

# PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE

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*A high-end monthly magazine*

Must Visit in

2021

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**Traditional Delicacies to Try on  
Makar Sankranti**



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## A Year of Rebound

Later in 2020, Skyscanner.com saw a 368% jump in searches for international destinations for travel in January. Many signs point out that 2021 will be a year of travel rebound. If and when you decide to embark upon a trip, you will find two kinds of travelers this time, those who are on their replacement vacations and those who want to make up for sitting at home the whole last year.

Which one are you? In both the cases, we are here to help you with our list of destinations to travel in 2021. Plan for an ecotourism trip to Costa Rica, go outdoors in Slovenia or take an island break at Tahiti, whatever your choice is, we have got you covered.

If thrill is what you need at the moment, we present a curated list of adventure holidays in India. Spend your holiday at Manali with high-altitude sports or enjoy trekking holidays in Darjeeling. From Gulmarg to Badami, India is a country that offers a wide range of thrilling experiences.

Read on!



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January 2021



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Far Far Away



# MUST VISIT IN 2021



*The Covid-19 pandemic has caused many to cancel their holidays in 2020. When the borders open again, these are some places to consider for travel.*

## Eco-tourism in Costa Rica

Costa Rica has been cited as Central America's great health success story. Its healthcare system is ranked higher than that of many highly developed countries. It is known also for good management during the pandemic. One of the most visited countries of Central America, Costa Rica draws many tourists to its extensive series of national parks and other protected areas. There is a trail that enables tourists to walk all the way from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast.

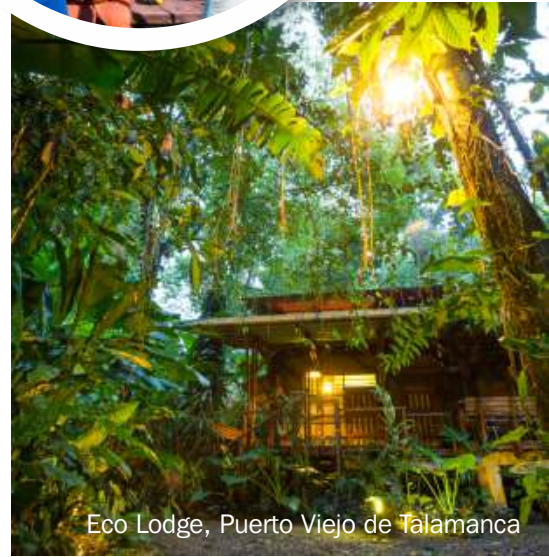
Parque Nacional Tortuguero is one of the top places to watch wildlife in Costa Rica. You can hire a boat or canoe that will take you through the forests along the water – you are likely to see caimans, river turtles, herons, monkeys and sloths.

Arenal Volcano





Rainforest Jungle



Eco Lodge, Puerto Viejo de Talamanca



## Outdoors in Slovenia

Slovenia has much to offer the visitor from the peaks of the Julian Alps, the formations in the Postojna and Škocjan caves, many green lakes and coastal areas along the Adriatic Sea. It is a relatively tiny country, where you can in a few days go from warm Mediterranean areas to the Alps, where it can snow even in summer. More than half the land is forest. Those who like sports can take a choice of skiing, walking and hiking in the mountains, cycling, rafting horse riding, ballooning, caving and canyoning.



The Church of the Assumption



Piran Town



Bled Castle



Predjama castle in Postojna Cave



Skocjan Caves



Kozjak Waterfall



Old Clock Tower In Piran



Matira Beach

## Island Break at Tahiti

Since July 15th, 2020, quarantine measures have been lifted and French Polynesia's borders are open to international tourism from all countries subject to precautions and conditions. Tahiti has many different islands, so you can find a secluded place away from the crowd to enjoy the scenery and perhaps pick from many outdoor pursuits. There is a wealth of accommodations including over-water villas at Bora Bora.



Moorea Island



Polynesian Dance



Lake Kivu



## Lake Cruise at Rwanda

One of the promising experiences of 2021, Mantis Kivu Queen uBuranga is a floating luxury hotel which cruises along Lake Kivu in Rwanda.

With ten modern cabins, a swimming pool, restaurant, bar, and viewing deck with a hot tub this boat goes through the Albertine rift montane forests known for its biodiversity. You can choose from hiking, birding and other outdoor pursuits, visit villages and try the local food.



Lake Kivu



Panoramic Top View of Lake Kivu



Volcanoes National Park



Silverback Mountain Gorilla,  
Rainforest



Source: The Road Provider/Shutterstock

Qatar National Museum



## Culture Tour of Doha

**D**oha in Qatar is an excellent place for a luxury holiday. It has top branded hotels like St. Regis, W, Park Hyatt and Ritz-Carlton. This city has many museums, modern exhibition spaces and a famous library. The National Museum of Qatar that opened in 2019 is designed by French architect Jean Nouvel and is spectacular, with its facilities within offering an immersive and educational experience.

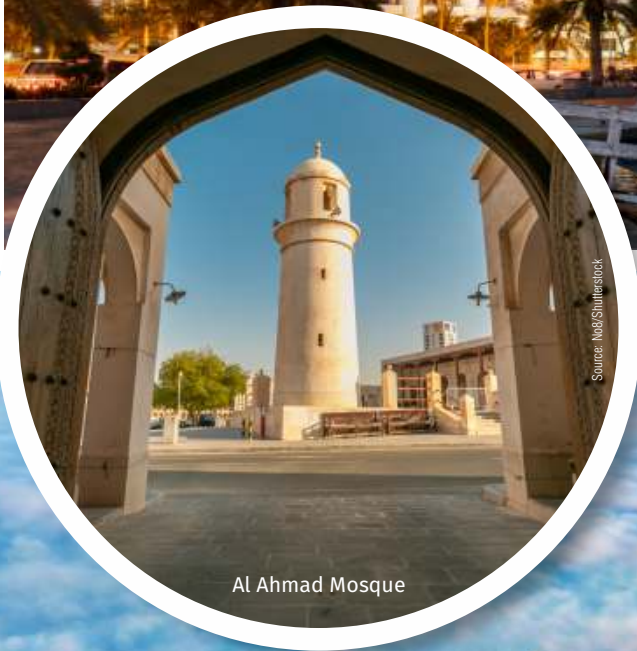


The National Museum of Qatar



Museum of Islamic Art

The skyline of Doha city center after sunset



Al Ahmad Mosque



Traditional Folk Dance



Pearl-Qatar Island



Megalithic Tiya stone pillars, a UNESCO World Heritage Site



Source: Derje/Shutterstock

## Visit The Parks of Addis Ababa

**E**thiopia has what is considered by many to be the world's first contactless terminal at Bole International Airport, designed with an eye toward biosafety, very much in keeping with the times. The introduction of E-VISA facility has boosted the arrivals here. This airport makes a base to visit nine UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the country, but in recent years the city of Addis Ababa has developed new attractions like the Bilal Habashi Community Museum that offers an insight into the Islamic heritage of the country. An interesting open museum is the Unity Park, opened in October 2019 within the 40 acres Imperial Palace grounds. You can walk to see murals, sculpture gardens and pavilions that showcase the history and culture of the country. For the outdoors type, Entoto Park has nice walking paths alongside eucalyptus trees. There is a good choice of adventure sports here from zip-line to horseback riding.

Holy Trinity Cathedral



Source: millos60/Shutterstock



Source: RudiEnat/Shutterstock

Meyazia 27 Square



Source: millos60/Shutterstock



Traditional Village Houses

## Take a Heritage Tour of St George

St. George's, located on an island in Bermuda, and within the parish of the same names, is the oldest surviving English town in the Americas. Originally called New London, it was Bermuda's capital until 1815. It contains many historic buildings, including Devonshire Redoubt, Landward Fort, Seaward Fort (King's Castle), and Southampton Fort, St. Peter's Church consecrated in 1612, which is the oldest Protestant church in the New World, the Tucker House, the Globe Hotel, the Mitchell House, Stuart Lodge, the Old Rectory, the Bridge House, the Carriage House, and the Unfinished Church. The opening of St. Regis Bermuda at St. Catherine's Beach is expected to give a boost to tourism at this UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Kings Square

Source: Wikibach Photo Gallery



Seascape at the coast of st. George's



St. George's World Heritage Site



Historic St. Peter's Church



Tobacco Bay

Bosta Beach and Iron Age House, Great Bernera



## Explore the English Coast

England's coastal areas have attracted artistic travelers because of imposing craggy cliffs, fossil-strewn beaches, seabirds and picturesque port towns. Craggy cliffs, fossil-strewn beaches, and picturesque port towns have long lured artists, writers and explorers to England's shores. In 2021, the 2,717-mile-long England Coast Path will form a continuous trail for those who want to explore the coastal wonders of England.

Lighthouse on Westray, Orkney Islands



The Church of St Thomas



St Magnus Cathedral



Isle of Wight



Northern Ireland Rope Bridge



Ruins of the Brodick Castle



Idyllic Waterfall in the Scottish Highlands



Isle of Wight



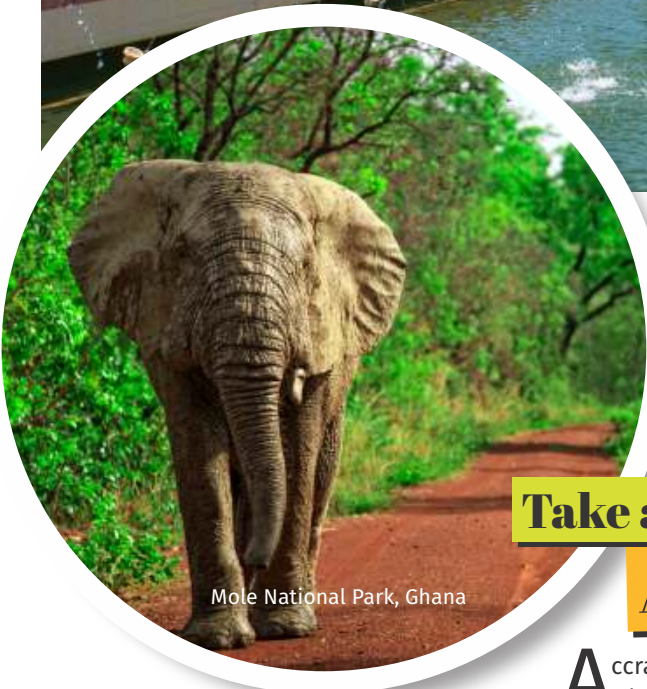
Isle of North Uist



Village in the Orkney Islands



The Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Park and Mausoleum



Mole National Park, Ghana



## Take a Safari at Accra

Accra is an atmospheric place with the Makola market and abounds in good places to eat. Don't miss the serene white sand beaches and numerous luxury hotels. Safari Valley Resort Aburi is creating a new buzz in Ghana. Located near the Aburi botanical gardens, it promises an emphasis on the forest and wildlife resources, art and culture. You can get close views of impalas, giraffes, zebras, hyaenas, lions and wildlife.



Art Masks at Outdoor Market



Wood Carvings at Outdoor Market

## Go Whale Watching in Mirissa

If you do not want to travel far, go to Sri Lanka for some nature trips. Mirissa is the base for offshore trips during which you are likely to get close to whales.



Mirissa Beach



Kyoto Tower

## Take a Safari at Kyoto

This city was geared up for the Olympics, which did not happen but much of the facilities newly developed are now available for travellers in 2021. Visit the recently renovated UNESCO World Heritage Site Kiyomizu-dera Temple, shop at Beams Japan Kyoto and enjoy lots of good Japanese food in the restaurants. 🍱



The Golden Pavilion, Kinkakuji Temple



A Maiko Performer



Kiyomizu-dera Temple



Daigo-ji Temple



Fushimi Inari Shrine



Bamboo Forest



Japanese Food

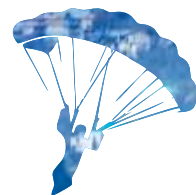
# ADVENTUROUS HOLIDAYS IN INDIA

From skiing in Himachal to scuba diving in Havelock, India offers many superb destinations for adventure holidays.

January to March is a good time for many adventure sports in India. Some of the top sites are also excellent holiday destinations. We look at a few places where a holiday with friends or family can turn into an adventure experience.



# *High-Altitude Sports in Manali*



If you have looked longingly at photographs of river rafting, rappelling, rock climbing, paragliding, skiing, heli-skiing, snowboarding, glacial lake trekking, mountain cycling, all-terrain quad biking and pony treks, plan to spend your holidays at Manali. At Manali, you will find a range of operators who can organize introductory-level adventure activities, pony and mountain bike hire, treks, adventure courses and even extreme sports like heli-skiing, powder skiing, mountaineering, solo paragliding and trekking expeditions.

Scenically beautiful Solang Nullah near Manali is the scene for mountain

sports: for tourists, there is tandem paragliding (a pilot operates the craft, while you get to see snow peaks and mountains during the flight), zorbing (two of you will be strapped into a giant ball, which is rolled down the sloping meadow), quad-biking and the fairly gentle Beas Kund trek. When there is enough snow (usually Jan-April), the valley offers a 1.5km Alpine run for skiing and snow-boarding. Balloon rides

are sometimes available.

For Rafting, one of the best stretches is between Pirdi and Jhirna near Kullu where the Beas River churns up white water for Grade 2 and 3-level rafting (on an increasing difficulty scale of 1-5). If it is your first time, the guides do much of the manoeuvring when you come to a wave or a small drop, while instructing you on how to paddle through rough stretches.



Kyoto's Sagano Bamboo Forest



# *Trekking Holiday In Darjeeling*

**D**arjeeling is the base for treks that are fairly easy for a family to attempt while offering superb views into Nepal or Bhutan and outstanding birdwatching. Before setting out for a trek, spend a couple of days in the hill station town, which has a good zoo, a mountaineering institute full of Everest expedition memorabilia, lovely walks around Tiger Hill, monasteries, tea estates and classy places to stay in converted heritage properties.

Offering grand vistas of Mt Everest and Kanchenjunga, the Singalila Trek is

enjoyable for a family as the trail is fairly easy, though those into trekking can opt for more strenuous paths, and there are houses on the way that let out comfortable rooms and serve home-cooked food. This trek starts from about two hours drive away from Darjeeling and runs to Sandakpu, with views from 12,000 ft above sea level of some of the world's highest peaks. Though the trek over the Singali Ridge to Sandakpu is in four stages, allow at least six days in order to explore the surrounding forests and experience Nepalese culture. During the

summer vacations, you can enjoy the seasonal blooms of rhododendrons and other flora besides spotting beautiful pheasants, fire-tailed myzornis, parrotbills, flycatchers, robins, woodpeckers, cuckoos, finches and other striking-looking birds.

Another interesting trek starts near Meli, which is good for white-water rafting on the Teesta. From the river, you can spend a couple of days trekking to Samthar Plateau, which offers a good view of the Bhutan Himalaya and makes a good base.



# *Skiing in Gulmarg*





If you are looking to enjoy sports amid snow, Gulmarg is the destination for you.

The gondola in Gulmarg, running along Apharwat, is the second-highest cable car in the world. The cable car takes you to an elevation of 4,265 feet just below the summit. From here, there are many off-piste with superb views. For serious ski enthusiasts, there are also powder skiing areas. The skiable terrain of Apharwat is one of the largest, longest and highest in Asia.

Gulmarg is also a great holiday destination with an excellent choice of good resorts.



# *Rock Climbing in Badami*



**B**adami is located in a ravine at the foot of rugged red sandstone outcrops with Agastya Lake as the centerpiece. The town is best-known for its splendid rock caves, and also makes the base to visit spectacular monuments at Pattadakal and Aihole.

The red sandstone cliffs are excellent for rock climbing enthusiasts. The area has a number of bolted routes that offer both sport climbing and bouldering.

There are bolted routes and switchbacks. Carry equipment you can use for various terrains.





Source: Samosh Nimbajkar/Shutterstock



Entrance archway for Shivalaya in Badami

Source: Saury Hardy/Shutterstock



Source: Duttapada M V/Shutterstock



Entrance archway for Shivalaya in Badami



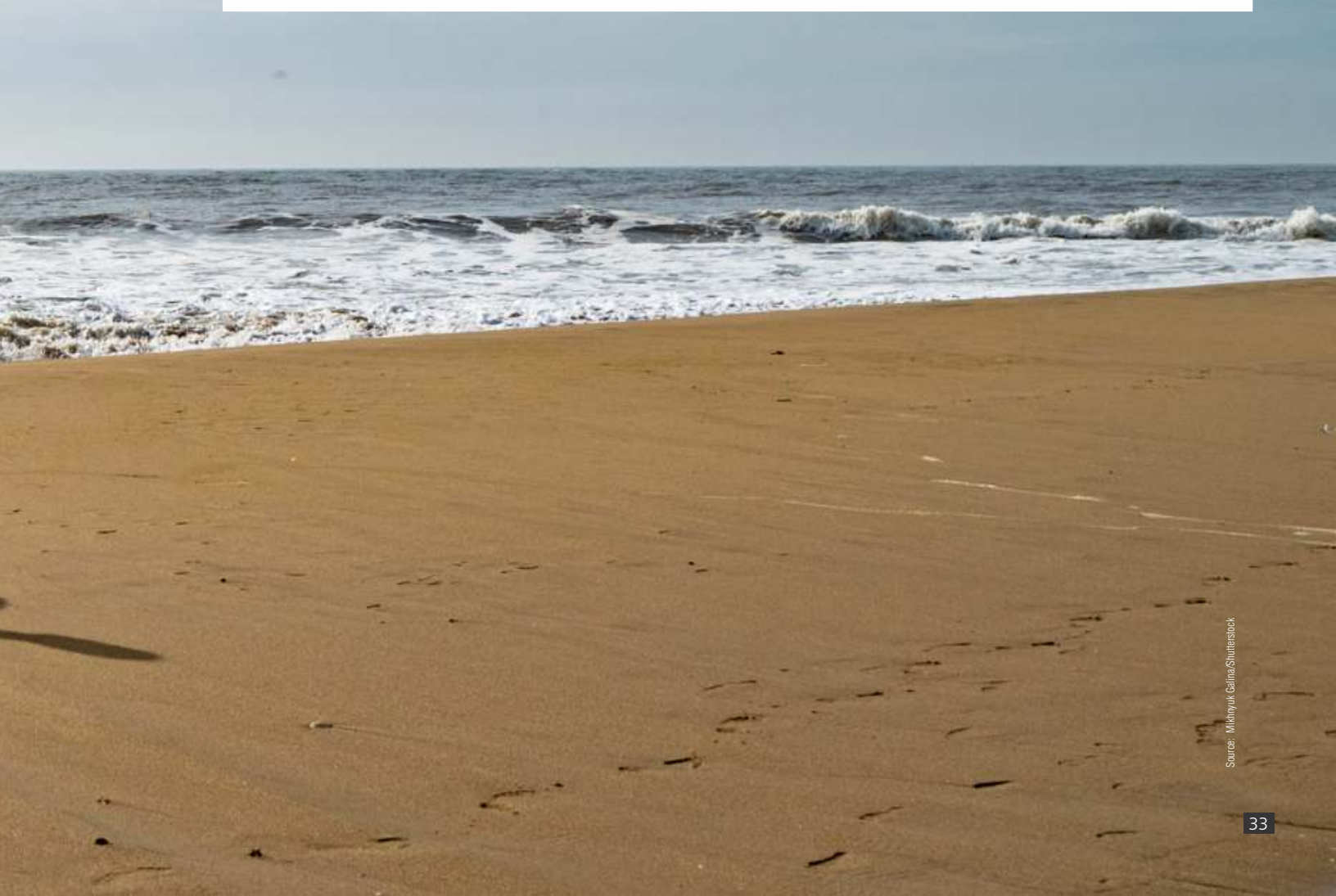
Source: Nila News/onyShutterstock

## *Surfing in Mangalore*

Surf tourism in India owes its origins to Jack Hebner, who became known as the Surfing Swami. Today, the Surfing Swami Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to introducing surfing and related water sports in India, providing free equipment, school scholarships and environmental awareness training for village girls and boys. Additionally, the foundation helps local children with school supplies, medical needs and personal instruction.

Mulki near Mangalore is one of the top destinations to learn surfing in India. If you are a beginner surfer or even an intermediate surfer, Mulki has a nice soft sandy beach without rocks and corals. The swells and currents in winter here are good for surfing. The surf school here is among India's first. Other water sports like kayaking are also on offer here, Kovalam and Varkala in Kerala, Covelong and Mahabalipuram in Tamil Nadu, Goa, Pondicherry and Odisha have also become popular places for surfing. The Andaman and Lakshadweep Islands have top surf spots that can match some of the best surfing destinations in the world", he claims.





## *Rafting in Rishikesh*

**A**fter flowing 249 km (155.343 mi) through its narrow Himalayan valley, the Ganges emerges from the mountains at Rishikesh before flowing down to the Gangetic plains. The river stretches near the Ganges are among the best for rafting in India.

About 9 km from Rishikesh are some good beaches from where beginners can launch on their rafting adventure. There are camps on the beaches with instructors and white-water

guides. You are first initiated into the sport of rafting and the safety tips you need to keep in mind. There are Grade 1 and Grade 2 rapids on these stretches.

For more experienced rafting enthusiasts, Kaudiyal is one of the greatest points for rafting. An eight or nine hour rafting routes encompass rapids of different grades, and you are also challenged by some rapid turns, winding river stretches and obstructions like rocks.





Source: Pamy Graphics/Shutterstock

## *Paragliding in Panchgani*



Panchgani is one of the most popular places for paragliding. Bhilar, Khinger and Tapola are some of the sites, where you will find instructors to take you for a tandem paragliding trip. You fly over beautiful scenery of hills, woodlands, valleys and water bodies.





## *Scuba Diving at Havelock*

The Andaman Islands offer some of the finest water sports in India whether it is surfing, kayaking, snorkeling or scuba diving. Havelock Island is one of the best places to combine a beach holiday with a scuba diving experience. You can begin your scuba diving journey either by doing the PADI Discover Scuba Diving first with 1-on-1 instructor supervision suitable for non-swimmers, or by plunging right into the PADI Open Water Diver course conducted in small groups.

Dive into the clear waters off this island and you can see schools of colourful fish around you, the beautiful coral reef formations and plenty of marine life. 🐠



**Every year, Makar Sankranti is celebrated in the month of January to mark the winter solstice. It is also one of the largely celebrated Hindu festivals of India and Nepal, which is celebrated differently in various cultures, and most uniquely it follows the solar calendar to fall on 14th January each year.**

**F**or most parts of India, this period is a part of early stages of the Rabi crop and agricultural cycle, where crops have been sown and the hard work in the fields is mostly over. This is therefore that time of the year when in rural areas people could enjoy socializing and eat the fruits of the harvest.

In Gujarat, Makar Sankranti is celebrated as Uttarayan or the Kite



Festival. Uttarayan is a day like no other in Gujarat. This festival, which falls on Makar Sankranti (14th -15th January) every year, brings men and women, boys and girls to their rooftops for kite flying. Traditionally, a harvest celebration and referred to as a salute to the sun as its warmth moves to the northern tropics, the best places to experience the kite flying celebrations of Uttarayana today



Source: Vyas Ahishay/Shutterstock

Firki

crowded with people making manjhas – cotton threads are coated with glass, rice paste, chemicals and other abrasive material to give them the tensile strength and cutting edge for the patangbazi or kite fighting games that are integral to the excitement of Uttarayana before reeling them on spools called 'firkis'. The kites flown using these threads, called patangs. These are active



Source: Vyas Ahishay/Shutterstock

Kite Market

are the neighbourhoods of Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat and other urban centres of Gujarat.

The excitement begins at the start of January when children start practicing their kite flying skills. The street sides of Ahmedabad are



Peanut Chikki



## PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE

Til (sesame)  
Chikki



and easily controllable kites flown with a single line of manjha. These kites are made by expert artisans with a spine and arch of bamboo supporting the paper and a tail for stability. The right materials and the balance of these kites will ensure their ability to fight during Uttrayan. The kite making industry is estimated by the Government of Gujarat to be worth over Rs. 100 crore. The kite makers get materials from Uttar Pradesh and bamboo from the north-east to make the fighter kites.



The idea is to manoeuvre the kite by pulling or releasing the string, which will make it go slower or faster, curve a graceful arc or spin on a wing tip, move in the desired direction, and make it 'fight' with other kites to cut their

Til (sesame)  
Laddoo



manjhas. When a kite flyer is successful in cutting another kite off its line, there is much excitement on the flier's rooftop with yells of 'kapyo chhe' (well cut). This is an important part of the festival's excitement, which brings men and women, boys and girls to the rooftop, where they fly the fighter kites, compete with other fliers, munch sugarcane, 'chikkis', snacks, fruits and vegetables typical of the January harvest season, and enjoy alfresco lunches of undhiyu (roasted, baked or fried mixture of vegetables. Matka undhiyu, which as the name suggests is made in an earthen pot, is especially popular in Surat and Khambhat) with puri on the terraces. The kite flying and dueling continue



Undhiyu



Rajasthani Ghevar

mainly falling in Anand district, is famous for its matlu undhiyu and matlu chicken. The wood apple chutney, called kothal, is a classic addition to the undhiyu of Anand.

Surat is most famous for its Undhiyu made using seasonal produce like papdi beans, moong, green garlic and yam.

Khichdi is another Makar

Sankranti staple, from Gujarati to Bihari households, khichdi is a part of the menu.

In Punjabi households, Lohri and Maghi are celebrated with seasonal favourites like saag and makki roti, pinni, etc. While the greens go with the harvest festival, pinni made with ghee and nuts has warming qualities to combat the winter.

In Karnataka this is the day of Suggi or the harvest, mainly the sugarcane harvest. Here the plate would normally contain "Ellu" (white sesame seeds) mixed with fried groundnuts, neatly cut dry coconut and fine cut bella (jaggery). The Ellu-Bella plate contains shaped sugar candy moulds with a piece of sugarcane.

In Telugu-speaking households, different types of appalu (a sweet made of jaggery and rice flour) and dappalam (a dish made with pumpkin and other

vegetables) are typical.

Maharashtrian homes make til laddu and puran poli, a sweet flat bread. In Assam and parts of eastern India, cakes called pithas are made like Shunga Pitha and Til Pitha, as well as coconut-based sweets. In Rajasthani houses you may find pheeni, til-paati, gajak, kheer, ghevar, pakodi, puwa, and til-laddoo.

For Tamil families, Thai Pongal is a multi-day harvest festival. The festival's most significant practice is the preparation of the Pongal, a dish of rice boiled with milk and sweetened with jaggery. More celebratory versions include cardamon, raisins, split green gram, cashew, ghee and coconut.

**Where to stay:**

Toran Hotel, Ahmedabad

For booking,

visit [www.booking.gujarattourism.com](http://www.booking.gujarattourism.com)



Gajak




Puran Poli



Petha

# COVID INNOVATIONS IN TRAVEL AND TOURISM

The background of the page is a warm-toned photograph of the Taj Mahal in Agra, India, reflected in the water. In the foreground, the back of a woman's head and shoulders are visible as she holds up a smartphone to take a picture of the monument. She has her hair in a bun with a flower accessory and is wearing a white top. The phone's screen shows the same scene as the background image.

**The cliché, 'necessity is the mother of all inventions' has certainly lived up to its reputation during the covid times. A number of innovations have come up that would make travel more easy or virtually expose the traveler to exotic locations, anywhere in the world.**

**An agent who handles inbound tours found his business had completely flattened with the advent of the pandemic. From a flood, the number of inbound tourists had dwindled to a trickle and then ground to a complete halt. Earlier, he would make frequent trips to Far East and Europe to sell Indian tourist destinations. These forays for procuring businesses too came to an end.**



Not to be cowed down by the pandemic, he found new ways to circumvent the Covid restrictions. He started off by creating virtual tours of Indian tourist destinations to sell to potential clients overseas. Typically, the video would begin with the embarkation of the tourists at the airport in India. They would then be taken through their



lunch/dinner courses for the day. For the second day of their trip, the video would show their departure to tourist destina-

tions like Taj Mahal, Jaipur or Varanasi. The virtual tour ends with the departure of the tourists from the airport. The promotion has been a resounding success, with the agent's Planner being crammed with booking dates for the latter half of the year.

The Hotel industry is doing their bit to encourage their clients to come and stay with them. Contactless registration into the hotel can now be done remotely, through online submission of your Aadhaar Card or Passport. The clients can move into their rooms, which would have remained vacant for a minimum period of 24 hours.

To ensure contactless stay, the client can download an app of the hotel, which would give them the menu for their meals. The buffet table is cordoned off. The clients can point to a particular dish





and the waiter would fill up the plate for them.

Visits to monuments have been made easier and safer. Visitors need not stand in front of the ticketing counter for their tickets anymore. To buy a ticket, a visitor needs only to scan his phone on the QR code in any of the kiosks, which have been put up there. Depending on the number of visitors, over a dozen kiosks have been installed.

A unique suggestion came up on my Facebook. It was titled, A View From My Window. Anybody could post or follow the posts, provided you followed the basic rules of propriety. The daily posts of the view from their windows, took you to all four corners of the earth. The views, needless to say, were spectacular - from Chile to Japan and from South Africa to Norway. It was an enchanting virtual journey to just about every part of the world.

Yet another website is the Window Swap, which allowed you to peek out of other people's windows, from anywhere in the world. Perched high up in your flat, you could gaze out of the window and see the traffic move silently far below; or watch the butterflies weaving between the flowers in somebody's garden, with the occasional cry of a bird;

or hear a placid stretch of the ocean as it gently lapped the shore. The list is endless.

Searches related to virtual tours have registered an exponential growth of over 500% year on year, indicating that for the nonce, people preferred virtual tours until they felt safe to travel. The virtual tours of some of the museums and national parks in many countries are currently, free of cost.

Tab With A View, a Google Chrome & Microsoft Edge extension, allows you to



travel to any place in the world just by opening a new tab on your browser. The browser extension randomly chooses a location or video of a destination, submitted by travel enthusiasts. The extension has more than 2,000 videos and photos from 83 countries around the world. It also has flight information and Covid statistics all updated in real time. Visa requirements are shown with each respective photo or video. Other than functioning as a diversion for a virtual vacation, it can be used as a tool,





when the time comes to travel freely again.

Skyscanner's interactive site gives country-wise information on Covid rules and regulation such as information on quarantine restrictions, corona virus case rate, the change in the number of cases from the previous week, all updated in real time. All you need to do is to click on the map where you wish to travel to and all the information is displayed on the screen. Countries on the map are colored red, green, grey or



yellow depending upon the availability of information relating to that country. Countries with scant information are grayed out. The available information will help you to make a judgment call on your travel.

Airlines too are finding ways to make travel easy for their customers. One airline is offering their passengers free Covid insurance at the time of booking. The insurance cover would take care of all medical expenses related to Covid and diagnosis.

Another airline is allowing their clients to redeem their miles for a mail-in test kit. The test kits are meant for travelers of all ages.

A new digital passport could help you pass through borders during the COVID-19 pandemic. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) is coming up with a travel pass - a digital "passport" in the form of an APP that could seamlessly see you through international borders. The travel pass will also provide information about your covid test results, and have a digital link of your passport. The app is also updated with the rules for entry at various destinations. The QR code in the app will assist the authorities at the entry points, to read all the relevant information.

Thanks to Covid, many innovations have been introduced that counter intuitively, have facilitated travel and tourism, namely seamless and safe entry and transfers. These innovations are here to stay. Travel without travelling. Age will no longer be a limitation for travel, thanks to virtual videos that would enable you to travel to any of the world's most beautiful places, however remote, from the comfort of your home. Didn't a wise old sage once say, "Misfortunes can also be a blessing"? <sup>10</sup>



# TRAVEL IN

**QUITE A FEW PEOPLE THAT I SPOKE TO NOW WANTED TO TRAVEL TO THOSE PLACES, WHICH THEY HAD MISSED GOING TO OR HAD BEEN POSTPONING FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS DUE TO COSTS, FAMILY CHALLENGES AND WORK PRESSURES.**

**A**fter months of protracted incarceration at homes and limited mingling due to Covid, are the people eager to travel again? At no time in the recent memory have people suppressed their wanderlust for so long. Now with the arrival of vaccines, is the travel mania surfacing again among the peripatetic lots?

The pandemic has brought home the realization of fatalism - the uncertainty of the future, the ticking away of our lives. It has forced people to dig into the travel section of their bucket list with a renewed interest. Quite a few people that I spoke to now wanted to travel to those places, which they had missed going to or had been postponing for a number of years due to costs, family challenges and work pressures. The people want to step out and stretch their legs and minds.

Some prefer domestic to international travel, owing to uncertainty of pandemic reports. A friend of mine, now in his sixties, has decided to travel to The Valley of Flowers, this summer. He had been postponing this trip for several decades, due to the grueling trek and the distance to be covered.

A couple, who would soon be pulling out from the fast lane of the corporate world, was keen to travel to all the major temples in the north and south. It would be a consummation of a pilgrimage long overdue.

A family of four would like to go to a location, which had less people and more nature, preferably in India. Foreign trips generally entailed visiting crowded cities, rather than the natural wonders.

Another friend has decided to go on a road trip across Yorkshire Dales in England. It had been his childhood dream to visit the place, after reading the James Herriot books, which dwelt extensively on the stunning Yorkshire Dales. A lady was keen to visit Salzburg in Austria, again a long overdue visit. She wanted to go on a tour of the shooting locations of that globally acclaimed musical film, The Sound of Music.

A travel agent had received a few bookings for Maldives Islands. There have been no cases on the island so far and travelers were welcome. For the business coterie, the United States is the land that beckons them.


For many parents, their first priority would be to travel overseas, to be with their children who had opted to stay back for their work or studies. It would be vice versa for children who would be homing at the first opportunity.

The future travel plans, however, are still mired in uncertainty. "The trouble I foresee is mostly in international travel with immunization being mandatory. Different countries may have different norms. Also the services may be affected due to the pandemic and may affect quality of hotels and restaurants," said an avid traveler from Mumbai.

A corporate executive in New Delhi said that she would like to visit "a city where the spread is in control with restriction in the number of guests. Also, there should be clear evidence of hygiene and sanitation standards being maintained."



# 2021



Quite a few people were hesitant to embark on an international trip, just yet. They were of the opinion that it would be a wasted trip, if you could not walk through the market area with gay abandon of the previous years; or sit in a food court swapping yarns with the locals.

Many people prefer to go in the second half of the year, by which time they would have more clarity. This is borne out by the fact that most bookings for hotels and airlines are timed for the second half of the year, especially for international trips.

Also US, Europe and Australia are still in a vice grip of the pandemic, with no sign of abatement. A lot of hope is being pegged on the efficacy of the vaccine and in its efficient distribution among the populace.

Having said all this, would you be welcomed by the local people of the place you would be visiting? An acquaintance of mine, who had a hideaway built in the hills, was asked not to come by his caretaker. He informed them that the villagers in the area would be opposed to their coming there. My friend had to stall his plans. Likewise if one were to go on a foreign trip, would one encounter the usual bonhomie from the local populace? Would there be an undercurrent of hostility that would make one feel unwelcome?

The doubts still linger. It is difficult to predict when the situation, domestic and global, would be safe enough for people to travel without fear of contracting the dreaded disease, especially since new mutants of the virus are exploding in some parts of the world. The usual stumbling block however, would be the inevitable misinformation and disinformation coursing the net.

The eagerness to travel is there, but is doused by the fear of the pandemic. Despite the widespread vaccinations in progress, the travel rush may not see the pre Covid levels just yet. It's still not known if asymptomatic people would transmit the virus, even after the vaccination or would they themselves be immune to the scourge. They are aware of the inexorable passage of time. The desire to travel is there in most of us. The brutal incarceration of the past several months, brought home the fact that there were still "many miles to go, before I can call it a day." ■

# DOLPHIN COUNTRY

On 15th August, 2020, the Prime Minister of India announced Project Dolphin to protect the aquatic mammal that is an indicator of the health of a river or coastal area. While green tourism has become a catchword, few talk about blue tourism for sustainable development of seas, lakes, rivers and wetlands. In this article, we look at some of best places for blue ecotourism.

## NATIONAL CHAMBAL SANCTUARY

The National Chambal Wildlife Sanctuary stretches along 600km of the Chambal River from the Kota Barrage in Rajasthan through its course in Madhya Pradesh and ending with the river's confluence with the Yamuna in Uttar Pradesh. This sanctuary has many attractions for

nature lovers - the clean and clear waters of the Chambal River, the spectacular ravines and rock formations, the abundance of the endangered gharial fish-eating crocodile, good chances of spotting Gangetic Dolphin and amazing opportunities to watch birds' characteristic of the river habitat.

One of the most convenient places from where to start a boat trip on the Chambal is Bah, just one-and-a-half hour from Agra. From Bah, you can drive to the river shore, where there is a floating jetty for a boat safari. Board a



motorboat, and enjoy views of the spectacular ravines and riverside sand beaches. As you go along the river, you can see mugger crocodile and the endangered gharial native to sandy river banks in the plains of north India. If you are alert, you will see the endangered Gangetic dolphins surfacing for air. Turtles bask on the river shores and islands. In winter, you can see flocks of ducks like common teal, Northern



pintail, Brahminy Shelduck and red-crested pochard, and often also bar headed geese. Scan the shores and small islands, where you may spot wading birds like crakes and sandpipers. National Chambal Sanctuary is important as the habitat of Indian Skimmers, one of

the key bird species of the Chambal. The skimmer is strikingly coloured with a fiery orange-red bill, red legs, and black head contrasting with the predominant white of the rest of its body, it has an unusual bill with the lower beak mandible being longer than the upper one. As it flies over the river, its bill skimming the surface, the lower mandible causes a furrow over the water and feels for fish, frogs and other prey to grab for its food.

## CHILIKA LAKE

**T**he Chilika Lake in Odisha is the single largest habitat of Irrawaddy dolphins in the world. This dolphin has a wide-range from Bay of Bengal to Philippines.

At first sight, the huge expanse of Chilika Lake, one of Asia's largest lagoons, looks like the sea but for the glass-like waters that you can see as you get closer. This brackish water lagoon spans 1100 square km at its peak during the rains, and meets the sea at sand-flats that separate it from the Bay of Bengal. This pear-shaped lagoon is best known for hosting the largest number of water birds in India and is an important habitat of Irrawaddy dolphin. Not surprisingly, it is on the tentative list of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites because of its ecological importance.

From Bhubaneshwar Airport, drive to Barkul from where you can hire a boat for the trip to the beach at the Sea Mouth, a channel that connects the lagoon to the Bay of Bengal Sea. The boat goes over glass clear water, where you can view fishes among the aquatic vegetation. As you come close to Nalabana Island Bird Sanctuary, the density of birds is impressive – spot billed pelican, open bill stork, flamingos and flocks of ducks can be seen. While winter is the time to watch





migratory birds that come here from the Caspian Sea, Lake Baikal, Aral Sea, remote parts of Russia, Kirghiz steppes of Mongolia, Central and South East Asia, Ladakh and the Himalayas, good birdlife can be seen throughout the year. As you come to Satapada, keep looking for Irrawaddy dolphin.

Return to Barkul and travel down to Rambha, a historic place with a fort, where you can stay at another Orissa tourism property. From here, hire a boat for a visit to island fishing villages, the fabled island kingdom of Parikud on the eastern side of the lake, and the devi temple on Kalijai island. Legend has it that a local girl once drowned here on the way to her wedding across the lake, and that her voice was subsequently heard calling from under the water. Believing the bride-to-be had become a goddess, local villagers inaugurated a shrine to her that over the years became associated with Kali. Pilgrims leave votive offerings in the sacred cave, where the deity was enshrined with the gatherings growing large on Makar Sankranti in January.



**A**lso called Cape Calimere, this headland is associated with Lord Rama whom devotees believe stood here to lookout to Sri Lanka – his footsteps are worshipped in a shrine here. It is the apex of the Cauvery River delta, key to the Cholas who built a lighthouse that was destroyed by the Tsunami. Point Calimere Wildlife and

Bird Sanctuary covers the promontory and its nearby dry forests, and the Great Vedaranyam Swamp, which stretches for about 48 km separated by a sand bank from the Palk Strait. This headland has the villages of Kodikkarai and Kodikkadu.

Drive and walk around the wetlands

here to watch large flocks of flamingos, pelicans, ducks, waders, gulls and terns. In the dry forests, you can also spot the handsome blackbuck or Indian antelope, deer and wild boar. A noteworthy sighting in the Kodiakkadu forests is of feral horses that roam free and popularly called 'Wild Horses'.



**H**arikeri Wetland also known as "Hari-ke-Pattan", with the Harike Lake in the deeper part of it, is the largest wetland in the Punjab state. This wetland is located at the confluence of the Beas and the Sutlej River, and is one of the few places in India

where the Indus dolphin has been seen.

The wetland and the lake were formed by constructing the headworks across the Sutlej River in 1953. This lake is most famous for its migratory waterfowls, including a number of globally threatened species of wetland birds.

As you approach the wetland, you pass through Harike village, where you will see many stalls selling fresh fish, fruits and farm produce. The Gurdvara is located near the river. You will see the headworks structure a little ahead. The main water body is a birdwatcher's paradise - you can see large flocks of ducks and other waterfowl. If you are lucky you may get to see otters too.





**V**ikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary is located in Bhagalpur District of Bihar, India. The sanctuary is a 60 km stretch of the Ganges River from Munger to Kahalgaon in Bhagalpur district. Designated in 1991, it is protected area for the endangered Gangetic dolphins in Asia. The river section from Sultamour to Bhagalpur is

a paradise for aquatic mammals, birds, reptiles and fish. There are many small sandbars inhabited by birds. They serve as breeding grounds for many birds. Lucky birders have seen hundreds of Indian Skimmers, as well as other threatened species like greater adjutant and lesser adjutant storks. The Sanctuary is rich in waders.



## BET DWARKA

**B**et Dwarka enjoys a strategic location at the mouth of the Gulf of Kutch (which includes India's first Marine National Park & Wildlife Sanctuary) with the open sea to its west. Well-known for its temples and gurdwara, the island can be reached by ferry service from Okha. The island is fringed by beaches, mudflats, rocky shores and corals. The marine life is rich, and an intertidal zone walk at Dunny Point can give you an opportunity to see many species – octopus, seahare, starfish, brittle star, sea cucumber, among others.

Take a boat ride north from Bet Dwarka and you come to places where islands come close to one another. This is the prime habitat of hump-backed dolphins that come through the channels to make the most of fish concentrations.



**MALVAN  
MARINE NATIONAL  
PARK**

**T**he town of Malvan in Sindhudurg is the headquarters of a marine wildlife reserve. Malvan is the centre for scuba diving and snorkeling. The centre here offers novice-level scuba diving for beginners during which you can watch brilliantly coloured fish and other marine life. The fort of Sindhudurg can be seen from Malvan.

A short distance from the town, at the estuary of the Karli River, Tarkarli is a great place for river trips, beach

activities, water-based adventure sports, dolphin spotting, houseboat holidays, or just whiling away time on the waterfront. Here, you find the river flowing through lush green landscapes of palms, casuarinas, mature trees, fruit orchards and estuarine mangrove forests, picturesque backwaters, and stunning beaches like Tarkarli and Devbagh. Take a boat trip here in search of dolphins – they are often seen near the fishing boats.





Devbagh, near the meeting place of the river and the sea, is the base for many water-based activities. One of the highlights here is the morning boat trip during which you get excellent views of bottle-nosed dolphins surfacing for air, frolicking or even communicating with each other through a series of whistles. The boat trip can also take you down to the Tsunami Island, which is believed to have appeared after the Tsunami, isolated beaches, and sand bars where

gulls. You can see a variety of coastal scenery from the boat. If you are more into sports activities than a serene boat trip, there are banana boats and speed boats for rides.

The best place to unwind is the Devbagh Beach. Walk on the beach, where you can see marine life like starfish, crabs, clams and shells. The sea is good for swimming or wading. Enjoy a sunset stroll here. 📍

# A ROYAL TRAIL IN THE HILLS



In the hills of eastern Gujarat are some palatial properties that can be explored from the homestays of Chhota Udepur.

Chhota Udepur was ruled by the Khichi Chauhans who once ruled Champaner. After Patai Rawal Chauhan lost the fort of Pavagadh at Champaner, his descendants moved to the hills of eastern Gujarat. In 1743, Rawal Udeysinh from that dynasty founded Chhota Udepur as the capital of his territory. The Chhota Udepur Princely State was accorded the status of an 11-gun salute state by the British.

During the late-1800s and early-1900s, Fatehsinh modernized Chhota Udepur. This was a golden period for the princely state as he personally attended office and handled state affairs. During

his rule, Chhota Udepur was endowed with medical facilities, schools, water-works, railways and other civic infra-

structure. Many palatial residences, administrative buildings and a club house were built in this period. In 1923,



Kali Niketan



Kusum Vilas Palace

he was succeeded by Natwarsinh who was known for his philanthropic works.

Driving through Chhota Udepur, you

can see many old palatial buildings. Some of them are now government offices, schools and hostels. The

grandest palace is the Kusum Vilas, a sprawling complex spanning about 40 acres. A massive wrought-iron gate marks the entrance. In the forecourt you can see three large massive marble statues of European women rising up from a pond. The fountained garden here was called Shalimar. The palace is crowned by domes and turrets.

The summer palace of Chhota Udepur, Kali Niketan is now open as a heritage hotel. Built by Maharaja Fatehsinhji in the late 19th century as his summer residence, this palatial property was called Nahar Villa, but was later changed, in honour of the family Goddess, Mahakali, to Kali-Niketan, which means the abode of Goddess Kali. The palace has six air-conditioned rooms, drawing, dining, lounge areas,

Kusum Vilas Palace



Lunavada Palace



and five terraces. The palace has a tranquil location in a 60 acre compound with fountains in the front and at the back of the main house, with its own mango orchards.

About 38km from Chhota Udepur, Jambughoda State was established towards the end of the 14th century by Thakore Vachha, a descendant of the Paramaras who ruled Malwa. The Thakur Sahib of Jambughoda was one of the original constituents of the Chamber of Princes an institution established in 1920. He exercised considerable civil and criminal jurisdiction. The progressive and efficient administration of the state of Jambughoda exempted it from being merged during the attachment scheme of 1943. The last ruler was Ranjitsinhji Gambhirsinhji (b. 1892) who reigned from 27th Sep, 1917 to 15th Aug 1947.

The palatial estate of Jambughoda now houses a heritage hotel named A

Home for Nature Lovers. The estate has green fields and shady trees.

About 63km from Jambughoda, Devgadhi Baria is called the Paris of Panchmahals. The Baria state was

founded around 1524 by the Chauhans. It became a 9-gun salute state during the British rule. The century-old Rajmahal of Baria was built in 1904 and work on it continued at various stages till 1924. The



Shri Joravar Vilas, Santrampur



Jambughoda Palace

palace became home to a government agriculture college but was recovered by the family in 2006. It has been restored to its glory.

Around 77 km from Baria, Lunavada's

Rajmahal has been renovated and now has rooms for tourists. Lunawada was founded in 1434 by Bhim Singh, the ruler of Virpur.

During the British rule, Lunavada

State was one of the princely states under the Rewa Kantha Agency of Bombay Presidency. The Rajmahal is architecturally impressive with carved jarokha balconies, turrets and cusped arches. Inside, there are courtyard gardens. The halls have impressive furniture and chandeliers. The rooms are neatly furnished.

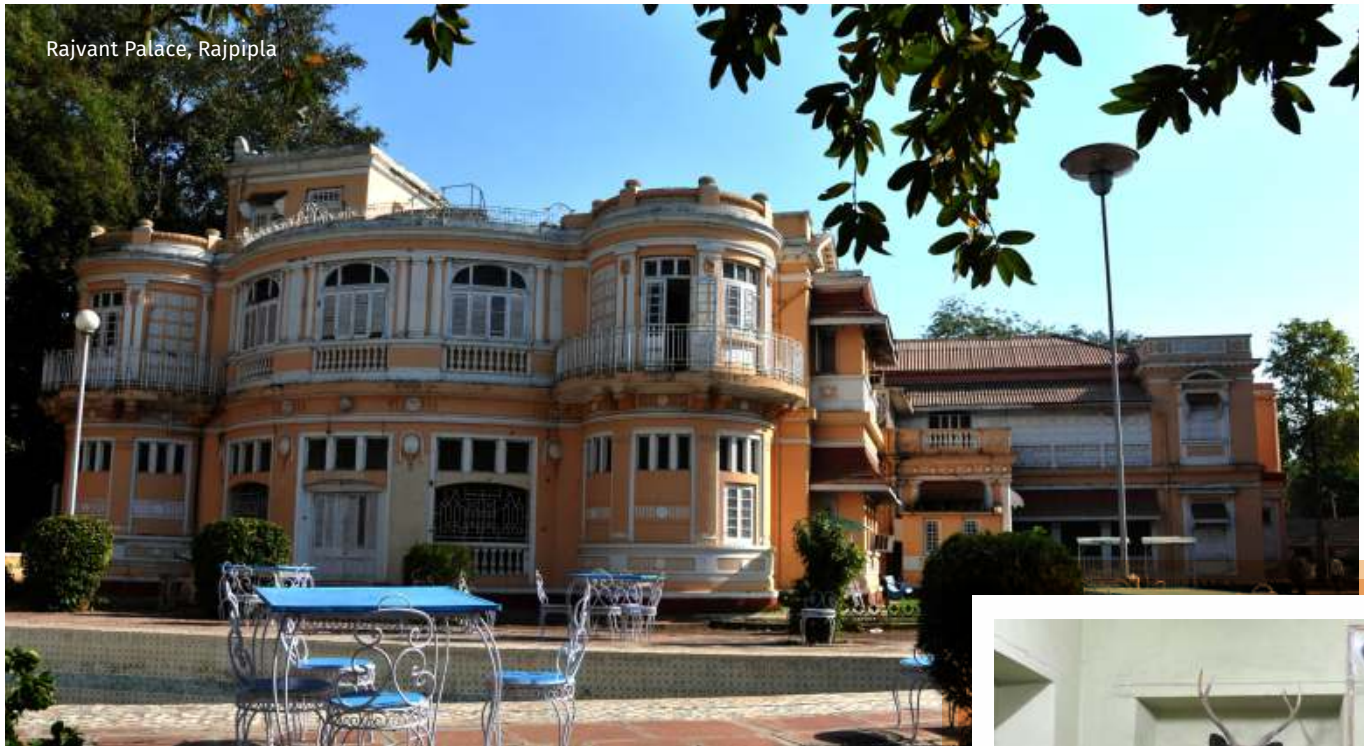
33km from Lunavada, Santrampur comprises two towns, Sant and Rampur. The Santrampur Princely State was ruled by the Parmar Rajputs. Set beside a lake, the Joraver Vilas is the family residence, which has converted some of its rooms into a family-run heritage hotel. The palace has a beautiful setting among gardens fronting the lake. The interiors are equally impressive with a profusion of meenakari-worked walls, mirror work and rich furnishings. The rooms are appointed in the 1930s and '40s European Art Deco style. The palatial



Jambughoda Palace

Interior of Shri Joravar Vilas, Santrampur

Rajvant Palace, Rajpipla



estate has woodlands running around the lake.

Santrampur also has a Hawa Mahal, set on a hilltop with a panoramic view of the lake and hills.

The largest of the palaces of eastern Gujarat is in Rajpipla. Falling in the Narmada basin, the Rajpipla Princely State prospered over an area of 3,929 square kilometer, with 927 villages. In 1901, the state had a population of 117,175.

Rajpipla was modernized by Maharaja Chhatrasinhji Gohil who introduced wide ranging reforms from 1897. His modernizing initiative was stepped up by his son, Maharaja Vijaysinhji Gohil who came to the throne in 1915. He is credited with town planning of Rajpipla, and the introduction of civic services like roads, railways and tramways, a modern hospital in the city of Rajpipla and regional dispensa-

ries, schools offering free or affordable education, waterworks and power supply. He is also credited with reforms in revenue collection and administration. The urban planning of Rajpipla and initiatives to improve agriculture and animal husbandry are also much talked about. The status of Rajpipla was raised from an 11gun salute state to 13 gun salutes. Vijaysinhji was also known for his race horses. His horse Tipster won the Indian Derby in 1919. His horse, Embargo, won the Irish 2000 Guineas making the Maharaja the first racehorse owner to win the Irish Derby at his first attempt. When Windsor Lad won the Epsom Derby in 1934, the Maharaja celebrated with a lavish party at the Savoy Hotel which featured a performing elephant arrayed in his purple and cream racing colours. His horses dominated the 1932-1933 Indian racing season. He died 29th April 1951 at The



Manor, Old Windsor, Berkshire, and was cremated at Rampura, on the banks of the river Narmada, 18 km from Rajpipla.

The old 19th century palace of Rajpipla, Chhatra Vilas Palace, was converted into an educational institution but had to be largely demolished. Today, you can see the palaces built for the princes in the early-20th century. One of the most famous of these is the Vijay Mahal, an Italian inspired palace with an Italianette fountain surrounded



Interior of Rajvant Palace, Rajpipla



Interior of Rajvant Palace, Rajpipla

by palms in the forecourt, a classical colonnaded semi-circular portico as the entrance, Corinthian pillars, Gothic arches, European domes and views of the river Karjan and the Satpura hills at the rear. This palace has now been converted into a heritage hotel largely catering to film units and events. It has museums of princely memorabilia and folklore. Another princely property near the river, the Natwar Niwas houses a school and a homestay facility. The

highlight of this property is the murals from Krishna Leela tales in the hall, and those of Maharana Pratap and Shivaji in the rooms. It is said that an Italian artist named Vali painted the murals.

The grandest palace of Rajpipla, the Indrajeet Padmini Mahal, better known as Vadia Palace as the entire village of Vadia was demolished and re-located to build and complete this palace in the 1940s, was designed by Burjor Sohrab J. Aga, and executed by in a predominantly Indo-Saracenic style, with a few western features. Inside, however, it retains much of the European character one would expect from a palace erected during the 1930s and 1940s. The building contractor was Mr. Navroji S. Shethna. The palace was set in a 151 acre estate with well laid out formal gardens and mango-and-lime orchards, and the building itself covered almost 4320 sq yards. It is said to have been financed by

Maharajah Vijay Sinhji's winnings at the races, and cost around Rs.50 lakhs (Rs.5 million). The building was designed by in a predominantly Indo-Saracenic style, with a few western features.

Much of the flooring is in Italian marble of different colors arranged in various geometric patterns, such that no two rooms or galleries are floored alike. At the rear is a marble fountain with intricate patterns. The palace has a number of wooden doors and windows of the Palace made from Burma teak. The Palace was centrally air-conditioned, with ducts still visible on the walls. According to the former owners, the palace had 11 bedrooms, a subterranean chamber and a suite facing the terrace, all with baths attached. Former Maharaja Raghubir Sinhji Rajendrasinghji Sahib of Rajpipla says the ballroom had a Burma teak flooring, the sitting room was done up



in wall paintings of dancing girls, the bar room had murals of drunk monkeys. The drawing room has beautiful paintings of events from Lord Krishna's lifetime, the prayer room has a series of wall and ceiling frescoes of Hindu deities, the reception behind the portico is painted with floral and faunal subjects. As at the Natvar Niwas, the painting was done by a European artist,

yet the quality of Indian devotional paintings and other local themes is flawless. Raghubir Sinhji says the drawing room was illuminated with lights concealed in marble globes, which were filled also with exotic perfumes. A water circulation system revolved the marble globes such that the perfumes diffuse and spread in the hall. An elevator took the royal family

and their guests up to the first floor and on the terrace. The kitchen was in an out-house, partially submerged so that it did not spoil the view from the galleries or from the intricate rear facade of the Palace. A 30 yard long insulated passage, took food in trolleys to the pantry in the main building. The Government of Gujarat purchased this palace in 1965. The building, its



Kusum Vilas Palace

outhouses and the grounds house the Gujarat Forest Rangers College which has trained many batches since 1979, government offices and the Ayurvedic Department.

One of the grand European style palatial buildings in Rajpipla, which was once a royal guesthouse is now the Shri Maharaja Rajendrasinhji Arts & Science College. 📷

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