

PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE

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A high-end monthly magazine

PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE | May 2019

**Ecological
Destinations**

**A Tryst with
Sangam Nagri**

**Heritage In
The Himalayas**



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Untaming **the Wild**

Isn't it very tempting to interact with animals that you could never interact with at home? From petting tigers, to riding elephants and swimming with dolphins, these sound enticing for a traveller! Of course, those clicks would do wonder to your social media timeline (Yay, we all love 'Likes'). However, how is it possible for human beings to interact with these wild-natured animals? Possibility is they are trained (read: abused) in order to make them approachable to you.

As World Environment Day is approaching fast, the scenario of human's impact on surroundings is worth pondering. Do we travel responsibly? We know vacations should be carefree and we would not like to be bothered by responsibilities. But just imagine - the forest you just explored might not be on the map down the few years or the animals you posed with end up in museum for your grandchildren's visit. Responsible travel is equally fun, just with a little care and appreciation towards your surroundings.

To commemorate the World Environment Day, we present some of the most ecologically rich destinations in the world.

Have a happy and responsible trip!



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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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Far Far away

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Ecological Destinations

ON WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY,
VISIT SOME OF THE MOST
ECOLOGICALLY RICH DESTINATIONS
IN THE WORLD.

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THE RAINFORESTS AND CORAL REEFS OF Queensland

QUEENSLAND HAS SOME OF THE WORLD'S FINEST UNTOUCHED WILDNESSES.

Here you can visit both rainforests and coral reefs, the two ecosystems where life can be seen at its most diverse and colourful. One hour from the Queensland city of Cairns, the Daintree Rainforest is believed to be one of the oldest in the world with unique plants and animals found nowhere else, stunning valleys, superb beaches, spectacular forest-clad mountains, clear streams, magnificent rivers and rolling farmlands, with the coral reefs close by. This variety of habitats makes it a home to one of the largest ranges of animals and plants on earth.

Hire a 4WD for one of Australia's most scenic and challenging drives going past World Heritage listed Daintree Rainforest, waterfalls, creek crossings, rainforest-clad ranges and stunning views. This is a bird watching paradise harbouring southern cassowaries, tooth-billed and golden bowerbirds, lovely fairywrens, Macleay's bridled, yellow-spotted and white-streaked honeyeaters, fernwrens, Atherton scrubwrens, mountain thornbills, chowchillas, Bower's shrike-thrushes, pied monarchs, Victoria's riflebirds and pale-yellow robins. The Cape Tribulation section of the park is a place to enjoy great beauty and one of the few places where the rainforest meets the sea. Here you can look for kangaroos, wallabies, possums and other marsupials as well. Many rare trees and plants occur in the wet tropics of Queensland. The winding channels of the Hinchinbrook Channel contain the most extensive mangroves in the region, providing a rich visual mosaic of rainforest and mangroves, and a terrestrial continuum with the Great Barrier Reef. The Estuarine crocodile and other reptiles can be seen in the mangrove swamps. At the end of the trip, try diving or snorkeling the coral reefs to enjoy watching marine life.





THE FORESTS AND ISLANDS OF *Ecuador*

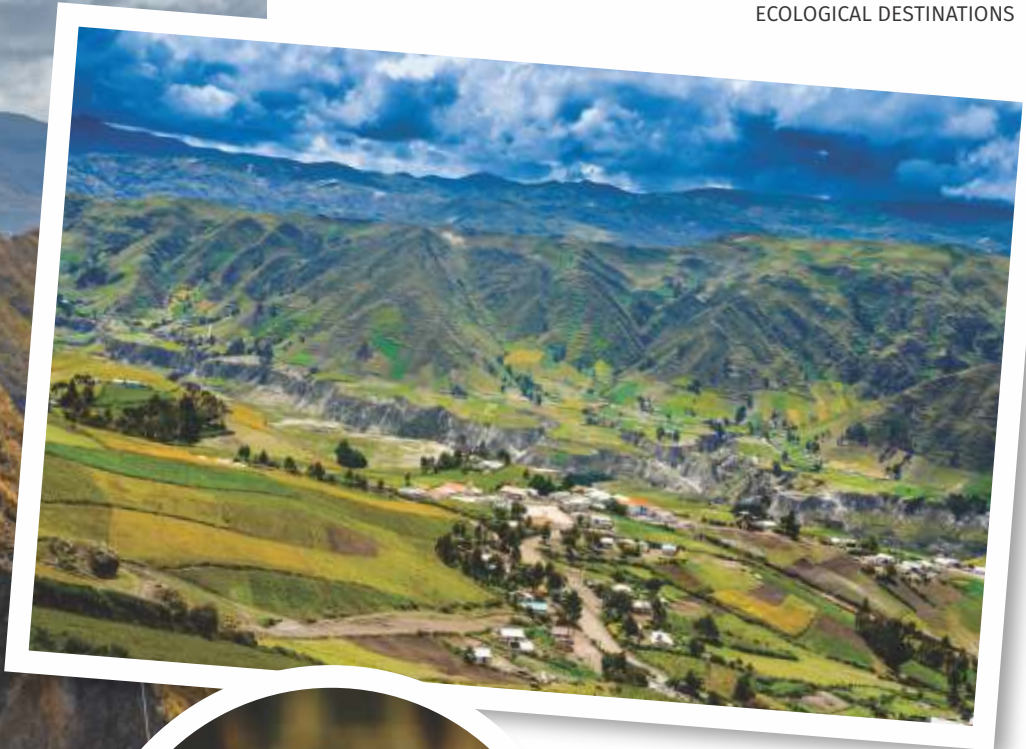
ECUADOR IS ONE OF THE MOST ENVIRONMENTALLY DIVERSE COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD.

The first scientific expedition to measure the circumference of the Earth, led by Charles-Marie de La Condamine of France, was based in Ecuador; and research in Ecuador by the renowned naturalists Alexander von Humboldt of Prussia and Charles Darwin of England helped establish basic theories of modern geography, ecology and evolutionary biology.

Travel through the cloud forests of the Andes of Ecuador, where you may

get lucky and spot some mammals - pudu, Andean fox, puma, spectacled bear and mountain tapirs. This is the land of hummingbirds and the great Andean condor. The cloud forests occur on both sides of the Andes (East and West) and contain incredible biodiversity, especially of birds like tanagers, hummingbirds, long-wattled umbrellabirds and plate-billed toucans. Look out for Spider monkeys, Squirrel monkeys and Woolly monkeys. Proceed to the Amazon Jungle, where large iguanas, colourful geckos, tortoises,

lizards, the caiman and massive anacondas are present. Jaguars, ocelots, monkeys, sloths and anteaters dwell in these forests. The renowned Galapagos Islands boast a wide variety of wildlife - Pacific green turtles, giant tortoises and iguanas at the islands, and fur seals, dolphins, whales, sharks could be spotted. The Atlantic coast and the Galapagos are also rich in bird life with frigates, boobies, albatrosses, cormorants and Galapagos penguins. Pelicans can be seen on the Atlantic coast of Ecuador.





THE AMAZONIAN FORESTS OF Peru

THE RAINFORESTS OF THE AMAZON ARE HOME TO A THIRD OF THE WORLD'S SPECIES.

While Brazil is the most popular place for an Amazon cruise, Peru, Columbia and Ecuador can be as or more exciting. From Iquitos the trip to the Pacaya Samiria

National Reserve reveals a flooded tropical forest called the "Jungle of Mirrors". This is the second largest protected area in the Amazon region. It covers a vast wilderness of unexplored forests, lagoons, inlets and rivers totaling over 5 million acres. Keep a lookout for pink river dolphins, brightly coloured macaws, endangered giant manatees and other wildlife. Here you will also find a variety of unique plants and beautiful orchids as well as colourful butterflies. The blue morpho butterflies are so iridescent, they can be seen from a km away. Also try to spot giant river otters, jaguar, caimans, howler and spider monkeys, sloths, boas and anacondas. In the water, you can spot Paiche, the world's largest freshwater fish. This region has the greatest diversity of hummingbirds in the world.





THE TEMPERATE FORESTS OF *Alaska*

THE CHILKOOT RIVER FLOWS FROM CHILKOOT LAKE INTO LUTAK INLET, HARBOURING AN ABUNDANCE OF FAUNA. This is among the largest expanses of temperate rainforest on the planet. Start your trip at Haines, which is called "The Valley of the Eagles".

You can look forward to seeing bald eagles on trees, on rocks and in flight, which are a popular sight during May through September. Bears are seen feeding in the river on salmon, mostly in spring and early summer. Seals abound in the watery wilderness. Mountain goats could be seen on the hill slopes.



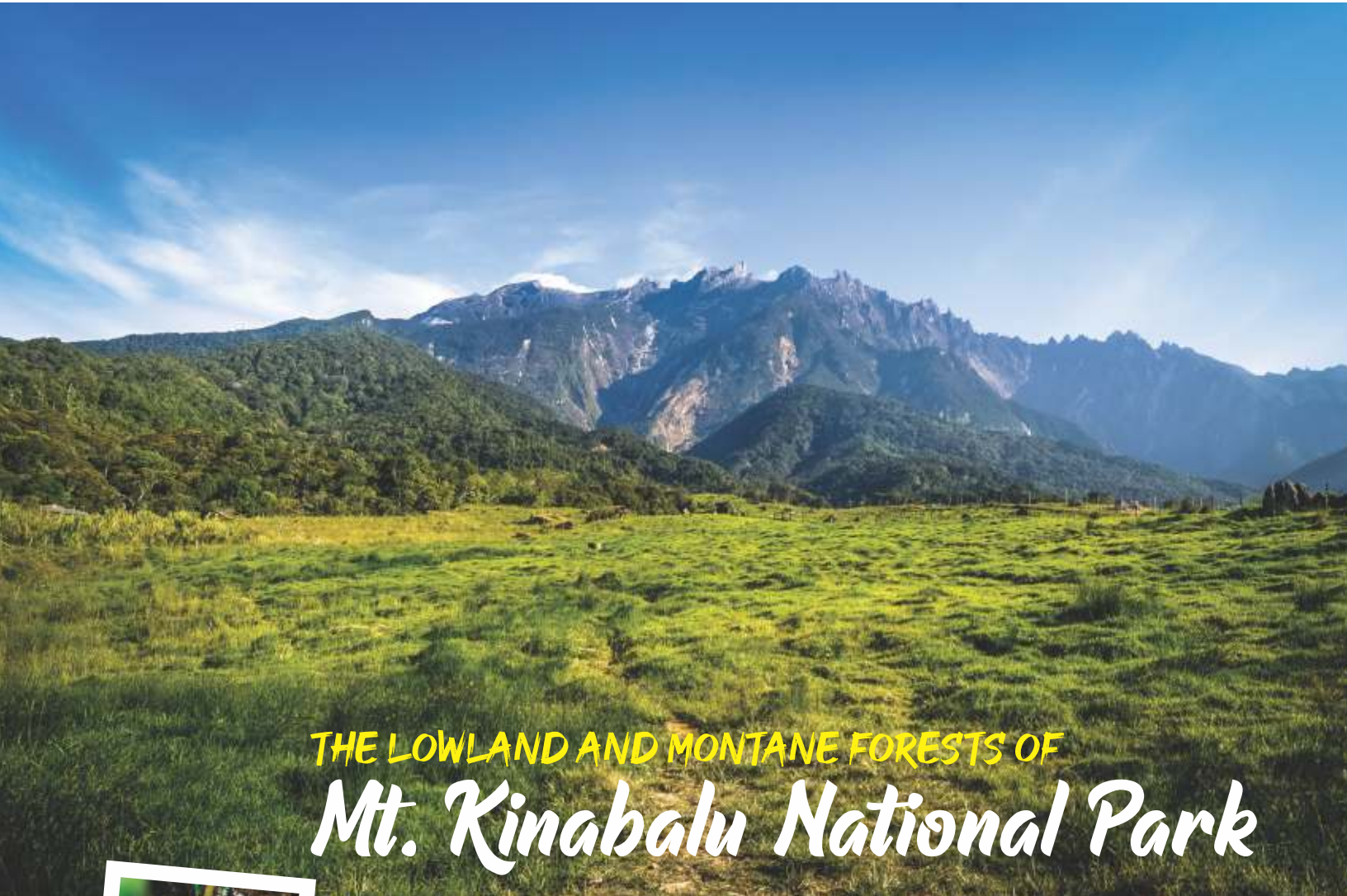


THE CLOUD FORESTS OF *Costa Rica*

THE MONTEVERDE CLOUD FOREST RESERVE IS ASTOUNDING IN ITS

BIODIVERSITY - over 2,500 plant species, 100 species of mammals, 400 bird species, 120 reptilian and amphibian species, and thousands of insects, make this one of the ecologically richest parks in the world. Wind-sculpted elfin woodlands give way to rainforests, where tall trees loom, and orchids, bromeliads, ferns, vines and mosses abound. This forest has one of the world's largest varieties of orchids - more than 400 different kinds of orchid recorded here. In 1972, the Monteverde rainforest was threatened by local farmers but George Powell and his wife joined forces with longtime resident Wildford Guidon to raise awareness about the need for the protection of this rich ecosystem. The Tropical Science Center accepted institutional responsibility for ownership and management of the protected areas. This is an example of Costa Rica's commitment to sustainability; a commitment to ongoing reforestation is another.

Visitors to the forest can hope to see interesting wildlife like the jaguar, ocelot, Baird's tapir, three-wattled bellbird, bare-necked umbrellabird and the quetzal.



THE LOWLAND AND MONTANE FORESTS OF *Mt. Kinabalu National Park*



MT. KINABALU NATIONAL PARK IS ONE OF THE FIRST NATIONAL PARKS IN MALAYSIA AND THE COUNTRY'S FIRST WORLD HERITAGE SITE SINCE 2000. The park is located on slopes of the massif. It is Southeast Asia's highest protected park. It's an excellent place to see the diverse range of Borneo's endemic plants and animals. From rich lowland forest through the montane oak, rhododendron, to the coniferous forests, the alpine meadow plants, and the stunted bushes of summit zone, each ecosystem harbours rich wildlife. It has been designated as a Centre of Plant Diversity for Southeast Asia and is exceptionally rich in species. More than 5000 species of plants have been identified here including many not seen elsewhere. The mountain is also known for its many carnivorous plant and orchid species, most notably *Nepenthes rajah*.

Around 326 species of bird and 100 of mammal inhabit the mountain's slopes. About 110 land snail species have been recorded. While climbing through the forests, look for hornbills, eagles and tree pies. Squirrels can be seen on the trees, and you may spot a mouse deer or a bearded pig. The forest is also the habitat of orangutans, Bornean gibbons and tarsiers. The park's importance is striking when you see how many nearby forests have been cleared for oil plantations.



VISIT THE LOWLAND FORESTS OF
Sinharaja



LOCATED IN SOUTH-WEST SRI LANKA, SINHARAJA IS THE LARGEST SURVIVING TRACT OF UNDISTURBED LOWLAND RAINFOREST IN THE COUNTRY.

An outstanding natural wonder known for its biodiversity, this Sinharaja Forest Reserve is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a globally-recognised Biodiversity Hotspot. To the north and south, the reserve is bounded by two sizeable rivers, the Kalu Ganga and the Gin Ganga, which cut picturesque, waterfall-studded courses through the tree. More than 60% of the trees are endemic and many of them are considered rare.

20 rainforest species endemic to Sri Lanka could be seen in this forest like the red-faced malkoha, green-billed coucal and Sri Lanka blue magpie. There are a large variety of reptiles and amphibians – tree frogs abound. Sri Lankan birdwing, one of the island's largest butterflies, occurs here. The towering hardwood trees, festooned with ferns, rise overhead as you walk through the forest, trilling with the calls of birds and cicadas. Purple-faced langur monkey and three species of squirrel – the dusky-striped jungle squirrel, flame-striped jungle squirrel and western giant squirrel – are usually seen. In the undergrowth, you may spot mongooses. There's also a rich reptile population, including 21 of Sri Lanka's 45 endemic species. Elephant, leopards, rusty spotted cats, fishing-cats and civets occur here but sightings are not common.



THE CONGO BASIN FOREST ECOSYSTEM OF THE Cameroon



THE FORESTS OF THE CONGO BASIN PROVIDE A SOURCE OF LIVELIHOODS FOR COMMUNITIES AND HABITAT FOR OVER 9,000 PLANT SPECIES, ABOUT 900 BIRD SPECIES, AND ROUGHLY 320

MAMMALS. The Dja Faunal Reserve is an integral part of the rain forests that form the Congo Basin. This vast range is one of the largest and best-protected African rainforests: 90% of its landscape remains undisturbed. Almost completely surrounded by the Dja River, which forms a natural



boundary, the reserve is especially noted for its biodiversity and a wide variety of primates. It contains 107 mammal species, and is best known for primates like the critically endangered western lowland gorilla, the endangered chimpanzee, white-collared mangabey, mandrill and drill. Forest elephants, African forest buffalo and leopard are among the large mammals that can be seen in this forest, which is also a home to about 320 species of birds.



THE DIVERSE ECOSYSTEMS OF *Gunung Leuser National Park*

GUNUNG LEUSER NATIONAL PARK IS A NATIONAL PARK COVERING 7,927 KM IN NORTHERN SUMATRA, INDONESIA.

This national park is Indonesia's largest reserve. Together with Bukit Barisan Selatan and Kerinci Seblat National Parks, it is recognized by UNESCO as a part of the Tropical Rainforest Heritage of Sumatra. This region is billed as the largest wilderness area in Southeast Asia. Of the estimated 400 Sumatran Tigers still living in Sumatra, more than 110 live in the park. Gunung Leuser National Park is one of the two remaining habitats for Sumatran orangutans. Sumatran elephant and Sumatran rhinoceros are spotted here along with siamang, sumatran serow, sambar deer and leopard cat. 🐾



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Incredible India

Heritage *in the* Himalayas



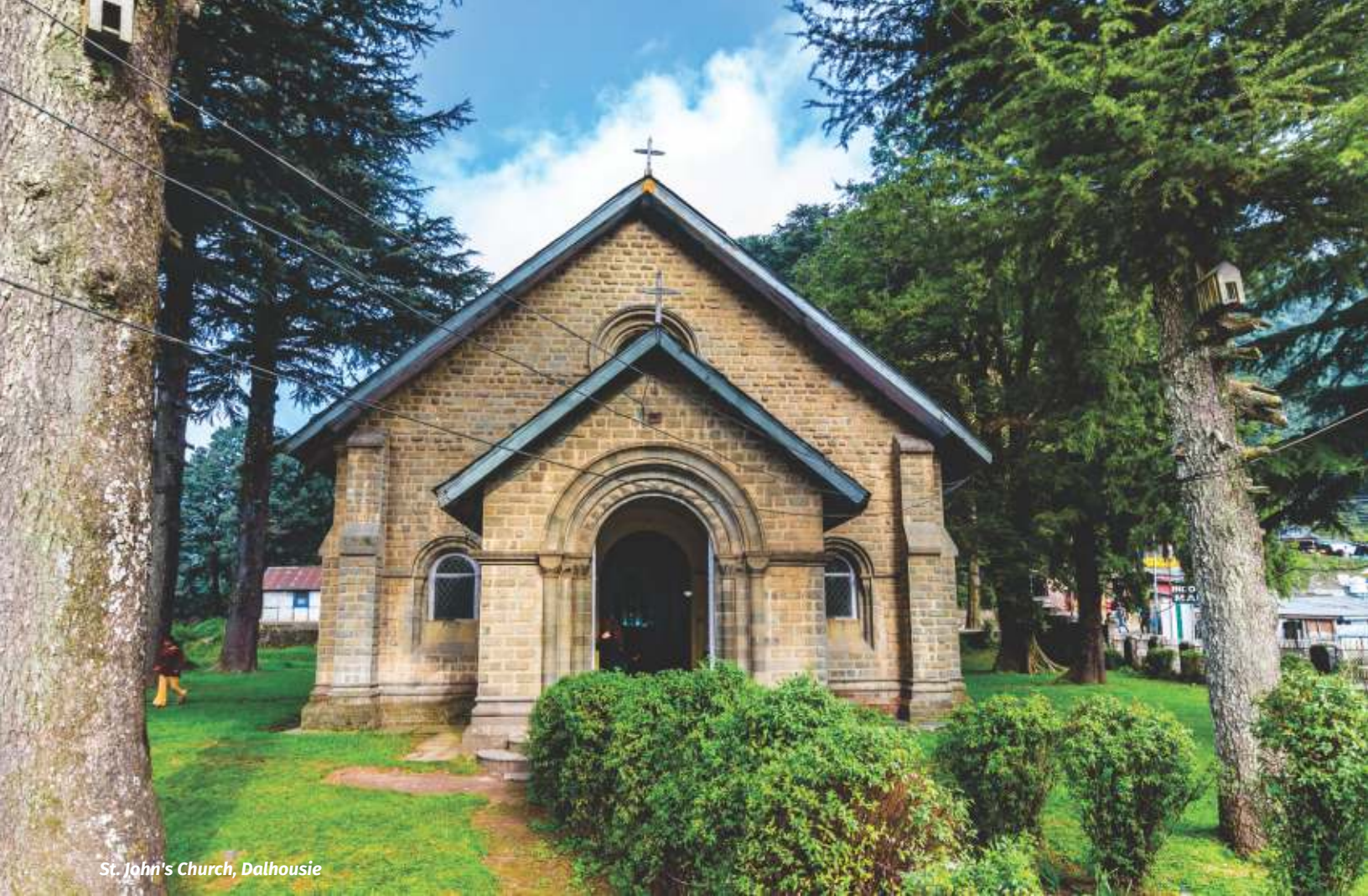
Himachal Pradesh is not only a great destination for a summer break with cool weather and snow peak views, it also has a rich architectural heritage. If you are looking for a combination of hill station holiday with sightseeing, head for these cities of Himachal.

Chamba offers an excellent introduction to Himachal Pradesh – it is rich in history, architecture, arts and handicrafts. The place has one of Himachal's best museums, and the town is set on the banks of the Ravi with a scenic location among mountains.

Start your tour of Chamba with a stay at Dalhousie. Sprawled over five hills, ranging in altitude from 5000 to 7800ft, Dalhousie is a quieter place than many other hill stations to enjoy a cool climate, superb views of Himalayan peaks and the Raj-era ambience of bungalows and churches set on leafy lanes. Some of the resorts near the bus stand offer spectacular views of the Pir

Panjal Range, and there are nice walks in the centre of town, the figure of eight loop of Garam Sarak-Thandi Sarak, the market and the old cantonment. When you want some more action, take the road to Kalatope Wildlife Sanctuary (about 8km from Dalhousie), which is excellent for bird and butterfly spotting treks. Continue from here to the saucer-shaped meadow of Khajiar for pony riding, paragliding, zorbing and a walk in deodar woodlands.

As you travel from Khajiar to Chamba, you can look forward to a view of the fast flowing river and snow-clad peaks from the bridge crossing the Ravi River to the town. Once across the bridge, the road ascends to Chaughan, the meadow that is the centre for recreational, sports and



St. John's Church, Dalhousie



Dalhousie

market activities in Chamba town. The townscape around the meadow is dominated by the Akhand Chandi Palace and the old palace called Rang Mahal, the 18th - 19th century residences of the Rajput clan that ruled Chamba for over 1000 years that currently house educational institutions and other public facilities. Opposite the palace complex, the Lakshmi Narayan Temple is one of the

finest temple complexes in the Western Himalaya. The complex comprises towering stone temples built between the 10th and the 19th century, with intricate stone shikaras and sedge-hat style wooden roofs of six temples visible in sequence from the entrance. Walk around the temples to see the panels carved with scenes from Hindu epics and mythological stories along the wall surfaces. Lakshmi Narayan



Tehri Dam, Chamba, Uttarakhand

Temple has richly carved walls. On another side of the meadow, the Bhuri Singh Museum has an excellent collection of miniature paintings including those of the Chamba School, Chamba

Rumals (exquisitely embroidered fabric pieces used as gift wrappings and coverlets), copper-plate inscriptions, masks, jewellery and the ornately carved stone slabs typical of Chamba district.

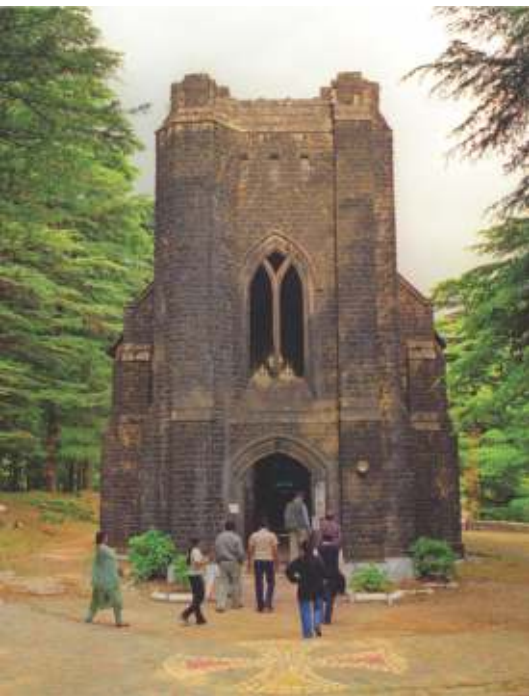
Drive from here to Brahmour, which has dramatic temples in the Chamba style and is surrounded by settlements of the Gaddi shepherds. Brahmour makes a starting point for superb treks and the famous Manimahesh Lake Yatra.

Chamba is rich in handicrafts like embroidered leather slippers and belts, silver jewellery and cast bronze figures, masks and bells that can be bought around the Chaughan. The Chamba Rumal is one of the specialty handicrafts of Chamba – these exquisitely embroidered fabrics used as handkerchiefs of coverlet have delicate handiwork inspired by miniature paintings.

From Dalhousie, drive towards Dharamshala. Just near Dharamshala is the Museum of Kangra Art that is well-known for historical Pahari miniatures. Stylized architecture and figures with large eyes, straight profiles, elaborate jewellery and fabulous clothing are typical of Pahari miniatures of the hill



Laxmi Narayan Temple, Chamba



states. The paintings evolved in the 18th century, during the reign of Raja Chanda Sansar Chand, and use the lush landscape of Kangra to provide the backdrop of romantic scenes. Temple carvings and princely memorabilia of the Katoch rulers are other key exhibits of the museum.

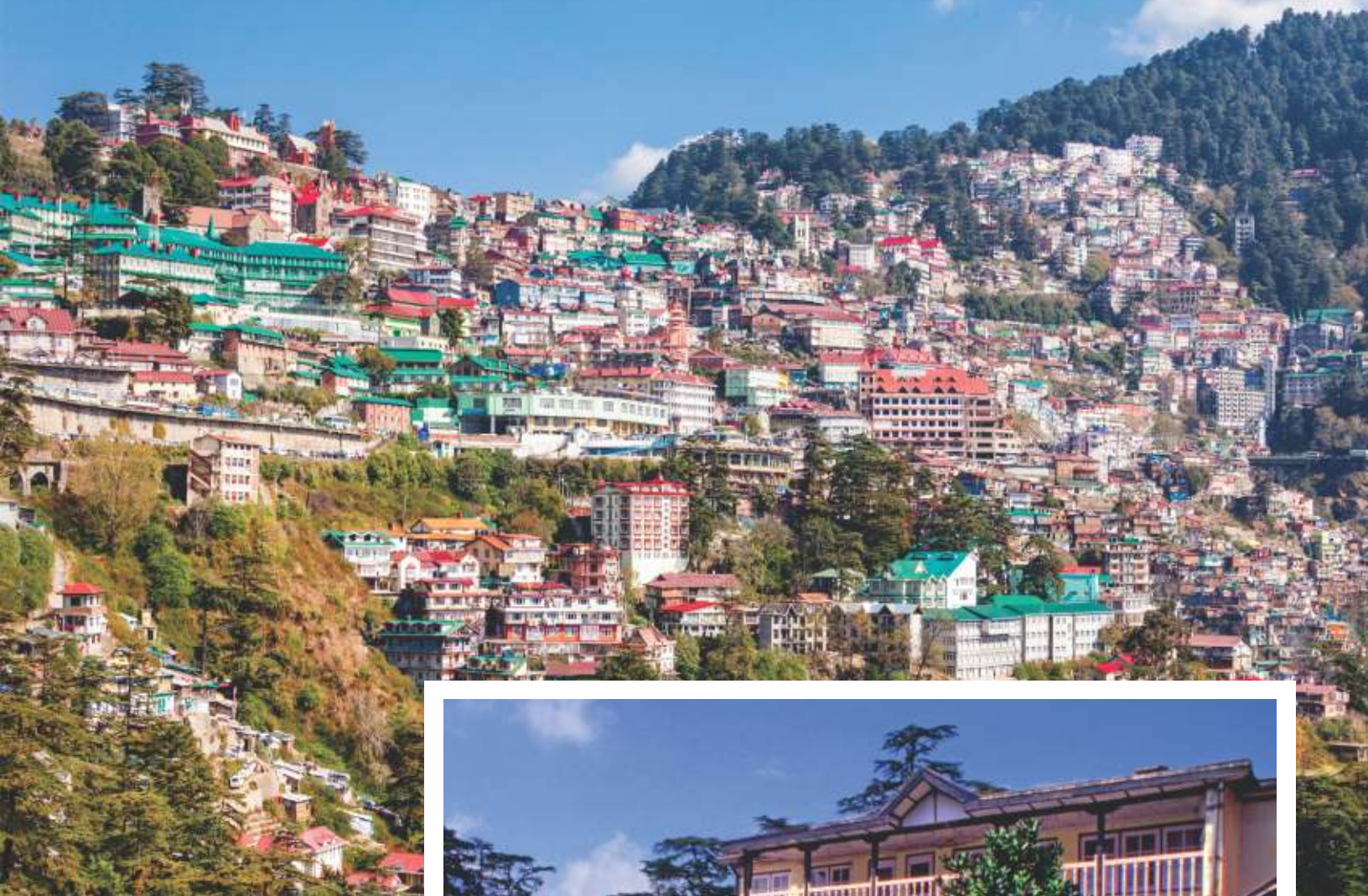
Near the museum is the town of Dharamshala, where you can visit the Norbulingka Institute founded to preserve Tibetan art and culture. The craftsmen here specialize in metalwork to make statues and relief panels usually with Buddhist and spiritual themes. Dharamshala's woodworkers make delightful cupboards, figures, picture frames, boxes and musical instruments. As you head up to McLeodganj or Upper Dharamshala, see the picturesquely situated Church of St John-in-the-wilderness, which has superb stained glass windows and wooded surroundings. Continue to ascend to McLeodganj to visit the Tsuglagkhang Complex which has fine Buddhist monasteries and temples. Near the



complex is a market where you can get thangka paintings on cloth, an art perfected in monasteries. Thangkas are considered removers of obstacles, and are hung to bring well-being, protect from evil eyes and to other spiritual purposes. They are also used in meditation halls. Mineral colours are widely used and the more important paintings are on silk. The appliqué thangka is like a scroll. McLeodganj has Buddhist temples, monasteries, institutes, museums, the façade of Dalai Lama's palace, the Tibetan settlement and some good walks.

From Dharamshala, travel to Jwalamukhi, which has a sacred temple. Further ahead, Pragpur is India's first Heritage Village. Lying in the shadows of Dhauladhar range, Pragpur was founded in the





late 16th century by the Patials in memory of Princess Prag Dei of the Jaswan Royal family. The area of Pragpur was part of the principality of Jaswan. Today, Pragpur retains its old world charm with cobblestone streets, old water tanks, mud-plastered walls, slate-roofed houses, havelis and villas. The grandest house of Pragpur, the 'kothi' of a jungle, is now a heritage hotel called Judges Court.

From Pragpur, drive to Shimla, which is set on a ridge, about 7300ft high, between a cluster of hills like the Jakhu peak, Observatory hilltop, Prospect Hill, Elysium Hill and the Choor Chandni hills. As Shimla was the summer capital of British India from the 1860s to 1947 – not surprisingly, this city boasts of one of India's finest collections





of Tudor and Gothic buildings.

Start with the ostentatious Viceregal Lodge, which houses Indian Institute of Advanced Study, and the bird park opposite the entrance. A short distance from here is Cecil Oberoi Hotel, which was the heart of the social scene of colonial Shimla and is now one of the most luxurious of Shimla's hotels.

Continue from the Cecil to the Observatory Hill from where a long walk eastward leads past the crumbling facades of grandiose 19th century buildings like Gorton Castle, the General Post Office, Gaiety Theatre, Library and Christchurch. En route you can drop in at the State Museum, which has art pieces ranging from 6th-11th century sculpture to magnificent 19th century Chamba murals in a Raj-building. A 20-minute walk or a short drive from the Christchurch will bring you to

Welcomheritage Woodville Palace. This rambling 1860s palace estate was once a retreat of His Highness Bhagwat Sinhji and then passed on to his in-laws, the Jubbal princely family. Drive past the terraced lawn to come to the imposing 1930s facade laden with trimmed vines. The interiors are equally impressive in their profusion of old furniture, beautiful antiques, historical references and old family photographs.

Another royal mansion converted into a heritage hotel is Chapslee, which was the summer residence of the Rajas of Kapurthala. Owned and run by the descendant of the original owners, this 1830s property has marvelous interiors with Gobelin tapestries, old wallpaper, carpets, ceramics, pieces of Victoriana and furnishings from the palaces of Venice.

Cecil Oberoi is the luxurious place to

stay in Shimla. One of the first hotels of the Oberoi family, this opulent hotel has wooden floors, colonial period furniture, rooms around an atrium, pretty gardens, excellent views and a special kid activity area. If views are high on priority, Springfield in Chhotta Shimla has spacious 1920s-style rooms in the summer retreat of the Raja of Shekhpura, with windows facing lovely views of the valley and the Choor Channi peaks.

44 kilometres from Shimla, Chail Palace is well known for its architecture. Now a tourist hotel, this palace was built as summer retreat by the Maharaja of Patiala during the British Raj. The cricket ground and a polo ground, at an altitude of 2,250m, was owned by erstwhile royal family of Patiala. It is perhaps the world's highest cricket ground. **10**



A BUDDHIST TRAIL IN SAURASHTRA

Buddhism thrived in Junagadh from the reign of Mauryan Emperor Ashoka in the third century BC. After ruthless conquests to expand his empire from Assam to Afghanistan and from the Himalaya to the Nilgiris during the early years of his reign, he was saddened by the plight of the people of Kalinga following his invasions and turned his back to war. This led him to the law of righteousness and the path of ethical conquest preached by Buddhism, which he worked to spread across Asia. Considered a noble ruler, reformer and statesman, Ashoka was known for his humanity, benevolence and tolerance. His rock edicts, inscribed at several sites across India, give instructions to his administrators to rule his subjects with fairness and expound Buddhist principles. One of his important sets of rock edicts can be seen in Junagadh.

After the decline of the Mauryan Empire, Buddhism continued to thrive around Junagadh during the reign of the Western Kshatrapas from the first to the fourth century AD.





Uperkot

The Maitraka rulers of Saurashtra patronised Buddhism, together with Hinduism and Jainism, during their rule from 470 to 788 AD. When Chinese travellers like Hiuen-Tsang and I-Tsing visited Gujarat during the Maitraka rule, they found thriving centres of Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism. Hiuen-Tsang in his travel writings described Vallabhi, the capital of the Maitraka rulers, as a large kingdom with a rich population. He saw about 100 monasteries accounting for about 6000 Buddhist monks, and found foreign students at the university. There are also reports of a large library dealing with schools of Hinduism and Buddhist thinking, and subjects like law, economics and the sciences. In the 7th century, Vallabhi was one of the most important Hinayana Buddhist universities and had been compared to Nalanda's Mahayana Buddhist university.

While Vallabhipur today does not have any Buddhist relics, Junagadh and its surrounding areas continue



Uperkot



Ashok Rock Edicts

to be an interesting place for those who want to see ancient Buddhist architecture.

At Junagadh, you can see the third century BC rock inscriptions of Emperor Ashoka housed in a building with the English translations of each edict displayed on the walls for the benefit of the visitor. According to these edicts in the Brahmi alphabet using the Prakrit dialect, Ashoka believed that to “foster one’s sect, depreciating the others out of affection for one’s own, to exalt its merit, it to do the worst harm to one’s own sect”. In these edicts, Ashoka preaches the mastery of the senses, purity of thought, gratitude and steadfastness in devotion, good deeds, kindness, liberality, truthfulness and tolerance of all religions. The edicts tell subjects to give up ambitions of glory and to replace superstition with respect for elders, courtesy to servants and other virtues. The edicts also proclaim changes in the lifestyle of the courts of Ashoka like the reduction in number of animals killed for food, the creation of

teams to preach virtues and dharma tours visiting monks and philosophers.

From the basalt rock with its edicts housed in a low rise building, proceed to the imposing Uparkot Fort, which has high walls and majestic gateways. Inside the fort, you can see the complex of Buddhist caves with three storeys of cell-like rooms set around a rain water tank. The caves reflect the advanced system of drainage and water utilisation prevailing in the period, and the cells are well-ventilated to get light and cool air.

The steps lead down to the tank with a seat on the fourth believed to have been for bathers to keep their clothing. The water is channelled through a pipe down the wall along the seat before entering a filtering cistern. The bath is open but there is a covered veranda on three sides and a southern corridor with a column that has floral ornamented capitals. The apartment in the northeast corner has a large chamber supported by six columns. A small cell with a smoke blackened hole in the roof could

have been the kitchen and beside it, a door leads to a stairway descending to a hall, which has delectable carvings. Over a bench recess is a frieze of carvings and chaitya-windows with two female figures.

On the opposite side of Uparkot Fort is another three storey cave complex with 13 cells cut into the rock face called ‘Baba Pyara’ or ‘Bawa Pyara’. The caves are arranged in three rows with the first line in the north facing southward featuring the largest cave on its west. The second line of caves has the Chaitya-Griha facing an open courtyard. The veranda in front of the Chaitya-Griha has a winged lion at each end and six pillars with lion capitals. The southern cave in this line has a sunken courtyard, a veranda and two cells. It is marked with Buddhist symbols and figures. The third line has five caves, each of which has a hall with a central pillar supporting its roof.

A third cave cluster is called Khapara Khodiya with cells set in an L-shape and a rain-water reservoir. It is unique in

having many water tanks.

You can see Buddhist relics exhibited at the Junagadh Museum in Sakkarbaug. This includes remains of the Boria Stupa discovered in the hills near Girnar, which had a solid brick core. The architectural fragments indicate that the railing and crown were probably made of stone.

Another Buddhist monument found in Junagadh district was a vihara at Intwa in the Girnar hills, which is dated to the reign of Rudrasen (199-222AD).

From Junagadh, it is a drive of about three hours to Una, passing through the forests of Gir. Taking a turn towards Timbi from NH-8E, the road leads to Vakia village after which the plains give way to hills as a metalled track leads to Shana Dungar, a hill marked with caves. In these hills, more than 60 caves have been found, believed to date from



Baba Pyare Cave





Khapra Kodia Cave

the 1st century BC to the 2nd century AD. The shelters have been carved at various levels on and around a hillock. Wander around the caves to see archaeological symbols representing the preaching Buddhism, rock-cut pillars, stupas, benches, chaityas, viharas, a pillared hall and various domes.

The largest is the Ebhal Mandap, which is about 22m wide, 5m high and 20m deep. The northeast-facing Bhimchory cave, sometimes written as Bhima-Chauri, has octagonal pillars and a stone bench. It is believed to have been a vihara. Near this cave is a chaitya-griha, which has a plain stupa, about 2.3m in diameter, and an apsidal rear. Cave-26 and Cave-13 are different from the others. They have long verandahs with simple pillars resting on raised basements. It functions as a support system for the beams above. The monasteries are also exquisitely designed with pillared verandahs that usually contain up to 4 cells at the back. The presence of benches around the hall is also an important feature of these caves.

The layout of Cave-48 is very different from the rest. It contains two halls of different dimensions. These halls contain



Khapra Kodia Cave



Khambhalida

benches around their perimeter. Most of the caves were carved at different heights and levels in the spur and could be approached by simple stairs cut into the rock. The presence of multiple tanks in this group of caves bears evidence to the importance given to water harvesting. With rock cut walls present on three sides and an oblong mouth on the other, these tanks were perfect for retaining water during the bleaker seasons.

A Sitaram Babu temple has been built on a hill, which has many caves connected to one another by rough hewn rock steps. A kund or water tank found near the site may have been the source of water for the residents of the caves.

From here, take the road to Talaja on the national highway running from Bhavnagar to Somnath. Talaja has 28 caves on a cone-shaped hill that has Jain temples on its summit. The most impressive is Ebhala Mandapa with a large hall fronted by four octagonal pillars. The other important cave is the ruined chaitya-griha with a stupa that



has a primitive version of the vedika and chaitya-window (horse-shoe shaped window).

From Talaja, it is a drive of about three hours to Gondal, from where you can continue to Virpur. Nearby Khambhalida has one of Gujarat's most impressive Buddhist caves. Steps lead down to the cluster of 15 caves in the centre is a chaitya-griha. The entrance to this cave is flanked by sculptures of Bodhisattvas. It is identified as Avalokiteshvara who is much revered by Buddhists as an embodiment of compassion and Vajrapani, one of the earliest bodhisattvas of Mahayana Buddhism. This cave site is of consider-

able interest as the only one in Gujarat with perfectly identifiable carvings of bodhisattvas, beings who assist people to achieve complete enlightenment or Buddhahood. This cave, believed to date to the fourth century, also has the remains of a stupa.

Another site nearby is at Dhank where there are some Buddhist caves hewn into a ravine. The first cave has a cell with a shrine door that has a Buddha figure. On the eastern side is a recess from where the image has disappeared but there are noteworthy flying figures. ■

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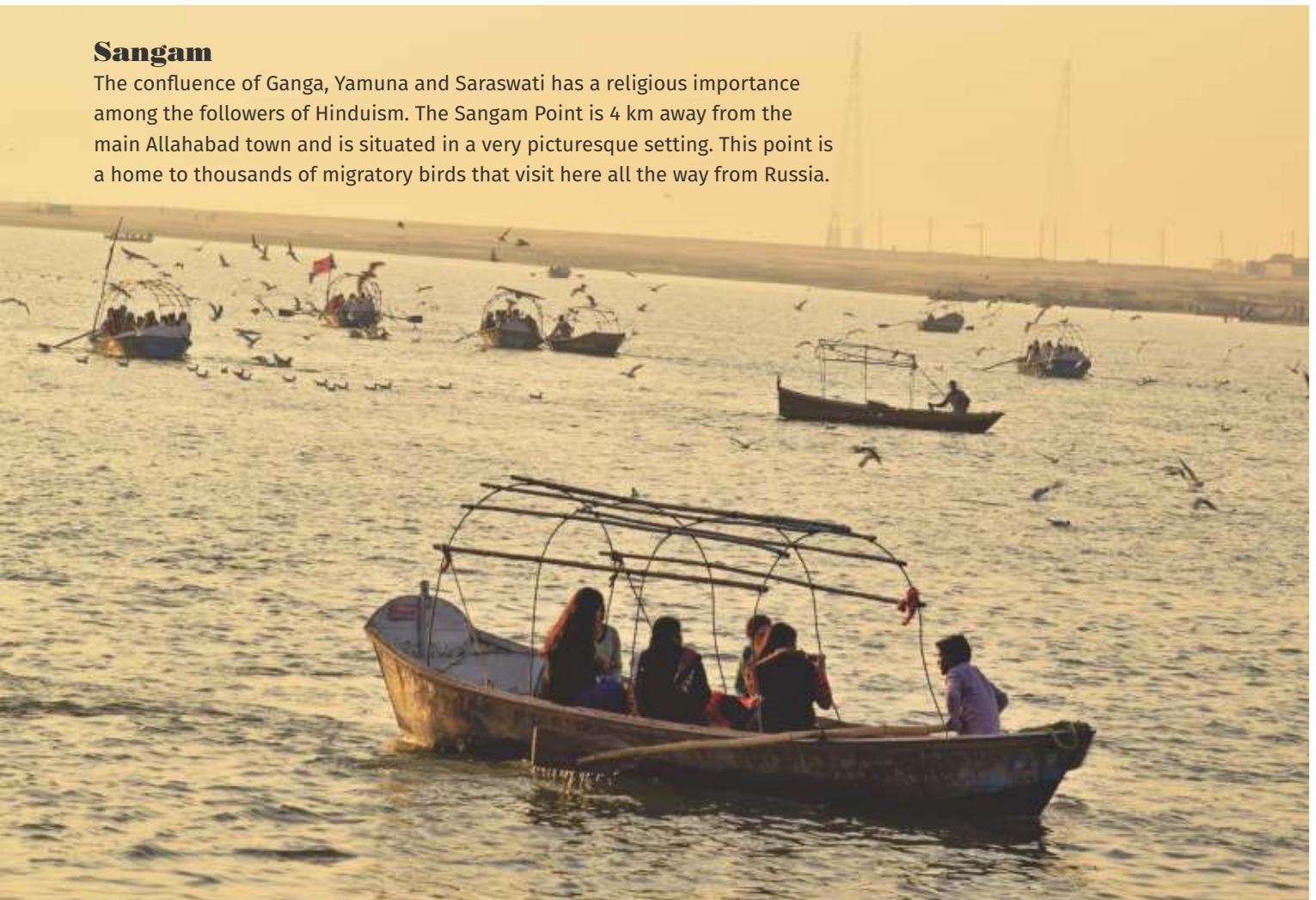
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Words by ANIL MULCHANDANI

A Tryst with SANGAM NAGRI

Sangam

The confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati has a religious importance among the followers of Hinduism. The Sangam Point is 4 km away from the main Allahabad town and is situated in a very picturesque setting. This point is a home to thousands of migratory birds that visit here all the way from Russia.



Varanasi and Allahabad are merely 3 hours away from each other, and yet there is an astonishing contrast between the auras of both the towns. Varanasi has a vibe that makes visitors to indulge in the mysteries hiding in its tiny lanes. Allahabad, on other hand, opens up to the visitors and shows everything that is

present in its different corners.

The City of Allahabad, originally named as Prayag, is a beautiful blend of culture and heritage. The history goes back to thousands of years and it has bestowed the town with an array of landmarks worth exploring. The soil of Allahabad is irrigated by the blood of many freedom fighters and martyrs. The

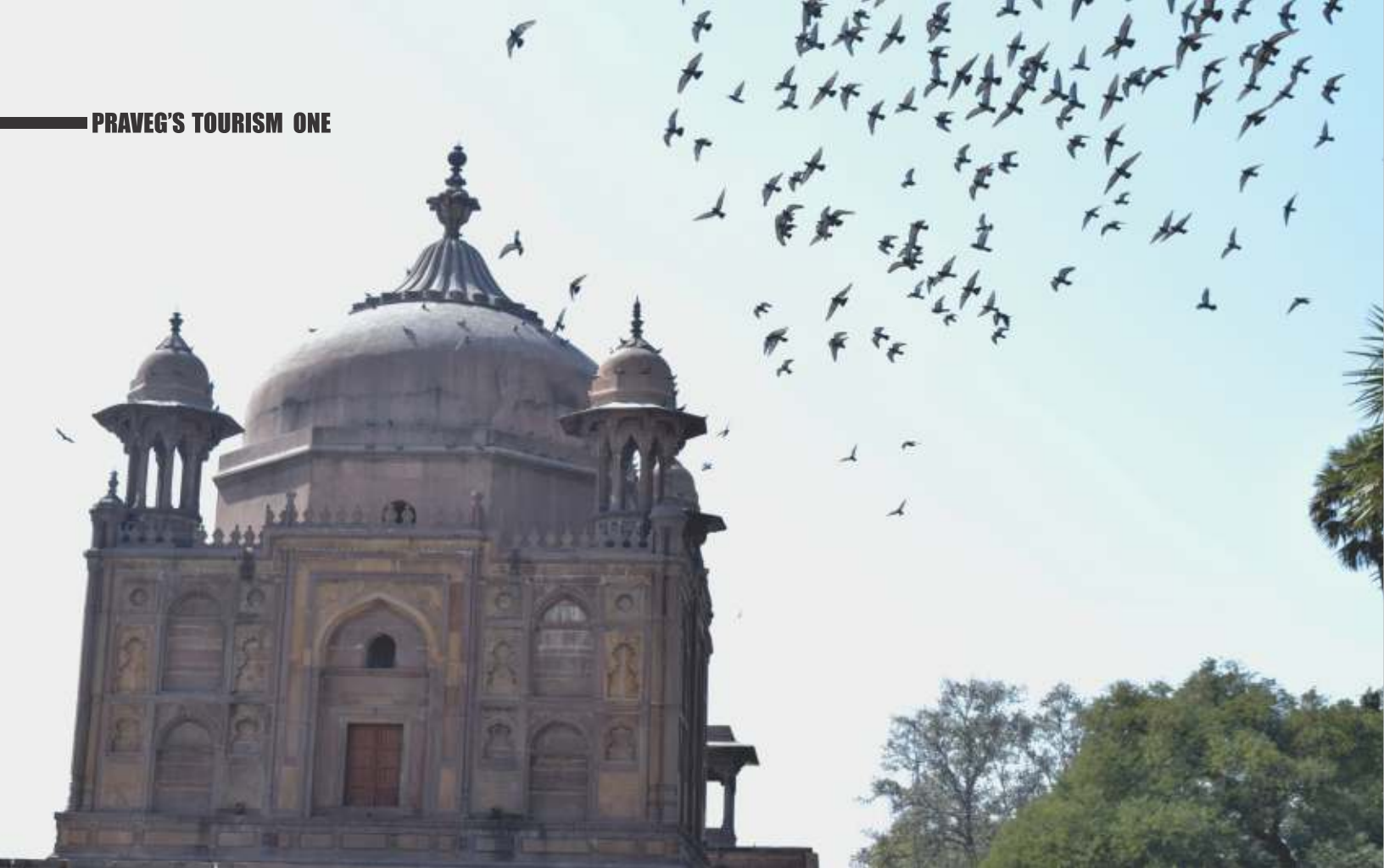
City, where the Ganges, Yamuna and Saraswati meet, has so much to explore. Here's the list of important places, including monuments, museums and food spots to make your Allahabad visit worth the journey.

Exploring Allahabad and making the best out of your visit



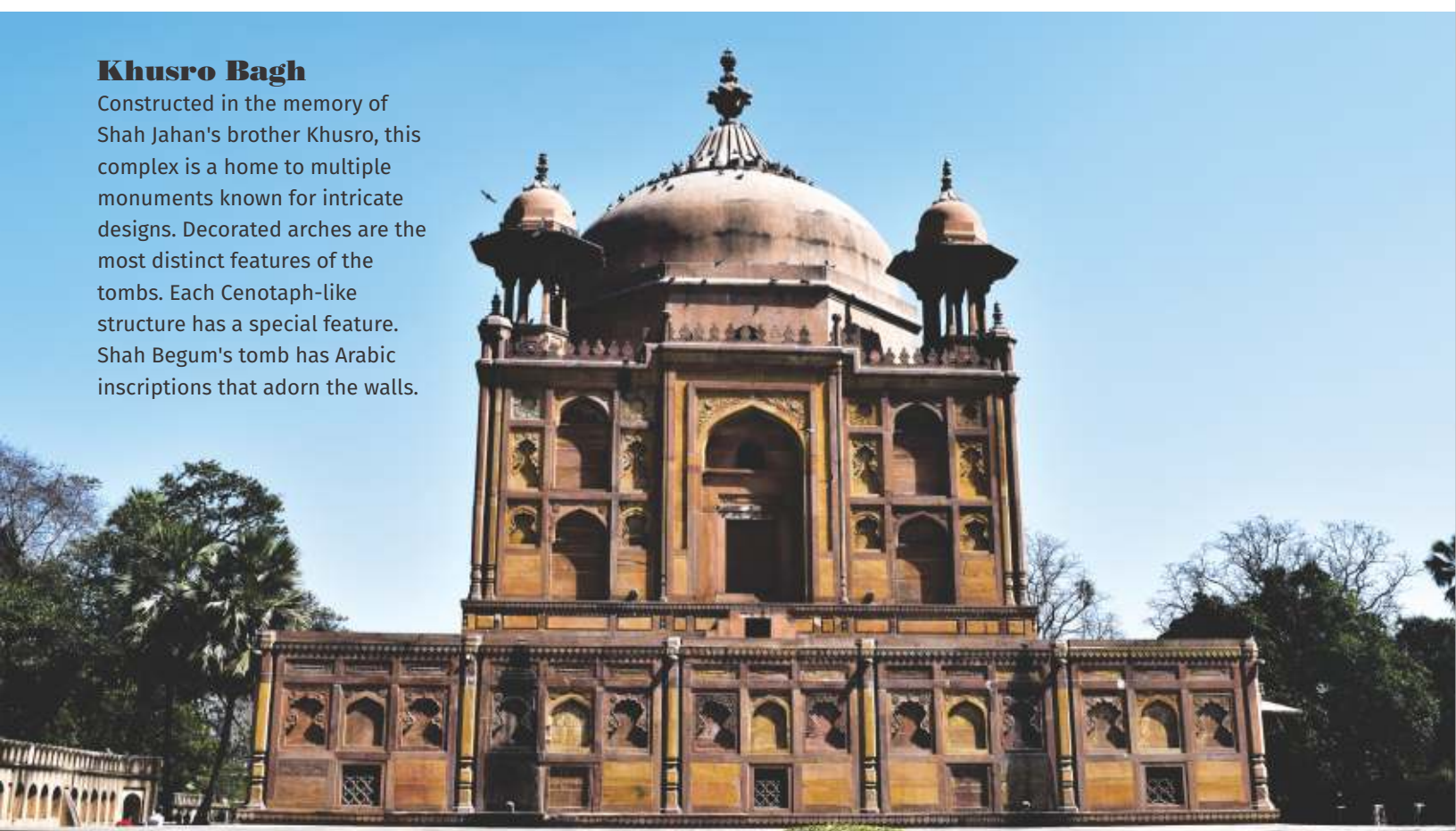
Anand Bhavan

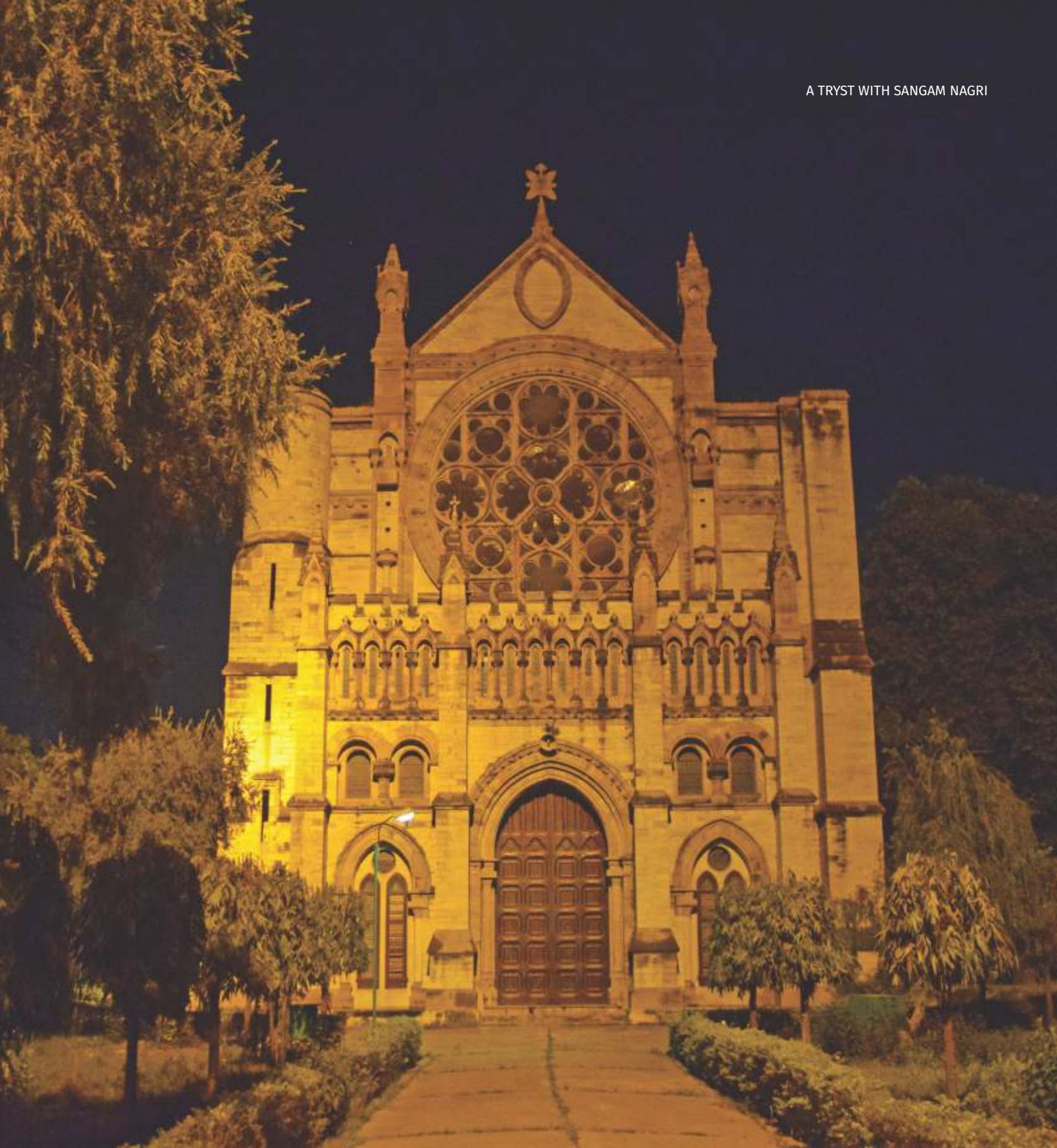
India's first Prime Minister Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru spent his childhood at this place. Today, Anand Bhavan is open for tourists and displays belongings from the life and times of Nehru Family. Since photography is not allowed inside the galleries, one can only click the portraits of the main building from a distance.



Khusro Bagh

Constructed in the memory of Shah Jahan's brother Khusro, this complex is a home to multiple monuments known for intricate designs. Decorated arches are the most distinct features of the tombs. Each Cenotaph-like structure has a special feature. Shah Begum's tomb has Arabic inscriptions that adorn the walls.





All Saints Cathedral

All Saints Cathedral is a love letter to the admirers of Gothic Architecture and is influence in India. This cathedral has a very unique appearance that is rare to find in North India. Constructed in the year 1877, the combination of white and red sandstone creates a very vibrant setting.



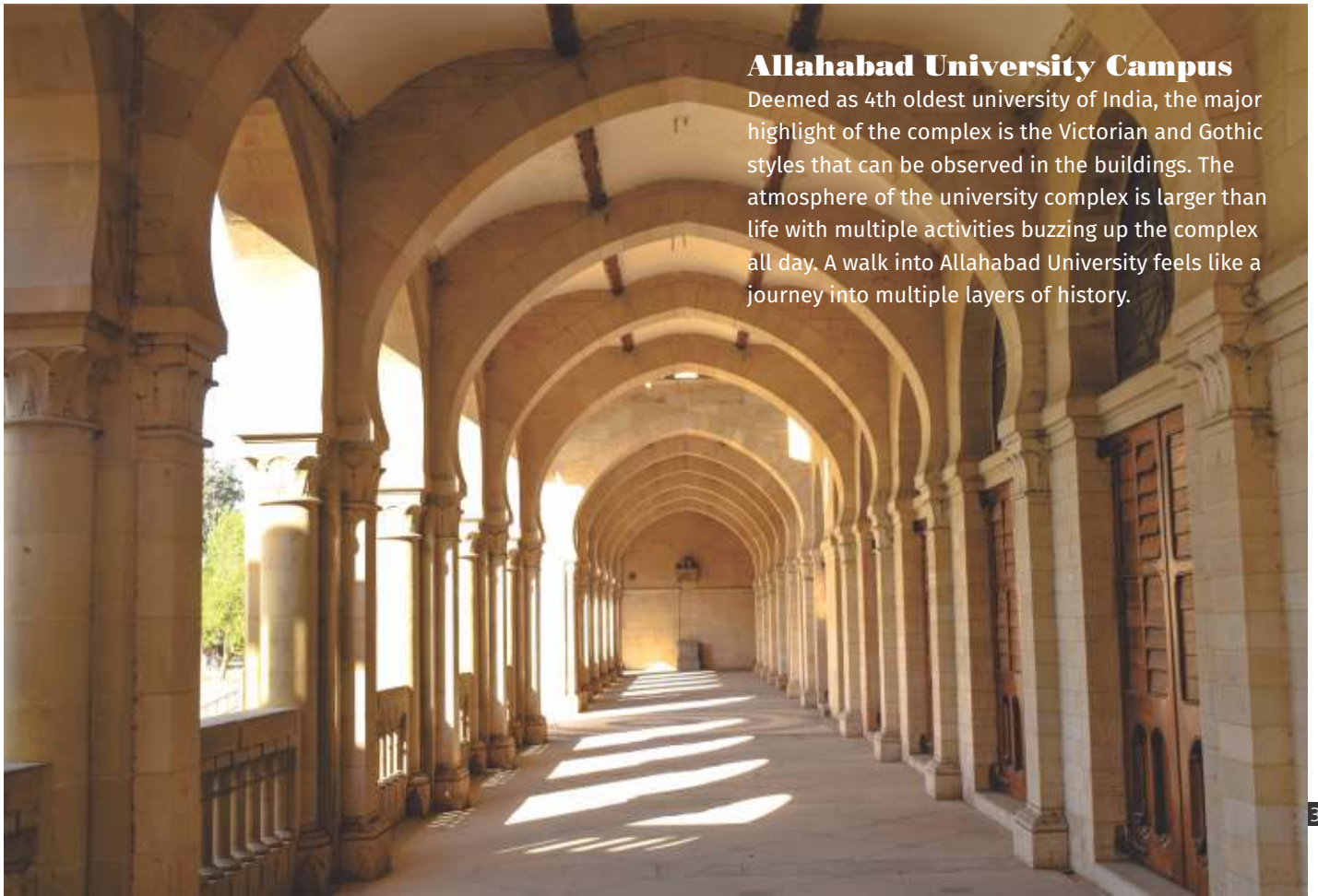
Allahabad Museum

The number of displays and exhibits in the many galleries make this place one of the most important museums in India. This multi-storied building consists of excavated remains from Harappan era, photos from Indian freedom movements, personal photos from the life of Indian political personalities and many samples of modern artworks.

Company Bagh

Company Bagh is adjacent to Allahabad Museum complex and has a special place in the city's history. This was the location where Revolutionary Chandrasekhar Aazad gained martyrdom after a skirmish with British Soldiers. A memorial for his bravery is constructed in the centre of the park and one can also see many plays and activities going around during afternoon and evening.





Allahabad University Campus

Deemed as 4th oldest university of India, the major highlight of the complex is the Victorian and Gothic styles that can be observed in the buildings. The atmosphere of the university complex is larger than life with multiple activities buzzing up the complex all day. A walk into Allahabad University feels like a journey into multiple layers of history.



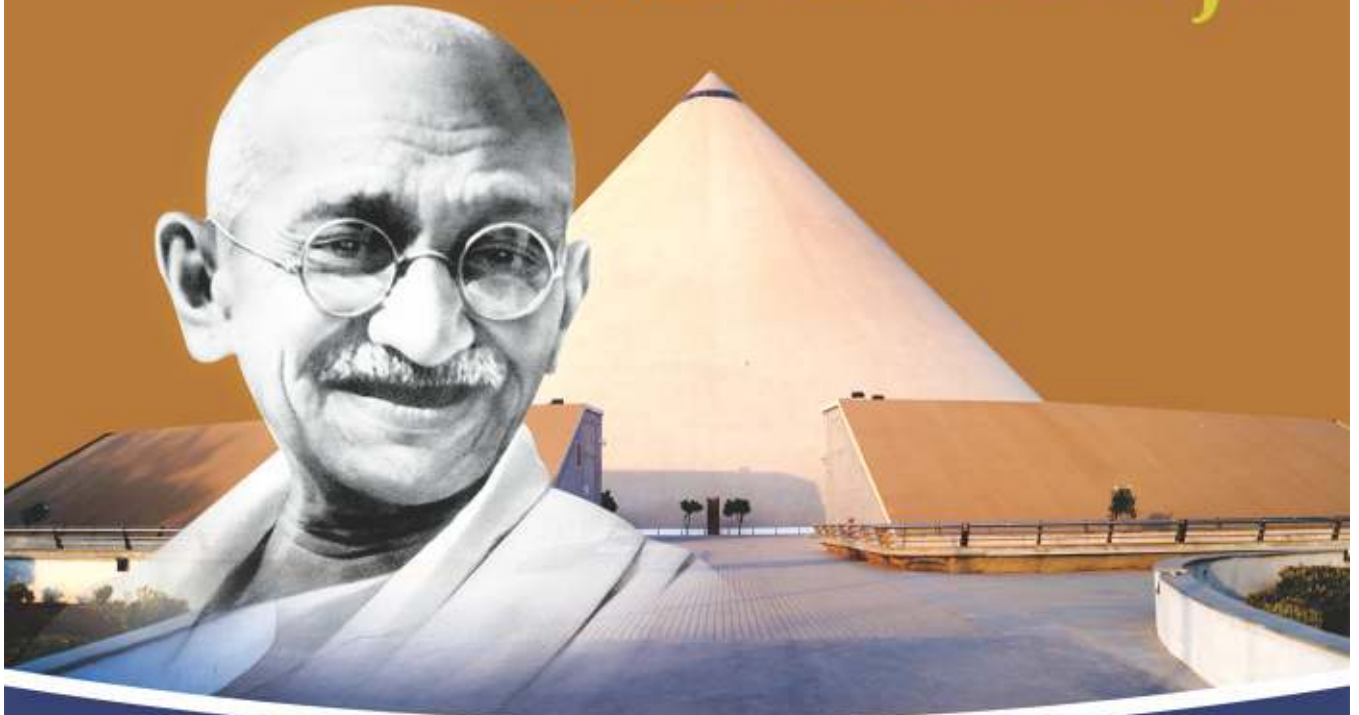
Must Try Allahabad Food

Allahabad's food has a legendary status. The city dwellers speak highly of the outlets that have been serving for hundreds of years. Among these, Netram's name stays on the top. They are known for their special puri and jalebi that simply ignite all the senses of taste buds.

Dahi Jalebi is another iconic breakfast favourite of the locals. It is easy to find shops that start preparing the same from 5 in the morning. 🍽️



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Incredible India



PATRIOTIC DESTINATIONS

If you are looking to salute our armed forces, these are some destinations where you can get an insight into the Army, Air Force or Navy.



Watch the border ceremonies at Punjab

Amritsar is one of the most visited tourist destinations in India, thanks to the Golden Temple. The Jalianwala Bagh here is one of the most poignant memorials of the Indian freedom struggle. The massacre of Jalianwala Bagh is commemorated by a memorial of national importance, established in 1951 by the Government of India. Near this public park, the Partition Museum in the grand Town Hall building tells the story of those who lost their lives or property during the partition. The museum exhibits artifacts, stories, materials, photographs, news clippings and documents related to the partition and the riots that followed. The Boundary Commission room describes the ad-hoc way that the boundaries were drawn in just 5 weeks with outdated censuses and incorrect maps. Special features of the museum are the oral histories played on video and soundscapes. You can hear Kuldip Nayar recount his interview with Cyril Radcliffe and read W.H. Auden's disconcerting poem, understand how people came with great difficulty on trains, boats, cars, or even on foot often without food and water, and the state of the refugee camps. The museum has the life-size replica of a train station, and on the platform, the objects carried by refugees on their journeys. There are also superb artworks and installations themed on partition.

In the late-afternoon, leave Amritsar for Wagah, the last outpost on the Indian border with Pakistan. This is the site for a spectacular evening ceremony. This daily event is participatory, inviting the audience to participate in running with the flag or dancing to patriotic songs. The Changing of the Guards and the Lowering of the Flag ceremonies are both accompanied by much show and rivalry. On both sides of the border, the uniformed teams of men and women taking turns, put up a display of



elaborate and rapid dancelike manoeuvres, aggression, scorn, showmanship and foot stamping, winning the applause of the audience. At sundown, uniformed guards on either side of the border goosestep to the flagpoles where they lower their respective national flags. The movement of the marching team raising legs as high as possible is so well synchronized it looks like mirror images of the same exercise. As the sun sets, the iron gates at the border are opened and the two flags are lowered simultaneously. The flags are folded and the ceremony ends with a retreat that involves a brusque handshake between

soldiers from either side, followed by the closing of the gates again.

Similar theatrics to the one at the Wagah-Attari Border can be seen at Mahavir/Sadqi border near Fazilka and Hussainiwala/Ganda Singh Wala border near Ferozpur.

Visit the India-China border at Sikkim

One of the top attractions of Gangtok is the drive to the Nathula Pass, which connects the Indian state of Sikkim with China's Tibet Autonomous Region. This pass is one of the three open trading border posts between China and India.

From Gangtok, the drive to Nathula Pass goes through spectacular countryside. On the way, you can visit the Tsomgo Lake or Chhangu Lake, a glacial lake 12,313 ft above sea level revered by Buddhists and other Sikkimese people. The lake is oval shaped, 2,743 ft by 1,401 ft in optimum area, changing its colour by season. In winter, it is usually completely frozen. As summer begins, the alpine forests are lush green along the lake. And by June, you can see



rhododendrons, primulas, poppies, irises and other flowers. There are food and tea stalls along the lake, and yak rides are possible. Continue from here to the 14,140 ft high Nathula Pass. You can see the army outposts on the either side of the border at this pass, a Border Personnel Meeting point between the Indian Army and the People's Liberation Army of China.

Another must-visit in Sikkim is Gurudongmar Lake located at an altitude of 17,800 ft, making it India's highest lakes. The lake can be visited as part of a North Sikkim tour with Yumthang and Lachung. The journey from Lachung to the high altitude lake passes through rugged terrain with high alpine pastures and rhododendron trees. The army post on the way has a café at 15,000ft above sea level, tagged as the highest café in the world. Run by the army, this café has a souvenir shop too.



Visit the Museum Ship at Karwar

Set on the beautiful Rabindranath Tagore Beach in Karwar, it is possible to see the interiors of the INS Chapal (K94), which was a missile boat that is now a museum ship. This ship is known for its services in the India - Pakistan war of 1971. The ship stands on a concrete platform. It has mannequins, which show the progression of the uniforms worn by the members of the naval ship crew. The ship also contains replicas of the missiles used on this boat.





Take a look at the Indian Navy's aircraft fleet in Goa

The Naval Aviation Museum is one-of-its-kind in Asia, showcasing the Naval Air Arm. The museum is not very far from Goa's Dabolim Airport. Share the excitement of Naval Aviation's rich history and see some of the well-restored aircrafts that once served the Indian navy. Constructed in 1961 on the base of an incomplete British naval ship, INS Vikrant was commissioned as the first aircraft carrier of the Indian Navy in 1961. The name Vikrant means "stepping beyond", "courageous" or "bold". The ship first carried British Hawker Sea Hawk fighter-bombers and French Alizé anti-submarine aircraft. On 18 May 1961, the first jet landed on her deck. The flight decks were designed to handle aircraft up to 11000 kg and the carrier fielded between more than 20 aircraft of all types. INS Vikrant served the Indian





armed forces in the naval blockade of East Pakistan during the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971 to counter the Pakistani maritime forces deployed in support of military operations in East Bengal, which became East Pakistan and is currently the country of Bangladesh.

The museum is divided into two main parts, an outdoor exhibit and a two-storey indoor gallery. The two storey indoor gallery showcases the evolution of the Indian Naval Air Arm over decades. Walk through designated rooms that hold models of INS Vikrant and other vessels, the armaments room with weapons, the attires room with uniforms and accessories, tales of naval and air battles, photographs, documents and naval memorabilia.

Outside you can see 13 aircraft representing different periods from the 1950s to the 1990s. You can buy souvenirs at the museum shop.



Checkout the history of the Indian Air Force in Delhi

Close to the Delhi Airport at Palam, the Air Force Museum offers an insight into Indian Military Aviation and the history of Indian Air Force. If you are fond of planes, this is the place to see some well-kept vintage aircraft.

The Museum entrance features an indoor display gallery that contains historic photographs, memorabilia, uniforms and personal weapons from 1932 to present times. The gallery leads to a hangar exhibiting small aircraft, anti-aircraft guns, vehicles and equipment. War trophies, radar equipment and captured enemy vehicles are also


on display, mostly outdoors. They also have a Vintage Aircraft collection, which is displayed only on the annual Air Force Day. This museum too has a small souvenir shop.

Board a naval submarine at Visakhapatnam

One of the few military museum submarines in the world, INS Kursura (S20) was a diesel electric submarine of the Indian Navy. This submarine played a key role in the India-Pakistan War of 1972. Board the submarine to see the workings inside. Retired naval officers are often around to tell visitors about the hardships the navy team faces aboard a submarine. 📌

Incredible India

TRIPURA'S FLOATING WONDER



Neermahal's name is synonymous with tourism in Tripura. The state takes immense pride in this unique piece of architecture and why not! Neermahal translates to Water Palace. It is located in Melaghar, a historical town 53 km away from Agartala. It was built by Maharaja of Tripura, Bir Bikram Kishore Debbarma Manikya (1908-1947) as his summer palace. Today, Neermahal stands diligently in the middle of Rudrasagar Lake with white exterior shining bright in the sun.

Neermahal boasts of beautiful architectural designs from inside and outside. Since the king himself saw the construction process, he focussed upon blending both Muslim and Hindu cultures, and tradition in the architectural designs. The major part of the building uses sandstone and

marble. Every part of the palace, including pavilions, balconies, towers and bridges, have intricate designs and details worth analysing. There are dome-shaped minars that create a fort like appearance from a distance.

The interiors of Neermahal are very serene. The summer palace was designed to help the royal family and their guests find some freedom from the scorching heat. They even hired services from a British company to achieve the same.

Rudrasagar Lake itself is a beautiful place to explore. The lake is used for fishing and the local fishermen can be seen setting up their traps and removing the nets from deep water. Since the only way to reach the palace is by a boat, you get to see the life around the lake in a much detailed way.

*Sunset on Rudrasagar Lake is a treat to behold.
Changing colours make the atmosphere beautiful.*



It took around 9 years to build this palace that has 24 rooms inside.

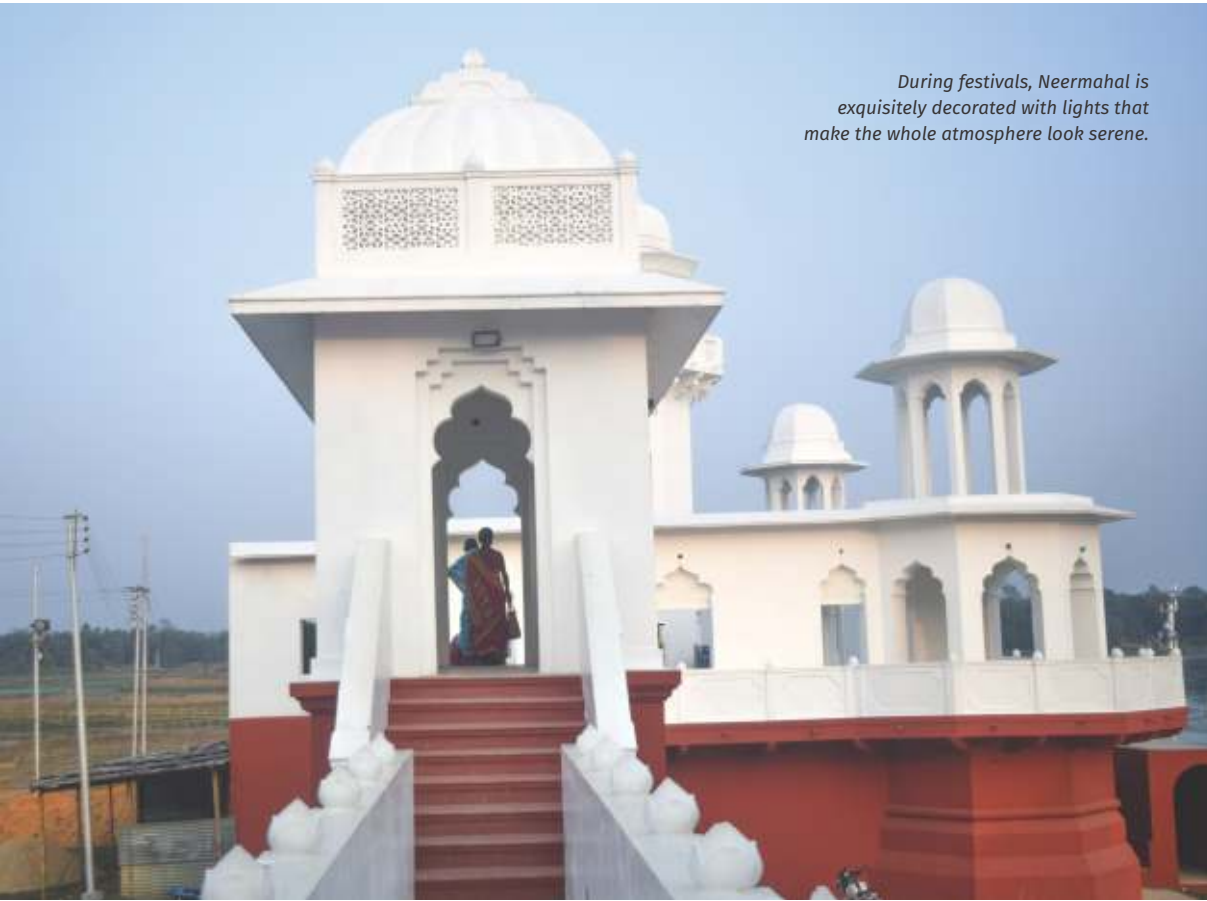




Fishermen have made temporary setup around the palace and it serves as a source of their livelihood.



The interiors of the palace have beautiful gardens, fountains and courtyard. The vibe of the palace is very scenic and calm.



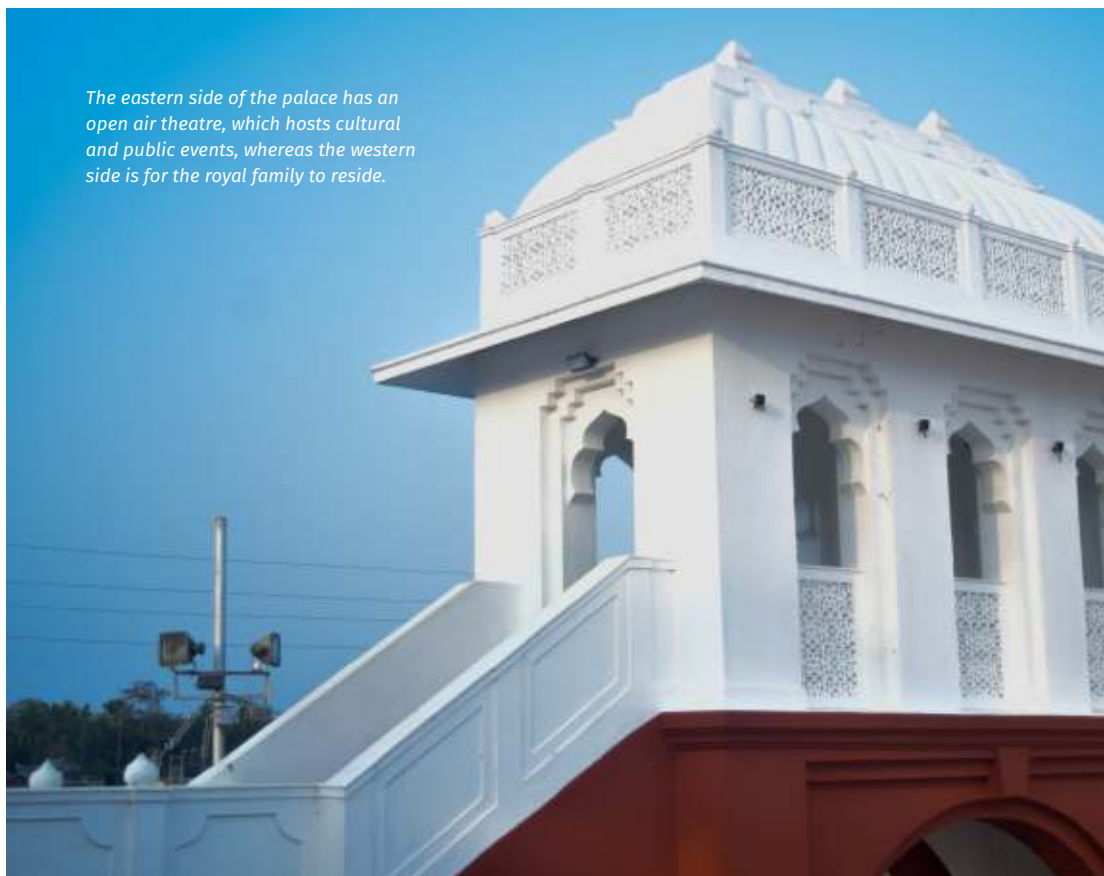
During festivals, Neermahal is exquisitely decorated with lights that make the whole atmosphere look serene.

How to reach Neermahal

Neermahal is located in Melaghar, 53 km away from Tripura's capital Agartala. Regular buses and shared jeeps run between both locations and take almost 1.5 to 2 hours. From Melaghar bus stand, you'll find auto-rickshaws going to Neermahal. Once you are at the Ferry Point, a 10-minute boat ride will take you to the palace and will give you 45 minutes to explore the premises.

Best time to visit Neermahal is after 2 PM. The sun starts to go down by the time you reach ferry point and the backdrop of the palace looks very gorgeous with orange sky.

Shared boat costs INR 20 while the entry fee is INR 80 with INR 100 fee for camera. 📷



The eastern side of the palace has an open air theatre, which hosts cultural and public events, whereas the western side is for the royal family to reside.

“
Tucked away in the remote hills of Northern Gujarat near the Rajasthan border are a number of lesser known heritage sites. Ranging from ancient archaeological sites to the living tribal heritage of terracotta shrines, these places are worth exploring.
”

Hidden Gems of North Gujarat



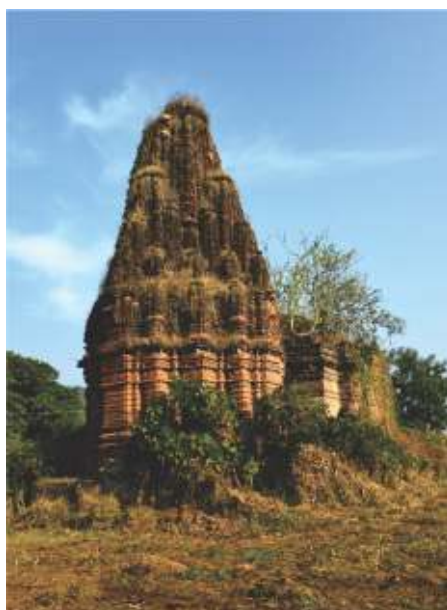
Himmatnagar to Shamlaji

The highway north from Ahmedabad to Udaipur passes the historic town of Himmatnagar before reaching Shamlaji on the banks of the Meshvo River with wooded hills around a valley. Shamlaji is one of the 154 important pilgrimage sites of Vaishnavism.

It is chiefly a Vaishnavite place and is known in the Puranas as Gadadhar Kshetra, the land of the Lord with a Club, but there are also ruined Shiva temples that show it was a Shaivite site as well.

Looming up near the highway, the Shamlaji temple with its white flag (it is locally called Dholi Dhajawala Mandir) rising from its spire is much visited. You enter the walled temple complex by a gateway and are presented by the façade of sandstone and brick. The two-storey temple stands on pillars, and on each side, the canopy has arches. A pyramidal tower with a shikhara (spire) rises up over the shrine with a flat terrace and small domes. A copper inscription at the entrance of the temple says the temple was renovated in 1762 AD by the then Thakor of Tintoi, while other inscriptions show it was ancient. There is ornamental sculpture inside as well as outside. Some fine stone carvings can be seen along the wall, including figures in bass-relief, men on horseback with bows and animals. The elephant is a recurring theme in many parts of the façade. The carvings include deities, friezes, and scenes from Ramayan and from the life of Shri Krishna.

For architecture buffs, some of the interesting ruined temples nearby are Somnarayan Temple, which many believe was the older Shamlaji temple, the Kashi Vishwanath Mahadev temple and the temple at Harishchandra ni Chori Temple, which is said to date back to the tenth century. An ornamental Torana leads to a rectangular sanctum and a large pavilion in front of it.



PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE

Trilokeshwar is a small temple opposite the Shamlaji temple dedicated to Shiva having idol with trident. On the opposite bank of the river, there is a temple dedicated to Ranchhodji, another form of Krishna.

Some partially broken beautiful idols of the Matrikas and other gods, belonging to the 6th and 7th centuries, were found by the side of a ravine in the Shamlaji hills, establishing the antiquity of the place to still earlier periods.

Visit the archaeological museum at Shamlaji, which has some sculptures found at the Shamlaji sites and a replica of the Buddhist relics casket unearthed at Devni Mori. Submerged by the Meshvo River dam and only visible when the water level is really low is the Buddhist site of Devni Mori. Just south of Shamlaji, a bridge leads off National Highway-8 across the Mesho River to a path leading to the village of Devni Mori, spelt Devani Mori or Devnimori in some maps. This village has come into limelight because of the excavations in



the area that has revealed the presence of a substantial Buddhist site.

The stupa found here gives an idea of the ground plan. A plaque indicates the design of the stupa that was in a three tiers - a platform, the centre and an elongated dome. The square platform was 25.8m wide and 2.4m high with a path that could have been used for pradiksinapatha. The elevation of the platform shows four mouldings, capitals decked with leaves and circles, pilasters in relief and a frieze of floral and geometric panel designs. Though badly damaged at the time of the excavation, the archaeologists believe that the second tier of the stupa was the most important as it housed terra cotta images of seated Buddha in Dyanamudra, a position of meditation with the fingers showing intense concentration, kept in niches.

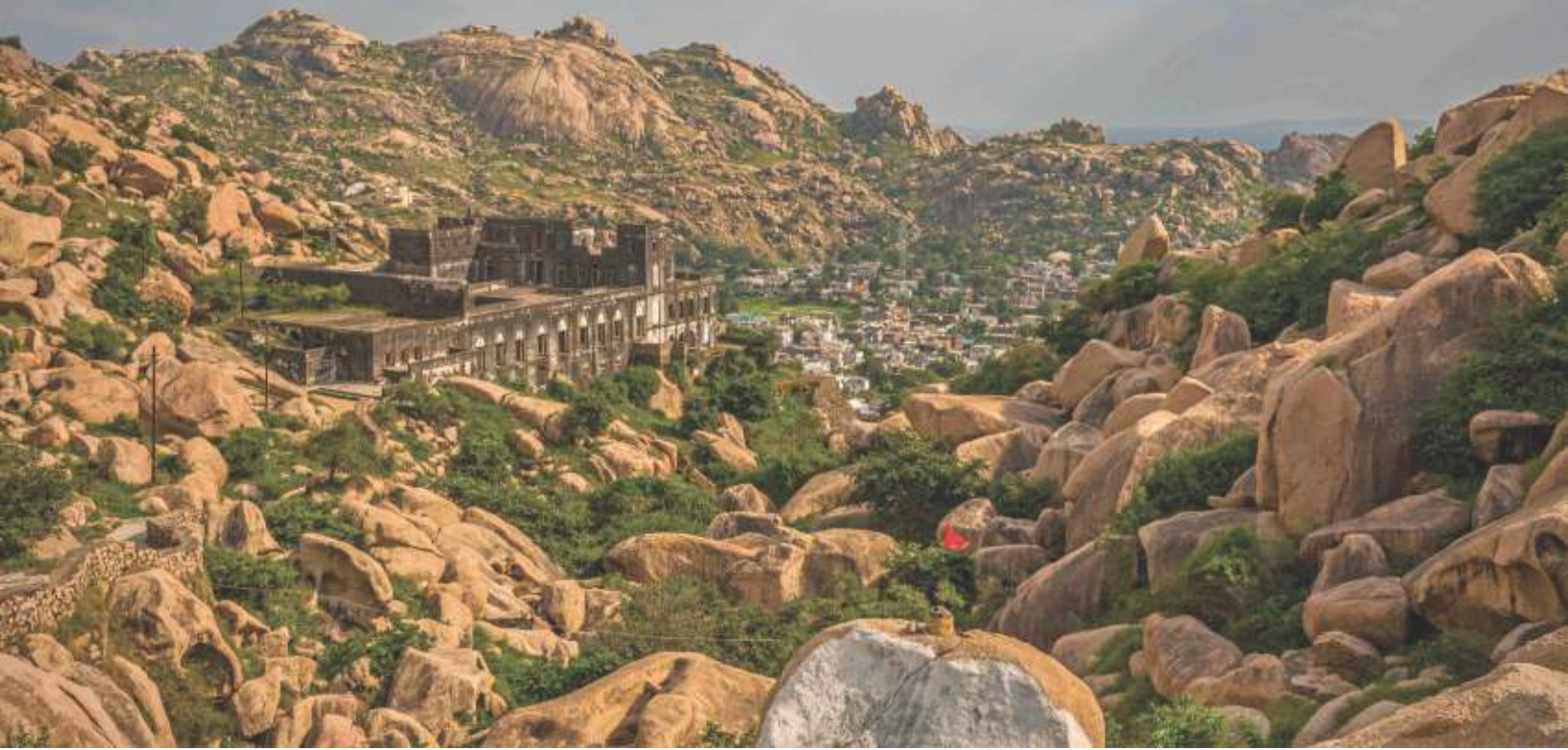
The stupa is especially significant as the inscription on a casket found at the site states that it once housed the relics of Gautam Buddha himself. The copper box had gold bottles, burnt sandalwood, beads, gold & silver foil and silk. While the casket and most of the other finds at

Devni Mori have been moved to Vadodara, a replica of the casket and a model of the stupa with its elongated dome as depicted in the plaque have been exhibited at the nearby Shamlaji Museum, as also some of the Buddhist sculptures found in Sabarkanta district.

The excavations also revealed that the site had viharas and four votive stupas. The vihara, found about 15 meters southwest of the main stupa, was a simple brick structure with a paved open courtyard surrounded by cells. Each side of the vihara had eight rooms, 8 sq.m. in area. A platform-like projection may have been a preaching place. The vihara is remarkable for its drainage channel in three levels probably denoting different phases in construction.

Iron, copper, silver and lead coins, earthenware and sculptural fragments have been found at the site, including stone depictions of Vishnu and Mahishamardini. Excavators believe that this site was extremely important in the fourth century when Rudrasena III reigned as the Saka ruler.

You can relax at Shyamalvan, a garden developed by Forest Department of Government of Gujarat.



Shamlaji to Poshina

Between Shamlaji and Poshina, a number of archaeological sites like stepwells, ruined Hindu and Jain temples and tanks can be visited just off the highway. Idar is one of the historical towns on the way. KhedBrahma at the confluence of three rivers Harnav, Kausambi and Bhima-shankari, has much religious significance as it is believed that Bhragu had chosen this place for his residence and yajnas. This site has step-wells and remains of temples built for Shiva, the Sun God and many goddesses.

The Brahma temple, a medieval stepwell, the Bhragu Ashram, the temple of Kshetramba, the Pan-khanath temple, the Amba Mata temple, the Hatkeshwar temple and some Jain temples are among the historical relics. The Brahma temple has a part of the original shrine with images of deities, dancing girls and Lord Brahma.





From Khedbrahma, drive to Poshina in the extreme north of Gujarat. This village in the hills contain a Shiva temple probably dating from the 10th century, which has some superb carved images on its walls, remains of other temples and a medieval Jain temple. The Jain temple has a carved white marble in the Mandap.

The main reason for visiting Poshina is its tribal culture. In the village, you can see potters making terracotta horses and other votive figures, and jewelers who make ornaments for the tribal market. The terracotta horses are integral to tribal rituals. Different parts of the hollow terracotta horses are turned out in separate parts, on the potter's wheel, and then joined together. Symbolic sacrifice of horses for fulfillment of wishes is common for many tribal diety, but an assembly of terracotta horses of various shapes and sizes representing sacrifice on wish fulfillment can be seen just outside the village of Poshina.

Make base at Poshina to visit a number of villages of the Bhils and the Garasia.



Poshina to Abhapur

From Poshina drive back to Idar and then turn for Abhapur passing through hill forests of Polo. Abhapur is the centre for a number of interesting ruined temples. Sarneshwar temple is one of the most visited and is believed to date from the 11th century, facing much destruction in the 13th century during Islamic incursions. Late medieval temples like the Panchayatana temple, the temples to goddesses and the Jain temples are architectural gems. The 16th century Lakhena Temple is a beautiful building, even though it has lost its ceiling – the carvings and stone lattice screens are highlights. 📷



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Po. Danta, Bhavangadh, Dist. Banaskantha

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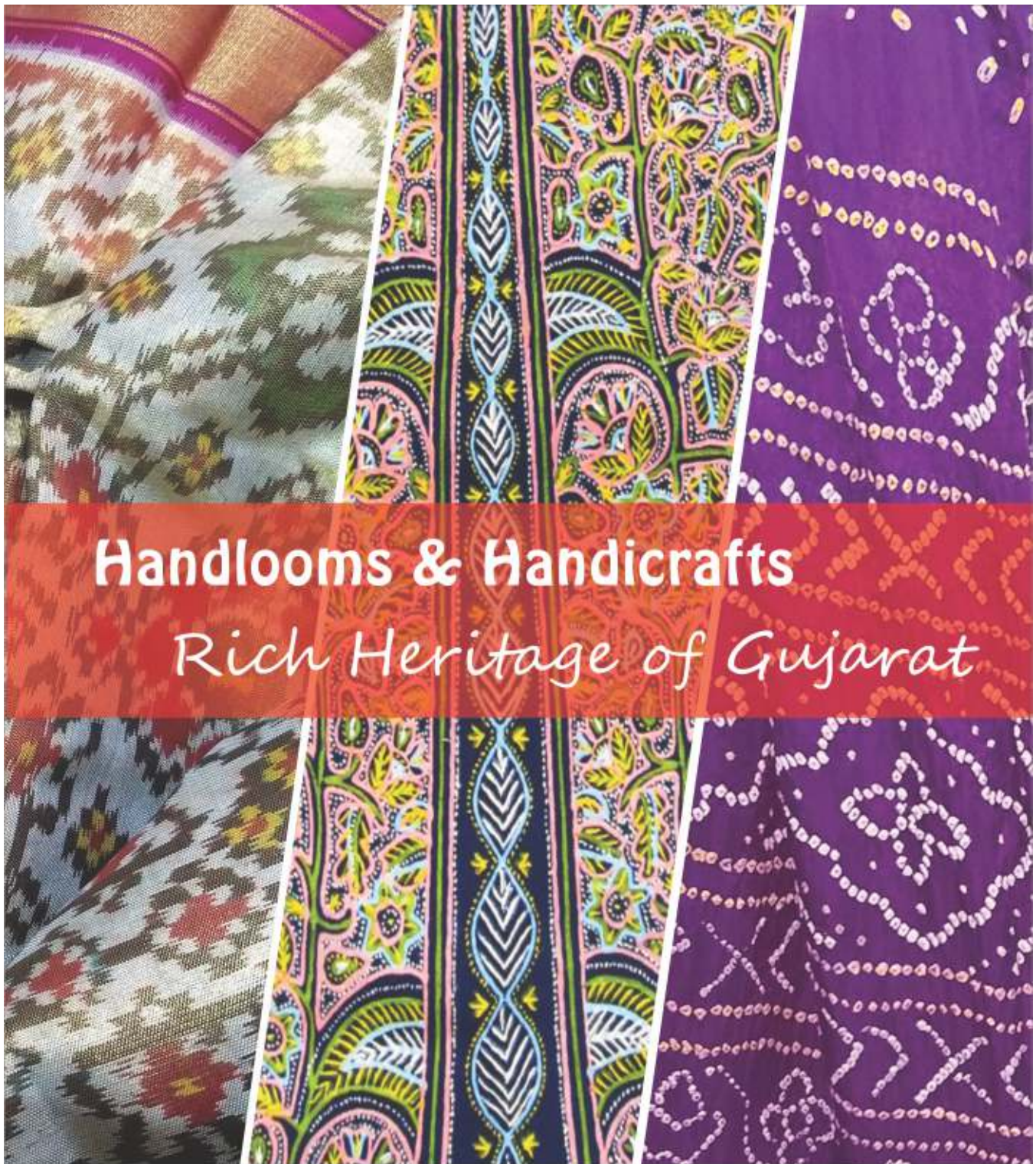
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