

PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE

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A high-end monthly magazine

Quick International Trips

Frontier Fun
Travelling to the DMZ from Seoul
Food and Farm Tourism

WELCOME BACK!

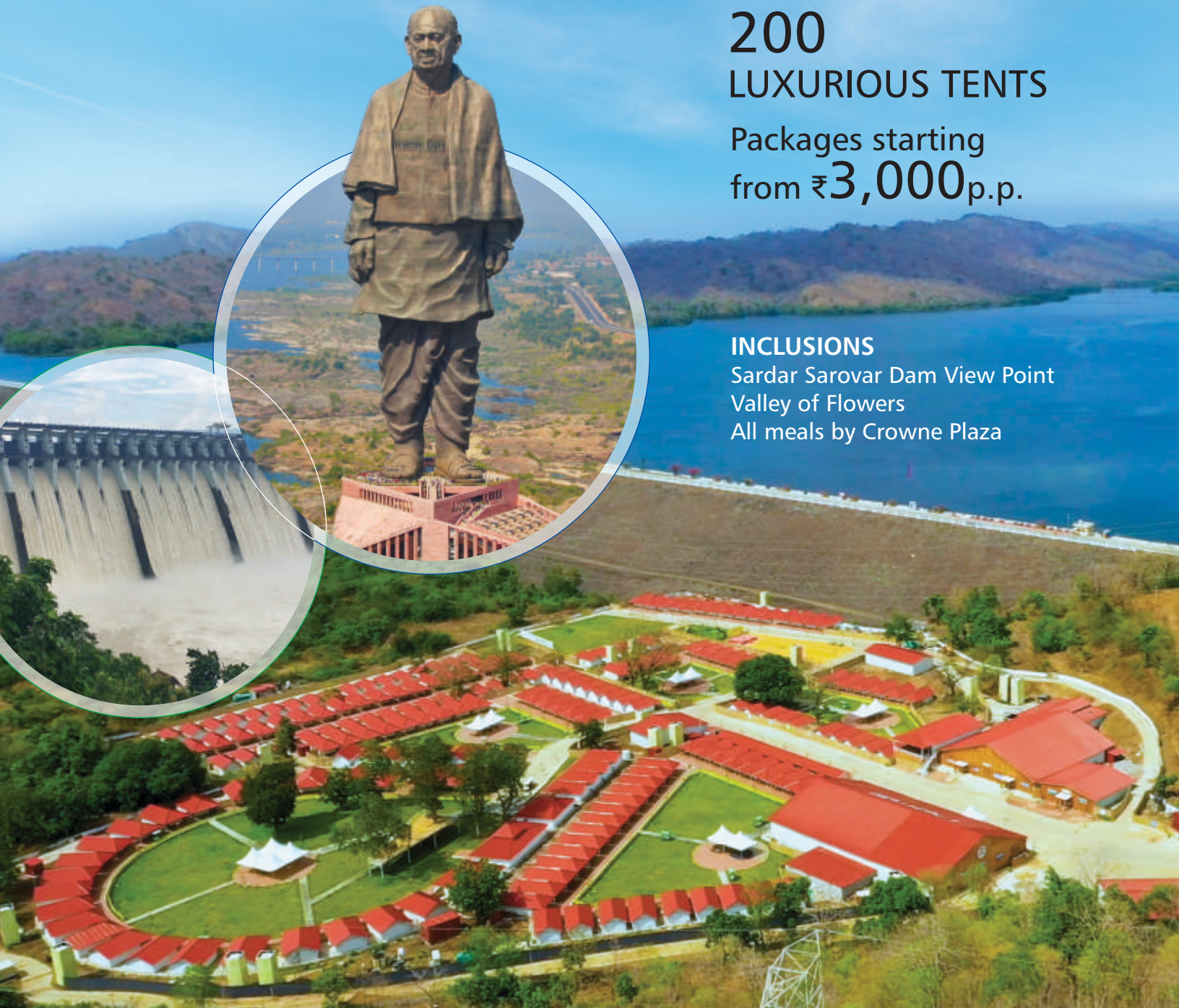
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Nostalgia

If the past few months have taught us anything, it is - to live in the moment and make the most of it. Suddenly, it was more about planning present than the future. The explorers who were till now cherishing memories of their journeys are now actively looking for safe getaways as the World is slowly trying to get back to normalcy (Just saying... the upgraded definition of 'normalcy' includes precautionary measures by default now).

So this edition of Praveg's Tourism One celebrates those unforgettable travel experiences that put a smile on our faces during our dull moments. Yes, reminding

us of the carefree times when our laughs were not hidden behind a curtain like a shy Raj Kapoor heroine and our affectionate touch was not scaring people away as if it is a human-scarecrow.

More than that, you know there are destinations not-that-far-away that can offer you international experience, but still with relatively less risk and travel time? Wondering which ones are they? Read our 'Quick International Trips'. If vocal for local is your new mantra, try out 'Food and Farm Tourism' to experience some flavorsome holidays in Gujarat. Read on!

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Share with us some enthusiastic inputs like photographs, essays or anything related to tourism.

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



Quick INTERNATIONAL TRIPS

Given the Covid-19 pandemic, it is understandable that no one wants to fly to a faraway destination. But there are some global destinations just a short distance from home.

GET ADVENTUROUS IN NEPAL

Nepal is an exciting destination to visit in winter for those looking for soft and extreme adventures like trekking, mountaineering, white-water rafting, kayaking and wildlife safaris. Drive to Gorakhpur, and visit the Buddhist sites at nearby Kushinagar.

Lumbini



Source: Damian Pankowicz/Shutterstock

After Gorakhpur, you can cross the border into Nepal. If you are interested in Buddhist culture, Lumbini in Nepal was the birthplace of the Buddha. Continue to Chitwan National Park, one of the finest wildlife reserves in Asia. Established in 1973, Chitwan is a UNESCO World Heritage Site from 1984. Nestled at the foot of the Himalayas, the national park protects more than 932 sq km of forests, marshland and grassland containing a particularly rich flora and fauna. During safaris in the park, you will see the great one-horned Asiatic

rhinoceros, deer and monkeys. There are also chances of spotting gaur or Indian bison and Asian elephant, though you need much luck to see the Bengal tiger, leopard, sloth bear, wild dog or hyena. Explore the rivers to look for the Ganges river dolphin, smooth-coated otter, gharial and mugger crocodile. The high total of 540 bird species has been recorded in Chitwan making it one of the top birdwatching sites. The grasslands can yield sightings of Bengal florican, grey-crowned prinia, slender-billed babbler and lesser adjutant.

From Chitwan, continue to Pokara, which is the gateway to Annapurna and other trekking routes. From Pokara, you can make trips to places suitable for rafting, trekking, mountain biking and kayaking. Proceed to Kathmandu, and visit the many temples and historical sites in this bustling city. You can go rock climbing at Pharping and Nagarjuna near Kathmandu or even the Astrek Climbing Wall in Thamel. You can even ask about sightseeing flights to Mount Everest.

Pokara



Nagarkot in the Kathmandu Valley



Annapurna Circuit trek

The 1192-island Republic of Maldives is where you can stay in the upper echelons of resort accommodations, gaze into crystal-clear waters of a lagoon around your villa room, take a morning dip among schools of brilliantly coloured fish, leave your footwear in the village to enjoy feeling the powdery sanded walkways below your feet en route to the lavish breakfast buffet in the restaurant, and choose from a whole raft of recreational offerings during the rest of the day.



ENJOY A RESORT HOLIDAY IN MALDIVES

As you land in Male, the resort representative will receive you and take you by seaplane or boat to the island resort you have selected. The first step to a summer holiday in the Maldives is selecting a resort either by contacting a travel agent, searching the internet or referring to guidebooks. Are you looking for a high style resort or an informal one? An ultra-luxe resort that offers sheer luxury and total indulgence or a more affordable resort is in your budget? Do you want to get into sporting



activities like diving, snorkelling, surfing, parasailing and sailing or do you want to get away for a laidback vacation at a lavish resort with a fully-facilitated spa? If you are taking your children for their summer vacation, it is important to look for kid-friendly resorts that offer activities for children. And as you are going to be pretty much 'islanded' at your resort, which covers an entire islet, it is imperative to be sure that you are comfortable with the cuisines on offer.

The clear waters of the Maldives make it a paradise for snorkelling and scuba-diving. Most resorts will be able to arrange a diving lesson or a diving expedition if you are a certified diver.

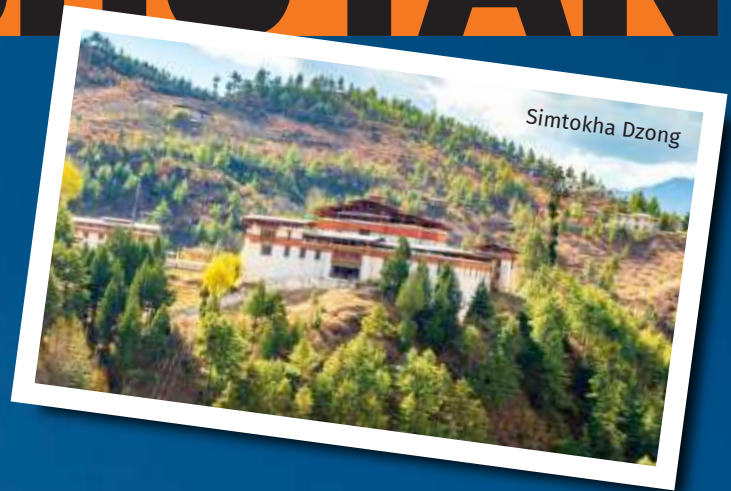




DRIVE IN BHUTAN

If you are only comfortable driving your own vehicle, Bhutan can be the destination for you. Take a trip through the Duars region of West Bengal, where you can visit tea estates, wildlife sanctuaries and the Cooch Behar Palace. You enter Bhutan at Phuntsholing, where you can visit Zangtho Pelri dedicated to Guru Rinpoche. Take the road to Thimpu calling in on the way to see the Kharbandi Gompa known for its Buddhist art and Simtokha Dzong. Thimpu has a Textile Museum, Folk Heritage Museum and many Buddhist sites.

From Thimpu, you can continue to Paro, where you can see the National Museum and other sights. Paro is the base for a scenic drive to Chele la pass, at 3,988 meters one of the highest motorable roads in Bhutan. The drive goes through beautiful forests and offers stunning views of the sacred mountain Jomolhari and Jichu Drake. Depending on the season, you can see a huge variety of flowers.





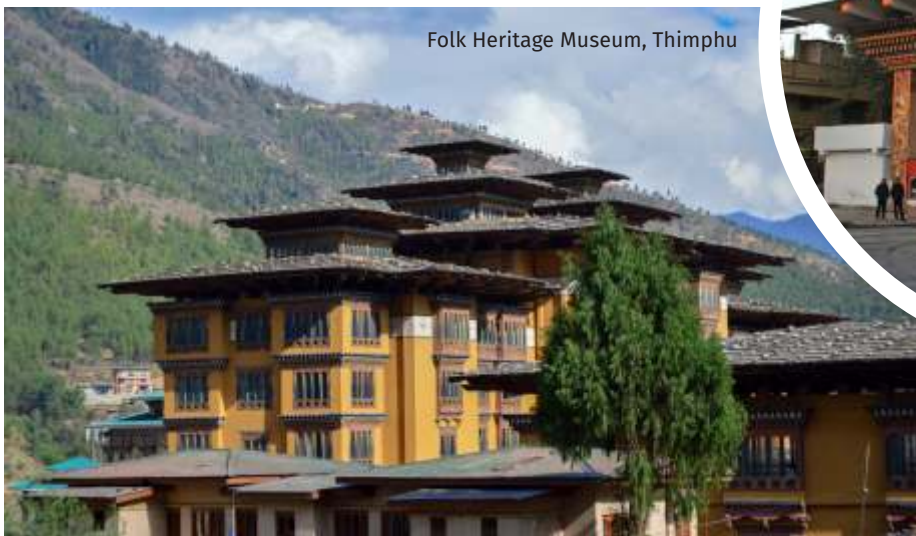
Taktshang Goemba

Phuntsholing



Source: AP/Shutterstock

Folk Heritage Museum, Thimphu



Paro National Museum



Punakha Dzong





Bashundhara City

GO SHOPPING IN DHAKA

One of the most unique aspects of Bangladesh is its long history of textiles, and handlooms, which are still one of the main sources of textiles in the country. From time immemorial, places like Dhaka have been the centre for muslin, tassart silk, muga silk, eri silk, loom-figured, diversely ornamented muslin is called jamdani, mixed fabrics called garbhasuti or asmani which are like Gujarat's mashroo, and Tangail saris made by the weavers of Bajitpur under the patronage of local zamindars.



Jamdani Sari



Ahsan Manzil



Lalbagh Fort

A central artisan's cooperative society was established in the 1930s to organize the weavers' caste and preserve the Tangail sari tradition.

Take the road from Kolkata to Jessore, where you can see the impressive High Court Building and the Shiva Temple. From Jessore proceed to Dhaka, the heart of Bangladesh. Begin your exploration with a visit to the National

Museum, which offers an introduction to the history and geology of the country. One of the city's most attractive buildings, Ahsan Manzil is a pink palace built by Nawab Abdul Ghani at the site of an old French factory, while Lalbagh Fort is a pleasant place to wander in gardens. The city abounds in other architectural masterpieces too like Curzon Hall, Dhaka University, the Louis



Curzon Hall

Source: Sk Hasan Ali/Shutterstock

Kahn designed Assembly Building, Hussaini Dalan built in 1642 as the house of the imam of the Shi'a community, the 18th century Armenian Church and medieval mosques. Visit the Bengal Gallery of Fine Arts and other centres to experience the arts and crafts scene.

For shopping, Dhaka has the market of Jatra, Bashundhara City, which is one of the largest malls in South Asia, New Market, Kumudini for Bengali clothing and handicrafts, Aranya for handloom woven fabrics and garments, Banga Market for bargains, Aarong for souvenirs, clothing and handicrafts promoted by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, Folk International for souvenirs and Viator for handicrafts.

From Dhaka, head for Tangail, the centre for handloom weaving. While there are many factories and shops, the Basak weavers who continue the original making process of Tangail Sarees sell their products at temporary markets. Products to look for are jamdani sari, dangoo sari and balucherri sari. ■



Hussaini Dalan

Source: Sohail Payal/Haque/Shutterstock

FOOD & FARM TOURISM

Gujarat is well-known for its variety of food and agriculture, which can be explored while travelling in the state. Some of the homestays offer a glimpse of the agricultural riches of Gujarat.

Livestock Tourism in Banaskantha District



Banaskantha District is famous for its agriculture and food processing, being one of the leading milk production zones in India with the Banaskantha District Cooperative Milk Producers' Union Ltd. linked to one of highest cold supply chains of milk. The rich milk resources make it also known for its sweets like the pedas of Palanpur. It is also a leading producer of vegetables, specially potatoes, grains and isabgul (Psyllium husk).

This district is largely hilly, with good views of the Aravalli hills. In this

district, Danta enjoys a scenic location with views of forests and hills. On one of the highest points of Danta, Bhavani Villa is the heritage house of the former Maharanas of Danta with a view of the grand old palace, the townscape and the scrubby hills. Leopards are sometimes seen from the property itself.

The owners of the homestay have their own farm sprawling over 100 acres, which once had the family's royal polo field. Mahipendra Singh, former Maharaja of Danta, is an office-bearer of many associations working to

preserve indigenous horse breeds. At this farm, you can see his Marwari horses, a cattle farm and dairy run by his wife Chandra Kumari, the agricultural fields, and the woodlands.



Homestay:
Bhavani Villa, Danta

Horticulture Tourism at Himmatnagar



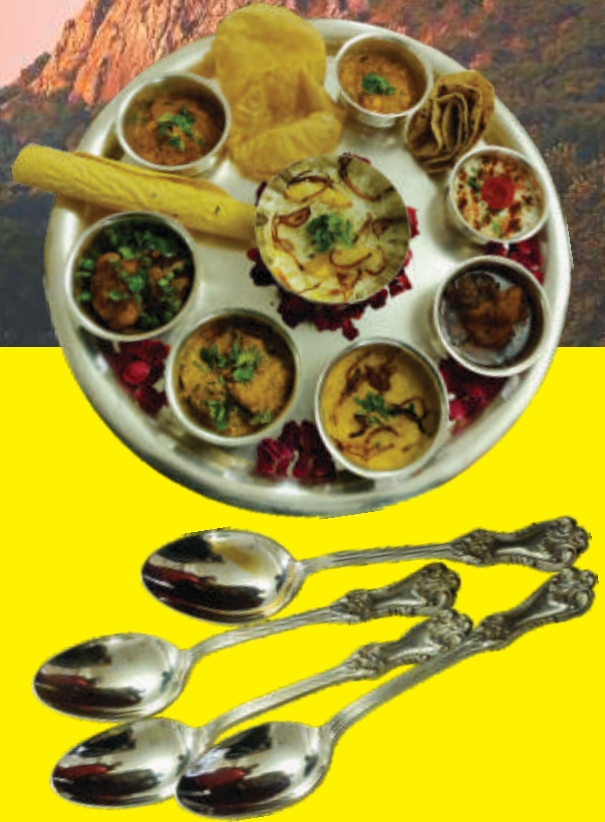
Sabarkantha district is an important centre for the growing of berries, mango, pomegranate and other fruits. The district is diverse, ranging from the bustling town of Himmatnagar to the forests of Vijaynagar and the tribal-dominated taluka of Poshina. Shrimp and fish farming, and dairying, are other agricultural sectors of the district.

The region can be explored by staying at one of the two palatial homestays – Dowlat Villas Palace or Dowlat Villas Palace – The Heritage. Both the properties have impressive architecture and sprawling grounds. Do not miss seeing the Idar Ratna Mango Orchard at Dowlat Villas Palace – The Heritage. The orchard is situated near the main building and the owner's museum of vintage and classic cars. The Idar Ratna was specially developed for the Maharaja of Idar using mangos from different places like Rajasthan. In

summer you can enjoy eating this special mango variety at the homestay.

The two homestay properties also offer heritage cuisine. Since marriages took place between Idar State with princesses from different parts of India and Nepal, many influences have entered the cuisine. All this is served in royal style on their banquet tables.

At Dowlat Villas Palace, you can enjoy Aloo Achar, Bhogate ko Raita using grapefruit, fresh Golbeda ko Achar (Tomatoes pickle), Nepalese type Raisin Pulao, Mutton Rus, Kwati Rus (Mixed beans curry), Bhote ko Masu (dry mutton), and sikhadi, which is like Shrikhand. The spices used are typically Nepalese. Indian sweets and fusion puddings like phirni, kheer, halwa, anjeer caramel custard, souffles, biscuit puddings, pies etc are part of many meals.



At Dowlat Villas Palace – The Heritage, you can enjoy Pichle Aloo from Kotla in Uttar Pradesh, Laal Maas from Jodhpur, Smoked Chicken in White Gravy, Dum Gobi and Makai ki Saag, which are the family specialties, Dal in the style of Idar State, sweet Missi Roti from Karauli, Rani Nirupama Devi's signature sauces, house special Pumpkin Halwa, Maas ka Achar, and other dishes.



Homestay:
Dowlat Villas Palace, Himmatnagar
Dowlat Villas Palace – The Heritage
Himmatnagar

Mango and Maldhari Tourism at Talala



The Gir Kesar is a mango known for its bright orange colored pulp. It was developed when Junagadh was a princely state ruled by Nawabs and has since become a popular cultivar of mangoes in the national and export markets.

One of the best places to enjoy this mango is in Talala during the summer months. A number of homestay properties in Gir Somnath and Junagadh districts have their own mango groves or arrangement for tourists to buy mangos.

When visiting the Gir National Park & Wildlife Sanctuary, another attraction is the Maldhari Nesses - settlements of the buffalo graziers of Gir. They have

distinctive clothing and jewellery like men wear gold hoops and buttons in their ears, silver rings embossed with Shiva symbols on the hand used for milking with the milk flowing over the lingam symbolizing an offer to the Lord. Maldhari women's ears are folded and stretched with a large amount of hanging silver ornaments and they sport heavy, hourglass-shaped bracelets. Traditionally, the bangles were made from ivory but after the wildlife preservation act of India, they get versions in other materials. The Maldharis keep buffaloes, and also camels, cows, goats and other livestock. When visiting their nesses, you can enjoy rustic food with freshly churned butter, ghee and chaas.



Homestay:
Gujarat Tourism has approved a number of homestay properties at Sasan, Talala and other centres.

The Pastoral Lands of Kutch



Kutch is another exciting place for those who love milk products. The number of heads of cattle in Kutch is said to be equal to or more than the human population. Bhuj, Anjar, Mundra and Mandvi make an ideal base to explore the villages of the Rabari and Ahir communities of cattle herders. The women of these communities are adept at embroidery. The food of these cities is therefore rich in ghee, butter and other milk products.

When staying at Bhuj, a unique experience is staying at Bhuj House, which is owned by a Parsi family. Built in 1890 by Pestonji Sorabji Bhujwala, a prominent businessman of the princely state of Kutch, The Bhuj House is the only surviving Parsi house in a neighbourhood that entirely belonged to the community at one time. Jehan, the descendant of Pestonji Sorabji Bhujwala, and his wife Katie decided to restore it as a homestay. This property

offers Parsi food dishes like Dhansak and Chicken Farcha, and for breakfast, you could try the Akoori. At Bhuj, there are dining halls like Annapurna, which serve regional food. Bhuj is also famous for its street food like the Dabeli.

From Bhuj, continue to the Banni grasslands, which has a high concentration of pastoral villages. The Banni forms a large belt of scrubby grasslands near the Great Rann of Kutch. Banni has a number of villages that are home to Sindhi-speaking pastoral communities like Mutwa, Halepotra and Jat that keep camels, cattle, sheep, goats and horses. On the highway, you can see shops near the village of Bhirendiara selling fresh buffalo mawa. Continue from here to Khavda, which is famous for its Gulab Pak and other sweets, besides handicrafts. The road to Dhordo, site for Rann Utsav, passes a number of rural homestays.

Another interesting area for

agriculture is Nakhatrana. Here, you can enjoy a farmstay at Devpur.

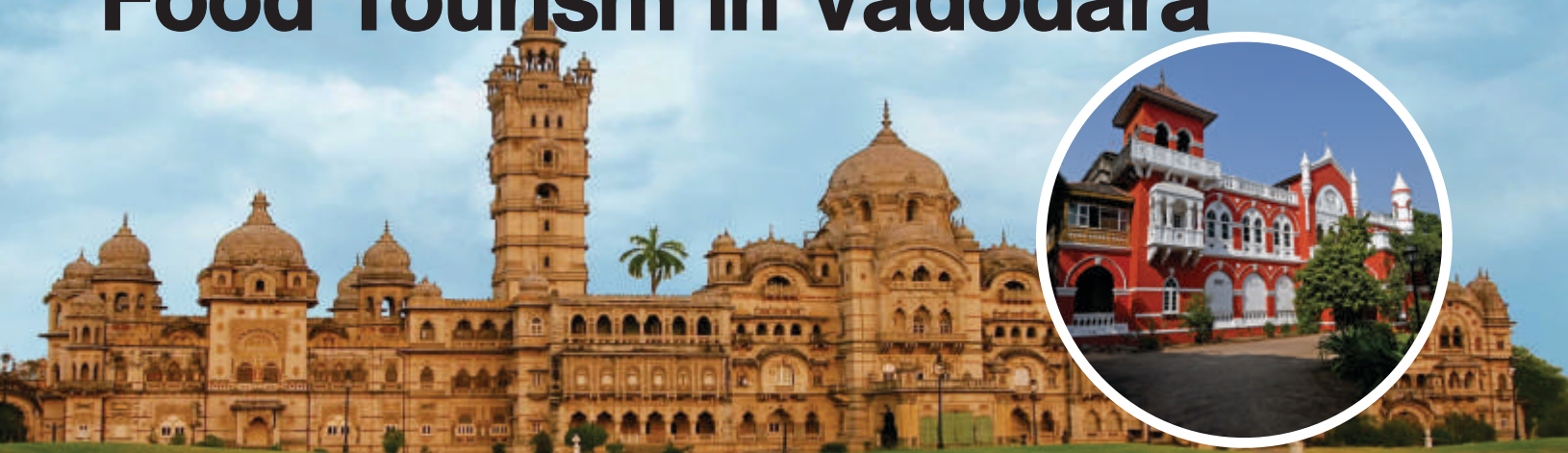
Before leaving Kutch, visit Gandhidham and Adipur to enjoy Sindhi street food like Dal Pakwan. If you are fond of seafood, the fishing ports like Jakhau are excellent places to buy fish and crustaceans.



Homestay:

Bhuj House in Bhuj is a heritage homestay. There are homestays at Bhuj, Anjar, Dhordo, Hodka and other centres of Kutch district.

Food Tourism in Vadodara



Vadodara has a variety of distinctive food that includes dishes from Maharashtra, Karnataka, Sindh and Northern India besides Gujarat. A unique feature of the cuisine is the influence of the Maratha rulers. The Marathas dominated many portions of Indian subcontinent in the 18th century. After the rise of the British too the Maratha dynasties ruled many prominent princely states like Baroda, Gwalior, Indore, Kolhapur, Dewas, among others. Each of these Maratha states evolved recipes that incorporated regional ingredients into their dishes or were influenced by matrimonial ties with other ruling families. This repertoire of recipes can be enjoyed at Madhav Bagh, built by Shrimant Madhavrao Gaekwad, in the 1890s. The palatial building presents an impressive elevation with European, Islamic and Hindu features, with a garden in front dominated by an attractive British fountain.

Sunti is one of the famous Thanjavuri Maratha dishes that involves an intricate process of making the meat balls and tying the delicate minced or shredded together meat using banana fibre. Bakar Komdi or Bharli Komdi is chicken stuffed with a filling of onions, coconut and spices. The Mutton Parsandi is a dish widely prevalent in Maratha palaces. It comprises mutton or minced meat that is topped with eggs before baking. Raj Vilasi Rassa is a rich meat dish and Methi Maas has mutton cooked with fenugreek. Narali Bhat, a coconut rice, and tomato rice are at Madhav Bagh too.

From Vadodara, you can visit the fertile agricultural lands along the Mahi River. Misroite Farm offers a homestay in an agricultural farm with a river view. Try some of the freshly made food at this farm.



Homestays are a great way to experience authentic local culture and cuisines.

Gujarat Tourism offers a wide range of sanitized and safe homestay options.

To book, please visit
www.gujarattourism.com.



Homestay:
Vadodara has many homestays including heritage houses and farm houses.

Athirapally Kerala

Many of us may have seen enough pictures of the Athirapally Falls, mostly thanks to the Internet. For those whose curiosity has been aroused especially as people are comparing it to the Niagara Falls, it is worth a trip. Mind you, Kerala has many beautiful little unexplored gems and at least once in this lifetime, it is worth to explore them.





When we were finalizing our trip to Kerala, we decided to include a trip to Athirapally with one night's stay at the nearest available resort/ holiday home/ hotel whatever was available. Our group consisted of all senior citizens; the eldest was 70 and the youngest 57! So if we could do it, anyone can!

We stayed at Kandamkulathy Ayursoukhyam Ayurvedic Resort. The village is called Chalakudy after the river that runs through the resort. It is also

the same river that falls over a gorge, some 20 km upstream.

From the Kochi Airport, we stopped at Malabar Restaurant to have lunch. Fish curry and rice was a treat to taste buds in addition to delicious fried prawn masala! As we stepped out, it started pouring gallons of rain. It rained all the way for the next 40 km to the resort. Our driver Sajid was very young but experienced and handled the vehicle very well indeed.

It finally stopped raining when we

drove into the resort. The setting sun casted its own gentle lights over the beautiful River Chalakudy, which was in full force, tumbling over rocks and boulders. Set in the midst of luxurious foliage and fruit laden trees, we were completely bowled over by the location. The peace and tranquility there was out of this world - the silence was broken only by our own voices and the sound of the crickets.

I found the sound of the river very soothing - the water gurgling over rocks brought back memories for each one of us, especially since all of us live in landlocked homes in Hyderabad. That was a precious memory indeed!

Early morning, we were all up with the lark and watched the sun sparkling on the river. It was time to pack our bags and head to the falls. The road was through a mild gradient, but fairly smooth. In the hands of Sajid, the van behaved itself very well indeed. The falls was 20 km away, up the River Chalakudy. The pathway was through a forest, where the birds were calling on the highest branches. Their calls were over and above the reverberating laughter and calls of young boys and girls who were there on school outings. The monkeys on the narrow pathway were very audacious





and were ready to snatch bags or any eatables out of your hands.

The viewing spot was a large open and almost flat rocky area, where the sun beats down mercilessly. The river flows beautifully, till it hits the rocky outcrop and plunges down at least 100 feet into the gorge - the sound is deafening while the spray and the rising mists make you want to look out for more. I was told that we were there at the correct time for viewing the falls as they are best after a generous rainfall (remember last night's rain?)

On one of the offshoots of the regular path, where the river takes a turn, there are lots of trees and through them all, I managed to click a few pictures to take memories back home and enjoy in the still evenings of the Deccan plateau. The falls are framed in the midst of the trees! It was mesmerizing!

There are benches made of fallen branches and logs for tired feet to rest. Even the pathway has bamboo railings for those who need to hold on - it is good to see the all natural look of the

place.

The exhilaration was over and we were en route to Munnar, in the hills.

We stopped at the Kerala Spices Organic Farms and went around the place. I got to eat a green cardamom off the plant! Lovely! Do stop and take a walk around the place. I did not know that cardamoms grow so close to the ground and that pepper grows on bushes and that coffee flowers smell like coffee!

Try it! It is so heartening and such a wonder! The simple pleasures of life!

Far Far Away

The ancient glory of the Nile... and its modern day people





In India, we have a strong belief in the afterlife and reincarnation. The early Egyptian culture and beliefs were somewhat similar. The Egyptian kings (the pharaohs) reveled in their glory and preserved their mortal bodies so that they could come back in the same glorified state. They made sure they were entombed with all that they could possibly need in the afterlife - rich clothes, gold cups and jars and every possible luxury one could imagine.

My sojourn to Egypt was something I wanted to do for a very long time, loosely based on the information gathered in school, the predominant thought being that the 'mummies' were not the queens. They were embalmed bodies of the dead kings preserved for an afterlife.



Pyramids, Giza



Pyramids, Giza



The Nile

The River Nile has always been known as the river of life and Egypt was known as the Gift of the Nile. We have to recall that the other flourishing cultures around the Mediterranean were the Romans and the Greeks who were well known for their adventurous explorations as much for acquiring new lands as getting the fabled gold and silver. The

earliest Pharaoh, King Khufu (also known as Cheops) - the builder of the Giza pyramid, was a Greek.

In the midst of the desert, the river flooded its banks every year without fail. In fact, the earliest system of taxation was based upon this particular annual event. Those whose lands flooded regularly paid more taxes, while the others paid less. References in Egyptian records show that a system of measuring the flood levels was in place around

3000 BC. The annual event of flooding also gave rise to the earliest calendar, wherein the year was divided into three seasons.

It was understood that the sun rose in the East, representing life, so all the dwellings were built on the Eastern banks of the Nile. The sun (also known as the Sun God Ra) set in the West, representing death, therefore all the tombs and burial chambers were built on the western banks of the Nile.





Mummification

The mummification

Legend has it that much before the mummification process started, bodies were just buried 2-3 feet deep into the sand on the edge of the desert. One of the Pharaohs is said to have told his council of ministers that he wanted no fanfare on his death - he should just be buried like a common man. That night he had a dream that a jackal was digging out his body from the sand pit. The outcome of this dream was to elevate the jackal to the status of Anubis, the god of fertility. The other more practical outcome was that a stronger cover for his mortal remains needed to be built. Thus came about the idea of the pyramids.

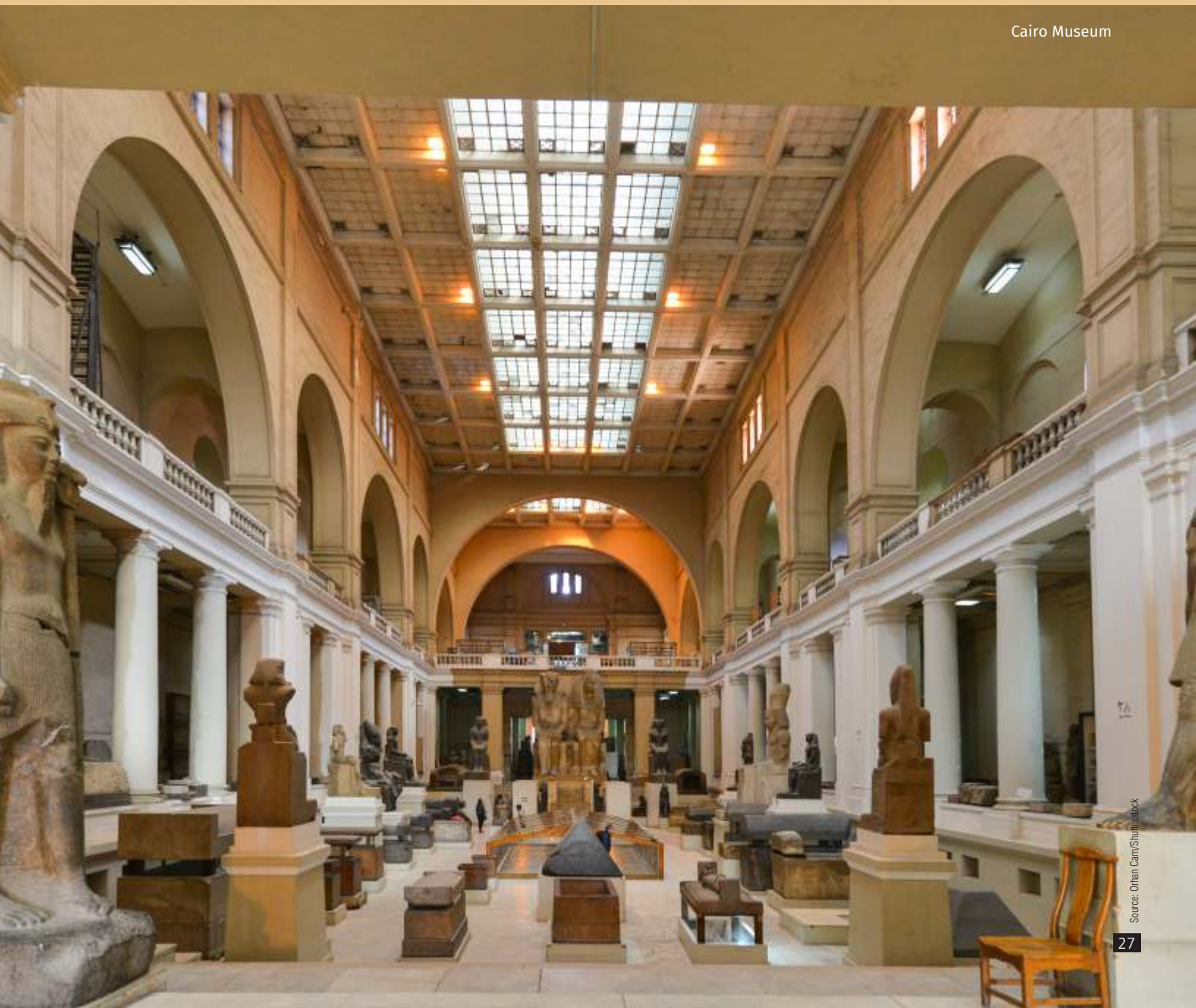
The Papyrus of Anhai depicts Anubis as half god, half man - the heavenly embalmer. The Cairo museum has a full size statue of Anubis.



THE ANCIENT GLORY OF THE NILE... AND ITS MODERN DAY PEOPLE



Cairo Museum



Cairo Museum

The sights

The temple of Abu Simbel is a massive work of restoration funded by the UN and designated as a UN Heritage world sight. The pharaoh Ramesses II built the temple in the village of Abu Simbel, a low lying flat land close to the edge of the Nile. When the Aswan High Dam was built in 1952, the village was submerged and the massive temple was lost in the waters of Lake Nasser.

The UN intervened and the temple was assembled on a high flat plateau, overlooking the lake. It is a painstaking work, which took more than 10 years to complete. But the current generation of Egyptians and the hordes of tourists who visit the site are proud and happy at the amazing architectural master-

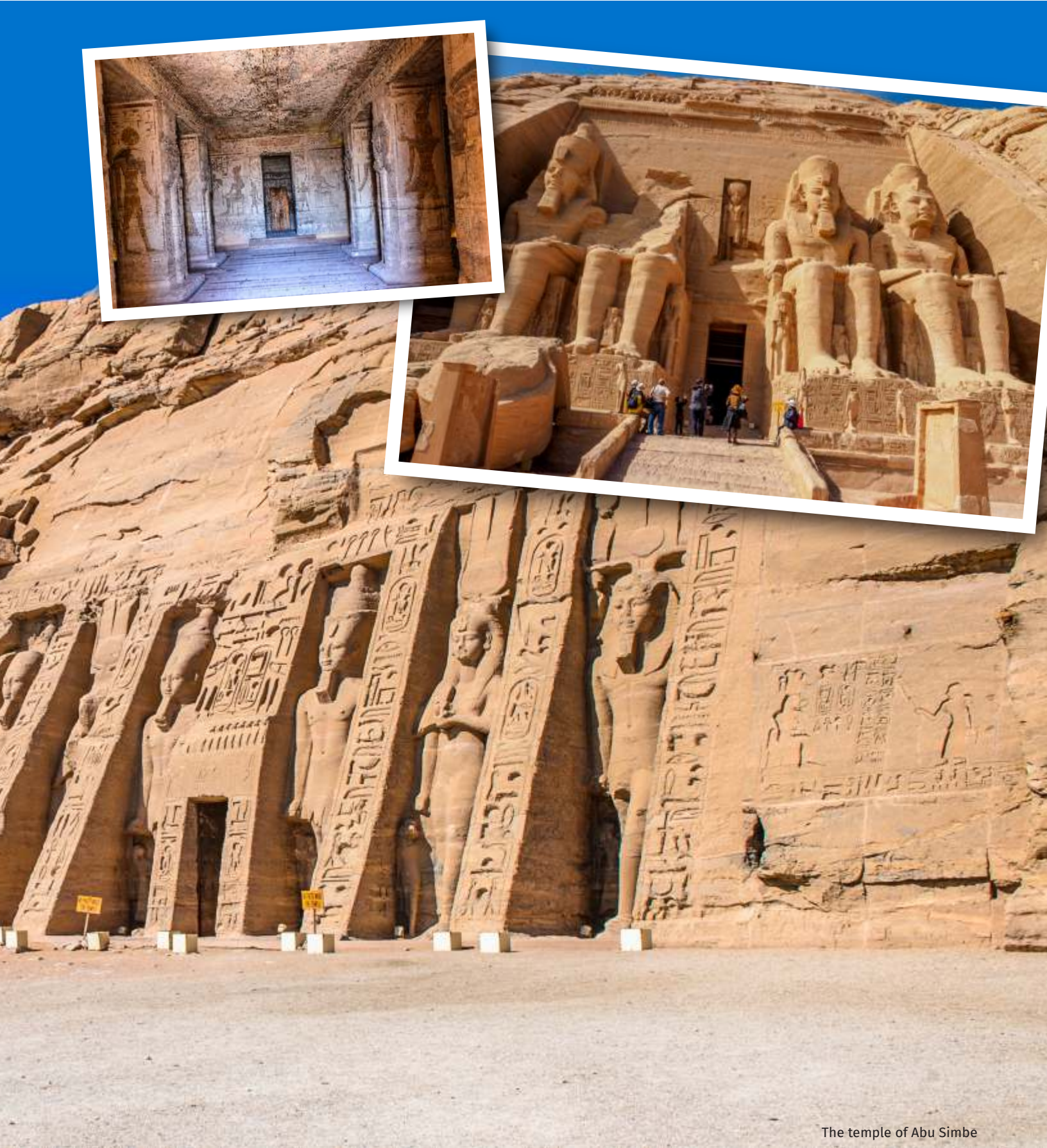
pieces built by the ancient Egyptians and then painstakingly reassembled by modern Egyptologists and historians. When one stands there facing these massive statues, he is humbled by the precision and architectural prowess of the ancient people.

Four massive statues of Ramesses II are placed at the entrance, while inside there are various panels depicting stories of the valour of Ramesses II. Just to give you an example, one stone panel measuring approximately 16'x 12' shows Ramesses trampling one enemy soldier underfoot, while he is slaying another and shooting multiple arrows at a third.

Maybe the king had to be shown as being a superhuman!

At a lower level and much smaller in size are statues of Ramesses, alternated with statues of Horus (the falcon God).





The temple of Abu Simbe

The Valley of Kings

Within a few years of building the great pyramid of Giza, it was pillaged and all the valuables therein were lost. This happened again and again till Pharaoh Thutmose I decided 3500 years ago that he would be buried in the Valley of the Kings, close to Thebes. Thus over a period of the next 500 years, all the kings were buried here, along with their accouterments.

The excavations in the Valley are carried out even now. A guide told us how they had recently found the crypts, which contained the mummified bodies



Valley of Kings

Temple of the Queen Hatshepsut





Com Ombo Temple Temple

THE ANCIENT GLORY OF THE NILE... AND ITS MODERN DAY PEOPLE

of 126 infants, all connected to the boy king Tutankhamun.

The temples of Com'ombo, Luxors, the colossus of Memnon, the temple of Hatshepsut, the stories of Amenhotep and Nefertiti - if one has the time and the patience, there is no end to the information one can gather. The guide was of the firm opinion and told us categorically "Please do not believe the American movies, they will dish out anything and in the name of cinema beguile the people." He is upset that the best of Egyptian treasures are in the Smithsonian in NY City, and the British and German museums.

The cruise on the River Nile is an absolute delight. One of the most endearing stops on the Cruise was the trip to the Nubian Village. A mélange of people, camels, stuffed lizards, stuffed crocodiles - one just could not get enough of it all. The camels had the right of way and we were warned to stay away from the massive jaws! At one tea stall, we were given tea and some snacks. More than the tea, I was fascinated by the baby crocodiles in a cage and one stuffed chap up on a wall. The women were happy being photographed. I am told that the Nubians were the original people of Egypt. Now most of them live in the northern regions of Sudan and the Sahara desert.



Amenhotep



Nubian Village

Modern young people

On our flight from Cairo to Hurghada on the Red Sea, I met this group of four pretty cousins with three little girls in tow. They were on a holiday without husbands, just generally having fun away from the families, which to my mind was great! And not everyone got to do this.

Dalia, my co-passenger was very excited to learn I was from India - she gushed about Shah Rukh Khan and Amitabh Bachan and declared her love for Hindi movies! One of the little girls, Selina, was all dressed up in glitter on her clothes, her shoes and her bag, so I teased her a little about dancing in Hindi cinema!

I enjoyed the camaraderie they shared and the obvious fun they were looking forward to, away from home and responsibilities!

Met Loris Spanos, a citizen of Cypress who shuttles between the three major cities of Egypt and home. He works in the food industry and is happy being here - very comfortable working atmosphere.

An aerial photograph of a coastal city in Egypt. In the foreground, a large resort complex with multiple buildings, swimming pools, and palm trees is situated along a sandy beach. The water is a vibrant turquoise color. Several large white boats are docked at a pier in the bottom right corner. In the background, a dense urban area with numerous buildings extends to the horizon under a clear sky.

The bottom line

With its ancient history, Egypt appears to be an oasis in the midst of the modern day turmoil, which seems to engulf the whole world. I found the general public quite happy in their place. One of the things guide said was that the two official religions of Egypt were Islam and Christianity. He pointed out that wherever a church is, one would find a mosque too! 🕌

Incredible India

Those are the early hours of a misty morning. There is absolute peace and tranquility. Mother Nature has rolled out a carpet of green and flowers are blooming in their colorful best. Thin layers of mist are rising and dissolving in the warm sunshine. An old tortoise carefully crawls forward, making sure there is no danger to its life. A crow takes a bath in a shallow pool of water beside the tortoise. A snake appears from nowhere, and slithers away into the dense



NEHRU ZOOLOGICAL PARK

vegetation. The silence is broken by anxious calls of peacocks.

This is Nehru Zoological Park, a peaceful spot away from the hustle and bustle of Hyderabad offering ample scope for spending time in the lap of

Nature. It was established as a large zoo in Public Gardens in 1959. Later it was relocated to Bahadurpura and declared open to the public as Hyderabad Zoological Park on 6th October, 1963 by General S.M. Srinagesh, the then Governor of Andhra Pradesh. After the demise of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, it was rechristened as Nehru Zoological Park in recognition of the initiatives taken by him. The park extends over 380 acres and abuts the Mir-Alam Tank on the southern side. A marvel of



wilderness, it provides natural refuge to about 733 birds of 86 species, 586 mammals of 57 species, and 287 reptiles of 31 species, besides countless varieties of flora and fauna.

The Nehru Zoological Park is ranked amongst one of the best zoos in Asia, and one of the largest and finest in India. It strives to be an outstanding zoo park with a focus on conservation, recreation, education and research while following the vision of a world rich in wildlife.

This zoo has many firsts to its credit – it is the first zoo in India to have created moat-enclosures for various animals; it is also the first one in the country to have started Safari Park (spread over 105 acres) in 1974, Nocturnal Animal Enclosure in 1982 and an open Butterfly Park in 1998, Jurassic Park, Reptile House and a Zoo Orientation Centre.

Its undulating landscape provides a natural setting to the animals and birds, which are displayed in fairly large enclosures simulating their natural habitat. The mosaic of thick vegetation with a series of water bodies supports a variety of wild animals and birds beyond the enclosures. The micro climate of the zoo provides visitors with a cool, green and clean environment to enjoy a day.

Zones

Once you enter into the zoo, you get a feeling of walking into a thick forest rich in wildlife, flora and fauna. The zoo is divided into different zones - all distinctly marked but interconnected by means of narrow pathways, footpaths, bunds, green shades and small culverts.

The Primate Park is spread across a vast space and is home to monkeys, baboons and chimpanzees. Their enclosures are



big and some of them have huge trees, providing a natural setting for the animals.

The roar of the tiger welcomes you to the Carnivores Corner. The White Tiger majestically comes out of its night enclosure; offers a royal glimpse and walks away. This zone has royal Bengal tiger, white tiger, wild dog, jaguar, wolf, hyena, jackal and fox.

Further ahead, the Lion Junction is a home to other animals like Asiatic lion, African lion and panther, besides hippopotamus and rhinoceros. The sloth bear, Himalayan black bear, Malayan sun bear and hornbills are displayed in the Bears Bay. In the Elephant Odyssey, the elephants are kept at a long distance from the visitors for safety reasons. A raised platform allows the visitors to watch the jumbos from an elevated position. The gharial, mugger and salt water

PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE

crocodile can be seen in the Reptile Row, while the Turtle Tunnel is a home to their smaller counterparts. The Deer Land has sambhar, nilgai, black buck, hog deer, thamin deer and swamp deer. The giraffe makes a surprise appearance with its long neck and is a star attraction nearby. A series of large enclosures for the colourful birds constitute the Parrot World. It is always full of the chirping of birds like macaws, parakeets, Dusky Lory, Sun Conure, Masked Lovebird, Eastern Rosella and Rainbow Lorikeet, among others.

The Safari Park, the largest one in India with an area of 105 acres



Source: ManeeshUpadhyay/Shutterstock

Triceratops, Stegosaurus, and Tyrannosaurus with their heads rising from behind thick vegetation.

A rich bird life

Winding pathways take you into the interior of the park, where a rich avian life awaits you. A huge real life size figure of a flightless bird resembling an Ostrich beckons you from a long

provides ample scope for the visitors to observe the animals growling, hunting and relaxing in their natural habitat. Specially designed buses take the visitors into the safari park.

The Butterfly Park (originally opened in 1998 and redesigned in 2019) has over 50 species of exotic butterflies. Suitable plants and flowering trees are planted here that lure over 50 species of indigenous butterflies throughout the day.

In the Nocturnal Animals House, the day and night cycles have been artificially reversed to create a natural environment for the nocturnal animals and birds. A walk through the house provides an eerie experience of walking through a forest in thick dark night while the owls, eagles, bats, jungle cats and civets seem to stare at you in anger. A lot of bushes are placed in their enclosures, which allow them to hide and sleep behind them, as they do in the forests.

Ever thought of visiting a Jurassic Land and saying hello to its dangerous creatures? Then the Jurassic Park is the place for you. It has life-size figures of dinosaur species like Brontosaurus,





seen hunting for their prey. The large enclosures have huge trees and specially designed wooden platforms for the birds to play and move around in their natural habitat. The birds take long flights inside the enclosures and can be seen building their nests atop the trees and feeding their fledglings.

The new Pheasants zone has birds of pheasant



distance. A few steps ahead you get lost in the cacophony of wetland birds. There are specially designed huge enclosures for flamingoes, sarus cranes, pelicans, storks, white ibises, egrets and herons. These enclosures have shallow pools of water (Pelican Pond and Flamingo Pond) full of fish in which the birds are often

group. These include the Golden Pheasant, Khali Pheasant, Ring Necked Pheasant, Lady Amrhet Pheasant, Silver Pheasant, Red and Gray Jungle Fowls, and peacocks of different species.

The Natural History Museum has stuffed and mounted trophies of tiger, elephant and some other big



PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE

animals. The zoo park has successfully bred several important species like rhinoceros, hippopotamus, tiger, lion, jaguar, panther, crocodile etc. Sometimes some of the foetuses (fetuses) get aborted due to psychological disorders. Such specimens have been collected and preserved in this museum. Dropping of each animal have unique coloration, shape and size which will help in identifying the species to which they belong. The droppings of giraffe, barking deer, sambhar, Thamin Deer, Mouse deer, nilgai (blue bull),



Source: arun sambhu mishra / Shutterstock



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Source: arun sambhu mishra / Shutterstock

black but, chowsingha and elephant are preserved in the Natural History Museum. The museum also has display boards explaining the history of the zoo park since its inception.

Amenities

When you come here, be prepared to walk for long distances (around 5-8 km) inside the zoo. It helps you to explore the secrets of the park at your own pace. Signboards display the route to various animal zones, exit route, important



characteristic of animals, mammals and birds of different species. Sprawling lawns, sit-outs, canopied shelters, benches and shades offer ample scope for relaxing and taking rest all around the park.

But still, if you prefer not to walk that long, bicycles are available inside for a nominal fee for going around the park.

Battery operated vehicles are an ideal option for senior citizens and larger groups. They take the visitors on a hop-on-hop-off trip, allowing them to relax and spend as much time as possible at different animal zones.

If you have children in your group, you should not miss a ride on the toy train. It takes you on a wonderful journey of 2.6 km in 20 minutes and let you explore everything at ease.

The multi-cuisine food court, Rhino Canteen and Maharaja Canteen (snacks and beverages) serve a good variety of food items.

The Nehru Zoological Park warrants more than a single visit to



appreciate the real beauty of Nature and wildlife in their best forms and colors. Still camera and video camera are allowed on payment of a nominal fee. So it is a favourite spot for amateur photographers who arrive early in the morning to photograph the animals and birds in their natural postures.

The park remains closed on Mondays. ¹⁰



Dwarka Temple

A DEEP DIVE IN DWARKA

Well-known as a religious destination, Devbhoomi Dwarka district is fast growing into a place for beach tourism, nature tourism, water sports and sightseeing.

Devbhumi Dwarka District comprises the talukas of Dwarka, Bhanvad, Kalyanpur and Khambhalia with its headquarters at Jamkhambhaliya. Though the main attraction is the Dwarkadish Temple and its religious importance as one of the Four Dhaam of India, Dwarka has enough to offer a person looking for stunning vistas, culture and heritage.

A look at three days in Dwarka:



Flamingo at Charakhla



Painted storks at Charakhla

BIRDWATCHING AT CHARAKHLA

Start your morning by driving to the salt pans of Charakhla, which comprises an Important Bird Area declared by Birdlife International. Here, you are likely to see hundreds of pelicans and flamingos, flocks of grebe, painted storks, spoonbills and small wading birds like oystercatcher. You may even get to see pelicans fishing in the water.



Embroidery and Patchwork

SHOP FOR HANDICRAFTS AT MITHAPUR

A short drive from Charakla brings you to Mithapur, where the Tata Chemicals Complex is located. This industrial town was started by the Tatas who took over salt works of Okha Mandal from the Baroda Princely State, and has many historical buildings and archives. Tata Chemicals founded its Society for Rural Development (TCSR) for the benefit of the rural population in the Okhamandal region, where their plant is situated. Much of the work has been done towards ensuring sustainable income for the woman artisans of

Okhamandal region in Gujarat's Jamnagar district whose embroidery has not got its due. Self-help groups of Bhopa Rabaris, and also other artisans like Ahirs, Charans, Lohanas, whose women do good embroidery and applique work, are part of the initiatives. The embroidered and patchwork are fabricated into a wide range of clothing, accessories and home decor products that is sold in retail in the district and the big cities. The Okhai branded products get a market in boutiques and emporiums.

You can visit the Bhopa Rabari villages, where women do exquisite handwork.

WORSHIP THE CHARANGANGA MANDIR

From Mithapur, drive to Tupani, about 23km from the Rukmini temple. Here there is a spring of fresh water said to have been created by the feet of Lord Krishna. The legend says that Krishna and Rukmini were personally carrying a sage in a cart towards Dwarka, when the queen was thirsty. Krishna created the spring so she could drink and this disturbed the sage who cursed them that they would both be enshrined 3 km apart from each other. The Charanganga spring is still here and there is a temple nearby.



Rukmini Temple

ADMIRE THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE RUKMINI TEMPLE

About 23km from Tupani, the Rukmini Temple is an architectural gem rich in sculptural details. Dating to the 12th and 13th century period, the Rukmini temple was built in honour of Rani Rukmani, princess of Vidharba who was to be married to Sishupala, but eloped with Lord Krishna. The temple is set facing towards the sea. You can see flocks of ibises and other birds nearby.

EVENING DARSHAN AT THE DWARKADISH TEMPLE

Continue to the Dwarka town, where there are many good places for lunch from traditional thali eateries like Shreenath Dining Hall and to hotels like Lords Eco Inn, VITS, Cygnet Inn and Dwarika.

After lunch and rest, visit the Dwarkadish Temple, which is an impressive sight with its towering





Bet Dwarka

shikara and carved walls. There is a 5pm aarti you can attend.

In the evening, walk down to the lighthouse and the beach for a splendid view of sunset.

MORNING AT BET DWARKA

In the morning, head for Okha, where you can get a ferry for Bet Dwarka. You can also charter a boat at the Rahemat Cruise Seva. It is enjoyable to watch the gulls flying, wheeling and cavorting around the boats trying to get tidbits from the passengers. As the boat starts from the jetty, you will soon start enjoying views of the open sea at the

mouth of the Gulf of Kutch. About an hour offshore start watching for dolphins. You are most likely to see the humpback dolphins surface for air – there are different types of dolphins and porpoise found in the Arabian Sea, and the conspicuous humps and elongated fins are diagnostic of the humpback dolphin species.



Gurdwara at Bet Dwarka

by DINESH SHUKLA



Nageshwar

After dolphin-spotting, come to the holy island of Bet Dwarka. Auto-rickshaws will take you for a tour of the holy places like the Hanuman Dandi, Vaishnav Bethak, Sidi Bawa Peer Dargah, Haji Kirmai Dargah and Gurdwara Bhai Mohkam Singh. Mohkam Singh was one of the Panch Pyare of Guru Gobind Singh making this a place of Sikh pilgrimage.

NAGESHWAR

Return to Okha and then drive from here to Nageshwar Mandir – the lingam here, believed to be one of the 12 Jyotirlingas, is set in an underground chamber.

You can also explore pristine beaches and coral reefs at Positara and Mulvel.

OKHA MADHI

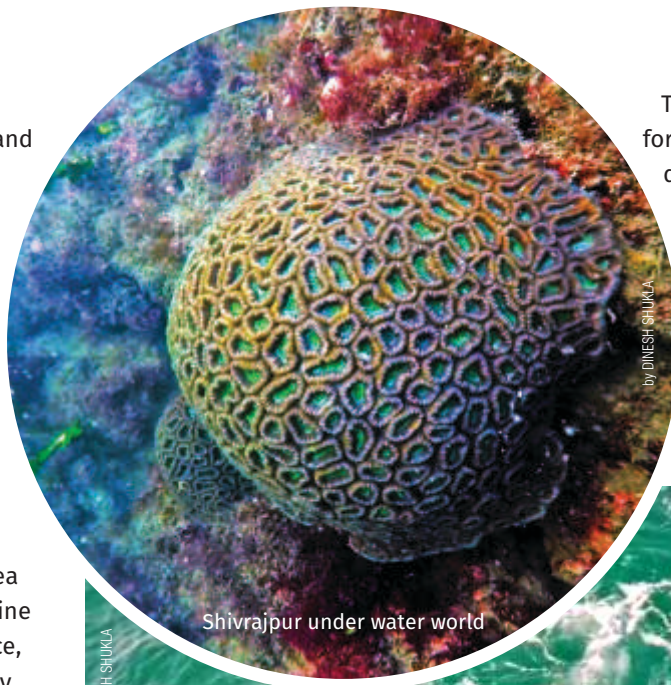
Return to Dwarka and then travel about 25 minutes to Okha Madhi, a long and beautiful sandy beach from where you can enjoy a glorious view of sunrise. Along this beach is a Turtle Hatchery. The western coast of Kathiawad is an important breeding zone for endangered green sea turtles. The green sea turtles are among the largest of marine turtles with a gleaming olive carapace, unique in being herbivorous. They lay eggs on the beaches, and the hatchlings have a perilous journey to the sea when they can fall prey to gulls and other birds, crabs, stray dogs and other predators. Eggs in potentially dangerous areas for the hatchlings are collected and kept in the hatchery. The interpretation centre has informative about sea turtles and their life cycle.

Okha Madhi is a glorious place to walk on golden sands and witness the sunset.

Return to Dwarka for dinner. There are many good resorts for dinner like Fern Sattva, Dwarkadhish Lords Eco Inn, Mango Hotels Select Dwarka, VITS Devbhumi, Cygnett Inn and Roma Kristo. Hawthorn Suites by Wyndham is a deluxe resort newly started on the National Highway near Dwarka.

MORNING AT SHIVRAJPUR

Take an early start in the morning for the stunningly beautiful Shivrampur Beach. A long stretch of white sands, the beach faces a calm sea that is swimmable for part of the year. Don the wet suit, mask and snorkel, before boarding a rubber dinghy. The diving instructors guide you through an underwater exploration of coral reefs and other underwater habitats. Yellow-finned fish swim past and a butterfly fish



Shivrampur under water world

by DINESH SHUKLA



Dolphins are spotted during boat cruises

come remarkably close to my mask. Among the corals you could see myriad marine life.

The beaches in this area are also excellent for other water sports.

JAMKHAMBALIYA

From Dwarka, travel east to Jamkhambaliya, which was the capital of the Nawanagar State before the Jadeja Rajputs moved to the new city of Jamnagar. This is a walled town with bastions, and five entry points: Nagar gate, Por gate, Jodhpur gate, Salaya gate and Dwarka gate. The town abounds with holy places like Ramnath, Kamnath, Ashapuri Mata, Kalyanraiji and Jadeshwar Mahadev temples, Mahaprabhu's Bethak and a Dargah.

A DEEP DIVE IN DWARKA

This town is an important centre for the agricultural produce of the district - you can get quality ghee, groundnuts and cottonseed oil.

Nearby Ghee Dam and the Khambaliya reservoir offer scenic views and possibility of birdwatching. A religious fair occurs here at Shrivana.



Diving at Shivrampur

by DINESH SHUKLA

GETTING THERE

Dwarka has a well-connected railway station. The nearest airports are Porbandar (101km) and Jamnagar (140km).

WHERE TO STAY

Toran Tourist Bungalow-Dwarka Nr. Government Circuit House, Dwarka Tel. 02892-234013 toranhoteldwarka@gujarattourism.com <http://booking.gujarattourism.com/>

Words by ANIL MULCHANDANI

Frontier Fun

Travelling to the DMZ from Seoul



Last June when US President Trump met North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, they did so in a technically no-man's land, the DMZ or Demilitarized Zone, an area that is 250 km long and 4 km wide. There was an element of familiarity as this was a place that I had visited the last time I was in Seoul. It was an experience that was scary as well





Chintung Lee - Freedom Bridge

as exhilarating. The scary part begins soon after the tour bus picks me up from the 5-star hotel in Seoul. Once outside the cosmopolitan, modern city with one of the fastest Internet speeds in the world and the most number of cosmetic shops I had ever seen in Myeongdong, the road is lined with barbed wire – something that I have not seen anywhere else. The guide explained that this was because of the threat of attack by North Korea, though I found it a wee bit difficult to understand how this could keep away the enemy in this era of drones and air warfare.



Imjingak Park Pagoda



Imjingak Park

South Korea's fear of an attack by North Korea is not invalid because technically the two countries are still at war. The ceasefire in 1953, which led to the creation of the DMZ did not signal an end to the war. This fear is also supported by another stopover on the tour, a tunnel that North Korea had dug to get through to South Korea, according to the guide. It is a steep tunnel and going down it is difficult but coming back up is tough. I was so tired that I was panting like a dog that has had a long run. If they were ready to do this, this shows the desperation of the people to escape. I say people because it seems impossible



Source: Chintung Lee/Shutterstock



Source: - Mengsik Im/Shutterstock

that a tunnel like this could have been dug with just a single individual. Four tunnels were found and the third tunnel discovered in 1975 is the one that we visited on our tour. North Korea said the tunnels were dug for coal and even painted the walls to look like coal.

You can only visit the DMZ in a tour group. We met in the hotel lobby at

about 9 am and the 1-hour drive runs mostly parallel to the Han River, a natural boundary between the Koreas. This is a highly patrolled river to prevent illegals from swimming across to South Korea. The first stop on the tour was Imjingak Park, which is dedicated to those who were killed in the Korean War in the early 1950s. Millions of families

were separated when the ceasefire was signed in 1953 and sight of the hundreds of thousands of fluttering prayer ribbons tied to the fence by people for their families in North Korea is a poignant symbol of the devastation that war brings to the common man. Also moving is the huge bell that former North Koreans ring, while facing the homeland they were forced to abandon to pay respects to their ancestors on Lunar New Year and Chuseok Day, which falls on September 30 this year.

A short walk brings us to the Freedom Bridge, a reconstructed structure. It was one of two bridges over the Imjin River, which were both blown up during the war. The railroad bridge was used as a safe passage way for 12,000 repatriated South Korean prisoners of war after the ceasefire was signed under United Nations supervision. Today, it is still heavily guarded



and no one is allowed to cross in either direction. We were only allowed to stand at the entry to take photographs with a cute pair of guard dolls, a male and a female. From a glass terrace at the building with a kiosk selling food and drink, we were able to get a better look at the Imjin River and the North Korean bank on the other side.

Just before the main security checkpoint for the DMZ, there is a visitor's centre with a small play area for children and stalls selling American and Korean food. Every tour group, it seemed, stopped here. Buses in all colours with passengers speaking many different languages crammed the parking lot. It sounded like the Tower of Babel. Our guide said that here children played while adults were at war.



PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE

The philosophy was more poignant at the Unification Village and the DMZ Theatre and Exhibition Hall, where we learnt about the history of the war and division of Korea. I remember once visiting the concentration camp in Dachau, Germany, where at a memorial is written “Never again” in five languages: Yiddish, French, English, German and Russian. Seeing the exhibition in DMZ brought back the same feeling of helplessness, the horror of war.

THE DMZ is the most heavily fortified border zone in the world, which is a huge tourist attraction. There are only two villages in the DMZ - Taesung in the South Korean half of the DMZ, and a mile away across the border, North



Guards across the border in the DMZ

Korea's Kijong Peace Village. No communication is allowed between the villages so that people in Taesung who have close family members in Kijong, have no idea if they are even alive. South Korea tries hard to keep Taesung as a model village, but a dwindling population means that only a handful of students in the village school are from

Taesung. The rest come by bus from the nearest village outside the DMZ, Munsan. Parents want to send their children to the Taesung School as they get personalized attention, with the best student-teacher ratio in South Korea – almost 21 teachers and staff for about 35 children. The village has no supermarket, no gym, no theatre, no hospital and

no restaurant. Farmers need military escort to harvest paddy from their fields.

The visit to the infiltration tunnel was next and this was followed by the Dorasan Train station, the only fully functional station in the world from where trains go nowhere. This is the station from where trains will leave for



FRONTIER FUN - TRAVELLING TO THE DMZ FROM SEOUL

glimpse into North Korea through binoculars. It was raining and incredibly hazy and we could barely make out the flagpole on the other side of the border. The village was built in the 1950s to lure South Koreans to defect and move across the border, according to our guide. I did not feel the windowless drab walls that we could make out would have lured anyone. ¹⁰



Dorasan Train station

North Korea whenever the two countries learn to live in harmony or unite – a sign of hope that I appreciated even more after all that I had seen on the trip so far. There are entry gates, ticketing booths, cafeteria, baggage check counters – but no trains. There's even a timetable, but it is empty.

At the top of the hill was the Dorasan observatory that gave us our only



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