

PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE

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A high-end monthly magazine

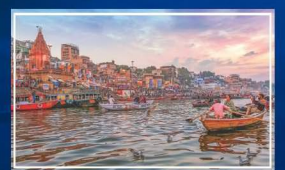
BAMBOO CRAFTS



PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE | September 2021



**GUJARAT'S EMERGING
CONFERENCE
DESTINATION**



RIVER TRIPS



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GUJARAT STATE AVIATION INFRASTRUCTURE COMPANY LIMITED

LEGACY

India is a treasure trove of exciting ancient stories. We celebrate some in the form of festivals and food, while others take the form of art & crafts. Like a legacy, these art & crafts have been passed on from generation to generation with great pride as a mark of identity. Today, every corner of India thrives with its exclusive designs and creations.

Bamboo craft is one of the oldest crafts known to man and India has a rich source of bamboo materials. Did you know that over 1200 species of bamboo are known to exist throughout the globe, with sizes starting from miniatures to giants stems of over 60 meters? Interesting, isn't it? On World

Bamboo Day, we introduce you to different parts of India that are renowned for their intricate bamboo crafts.

If you are into exploring other forms of heritage, what more fascinating than discovering the heritage of Himalayan hill-towns? Let's walk through the colonial heritage of Shimla or relish the beautiful mountain scenery, oak forests and profusion of Himalayan flowers characteristic of Kalimpong. Stay back and enjoy a traditional Kangra-style mud house or enlighten yourself with the rich history, architecture, arts and handicrafts of Himachal Pradesh at Chamba.

Read on!



Manali, Himachal Pradesh

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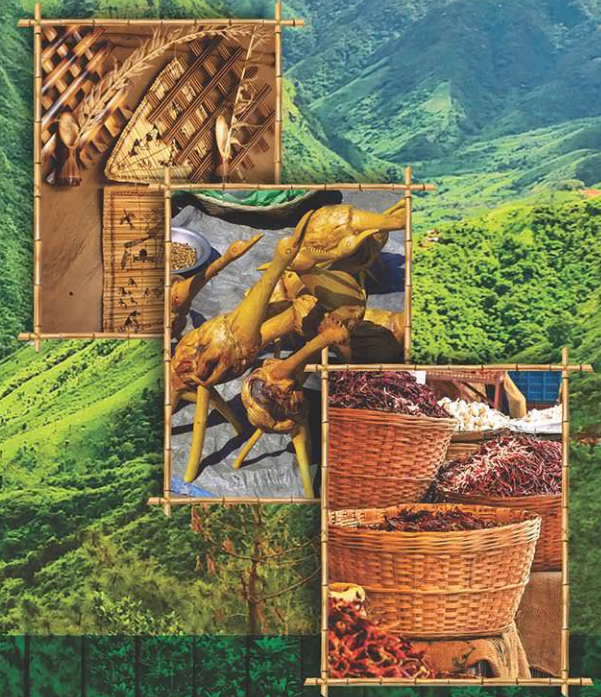
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Chambal River, Kota

Contents

| | |
|---|--------|
| BAMBOO CRAFTS | Pg. 04 |
| OF WATERFALLS TEMPLES AND TRIBES | Pg. 18 |
| GUJARAT'S EMERGING CONFERENCE DESTINATION | Pg. 24 |
| HERITAGE IN THE HIMALAYA | Pg. 28 |
| RIVER TRIPS | Pg. 40 |
| INDIA'S RHINO LAND | Pg. 54 |



BAMBOO CRAFTS

On World Bamboo Day,
we look at some places,
where you can buy wide-ranging
bamboo products.

SHILLONG



Elephant Falls

Shillong is the capital of Meghalaya, where the forests provide plenty of bamboo for many purposes. Bamboo is used for a variety of purposes like basketry, mats, rain shields, decorative items and even building houses.

At about 4900 ft above sea level, this was the British headquarters for much of the northeastern hill states and still

has remnants of its colonial past like the All-Saints Cathedral, Anglican Church, British buildings, an undulating golf course with an old clubhouse, timbered Tudor-style bungalows, the Pinewood Hotel, which was once a British planters' retreat and Rosa Ville, the hill station home of one of Assam's prominent families, which is now a guesthouse style hotel. The recreational areas in

town are Ward Lake and the Japanese style Lady Hydari Park. The Polo Ground is the venue for high-stake archery competitions. Scenic attractions include Elephant Falls and Shillong Peak, whose summit has good views on a clear day.

Lewduh, also known as Bara Bazar, is a colourful market, where you can get glimpses of Khasi and Garo attire and cultures. Here, you can see a variety of

bamboo baskets for sale. The most typical Khasi basket is unusual in being conical with wide rims. The Garo basket is made to carry large loads to the hills.

Shopping baskets are carried on the back with straps that are held around the head. Drive to Cherrapunjee, the town, which is famous for its heavy rainfall. Here, you can get rain shields that keep your hands free when walking in the hills.





The Ujjayanta Palace

AGARTALA

Agartala is the capital city of the Indian state of Tripura. It is one of the largest cities in Northeast India. The main sightseeing attraction is the Ujjayanta Palace, which was converted to a state legislative assembly and now into a museum. The name Ujjayanta Palace was given by the poet Rabindranath Tagore who had visited the state of Tripura many times. It has now been transformed into a museum named Ujjayanta Museum. The museum was inaugurated by Dr. Hamid Ansari, the former Vice President of India.

This is the city that has some of the most intricate bamboo crafts. Apart from storage baskets, sieves, wall panels and other traditional uses, Agartala's artisans practise the art of using bamboo for fine loom-woven mats. A newly developed craft of Agartala is bamboo root carving. Bamboo root is carved into statues and sculpted narratives.

Drive from here to Katlamara, famous for its bamboo fishing poles. Here, you can get furniture made from whole bamboo.



Source: Rama Day Acharya/istock

AIZWAL

The population of Aizawl strongly reflects the different communities of the ethnic Mizo people. In this city, you can look for a variety of bamboo crafts. The typical evergreen forests covering the Lushai hills provide bamboo for many purposes. You can buy bamboo hats, bamboo baskets and bamboo containers. A speciality of Mizoram is the cane stool, made using solar energy to bend cane.



Aizawl City, Mizoram



Basket



The Royal Palace

ZIRO

Ziro in Arunachal is the centre for the Apatanis, a community with a few unique special characteristic features. Apatanis practice permanent wet paddy cultivation and are known for their facial tattoos. This town is justly famous for its variety of bamboo baskets. The Apatanis also use bamboo to make serving trays for rice and containers for beverages.



Elderly Apatani Woman

Source: Mitti Jahanward/Shutterstock

DHENKANAL

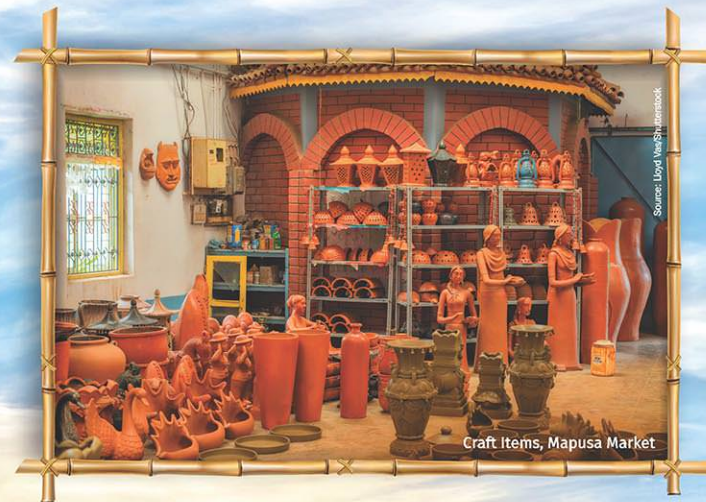
About 60km from Bhubaneswar, Dhenkanal is one of the centres for bamboo crafts. A variety of bamboo grows in the nearby forests. Local artisans dye bamboo strips to make various patterns. In the village of Rai Narsinghpur, you can watch artisans fashion bamboo into many products. Racks, trays, table lamps, candle stands and other items can be bought in Dhenkanal district.



Source: Jai Kamesh/Shutterstock

MAPUSA

The market at Mapusa in Goa is at its busiest on Friday morning, attracting vendors and shoppers from all over Goa. Best known for its clothing and produce, tourists also look for souvenirs, antiques and handicrafts here. This is one of the best places to buy bamboo baskets, trays and mats made from bamboo strips. These baskets are expertly made by artisans like the Mahars of Goa in various villages.



Craft Items, Mapusa Market

Source: Lloyd Webber/Shutterstock



Wooden Shacks on The Beach

SAPUTARA

Saputara, which literally means the abode of serpents, is a unique hill station developed after independence. The hill station is splendidly situated in the Sahyadri mountain range. The centrepiece is the Saputara Lake with picturesque gardens and amusements around it. There are many points for viewing the sunrise, sunset and panoramic mountain

landscape. The hills have many old forts.

This is one of the places, where you can get bamboo products made in the Dang district.

Basket weaving is the main occupation of the Kotwalia community of Dang and Tapi district, from May to August. The basket called topia is the local stock in trade, but they also make

storage containers, fish traps, winnowing trays and a variety of different baskets. In recent years, the artisans also make bamboo toys, which require much labour and crafts skills. With NGOs active in South Gujarat, many utilitarian bamboo products for offices and home décor are being made in the villages. The hill station of Saputara is a good place to look for bamboo products. ■





OF WATERFALLS TEMPLES AND TRIBES

Swami Vivekananda Memorial

“**M**ay some gentle hands in the far off land lay down a flower for us.” This silent plea, etched on one of the gravestones, is for a soldier interred in the war cemetery in Ranchi. In 1942, the British had deployed a large contingent of soldiers to forestall the Japanese juggernaut into India.

The cemetery was built in 1942, by

the army, and was used till the end of the Second World War. Subsequently, in 1952, isolated graves scattered in different parts of the country were brought here. Soldiers from regiments like Royal Australian Air Force, Royal Canadian Air Force, East Yorkshire Regiment, West African Army and Royal Army Ordnance have been interred here.

Each headstone is etched with the name of the soldier, his designation, the regimental badge and his age at the time of his death. Some of the soldiers died at the tender age of 20, a stark reminder of the ravages of war - death, violence and loneliness.

Ranchi was one of the summer capitals for the British. Its cool climate

and extensive forestlands had drawn them to this location. And it was not without reason, for this place in the Chota Nagpur plateau has a lot to offer.

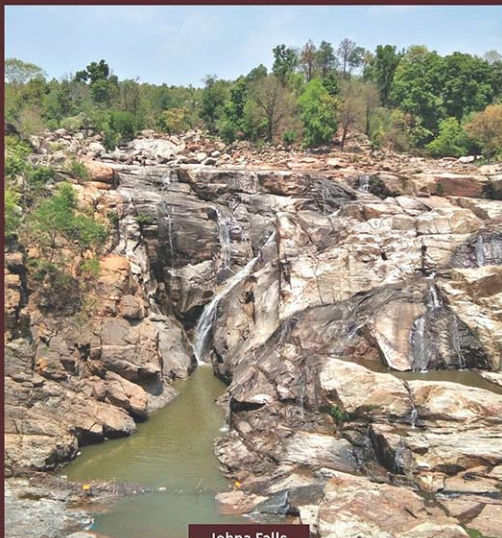
Ranchi Lake, a large placid stretch of water, is located in the center of the city. A British agent, Colonel Onsely excavated this man-made lake in 1842. Not much is known of this Englishman,

but his effort has made the lake one of the central attractions of the city. The lake had recently undergone a facelift.

The Ranchi plateau is the largest part of the Chota Nagpur Plateau, at an elevation of about 700m. The plateau is riven with rivers due to which the waterfalls are abundant as the land gradually slopes down towards the

southeast.

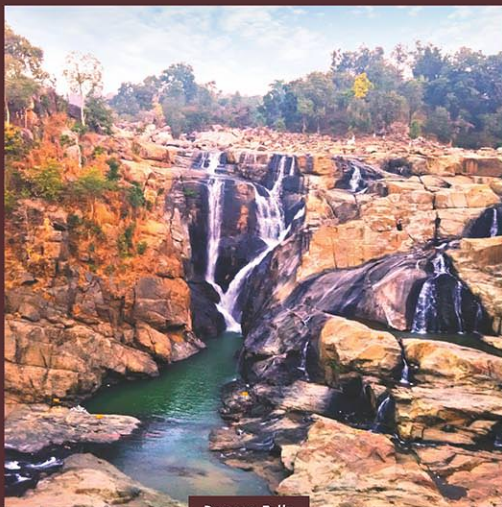
Panchghagh Falls is about 55 kilometers from Ranchi. It is the collective name for a group of five waterfalls. It is here that the meandering flow of the Banai River is interrupted as it branches into 5 streams, before cascading down.



Johna Falls



Hirni Falls



Dassam Falls



Durga Temple



Sun Temple

The other falls worth visiting are Hundru Falls, Johna Falls, Hirni Falls and Dassam Falls. The best time to visit the falls is during the monsoon, when the somnolent flow is turned into a wrathful menacing entity in its rush

towards the estuary, several hundreds of kilometers away. It is not without reason that Ranchi is called the City of Waterfalls.

The Deori Temple reportedly dates back to the 10th century. Architecturally

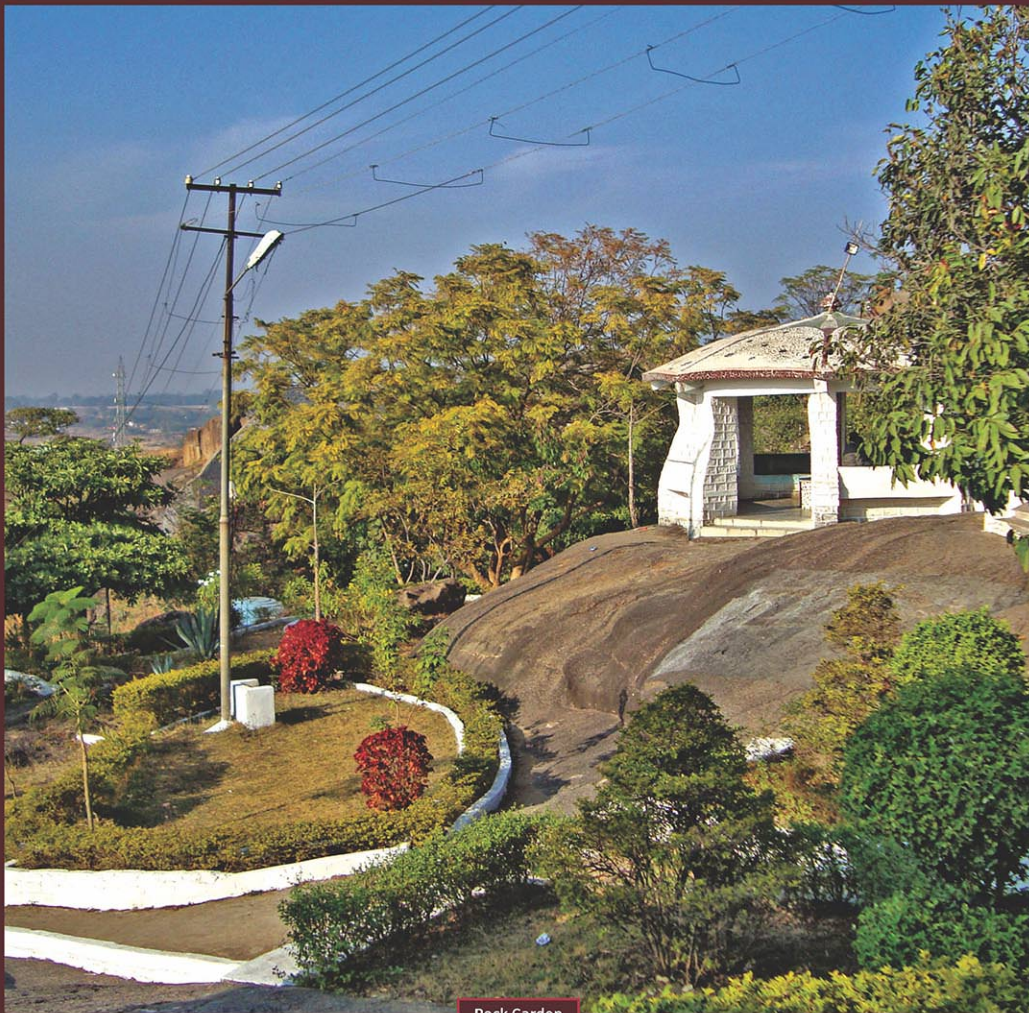
beautiful, its sandstone walls are decorated with intricate bas-reliefs featuring various deities. The deity is a 16-armed Goddess Durga. The temple gained immense popularity after Indian cricketer MS Dhoni visited there.

In Hindu mythology, Surya or the sun is represented as rising in the east as it traverses across the sky in a chariot drawn by seven horses. It is regarded as the creator of the universe and the source of all life. It is a common sight to see people bow in obeisance from the rooftop of their

house to the banks of River Ganges in Varanasi. The veneration for the sun was not just in India, but it was worshipped by the Incas in Peru and in the Shinto shrines in Japan.

There is a Sun Temple in Ranchi too. Flamboyantly constructed on a hilltop, the Sun Temple in Ranchi has a

magnetic power of its own, drawing atheists and non-athletics to its fold. It is a magnificent structure and has a commanding presence. Dedicated to the sun god, Surya, its construction is similar in style and architecture to the Sun temple in Odisha. The temple was built in 1994.

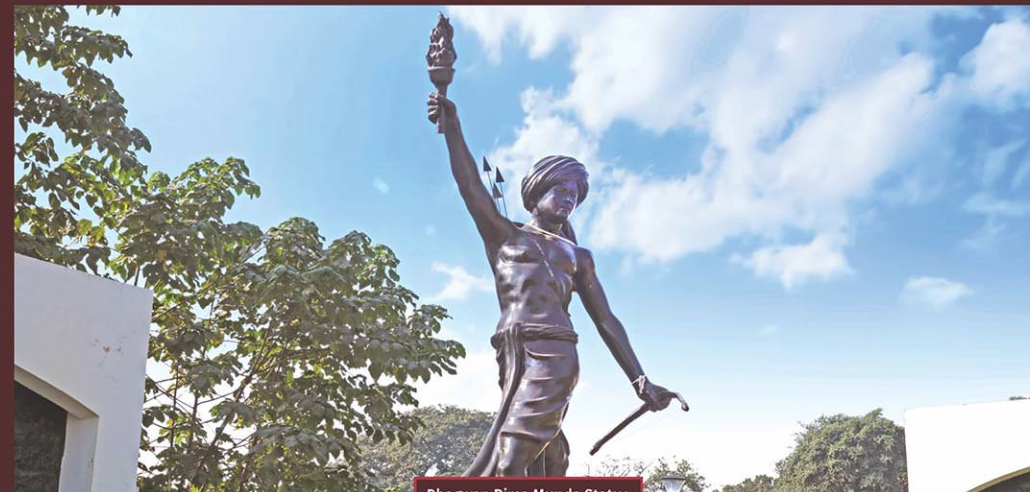


Rock Garden

Rock Garden in Ranchi is built along the lines of the Jaipur Rock Garden. It is easily one of the most popular locales in Ranchi. Built on a hillock, (there are plenty in Ranchi), the place is strewn with statues carved out of rocks from the Gonda hill. The garden overlooks a lake that forms part of a dam. The lake, the foliage and the hillock form a potent

combination for an ideal day out here. There are a number of wildlife sanctuaries around Ranchi. However, the forest area and the number and variety of animals have been steadily declining. Rampant poaching and illegal mining are taking a toll, increasing the confrontation between man and animal.

There are 32 tribes in Jharkhand constituting almost two fifth of the population. The statue of Birsa Munda can be seen at many places in Ranchi. This tribal lad had dared to take on the might of the British Empire. He was instrumental in forcing the colonial officers to introduce laws protecting the land rights of the tribe. He railed against



Bhagwan Birsa Munda Statue



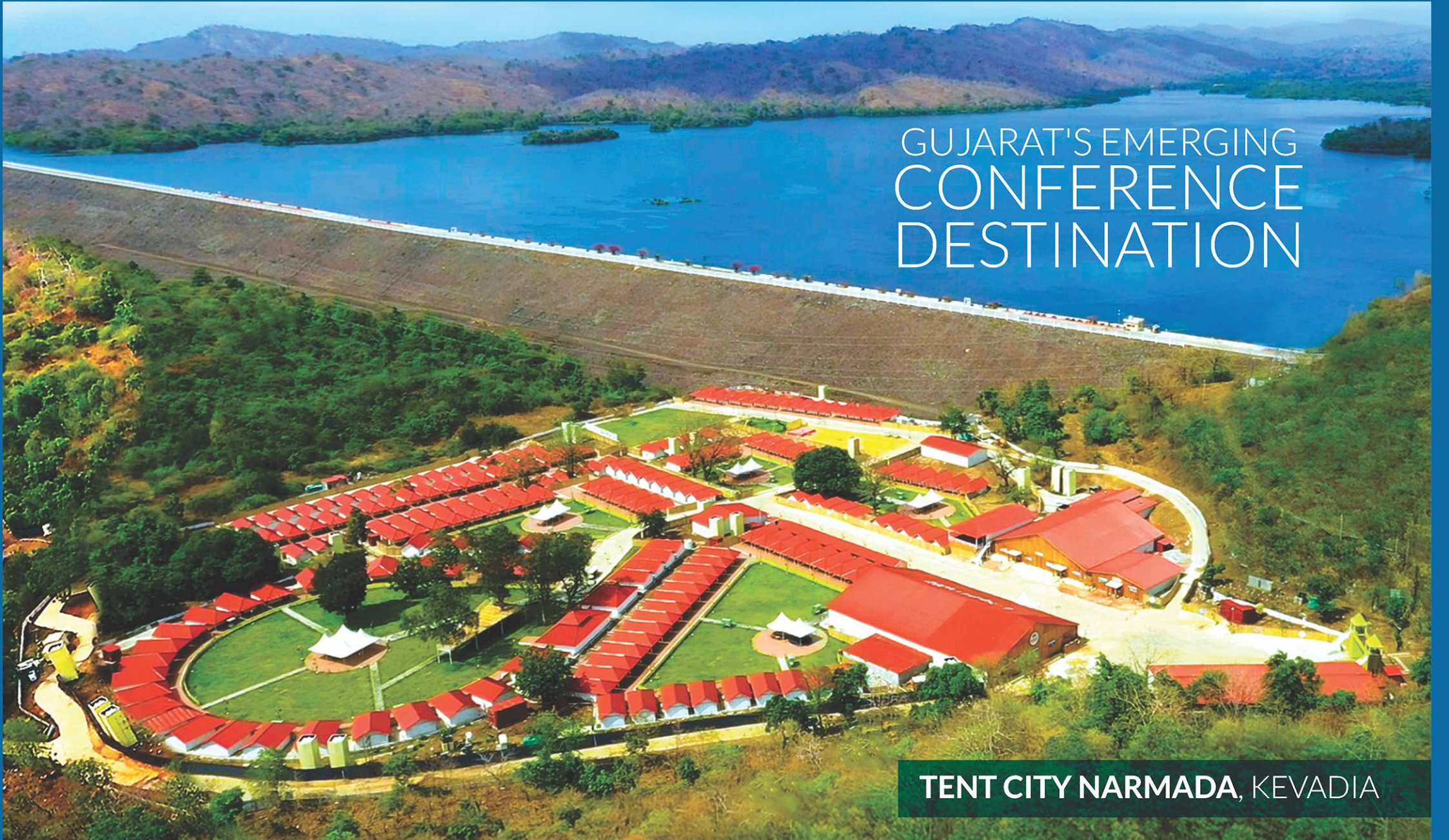
the anti-missionary and anti-government program. He also vehemently opposed the British oppression of the tribal communities. He was arrested by the British police and died during his incarceration. He was all of 25 years, at the time of his death.

Ranchi is famous for its exquisite tribal handicrafts. The handicrafts are

RANCHI IS FAMOUS FOR ITS EXQUISITE TRIBAL HANDICRAFTS.

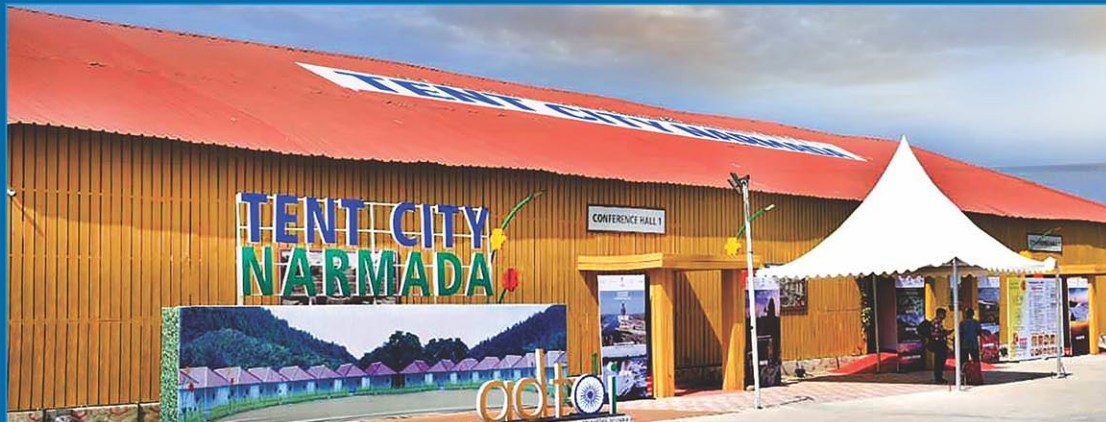
made from metal, bamboo, stone and wood. Only the branches are used for creating artwork. The trees are never cut. The tribal population is ever conscious of preserving the environment.

The plateau location of Ranchi with its undulating gneissic hills makes an interesting topography. The numerous waterfalls, lakes and rivers and a land rich in mineral resources and a robust tribal population, give it a distinct character of its own. Its temperate climate attracts many visitors to this place. ■



GUJARAT'S EMERGING CONFERENCE DESTINATION

TENT CITY NARMADA, KEVADIA



Tourism has gone far beyond just exploring new places. Considering the invincible advantages of travelling in terms of increased productivity and creativity, the concept of 'Business with Leisure' holds a great significance.

One such destination apt for your next leisure trip, where you can have both business and leisure time in an equally amazing way, is right near the world's tallest statue – Statue of Unity in Gujarat.

Tent City Narmada is a beautiful setup embellished with the backdrop of the Statue of Unity and Sardar Sarovar Dam. An array of exquisite tent nestlings in the valley surrounded by hills, wooded areas and not to mention – fresh air. Flowing nearby is the mighty

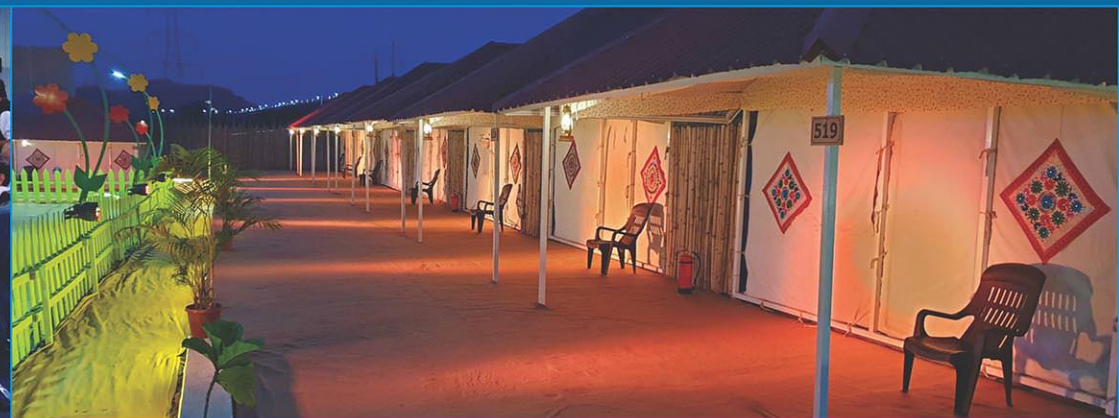
THREE SOPHISTICATED CONFERENCE HALLS, WELL-EQUIPPED WITH ALL THE AMENITIES, THAT CAN HOST 100-1000 GUESTS.

River Narmada in all its glory.

A spectacular collection of 200 air-conditioned tents, Tent City Narmada sprawls across an area of 50,000 sq.m. Modern amenities like room décor and services, delectable cuisines by a five star hotel chain, professional and humble staff, a wide array of entertainment and cultural programs and sightseeing tours add to the charm.

How refreshing it is to stay in a natural setting while you're on a

business trip! Moreover, it is proven that a little time-off offers increased focus and creativity. So organize a conference, get-together or meeting in one of the three sophisticated conference halls well-equipped with all the amenities that can host 100-1000 guests and enjoy sightseeing tours to the iconic tourist attraction like Statue of Unity, Valley of Flower, Jungle Safari, River Rafting and many more with your work family to get some fresh perspective. ■



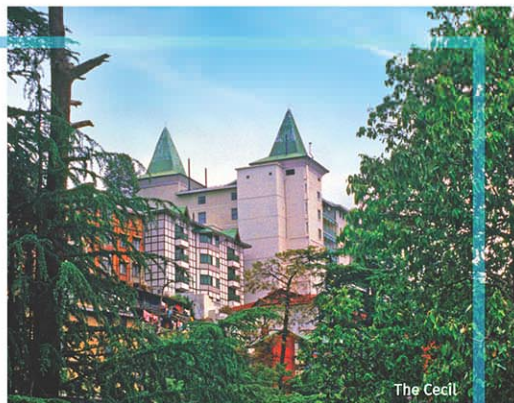
HERITAGE IN THE HIMALAYA

Combine your trip
with heritage
tourism at these hill
towns of India

COLONIAL HERITAGE OF SHIMLA



Chapslee House



The Cecil



Woodville Palace



Viceregal Lodge or
Indian Institute of Advanced Study



Christ Church

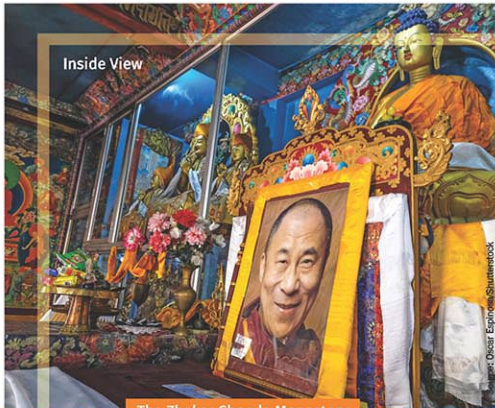
As the capital of Himachal Pradesh, Shimla offers visitors both the urban amenities of a state capital city and the charm of a hill station with panoramas of verdant valleys and green hills, snow views on a clear day, a pleasant climate even during the peak of Indian summer hot-season, flower-strewn meadows and pine-scented walks in cedar and pine forests. The town is set on a ridge, about 7300ft high, between a cluster of hills like the Jakhu peak, Observatory hilltop, Prospect Hill, Elysium Hill and the Choor Chandni hills. As Shimla was the hot-season capital of British India from the 1860s to 1947, it also boasts one of India's finest collections of Tudor and Gothic buildings – the majestic Viceregal

palace which is now an institute, Gorton Castle, Post Office, Gaiety Theatre, Library, Christchurch. This string of grandiose but decaying 19th century buildings is best visited and photographed while walking from Observatory Hill to the east end of Shimla, with a halt en route to see the State Museum which has art pieces ranging from 6th-11th century sculpture to magnificent Chamba murals of the mid-1800s in a Raj-building. You can even stay in impressive colonial-period heritage properties like The Cecil and The Clarkes run by the Oberoi Group, Woodville Palace of the estwhile Jubbal ruling family, Chapslee House which belongs to a Kapurthala family, among others.

Most of the tourist facilities in Shimla are at the Mall, a street running along the ridge where there are handicraft emporia stocking shawls and other handiwork of Himachal, bookstores, magazine stalls, a tourist office, restaurants and other eateries for Punjabi, Himachali, Tibetan and other cuisines, fast food and coffee outlets, ice-cream parlours, gaming places and internet centres. While walking along the Mall you can get glimpses of the peaks around Shimla and stopover at some of the attractive viewpoints on the road. Another market of Shimla is Lakkar Bazaar where you could get good woodcarvings.

You can also visit Chail which was the hill retreat of the Maharajas of Patiala complete with their cricket ground and royal palace.

BUDDHIST HERITAGE OF KALIMPONG

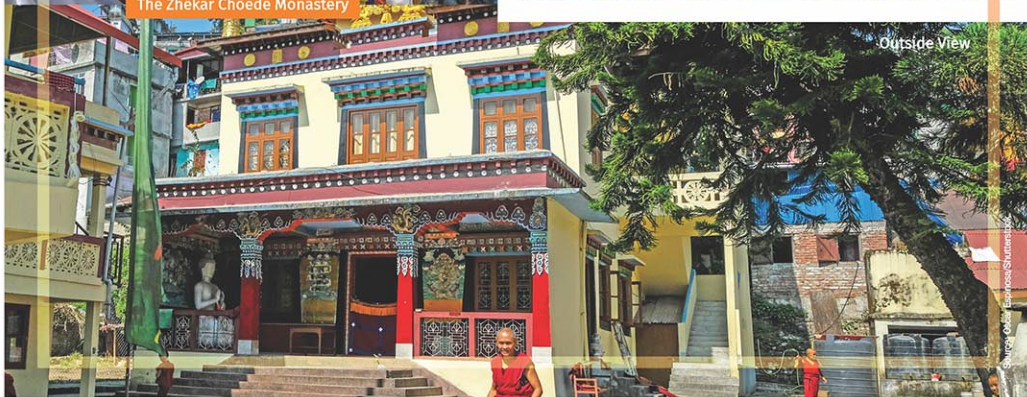


Inside View

The Zhekar Choede Monastery



MacFarlane Church



Outside View



Dr. Graham's Homes

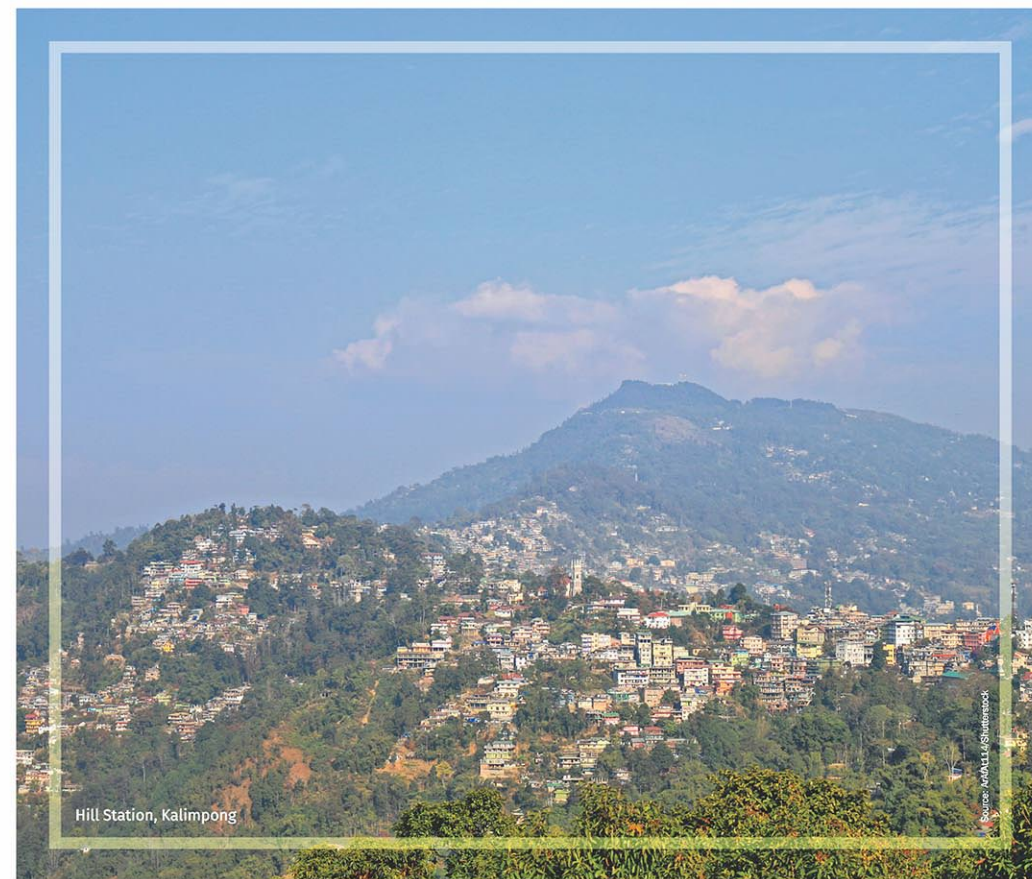
Living on trade routes connecting Bengal, Sikkim, Nepal, Bhutan and China to each other, Kalimpong is a hill town with plenty of character – it has churches built by Swiss and Scottish missionaries, British colonial bungalows, Tibetan and Bhutanese Buddhist monasteries, Hindu temples, hill station cottages of Bengali families (Gauripur House where Rabindranath Tagore wrote some of his poetry is like a pilgrimage for Bengali tourists), and typical Himalayan timber houses. Called a meeting place of cultures on the wool trade circuit, it is also a good place to get a variety of Bhutanese, Tibetan, Nepali and Bengali food.

In recent year, Kalimpong which is

mainly a bazaar town set on 4100 ft curving on a ridge between 5591ft high Deolo Hill and 4501ft high Drupin Dara, has gained popularity as an alternative summer retreat to overcrowded Darjeeling which was the main British hot-season hill station. Kalimpong is also dubbed the horticulture capital of India - you can visit a number of gardens and nurseries with orchids, roses, dahlias, gladioli, amaryllis and cacti hot-houses from where flower bulbs, tubers and rhizomes are exported and Himalayan grown flowers are sold to flower markets and florists of India.

The beautiful mountain scenery, oak forests and profusion of Himalayan

flowers characteristic of Kalimpong can be experienced when visiting the Deolo Hill which has a hilltop garden, a lake and a school called Dr Graham's Home which has a school, orphanage, cottages, staff quarters, chapel, workshop, hospital, bakery, playground, farm and hostels set in greenery . Another good viewpoint is the beautifully painted Zang Dhok Palri Monastery designed like Guru Rinpoche's palace and consecrated by the Dalai Lama in 1976 which holds a copper statues and a reliquary with 108 volumes of the Kangyur and other rare Buddhist scriptures, situated on Drupin Dara facing sunrise in the hills with snow-capped Kanchenjunga peak seen on a clear day.



Apart from this monastery, those interested in Buddhist art must visit Thongsa Gompa and other monasteries with superb murals from different periods and old thangka (Buddhist cloth paintings) while religious Hindus make it a point to visit Mangaldham, the resting place of the late Hindu spiritual guru Mangaldasji with the Parnami Krishna temple. For even better views than what Kalimpong can offer you can head for Lava, 32km east of the town. Other vantage viewpoints are Rishyap on a hilltop off the road to Lava, Neora Valley National Park near Lava and Loleygaon 56km from Kalimpong and about 20km

from Lava. There are good lodges at Lava for those who want to spend the night out of Kalimpong. Another interesting aspect of Kalimpong is its cottage industry – the Gangjong Paper Factory where you can see processes of handmade paper making and buy stationary, the dairies making cheeses and lollipops which started as a Swiss missionary activity but are now largely made in houses, the orchid and cacti culture nurseries. Visit the market, grubby but lively, to buy products like locally made cheese, lollipops, pickles, mustard sauce, cold meats, large cardamom and other food

products at Lark's and the Keverters delicatessen, a variety of tapestries, Tibetan brocades, Chinese dolls and porcelain products, and crafts made at Dr Graham's Home. With tourism being a mainstay of Kalimpong's economy, orchid culturists have built cottages at their nurseries and local entrepreneurs have started family-run accommodations. Those who like heritage properties can choose from the curio-filled Himalayan Hotel, the Kalimpong Park, the modernized Silver Oaks, and the affordable but scruffy West Bengal Tourism Morgan House set by the army-run golf course.

THE ARTS OF KANGRA



Andretta Artisan Village



Mustard Fields



The Kangra Fort



Bajjnath Temple

The town of Kangra has the remains of a once formidable fort damaged by an earthquake in 1905, which has Hindu and Jain temples inside its walls. Outside the fort is a museum that offers an insight into the life of Katoch dynastic rulers of Kangra. In the town, the much-revered Brajeshwari temple stands at the site of an older temple that was looted by invaders and finally devastated by the 1905 earthquake.

Drive to the village of Andretta well-known as an artist colony established in the 1920s by a theatre artist Norah Richards. Since then it has been home to painters like Sobha Singh and Sanyal, theatre practitioners, and the noted potter, Gurucharan Singh whose son still has his workshop here.

A traditional Kangra-style mud house, known as 'Chameli Niwas', employing local style and material, using mud, slate and bamboo was built here by Norah, an actress originally from Ireland, married to

Philip Richards, who was a professor at Government College, Lahore. She later became vice-principal at Dayal Singh College, Lahore. In the following years, she played a pivotal role in establishing modern Punjabi theatre, staging plays with Punjabi themes. After the death of her husband, she made Andretta her home. She built the makeshift proscenium, where Punjabi theatre amateurs and professionals were invited to perform plays.

In 1935, the District Commissioner of Kangra gave Richards 15 acres of land, called the Woodland Estate. She started a school of drama. Despite the journey to Andretta which would involve a 12-hour train journey, followed by a bus ride, and a nine miles trek from Banuri, from major cities, it started attracting artists. Painter B. C. Sanyal and professor Jai Dayal Singh, a pupil of Philip Richards from Lahore University, settled here and started organizing painting exhibitions to fund the Norah

Centre for Arts. Noted painter, Sobha Singh, most known for making Sikh religious painting, moved in and stayed here till his death in 1986. Richards nurtured Punjabi theatre through the 1940s and 1960s, and came to be known as the "grandmother of Punjabi theatre."

Further on, Gurucharan Singh, a noted potter who started the Delhi Blue Pottery in the 1952, established base here. Active till the end, he died in 1995 at the age of 99. Freda Bedi, mother of actor Kabir Bedi, who converted to Buddhism, lived at the village.

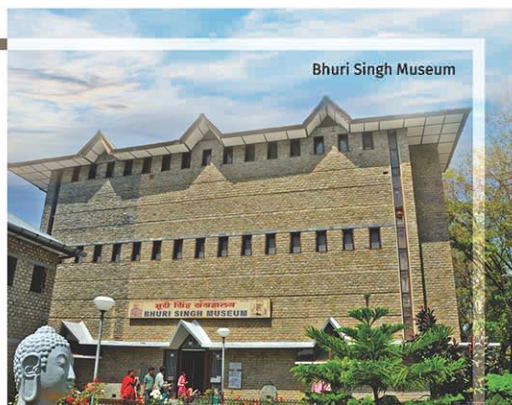
In 1983, Mansimran "Mini" Singh, son of noted potter Gurcharan Singh, and his wife Mary Singh started Andretta Pottery and Craft Society with a production studio and a terracotta museum. They set up a Central Government Rural Marketing Centre to provide assistance to potters and run residency programs.

On the highway to Mandi, visit Bajjnath, an architecturally impressive temple that is also a pilgrimage site.

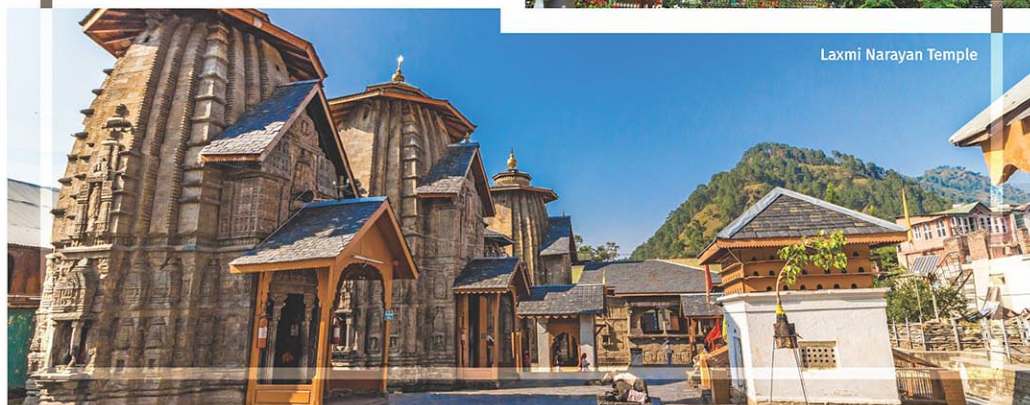
HERITAGE OF CHAMBA



Handicrafts in the Making



Bhuri Singh Museum



Laxmi Narayan Temple



Khajjiar Hill Station

Source: shalinder/Shutterstock

Chamba offers an excellent introduction to Himachal Pradesh – it is rich in history, architecture, arts and handicrafts, has one of Himachal's best museums, and the town is set on the banks of the Ravi with a scenic location among mountains. In winter, it is a pleasant place to visit because of its moderate altitude of about 3200 feet above sea level. Surprisingly, it is off the beaten track of most tourists.

As you approach Chamba from Pathankot Railway Station, look forward to a view of the fast flowing river and snow clad peaks from the bridge crossing the Ravi to the town. Once across the bridge, the road ascends to Chaughan, the meadow that is the centre for recreational, sports and market activities in Chamba town. The

townscape around the meadow is dominated by the Akhand Chandi Palace and the old palace called Rang Mahal, the 18th - 19th century residences of the Rajput clan that ruled Chamba for over 1000 years that currently house educational institutions and other public facilities. Opposite the palace complex, the Lakshmi Narayan Temple is one of the finest temple complexes in the Western Himalaya. The complex comprises towering stone temples built between the 10th and the 19th century with intricate stone shikaras and sedge-hat style wooden roofs of six temples visible in sequence from the entrance. Walk around the temples to see the panels carved with scenes from Hindu epics and mythological stories along the wall surfaces.

The finest is the Lakshmi Narayan

Temple which has richly carved walls. On another side of the meadow, the Bhuri Singh Museum, originally founded by Raja Bhuri Singh of Chamba who ruled by 1904/1919 but now administered by the government, has an excellent collection of miniature paintings including those of the Chamba School, Chamba Rumals (exquisitely embroidered fabric pieces used as gift wrappings and coverlets), copper-plate inscriptions, masks, jewellery and the ornately carved stone slabs typical of Chamba district.

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

RIVER TRIPS

*On World Rivers Day
on 26th September,
Some Exciting Trips
on India's Rivers.*



Gharial Crocodiles

WATCH BIRDS ALONG THE CHAMBAL RIVER



Indian Skimmers



Boat Safari

While the bird sanctuary of Bharatpur gets over crowded in the Diwali holidays, thanks to its proximity to Delhi, Agra, Fatehpur Sikri and Jaipur, you can enjoy birding in tranquility at river sites of the Agra and Etawah districts of Uttar Pradesh, Dholpur district in Rajasthan and Morena in Madhya Pradesh especially along the Chambal River. One of the best places to stay in the Chambal Safari Lodge at Jarar, about two hours from Agra, set within 35 sprawling acres of Mela Kothi, which is a farm of a zamindari family.

From the lodge, travel to Bah and a little further ahead is the 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 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 sandpipers. National Chambal Sanctuary is especially important as the breeding area 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.

Besides birds, you can see mugger crocodile and the endangered gharial native to sandy river banks in the plains of north India, rare turtles and the endangered Gangetic dolphin.

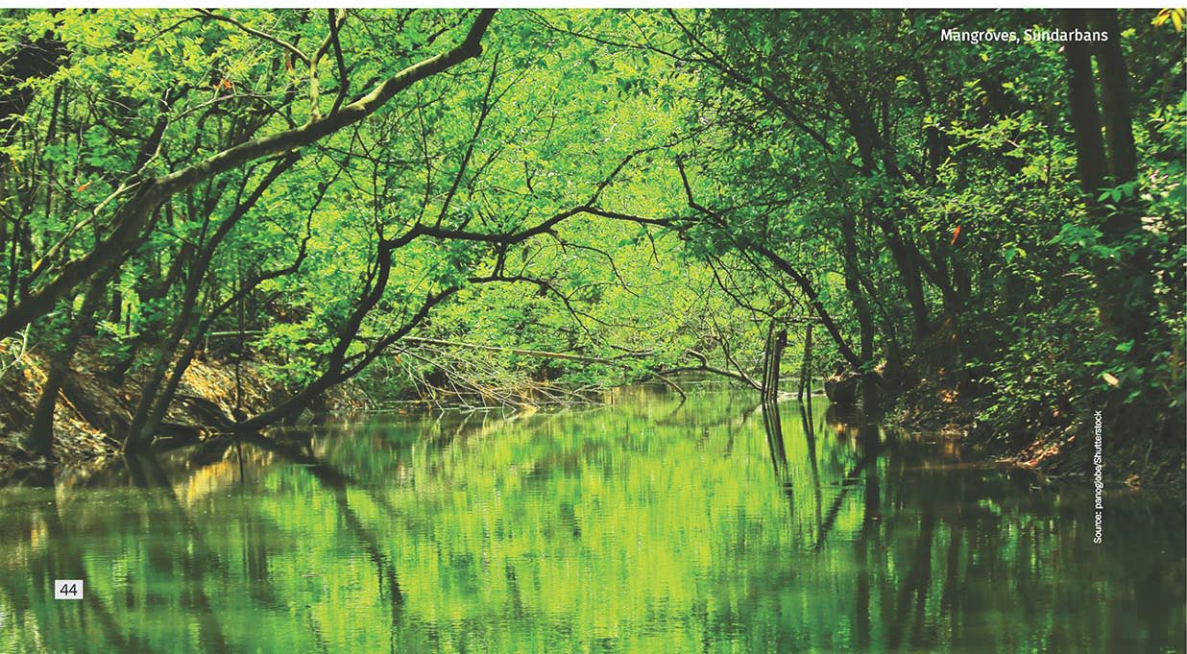


Bengal Tiger, Sunderbans

RIVER TRIP ON THE HOOGHLY



Prinsep Ghats along the Kolkata bank



Mangroves, Sunderbans

Source: pangsang/Shutterstock

Start with Kolkata, the city of palaces. Along the river, Kalna has some quaint terracotta temples. The battlefield of Plassey, where the foundations of the British Raj were laid, lies close to the river, with a commemorative obelisk. Musheerabad is rich in Nawab-period architecture. Hooghly meets the Ganges at the Farakka Barrage. Many historic cities like Gaur, Rajmahal, Monghyr, Patna and Varanasi lie along the Ganges.

From here, travel to the Sunderbans National Park and its adjoining Sajnekhali Sanctuary, covering much of the Gangetic Delta. This national park is densely covered by mangrove forests, providing a nursery of life for many fishes. It is also one of the most important areas for the royal Bengal tiger. The Sunderban Tiger Reserve has a total geographical area of 2585 sq.km.,

continuous with the mangrove habitat in Bangladesh.

The Sunderbans mangrove forest, one of the largest swamp forests in the world, lies on the delta of the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers on the Bay of Bengal. The area is known for its wide range of fauna, including more than 260 bird species, many threatened mammals and reptiles, aquatic fauna and marine life.

From one of the jetties, you can hire a boat to explore some of the waterways and islands in the vast river delta formed by Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna. The first stretch of the journey passes inhabited islands, subsisting on agriculture and fisheries. As you go deeper, the dense impenetrable mangrove forest fringes both sides of the rivers and creeks. The forest is famous for a kind of mangrove called

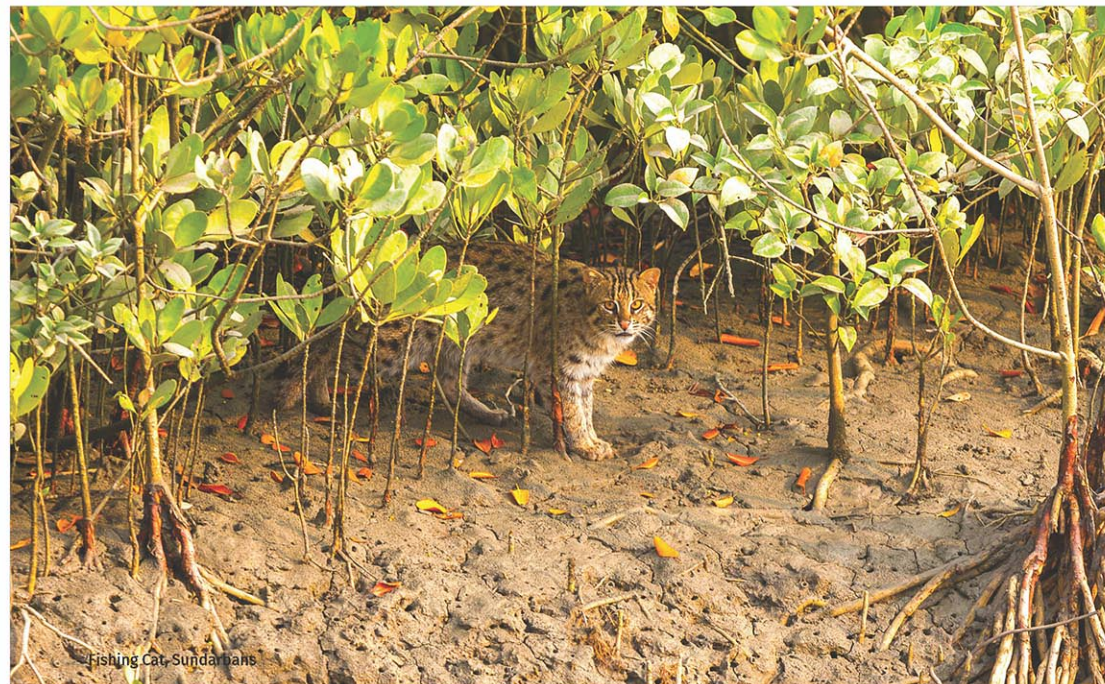
the Sundari, with specialized roots called pneumatophore, which emerge above ground and help in gaseous exchange even when the forest is waterlogged during the rains.

From the boat, keep a watch for wildlife in the forests and on the island shores. Spotted deer is often sighted and there are good chances of seeing the estuarine saltwater crocodile, one of the world's largest reptiles. Water monitor lizard is also spotted by many visitors. One of the specialties of the park is the fishing cat. Rhesus monkey and Jackal are quite common.

The river shores offer good opportunities to see wading birds like sandpipers, stints, plovers, curlews, nine species of gulls and terns and also storks. Out of 12 species of kingfishers found in India, six can be seen in the Sunderban National Park.

Source: amanah/Shutterstock

Sundarbans



Fishing Cat, Sundarbans

A popular stop on a Sundarban cruise, Sajnekhali has enclosures for estuarine salt-water crocodiles. The bushes are good for great tits, green bee-eaters, sunbirds and other birds. Another stop is at Sudhanyakhali, where a tightly-meshed walkway leads to one of the well-known watchtowers of the Sundarbans reserve. On both sides of the meshed fence are the mysterious-looking mangrove forests with their tightly packed canopies that hardly allow light to penetrate and the strange-looking protruding roots reaching out for oxygen and nutrition from the marshy soil. The watchtower overlooks a fresh-water pond, one of the few drinking water sources for the local wildlife like deer, wild boar and water monitor. Another island stop, Dabonki has a very attractive walkway called a 'canopy walk' as it is raised on pillars passing through the dense forests at the treetop level giving not only an amazing

view of the surrounding forests but also an opportunity to get close to the denizens of the upper canopy like birds.

The aerial walk is also a good way to experience the mangrove ecosystem, for the protruding roots of the mangrove trap nutritious debris, which together with the protection offered by the rib-like root formations, make the trees a nursery of life. You could see mudskipper fishes dragging themselves on the swampy soil and fiddler crabs named for their large claws that are quite out of proportion to the rest of their tiny bodies making them look like musicians. The Dobanki watchtower is an open rooftop with a superb view on all sides, taking in a number of water points on the island. Much of the Sundarban is a bird watchers' paradise, especially Sajnekhali Bird Sanctuary with unusual species like masked finfoot, mangrove whistler and spoonbill sandpiper.



Varanasi Ghat

Source: Davide Giandotti/Shutterstock

SACRED SITES ALONG THE GANGGES



Dasha Swamedh Ghat

Kashi Vishwanath Temple



Varanasi is among the holiest of all tirthas, literally “crossing places”, that allow the devotee access to the divine and enable gods and goddesses to come down to earth. Hindus believe it to be the centre of the Hindu universe from Amarnath in Kashmir to India’s southern tip at Kanyakumari, Puri in the east and Dwarka to the west. Nearby Sarnath is one of the four holy places for Buddhists and also has considerable religious importance for Jains as well.

Varanasi’s quintessential sight is the row of ghats along the Ganges, where visitors can bear witness to a variety of religious rituals. Good viewing of the ghats and the temples that rise steeply behind them is

This is the place, where devotees bathe in the rivers to cleanse themselves and locals come for their morning ablutions.

possible from a boat that can be hired at the ghats. This is a fascinating area from a tourist’s viewpoint where the juxtaposition of beauty and the macabre can be seen from a boat on the Ganges, the crescent of the serene river flowing between two banks, the southern one lined with soaring temples and the other with sandy beaches makes

a beautiful sight, while death can be seen at close range at the ghats, where bodies are cremated by mourners. This is the place, where devotees bathe in the rivers to cleanse themselves and locals come for their morning ablutions.

Besides the riverside ghats, the devotees come to Varanasi for its Kashi Vishwanath Temple, one of the most important places of worship in India, and Kedareshwara temple.

Other temples worth visiting include the Bharat Mata Mandir inaugurated by Mahatma Gandhi with a huge relief map of India, the 19th century Durga Temple with an ornate shikhara supported by fine carved columns, and the Tulsi temple inscribed with verses of Tulsidas.



Spotted Deer, Nagarhole National Park

ELEPHANT SPOTTING ALONG THE KABINI



Elephants, Nagarhole National Park

Kabini River



The Kabini River is one of the major tributaries of the River Cauvery, which originates near Kavilumpara in Kozhikode district of Kerala state by the confluence of the Panamaram River and the Mananthavady River. It flows eastward through Wayanad district, entering Mysore district of Karnataka, to join the Kaveri River in Mysore district of Karnataka.

In Karnataka, the Kabini runs between Bandipur and Nagarhole National Parks. This is one of the best areas for wildlife viewing.

You can join a motorboat safari for a trip along the Kabini River. At times, the scene is reminiscent of the African Savannahs. The river is dotted with elephants, grazing on the aquatic grass, the petrified trees

protruding over the river surface covered with birds, crocodiles bask by the water, deer are gathered on the river shore for their evening drink, and a wild boar with large tusks is wallowing in the marshes by the river. A crested serpent eagle swooped down from a nearby tree - it had probably sighted potential prey in the long grasses along the river. Kites and kingfishers hovered over the water. Wagtails strolled along the edge of the river.

The boat gets close to where elephants in large numbers gather to browse the fresh grasses along the river. You can watch them pulling out the aquatic grass, cleaning each bunch and then gulping it down. Crocodiles can be seen basking along the river.



Mountains at the Riverside of the Brahmaputra River

CRUISING THE BRAHMAPUTRA



River Cruise, Assam



Majuli, Biggest Island in River Brahmaputra

India's largest river, the Brahmaputra is a vast expanse of water offering serene views of islands and riverside villages. A cruise on the Brahmaputra can be combined with some superb wildlife and cultural trips.

Hire the MV Rudra Singha, a houseboat built by local craftsmen in the traditional style of an Assamese Pansoinau (flat-bottomed large boat), entirely made of local wood and local weavings.

A houseboat is perfect for couples and small families to explore the Brahmaputra River and the numerous attractions of the Brahmaputra Valley. The boat has a crew and kitchen team to cater your needs. The boat is capable of gliding through even the shallow channels on the river.

The boat is equipped with a modern

on-board waste-water treatment plant, safety equipment and an electric generator. The cabin has an air conditioned double bedroom with an attached bath, and a lounge with a superb view. Fly to Jorhat and drive to Nemat Ghat to embark on the river journey in the evening. In the morning, you can visit Majuli, one of the world's largest river islands.

Majuli is rich in culture and crafts, especially known for its Vaishnavite monasteries. After Majuli, the houseboat floats along the river; you can spot river dolphins and birds, and watch life at riverside villages. A visit to a village is possible and also Vishwanath that is known for its temple from the Ahom dynastic period. Presently after a few nights in the houseboat, you get to Silghat from where a car can take you to Kaziranga National Park for safaris. ■

INDIA'S RHINO LAND



“ ON WORLD
RHINO DAY,
WE VISIT
THE BEST
PLACES TO
WATCH RHINOS
IN INDIA. ”



Elephant Safari, Kaziranga National Park



Jeep Safari, Kaziranga National Park

The alluvial Terai-Duar savanna and grasslands and riverine forest of Northeastern India is the land of the one-horned rhinoceros. Among terrestrial land mammals native to Asia, the Indian rhino is second in size only to the Asian elephant. It is also the second-largest living rhinoceros, behind only the white rhino of Africa.

The best place to watch the rhino in India is the Kaziranga National Park. As you travel to Kaziranga, rhino, elephant and flocks of geese are often seen from the highway itself before you reach the Baguri, the entrance to the Western Range of Kaziranga. The national park has more than 70% of the world population of Indian one horned rhino, Asiatic wild buffalo and swamp deer, more than 1000 elephant, one of the world's largest tiger concentrations, more than 490 species of birds including

25 globally threatened birds and 24 near threatened species, and a variety of reptiles.

In the morning, head for Mihimukh, where you may be able to get an elephant ride taking you through the tall grasses for close views of the rhino. This is also a possible opportunity to spot the endangered Bengal florican. In the morning, the atmosphere at Kaziranga is magical. The drive from the Kohora gate near Mihimukh on the Daflong- Foliomara route covers the central region of the park, which has a cross-section of habitat types. You are most likely to spot the three mega-herbivores – elephant, rhino and wild buffalo, and this is also an important habitat of barasingha swamp deer and hog deer. The wetlands on the way are gathering places for great adjutant stork, black necked stork, bar-headed geese and motley duck species.



Rhinoceros, Kaziranga National Park

In the afternoon, head for the entrance to the Western Range of Kaziranga, which has vast tracts of short grass, optimum rhino habitat. The 20 km Baguri-Monabeel- Bimoli- Baguri drive offers opportunities to watch a good number of rhino browsing the short grass, and also high herbivore and bird densities that can be seen around the oxbow lakes and marshlands, characteristic of the area's habitat. A small stretch of the loop goes through low alluvial savannah woodland, where you may spot khaleej pheasant and red

jungle fowl. Spend some time at one of the viewing towers by the river to watch rhinos and other mammals coming to drink water in the evening.

The best time to visit Eastern Kaziranga is in the morning. From Agaratoli, the road passes Sohola Bheel, which is frequented by pelicans, storks and herons. The endangered Pallas fish eagle is often seen breeding near the wetland. The Eastern Range is scenically beautiful with good woodland, which provides good opportunities to watch woodpeckers and other forest birds,

while the grasslands are good for bee-eaters, parrot bill and swamp francolin. This range is also excellent for viewing river turtles. The grasslands at Debeswari in this range are a good potential area for florican sightings. A half day trip should be made to Panbari, which is good for birds and also the habitat of hoolock gibbon and other mammals.

Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra in Assam provides grassland and wetland habitat for the rhino. This sanctuary has one of the largest rhino concentrations.

You can also see the golden jackal, wild boar and feral water buffalo. Barking deer, Indian leopard and rhesus macaque are also present.

The highway from Bagdogra to Gorumara goes along the Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary – if you take an early start you could see deer, monkeys, jungle cat, civet, jackal and a variety of birds just 20-30km from Bagdogra on this road. The national park is entered via the Lataguri Interpretation Centre. An elephant ride at Gorumara is one of the best ways to look for the large mammals like rhino, elephant and



Jaldapara National Park



Jaldapara National Park

bison. The 80km park does not have a good road network; you need to stakeout at Jatraprasad Viewing Point or Rhino Observation Point, both with comfortable sitting arrangements, facing rivers, and wait patiently for rhino, elephant, bison, deer or wild boar to arrive for their drink. Other viewing points are Chandrachur Watch Tower with a view of riverine grasslands, bamboo and deciduous forests, Chapramari Sanctuary rest house facing a lake, where elephant, bison and storks could be seen, and Chukchuki, which is popular for bird viewing.

Jaldapara is one of West Bengal's best reserves for the Indian one-

horned rhino and most visitors do get to see one during an early morning elephant ride through tall grasslands and marshland along the Hollong River. The 21 sq.km.-sanctuary comprising riverine forests, tall grasslands and open African Savannah-type grasslands, supports 75-80 rhinos, which is a good density for this species. Besides rhino watching from elephant back, Jaldapara has watchtowers and viewpoints facing waterholes and salt licks – those who sit in them could be rewarded by sightings of sambar, hog deer, barking deer, elephant, Indian bison and wild boar. The sanctuary is also interesting for birdwatchers. ■

Words by ANIL MULLICHANDANI | Pic by DINESH SHUKLA

Just for Fun!

Portuguese is the official language of 9 countries - Brazil, Mozambique, Angola, Portugal, Guinea-Bissau, East Timor, Cape Verde, Sao Tome and Principe and Macau.

Europe has no deserts - it is the only continent without one.

The Sphinx in Egypt lost its nose in 1798 when Napoleon soldiers used it for target practice.

The world's tallest mountains, the Himalayas, are also the fastest growing. Their growth - about half an inch a year - is caused by the pressure exerted by two of Earth's continental plates (the Eurasian plate and the Indo-Australian plate) pushing against one another.

The only continent without reptiles or snakes is Antarctica.

Did you know that the Ukrainians were the first people to have lived on Earth? Trypillia, a village that is situated in Ukraine, is believed to be the most ancient civilization in the world. Trypillians lived on the Earth in the period 5,400 - 2,700 BC!

It is forbidden for aircraft to fly over the Taj Mahal.

Although Sapporo is the fifth largest city in Japan, it is regarded as pastoral destination by the Japanese!

For centuries, the Ajanta Caves in Maharashtra lay hidden, known only to the local tribe people and were discovered by accident only in the 19th century by a British army officer John Smith, when he was out hunting.

Disney World in Orlando, Florida covers 30,500 acres (46 square miles), making it twice the size of the island of Manhattan, New York.

The Eiffel Tower was built for the 1889 World's Fair.

Marrakech in Morocco got its nick name of the 'Red City' because of the red sandstone used in the construction of its buildings.

San Francisco is a home to the largest Chinese population, outside of China of course! By the way, the Chinese Fortune Cookie was invented here.

Silver was considered more valuable than gold in Ancient Egypt.

Before 1972 Sri Lanka was known as Ceylon.

Canada is an Indian word meaning 'Big Village'.



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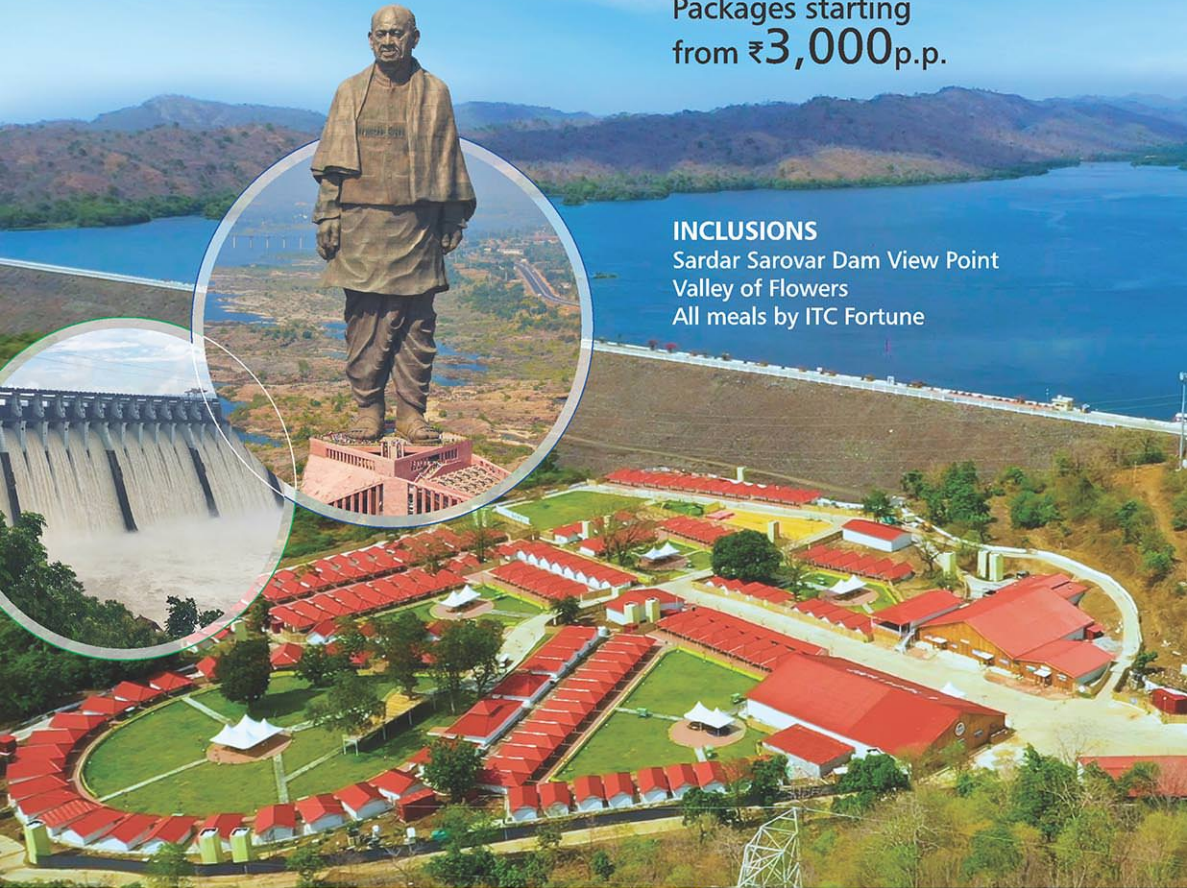
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