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with love,

There are simply some places or adventures that make us want to fall in love with ourselves, our significant other, or our beloved family and friends. This Valentine's Day, let's take a time-off to discover or re-discover that spark of romance with our ROMANTIC RETREATS. If you prefer to stay next to the lake or wish to escape the crowds, we have a curated list of destinations suiting all your special requirements.

If this Valentine's is all about your love for food or adventure, this Edition of Praveg's Tourism One is for free spirits like you. Jump to our ADVENTURE HOLIDAYS that features some of the adrenaline pumping extreme sports to satiate your thrill-loving soul, or FOOD CITIES IN INDIA to indulge in a Mughlai feast in Lucknow, dhaba food in Amritsar and royal dining in Hyderabad.

Read on!

PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE

February 2019

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

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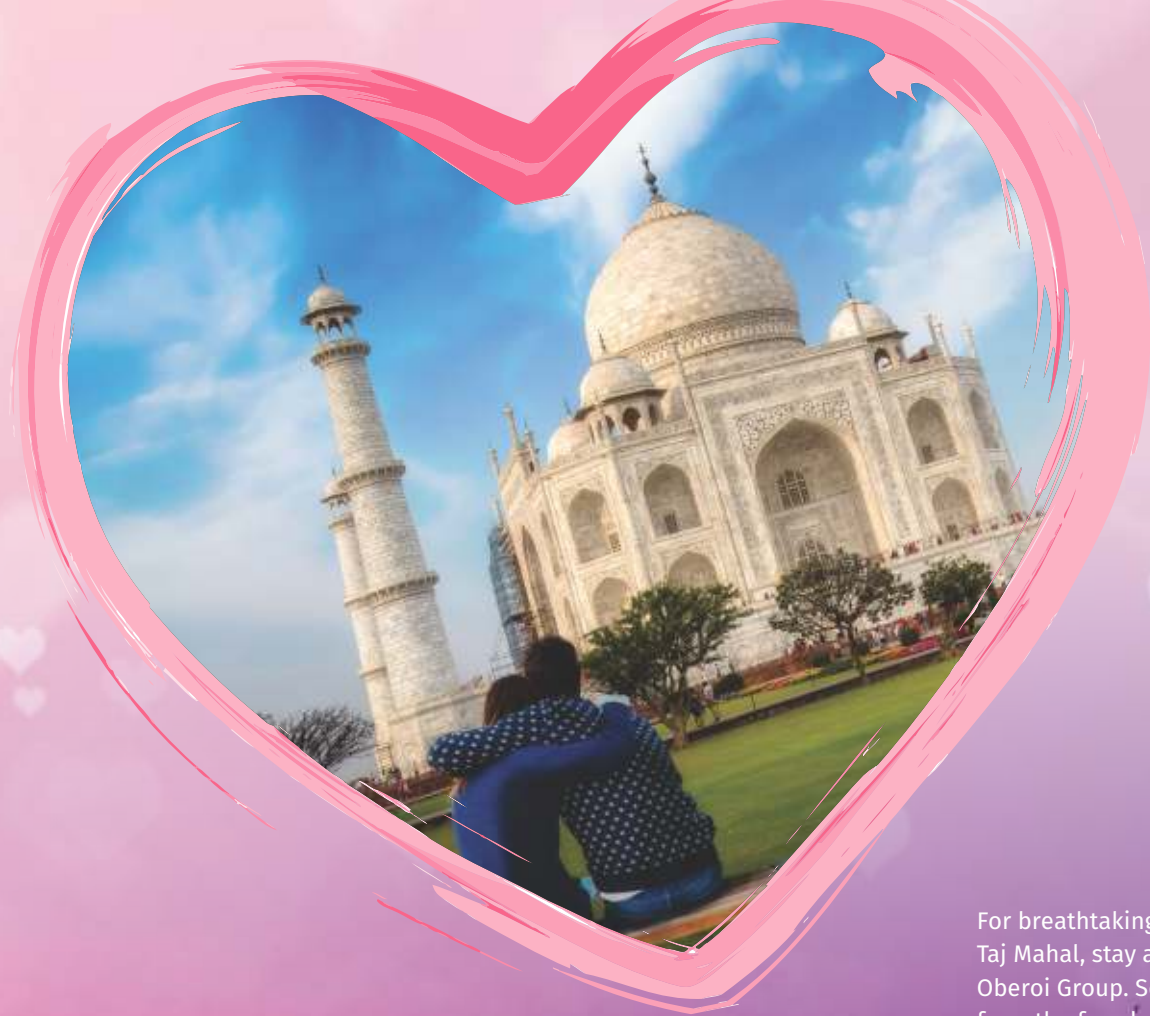
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Incredible India

Romantic Retreats

If you are looking for a place to take your beloved one on Valentine's Day, choose from these resort destinations.



Luxury In The City Of Love

The Agra Fort is certainly a great vantage point to stare out towards the Taj Mahal, a monument of love of Shah Jahan for Mumtaz Mahal. It is undoubtedly one of the world's most marvelous buildings. Visiting Taj Mahal overwhelms you no matter how much you have seen of it. Visit is as many times as you can as the changing colours of the Taj Mahal at different times of the day is actually a decorative device. Together you can walk on the pathways through the gardens with lovely landscaping, pools, flowers and colourful birds. From the Mehtab Gardens on the other side of the Yamuna, you can get a good view of the Yamuna and the Taj Mahal. Another delightful marble mausoleum, Itimad-ud-Daulah is older than the Taj Mahal. It has exquisite inlay work, called Pietre dure in Europe and Parchin karigari in India. This gem is the tomb of Mirza Ghiyath Beg who died in 1622. He was the father of Noor Jehan.

For breathtakingly beautiful views of the Taj Mahal, stay at the Amar Vilas by the Oberoi Group. Set just 600 meters or so from the façade of the Taj Mahal, Oberoi's Amar Vilas is entered through beautifully kept gardens with fountains. The interiors of the property bring alive the opulence of the Mughal Era in its richly inlaid walls, meenakari work, marble tables, teakwood furniture, glistening pools, luxurious furnishings and antiques. The property is superbly positioned so that you will love the views of the wondrous monument from any of its 105 rooms. The ultra-luxe rooms feature Burma teak flooring, teak armoires, four-poster beds, supremely comfortable seating arrangements and spacious marble bathrooms with bathtubs, beside the complete range of modern conveniences.

In the evening, step into the bar for a drink with a view of the Taj Mahal at dusk from the adjoining terrace. After dark, the setting is magical as the gardens come alive with lighted braziers among the manicured lawns and fountains. Amar Vilas often has music and dance on offer. One of the highlights of this resort hotel is its spa, from where you can enjoy a view while taking a treatment.



2

Getaway To Kathiwada

If you are looking to escape the crowds, take the road to Raaj Mahal of Kathiwada set in the picturesque countryside of western Madhya Pradesh. Set in a 120-acre estate, the Raaj Mahal was the royal hunting lodge commissioned by Rana Onkarsinhji of Kathiwada in 1895. The interiors are appointed with original early-20th century art deco furniture, elegant four-poster beds, princely relics and interesting artifacts. The special attraction is the library, which has a huge collection of books of Yuvraj Bharat Singh who was an avid reader. He was also a keen rider. His family has furnished the rooms with tweeds. Ascend to the terraces for splendid views of the Vindhyas. The property grows much of its own fruits and vegetables, which are served at the dining table.



3

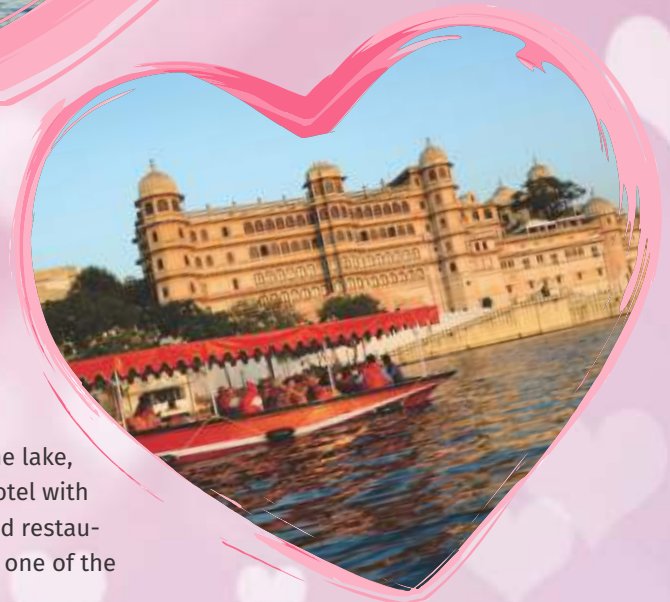
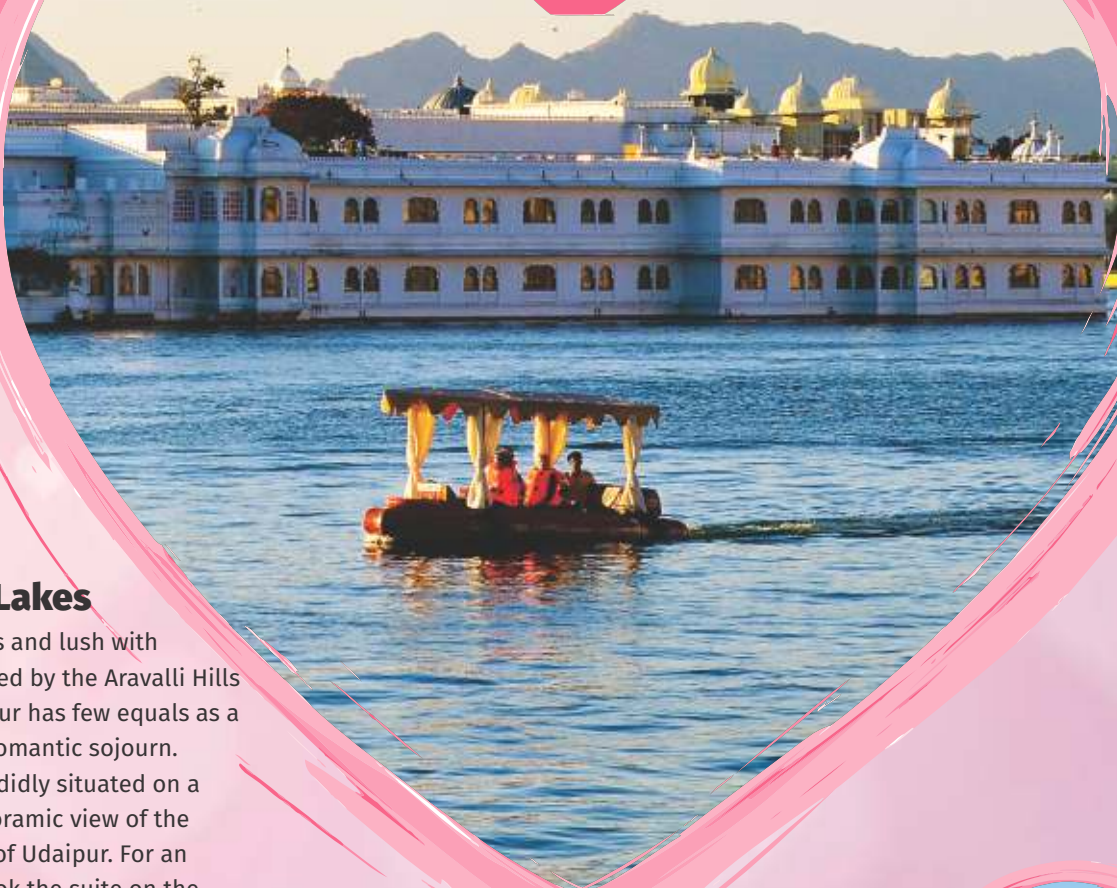
The City Of Lakes

Studded with lakes and lush with gardens, surrounded by the Aravalli Hills on all sides, Udaipur has few equals as a destination for a romantic sojourn. Fatehgarh is splendidly situated on a hilltop with a panoramic view of the lake-studded city of Udaipur. For an enjoyable stay, book the suite on the rooftop with a view of Sajjangarh, the monsoon palace of the erstwhile Maharanas of Mewar that rises about 3100ft above sea level and approximately 1,100 ft over Udaipur. Here, you can wake up to a view of the hills, order a champagne with breakfast to be had by the hill facing window, relax in a Jacuzzi with a hill view and ask for a his-and-her massage in the suite's dressing area. Descend by the glass-walled lift that offers hill views as you go down, and tuck into lunch in a balcony facing the monsoon palace, swim in the pool overlooking the lakes of Udaipur, sip a tall drink on the terrace while witnessing the sunset in a valley and ask for a candlelit dinner in the Baradari Restaurant which has a panorama of the illuminated palaces of Udaipur. At night, the marble floored courtyards and terraces of Fatehgarh look especially attractive in the moonlight.

If you prefer to stay next to the lake, the Leela Palace is a luxury hotel with beautiful lakeside gardens and restaurant and pool villa. The spa is one of the property's highlights.

One of the finest resorts in Udaipur the Udai Vilas Palace, an Oberoi-run resort that recreates the grandeur of a palace with aesthetically appealing gardens, fountains, reflecting pools, frescoes, Rajasthani-themed swimming pools and richly furnished hallways to match.

To stay on an island on the lake itself, Lake Palace is the dream palace hotel – it has a beautiful location, pleasant courtyards, splendid rooms and grand dining areas, together with the Taj brand of service.





The Lap Of Nature In The Himalaya

For nature loving couples, Pangot is a delightful destination – dense forests, amazing birdlife, superb views of the Himalaya and some nice lodges to stay in. One of the best located of the lodges is Jungle Lore Birding Lodge that has cottages set at different levels on a hill slope. Some of the cottages are in splendid isolation with jungle on all sides. Take walks in the green surroundings of the lodge and spend time relaxing at the dining hall, which overlooks a waterhole frequented by colourful mountain birds.



5

Room With A View In The Rain Forests Of Kerala

The Rainforest Retreat has a view to die for – each of its rooms faces the Athirappilly Falls, which stands tall at 80 feet. The resort itself is beautiful with seven acres of rain forest within its precincts – you can see magnificent hornbills, thrushes and colourful songbirds, brilliant butterflies, giant squirrels and even sambar deer in the property itself. The rooms have chic interiors, stylish furniture and modern baths. And the more adventurous couples can even book the tree house designed by a Swiss architect, engineered to allow for the needs of the growing tree. Special care has gone into the design of the tree house to ensure that the tree is unharmed while the tree house remains a safe abode. Standing in your tree house and looking out at the tops of the trees in the rainforest and the thundering waterfall is an exhilarating sight indeed. You can visit the Sholayar forests inhabited by a variety of wildlife. 📍



FOOD CITIES IN INDIA

**With culinary tourism being much talked about,
we look at some splendid food trails in Indian cities.**

A MUGHLAI FEAST IN LUCKNOW

From kebabs to kulfi, Lucknow's food is legendary. The Chowk, a market in the heart of the old city, opens early for breakfast. Start your morning with a meat feast of paya and nihari, stews of slow-cooked meat usually shanks and trotters rich in bone marrow. The gelatinous gravy can be mopped up with kulcha, a mildly leavened flatbread. A sweetish tandoor made bread called Sheermals are made with warm milk, which is sweetened with sugar and generally flavoured with saffron. Started in 1890 by Haji Abdur Raheem Saheb, Raheem's hotel is one of the famous places for paya or nihari with kulcha and sheermal.

Drive out to Hazratgunj and gaze at the towering imambaras and other majestic monuments. This is the area for some of the famous Lucknow chaats. Royal Café is known for Tokri Chaat –aloo tikkis, papdi, lentil fritters, chickpeas and sweetened yogurt topped with tamarind and green chilli chutneys in a basket made of fried potatoes, garnished with grated carrots, sev, pomegranate kernels and aromatic spice

powders. Continue to the old Shukla Chaat House for its famous matar-ki chaat. Capoor's is another Hazratganj legend – they have chaats and main courses. Pani ke Batashe, Dahi ke Batashe, Aloo ki Tikki, Nimbu ki Matar are some of the famous chaats of Hazratganj. There are some famous halwais in Lucknow like Netram, as well-known for their Raita, Chaat, Samosa, Lassi and Aloo Sabji, as for their Jalebi, Rabri and mithai. Feeling hot? Head to Prakash Kulfi, one of the city's oldest and most famous kulfi shops.

In the evening, the crowd gathers at Tunday Kababi, Lucknow's most iconic kebab joint. Started by legendary one-

armed cook Haji Murad Ali in 1905, this is one of the best places for the melt in your mouth Galawati Kebab and dozens of other kebabs. Sakhawat is known for its shammi kebabs and roganjosh. Return to the Chowk for biryani - Idris started in 1968 is known for its mutton biryani cooked in a large copper vessel on a traditional stove. Bismillah and Wahid Mia are other biryani icons. For those with a sweet tooth, Ram Asrey in the Chowk is famous for ladoos and the Malai Paan or Malai ki Gilori. If you are in the Chowk on a cool evening, nimish or makhan malai is Lucknow's delectable milk dish beautifully embellished with silver leaf.



THE DHABA TRAIL IN AMRITSAR



Amritsar's iconic heritage includes the Golden Temple and the Jalianwala Bagh, and close to these landmarks are some outstanding dhabas.

Start your morning with aloo, gobhi or mooli parathas, channa puri or kulcha – cholley at Neelam's near the Golden Temple. From here, you can walk through the bustle to the poignant memorial of Jalianwala Bagh, the excellent Partition Museum and the stunning Golden Temple. Do not miss the temple's langar, a tradition of serving free hot meals started centuries ago by the Sikh Gurus. The vegetarian lunch includes dal, vegetables, roti and kheer. The two dining halls have a combined capacity of 5000 people. People come and sit down to eat on the mats on the floor, where they are served food by the volunteers. Walk out of the Golden Temple and explore the markets known for their phulkari embroidery, jootis and other handiwork. You can buy papads, wadis and other local food products near the Golden Temple. If you are in the mood for something sweet, go to Jalebiwala Chowk – Gurdas Ram is most famous for his jalebis.

In the late afternoon, Lawrence Road is the place for snacking. Lassi, puri with cholley or aloo, gur ka halwa and pinni

are some of the must-try dishes of Kanha Sweets. Walk along this road to try Amritsar's famous kulcha – cholley.

For non-vegetarians, Makhan Fish and Beera Chicken are some famous must visits.

In the evening, head back to the market with its celebrated dhabas. Bharawan Da Dhaba (which gets its name from 'praa-waan' or father) has been known for its food from 1912 – try their many vegetarian Punjabi dishes with naan, roti, kulcha or rice, or their paratha platter

and end with the phirni in cute clay pots. A breakaway from the same family called Brothers Dhaba has become as popular - for channe bhatura, kulcha and Amritsari lassi. Kesar da Dhaba is another heritage place, about 100 years old, for parathe wali thalis and lassi. If you want to dine non-vegetarian, go to Crystal – a lounge style restaurant famous for its Tawa Chicken Frontier and paneer dishes.



HERITAGE HAUNTS OF MUMBAI

Mumbai has a number of eateries that enjoy a longstanding reputation for their food. Begin your morning with a walk from the Gateway of India and Apollo Bunder to Colaba for breakfast at the Leopold Cafe and Bar, founded in 1871 and one of the famous Mumbai Irani restaurants with the Achaemenid Persian Lion Rhyton as its logo. The cafe was the morning site of gunfire and grenade explosions during the 2008 Mumbai attacks by terrorists on Nov 26, and the marks have been retained by the owners as a memorial. Walk around to explore Colaba's many cultural landmarks like the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), Jehangir Art Gallery, Prince of Wales Museum (now Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Museum), Regal Cinema, art deco and Victorian buildings, Bombay Natural History Society, many art galleries and libraries and the old Parsee residential colonies, as well as the Causeway market. If you get hungry, Kailash Parbat is a Sindhi place that has been around from decades – the dal pakwaan, koki, pani puri and chaats are must haves and their kulfi falooda is also famous. If you prefer non-vegetarian food, Bagdadi has been around from more than 90 years.

Proceed from here to the elegant Edwardian neoclassical buildings of



Ballard Estate, an old European business district that houses many offices. Tucked away in one of the buildings is Britannia & Co, a restaurant that was opened more than 95 years ago. The Berry Pulao is their signature dish. You must also have the cutlets, and end with caramel custard. If you still have a sweet craving, go to Crawford Market – Badshah here is about a century old and their faloodas are to die for.

Take the train to Dadar, where Mama Kane has been serving Maharashtrian snacks from 1910. Tuck into the

thalipeeth, missal pao and sabodana khichdi.

For dinner, head to Byculla – Sarvi here has been serving visitors from over 95 years. The Seekh Kebab, Bheja Masala, Seekh Paratha, Paya and Afghan Chicken make a great meat feast, and the Caramel Custard is legendary.

If you fancy a drink after dinner, go back to The Taj Mahal Hotel. The Harbour Bar at The Taj Mahal Palace is Mumbai's first licensed lounge bar with their signature cocktail, From the Harbour dating back to 1933.

ROYAL DINING IN HYDERABAD

Nizam used the palace as a guest house for the royal guests visiting the kingdom of Hyderabad like King George V, Queen



The city of Nawabs is deservedly famous for its food. Hyderabad Haleem has a GI mark, the kacche ghost ki biryani is legendary, and patthar gosht, baghare baigan, khubani ka meetha and double ka meetha are some of the other classics.

Start your morning at Hameedi Confectioner & Co for a sweet breakfast – started in 1907, even the Nizam of Hyderabad is said to have enjoyed their sweets. Continue to Falaknuma Palace, a grand palace spread over 32 acres. The

Mary, Edward VIII, Tsar Nicholas I and India's first president, Rajendra Prasad. One of the highlights of the palace is the state reception room, where the ceiling is decorated with frescoes. The ballroom contains a two-ton manually operated organ said to be the only one of its kind in the world. In the palace, you can see princely memorabilia like paintings, statues, furniture, manuscripts, books, an extensive jade collection and Venetian chandeliers. After seeing the palace, walk into Adaa for lunch – the Hyderabad biryani here is exquisite.

After lunch, visit the old areas of Hyderabad to see the museums and monuments. You can enjoy many of the iconic snacks in this area.

For dinner, choose from Aish, Bidri, Firdaus or Jewel of Nizam, all four offering delectable royal Hyderabad fare in a setting to match.



SEAFOOD IN MANGALORE



The coastal city of Mangalore or Mangaluru is one of the best places for those who love seafood. Lunch at Giri Manja's for fried prawns and a fish thali. If you are looking for a more up-market place, Gajalee is good for clams, crabs and other seafood.

In the evening take the road to Ulal beach for a glorious view of sunset. Follow this up with a seafood feast at Summer Sands.



ENJOY FOOD IN DELHI'S MARKETS

Delhi is famous for its rich and well-made foods. Start your day at Chandani Chowk. Parathe Wali Galli is a must visit for stuffed parathas. If you like chaats, Natraj Dahi Balle Wala is a good place in Chandni Chowk. You can indulge your sweet tooth at the old Jalebiwala and Chaina Ram Confectioners.

For lunch, Sadar Bazaar's gem is Nand di Hatti - don't miss their pure desi ghee channa batura.

In the afternoon, take the road to Khan Market that has many upmarket cafes and restaurants. Yellow Brick Road at Vivanta by Taj Ambassador is among Delhi's oldest coffee shops – an unmissable experience.

Proceed for dinner to the Pandara Road market. If you are looking for a meaty dinner, go to the Jamma Masjid area – Karim's is deservedly famous as are some of the dhabas.



COSMOPOLITAN EATING IN KOLKATA

Kolkata 's heritage reflects an amazing mix of global cultures, from the Armenian Church and Jew Synagogue to the Anglo-Indian houses of Bow Barracks and the British buildings of Chowringhee and BBD Bagh. All this is reflected in the food of the city whether it is European food in Park Street, Chinese food at Tangra, the Jewish bakery or Nahoum's or the widely available Mughlai food.



BAKERIES AND FARSAN IN SURAT

Surat is Gujarat's famous food city – its khaman and locho, its egg dishes, the meat dishes of Zampa Bazaar, rich sweets like ghari are all among Gujarat's legends. In winter, people head to Surat for ponk and matka undhiyu.

An important heritage of Surat is its Parsee owned bakeries.

Nanpura in Surat district held the 18th century Dutch Warf, the Dutch Commodore's bungalow and the Dutch factory, a self-contained residential complex for Dutch factors or merchants. The Dutch employed five Parsee men to work in their kitchens. They learnt to bake bread. Surat's famous muslin cloth was used as the flour sieve and the dough was made without any water. Farmasu Surti Batasa or Butter Biscuits and Nankhatai are among the iconic products of bakeries like Dotivala Bakers and Confectioners. You can also hunt down some lesser known bakeries like Khurshed Bakery that still use old bhattis.



EATING OUT IN BANGALORE



Being a cosmopolitan city, Bangalore has a wide range of restaurants, where you can get anything from Mexican to Korean or Japanese, European or Kashmiri. But the places serving the cuisines of Karnataka remain popular. Mavalli Tiffin Rooms or MTR is a legendary name for its idlis and other South Indian snacks while VV Puram has one of the city's well known streets for snacking. At the high end of the scale, Karavalli is a beautiful seafood restaurant with a traditional thatched roof, vintage woodwork and beaten brassware, and even garden seating. This is the place to enjoy the food of Karnataka's coast. 10



Words by ANIL MULCHANDANI Pics by DINESH SHUKLA



CITY BY THE SEA

VERAVAL AND SOMNATH

The historic city of Veraval makes an ideal base to explore the temples of Somnath. This city was founded by Rao Veravalji Vadher, a Rajput ruler of the 13th and 14th centuries. The town was fortified and became the major seaport for pilgrims to Mecca during the Sultanate and the Mughal Empire before the Mughal Serai was built in Surat.

In the 1700s, when the Nawab of Junagadh declared himself an independent ruler on the decline of the Mughal Empire, Veraval grew to prominence as his port town. The Nawab's Palace, now a college, on the sea is an architecturally interesting building with a sea water pool fed by tides. The old gateways, Junagadh Gate to the North and Prabhas Patan Gate to the east stand testimony to the heritage of the walled town.

Veraval today is a manufacturing centre for chemical, yarn, cement, processed seafood and other products. Many cement majors have their production centres at Veraval. It is a home to

Aditya Birla Nuvo Ltd (Formerly: Indian-Rayon Industries Ltd), which is one of India's largest rayon manufacturing companies. Some of the Vaishnav temples here are endowed by the Birlas.

Veraval is best known as a fishing port that is among India's largest. Several fish processing factories are located near the port - they collect seafood from the port, process and pack it, and export it to the United States, East Asia, Japan, Europe and the Gulf countries.

From Veraval, it is a drive of about 6-km to Somnath. Scenically located on the sea coast of Saurashtra, Somnath is one of the holiest pilgrimage sites in Hinduism with one of the 12 jyotirlingams housed in a Shiva Temple, the site where Lord Krishna disappeared at Bhalka Tirth and the Triveni Sangam, a confluence of holy rivers with the sea.

The Somnath Temple is believed to have been founded in gold by Lord Somnath, the Moon God, to show his gratitude to Lord Shiva who cured him of

the effects of poison. Waves of destruction engulfed Somnath as tales of its riches spread. When Mahmud of Ghazni plundered Somnath, it is said that his entire caravan serai could not take back the wealth of the temple. The temple was destroyed by successive invasions. However, it was reconstructed each time with a religious passion at the same site.

In 1024, during the reign of Bhima-I, the prominent Turkic ruler Mahmud of Ghazni raided Gujarat, plundering the Somnath temple and breaking its jyotirlinga despite pleas by Brahmins not to break it. The Solanki ruler Kumarapala rebuilt it in "excellent stone and studded it with jewels," according to an inscription in 1169. During its 1299 invasion of Gujarat, Alauddin Khilji's army led by Ulugh Khan sacked the Somnath temple.

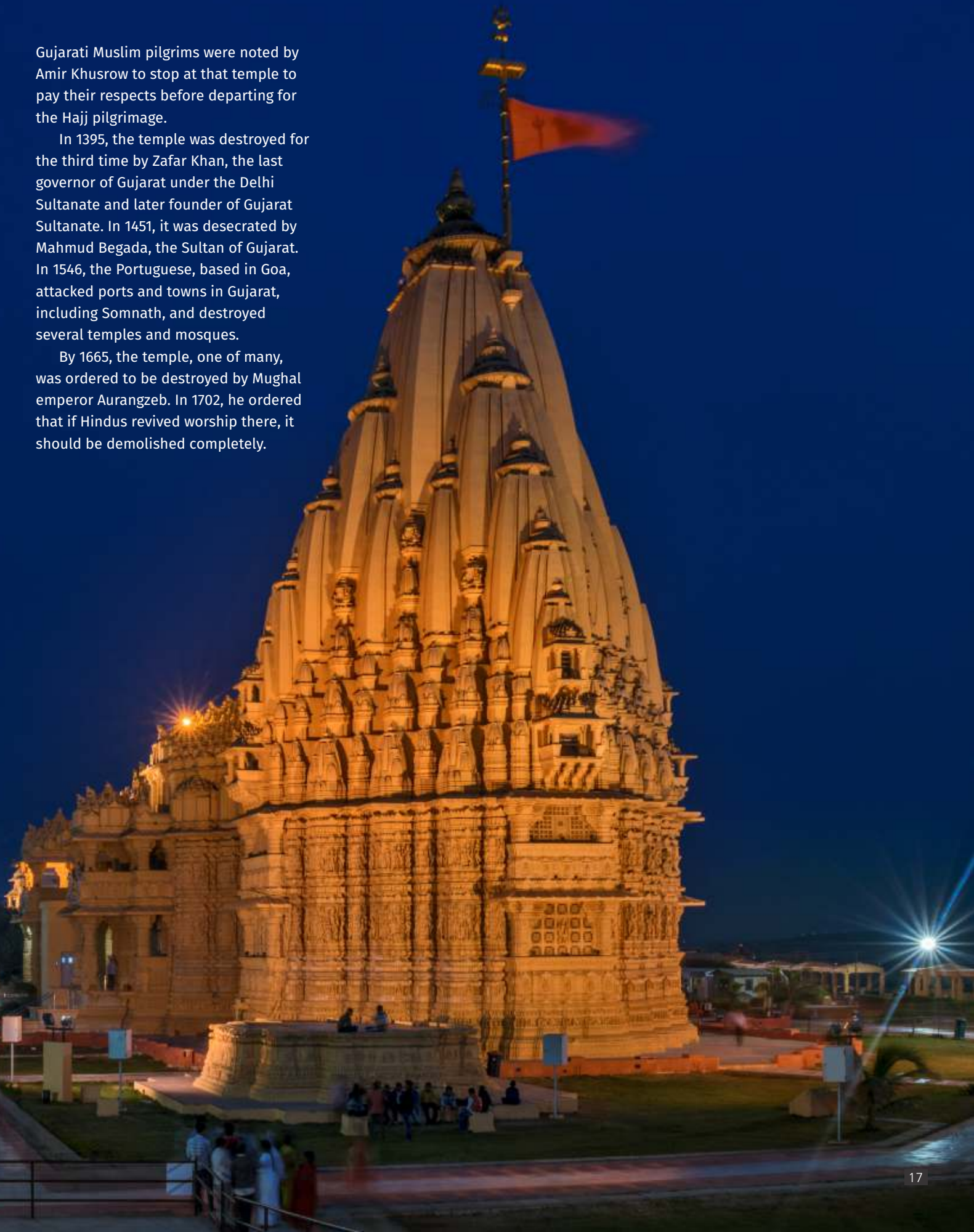
The temple was rebuilt by Mahipala-I, the Chudasama king of Saurashtra in 1308 and the lingam was installed by his son Khengara, sometime between 1331 and 1351. As late as the 14th century,



Gujarati Muslim pilgrims were noted by Amir Khusrow to stop at that temple to pay their respects before departing for the Hajj pilgrimage.

In 1395, the temple was destroyed for the third time by Zafar Khan, the last governor of Gujarat under the Delhi Sultanate and later founder of Gujarat Sultanate. In 1451, it was desecrated by Mahmud Begada, the Sultan of Gujarat. In 1546, the Portuguese, based in Goa, attacked ports and towns in Gujarat, including Somnath, and destroyed several temples and mosques.

By 1665, the temple, one of many, was ordered to be destroyed by Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. In 1702, he ordered that if Hindus revived worship there, it should be demolished completely.





The final reconstruction activity was in 1950 AD, when Sardar Patel had the temple restored. When Patel, K. M. Munshi and other leaders of the Congress went to Mahatma Gandhi with their proposal to reconstruct the Somnath temple, Gandhi blessed the move, but suggested that the funds for the construction should be collected from the public and the temple should not be funded by the state. He expressed that he was proud to associate himself with the project of renovation of the temple. However, soon both Gandhi and Sardar Patel died and the task of reconstruction of the temple continued under Munshi who was the Minister for Food and Civil Supplies in Jawaharlal Nehru's cabinet.

The ruins were pulled down in October 1950. In May 1951, Rajendra Prasad, the first President of the

Republic of India, invited by K M Munshi, performed the installation ceremony for the temple. The President said in his address, "It is my view that the reconstruction of the Somnath Temple will be complete on that day when not only a magnificent edifice will arise on this foundation, but the mansion of India's prosperity will be really that prosperity of which the ancient temple of Somnath was a symbol." He added "The Somnath temple signifies that the power of reconstruction is always greater than the power of destruction."

The present temple is built in the Chalukya style of temple architecture, called the "Kailash Mahameru Prasad" style and its carvings reflect the skill of the Sompura Salat, hereditary artisans of Gujarat. The temple's *shikhara*, or main spire, is 15 metres in height. It has an 8.2-metre tall flag pole at the top. The

temple has a portico and hallway leading to the sanctum, which houses one of the 12 sacred *jyotirlingams*.

The Prabhas Patan Museum, a short walk from the temple, has sculpture, columns and architectural fragments of the original temples of Somnath, among other exhibits.

The Somnath Museum near the bus stand offers an insight into the maritime activity in the region.

The temple, built by Ahilya Holkar at Somnath, is a fine work of architecture. The Surya Mandir is in the typical Sun temple architectural style of the



Chalukyan period. Bhalka Tirth is the place where Krishna is said to have been hit by an arrow shot by a hunter named Jara, after which he is said to have left the earth for the heavenly abode, an act referred to in the Puranas as Shri Krishna Neejdham Prasthan Leela. Lord



Krishna left his mortal body at Dehotsarg Teerth, also called as Golak Dham Teerth or Shri Krishna Nija Dham Tirth. Ahir community women of this area wear black even to this day symbolizing mourning at his death. Dehotsarg is located on the bank of River Hiran. People worship Krishna's footprint in marble and there is a Chhatri commemorating Lord Krishna.

The Mahakali temple here is also revered by some as a Shaktipitha. Triveni tirth, where three rivers meet the sea, is a picturesque pilgrim spot. The three rivers Saraswati, Kapil and Hiran stand for the three stages of the life; birth, life and death. Triveni Sangam Snanghat is therefore a sacred site for taking a divine and sin cleansing dip in the Triveni Sangam. Apart from that, this Snanghat is also acclaimed as the place where 'Pitru - tarpana' can be offered to your departed ancestors. Triveni Ghat has a significant place in Hindu Mythology and Puranas.



There are many caves, temples and tombs of historical or religious significance in Somnath town and along the Hiran River.

In the evening, you can enjoy the Sound and Light Show at Somnath.

Travel east from Veraval to Kodinar, from where it is a drive of about 10km to Kaj Lake, which is a birdwatcher's paradise. It is a tidal regulatory dam constructed by the Irrigation Department, Government of Gujarat in 1995 called 'Pipalava Bandharo' - Bandharo is the local term for earthen dams erected to harvest rainwater. Cotton, groundnut, sugarcane, sorghum, maize and millet are cultivated near the dam. The lake is bordered by three villages: Nanavada, Pipalava and Chikhli. During the high tide, tidal water from the Arabian Sea touches the dam. Thus, the brackish water to the coastal side of the dam is rich in seashore birds. While inland you can see fresh water birds. The wetland regularly harbours more than 20,000 birds during winter.

Homestay

Gokalbhai Ratnabhai Paghadar

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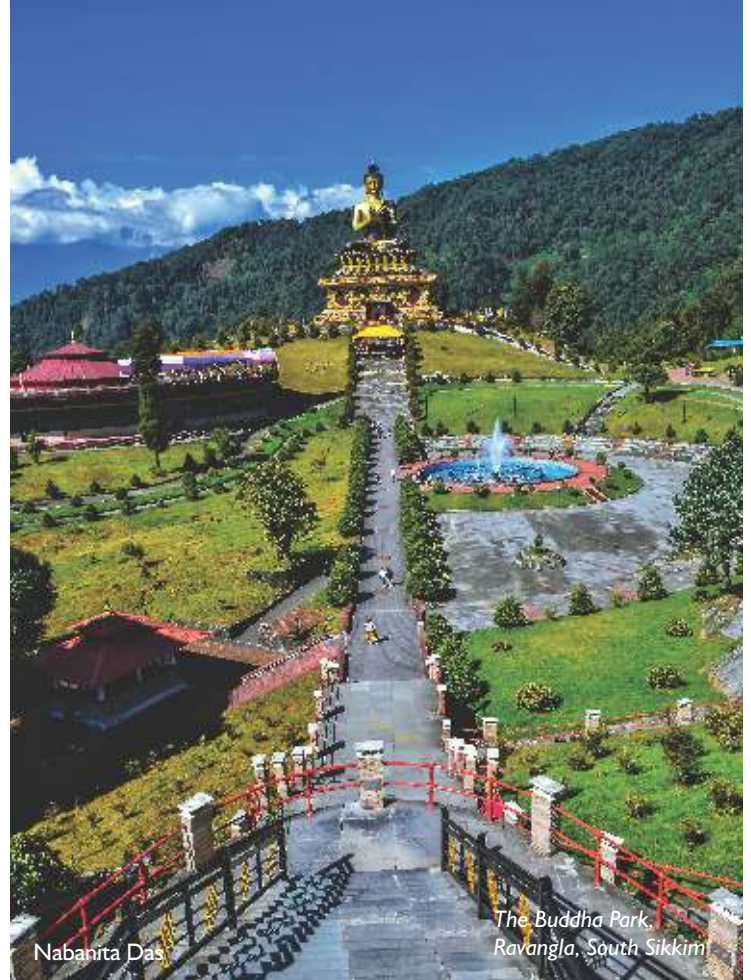
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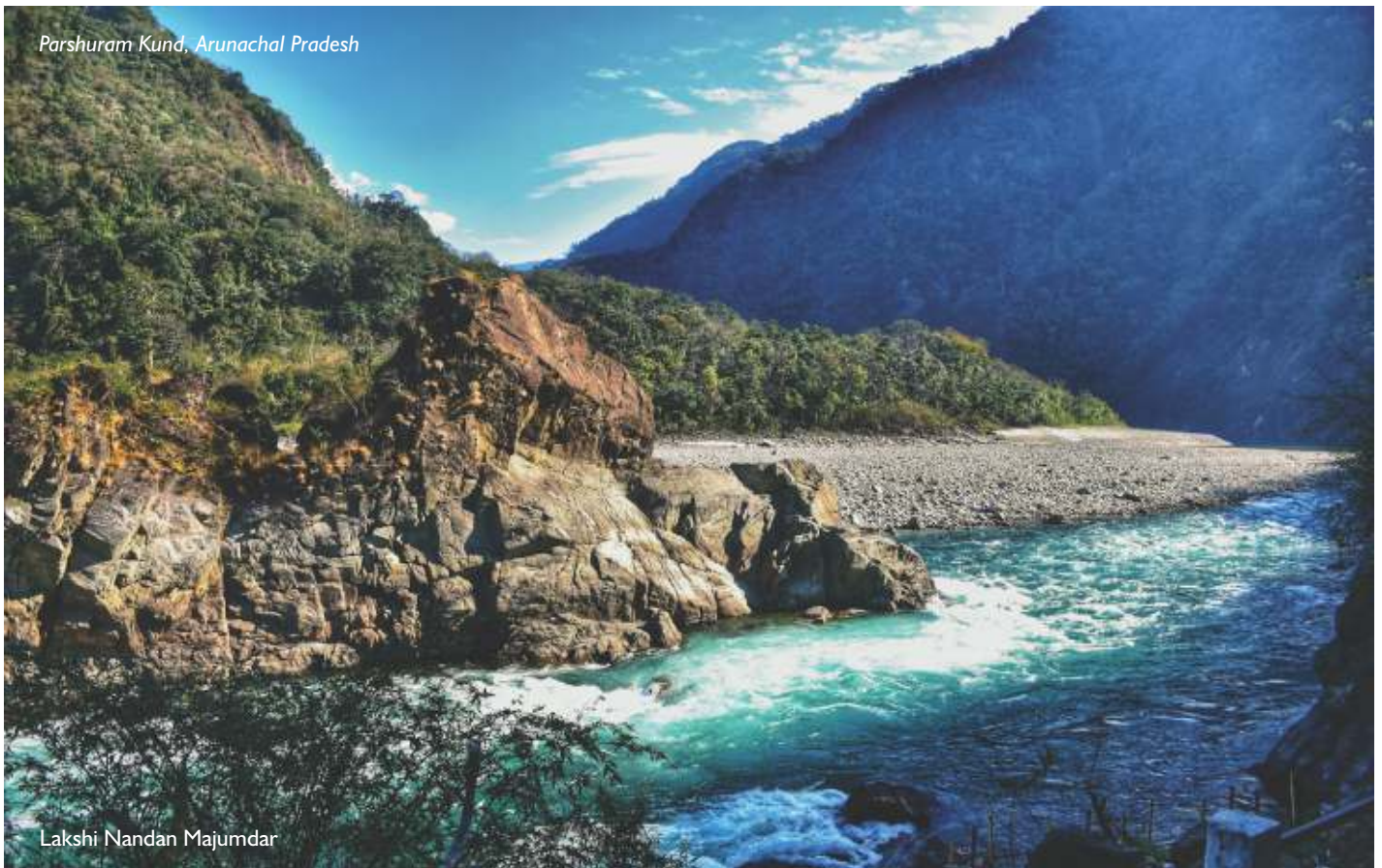
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Pijush Kanti Ghosh



Parshuram Kund, Arunachal Pradesh

Lakshi Nandan Majumdar

Sandakphu, Ilam, Bengal-Nepal Border

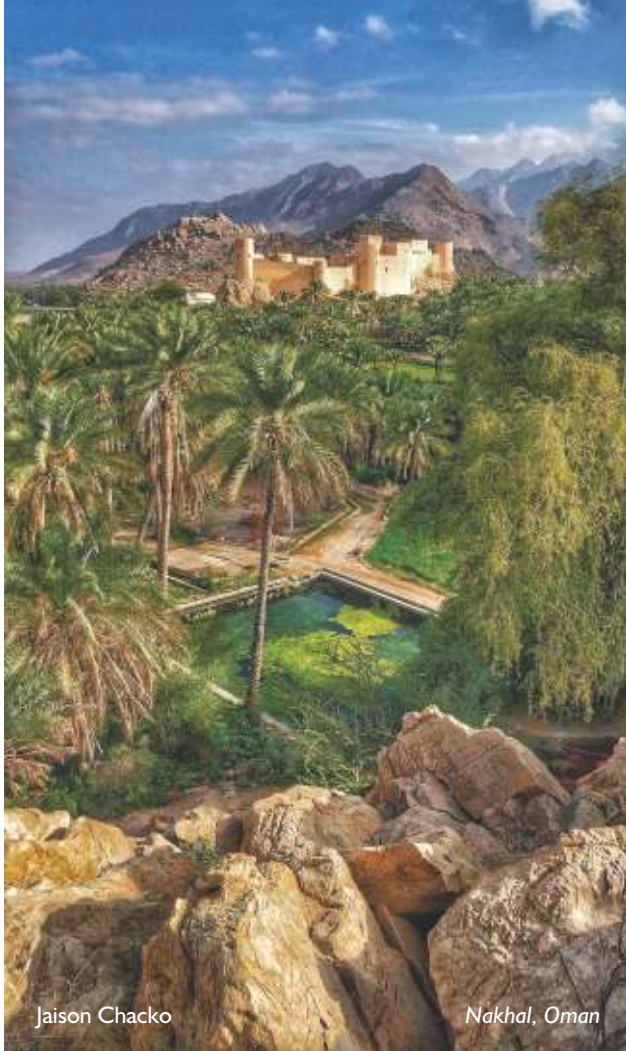


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COMMENT & WIN



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Raju Singh



Ramdhura, Kalimpong

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Incredible India

Discovering the essence of

Holi

"Oo re grihobashi... khol dwar khol... laglo je dol", followed by "ore bhai... fagun legeche bone bone" The lines from one of the famous songs written by Rabindranath Tagore open the Holi festival at Shantiniketan.



Known as Basanta Utsav, Holi at Shantiniketan is as iconic to Bengali culture as it can get. I had no idea about the importance of this festival among the Bengali folks until I started looking for a stay. It was early January when I searched for a hotel around Bolpur and found that everything was already full. Upon enquiring, I realized that bookings for Holi start coming from December itself. The more you delay, the lesser are your chances to find a stay close to Shantiniketan.

So what is the solution? Book a hotel in Bardhaman, the nearest town from where you could find a train and reach the venue.





Basanta Utsav is one of the many events in Shantiniketan that holds a huge significance. What makes Holi different here is its unique way of celebration. Groups from Shantiniketan perform traditional dance form. At the same time, visitors celebrate among themselves. Boys dressed in traditional Kurta and girls in pretty sarees. A well-balanced atmosphere with different groups dancing and singing makes the venue beautiful. Another highlight of Basanta Utsav is the floral jewellery that everyone flaunts. This goes very well with the yellow and red attire of majority of the attendees.

Rabindranath Tagore knew that society stays together, only when there are regular occasions for the people to meet and celebrate. Reason or not, these festivals bring everyone closer and strengthen relationships.



Tips to attend Basanta Utsav

Hotels in Shantiniketan and Bolpur are booked several days in advance. If you are planning to attend the festival, a better idea would be to stay in Bardhaman. Regular trains between both the places run at every half an hour. You can attend the festival and return to Bardhaman after lunch.

Basanta Utsav Celebration starts from a day before Holi, so make sure to attend both the days to make the best out of your visit.



Incredible India

Trailing the Traces of Chalukyan Glory



In 540 AD, Pulakeshin-I moved his capital to a new location in search of a more strategic spot from where the Chalukyas could defend their kingdom. Soon this area became a playground for their experiments with architecture. Today, this region is dotted with temples and caves telling the history of this glorious empire over and over again. Three main destinations famous for such unique marvels of architecture are Badami, Pattadakal and Aihole.

The first set of temples was constructed in Aihole, which was the first capital of Chalukya Empire under Pulakeshin-II. According to mythology, Aihole is the place where Parashurama

washed his axe after killing the Kshatriyas. Aihole has historical significance and is called as cradle of Hindu rock architecture. Here, the architects gained perfection in their style. The updated versions of the temples are found in Pattadakal. Together, with the caves of Badami, these temples are unique attractions for the heritage and history lovers.

Badami was the second capital of the Chalukyas after they moved from Aihole in search of a better fortified spot to protect their kingdom. In mythology, Badami has been called Vatapi. The name Badami comes from red colour of the sandstone used in construction of caves and fortress. Important places

worth seeing here are Rock-cut Caves, Bhootnath Temple, Fort, Museum and the massive lake adjacent to it. Out of these, Rock-cut Caves are the most unique and a must-visit. There are 4 sets of caves – some dedicated to Vishnu, others to Shiva and the last one to the Jain Gurus.

An interesting fact about Pattadakal is that it unknowingly provided an inspiration to all the architects around India. Temples of Pattadakal are 1000 years older than Taj Mahal, 500 years older than stone carvings of Belur and Halebid and almost 300 years older than the towering temples that the Cholas had created. The gopura (tower) in South Indian temples is first seen among the Chalukyas.



Pattadakal reached the peak of glory between seventh and ninth centuries functioning as a royal commemorative site for the Chalukyas



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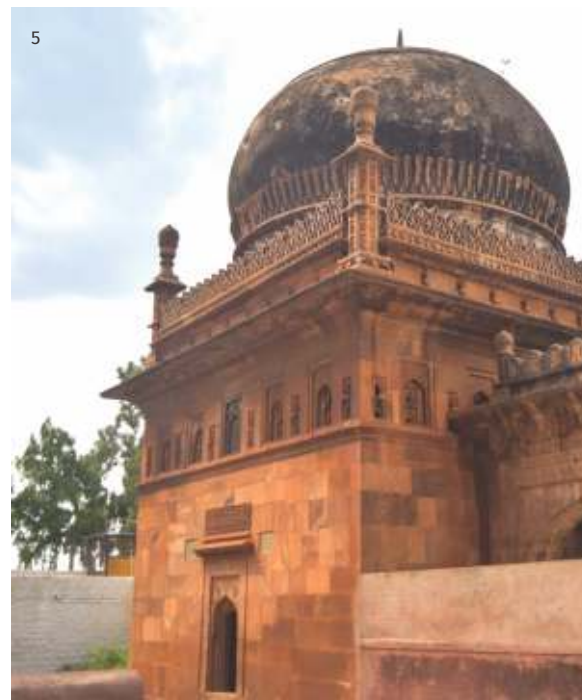
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5

- 1 These hills of Badami are one of the best places for rock climbing in India.
- 2 Every cave temple has various carvings that are chiseled in a single rock and have the images of Lord Vishnu, Lord Ganesha, Varah Avtar of Lord Vishnu, Narsingh Avtar of Lord Vishnu, A Shivalingam, Nandi Bull etc.
- 3 Think about it, they created such ornate ceilings more than 1500 years ago
- 4 All the major attractions of Badami are located around the Agasthya Lake and sandwiched between two high mountain cliffs at Northern and Southern side.
- 5 Mosque of Adilshahi of Bijapur is right outside the cave complex. Its black Gumbaz is carved with extracts from Holy Quran engraved on its walls.
- 6 A number of sculptors installed in Pattadakal complex were brought from Kanchipuram by King Vikramaditya II (734 – 745 AD) and his queens Lokmahadevi and Trailkyamahadevi.





7



8

- 7 Aihole comprises more than 125 temples scattered around the village.
- 8 The group of about nine temples in the main complex represent the climax of early Western Chalukyan Architecture.
- 9 Renowned British scholar, artist, art critic, historian and archaeologist, Percy Brown, described Aihole as 'One of the cradles of Temple Architecture'.



HOW TO REACH BADAMI

Badami is 7 hours away from Bangalore and 3 hours from Hampi. Many travellers combine their trip to Badami with Hampi. Regular buses between Goa and Badami are also available and it takes almost 8 hours to travel one side.

The nearest major city close to Badami is Hubli, which is 100-km away. Bagalkot is accessible from Bangalore and Goa by road and train.

WHERE TO STAY

Out of all the three spots, only Badami has hotels. Rest of the locations can be covered keeping Badami as a base. ¹⁰



Incredible India



SPIRITUAL TRAIL IN KUTCH





Situated on the west coast of India, Kutch was an important gateway to the Indian peninsula for centuries. The convenient location of the region on a navigable part of the eastern Arabian Sea made this a landing point for invaders, traders and migrants. In consequence, Kutch has landmarks associated with different cultures and religions – Greek, Arab, Persian, Buddhist, Sikh, Jain, etc.





The Gurudwara of Lakhpat

At the mouth of Lakhpat is a fortified village town along the Kori Creek. The Indus or Sindhu waters are said to have flowed to the Arabian Sea at this point, creating a rice growing region and an important trading port. After the shifting of the Indus away from Kutch, Lakhpat declined and became a sparsely populated town. The hard brown stone fort, rebuilt and expanded in 1801 by Fateh Muhammad, is an irregular polygon of about seven kilometers length, strengthened by semi circular bastions.

Sikhs make the pilgrimage to Lakhpat Gurudwara Sahib, which is believed to be the house where Guru Nanak stayed before embarking for Mecca. The pilgrims, mainly from the Udasi sect of Sikhism, revere the footwear and palkhi kept at this Gurudwara that won the UNESCO award for restoration after the earthquake.

The Vaishnav Site of Narayan Sarovar

Travel south from Lakhpat to Narayan Sarovar, which is among the five sacred lakes - the others being Mansarovar, Pushkar, Pampa Sarovar and Bhubaneshwar's Bindu Sarovar. These five sacred lakes are also mentioned in Shrimad Bhagavata Purana. According to legend, the River Saraswati had its estuary at Narayan Sarovar and the lake carries the water of this holy river. The lake's embankments have flights of stone steps and perforated walls that create separate bathing areas. A cluster of temples stands in fortified walls - Vagheli Mahakunvar; the wife of Rao Deshalji who was the ruler of Kutch in the 1700s is said to have worked to make Narayan Sarovar a rival to Dwarka. Accordingly, in 1734, she first built the temples of Lakshminarayan and Trikamay in the same style as the Dwarka and then those of Adinarayan, Govardhannath, Dwarkanath and Lakshmiji. Another reason for Narayan Sarovar's spiritual significance is its association with Vallabhacharya (1479-1531 CE), a Hindu theologian and philosopher who founded the Krishna-centered Pushti sect of Vaishnavism and the philosophy of Shuddha advaita (Pure Non-dualism). Vallabhacharya wanted to preach his

message of devotion to God and God's grace called Pushtimarg (path of grace). He undertook three pilgrimages of India. During the second pilgrimage, Lord Krishna appeared in the form of Lord Shrinathji in front of him and ordered him to reestablish Pushti Marg and propagate the pushti kind of devotion among the chosen ones and bring them back to their original state in God's own domain i.e. Vaikuntha or Golok-dham. But the question in Shri Vallabh's mind was that the divine souls in this world too are highly influenced by the materialistic world and their souls and body have lost the kind of purity that is needed for their reunion with the Supreme entity i.e. Lord Krishna.

Lord Shrinathji assured him that with "Brahma sambandha" (relationship with God), whichever soul is admitted into

the Pushti marg, all its impurities will refrain from obstructing the soul's relation with Himself and the soul will be eligible to pursue His bhakti. That was the night of Pavitra Ekadashi (Four days before the new moon day) of the auspicious month of Shravana. Lord Shrinathji taught him the Brahma sambandha mantra and asked him to bring back the divine souls back to him.

On the following day, Vallabha initiated his first disciple Damodardas Harsani with this mantra along with the principles of Pushtimarga. This was how Pushtimarga was established. Baithak or Bethak, literally "seat", is the site considered sacred by the followers of the Pushtimarg for performing devotional rituals. One of these seats of Pushtimarg is Narayan Sarovar.





The Shiva Temple of Koteswar

Just a few minutes' drive from Narayan Sarovar, an ancient Shiva temple is located near the mouth of Kori Creek. One of the mythological stories about Koteswar links it to Ravana who won a Shivalinga as a boon from Lord Shiva but in his arrogant haste accidentally dropped and it fell to earth at Koteswar, where it turned into multiple lingams. Unable to distinguish the original, Ravana grabbed one and departed, leaving the original one here, around which Kotilingeshwar Temple was built. Hiuen-Tsiang mentioned it as "Kie-tsi-shi-fa-lo situated on the western border of the country, close to the river Indus and to the great ocean" of Kutch. According to Hieu-en-Tsiang, Koteswar Port was five miles in boundary near the mouth of the river Indus. However, a writing on the left side of the gate shows that the present fort and temples were built in 1820 by two Seths, Sundarji and Jetha Shivji.



Buddhist Cave of Siyot

Hiuen-Tsiang in the seventh century mentioned that Koteswar was a centre for about 80 Buddhist monasteries inhabited by many monks. From Koteswar, travel to Ghaduliya, from where a road leads past the village of Siyot to a cave with an east facing sanctum and an ambulatory that is said to date to about the first century AD. Brahmi inscriptions and seals have been found at this cave site. There is a primitive rock step-well walking distance from the site.



Shrine of the Mother Goddess

Travelling west from Siyot towards Bhuj, you come to Mata no madh, a shrine to Ashapura Devi who is the patron deity of Kutch, much revered by the Jadeja Rajput dynasty. The Ashapura temple was built in medieval times by two Karad Vanias, Ajo and Anagor, who were ministers in the court of the rulers of Kutch. The temple was damaged by an earthquake in 1819 and then rebuilt by Sundarji Shivji and Mehta Vallabhaji, two Brahma kshatriya in 1823. The present day temple was renovated after the 2001 Earthquake.

A legend says that when Mian Ghulam Shah Kalhoro of Sindh attacked this temple in 1762, his soldiers became blind by the curse of Ashapura. Then, Ghulam Shah took an oath to furnish the temple with the huge bell still stands there in the temple in return for restoring their eyesight. Military leader Jamadar Fateh Muhammad endowed this temple with a 41-lamp deep mala tower weighing 2 kg silver.



The Heritage Village of Tera

From Mata no Madh, drive back towards the coast, stopping at the village of Tera. The village is known for its fort. It is located near three lakes that formed part of a sophisticated rainwater management system. Rainwater was channelized to Chhatrasar Lake with solid manmade embankments to harness the water without being impacted by erosion. The overflow was filtered through a weir to Surarasar Lake and from here, any excess water would reach the third lake and finally Tera River. Each of the three lakes was allotted for different uses – bathing, drinking and watering livestock.



PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE

A viewing spot has been built for visitors to see the lakes and the fort.

From the fort, walk through the bazaar to Jumma Masjid. A mosque with onion-shaped domes probably influenced by trade with Arabic and Persian lands from Jakhau and Lakhpatt (a major port for Haj to Mecca during Mughal reign), and splendidly carved entrances. The dargahs of Kalapir and Saiyed Mahmudshah Pir attract many devotees to this complex.

The village road continues to the derasar (Jain temple complex), which has a 285-year old temple with glass paintings and murals and a 148-year old temple with multiple shikaras. This

temple complex is a part of five-point Jain yatra in Kutch, attracting about 40,000 pilgrims every year, according to Girishbhai Soni, one of the prominent Jain residents of Tera. The village also has a much visited Ram Temple.

Explore the village to see beautiful havelis of the Jains, Bhatiyas and other residents of Tera. A notable feature of Tera's havelis is the gateway – carved wooden doors framed by ornate stonework featuring Indian and western motifs. Corinthian pilasters with floral capitals are a common architectural element in Tera's havelis. Once inside, the courtyard is surrounded by the residential wings of extended families



that have ornate facades and carved balconies. Many havelis are locked as the owners do not reside in them, while some are tenanted or occupied by relatives of the owners. The village also has temples to Ashapura, Modeshwari Mata, Hinglaj Mata, Shitla Mata, Hanuman and Rama. The Vaishnav haveli temple is especially attractive.

On the outskirts of Tera village is Ratanbai's Samadhi. Ratanbai from a prominent Khoja family of Bhadali, a nearby village, renounced worldly life after losing her son and became a mystic poetess. Her verse, "as a jogan, I left to marry jagida, the almighty, and



received the hills and the sea as mahr”, have led to people comparing her kafis with the bhajans of Mirabai. The ashram she set up on invitation from Gaguba also has the Samadhi of her guru, Bhakarsha.

From the Samadhi, the path continues to sandstone cenotaphs and memorial stones, one of them has a millennia-old inscription and some are recently restored. Walk from here to the step well, which is about 450 years old. The step well is a feature of arid areas of Gujarat, Rajasthan and Sindh, where rainfall is scanty and water sources are rare. The step wells in Gujarat, called Vav in Gujarati, were on a large scale and decorated with fine carvings. The step well at Tera, called Selor Vav, is a fine example of the water-retaining architecture of Gujarat.



The Jain Temples along the Coast

A short distance from Tera, Naliya has a much-visited Jain temple. Travel down the coast from Naliya to Mandvi, near which is a 72-shrine Jain temple. Proceed to Bhadrashwar, which is a historically significant Jain town.

Bhadresar is the site of the ancient city of Bhadravati. Vasai Jain Temple here is believed to be an ancient temple renovated in the 13th century by Jagdusha. The artisans of Kutch renovated these temples during the earthquakes of 1819, 1844–45 and 1875.

The temple, facing the east, is entered by a flight of steps that rise from the outer door to the covered area in front of the sanctuary. Over the porch is another large dome covering an area separated by a low screen wall from the area of the entrance hall, mandap, between it and the front of the temple itself. The central image is Ajitnath, the second of the Tirthankars, with the date 622 probably for Samvat 1622 or AD 1565.



On his right is Parshwanath with the snake hood marked 1175 and on his left Santinath, the 16th Tirthankar, also marked 1175. On the extreme right is the image of the black or Shamlha Parshwanath. This colourful temple was renovated again after the 2001 Earthquake.

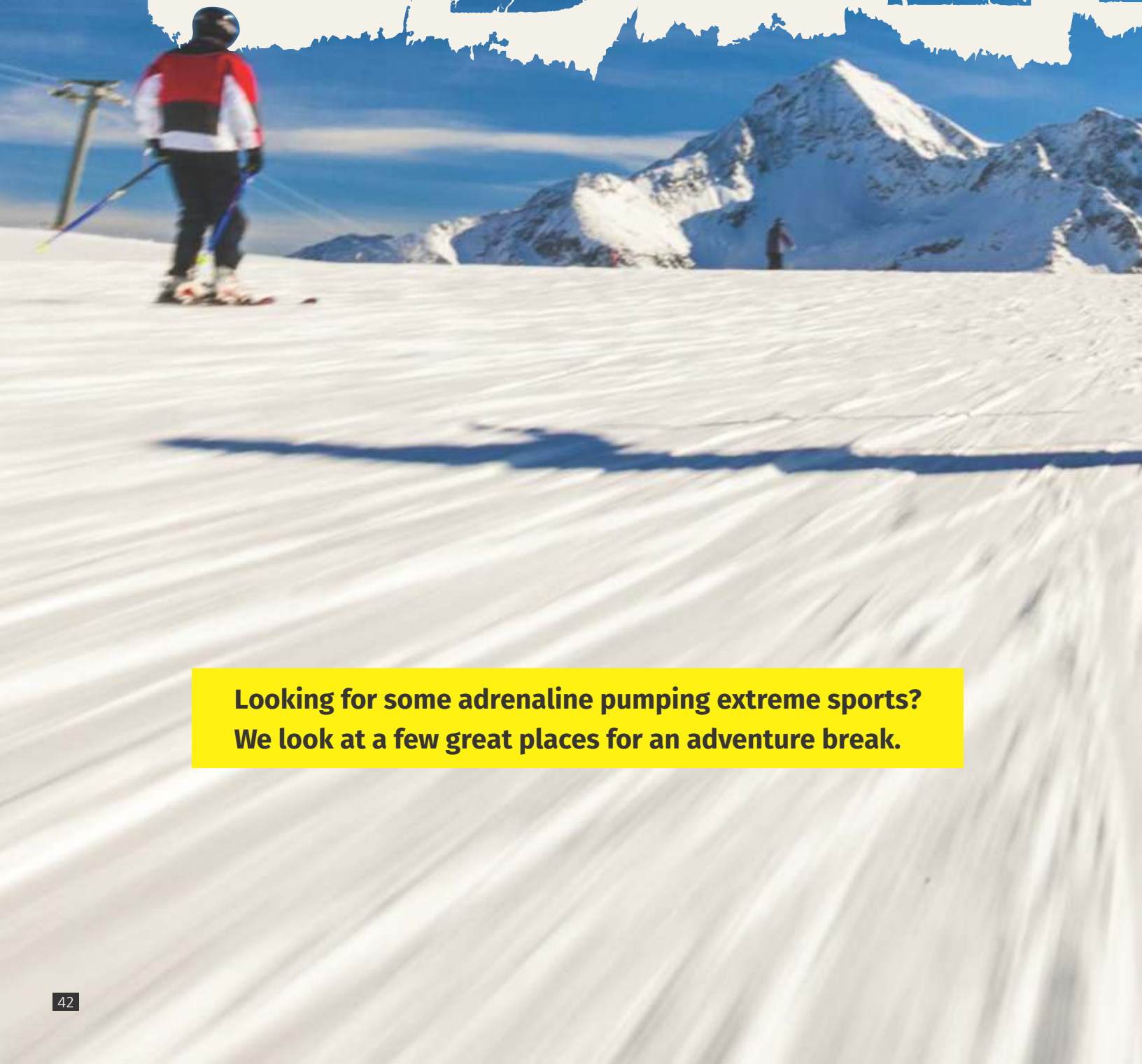
A unique feature of Bhadrashwar is its mosques built in the 12th century, which are among India's oldest Islamic buildings. Some of these mosques are said to have been sponsored by Jain merchants who traded with the Arab fleets.

WHERE TO STAY

Toran Hotel, Narayan Sarovar | Phone: 02839266665, Mobile: 9825026813

Far Far away

ADVENTURE



**Looking for some adrenaline pumping extreme sports?
We look at a few great places for an adventure break.**

ADVENTURE

Holidays



Take a ski tour in Chamonix

Chamonix-Mont-Blanc in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region in south-eastern France was the site of the first Winter Olympics in 1924, which raised its profile as one of the world's top destination for snow sports. As the highest European mountain west of Russia, this is also a popular destination for mountaineering.

Ranked by skiing enthusiasts among the best free ride resort in the world, there are resorts like Grands Montets, Les Houches, Le Tour/Balme, La Flegere and Le Brevent that make this the perfect ski holiday destination. If this is your first ski holiday, there are a number of ski areas in Chamonix, which provides easy slopes for beginners like Les Planards, Le Tour, Arg entiere/Les Grands Montets, Vallorcine, Chamonix/Brevent and Les Houches. The Teleski de Savoy is a learning area for children. You can enroll at one of the ski schools or hire an instructor.

You can also find specialist snowboard or telemark instructors. If you already have ski proficiency, hire a mountain guide to ski the Vallée Blanche, a route that goes over glaciers, around and over crevasses, with views of the breathtakingly beautiful valleys and alpine peaks. For the more seasoned skier, extreme off piste skiing routes take you through glacier systems, wide powder slopes, steep couloirs and tree skiing trails, Ski touring and cross-country skiing is also possible. Like skiing, Snowboarding is a popular sport that involves descending a snow-covered slope with your feet attached on a snowboard. You can also go dog-sledding, ice-skating, heli- skiing and ice-climbing.

If you have had enough of skiing, head to Mieusey, 50km west of Chamonix, which is one of the first paragliding sites in the world, from 1974. Take a tandem flight with a qualified pilot or lessons with a paragliding school. It is considered one of the finest and most beautiful flying areas in the world. If you are more adventurous try Speed Riding - a blend of paragliding and skiing that lets you ride/fly the slopes at incredible speeds.



Enjoy alpine skiing and snowboarding at Whistler British Columbia

Whistler BC, about 125 km (78 mi) north of Vancouver and 36 km (22 mi) south of the town of Pemberton, is a resort municipality that attracts over two million tourists most of them for skiing and snowboarding. With over 8,100 acres of snow-covered slopes, 16 alpine bowls and 3 glaciers, Whistler offers world-class terrain parks and more than 200 marked trails. You can start by joining the Whistler Blackcomb Ski and Snowboard School, which can be good for beginners or for those who want to improve their skills. There are also lessons for children. For skiing, you can select the trails according to your proficiency levels. You can even opt for Heli-skiing where a helicopter takes you to the point for downhill off-trail skiing.

While in Boulder, don't miss a ride on the Whistler PEAK 2 PEAK 360 gondola – Its glass bottom offers a bird's-eye view of the forest, Whistler Village, mountain peaks, lakes and glaciers.

Enjoy alpine skiing and snowboarding at Whistler British Columbia

The Alps of Switzerland are known for winter sports. But if you are looking for a summer break, head for Interlaken for some superb views of the mountains from the sky. Interlaken is a prime destination for paragliding. Begin with a tandem paragliding flight from Beatenberg to Interlaken enjoying views of the beautiful landscape. Buy more airtime to soar high above the lakes and get a bird's view of the splendid Jungfrau, which at 4,158 metres (13,642 ft) is one of the main summits of the Bernese Alps. After seeing Lake Thun from the sky, you can even let yourself be pulled across the lake by our boat.

Other sports at Interlaken are canyoning, Rafting on the Simme or Lütschine, water skiing, wake boarding, tube and banana boat rides, jet boat ride, mountaineering and trekking. Stockholm is one of the finest bungee jumping sites - you go 134m up in a mountain gondola, the doors open and you take the plunge - leaping and free-falling towards the pristine mountain lake Stocksee, where you are lowered onto a boat waiting for you.



Experience rafting near the Victoria Falls.

Livingstone is a tourism centre for the Victoria Falls. The Falls is classified as the largest waterfall, based on its combined width of 5,604 ft and height of 354 ft, resulting in the world's largest sheet of falling water. Not surprisingly, the Zambezi River below the waterfalls is one of the world's top white water rafting destinations. An excursion from Livingstone is rated by many white water enthusiasts as one of the greatest one-day whitewater rafting trip in the world, but you can even take multi-day expeditions that run down the Batoka Gorge. Once you are done with rafting, you can enjoy Zambezi River wildlife safaris, canoeing and scenic float trips on the river.



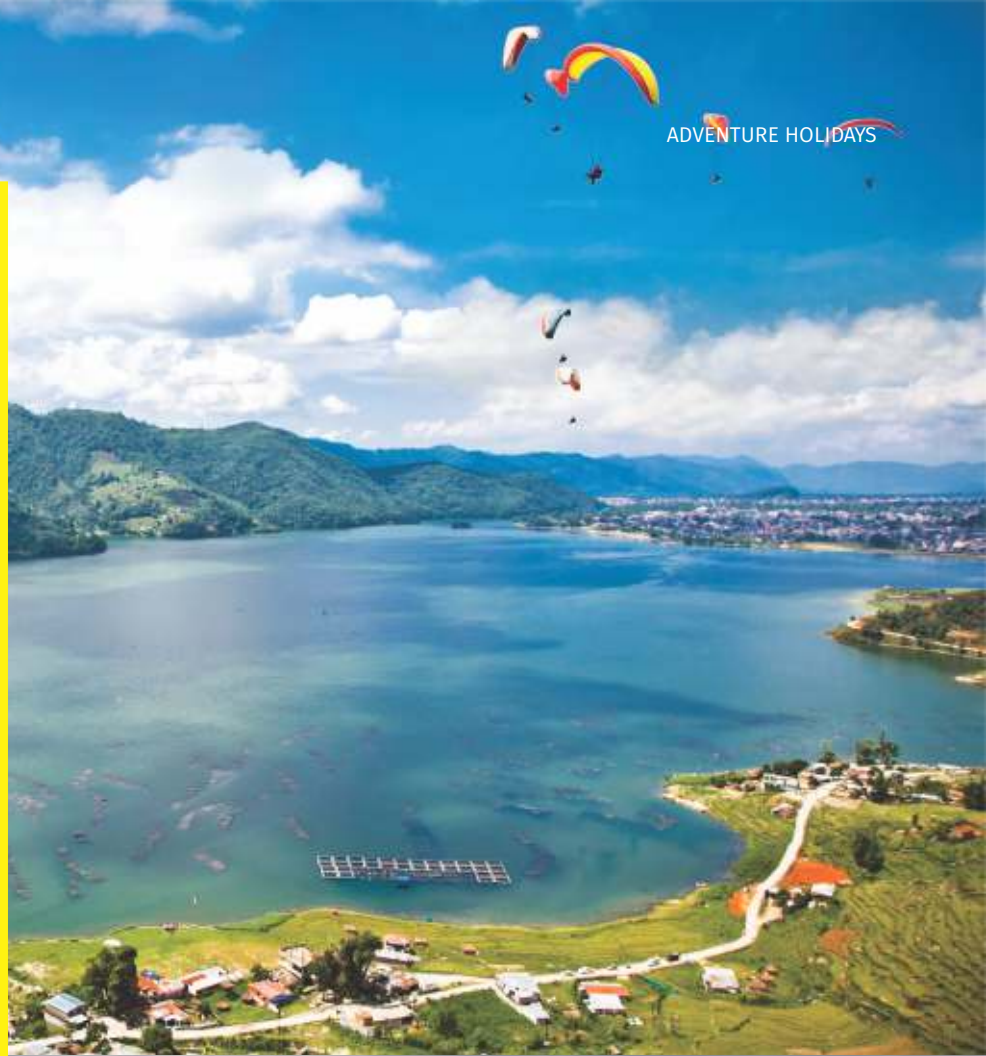


Experience high altitude adventures in Pokhara.

With the world's highest mountain peaks, Nepal is an adventure holiday seekers dream destination. Besides being a magnet for mountaineering and trekking enthusiasts, Nepal offers whitewater rafting on the Sun Kosi River rated among the best white water stretches in the world and kayaking on mountain rivers.

But if it is extreme aerial adventure you seek, Pokhara is one of the best places for sky diving – from the aircraft jump down with a view of the mighty Annapurnas and the Fewa Lake below. For even more excitement, try Everest skydiving, which is one of the most unique experiences in the world. You dive onto the world's highest drop zone at Gorak Shep, Kala Patthar, past some of the world's highest mountain peaks.

The ultimate thrill of a bungee jump can now be experienced in at Tatopani, near Pokhara. You jump from a 166m wide steel suspension bridge that joins two sides of a deep valley over the raging Bhote Koshi River. The place has spectacular scenery with dense forests covering the top of the cliff. Bungee jumping is also offered in Hemja, Pokhara. The bungee there is Nepal's first and only tower bungee, high ground bungee and swing, offering different options of bungee jumping. Located at a convenient 20 minutes from Pokhara Lakeside, the jump site offers a spellbinding view of the Himalayas, the hills and the rivers.





Go bungee jumping in Macau

Macau is a major resort city and the top destination for gambling tourism. Though Macau evokes visions of casinos and resorts rather than adventure, this is among the world's best places for bungee jumping. New Zealand entrepreneur Alan John "A. J." Hackett made a 233-meter jump from the Macau Tower earning him a Guinness world record as the "highest commercial bungee jump" in 2007.



Take on the sands of Huacachina

It is an oasis in the desert of Southern Peru. Located five hours south of Lima, this is the destination for dune buggy rides and sandboarding. You go deep into the desert to see the huge sand dunes on the coast, beautiful and surreal sand hills. Dune buggies and 4x4 vehicles take thrill seekers to the highest sand peaks in the area. The dunes of Huacachina stretch all the way to the shores of the Pacific Ocean. Not only are the steep slopes ideal for sand sports, but they are also very picturesque, with peaks and valleys that resemble sandy waves. Once you are done with the sands, you can take flights over the world-famous Nazca Lines, which are a group of very large geoglyphs formed by depressions or shallow incisions made in the soil of the Nazca Desert in southern Peru, and boat tours to see Humboldt penguins and sea lions.





Take on the ice of Alaska

Alaska is the land of about 100,000 glaciers. The Matanuska Glacier is a popular place for beginners to experience ice-climbing. There are also ice-climbs that are roped and protected icefalls, frozen waterfalls, and cliffs covered with ice refrozen from flows of water. Depending on how extreme you want to go, there are natural ice walls to choose from.

While in Alaska, you can also go heli-skiing, snow kiting, snow mobiling and mountaineering. A special sport of Alaska is bore tide surfing – a bore tide is a wave of seawater that forms when the tide shifts as it returns to a shallow and narrowing inlet from a broad bay. It occurs after extreme minus low tides created by the full or new moon.



Go Kiteboarding at Nabq Bay, Egypt

Kite-boarding is an action sport that combines features of wake-boarding, snow-boarding, wind-surfing, surfing, para-gliding, skate-boarding and sailing. A kite-boarder harnesses the power of the wind with a large control lable-power kite to be propelled across the water, land or snow. One of the best places to enjoy this is the beach town of Nabq Bay in Egypt. Here the riding area is guarded by reefs, which create relatively shallow and flat waters, and the wind blows at least 20 knots on most days. The reef also means that the riding area is minimally affected by tides, giving you hours of uninterrupted surfing time.

When you are done with kite-boarding, you can take a snorkeling or scuba-diving trip to Ras Mohammad National Park – over 125 types of coral, 1000 species of fish, 40 species of star fish, 25 species of sea urchins, more than a 100 species of mollusc and 150 species of crustaceans, together with good chances of spotting sea turtles, make this among the best sites in the world for diving.

You can also take on various water-sports at El Gouna like scuba-diving, wind-surfing, kite-surfing, water-skiing, parasailing and snorkelling.





Cave Diving in Tulum

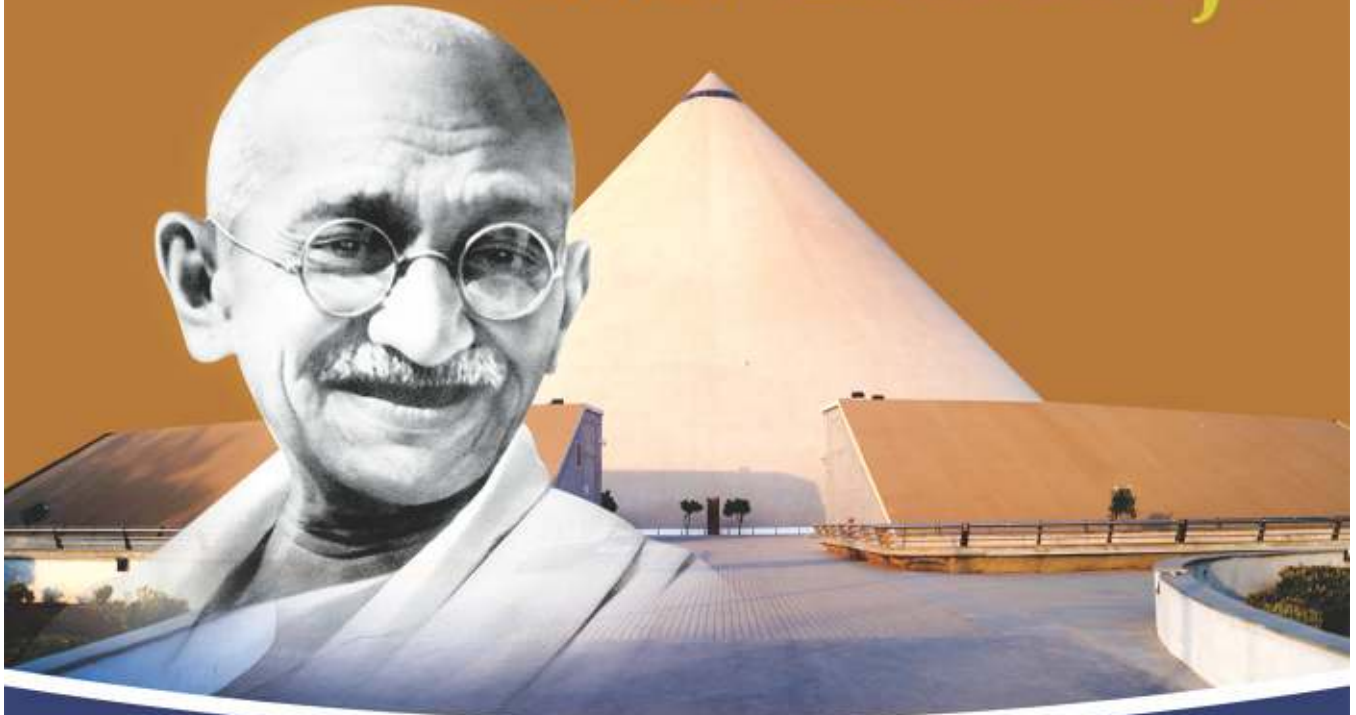
Tulum is the site of a pre-Columbian Mayan walled city situated on tall cliffs along the east coast of the Yucatán Peninsula on the Caribbean Sea in Mexico. A large number of cenotes are located in the Tulum area such as Maya Blue, Naharon, Temple of Doom, Tortuga, Vacaha, Grand Cenote, Abejas, Nohoch Kiin and Carwash cenotes and cave systems. Some of these are ideal for cave diving and underwater diving in water-filled caves. One of the best is Cenote Angelita with its layer of hydrogen sulphate, which separates the incredibly clear fresh water from the salt water below at approximately 100 feet.





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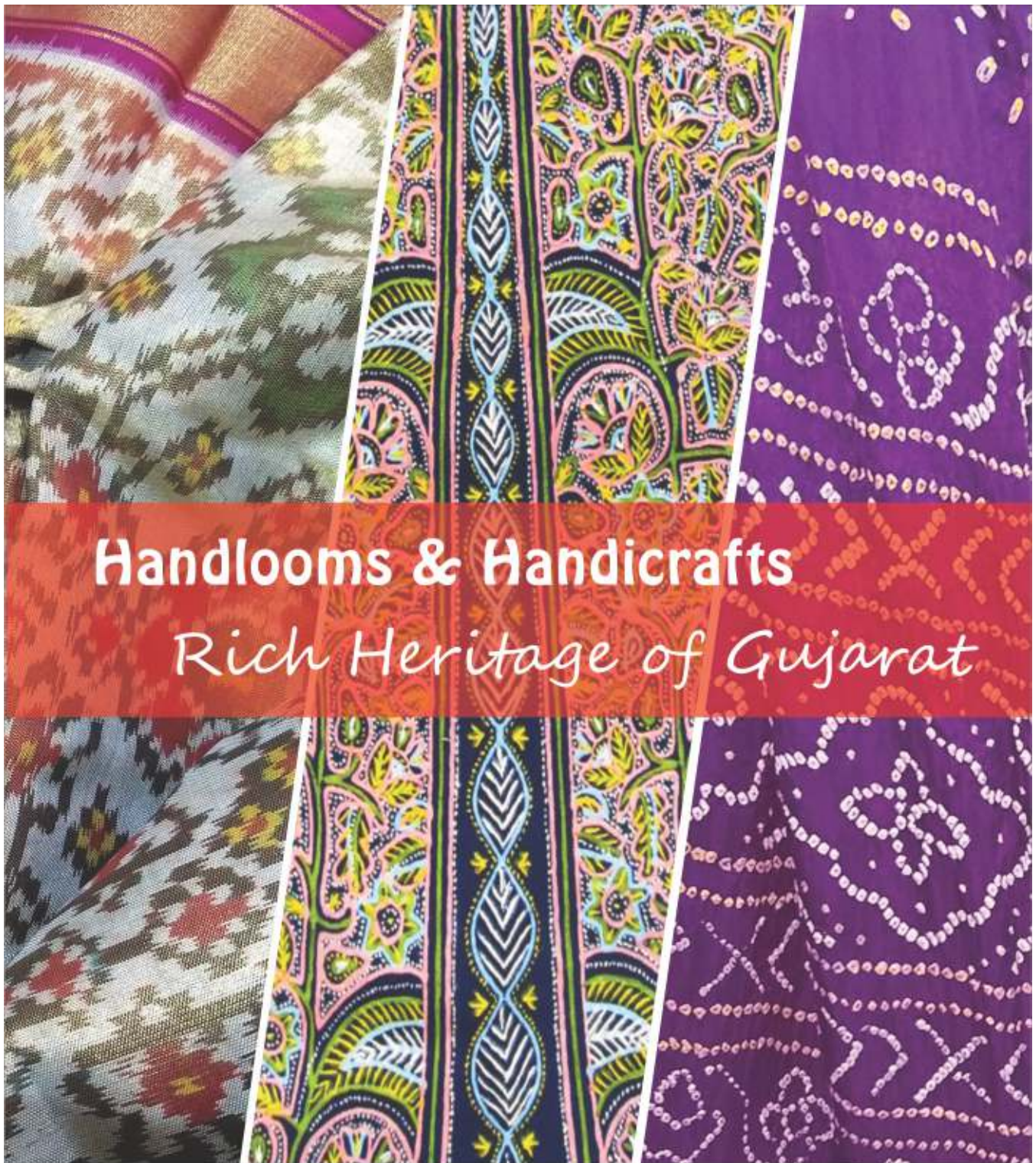
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