adventurous sports to encounter your fears and meeting new people can be transformational. The exotic locations of **Spain** and splashing celebration of 'La Tomatina Festival' added different flavors to the film.



### Highway (2014)

Yet another woman-centric flick reels vivid emotions of two opposite characters (Alia Bhatt and Randeep Hooda), struggling with their inner self, happened to be together on a road trip and mapping out their own problems is the storyline of the film. As it is rightly said, 'Traveling is all about journey and not the destination', the movie explores the charm of unplanned journeys to unknown destinations and the awareness such journeys can bring. There's a surreal strength in travel; absolute disconnect from routine makes way for carefree spontaneity. The journey on Highway is a blend of fear and excitement. The long stretch of roads brings all the utter emotions in human beings with its surprising elements, especially when you don't know where the road is leading. The film artistically features the paradox that the journey on highway can be safer than home. What follows is a journey through the high roads of **Rajasthan, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Kashmir**.



### Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani (2013)

A tale of four classmates (Ranbeer Kapoor, Deepika Padukone, Aadiya Roy Kapur, Kalki Koechlin), the adventure tour to **Manali** and their lives. Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani is truly a film for wanderers. The story intricately intertwines evolution of two main characters with the trips. The first trip leads to change the approach of the actress that life is all about living it to the fullest. The gorgeous locations of Manali add required spices to the story. The wonderful dialogue of the film '*Main udna chahta hu... daudna chahta hu.. girna bhi chahta hu bas rukna nahi chahta*' was a dialogue of the year for the youth. The captivating picturisation of **Paris** portraying actor's travel ambitions is sure to tickle your nerves to plan the next trip.



### English Vinglish (2012)

A middle-class housewife (Played by Sridevi) who holds no value in her family struggles to regain self-confidence in the process of learning English after she finds herself lost in language in an **American** restaurant. Mainly on the significance of English as a language, English Vinglish showcases how important it is to meet people from other cultures. It helps to develop an insight into their lives. It shows how different their beliefs or practices are from yours, and yet, they grow. Going beyond your place, and exploring new traditions, many times, lead to break those psychological fences built by our own self.



One of the largest districts in India, Kutch offers a variety of attractions. The archaeological site at Dholavira offers an insight into the 5000-year old Indus Valley Civilisation, the palaces of Bhuj house incredible art treasures, and scores of fortified villages are worth-visiting for their heritage. The northern and eastern areas of Kutch comprise a vast white salt encrusted desert wilderness called the Great Rann of Kutch, while the southwest is fringed by lovely beaches like Mandvi with soft sands and calm waters. Birds abound at the salt marshes, lakes and grasslands, while endangered mammals like the wild ass, caracal, wolf and chinkara gazelle can be seen in the Rann and the Banni grassland.

Most of all, Kutch is famous for its rich living heritage of handicrafts – embroideries, bandhani tie-dye, block printings, metal crafts, woodwork, pottery and some rare arts thrive in the district.

**CENTRAL KUTCH**

The district capital, Bhuj, offers an introduction to Kutch in its monuments, museums, markets and craft parks. The Bhujia Fort rises up from a hill overlooking

Bhuj, while the Hamirsar Lake to the west and Desalsar to the east flank the town attracting birds when they contain enough water.

The Darbargadh or walled palace complex is an imposing sight, rising up beside the lake. Inside this complex, you can see ornate balconies and carvings on the wall. Among the old buildings in this complex, the Aina Mahal was the old palace built during the reign of the flamboyant 18th century Jadeja Rajput ruler, Rao Lakha. The palace exhibits the craftsmanship of Ram Singh, who was rescued from a shipwreck and spent many years in the Netherlands learning arts like tile making, enameling, clock making, stone carving, glass blowing and metal casting. When he returned to Gujarat, he found a willing patron in Rao Lakha who commissioned him to build palaces at Bhuj and Mandvi. The palace has ivory inlaid doors, Delft blue tiles, chandeliers, enameled silver utensils and objects, chiming clocks and marble walls covered with mirrors and gilt. It also exhibits high quality crafts of Kutch like embroidery, scroll painting and jeweled

weaponry. The Fuvara Mahal, where the Maharao listened to music is a showpiece of the palace. Unfortunately, many areas of this palace are not accessible, due to earthquake damage, at the time of writing.

The Pragmahal Palace, which is currently undergoing a major renovation, is an impressive building across the courtyard. Built in 1865 during the reign of Maharao Pragmalji, this elaborate palace was designed by Colonel Wilkins. The highlight of the palace is the



PRAG MAHAL



AINA MAHAL

# KUTCH

**FROM WHITE DESERT TO GOLDEN BEACHES**

Story by ANIL MULCHANDANI  
Pictures by DINESH SHUKLA



opulent Durbar Hall, which is decorated with Shakespearan figures, Minton tiles, carving, gilding and statues. The veranda, the zanana for women and corner towers are equally elaborately decorated.

To the southwest of Hamirsar Lake, the Sharad Bagh Palace was built in the 19th century. It was a favoured garden retreat of the Maharao and its appealing features include its garden. The small porticoed buildings are delicately proportioned. It has a beautifully appointed drawing room and collections of the Maharao's heirlooms including stuffed animals and tennis trophies. Just south of Hamirsar, a path leads to the 250-year old Ramkund tank, decorated with skilfully crafted religious images. You can see the niches in the walls where oil lamps would glitter in the dusk during the evening puja.

From here, you can continue east to the Kutch Museum, which is known for its outstanding collection of Saka inscriptions, a coin collection including Kutch koris, an excellent section dedicated to musical instruments, a shipping display, sculptures and handicrafts. The Chhatardi complex includes the cenotaphs of successive Maharao or rulers of Kutch. Though badly earthquake-damaged, they still reflect the high quality of sandstone sculpture that existed in Kutch.

Take the Mandvi Road to visit Bharatiya Sanskruti Darshan, the folk museum of Kutch designed by a scholar named Ramsinhji K Rathod. This museum showcases the architecture of the bhungas (the earthen roundhouses of Kutch), the rich handicraft heritage of the region and literature of Kutch.

From Bhuj, a drive of about 15 minutes will bring you to Bhujodi, known for its award winning weavers. Called Vankars, the weaver families produce colourful shawls, traditional blankets like the Dhabda, dhablas and floor coverings like woolen durries. The shawls and other

products are distinguished by their intricate woven patterns, tight weaving and embellishments with tie-dye or embroidery. Many of the weavers of this village have won prestigious national awards for their work. The weavers work on a throw shuttle or a fly shuttle pit loom, or occasionally frame looms. The colourful shawls and durries of Bhujodi are usually woven with motifs, which have been passed down through generations of artisan communities. While wool was sourced from the pastoral communities like the Rabaris, the weavers today also use cottons, Merino wools, acrylics and silks. The shawls may be embellished further with tie-dye, mirror work embroidery and other handwork.

Bhujodi is also known for Rabari and Marwada embroidery. You will also find Marwadis working on carving wood in Bhujodi. In the village, you may find Dhebaria Rabari women and girls doing their distinctive embroidery.

From Bhujodi, it is a short drive to the villages of Dhaneti and Paddhar, which have substantial Ahir populations. Ahirs are traditionally a pastoral group that identifies itself with the Gope Culture of Lord Krishna but today many of the Ahir men are in businesses like truck transportation.

Several Ahir women in villages of Kutch, like Dhaneti, Paddhar, Tappar, Lodai, Ratnal, etc, continue to do embroidery for their own use and for a second source of household income. Ahir embroidery is known to be largely in a flowing style, with peacock, floral and other motifs, and circular patterns. They use ladder chain stitch, herringbone stitch and round mirrors. Paddhar is also home to the Dhebaria Rabari, a pastoral group that also lives in villages like Makhiyan, Bhardoi, Mamuara, Nadapa, Raydhanpar,

Varnora and Dudhai. The Dhebaria Rabari embroidery is known for its highly-skilled work and accent stitches, but many of them no longer do embroidery because of a ban imposed by elders in the community. You may still be able to get some fine work with detailing in these villages. Some of their border motifs derive from Sindh and the princely courts of Kutch.

A short distance from these villages, Dhamadka and Ajrakhpur are well-known centres of Ajrakh, richly-printed fabrics. Predominantly blue with red and white accents, the Ajrakh is said to be well-suited to the extremes of the desert – the combination of colours makes them cooling in summer and warming in winter. The rich prints on the surface of the Ajrakh fabric is achieved through a highly-evolved process, which includes different stages of mordant-dyeing and resist-printing. This elaborate process can take weeks to complete and uses a large number of engraved printed blocks for selective dyeing. Indigo, madder and other mineral & earth colours are used for Ajrakh painting.



BHUNGA HOUSE

Near these villages, the Khamir Craft Resource Centre on Kukma Road is working on interventions to upgrade handloom weaving, ajrakh block printing, leather craft, lac turned wood, metal bell, pottery, and silver jewelry craft sectors in Kutch. They are also promoting declining skills like namada or felt-making in Kutch.

From Kukma, you can travel onward to Anjar, which is known for its bandhani and metal crafts. Anjar's markets are excellent places to look for ornamented knives, nutcrackers and other metal handicrafts.



## NORTH TO THE DESERT

Traveling north on the Bhuj-Khavda highway, you pass grasslands dotted with villages of Muslim pastoral groups who graze their livestock here, and also villages of Sodha Rajputs and Meghwals who are mostly migrants from Sindh. The women of each of the different communities, whether they are Hindu pastoralists like the Rabaris, Muslim pastoralists like the Jats and the Mutwas, or artisans like the Meghwals, specialise in a distinctive style of embroidery. Sumrasar Shaikh is an important centre for the Soof embroidery of the Sodha Rajputs, as are villages like Kuran, Loriya, Bibbar, etc on this route. The Meghwal Harijan is an artisanal group



spread across a number of villages like Bhirandiar, Sadai, Dumado, Dhrobana, Kuran, Tuga, Andhau, Gorewali, Dhorodo, etc, and practices embroidery styles like Soof, Paako, Kharek, Kambira and Kudi, which vary with the village. Garasia Jath women, in villages like Sumrasar Jathwali, stitch an array of geometric patterns in counted work based on cross stitch studded with minute mirrors. They are known for their superbly embroidered yokes. Dhaneta and Fakirani Jaths embroider tiny bars of tight satin stitch with radiating circles of a couched stitch. The villages of Bhirandiar, Hodka, Gorewali, Dhorodo and Dumado are known for their appliqué or patchwork. The

Jadeja Rajput women of villages like Bibbar also do applique work. Dhorodo and Gorewali are excellent places for the minutely detailed embroidery of the Mutwas. Hodka, Dhorodo and other villages produce embroidered leather products. As the women of these groups do embroidery for their personal use and a second income, this is one of the highest concentration areas of craftswomen in the world.

Khavda and Kuran are villages known for weaving, pottery and other handicrafts.

Continuing from Khavda towards the border, you find traditional weavers of goat hair and camel hair products.

From Khavda, drive to the Dattatreya Temple atop Kala Dungar, which is called the Black Hill of Kutch. The Kala Dungar and Goro Dungar hills are covered with grassland, scrubland, rocks and ponds that support faunal populations. These hills can be good to see some typical birds of the scrubby and barren habitats. The Dattatray Temple on Kala Dungar is the site for a unique daily event – when the priests of this temple offer food and call Lo-aang, jackals and other animals come to feed!

From the hill, you can get a panoramic view of the salt-encrusted Rann of Kutch.

Make base at Dhorodo to visit the 'White Desert'. A vehicle, camel or camel cart, can take you from one of the camps or ethnic resorts here to the white expanse of salt flats, most beautiful on a full moon night.



## WEST KUTCH

West from Dhorodo, you come to the village of Nirona, which is the centre for the rare art of Rogan, now practiced only by the family of Khatri Abdulgafoor Daud, who has won national awards for this art. Rogan is the art of painting fabrics using castor oil-based colours. Much work goes into creating the castor-oil based paint, which is then rubbed between palms to create a stringy gooeey paste from which the colour can come off on an iron rod or wooden stick like threads. He and his nephews create rogan masterpieces for wall hangings and decorations, sarees, tablecloths, wall hangings, skirts, etc in silk and cotton cloths. At Nirona and nearby villages like Zura, it is possible to see 'Vada-kaam', the work of carpenters who create wooden products which they lacquer in various colours, and the making of melodic bells, cast in iron and covered with copper.

At the edge of the Banni grasslands, a patch of 'salvadora persica' trees near Fulay village is extremely interesting for specialty birdwatchers. This patch is one of the few sites in India where the grey hypocolius is seen. This slender and long-tailed bird is found in the dry semi-desert region of northern Africa, Arabia and Afghanistan, and visits Kutch in winter.



From Fulay, you can drive to the Charri Dhand, a depression that is a prominent feature of the extensive grasslands of Banni. When this depression fills with water in a year of good rainfall, it becomes a paradise for birdwatchers, attracting countless birds. A winter tour of the Banni grasslands, covering Chhari Dhand and other wetlands, is extremely rewarding for viewing birds. Vast flocks of common cranes can be seen and the lakes are full of ducks and waders. A viewing tower offers a panoramic view of the Chhari Dhand. The grasslands are important areas for watching raptors including Greater Spotted Eagle, Imperial Eagle, Bonneli's Eagle, Laggar Falcon and Red Headed Falcon. Chinkara or Indian Gazelle, Wolf, Striped Hyena and

other mammals are seen here as well as some interesting reptiles. From the grasslands, you can see Dinodar Hill.

Nearby, Mohan Singh Sodha has created a private fossil museum with a standout collection of fossils found in Kutch and a camp. Continuing from here, the road leads to the ancient Buddhist site of Siyot and the fortified town of Lakhpat best known for its historic Gurdvara, associated with Guru Nanak. The Lakhpat Gurdvara has won a UNESCO conservation award.

**COASTAL KUTCH**

From Lakhpat, you can travel down to the holy lake of Narayansarovar and the shore temple at Koteshtar. Further south, the heritage village of Tera has exquisitely carved havelis, a historic fort, temples and



VIJAY VILAS PALACE

mosques, and an interesting water-harvesting system. Tera Fort has fascinating Ramayana folk murals. Naliya near Tera has a popular Jain temple. Near Naliya is the Lala Sanctuary, home to endangered birds like the Great Indian Bustard, Black-naped Tit, Stolikza's bushchat, White-backed and Long-billed Vultures, and the Lesser Florican. The Narayan Sarovar and Lala Sanctuaries also support endangered mammals like Wolf and Gazelle, while the beaches are used by Sea Turtles for breeding.

From here, you can continue along the coast to some fine stretches of beach, fruit



MANDAVI BEACH



MANDAVI BEACH





DHOLAVIRA

and palm grove, and bird-rich creeks. The key destination is Mandvi, about 50km from Bhuj airport, which has the majestic Vijay Vilas Palace, and beautiful beaches. Once a major port, Mandvi still supports a thriving dhow-building industry at its creeks. It is a market for the handicrafts produced in nearby villages like bandhani and the rare mashru. There is a deluxe tented beach resort in the palace estate.

East from Mandvi are the modern developments of Kutch like the Mundra Port, Kandla Port, the planned city of Gandhidham and industrial estates.

### EASTERN KUTCH

The main focal point of Eastern Kutch is Dholavira, the excavations that provide an insight into the Indus Valley or Harappan Civilisation, which was specially mature about 2500-1900BC. This site shows the town planning of the period, specially the sanitary drainage systems and the water-harvesting structures, like reservoirs, wells and canals, that were surprisingly sophisticated for the period. The smoothed stone columns, signboard and microbeads are some of the unique finds at Dholavira. There is also a large public area of the kind seen at few Indus sites. A trip to Dholavira can be combined with visiting the Vaghadia Rabari villages nearby to see their embroidery. ■



## SUGGESTED ITINERARY

### DAY-1

Bhuj - Visit the Aina Mahal and Pragmahal Palaces, the Kutch Museum, the Bharatiya Sanskriti Darshan (folk museums), markets and craft centres. Visit the villages around Bhuj. Each of these villages specializes in a distinct craft - Bhujodi for weaving, Dhaneti for Ahir embroidery, Dhamadka and Ajrakhpur for Ajrakh block printing, to name but a few. Stay at a hotel in Bhuj or at Pranav Farm.

### DAY-2

Travel north from Bhuj to Hodka - Make base at Shaam-e-Sarhad, an endogenous resort, to visit a number of villages known for embroidery, leather crafts, pottery and other handiwork. Enjoy a view of the white desert from the Kala Dungar hills.

### DAY-3

Travel towards Nakhatrana - In this area, you can visit craft villages like Nirona and Badhli, see historic forts, watch birds at Chhari Lake and explore the Banni grasslands. The Infinity Rann of Kutch, CEDO Camp, Darbargadh Devpur Homestay and other properties in this area offer arrangements to tour the area.

### DAY-4

Continue west to the holy places of *Ashapura Mata no Madh*, Narayan Sarovar and Koteswar Temple - Travel along the coast to Lakhat with its fort, Gurdwara and other monuments. The Buddhist caves of Siyot can be visited on this route. For those interested in wildlife, the Lala Sanctuary near Naliya is the habitat of Great Indian Bustard, Indian Wolf, Chinkara, Nilgai, Spiny-tailed Lizard and other wildlife species. The heritage village of Tera contains a variety of architectural sights including a fort, a stepwell, temples, mosque and havelis. There are limited accommodations in Northwestern Kutch. You can retrace to Bhuj or one of the accommodation facilities near Nakhatrana.

### DAY-5

Continue to Mandvi - This town's rich maritime past can be experienced at the old harbor, where ocean-worthy vessels like dhows are hand-built. Mandvi is the premier beach destination of Kutch. The Vijay Vilas Palace of Mandvi occupies a huge estate with an unspoiled beach at one end. Stay at The Beach at Mandvi Palace.

### DAY-6

Travel from Mandvi to Gandhidham where you can stay in a star-rated hotel or resort. Visit the historic town of Badhreshwar, known for its Islamic architecture and Jain temples, near Gandhidham.

### DAY-7

From Gandhidham, travel to Dholavira for an insight into the Indus Valley Civilisation.





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## **THE ODD TRAVELLER**

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in 12 months**

The exclusive itinerary of 'The Odd Traveler' (as he calls himself) includes:

### ▶ **'25 Days, 25 Trains' in India**

**'Positive stories of Tamil-Sinhala friendships' in Sri Lanka**

**'Rock-climbing' in Thailand**

**'Batucada music' in Brazil**

**'Surfing' in Chile**

**'Walking through mountains' in Peru**

**'Finding out the reality of drugs' in Colombia**

**'Scuba-diving' in Costa Rica**

**'Learning to cook' in Mexico**

**'Salsa dance' in Cuba**

**'Cycling 2,000 km' in the U.S.**

**'Stand-up comedian' in New York**

*Living passion is a dream for many. But for **SACHIN BHANDARY**, 32-year old Mumbai-based Public Relations professional, it is a reality. Sachin bid farewell to his bright PR career to pursue his passion of traveling 12 countries and taking up 12 different challenges.*

*When asked about what inspired him to take up such challenges, Mr. Bhandary said, "The 12 Project - 12 months, 12 countries, 12 challenges' is something I devised and many others contributed to. Almost two years ago, a good appraisal turned into a moment of epiphany for me. I had worked in PR for eight years. But as a 24 year old, I had promised myself that I would travel the world with a project.*

*It was clear that the time had come. From January 2014, I worked on this idea and figured out other factors - financial, mental and emotional. Then on*

*my 32nd birthday, I quit my job and committed full time to this project."*

*But why he wanted to opt for such an expedition? He explains, "The idea is not to take a sabbatical. The idea is to put yourself beyond your comfort zone. And this is what I wish fellow-Indians would do. For many, travel is a hobby or peer-pleasure. But for me, it was experiencing the world around me. With this project, I wish to encourage more people to take trips into the unknown. That was the original idea of travel, but these days even adventure is curated. So I am hoping with my project, others will decide to take odd trips linked to their interests. Eventually, I would like The Odd Traveller (the website where he shares his travel experiences) to become a platform for many to narrate their experiences.*



Giving such 'fairy-tale' world-tour ideas the shape of reality is a daunting task. The biggest challenge is – Finance. Apart from dedicating hard-earned savings of Rs. 8 lakh to the project, Mr. Bhandary managed to collect Rs. 1.2 lakh from crowd-funding. Well, what else one can ask for? Sponsorship of some private brands and writing for few Indian publications help him make money while he is traveling.

Sachin believes that traveling need not be expensive. He traveled across India in Rs. 20,000. Staying in Sri Lanka didn't cost him more than Rs. 20,000 for a month. And learning rock-climbing and staying for a month in Thailand incurred Rs. 54,000 only. Of course, there are few compromises if you want to make your distance trip budget-friendly. But, the pleasure of bumping into the unknown will surely overshadow those sacrifices. Let's explore his thrilling journey of **25 Trains in 25 Days** in his own words:

### What Did 25 Days And 25 Trains In India Teach Me?

One early February morning this year, I found myself at Mumbai CST railway station. It is the oldest and one of India's largest railway stations. Arguably, it is also the most magnificent train station anywhere in the world.

It was in this historical setting that the Mandovi Express kept me waiting. It was the first train in my month-long journey across India.

There was a grand party of exactly three people to



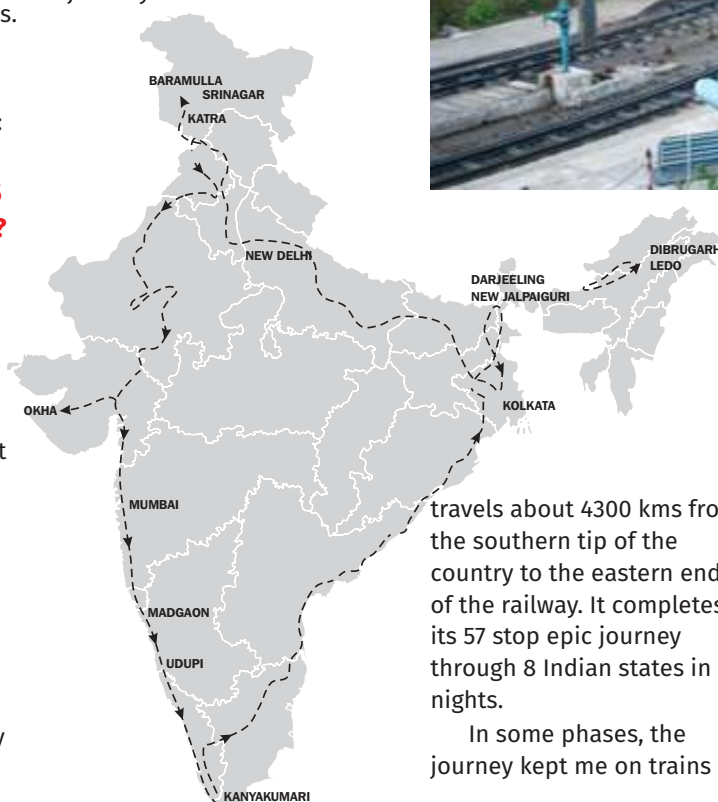
see me off, my mother & my best friends. They were concerned about my insanity, but made a fine effort of hiding it.

I was about to travel around India on 25 trains in 25 days.

### What was so interesting about this journey?

Well, 25 trains in 25 days would be an interesting journey anywhere in the world. But in sleeper class (non air-conditioned) trains in India even more so. My journey took me to the last

railway stations of every major direction of the great Indian railway. It also put me on board the Darjeeling toy train, a world heritage site. I traveled on meter gauge lines. Among these 25 train journeys was also the Vivek express, the longest train journey in the country. It



travels about 4300 kms from the southern tip of the country to the eastern end of the railway. It completes its 57 stop epic journey through 8 Indian states in 4 nights.

In some phases, the journey kept me on trains

for 7 days at a stretch. And in 18 of the 25 nights, my bedroom was the overflowing train compartment. The Indian railway literally became my home during the journey.

Here is what I learnt from this once-in-a-lifetime journey:

### People Make A Place:

India is a beautiful country and there is so much to be explored & experienced. But it is people who made this journey special and not just the sights.

The tea plantations of Dibrugarh may not stay in my memory for long, but Pranjal Prakash Kalita, his wife & kid

will. My wallet, camera & phones were stolen on the last night of the journey on Vivek Express. It was Pranjal who came to my rescue. During the darkest hours of my journey, it was he and his family that restored my confidence and conviction. Great meals, a cosy bed and wonderful conversations were just few of the many things they offered to me. If it wasn't for them, there is a good chance I would have given up 10 days into this trip.

In Kashmir, the snow and the mountains made for a



pretty sight. But my memory jogs back to a charming Kashmiri man who offered me a bed in his home and the warmth of his friendship. In the cold Srinagar evening, our chat about Hollywood movies and life in Bombay will survive even when my memory will fade away.

These experiences made me realise that a place without people is like a body without soul. It is kindness and love of people that make any beautiful place worth visiting.

### Diversity Is A Word We Don't Really Comprehend:

That this world is a diverse place is common knowledge. As kids we were told this and we repeat this through our lives. But do we really understand what diversity means?

The train journeys made me realise that I did not fathom the magnitude of diversity of my country. Landscapes, people, culture, food and attitudes change with every hundred kilometers.

From the polite yet hesitant South Indians to the welcoming Punjabis; from the wild woods of Assam to the beautiful barren countryside of Rajasthan – I experienced a lot. And for the first time in my life, I truly realised how diverse India is.



Rather than some people defining a narrow narrative, it is diversity of the country that needs to be celebrated.

There is no single definition to anything, no single thought that surpasses other. We need to make room for everyone and everything. That is the true test of humanity.

### Most Of Us Lead Other People's Lives

As I hopped from one train to another, many young Indians in their twenties spoke to me. Each one of them had a great interest in my journey.

Inevitably, they would end up saying, "Wish I could do something like this too. But I cannot."

On probing, they would narrate their life stories. Most people went to a particular university because their friends did the same. Others took a job they did not like because parents pressurized them to. And while they still wanted to experience & explore life, they were married off.

While this might be a peculiar Indian problem, other societies have their own issues. The individual's true passion and desire get lost most of the times. No matter what the external façade, many people are sad.

And this sadness can only

be brushed off by action. The action of choosing what is right for you. But I do agree that it is easier said than done. Ironically, being yourself is the most difficult thing to be.



### Infrastructure Builds Dreams

It was naïve of me to never truly realize the power of infrastructure.

The Vivek Express is a link back home for people of North East India working or studying in the south.

Yes, it is a four night long journey. But without this train, the way back home would be much longer.

Surely, it is not the most comfortable of journeys. But for the young engineering student who gets to see his mother after exams comfort that hardly matters.

The train from Banihal to Baramulla is a relief for people in the Kashmir valley. Getting to the hospital in Srinagar is easier. For many people, the train is a comfortable journey into and to get outside the valley.

Roads & trains are a great tool for national integration. Good connectivity and easy access give people a sense of belonging like nothing else can.

### Guns Don't Need To Fire To Intimidate

Kashmir surely is one of the most beautiful places on the planet. But when I got there, strangely enough, I noticed guns far more than the beauty.

It is one thing to look at a gun in movies or newspapers and quite another to live in

its shadow. Guns do not need initiation to intimidate you.

Every railway station in the Kashmir valley was guarded like a fortress. It wasn't like a war was ending or that it will arrive. It was almost as if, there was a raging war. Here and now.

In some areas of Assam the situation was similar. Paramilitary forces made their presence felt and there was a thick air of fear that accompanied them.

Of course, I am no expert in geo-politics, or in anything else, for that matter. In my inexperienced view – war, guns and intimidation need to be avoided at all possible costs. It is impossible for a truly free & inspiring society to grow under the shadow of guns.

Like this, the Indian Railways gave me the greatest gifts. Some lessons on life and others on the country I call home.

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By the time you're reading this, Sachin has already covered Sri Lanka in search of tales on Tamil-Sinhala friendship, and traveled to Rai Leh in Thailand to learn rock climbing for 20 days to a month. Presently, he is learning the Batucada drums in Brazil.

The exciting project doesn't end here. Stay tuned to know more about the detailed experiences of Mr. Sachin Bhandary.





## KOLHAPURI MISAL

### “ DO YOU LIKE SPICY FOOD? ”

Real spicy food that can bring tears in your eyes and turn your nose crimson red. If yes, this one is for you. Tempered with kolhapuri spices, Kolhapuri Misal is a timeless treasure of tasty treats. Misal literally means 'mixture' in Marathi. Sumptuous mixture (as the name suggests) of boiled moth beans, farsan, potatoes, sev, red curry called Kat, tomatoes, onions, ginger, garlic, wet & dry coconut and a spicy soup like gravy made with garam masala make it a healthy and filling breakfast. Pungent flavors and tantalizing aromas are enough to make you dizzy with hunger. So keep the glass of water ready by your side and pamper your taste buds with the spicy misal. ”



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# What's Traveling

## Qatar Airways re-launches its Nagpur services

Qatar Airways, which suspended its route in May 2009, has announced to re-launch flights on 1st December 2015. The operation of new service will be on daily basis. It is part of Qatar Airways' strategy to reinstating the Doha-Nagpur to service increasing demand by providing the best possible flying experience to their customers in India. Qatar Airways will operate the route using an Airbus A320 aircraft with 12 seats in business class and 132 in economy. The addition of Nagpur, which lies in the state of Maharashtra, will boost Qatar Airways' total Indian network to 13 cities, which it serves with a total of 102 weekly flights.

## India to relieve rules for foreign pilots

To ease a shortage of pilots in the country, the Indian Government is planning to accelerate the procedure of issuing licenses to foreign pilots. The security clearance that comes from the Home Ministry takes up 60 days to issue license to foreign pilot, which is only seven-day process. The Civil Aviation Ministry has been asked by the director general to raise the issue with the Home Ministry. The Government of India is officially planning to discontinue foreign pilots by year-end 2016. However, as airlines expand their fleets and demand for pilot increases, it appears unlikely that this deadline will be met.

## India to develop island tourism

The Government of India has declared to develop island tourism. The Ministry of Tourism said recently that - for the development of tourism infrastructure in island destinations, it will extend Central Financial Assistance (CFA) to states and union territories. A new tourism circuit will be launched to include backwaters, coastal areas, and mangroves, as well as the promotion of cruise tourism. A group of ministries, including Tourism, Environment, Home Affairs, Shipping, Forest & Climate Change along with the Archaeological Survey of India and other maritime agencies, have been assigned with identifying islands for 'holistic development', including those with tourism potential.

## Thomas Cook India offers online visa service

Thomas Cook India has started offering a new online visa service to its customers. The new

service provides travelers with visa information via the Thomas Cook India website, including visa requirements for each destination, downloadable visa application forms, consular addresses and opening times, plus the cost and processing time of the application. Under its new online visa service, Thomas Cook India will take travelers through the full process, including documents checks, submission, collection and final delivery of a visa stamped passport.

## Indian domestic tourism on the rise

According to new data, India's domestic tourism is experiencing a surge. Data published by the country's Ministry of Tourism reveals that there was 11.9% increase in domestic trips to other Indian states or Union Territories (UTs) in comparison with the previous year. The most popular destination was Tamil Nadu (registering 327.6 million domestic visits in 2014) after Uttar Pradesh (182.8m), Karnataka (118.3m), Maharashtra (94.1m), Andhra Pradesh (93.3m), Telangana (72.4m), Madhya Pradesh (63.6m), West Bengal (49.0m) Jharkhand (33.4m) and Rajasthan (33.1m).

## MakeMyTrip takes significant stake in HolidayIQ

Indian online travel agency, MakeMyTrip, has acquired a significant stake in HolidayIQ, the travel planning and review site. In July 2015, the companies confirmed a deal worth approximately INR950 million (US\$14.9m), which will see MakeMyTrip hold a 28% stake in Holiday IQ. The two companies said they now plan to 'jointly scale-up HolidayIQ', with a key focus on mobile platforms. The new funds would be used to strengthen MakeMyTrip's content, and enhance the company's ability to generate hotel and holiday reviews.

## India to fund yoga tourism

With the aim of boosting tourism, India will develop its yoga and meditation facilities. To expand yogic infrastructure and facilities, including meditation centres, yoga centres, amenities and facilities at pilgrim centres, Central Financial Assistance (CFA) will be extended by the Minister of Tourism, Culture & Civil Aviation to state governments and union territories. The government would encourage spiritual and yoga tourism in foreign markets through road-shows, its overseas offices, publication of new brochures, films and participation in international travel shows.

## India cleans up to attract more tourists

To improve the cleanliness and hygiene of its tourism sites, India has launched a new nationwide campaign. Driven by the Ministry of Tourism, the 'Campaign Clean India' aims to sensitize all sections of society on the importance of cleanliness and hygiene in public places, particularly monuments and tourist destinations. An MoU among Archaeological Survey of India, the ONGC and the Ministry of Tourism is signed for undertaking a clean-up programme at the Taj Mahal. The ministry is also working with private and public sector enterprises with the purpose of including the scheme as part of their CSR programmes.

## One of the world's first Sheraton Grand hotels in India

Bengaluru is the location of one of the world's first Sheraton Grand hotels. The new sub-brand was announced by Starwood earlier this year, as part of a broader revamp of the Sheraton concept. The company has now unveiled an initial portfolio of 10 Sheraton Grand hotels, the majority of which are located in the Asia Pacific region. By year-end, Starwood expects to have a portfolio of 50 Sheraton Grand hotels, rising to 100 by early 2017. The launch of Sheraton Grand is a key part of the 'Sheraton 2020' initiative, which will also include a new US\$100 million marketing campaign, the launch of a new website, and a goal of opening more than 150 new Sheraton hotels worldwide by 2020.

## USA accounts for one third of India's visa-on-arrivals

Visitors from the USA accounted one third of all tourist visa-on-arrivals issued at Indian airports last month. The figures, released by India's Ministry of Tourism, show that 33.7% of the 21,476 e-tourist visas issued in July 2015 were to American citizens. Australian travelers accounted for the second highest proportion (7.7%), followed by France (7.1%), Germany (6.8%), the UAE (6.7%) and Canada (6.3%). New Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport issued 43.0% of the visas, while 20.7% were processed at Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport. Bengaluru (10.4%), Chennai (10.3%) and Hyderabad (5.3%) airports were the other main points of entry.

Source: Travel Daily India





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