

# PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE

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A high-end monthly magazine

## *Festive Foods Of Diwali*

**Beating the odds during Pandemic**

**A Walk in the Park – New York Central Park**

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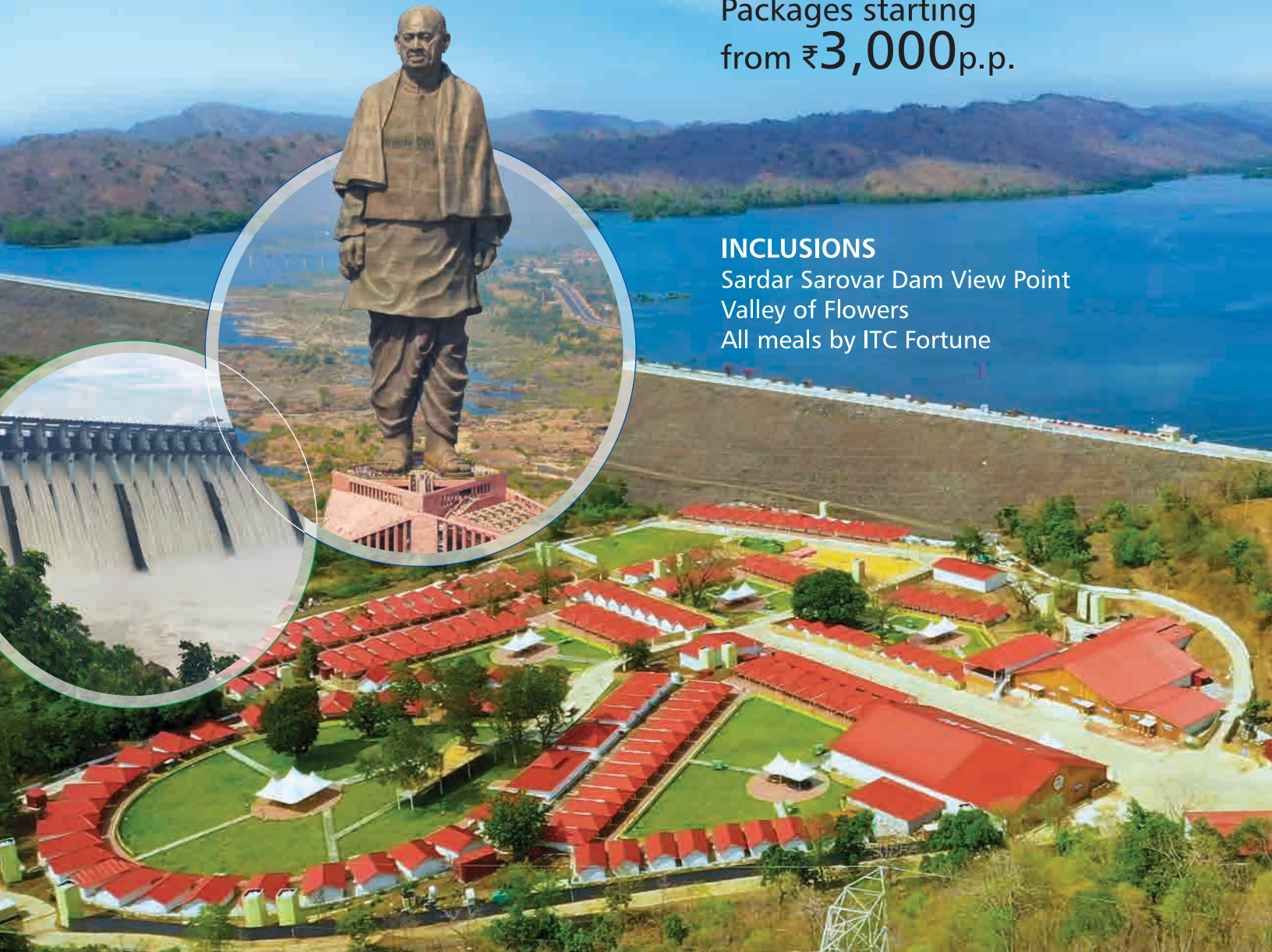
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# Old will always be Gold!

**A**s much as we are attracted to new creations, the stories of the past never fail to amaze us. And it is probably the reason why places with yesteryear charm are popular among tourists. More than the attractive elements, they reflect ancient times and give us a peek into different eras, habits and traditions.

'A Walk in the Park – New York Central Park' features an interesting journey of New York Central Park with the moments and stories of glory to outbreaks and pandemics. The Park came into existence somewhere in 1800s. Since then, New York Central Park has evidenced both good and challenging times for the human race. It is a must-visit place of New York and the most filmed location in the world.

As Diwali is round the corner, we know it is difficult to resist that usual festive enthusiasm. Though the pandemic won't allow us to meet as many people as earlier, shop like we used to or explore restaurant to try out new cuisines, it is surely possible to spend quality time with the family while cooking new 'Diwali Special Dishes'. Read on!

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November 2020



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Source: Mahendra N Parikh/Shutterstock

Bar Headed Goose - Nalsarovar, Ahmedabad



# A Walk in the Park New York Central Park

One of the first things I do after landing in the Big Apple once the jet lag is dealt with is go for a walk in the park. And not any park. It has to be THE park, the Central Park. One of the biggest parks in an urban city in the world, the New York Central Park covers 843 acres and draws around 38 million visitors annually. Ever since I first visited Central Park in 2007 on my first visit to New York City, I have been in love with it. In today's world, amid the pandemic, this green lung is even more valuable.

The Central Park itself owes its existence to the city authorities' realisation of the need for open spaces for the city's elite to walk around and enjoy fresh air after the wide outbreak of cholera in 1832 and again in 1849, which left thousands dead in New York. The Central Park was designed by Calvert Vaux and

Frederick Law Olmsted, who was a huge supporter of open spaces where people could enjoy sunlight and fresh air, which was supposed to help get rid of miasma or foul vapours that were blamed for contagious diseases such as cholera. Olmsted had lost a child to cholera and he was even more determined to provide parks for New York citizens. He went on to design and build more than 100 parks, including in cities such as Boston, Chicago, and Detroit. In New York itself, he was responsible for Prospect Park in Brooklyn as well.

Though with the advance of science and medicine, diseases and epidemics are no longer blamed on miasma or vapours, the importance of fresh air and sunlight is as relevant now. In fact, the Central Park is an escape as well as a place to get that much needed sunlight that doctors are asking all of us to get more of to build immunity to coronavirus amid the Covid-19

pandemic. It also became a kind of field hospital operated by the evangelical Christian relief group Samaritan's Purse to help treat Covid patients from the Mount Sinai Health System in April when the city's hospitals were struggling to deal with the large numbers of patients. The 68-bed field hospital in Central Park had 10 ICU beds and ventilators and operated till the beginning of May.

I love Central Park in all its hues. I love it in the summer when I love walking through the tree-lined avenues all the way to the Belvedere Castle that offers gorgeous views of the Great Lawn, the Turtle Pond and the Delacorte Theater. I love it in the fall when all the trees glow in a variety of hues. I love it when the cherry blossoms are in bloom. I love it in winter when snow covers the ground, giving the whole area a Christmas card look.



## New York Central Park



Belvedere Castle was designed by Vaux and architect Jacob Wrey Mould and is built on the lines of the English folly. With its stone façade and turrets, it could easily stand in for Sleeping Beauty's castle, especially as it is surrounded by so much greenery. Originally designed as a structure that does not serve any useful purpose, in 1919, it became a site where scientists gathered to determine wind speed and direction. Today, it houses the Henry Luce Natural Observatory, where visitors can learn about the Park's nature and wildlife. The Observatory displays microscopes and telescopes, and offers Discovery Kits complete with binoculars, maps, and paper for those who want to jot down their findings and observations about Central Park. The second floor of the Observatory has a collection of papier mâché replicas of the birds

found in the Park. Belvedere Castle is a great location for bird watching. The Observatory also offers up-to-the-minute weather forecasts on request.

The most popular part of Central Park has to be the 55-acre Great Lawn, located mid-park from 79th to 85th Streets. A great space for a picnic, it is difficult to envisage the Park without the Great Lawn. But it was not even part of the original design. It was built on the site of the original Croton Reservoir, which was drained when a new water tunnel was built in 1917. The space became a place for the homeless during the Great Depression and also a place to dump rubble when the subway and the Rockefeller Center were built. After a lot of debate the space became the Great lawn in 1937, but fell into disrepair and neglect in the 1960s. In 1995, a huge restoration project brought the Great Lawn back into the lush expanse of green that it is today.

Walking through Central Park is like taking a walk through the annals of history. The park is littered with statues, each one a tribute to an icon – playwright William Shakespeare, poet Robert Burns, author Sir Walter Scott, and American satirist Fitz-Greene Halleck. The latest to join them is the Women's Rights Pioneer Monument, the first statue to depict real women. The 14-foot-tall statue has been created by sculptor Meredith Bergman and shows Sojourner Truth, Susan B. Anthony, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, visionary women who worked for women's suffrage, women's civil rights, and the abolition of slavery. The statue marks the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution that gave women the right to vote. Inaugurated in August 2020, it is the first monument to be added to Central Park since 1965.

I usually exit Central Park at its southern end for a relaxing break of tea and cakes at The Plaza, a 100-year-old New York icon. Unfortunately, the hotel has suspended services in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. I pray this pandemic ends soon and look forward to when tea and cakes will again be served at The Plaza. And I will walk through Central park again.



# Beating the odds during Pandemic

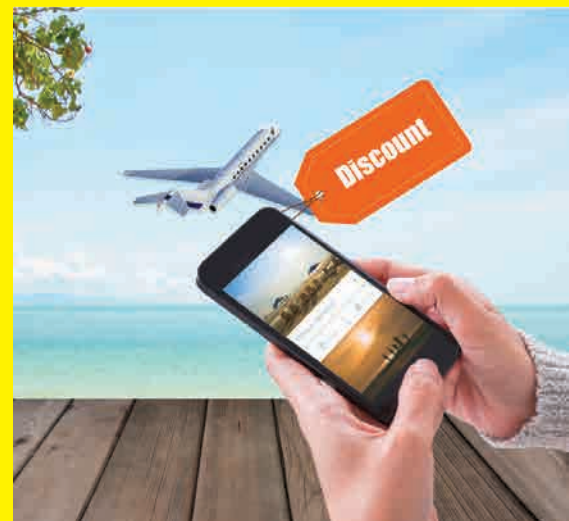
**A** tour operator specializing in inbound tourism to India, paused for a moment and then wearily said, "With the advent of the internet, we were already struggling to get customers. We were just about keeping our heads above the water, but the Covid, delivered the coup de grace. Is this the end of the road for tourism," he wondered.

Tour operators are in for a rough time. Inbound tourism has taken a body blow. The profits in inbound tourism had ranged from 20 to 25 percent, whereas in domestic tourism the profit margins were "a paltry 10 percent". According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the economic damage is likely to exceed US\$1 trillion in 2020 alone.

Is it really the end of the road for tourism? Not really. The focus is now on domestic travel. In India at least, domestic tourism is beginning to pick up. Today, the airline rates have almost reached pre-Covid levels.

The word 'staycation' has suddenly become a ubiquitous word on the Internet. Staycation - the word coined in the year 2005 means, 'a holiday in which leisure activities are pursued while staying at one's own home'. Many travel companies have taken up the word with alacrity, in their advertisement campaign to promote, domestic travel. So what is there for the footloose traveller?

With the option of working from home, many families have gone for an extended stay at exotic resorts combining work and leisure in a salubrious environment - a staycation in the true sense of the word.



A travel company has come out with a package with flight and hotel bookings at concessional rates. The companies have also become lenient in their cancellation rules. Further the packages are loaded with other complimentary offerings. An airline is enticing passengers with a complimentary night in a particular premium hotel, if you book a flight with them. All these are, of course, for a limited period of time.





Tent City Narmada, Kevadia



An inbound tour operator has made a collection of his photographs and videos of various destinations in India into a video for presentation to various clients outside India. The virtual tours with excellent diction, makes a masterful presentation, which he is able to sell at a profit.

Another tour operator is organizing weddings at exotic fort palaces in and around Rajasthan. With the pandemic restricting the number of guests, these locales are beginning to see more clientele. According to a travel agent, many of these resorts have already been booked in advance.

Is it safe to travel? The Ministry of Tourism is looking for ways of reviving Tourism in the country. In order to assist the hospitality industry, the Ministry has partnered with the Quality Council of India to introduce an initiative called SAATHI for Assessment, Awareness and Training for the Hospitality Industry. The Ministry is also ensuring uniform protocols between states to ensure that the tourists have a seamless travel across state borders.

The COVID 19 pandemic has made it imperative for creation of a comprehensive national database of accommodation units in the country. The database would assist in framing of policies and strategies such as promotion and development of tourism. Further it would assist tourists to find ready information on places for accommodation and other relevant information that the tourists seek before deciding to travel.

The Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC), the subsidiary of India Railways, has resumed the private Tejas Express train services from 17th October, 2020 between Ahmedabad - Mumbai and Lucknow - New Delhi. The service was suspended seven months ago due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Like in airlines, every alternate seat would be left vacant. The passengers would be thermally screened before they embark. Once seated, they would not be allowed to exchange seats. A protection kit would also be provided to them in embarkation.



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## PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE

The West Bengal Transport Corporation (WBTC) is expected to open up riverine cruise on the Hooghly River. The tourists would be able to enjoy a 90-min cruise journey on the river, alongside Kolkata's heritage landmarks.

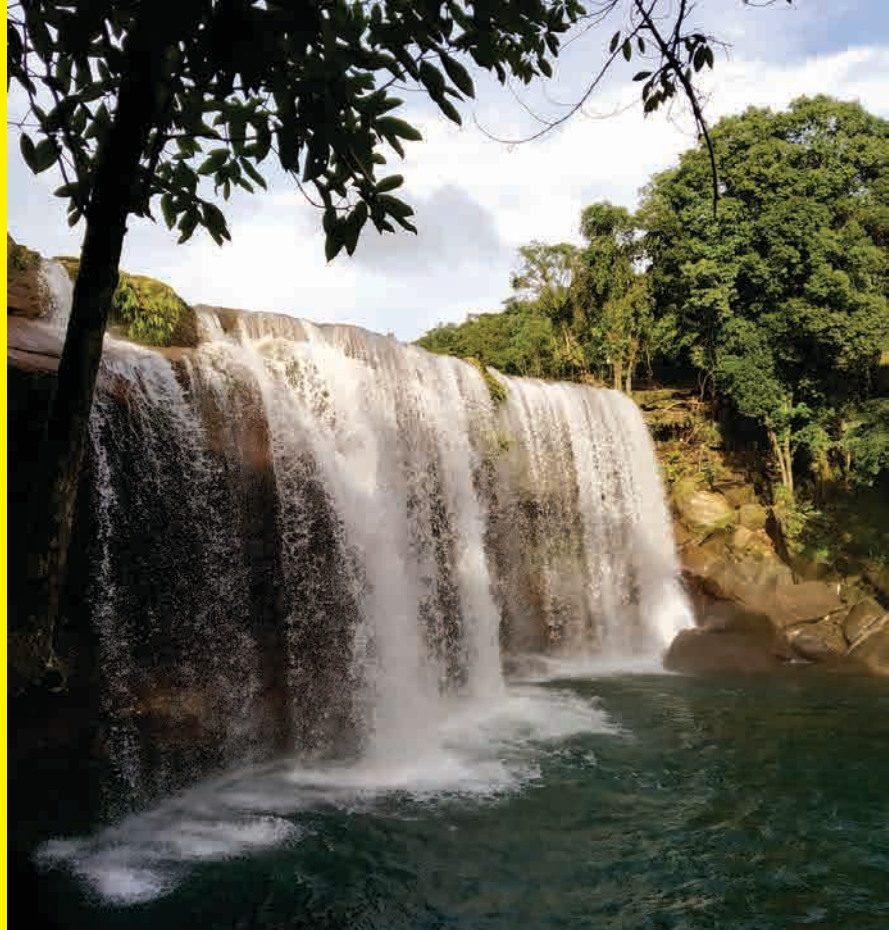


Source: Dr. Shantanav PChitnis/Shutterstock

The metropolitan cities have been badly affected by the pandemic. However the North-eastern states and the Himalayan States have been least affected. These places provide ample opportunities for the domestic travellers to rove.

Uttarakhand is all set to ease norms for visitors. The hill state is expecting higher inflow of tourists. River rafting, the high voltage activity, is also set to return. Various river rafting agencies have been advertising in the recent past. The Uttarakhand Government is planning to exempt the mandatory Covid-19 test for tourists coming for short trips.

The Indian Government has announced that it will permit cruise ships to resume sailing from October 1. The Ministry of Shipping has rationalized tariff rates for the Cruise vessels. There would be an immediate rate relaxation in port charges ranging from 60% to 70%, which would immensely benefit the cruise industry in India. From November 6th, 2020, a cruise line is expected to commence its services from India.





International travel is of course not possible for some time to come. At the time of writing, many parts of Britain have gone in for a second lockdown and so have other parts of Europe. If you cannot get out of the house, the world still can come to you. Many museums are offering an exciting insight into their exhibits - free of cost. Google Arts & Culture has teamed up with over 2500 museums and galleries around the world to bring virtual tours and online exhibits of some of the most famous museums around the world, right into your living room.

Welcome to the world of virtual journey through art and time. Choices are there for you to pick, whether it be, The Louvre, Van Gogh Museum, The Vatican Museum or the British Museum or the world of graffiti in New York, Buenos Aires, Bangkok or Dakar. Sit back for a vicarious enjoyment for a trip of a lifetime for some of the most enchanting experiences, not with your legs, but with your hand!

For the entrepreneur, these times could be serendipitous for those who wish to tread uncharted waters. For the clients their outdoor travel is circumscribed, but there is a whole array of virtual tours for their delectation. The good news is that the tourism sector is opening up, albeit slowly. The fall in tourism has been steep and sharp. But the recovery gradient would be more slanting than steep. But the odds can be overcome.



# FESTIVE FOODS OF DIWALI



Each festival in India has foods attached to them.  
Praveg's Tourism One talks about some of such festive foods.

**D**iwali is one of the most celebrated festivals in India and food is very much part of the tradition throughout India where it is celebrated in different ways. In an agricultural country like India, most festivals are celebrated during harvest period. Diwali marks the last harvest before the winter crops.

Around a month before the festival starts, women start work on making sweets and snacks for Diwali. In some parts of India, Diwali snack and sweet making is very much a social activity, where women get together to make festive foods, swap recipes and ingredients, and chat in



kitchens and courtyards. Since Diwali is at the beginning of winter the produce of the autumnal harvest like chickpeas, rice, lentil, cereals, spices, sesame seeds, fresh fenugreek leaves, coconut, sugar and jiggery, are all part of the festive menu. Come Diwali, and family and friends to drop around to each other's houses with boxes of homemade snacks and sweets.

The mithai shops are very busy during the days leading to Diwali – great crowds gather as Diwali approaches to buy sweets, snacks, dry fruits and confections.

The foods of Diwali made in Sindhi households celebrate the

Diwali Food



Cashew Barfi



Badam Barfi

Motichoor Laddoo





**Mawa Kachori**



**Sooji Halwa**



**Ukkarai**

vegetables available during this harvest. For Diwali, one of the classics is Saat Bhajiyun, called Chiti Kuni by some families, a dish of seven vegetables cooked together usually in a tomato gravy. Varo is a popular Sindhi winter sweet, usually made during Diwali. This is a kind of nut brittle which has mixed nuts with caramelised sugar or jaggery as the base.

The first thing that comes to mind when you think of Diwali food is sweets made from milk, lentils, semolina, chickpea flour, carrots, pumpkins and other ingredients that are shaped into laddoos, barfis and halwas.

If you visit Delhi, you will find Kheel Batasha - sweet puffed rice with sugar drops made during Diwali. These sugar confections are made in different shapes. Kheel Batasha is traditionally prepared from the fresh batch of rice is offered to goddess Lakshmi as a token of respect, and to ensure health, wealth, and prosperity. It is also said to give the necessary carbs and sugar after a spell of fasting.

In Rajasthan, you can enjoy Mawa Kachori during Diwali. Round flattened



**Tea-time Snacks**

balls of dough are deep fried and stuffed with khoya or mawa made from thickened milk, and possibly dry fruits and nuts. One of the famous places to enjoy this is in Jodhpur.

Moti Pak is another winter sweet usually made starting with Diwali. This barfi is made from chickpea flour, khoya and sugar, and is popular in Rajasthan and Gujarat. During the festive season it is decorated with foil work called varaq.

In the states of western India, from Rajasthan to Maharashtra, you are likely to get Lapsi, Rava or Shira as a Prasad or sweet. Lapsi is typically cracked wheat sautéed with ghee and sugar - it is served with long beans in Maharashtra, and they say the long bean signifies longevity. Maharashtra's Diwali faral comprises a number of sweet and savoury snacks. Anarsa, rice flour and jaggery fritters studded with poppy seed, is a popular Diwali faral for



**Red Halwa - Made of arrorate**



**Cholafali**



**Rabdi**



Moti Pak



Karanjis



Homemade Halwa Slices

breakfast. It can take a week to prepare. Another faral is the crescent shaped karanjis. This very traditional sweet has a crisp golden exterior with a fluted edge and a delightful stuffing inside. Regional versions of karanji are ghughra in Gujarat, kusli in Madhya Pradesh, gujjia in north India and neuri in Goa. Shankarpale are diamond shaped sweet cookies dusted with powdered sugar popular throughout the year but especially in Diwali and winter. Dal pakoras are also popular in Maharashtra. Galaka, ukkarai, sheera and poli are also popular during Diwali.

Mathiya, the spiral-shaped chakri and chivda are commonly served to guests visiting houses.

During Diwali, some parts of India celebrate with sweets made using Chironji, a nutty seed that comes from the plant which goes by the botanical name Buchanania lanzan. Chironji ki barfi, said to have its origin in Sagar in Madhya Pradesh, is popular in Malwa and other parts of Central India. In parts of central India, dinner can include Dumwale Suran - elephant foot yam served for dinner.

In Telugu, teepi gavvalu is made rolling dough made from flour and jaggery into pretty shell shaped curls (teepi gavvalu means shells) that are then deep fried and dipped in sweet sugar syrup. It is a popular festive snack in Andhra Pradesh during the Diwali

period.

Gulgule is a mix of sweet dumplings made from wheat flour, gulgule are commonly eaten during Diwali in many states of north India sometimes with kheer (rice pudding) or rabdi (sweet thickened milk).

In Tamil Nadu, deepavali marundu or legiyam is made using carom seeds, poppy seeds, dry ginger, dry grapes,



Shankarpale



Anarsa



Poha Chivda



Dal Vada



**Pinni Laddoos**



**Laapsi**



**Farali Chevdo**

honey, jaggery, nuts, ghee and more. It is believed that this preparation aids digestion. If you visit the Chettinad region of Tamil Nadu during Diwali, you are likely to get Thenkuzhal-murukku made from chana dal, jaggery and roasted nuts.

Up north in the hills of Kumaon, something to look forward to during Diwali is the single-fried semolina spirals made with semolina, banana, curd, milk, sugar, and cardamom. These are soft and spongy.

In Punjab, this is the season for Pinni – Laddoos made from whole wheat flour is roasted and enriched with ghee, dry fruits, khoya and sugar till it turns a beautiful golden brown colour.

This is the time when the season starts for cholafali in Gujarat, widely enjoyed during Diwali. Light and fluffy, with a sour and spicy seasoning of chilli powder and dry mango powder, this fritter is definitely an irresistible snack.

Further south in Goa, Diwali is a big festival that marks the destruction of Narkasur by Lord Krishna. The morning begins with poha - batata fau (with piquant potatoes), kalayile fau (with jaggery and spices), doodhatlye fau (with milk), rosathle fau (with cardamom-infused coconut) and a simple sweet poha prepared with curd or buttermilk.

If you are in Odisha, look for the sweet called Rasabali.

It is a long held Bengali tradition to eat Choddo Shaak, a preparation made of 14 different leafy greens, on the day before Kali Puja, which is how Diwali is celebrated among Bengalis. The fourteen greens keep the evil spirits away. 🍃



**Thenkuzhal Murukku**



**Karanjis**



**Suji Halwa**



**Mathri**



**Chakli**



**Mathia**



**Rasabali**





Cities like London, New York and Amsterdam abound in vegan and vegan friendly restaurants but you can also find vegan choices in other destinations. On 1st November, World Vegan Day, we describe some interesting places for vegan food.

## 1. Pig-out on pasta in Puglia

Puglia is one of the best places for food in Italy and perhaps the most vegan-friendly in the country. The cuisine includes many plant-based dishes like handmade eggless pasta, dark leafy greens, and hearty legumes like chickpeas and fava beans. A must have is the orecchiette, which means little ears - the eggless ear-shaped pasta is served with cime di rapa, known in English as broccoli rabe or turnip tops without any cheese.



Ear-shaped Pasta

Castel del Monte



Start your visit to Puglia by visiting the Castel del Monte, which looks like a geometric shape on a hilltop when seen from a distance. Emperor Frederick II built this castle near Bari in the 13th century and it is a UNESCO-listed World Heritage Site with the remarkably perfect shape, and the mathematical and astronomical precision of the layout. The architectural style is eclectic with Islamic, Gothic and classical elements. Take a trip to Otranto's cathedral, which is a place apart - built by the Normans in the 11th century, incorporating Romanesque, Byzantine and early Christian styles, its most spectacular piece of art is the vast 12th-century mosaic of a stupendous tree of life balanced on the back of two elephants. This mosaic was created by a young monk called Pantaleone in 1165, whose vision of heaven and hell encompassed an amazing (con)fusion of the classics, religion and plain old superstition, including Adam and Eve,

Diana the huntress, Hercules, King Arthur, Alexander the Great, and a menagerie of monkeys, snakes and sea monsters. Walking on beautifully preserved floors doesn't forget to look up at the exquisite wooden ceiling.

The Grottos of Castellana are one of the most important attractions of Apulia

and a natural heritage of inestimable value to Italy. The tour winds along a distance of 3 km, a unique guided tour of the caves. Continue to Locorotondo known for its local wines, and then Alberobello the town of the "trulli" - typical houses with a cone roof, used as homes and to store farmer utensils. The

Grotte de Castellana, Puglia



Locorotondo



history of the trulli is linked to the Prammatica De Baronibus, an edict of the 15th-century Kingdom of Naples that subjected every new settlement to a tribute. In 1481, the Counts of Conversano D'Acquaviva D'Aragona from 1481, owners of the territory of Alberobello, then imposed on the residents that they built their dwellings dry, without using mortars, so that they could be configured as precarious buildings and easily demolished.

Having to use only stones, the peasants found in the round form with self-supporting domed roof the simplest configuration. The roofs were embellished with decorative pinnacles representing the signature of the architect (master trullaro).

Trattoria Terra Madre is a restaurant that is known for its outstanding use of vegetables and farm-to-fork concept of zero-mile sourcing from their own organic gardens. Start with the huge vegetable antipasti and for the mains order the pasta with eggplant, zucchini and peppers. Save room for their perfect house-baked desserts.

Trulli Village in Puglia



## **2. Vegan by the beach in Tel Aviv**

Tel Aviv is a superb beach destination with its shimmering seashore, stretching 14km along the Mediterranean coast – you can choose from sites ranging from the glitzy Metzitzim Beach, where the rich and famous gather to Alma Beach. If you are interested in art, don't miss the Museum of Art and a number of art galleries. At night, Tel Aviv has a vibrant entertainment scene with plenty of places for live music and DJs, cocktail bars and lounges.

When it comes to plant-based food, Tel Aviv has more than 400 vegan or vegan-friendly restaurants across the city – not surprising when you know that Israel has 200,000 vegans. Not only is Israel known for vegan dishes like falafel and hummus, you can find vegan dishes from Persia, Israel, Turkey and Greece, Japan, Morocco, Tunisia India and elsewhere at various restaurants. Some of the iconic restaurants are Dosa Bar, Rainbow Burgers, 24 Rupee, Green Cat and Meshek Barzilay.



Metzitzim Beach



### 3. The Grandeur of Germany at Berlin

Berlin is as well-known for its historic architecture as it is for its party scene and nightlife. Don't miss one of Germany's grandest palaces - Schloss Charlottenburg, which has the flamboyant private chambers of Frederick the Great, designed in 1746 by master architect Georg Wenzeslaus von Knobelsdorff, the mirrored and gilded Golden Gallery and the paintings by Watteau, Pesne and other 18th-century French masters. Don't miss the apartment of Luise (1776–1810; a popular queen and wife of King Friedrich Wilhelm III), with its stunning bedroom designed by Karl Friedrich Schinkel.

Another grand building is the The Pergamon, which houses three awe-inspiring museum collections- Classical Antiquities, Islamic Art and the Ancient Near East. There are many other standout museums.

This city is known to have one of the largest vegan populations in Europe – try jackfruit burgers at the Valladares Feinkost, desserts at Brammibal's Donuts, iced coffee with soy-based ice-cream at geh Veg, and vegan pizzas at La Stella Nera. Don't miss the world-class vegan döner kebab at Vöner der Vegetarische Döner, 1990 Vegan Living for its Vietnamese tapas-style dishes and the value for money Cafe Vux.



Schloss Charlottenburg



Jackfruit Burgers



Falafel



Street food in Germany



Salad



Ice coffee



Pergamon Museum



Traditional Balinese Mask

#### 4. Take Cultural Break at Bali

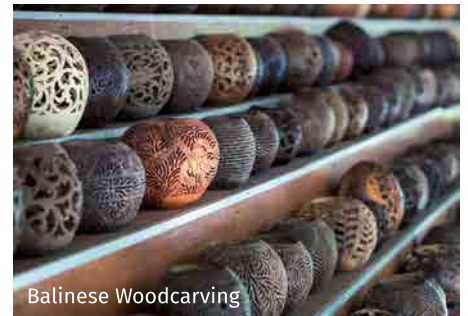
Bali is famous for its art and crafts. Start with the Celuk Village, where skilled artisans design and create stunningly intricate jewellery with filigree strands, then visit Mas village famous for Balinese woodcarving, considered to be one of the finest in the world. Exploring the Mas Village, famous for its distinctive style of wood sculptures, you will find natural designs, as well as characters from Hindu mythology. Engage with expert carvers who still chisel by hand, intricate designs and pieces, such as traditional Balinese masks used in Balinese ritual ceremonies.



Balinese Woodcarving

Continuing to Ubud, the artistic heart of Bali – here you will see many studios, workshops and galleries of local as well as expat artists. View traditional Balinese paintings as well as a variety of works by contemporary artists. During your day trip, you can buy fine works made from ebony, jackfruit and coconut wood, and textile arts like weaving and batik, paintings, and jewellery.

Ubud is also famous for its vegan restaurants. Indonesian food has vegan options - Balinese vegan restaurants located in part of the Pengosekan community of artists offer delightful options. Tempeh, tofu and red rice are widely used for the vegan takes on Indonesian dishes.



Balinese Woodcarving



Tofu



Ubud Village



Balinese Paintings



Red Rice



Tempeh



Aerial view of Glasgow



University of Glasgow

### 5. The Scottish Charm of Glasgow

Glasgow is a city known for its castle, cathedral, parks and museums, and makes a base to enjoy many delights of Scotland. But this city also offers a vegan culture. Visit Serenity Now, where the classic Scottish drink Irn-Bru is used on roasted jackfruit that goes into sandwiches, and you can also try Acai Bowls and Tofu Scramble. "There Won't Be Blood" sandwich, which features sliced seitan deli meat and almond bacon. Fans of raw plant-based food should also consider visiting Rawnchy, the city's first raw vegan dessert shop with organic, gluten-free, refined sugar-free, soy-free, and naturally sweetened treats. 🍷



Art Gallery and Museum



Acai Bowls



Tofu Scramble



Irn-Bru

Source: Weho/Shutterstock



Glasgow Cathedral

Incredible India

# GO BIRDING IN GUJARAT



Gujarat in winter is a birder's paradise. We look at destinations that can be explored when staying at homestays in Gujarat.



Gujarat is an extremely exciting destination for natural history tourists because of its remarkable diversity of habitats – from the dry deciduous forests and thorn scrub jungles of Gir and Barda hills to the moist deciduous, evergreen and semi-evergreen vegetation of the Dangs district forests, from the salt-covered desert landscapes of the Great and Little Rann of Kutch to the coral reefs, mangrove swamps and other marine eco-systems along the Gulf of Kutch, from the flat grasslands of Banni region, Lala Bustard Sanctuary and Velavadar

National Park to the hills of Jessore Sloth Bear

Sanctuary, Jambughoda Wildlife Sanctuary, Ratanmahal Sloth Bear Sanctuary, Shulpaneshwar

Wildlife Sanctuary, Purna Sanctuary and Vansda National Park. This



geographical diversity makes it possible for an eco-tourist to see a variety of mammals, birds, reptiles and floral species characteristic of each habitat over a seven to 10 day tour of Gujarat.

While Gujarat is well-known as the remaining abode of mammals like

the Asiatic lion and Indian wild ass, not seen elsewhere, it is also one of the most prolific regions for birdwatching in the whole of Asia. As the state lies on an important avian flyway for migratory birds, it is possible to see huge flocks of waterfowl at Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary, Thol Bird

Sanctuary, Porbandar, Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary and other wetlands that dot the state of Gujarat. A number of globally-threatened species could be seen in the state including White-backed and Long-billed Vulture, Great Indian Bustard, the Lesser Florican, the Stolickza's Bushchat, the Black-naped Tit, the Saras Crane, the Indian Skimmer, etc.



## AHMEDABAD

Ahmedabad, the largest city of Gujarat, is the base for visits to Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary, Thol Bird Sanctuary and a number of important bird sites.

A drive of about one or one-and-a-half hours brings you to the Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary, specially significant for its spectacular congregations of wetland birds during the winter months. An ecliptical lake sprawls across the 121 sq km sanctuary area and is dotted with about 360 tiny islets. Members of local communities like the Jaths and the Padhars operate country boats on the lake, using long poles to negotiate the aquatic vegetation of the predominantly shallow lake. Start by scanning the margins of the lake, which can be very good for viewing wading and waterside



birds. As you progress over the water, you could see ibises and spoonbills feeding in the shallow waters of the lake, herons and storks spearing fish, and rafts of ducks floating over the water. Both greater and lesser flamingoes could be seen during a boat trip at Nalsarovar. In winter, huge flocks of demoisselle and common cranes gather at the lakes, while the saras crane is usually seen round the year in sur-

rounding fields. Rosy white and dalmatian pelicans fish in the open waters of the lake. Large flocks of greylag geese can be seen in winter. The lake is also important raptor habitat with Palla's fish eagle and greater spotted eagle among the birds of prey that could be seen.

Even closer to Ahmedabad than Nalsarovar, Thol Bird Sanctuary is about 45 minutes to one hour drive

from the city. The shallow water reservoir and predominantly open water area was largely created in the early-1900s by the Gaekwad Princely State. The drive to the lake goes through fields, where you can often see the tall saras cranes. The fields are feeding grounds for many migratory birds like greylag and bar-headed geese, demossile and common eastern cranes, and ducks. The trees around the lake provide good



roosting areas. You can expect to see about 80 species of birds during a winter day spent at Thol. Carry a good pair of binoculars and wear good shoes for walking on the embankments from where you can watch the waterfowl. Flamingos, pelicans, storks, spoonbill and ducks abound, while waders are seen close to the margins. The bushes and trees can also yield good bird sightings.



**WHERE TO STAY**

There are a number of Gujarat Tourism registered homestays in Ahmedabad including heritage properties. Visit [www.gujarattourism.com](http://www.gujarattourism.com) for booking it in advance.

## VADODARA

Driving from Ahmedabad to Vadodara, take a detour at Kheda to visit a number of wetlands that lie between Kheda and Khambatt. These wetlands are excellent for watching birds. Periej and Kanewal are specially good.

Continue to Vadodara. About 50km from Vadodara, Wadhvana is a century old tank, constructed by the Maharaja of Baroda in the early-1900s near the Orsang river. There are watchtowers and you may even get a guide here. Walk around the lake to get views of coots,

ducks, geese and other birds.

Continuing east from Wadhvana, you can visit the Jambughoda Wildlife Sanctuary and the forested areas around Chhota Udepur inhabited by a good number of birds. You can also hope to see giant brown flying squirrel at Kevdi near Chhota Udepur. The Ratanmahal Sanctuary for sloth bear is

also worth exploring for birdwatching.

Another good area to explore is the Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary, well-known for its waterfalls. This is a good area for raptors - crested serpent eagle, changeable hawk eagle and shikra nest in these jungles. You can also hope to see grey hornbill among the fig trees, jungle fowl in the bushes, and eagle owl.





**WHERE TO STAY**

You can stay at homestays run by Bharatsinh Pravinsinh Parmar in Kadwal, Bhavnakumari Jitendrasingh Parmar at Chhota Udepur, Prafulbhai Ochhavlal or Prafulbhai Bhatt in Narmada district, Jahanara Abdulsattar Shaikh at Champaner or Mehulkumar Rameshbhai Patel, Panchmahal. Online booking is available at [www.gujarattourism.com](http://www.gujarattourism.com)

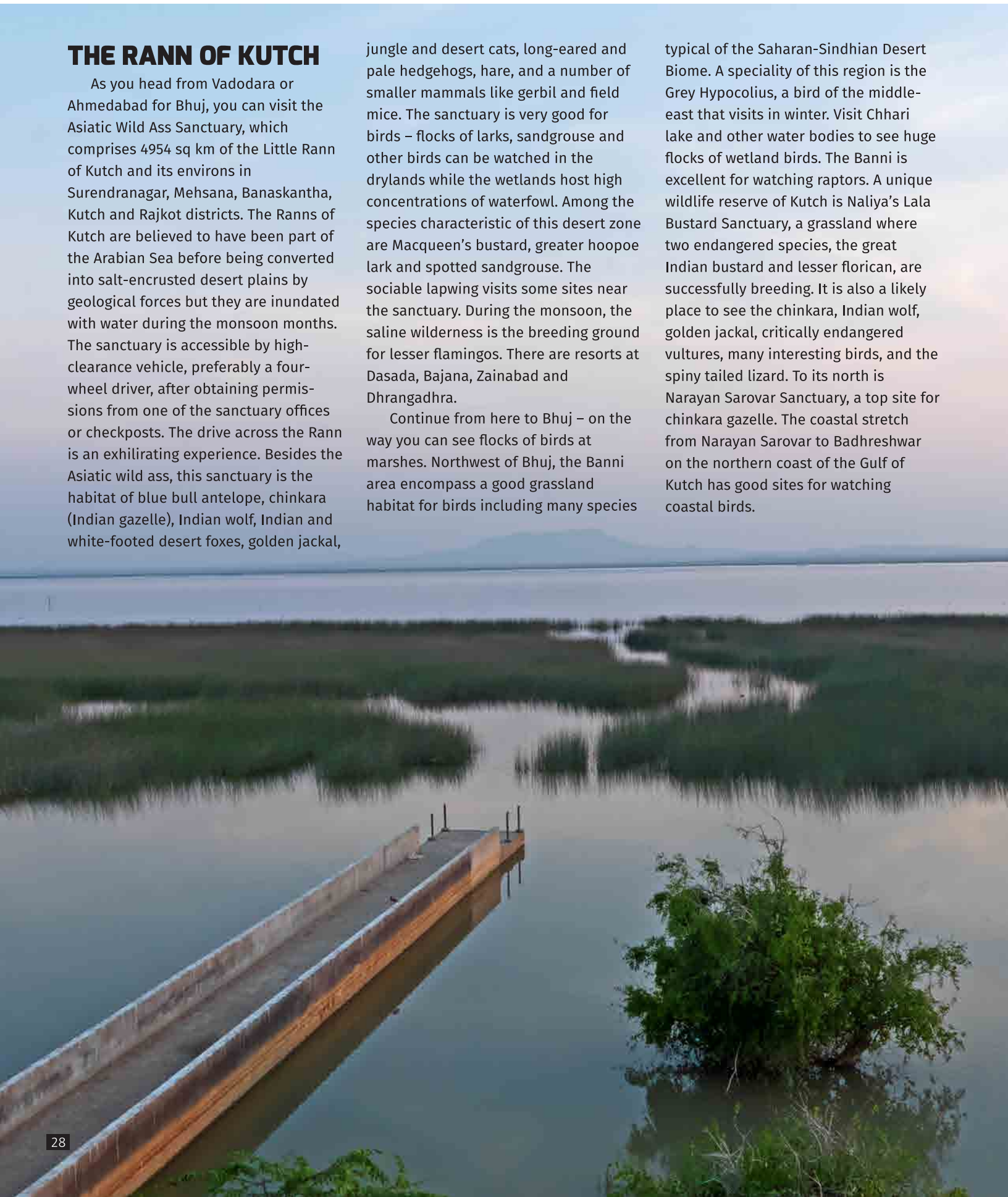
## **THE RANN OF KUTCH**

As you head from Vadodara or Ahmedabad for Bhuj, you can visit the Asiatic Wild Ass Sanctuary, which comprises 4954 sq km of the Little Rann of Kutch and its environs in Surendranagar, Mehsana, Banaskantha, Kutch and Rajkot districts. The Ranns of Kutch are believed to have been part of the Arabian Sea before being converted into salt-encrusted desert plains by geological forces but they are inundated with water during the monsoon months. The sanctuary is accessible by high-clearance vehicle, preferably a four-wheel driver, after obtaining permissions from one of the sanctuary offices or checkposts. The drive across the Rann is an exhilarating experience. Besides the Asiatic wild ass, this sanctuary is the habitat of blue bull antelope, chinkara (Indian gazelle), Indian wolf, Indian and white-footed desert foxes, golden jackal,

jungle and desert cats, long-eared and pale hedgehogs, hare, and a number of smaller mammals like gerbil and field mice. The sanctuary is very good for birds – flocks of larks, sandgrouse and other birds can be watched in the drylands while the wetlands host high concentrations of waterfowl. Among the species characteristic of this desert zone are Macqueen's bustard, greater hoopoe lark and spotted sandgrouse. The sociable lapwing visits some sites near the sanctuary. During the monsoon, the saline wilderness is the breeding ground for lesser flamingos. There are resorts at Dasada, Bajana, Zainabad and Dhrangadhra.

Continue from here to Bhuj – on the way you can see flocks of birds at marshes. Northwest of Bhuj, the Banni area encompass a good grassland habitat for birds including many species

typical of the Saharan-Sindhian Desert Biome. A speciality of this region is the Grey Hypocolius, a bird of the middle-east that visits in winter. Visit Chhari lake and other water bodies to see huge flocks of wetland birds. The Banni is excellent for watching raptors. A unique wildlife reserve of Kutch is Naliya's Lala Bustard Sanctuary, a grassland where two endangered species, the great Indian bustard and lesser florican, are successfully breeding. It is also a likely place to see the chinkara, Indian wolf, golden jackal, critically endangered vultures, many interesting birds, and the spiny tailed lizard. To its north is Narayan Sarovar Sanctuary, a top site for chinkara gazelle. The coastal stretch from Narayan Sarovar to Badhreshwar on the northern coast of the Gulf of Kutch has good sites for watching coastal birds.





**WHERE TO STAY**

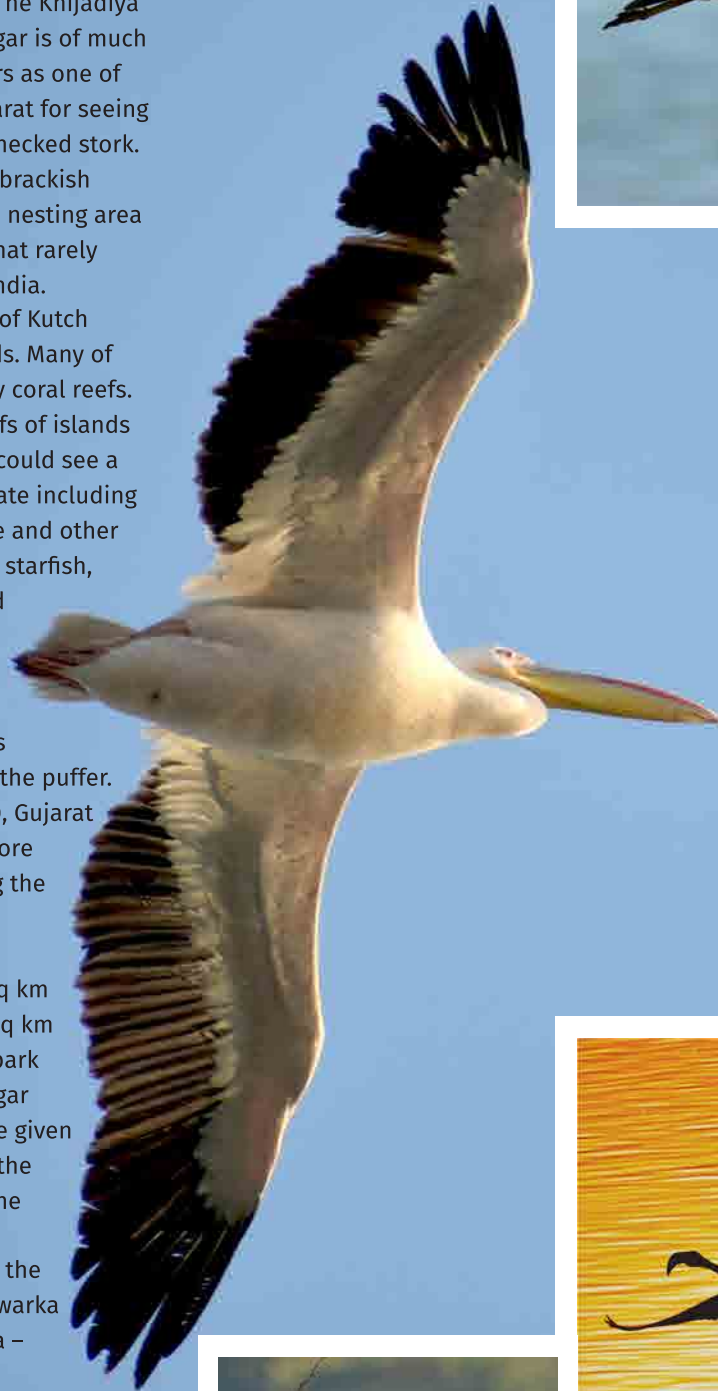
Homestays run by Vikramsingh Mohansingh Sodha and Bharatbhai Ajitbhai Kapadi offer birdwatching safaris in the Banni.

## DWARKA

Travel south from Bhuj to Jamnagar and Dwarka districts, which get large assemblances of coastal birds like crab-plover, oystercatcher, sanderling, etc, during the winter months. The Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary near Jamnagar is of much importance for birdwatchers as one of the most likely sites in Gujarat for seeing Indian skimmer and black-necked stork. A group of fresh water and brackish water bodies, Khijadiya is a nesting area for many species of birds that rarely breed in the peninsula of India.

Off shore from the Gulf of Kutch southern coast lie 42 islands. Many of these islands are fringed by coral reefs. While wading along the reefs of islands like Pirotan or Narara, you could see a variety of marine invertebrate including species of octopus, seahare and other molluscs, echinoderms like starfish, brittle star, feather star and sea urchin, sea anemone, crabs and other crustaceans, segmented and unsegmented worms, etc as well as interesting fish like the puffer. In a landmark move in 1980, Gujarat set aside a 458 sq km offshore waters of the Gulf including the islands as a marine nature reserve, which was further divided in 1982 into a 295 sq km Marine Sanctuary and 162 sq km Marine National Park. The park headquarters are at Jamnagar from where permissions are given on application for visits to the ecologically-sensitive marine habitats.

For bird photographers, the Charakhla salt pans near Dwarka offer a very productive area – thousands of flamingos, hundreds of pelicans, and a number of other birds can be seen at these pans.







**WHERE TO STAY**

Homestays by Chhaganbhai Velajibhai Chudasma, Nitin Gordhandas Dhanak, Kiranben Rameshbhai Mandora and Jayotiben Vinodbhai Chauhan, all in Dwarka. Book online at [www.gujarattourism.com](http://www.gujarattourism.com)



## GIR

The most famous of Gujarat's reserves is the Gir National Park & Wildlife Sanctuary, the last home of the Asiatic lion. This 1412 sq km wildlife area comprises of deciduous forests, semi-evergreen and evergreen riverine flora, thorn scrub jungle, grasslands and rocky areas, with seven rivers flowing through it. While the Gir is best known as the only place to see the lion in its natural habitat outside Africa, it is also one of the best sanctuaries for leopards in India and boasts thriving populations of sambar, chital or spotted deer, chowsingha (the world's only four horned antelope), chinkara gazelle, blue bull antelope, striped hyena, golden jackal, jungle cat, black-naped hare and other mammals. Rusty spotted cat has also been seen and photographed in this wildlife reserve. The sanctuary known for its population of vultures and eagles. The Kamleshwar reservoir in the sanctuary yields crocodile sightings. 📸





**WHERE TO STAY**

There is a good choice of homestays at Junagadh, Sasan Gir, Somnath and Veraval. Check out [www.gujarattourism.com](http://www.gujarattourism.com) for more information and booking.



Words by ANIL MULCHANDANI

Incredible India

# RANG RANGILO RAJASTHAN



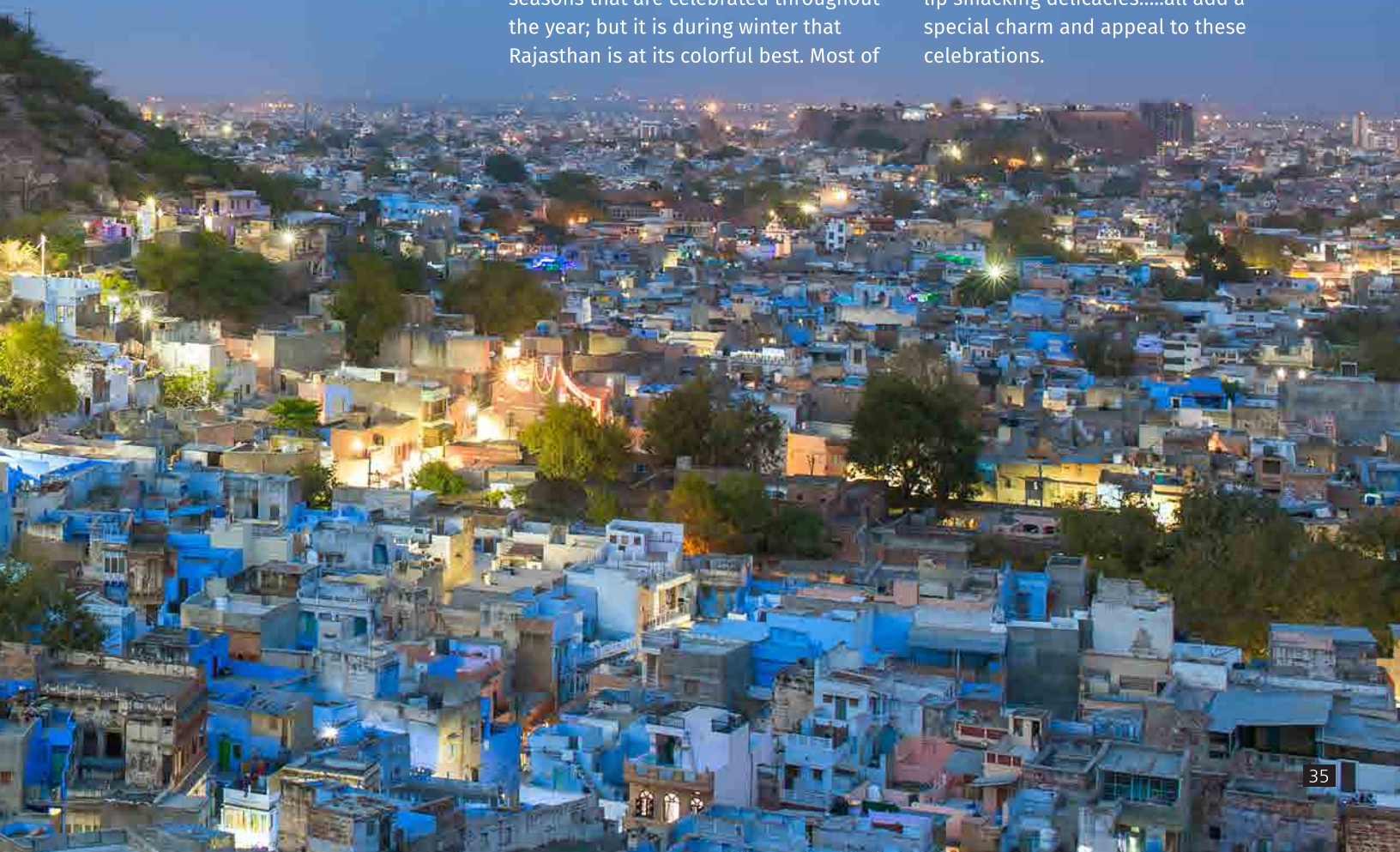
Mehrangarh Fort, Jodhpur



Ever thought of going on a voyage of self-discovery and reveling in the small pleasures of life? Well, if you are willing to walk out of your mundane life, travel to a different world and free-fall into a whirlwind of colors, music, songs and dances, the upcoming Rajasthani fairs and festivals are just the right scoop for you in winter.

Rajasthan is a land of celebrations and the Rajasthani people are well known for their generous hospitality. There are animal fairs, religious fairs and also fairs to mark the changing seasons that are celebrated throughout the year; but it is during winter that Rajasthan is at its colorful best. Most of

the winter festivals are a rich blend of trading, commercial activities, social gatherings, music, folk dances, cultural performances; religious rituals, and pilgrimages at temples, shrines, holy water bodies and in lush green forests - all of them distinct yet thinly overlapping over each other in perfect symphony. The chilled nights, the thin layers of mist, the sound of the temple bells, the mood of the Diwali, the holy festivities of the Kartik month, the devotional music, the singing of hymns, the rides on the camel-drawn cart, the lip smacking delicacies.....all add a special charm and appeal to these celebrations.





Kalbelia Dance

Source: Nila Newsom/Shutterstock

The glorious history and heroic tales of the brave Rajputs echo in the Marwar Festival in the Blue City of Jodhpur. It is organized at multiple venues like Umaid Bhawan Palace, Mehrangarh Fort and Mandore. These spectacular venues add their own charm to the celebrations. Turban tying competition, matka race, traditional dress competition, puppet shows, magic shows, camel tattoo show, horse riding, and horse polo steal the show. The best of folk dances like Dandi Gair, Kalbelia and Ghoomar enthrall the visitors. A handicrafts mela is organized in which the best handicrafts, artifacts and souvenirs are put up for display and sale. The best of the lip-smacking delicacies and the aroma of the local snacks are special attractions of this fair.

Umaid Bhawan Palace





## PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE

Shortly after Diwali, Pushkar transforms into a humming and bustling town and gets enveloped into the festive colors of the Pushkar Camel Fair. The fair is celebrated in honour of Brahma – Pushkar has a unique temple dedicated to him. Caravans of camels majestically amble their way through the golden sands and converge at the scrublands. The grounds are infested with herds of camels of different sizes and colours, groaning and grunting and feeding on dry fodder. Wonderfully bedecked camel drawn carts – surmounted with red, pink and green canopies – take the tourists on a sightseeing tour of Pushkar. Competitions like horse dance, camel dance, camel decoration are crowd pullers. Musical concerts, cultural dances, songs programmes – all in chilled weather under the canopy of stars and a waxing moon– provide the tourists an opportunity to bask in the rich art and culture of Rajasthan at the mela-ground. Traders set up stalls selling virtually everything – odhnis, ghagras, leharria fabrics, embroidered shawls, clothes with mirror work, lovely colourful bangles, beads, ethnic jewellery, miniature paintings....The mela ends with the pilgrims taking a holy dip into the Pushkar Sarovar on the Kartik Purnima (full moon night) and a visit to the Brahma Temple.



Pushkar Lake



Pushkar







Sri Raghunath Swamy Temple

RANG RANGILO RAJASTHAN



Rajasthani folk dancers





Garh Palace

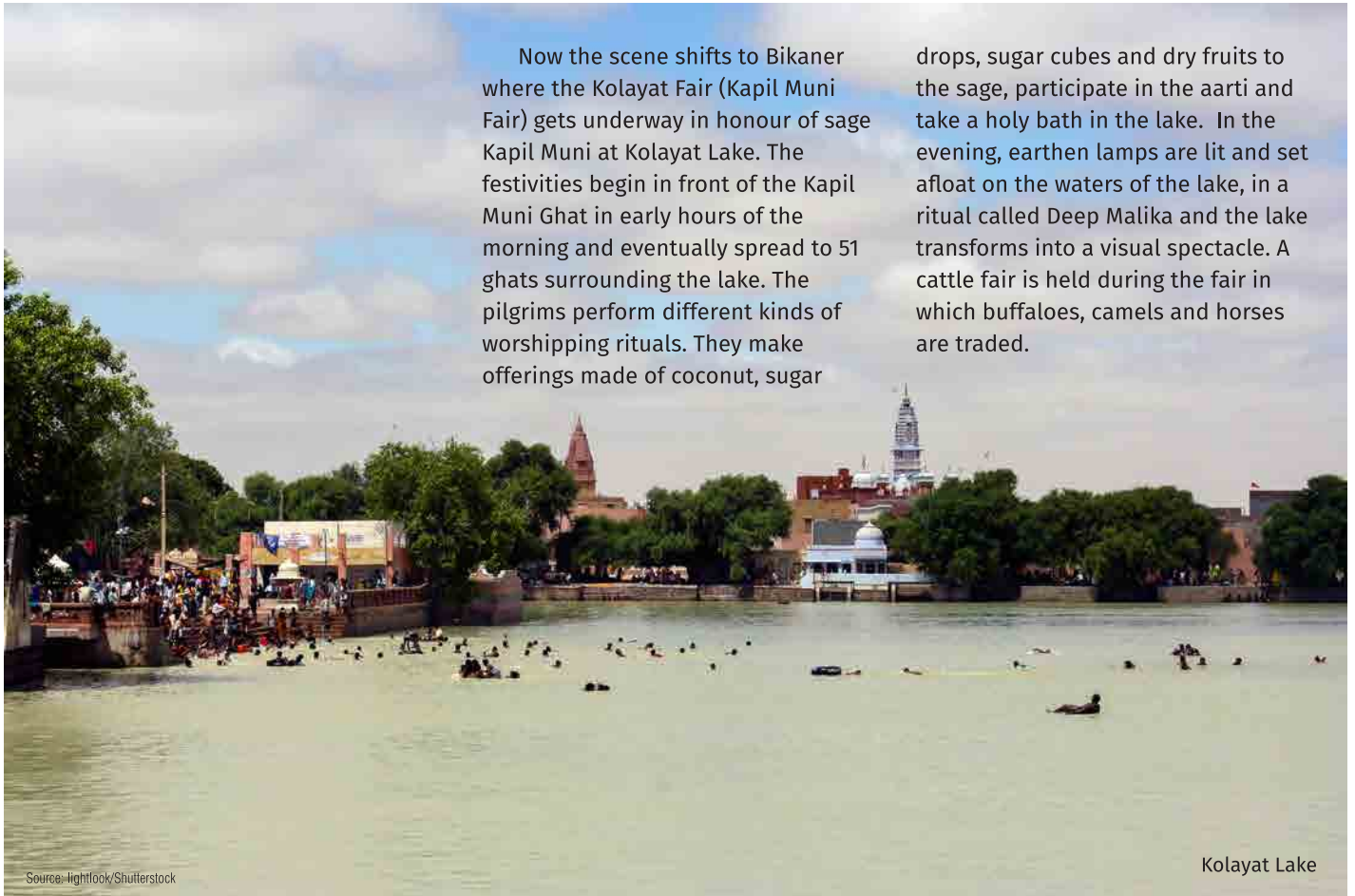
Bundi is a little known off-the-beaten track destination that retains most of its old world charm even today. It is famous for its Garh Palace, which houses the Ratan Daulat, Chhatar Mahal and Badal Mahal. The Chitrashala is an open art-gallery of miniature art executed in the Bundi School of Paintings. While the camel fair is still in progress at Pushkar, the Bundi Utsav begins in Bundi with a Shobha Yatra. It is a colorful procession of beautifully dressed folk dancers and musicians - all performing live in camel drawn carts, which make everyone dance with joy. Kabaddi, Panihari race, camel race and horse race are special attractions during day time. In the evening, men light diyas (lamps) and the women bedecked in colour costumes set the lamps afloat in the Chamber River seeking blessings. In the night, Cultural evenings and musical programmes are organized at 84-pillared cenotaph.



Chitrashala in Bundi

Now the scene shifts to Bikaner where the Kolayat Fair (Kapil Muni Fair) gets underway in honour of sage Kapil Muni at Kolayat Lake. The festivities begin in front of the Kapil Muni Ghat in early hours of the morning and eventually spread to 51 ghats surrounding the lake. The pilgrims perform different kinds of worshipping rituals. They make offerings made of coconut, sugar

drops, sugar cubes and dry fruits to the sage, participate in the aarti and take a holy bath in the lake. In the evening, earthen lamps are lit and set afloat on the waters of the lake, in a ritual called Deep Malika and the lake transforms into a visual spectacle. A cattle fair is held during the fair in which buffaloes, camels and horses are traded.



Source: lightlook/Shutterstock

Kolayat Lake



Kolayat Fair

Source: Om Mishra/Shutterstock



Kolayat Fair



Kolayat Fair



Kumbhalgarh Festival

Source: MD ROZ/VALENTIN/Shutterstock

The Kumbhalgarh Festival is organized at Kumbhalgarh Fort to pay tribute to Rana Kumbha for his splendid art and architecture. The events are divided between day and night. During daytime, tourists visit the magnificent fort and appreciate its grandeur. The local artisans display and sell their ethnic handicrafts, handmade jewellery and a plethora of souvenirs, and they also show how these items are hand-crafted. Cultural competitions like musical chairs and henna application are enjoyed by one and all. Nights come alive with musical concerts, puppet shows, folk and dance performances like Kalbeliya, Sapera, Terah Thali, Kachi Ghodi, and Odissi all in the backdrop of the magnificent fort, wonderfully illuminated in golden yellow lights.



Kumbhalgarh Fort



Kumbhalgarh Festival



Ranakpur - a unique spectacle of verdant greenery, gushing streams and natural beauty - hosts the Ranakpur Festival. The Ranakpur Jain Temple and the Sun Temple are prime attractions and main venues. The cultural evenings abound in attractive folk and classical performances. Yoga and nature walks at the foothills in the forests of Aravallis and hot air ballooning are other attractions of the fair.





Ranakpur Jain Temple



If you wish you enjoy a perfect blend of delicious food, stunning handicrafts; kite flying, rowing, poetry reading sessions and cricket in winter, you should visit the Winter Festival in Mt Abu. A grand procession marks the beginning of the fair and culminates at the Nakki Lake with Deepdaan ceremony in the evening, where hundreds of earthen lamps are set afloat in water as a mode of respect. A stunning display of fireworks marks the end of the festival.

And with that Rajasthan rolls over into New Year celebrations, with a long list of fairs and festivals, waiting to be celebrated... 📍



Toad Rock







Nakki Lake



Mt. Abu

Incredible India



# CHILD-FRIENDLY GUJARAT

Travelling with your family? Gujarat has many enjoyable and educational excursions you must take with your children.



## ENJOY ACTIVITIES WITH KIDS IN AND AROUND AHMEDABAD

In recent years, Ahmedabad has developed a number of modern urban projects like the Kankaria Lakefront and Sabarmati Riverfront that take into account the needs of children.

Start your morning at Kankaria Lake, which has been a recreational hub for families in Ahmedabad for decades. The lakefront is entered by a magnificent gateway designed to represent the architecture of the Gujarat Sultanate, and there are well-planned parking areas. Walk along the promenade to enjoy views of the lake, which was created in the 15th century. It was originally named for Hauzi-i-Qutab-ud-

Din when he was the Sultan of Gujarat. This polygonal medieval lake has finely sculpted embankments and carved sluice screens which are worth seeing for the architecture. The 34 sided lake has an island garden in the centre and the Nagina Wadi Gardens. You can watch herons and other birds at the lake.

The lakefront has been rejuvenated with a pedestrian-only recreational area. Take a morning toy train ride on the Atal Express, a toy train. Proceed from here to enjoy the gardens and fountains. A little further away is the tethered balloon – get into the basket and go up in the balloon for a superb panoramic view of the city. Nearby, you can hire a Segway - a two-wheel balancing vehicle, for a ride around the lake. A number of aquatic activities and boating can be enjoyed at the lake.



Atal Express, a toy train

Leave the promenade and visit Kid's City, which is like a miniature scaled down world for children, where they learn through realistic role-play at micro-versions of a fire station, a post office, a police station and other utilities.

Opposite the lake, the Kamala Nehru Hill Garden Zoological Park is one of the most visited zoos in India. The zoo was started in the 1950s by the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation with the late Reuben David as its first superintendent. The zoo became famous for the interest David took in each of the animals, its breeding record of lesser flamingo, water monitor and various endangered species, and its record of maintaining albino specimens of many mammals and birds. There is a good collection of big cats, herbivores, monkeys, birds and reptiles. Don't miss seeing the Nicobar pigeons.

Kankaria Lake Front



Near the zoo is the Balvatika, a children's park with a maze of mirrors and other attractions. There is also an informative Natural History Museum with dioramas featuring stuffed animals and birds in their natural habitat. The Butterfly Park is a garden that has been landscaped to create a habitat for butterflies – walk around the park to see butterflies feeding at various flowers.

From Kankaria travel to Shreyas Campus, which has two museums exhibiting toys, dolls and handicrafts. Proceed to the Gujarat Science City, a unique science theme park. It has IMAX 3D Theatre, a Planet Earth Pavilion, a Hall of Space, an Energy Education Park, an Electrodrome with lots of information about electricity and its uses, a Life Science Park and Hall of Science with interactive exhibits. Take a thrill ride in the simulator and see a show on the Science City LED Screen. You could also check on details about events at the Amphitheatre. At night, enjoy the musical fountains.

From Ahmedabad, travel to Indroda Nature Park set along the Sabarmati River. The park contains botanical gardens, a reptile park, a zoological park with enclosures for hoofed ungulates and carnivores of Gujarat, a bird aviary, a dinosaur park and wooded areas. From the parking area you come first to the Dinosaur Park, which exhibits fossils of

prehistoric fauna from Kutch, eastern Gujarat and the fossil site of Raiholi near Balasinor, life-like models of Deinonychus (a carnivore), Tyrannosaurus-Rex, Megalosaurus, a Triceratops and her baby, a giant Brontosaurus, an Iguanodon and other dinosaurs, and informative text about prehistoric life. The models are displayed in a naturalistic environment. Further ahead of the dinosaur park is an exhibition of skeletons of blue whales, a dolphin and a dugong. Continue to the bird aviary, snake park, deer park, crocodile enclosures and cages with big mammals.

Akshardham, a colossal complex with beautiful gardens, the impressive pink stone Swaminarayan temple, which contains gold-leaf coated statues of Lord Swaminarayan and a theme park with a Hall of Holy Relics containing possessions of Swaminarayan and state-of-the-art galleries with audio-visual shows. The first hall of exhibition traces the journey of Lord Swaminarayan or Sahajanand Swamy through a video show; a fiber-optics cosmos; a miniature recreation of Chhapiya village in Uttar Pradesh where he was born, his travels from the northern hills through jungles to the southern coast of India, and 'sound-and-light' shows. Other halls use multi-media, audio-animatronics show, dioramas and fiberglass figures to depict



Tethered Balloon

messages from the scriptures.

It is worth spending time in the gardens called the Sajajanand Van, which have water features, statues, play areas for children and a café called Premvati Refreshments. The complex is well-known for its spectacular water show.

Take a day trip from Ahmedabad to Balasinor. This town has come into limelight because of the nearby Raiyoli Dinosaur Site. This is where one of the largest dinosaur fossil sites in Asia. Visit the museum and interpretation centre, and the fossil park.

#### WHERE TO STAY

Toran Hotel Opp, Gandhi Ashram,  
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Words by ANIL MULCHANDANI



Boating at Kankaria Lake

## **AN EDUCATIONAL TRIP AROUND VADODARA**

Vadodara has a huge garden complex with the Kamati Bagh and Sayaji Bagh, with a zoo and play areas for children. For an educational experience, visit the museum at Vadodara purpose built in the 1880s and '90s. Among the key museum exhibits are the narrative paintings and silver trays from Tamil Nadu, prayer flags and other Tibetan-Buddhist exhibits, miniature paintings and manuscripts of the Mughal period, oil paintings from Europe, plaster images of classical works meant as role models for aspiring artists and an Egyptian mummy. The museum also has excellent archaeological, geological, ethnological and natural history sections. The picture gallery, with royal portraits, was commissioned in the early-20th century.

Proceed to Ajwa lake and Nimeta, famous for its gardens, and then to the World Heritage Site of Champaner-Pavagadh. See the impressive historic fort and majestic mosques of Champaner, before taking the ropeway to Pavagadh Hill – the views are superb.



Baroda Museum



Sayaji Bagh



Sayaji Bagh



Pavagadh Hill



Nagina Mosque, Champaner

**WHERE TO STAY**

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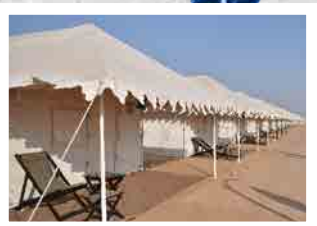
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