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FESTIVAL OF COLOURS

**SALVATION IN
SOLITUDE**



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FRIENDLY
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PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE

March 2023

Colour Me Red

India and colours go hand in hand. From streets filled with rainbow-hued sarees to household kitchens with aromatic spice palette, from saffron-clad monks to deity-filled temples, every colour comes alive here to tell a story.

Once a year, the palette goes into overdrive for the festival of colours that is celebrated here with great fervour. On the Hindu lunar month of phalguna, the country rejoices Holi, marking the onset of spring and the harvest season.

So let's set the tempo for Holi this year by witnessing the unique styles of celebration across the nation. What better way to explore local culture than discovering their way of celebration in terms of rituals, festivity, food and games?

Read on...



Source: Yash Sanyal



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Sumela Monastery

FESTIVAL OF COLOURS

March is a month of many festivals that celebrate the spring harvest.

Kvant Mela

In the hills of Chhota Udepur, the eastern district of Gujarat bordering Madhya Pradesh, several tribal fairs and haats celebrate the period of Holi. One of the largest is the fair at Kvant village. As you approach the fairground, you can see jeeps jam packed with colourfully dressed women and traditionally dressed men. Many of these come walking in processions, playing musical instruments. The fairground is a blaze of colour. Festivities include folk music, dancing and acrobatics. A tribal market comes up and you can see the ceremonies. The Rathwa tribe is predominant in the area and the youth is seen dancing with drums and other musical instruments. Some of them paint their bodies with white dots, and sport bamboo hats or peacock headdresses, and tie ornaments on their neck. The young men dance rhythmically to impress the young women, as this fair is also used for match-making. The young men wear bells around their waist so that a rhythmic sound is produced while dancing.

Terracotta horses and harvest produce is offered to the deities during the fair.



Chitra Vichitra Mela

Poshina in North Gujarat is surrounded by tribal villages, and a series of tribal fairs occur here during the period of Holi. The most spectacular, Chitra Vichitra Mela occurs at the confluence of three rivers, a site that tribal people associate with the Mahabharata. At night, this fair is a time for mourning and remembering the dear departed. By day, there are festivities like music, dance and amusements. This is a good time to experience the culture of the Garasia tribal groups of this region.





Dang Darbar

Dang Darbar in South Gujarat is the time of gathering of the tribal chieftains. Though privy purses were abolished in India, the practice continues in the Dang. During this festival, the chieftains receive their privy purses. The festivities are spectacular as you can see the Dangi tribal dances of various groups, and their traditional musical instruments. Ahwa and Saputara are the best places to enjoy the festivities.

Bhagoria

The Bhagoria Festival is a time of betrothal for tribal people like the Rathwas in Barwani, Dhar, Alirajpur, Khargone and Jhabua districts of Madhya Pradesh. The fairs occur in the week of Holi. The tribal people arrive in gaily decorated bullock carts and other vehicles at the fair sites, where there is much music and dancing. You can see tribal youth eloping with their selected bride during the fair.



Chettikulangara Burani in Kerala

At the Chettikulangara temple in Alleppey, a festival is dedicated to Goddess Bhagavathy with offerings of rice and coconuts. Processions, music, dance and other celebrations can be witnessed.

Source: AJP / Shutterstock.com

Bamboo Harvest in Mizoram

In Mizoram, Chapchar Kut is a harvest festival of bamboo shoots, celebrated to mark the drying up process and subsequent cultivation. The local people wear their traditional outfit, dance, and sing, play drums, gongs, and cymbals.

Source: Mr.SMS / Shutterstock.com



Spring Festival in Goa

The Shigmo parade is a religious festival characterized by colors, music, dance and floats. The parade demonstrates the essence of Goa's favorite spring festival on the streets all across the state. It has elaborately built floats depicting scenes from regional mythology and religious scenes. Traditional folk dances like Ghode Modni and Fugdi are performed along the processions, and the streets of Goa are lit up with eye-catching décor. Delicious Goan delicacies, music and dance performances add to the festivities.

Source: Lloyd Vas / Shutterstock.com

Indigenous Festival of Manipur

Yaoshang is a festival celebrated in Manipur for five days in spring, starting on the full moon day of the month of Lamda. Yaosang celebrates the indigenous traditions of the Meitei people with colour-throwing in the Holi tradition.



Words by ANIL MULCHANDANI

Far Far Away



A CITY FOUNDED BY THE SPARTANS

Monemvasia is a city located in the southern tip of Greece in the Peloponnese peninsula that juts into the turquoise waters of the Aegean Sea. The magical colours of the sea are just one of the attractions of this ancient island established by the Spartans in the 6th century. As any strategically placed location, the island was occupied by different maritime powers over the millennia. The checkered past has transformed the tiny island into an idyllic place, primed with historical legends and settings.

Monemvasia was founded by the Spartans who dwelled in the district called Laconia in the 6th -century AD. It was meant to be a strategic stronghold against the recurrent invasion by the Goths. It is a small island that is connected to the mainland by a narrow stretch of path, built above the sea level. The city quickly grew in importance due to its location on the East and West maritime trade route. Over the centuries, Monemvasia was ruled by several empires. During the Byzantine era, Monemvasia was a major

commercial centre and an important military stronghold. The city's fortifications were built during this time. The ruins of the massive walls that once surrounded the city are visible across the island.

In the 17th century, Monemvasia was captured by the Ottomans who ruled the city until Greece gained independence in the 19th century. Today, Monemvasia is a popular tourist destination, attracting visitors from around the world who come to see its historic sites and striking natural beauty.

The craggy rock island is like a giant block that slopes down into the sea. This well-preserved mediaeval town is divided into two broad areas - the lower town and the upper town. In the mediaeval era, the working class composed of agricultural workers, blacksmiths, and slaves, occupied the lower portion of the town. Many of the buildings here have been converted to hotels and boutiques.



Old Medieval Castle Town

The upper portion of the town was occupied by the landed gentry. It was once a sprawling township with mausoleums, mosques, churches and mansions of the nobles. Today all that remains are the crumbling ruins, weathered by the Grecian climate. Some of the notable buildings to be seen are the Church of Hagia Sophia. It dates to the 12th century. Perched on the edge of a cliff, the church has a stunning 180-degree panoramic view of the brilliantly coloured Aegean Sea. During the Ottoman occupation, it was converted

into a mosque before being restored to a church when Greece achieved independence in 1930. It is well worth the stiff climb to this ancient structure.

The Church of Elkomenos Christos is an ancient church, which is gouged into the rock. A carved inscription at the entrance of the church indicates that it was constructed in 1697, probably on the site of a former church founded in the 6th-7th century. There are two thrones, dedicated to the Byzantine Emperor and the Empress.



Church of Hagia Sophia



Monemvasia has no streets, only cobblestone paths, which takes you to various cafés and bar-restaurants that overlook the sea. The old town is located on the top of the island's rocky hill. It is a maze of narrow labyrinthine streets and alleys, lined with centuries-old stone houses and churches. The roofs of the houses are made up of curved terracotta tiles, with chimneys protruding from them. Many of the houses have been carved into the rocks. The experience of walking into these narrow passageways is akin to walking into the mediaeval past.

When in Monemvasia, travel on foot. For nature lovers, Monemvasia offers plenty of opportunities for hiking and exploring the surrounding countryside. There are several trails that lead through the hills and along the rugged coast. Many of the mediaeval buildings have been restored, and converted to hotels, boutiques, cafés, and restaurants. Cocktail bars and cafes abound here. Many of the cafes have extended terraces where the visitor can enjoy meals, alfresco.

Monemvasia is also known for its delicious food and drink. The city is famous for its local wine, which is made from the Malvasia grape and has a rich, sweet flavour. You can sample the wine and indulge in 5 S's of tasting wine i.e. See, Swirl, Sniff, Sip and Savour, at any of the many local wineries and taverns there.

Some of the most popular dishes in Monemvasia include fresh seafood, grilled meats, and traditional Greek dishes like moussaka and souvlaki. There are plenty of restaurants and tavernas in the old town and along the seafront, offering a range of delicious options for every taste.



Cafes and Restaurants




Malvasia Wine

We began this article by mentioning that this place was founded by the Spartans who lived in the district of Laconia. The word Spartan and Laconia has since come into the English lexicon. The Spartans were known for their austere life. Their life was characterised by self-denial and were restricted to basic amenities. It was a life sans luxuries, amenities and frills - a strict and austere existence. It was a form of conscription and the boys from a young age were trained to be warriors. They remained in battle readiness throughout their life, which meant they lived an arduous existence. The plausible reason was

because Monemvasia lay on a lucrative trade route and was therefore often open to annexation by various maritime powers. The word Spartan has thus come to mean a life marked by simplicity, frugality, or avoidance of luxury and comfort.

The Spartans were also known for the terseness of their speech. The story goes, probably apocryphal, that Philip of Macedon (Alexander's father) threatened to conquer Laconia. When the Spartans resisted, Philip threatened them, saying "If I enter Laconia, I will raze Sparta to the ground," The Spartans' pithy response to Philip was, "If!" The famous concise retort

engendered the word 'laconic', to mean - 'expressing much in a few words'.

As you sit in one of the cafes on the slopes of the lower town, you can see a vast array of dun-coloured roofs, progressively descending towards the shore. Beyond it, the vast ocean stretches interminably. You can see the waves washing up to the shores. The sounds do not reach you. All is quiet. A gentle breeze blows across the island, rustling the tree leaves. Occasionally a bird chirps, looking for crumbs. A group of tourists come walking by, talking animatedly. Soon their sounds fade away. All is quiet once again in this small paradise in the Aegean Sea. 



WOMEN-FRIENDLY STAYS

For solo women travelers, it can be comforting to stay in a property owned and run by women. We look at a few options in Gujarat.



Utelia House



ENJOY A LUXURIOUS HOMESTAY IN AHMEDABAD

Ahmedabad's Law Garden Night Market is one of the favourite places for bargain shopping and street food snacking in the city. It bustles with amusement facilities for children, street vendors and shoppers gathered at stalls put up by colourfully dressed women who sell embroideries, patchwork and trinkets. Some of Ahmedabad's popular restaurants are nearby like Swati Snacks, Tomato's and Nini's Kitchen.

Yet just a short walk from the bustle of Law Garden, the residential lane of Gandhi Bagh leads to Utelia House, at number 9 Gandhi Bagh. A typical 1950s-style city house, residence of the erstwhile ruling family of Utelia Jagir (Utelia village is about 75 km away),

Utelia House is a peaceful converted home with a garden in the forecourt.

The front room is appealing with fine wooden furniture, comfortable sitting arrangements and historical photographs. The rooms with twin or double beds are also aesthetically appointed. The rooms have French windows that open out to the green courtyard, giving the impression of a private garden, with water features.

The most luxurious room is called the Princess Suite with a huge four-poster wooden bed, plush furnishings and art pieces. The owner, Vidhatri Devi, personally attends to the guests and supervises the cooking. Her own specialty is the house special mutton and she also makes good desserts.

TAKE A TEXTILE TOUR IN SURENDRANAGAR DISTRICT

Surendranagar district is known for its distinctive weaves like the Tangaliya or Tangalio. Deidara, Vastadi, Godavari, Bajana and Vadla are among the main clusters for Tangalio, Sayla and Someshwar for Patola, Wadhwan for bandhani and Dasada for Rabari embroidery.

As you travel from Ahmedabad past Limbdi, you come to Vastadi where Dangasia community weavers can be seen weaving shawls in pit looms. The signature style of the Tangaliya is the use of a contrast colour thread, which the weavers knot and weave into the fabric creating the design with the effect of raised dots and geometric patterns. Continue from here to Sayla, where you

can visit award-winning weavers of the Patola. You can see the intricate process of making the saree from the tie-and-dye of individual yarns, and each yarn set on the loom according to the design. At Sayla, you can also see the weavers who work with fabric and wool scraps, upcycling them into usable floor coverings and other textiles.

Bell Guest House at Sayla is a British colonial-style mansion guesthouse set in grounds with a drive around the garden. The rooms are comfortably furnished and the dining room has historical photographs. Upstairs, the terrace looks out over the garden. The 19th century property is run as a homestay by Preeti and Somraj

Singh, Jhala Rajputs from Sayla's erstwhile ruling dynasty who personally spend time with guests and look after their comforts. The food at Sayla offers influences from Kathiawad, Rajasthan, Patiala, Chhattisgarh and Odisha.

A short distance from Sayla, Ambika Niwas Palace is an impressive palace at Muli. Set among agricultural fields, the palace wings are set around a courtyard. The halls house princely memorabilia and old photographs. The owner, Jitendra Singh, scion of the former rulers of Muli, is usually around to tell stories about the history of the region, while Ranjitsinh and Mradima Kumari personally attend to the guests.



Dining Hall, Ambika Niwas Palace



Bell Guest House, Sayla

RELAX AT A ROYAL RETREAT

The royal family of Wankaner resides at the majestic Ranjit Vilas Palace, built from 1907 to 1928 halfway up a hill with a view of the countryside. The architecture is eclectic with Venetian, Gothic, Moorish, Mughal and Rajput features. Inside, the palace has Italian marble floors, Burma teak furniture, Belgian chandeliers, Murano blown glass chandeliers, and intricately woven rugs.

Next to the palace, Khengar Bhawan is a homestay run by Yogini

Kumari with her husband Kesri Sinh who belongs to the ruling clan of Wankaner. The rooms here are appointed in colonial-style with four-poster beds and planter's chairs.

If you prefer to stay in a garden, Royal Oasis is the family's summer palace set in orchards along the Machhu River. The attractive mansion guest house has a lovely courtyard with fountains and sitting arrangements. The rooms here are appointed with original European

furniture, and the bathrooms are real Art Deco beauties.

The piece de resistance is the Art Deco style swimming pool inside the palatial building. Don't miss a visit to the step well in the orchard.

The harvest of the fruit orchards features on the dining table – the lemonade is made from the lime grown in the orchards, guava may also be part of the menu, and Yogini Kumari makes jams, pickles and other products from this produce.



The Royal Oasis, Wankaner



RETREAT TO A FARMHOUSE



Misriote Farm Homestay

A short detour from the Ahmedabad-Vadodara stretch of National Highway, Misriote Farm is run by Gyaneshwari Kumari and Ishwar Singh. This farm offers accommodation in the bungalow and cottage-like rooms set among trees. You can enjoy breakfast sitting out under a sprawling tree.

Walk from the rooms to the outdoor dining and barbecue area that faces the river. Nearby is the Trap Shooting Range, where your host, champion rifle sportsman Ishwar Singh will introduce you to the sport of trap shooting.

DINE WITH A BEGUM



Balasinor Palace



Just 86 km from Ahmedabad, Balasinor was a princely state ruled by the Babi dynasty of Nawabs. The Babis ruled over Junagadh, Radhanpur and Balasinor. The descendant of the family, Salauddin with his mother who hails from the Palanpur Princely State and wife Zeba from Karnataka have

converted part of their Garden Palace into a homestay. The front room here showcases the heritage of the Nawabs with old European furniture, carved wooden tables, portraits and artefacts.

The family has a rich repertoire of recipes from the Nawabs and Begums of different princely states – enjoy the

kebabs, curries, biryanis and desserts. The vegetarian speciality of the Begum is the Dakor Gota Biryani. Do not miss a dinosaur safari with Aaliya Babi. She will take you to the dinosaur museum and interpretation centre, and the fossil park where you can see fossils from the Cretaceous period 65 million years ago.

EXPERIENCE HERITAGE AT HIMMATNAGAR

Dowlat Villas Palace at Himmatnagar was built in the 1920s and '30s in the shape of a scorpion. Taking inspiration from European castles, the palatial property has an impressive façade rising up behind formal gardens.

The present owners are happy to take you around the halls, showing you

the portraits and artefacts as they explain the historical significance of the palace. The interiors are elegant and well-maintained.

The women of the family ensure the meals are a good mix of various dishes from their heirloom recipes in the dining room of the palace, which is now a heritage homestay.



Dowlat Villas Palace

EXPERIENCE HERITAGE IN VADODARA

In the Makarpura area of Vadodara, Madhav Bagh is a hidden gem – this palatial house was built by Shrimant Madhavrao Gaekwad in the 1890s. It presents an impressive elevation with European, Islamic and Hindu features, and a garden out front dominated by an attractive British fountain. The rooms face a courtyard that has a jhoola (swing) and a fountain. The dining room

is attractive with period furniture, Italian flooring and porcelain artefacts. The rooms are also attractively appointed.

The highlight of staying here is enjoying the food prepared by Indrayani Kumari.

The meals cover a variety of dishes drawn from the palaces of Baroda, Kolhapur, Thanjavur and other Maratha Princely States.

Interiors of Madhav Bagh Palace



STAY WITH THE FAMILY PETS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

Bhavani Villa sits on a hill with a panoramic view of Danta, the Aravalli foothills and the old palace of the Danta royal family. Chandra welcomes guests at her homestay in this country house where she stays with her family. The rooms here are large and comfortable, with windows and verandas overlooking a

valley.

The family loves animals, and there are pedigree dogs and aviary birds at Bhavani Villa itself. Head to their nearby farm, which has pleasant walking trails and picnic spots. Here, the family will show you their prized Marwari horses and cattle farm.

Drive or walk around the farm to

spot birds, nilgai antelope and other fauna.

Walk from the rooms to the outdoor dining and barbecue area that faces the river. Nearby is the Trap Shooting Range, where your host, champion rifle sportsman Ishwar Singh will introduce you to the sport of trap shooting.



Bhavani Villa, Danta

LUXURIATE AT A ROYAL PALACE BY THE LAKE

Drive to Santrampur, where you can see a lake with birds and occasionally crocodile with a palace on the shores.

This palace called Shri Joraver Vilas is owned and run by Mandakini Kumari and Paranjay Sinh, scion of the erstwhile ruling family of Sant. Inside, the palace is very attractive with original 1920s Art Deco furniture, colonial-period pieces of furniture, and new additions that are keeping with the early-20th century theme. Exquisite meenakari and other

handwork decorate the walls, and the furnishings are also beautifully embellished. Rooms look out or open onto the lake.

Mandakini Kumari takes pride in setting a fine table with the signature dishes of the Santrampur royal family including those of her father-in-law.

Walk out of the palace for a stroll by the lakeside or a trek in the adjoining forest. In the evening, drive up a hill to enjoy a panoramic view of the hilly countryside from the Hawa Mahal. ☑



Shri Joraver Vilas, Santrampur

SALVATION IN SOLITUDE

Perched impossibly at the edge of a precipitous cliff, 1200 metres above sea level, the Sumela Monastery in Turkey presents a stunningly spectacular view. The first thought that comes to mind is how the monastery was built at all? How many fatalities were there in making this monastery so precipitously poised on the edge of this rocky mountain? How long did it take to build? And why was it built in such an inaccessible place?

The Sumela Monastery, also known as the Monastery of the Virgin Mary, is a historic Greek Orthodox monastery located in the Trabzon Province in Turkey. Situated on a steep cliff face overlooking the Altindere Valley, the Sumela Monastery stands out as one of the most popular tourist attractions in

the region. The Sumela Monastery was founded in the 4th century AD by two Athenian monks, making it among the oldest Christian monasteries in the world.

According to legend, the two monks discovered an icon of the Virgin Mary in a cave near this site. This miraculous discovery in this remote region inspired them to establish a place of worship there. Initially, only two rooms were built, carved into the rocky mountain. The Byzantine Emperor Justinian (AD 527-568) ordered the enlargement of the monastery. Over the years, the monastery was looted and burnt. However, when peace reigned, the monastery was restored and enlarged. The monastery now has 72 rooms and an ample library.



Source: Thomas Wyness / Shutterstock.com

It is now one of the prominent centres of Orthodox Christianity in the region. The Orthodox Christian Church also called the “Eastern Orthodox,” “Greek Orthodox” Church, or simply “the Orthodox Church” is the oldest Christian Church in the world, founded by Jesus Christ. It is one of the three main Christian groups. The others being Roman Catholic and Protestant. The Orthodox tradition was developed from the Christianity of the Eastern Roman Empire and was shaped by the pressures, politics, and peoples of that geographical area. Since the Eastern capital of the Roman Empire was Byzantium (ancient Greek city, now known as Istanbul), this style of Christianity is sometimes called Byzantine Christianity.

During the Byzantine era, the Sumela Monastery was an important cultural and religious centre, attracting scholars, theologians and artists from across the Byzantine Empire. Despite the relative inaccessibility, the monastery played a

significant role in the political and social life of the region, serving as a refuge for political exiles and a centre of resistance against invading armies. It had gallantly survived numerous wars and invasions.

In 1919, war erupted between Greece and Turkey over the occupation of certain areas along the border. However, with the armistice of 1923, in the redistribution of the land between the two countries, the Black Sea coastal region of Greece came under Turkish governance. In the treaty that was adopted, the Greek and Turkish governments agreed to engage in a population exchange. The Muslims from Greece were forced out and likewise the Christians from Turkish lands had to come to Greece. The area around the Sumela Monastery, which was earlier under Greece, came under Turkish governance. During this period, the monastery fell into disrepair, and it was eventually abandoned in 1923.

Church in Orthodox Monastery, Sumela


In the years that followed, the Sumela Monastery remained largely neglected and forgotten, and it was not until the 1950s that efforts were made to restore the site and open it up to tourists. Today, the Sumela Monastery is a popular destination for travellers to the region, and is widely regarded as one of the most important religious and cultural sites in Turkey. The Monastery's main source of income is an icon of the Virgin Mary, which is believed to be the work of Saint Luke, one of the disciples of Jesus Christ. The wooden icon is believed to possess miraculous properties. However, reportedly the wooden surface of the icon has been split open down the middle. The paints and the lines have been obliterated. In the centre of the Monastery, large drops of water drip at irregular intervals from the roof of the cave. The faithful believe that these drops of water can cure any ailments.

The Sumela Monastery is renowned for its unique architecture, which blends elements of Byzantine (Roman), Greek, and Ottoman styles. It features a series of chambers, courtyards, and chapels that are connected by a network of narrow passageways and winding staircases.

One of the most impressive features of the Sumela Monastery is its main chapel, which is decorated with exquisite frescoes depicting scenes from the life of the Virgin Mary and other biblical figures. The frescoes on the inner and outer walls of the church are recent, believed to be painted over earlier works. The chapel also features a large wooden iconostasis - a screen with doors and icons set in tiers, which separates the space surrounding the altar from the nave (the principal longitudinal area of a church). It is intricately carved and adorned with gold leaf.

Other notable features of the Sumela Monastery include its dining hall, which is carved into the rock and features a large communal table and a library, which once housed a vast collection of ancient manuscripts and religious texts. Once inside the monastery, one can explore the various chambers, courtyards and chapels, and marvel at the intricate carvings and frescoes that adorn the walls and ceilings.

There are other monasteries across the world and across religions, similarly perched in extreme conditions. Some of which are the Fanjingshan Buddhist Temple in China, the Katskhi Pillar in Georgia and the Paro Taktsang monastery in Bhutan.

The Sumela Monastery is accessible by car or bus from the nearby city of Trabzon, located approximately 50 kilometres away. An incredibly narrow, steep path on the side of the cliff face leads to the entrance of the monastery. The monastery overlooks the Altindere Valley National Park that spreads over 4800 hectares. From this vantage point, you can see the vast canopy of the forest. Over the centuries, the monks would have come to this remote sequestered abbey for meditation and solitude. Sitting in a meditative pose and looking out into the quietude of the vast canopy of trees below, they would have sought salvation. 

TENT CITY NARMADA

A PERFECT SUMMER RETREAT



Tent City Narmada, Ekta Nagar

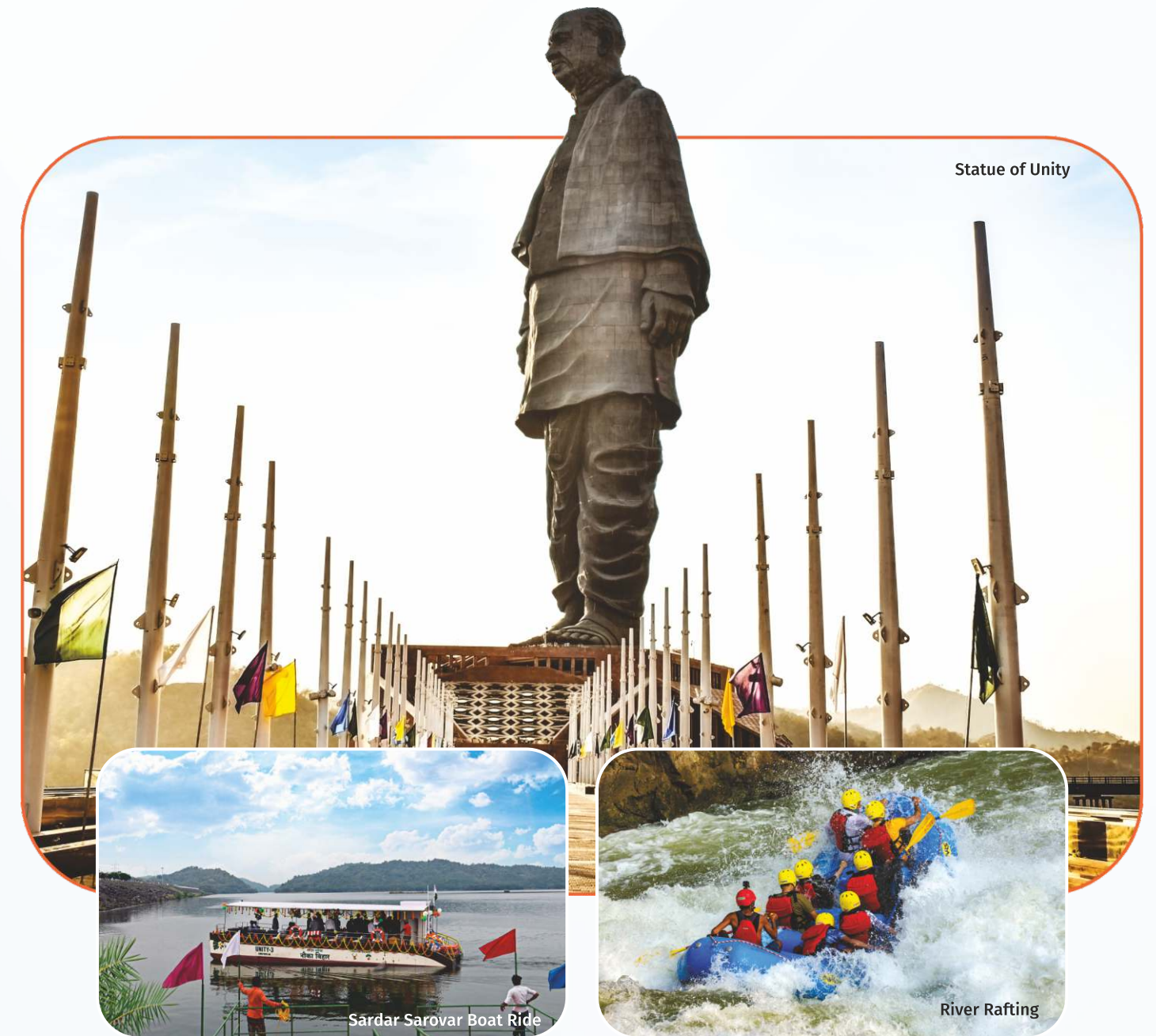
Summer is upon us and if you are looking for the best way to beat the heat, here is a perfect choice: Tent City Narmada - an ideal summer retreat for you and your family.

Come summer and everyone is finding some cool ways to beat the heat. For travellers, it is arguably one of the best seasons to explore new destinations. Sea beaches can be a perfect location for summer-stricken souls; however, there are quite a few who are allergic to sea wind and salt waters. For the same reason, many avoid visits to water parks as hundreds of people are bathing in a giant,

chlorinated pool. Although holiday revellers are left with limited choices, a river-side resort near the ancient river Narmada gives you some relief from scorching heat.

Some destinations lure people with their natural setting. Tent City Narmada boasts this edge as it is neighboured with the spectacular and beautiful Sardar Sarovar dam built on Narmada, near the town of Ekta Nagar of Narmada

district. The scenic beauty invites thousands of visitors in summer and monsoon. Add to this, nature showers her choicest blessings with luxuriant greenery and dense forest. Amidst the dense forest, the resort is an ideal place to be one with nature. Soothing breeze ruffles your hair, honey-dewed chirping of birds is your wake-up alarm, and the coolness of dew drops gives you palliative pedicure. For nature lovers,



Statue of Unity

Sardar Sarovar Boat Ride

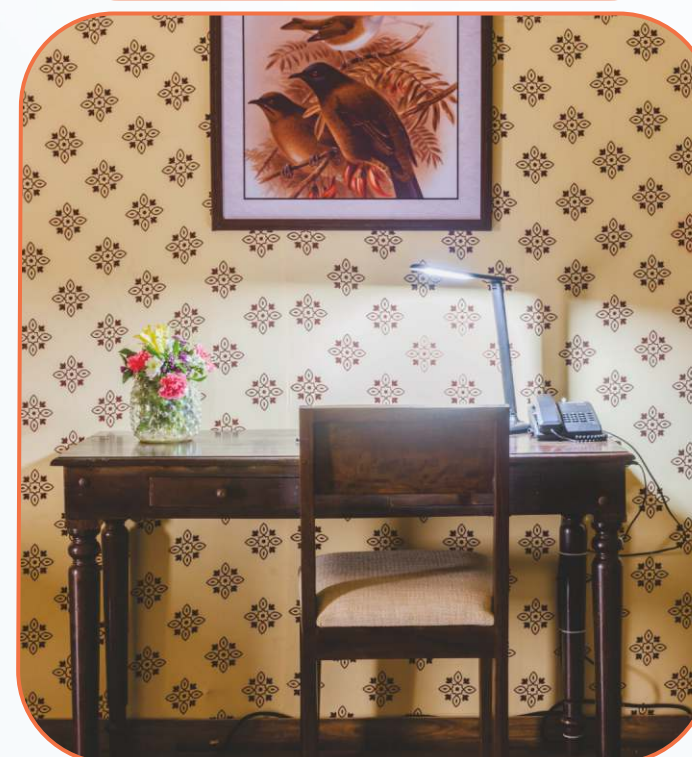
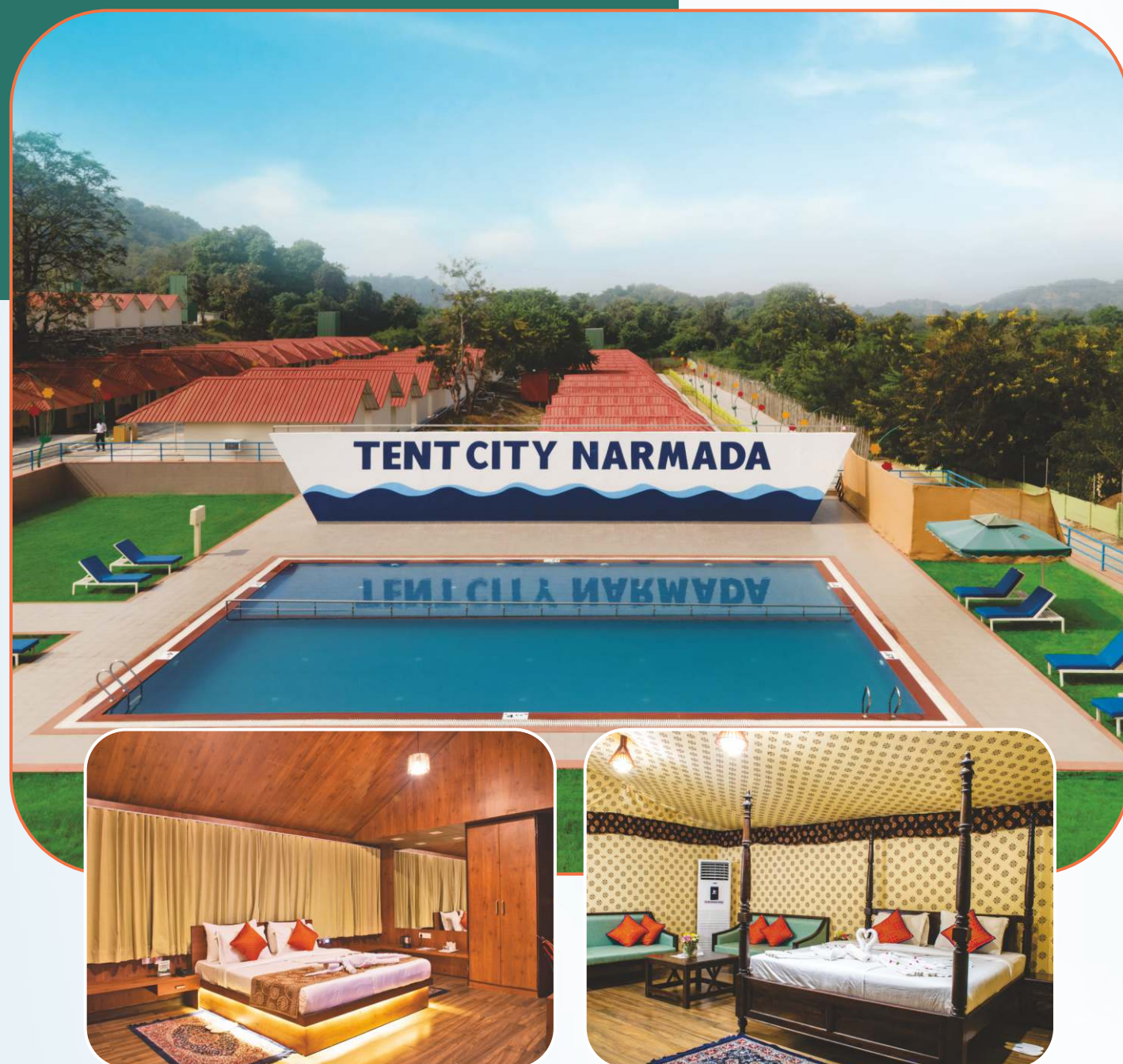
River Rafting

the resort and its nearby area provide an opportunity to live the romance of their life in the most peaceful milieu. Although nature always delights us with her inexhaustible supplies of awe-inspiring treasures, Narmada district can also surprise you with one of the engineering marvels (in case you need some respite from the green gold of forests). Yes, your guess is right. It's the Statue of Unity, the tallest statue in the

world that puts you in awe for its majestic structure and amazing craftsmanship. This monument has garnered attention of tourists across the globe. Following this, the entire campus of Statue of Unity is now reverberating with countless activities to entertain tourists.

There are a few gardens viz. Arogya Van, Butterfly Garden, Cactus Garden, Ekta Nursery, Vishwa Van, Valley of Flowers, and Unity Glow Garden. For kids'

infotainment, there is a nutrition park, jungle safari, dino trail and Ekta cruise. Adventure lovers can feel the adrenaline rush by engaging in Kesuda tour, river rafting, Sardar Sarovar boat ride, and cycling tours at Zarvani and Khalwani. Night tourism, shopping at Ekta Mall and SOU souvenir shop, eating points like Ekta Food Court, SOU Food Court, and Amul Foodland are other attractions of this campus.



Kids normally are averse to the idea of a long walk in the forest or surrounding areas. For them, the resort has a clubhouse and play area. Equipped with games like chess, carrom, snooker, foosball, and other board games, the clubhouse keeps your kids happily occupied for a few hours. A spacious hall gives them enough leg room to run around and spend time in

the company of other kids. Apart from the clubhouse, kids would like to indulge in some outdoor activities like cycling and playing at a dedicated play zone. For adults, who don't want to miss their fitness regime, a treadmill helps them burn a few calories even while they are on a pleasure trip.

After a day-long trip in nature, a plunge in a swimming pool is all you

need to pamper yourself. A one-hour swim will relax your stiff muscles and strained nerves, and also build your appetite. Next, just gorge on mouth-watering cuisines at the dining hall. The chef and a team of experts prepare global cuisines to fill your starving stomach. The lavish spread of delicacies also includes Jain food for guests, who abstain from onions, garlic, and other roots.

When stars begin to sparkle, it's time to retire into Premium, Deluxe or Darbari tents, welcoming you with every possible luxury. Patio recliner chairs, rajwadi sofa set, study table with lamp (to write down your experiences) are some of the facilities to de-stress your body and mind. Nocturnal creatures can take a ride in a golf cart, enjoy cultural

programs or just hang out under the starry night sky. If you are young and romantic at heart, have some sweet nothings with your love interest in the rich lawn with a gazebo.

Tribals from the neighbouring district of Chhota Udaipur give cultural performances at the resort. Rathwa is a popular tribe in Gujarat; men and

women of this tribe deliver acrobatic dance performances. Using their traditional props, robust tribals demonstrate their amazing dancing skills in front of the guests.

Summing up, Tent City Narmada is an ideal venue for you and your family to spend summer holidays. Book your tent, pack bags, and have fun! ■

FOREST GETAWAYS IN GUJARAT

Forests give so much to our health. They purify the water, clean the air, capture carbon to fight climate change, provide food and life-saving medicines, and improve our well-being. International Day of Forests is celebrated on 21st March to highlight the importance of forests. We look at the forests of Gujarat for a health retreat.



WALK IN FARM- LANDS AND FORESTS

The Home for Nature Lovers at Jambughoda Palace offers the opportunity to stay in a converted heritage property set in the forests of Jambughoda Wildlife Sanctuary. Located in the Panchmahal district of Central Gujarat and declared as a sanctuary in May 1990, Jambughoda Wildlife Sanctuary has thick teak and bamboo forests. The highlight of the sanctuary is the water bodies like the Kada Reservoir and Targol Reservoir with forest rest houses nearby.

Though the sanctuary has a sizable leopard population, and is also a home

to other mammals like four-horned antelope and striped hyena, you need to be very lucky to see much wildlife. The forests trill with bird calls and you can see some colourful birds while walking in the sanctuary.

At the edge of the forest, the drive to 'A Home for Nature Lovers' leads through the farmlands, orchards and plantations owned by the royal family. The family here follows natural and organic practices, not using any chemicals or pesticides. Different mango varieties are grown in the family's orchards.

At the end of the drive, you come to 'A Home for Nature Lovers', which has 19 bedrooms in various low-rise, red-tile roof heritage structures set amid greenery.

All the rooms are well-appointed with period furniture. Each room is distinctive. For instance, you can choose from a room with a low ceiling to another with a high vintage roof, depending on your requirement. Some of them have views of the forested hills of the sanctuary.

There is a swimming pool with gazebos and changing areas, set near

the palace. The family lives in the palace in the same estate. Home-cooked organic food is served alfresco and dinners can also be organised around bonfires in winter. The food is slow-cooked on wood. The recipes, which have been passed on from one generation to another have been carefully selected for the guests.

The family has tried to preserve the age-old cooking methods and the flavours, which would have otherwise got lost in time. On prior arrangements, the family can arrange a special meal served in monogrammed crockery in the

palace dining gallery. For high profile groups, even a silver thali meal hosted by the family is arranged.

Maharana Vikram Sinhji is very enthusiastic about his farm and the forests. He will take you for a tractor tour, a walk through the 12-acre farm and orchards or a nature trek in the forests.

You can also take a cycle ride in the landscape. The owners will tell you about the history, tribal culture, agriculture, forestry and natural history of the area.

Jambughoda Wildlife Sanctuary

CAMP IN THE FORESTS OF KEVADI

In the corridor connecting the Ratanmahal Sloth Bear Sanctuary and the Jambughoda leopard sanctuary, Kevadi is a forest area that is great for nature walks. This area has a thriving population of sloth bear and leopard, but the main reason for coming here is a possible sighting of the giant brown flying squirrel at the ecotourism site itself. At dusk, you could get a glimpse of a flying squirrel gliding from one tree to another with the aid of a parachute-like skin membrane that stretches from wrist to ankle. Their long tails also provide stability as they glide.

Facilities for visitors include an Orientation Centre, tented camp, kitchen and dining areas, an attractive amphitheatre, camp fire pit, and viewing platforms. There is a nature trail at the campsite itself.

SPOT BIRDS AT DEDIYAPADA

The Shoolpaneshwar Sanctuary has some of Gujarat's finest semi-evergreen and moist deciduous forest. The Forest Department has recorded about 575 species of flowering plants like timru, amla, khair, aritha, sadad, tanachh, karanj, bamboo, mahuda, bor, herde, amaltas etc.

The main town in the sanctuary is Dediapada, after which you start seeing tribal hamlets of the Vasavas and Tadvis with houses built using the bamboos that grow profusely in the area. The forests get dense as you approach Sangai - Malsamot. Leave the vehicle and walk up the hill to enjoy a view of

the Shoolpaneshwar waterfalls. Walking in the forests can be rewarding for those who like watching birds. This is one of the best habitats for the changeable hawk eagle, crested serpent eagle and shikra hawk. You may also get to see jungle fowl and spurfowl. Grey hornbill, barbet and parakeets can be seen on fruiting trees.

Kevdi Forest Campsite

Shoolpaneshwar Sanctuary

EXPLORE THE FORESTS OF VANSDA

The Vansda National Park consists of a spectacular forest, where one can see the fauna of moist deciduous forests. You can walk under a dense canopy of tall trees, and see a variety of flowering plants. This is a prime area for orchids. The walk in the

Sahyadri Hills offers an opportunity to see colourful birds characteristic of the Western Ghats habitat. This is also home to the endangered forest spotted owl. The forests can be good for butterfly-spotting too, especially where there are flowering plants.

Vansda Nature Education Campsite

VISIT A WATERFALL IN GIR

Gir National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary is globally-known as the remaining habitat of the Asiatic lion. While tourism has developed rapidly at Sasan, the sanctuary headquarters, there are some lesser-known sites for those looking to get away from the crowds.

The Jamjir Waterfalls is the finest water fall in Saurashtra. The falls on the river Shingoda are set near deciduous forests that can be good for mammal, bird and reptile spotting. From here, you can visit mango orchards and various sites, as also visit Sasan for the jeep safaris in the Gir Wildlife Sanctuary.

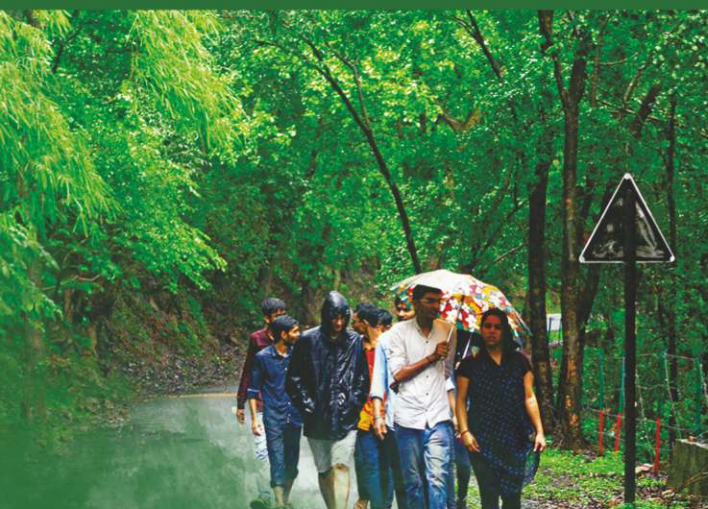
TREK IN THE POLO FORESTS

The forest of Polo has a number of possible sites for trekking. As you turn-off from Idar towards Vijaynagar, you come to the temple of Vireshwar. Just behind the temple loom hills that offer panoramic views of the forested countryside. You can follow the trails or climb rocks to reach the top of

the hills. The forest can yield some good sightings of brown-headed barbet and grey hornbill.

Continue from here to see other sites in the forests and on the banks of perennial Harnav River. The forest has ruins of several 15th-century Hindu and Jain temples such as Sharneshwar Shiva

temple, Sadevant Savlinga na Dera, Surya Mandir and the architectural masterpiece, Lakheha na Dera Jain temple. From Abhapur, you can follow the tracks in the hills to reach vantage viewpoints. There are several treks here that can take you through forests to scenic sites.

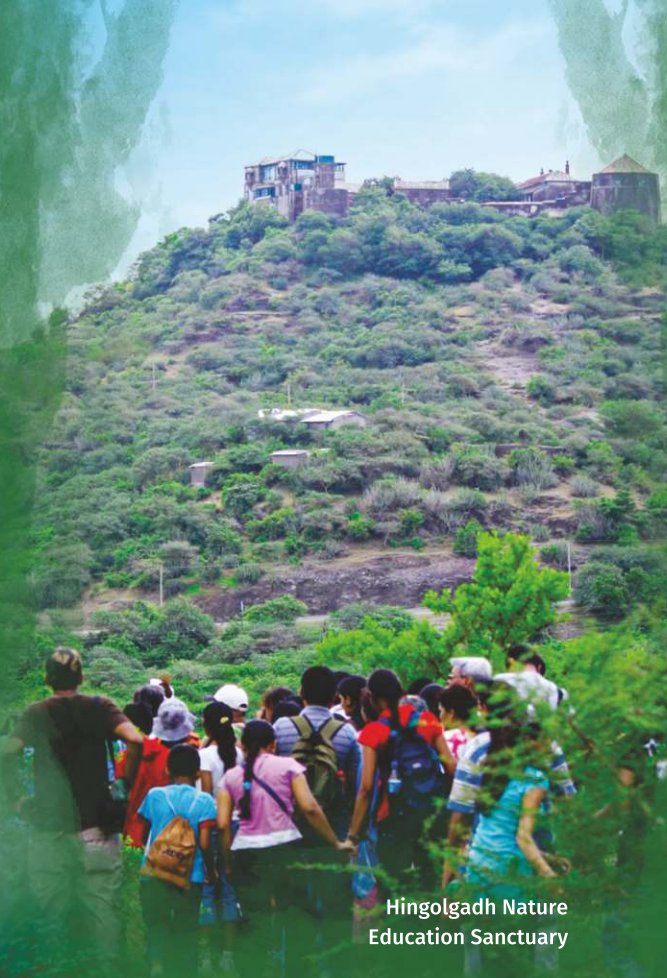


WALK IN THE THORN FOREST OF HINGOLGADH

Though it is a small sanctuary, Hingolghadh has interesting dry deciduous thorny forest with scrub-jungle and grassland. The sanctuary plays a crucial role in the ground water conservation by recharging aquifers in the region. The Forest Department has identified 314 species of plants in this small area. The highlight of the sanctuary is the royal castle of the Jasdan royal family that crowns a hill.

Walking in the thorn forest, you are likely to see the graceful Indian gazelle called the chinkara as well as nilgai antelope and the Indian hare. Wolf, jackal, fox and hyena are also present and caracal has been spotted nearby. Indian porcupines and hedgehogs can sometimes be seen in the evening.

The thorn forest can also yield sightings of shrikes, larks and other birds.



WATCH MARINE LIFE IN THE MANGROVES OF JAMNAGAR

Mangroves are the rainforests of the coastal world. They harbour a rich variety of life. Mangroves protect the shoreline against erosion caused by wind and water currents, and also mitigate the impact of natural calamities such as cyclones and tsunamis. They are one of the most important carbon sinks in coastal and intertidal regions.

The Gulf of Kachchh has mangrove forests on both the northern coast and

the southern coast of the gulf. One of the most easily accessible mangrove swamp forests is at Narara Bet. Though this is an island, it can be approached by a tarmac road. Once you leave your vehicle, walk along the mangrove trees. The aerial roots of these trees protect a variety of marine life and also provide them with food as nutritious debris gets trapped in the rib-like root structures. Fiddler crabs and mudskipper fish are fascinating

species that live in the mangrove swamps. Continue your walk in the intertidal zone where the rock pools are filled with marine wildlife – octopus, brittle star, sea cucumber, colourful sea slug, puffer fish and other species can be seen in the pools. The coral formations host a rich diversity of fish and invertebrates. You can also visit the museum of the Marine National Park & Wildlife Sanctuary at Narara.



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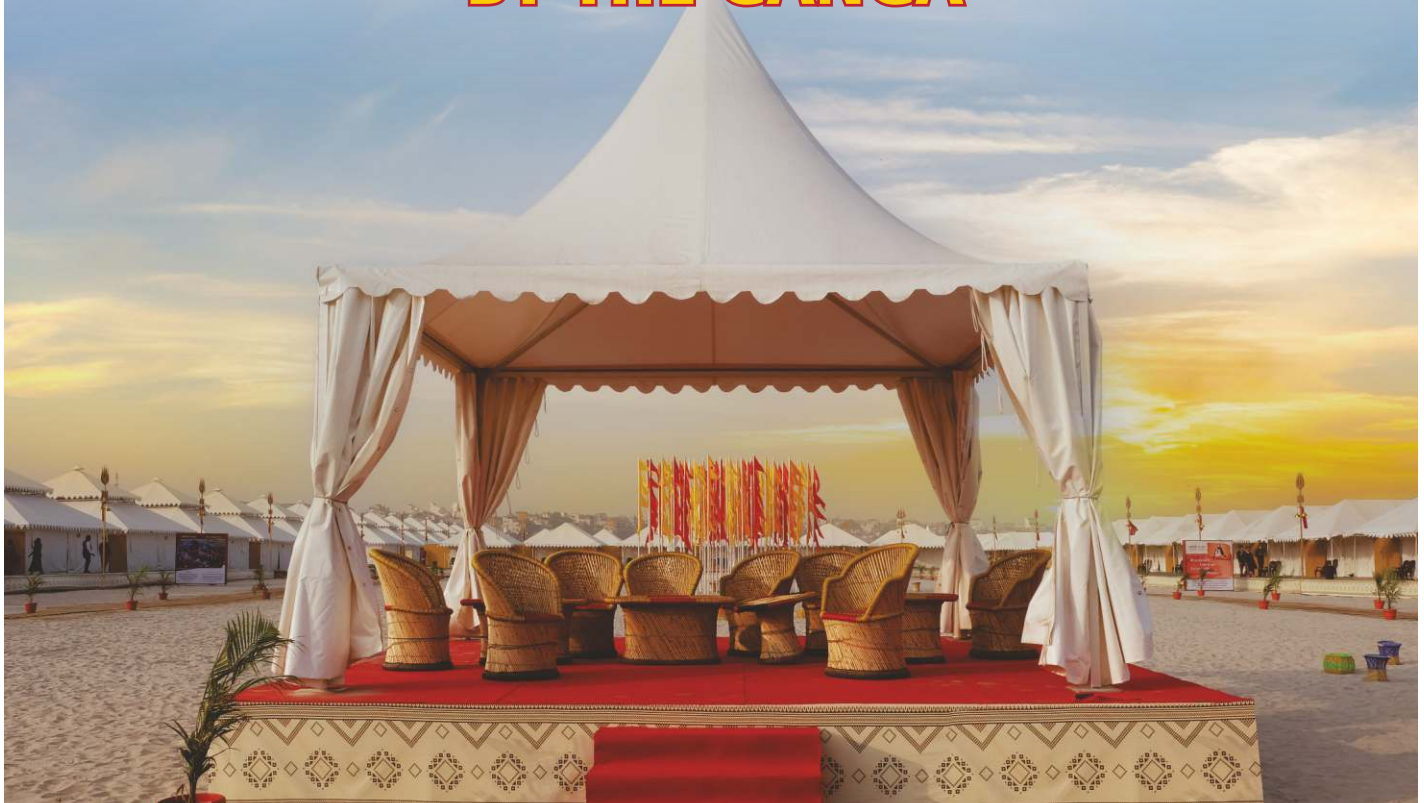
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