

THE WEEK

# Plus

DECEMBER 25, 2011



Gujarat  
Tourism

## VIBRANT GUJARAT

.....  
GUJARAT HAS SOMETHING  
FOR EVERY TRAVELLER



# THE ENCHANTING NAVRATRI

.....  
GUJARAT HAS SOMETHING  
FOR EVERY TRAVELER



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## Splendor in diversity

GUJARAT, WITH ITS MULTI-HUED CULTURAL, GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL EXTRAVAGANZA, IS A TRAVELLER'S DELIGHT



A diverse and dynamic state with fascinating archaeological sites, distinctive and magnificent architecture, exquisite handicrafts and tribal cultures, Gujarat also has a variety of natural attractions ranging from expansive, welcoming beaches to the desert wilderness of the Rann of Kutch and the richly forested slopes around the hill station of Saputara.

The state's architecture is talked about across the world, especially the intricately carved temples, majestic mosques and mausoleum complexes, finely carved wooden *havelis*, and stepwells that are so beautifully sculpted they look like subterranean palaces. Gujarat has some of the most substantial remains of the Harappan Civilisation in India at Dholavira and Lothal. It is known for its vivid historical associations with great leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Patel.

This eastern Indian state is also a place of pilgrimage for people of many faiths. About two millennia ago, Gujarat was a stronghold of Buddhism testified by the many Buddhist cave sites and a relic casket of Buddha at Devni Mori in North Gujarat and remains of a huge Buddhist university town at Vadnagar. Hindu devotees flock to holy places like Dwarka, Somnath and Ambaji. The Jain temple-covered hills of Palitana and Girnar are among the holiest

places of Jain pilgrimage. In South Gujarat, the Parsis fleeing their native Persia landed at Sanjan and established their holiest temples at Udvada, Navsari and Surat.

Gujarat is equally exciting for those interested in wildlife as it offers a natural habitat to a variety of species like the Asiatic lion and the Indian wild ass that are not seen elsewhere. It is a paradise for birdwatchers, boasts India's first Marine National Park, and has one of the best national parks for viewing the blackbuck.

The best time to experience Gujarat is during its myriad festivals that offer a glimpse of India at its colourful and exotic best. Navratri features nine nights of dancing and the Tarnetar Fair sees the gathering of tens of thousands of vibrantly-dressed people. Visitors will enjoy the exciting kite festival, which brings kite-flying enthusiasts from different continents to the cities of Gujarat. The unique Rann Utsav offers an opportunity to enjoy the snow-white salt plains of the Great Rann of Kutch in the moonlight. During the Rann Utsav, visitors can explore the district of Kutch, which is synonymous with its handicrafts and the heavily embroidered dresses of the local communities.

Take a look at some of Gujarat's most alluring tourist attractions.

**GUJARAT HAS SEVERAL UNIQUE ATTRACTIONS FOR TOURISTS BIRDLIFE, HERITAGE MONUMENTS, HANDICRAFTS, CUISINES, COLOURFUL COSTUMES AND TEXTILES, AND THE BUSTLING OLD MARKET PLACES. A UNIQUE ASPECT OF MANY PLACES IN GUJARAT IS THEIR ASSOCIATION WITH COLOURFUL FOLKLORE.**

*Esther David, internationally-published author and Sahitya Akademi award-winning novelist*



## Road to prosperity

GUJARAT LEADS MOST INDIAN STATES WHEN IT COMES TO INFRASTRUCTURE AND DEVELOPMENT

Gujarat is known for its enterprise, which has made this state one of the wealthiest and most industrialised states of India, with good infrastructure and modern entertainment complexes.

Gujarat leads India in the number of airports. The Sardar Vallabhai Patel International Airport, Ahmedabad, receives flights from many international destinations and most of the large cities of India including Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Pune, Cochin, Jaipur, etc. Other airports like Vadodara, Bhuj, Kandla, Jamnagar, Rajkot, Bhavnagar, Surat and Porbandar have high connectivity to major cities.

The state's major cities, like Ahmedabad, Vadodara and Surat, all have excellent rail connectivity to the rest of India. Most of Gujarat's destinations, from the holy towns of Dwarka and Somnath to the wildlife reserve of Sasan Gir, have a good rail network. Gujarat has a 5,283km rail network, about 8.5% of India's railway network for about 6% the country's land area and 5% of the population.

Gujarat also has a 74,111-km road net-

work, including excellent national highways, state highways, and the National Expressway—a 1,95km freeway between Ahmedabad and Vadodara. All of which translates into making the state a great one to travel in, with good approach roads to tourist destinations. Gujarat is connected to other states by national highways like NH8 between Delhi and Mumbai which has a 498-km stretch through Gujarat, NH59 which connects Gujarat to Madhya Pradesh, NH14 which connects Gujarat to Rajasthan, and NH15 which runs from Kutch to Punjab.

Heritage hotels, including converted forts, palaces and havelis, are a unique feature of the state, offering tourists an opportunity to stay in buildings of historic and architectural importance, and often to interact with the owners. In recent years, eco-resorts have developed in Gujarat especially in the vicinity of the Gir Wildlife Sanctuary, the Little Rann of Kutch and the Velavadar National Park. Cities like Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat and Rajkot are endowed with five-star hotels, contemporary restaurants and modern entertainments.

GUJARAT HAS GOOD ROADS AND MODERN AMENITIES AND YET OFFERS A TRADITIONAL GUJARATI CHARACTER. I LOVE VISITING GUJARAT'S CITIES LIKE AHMEDABAD WITH THEIR LIVELINESS, GOOD FOOD AND MODERNITY.

*Mona Thiba, Gujarati actor*





WHEN I TRAVEL IN GUJARAT I LIKE THE SMOOTH ROADS IN THE STATE; THE DIFFERENCE IS NOTABLE COMPARED TO SOME OF THE OTHER STATES.

Raksha Bharadia,  
author



I APPRECIATE GUJARAT FOR THE ROADS AND THE RELATIVELY CLEAN ENVIRONS COMPARED TO MANY OTHER PLACES, THE FESTIVITIES AND CELEBRATORY ASPECT, AND THE HERITAGE BUILDINGS.

Anupa Mehta, art  
consultant

## Pilgrim's progress

THE SHORE TEMPLES AND MANY HINDU, JAIN AND BUDDHIST HOLY PLACE IN THE STATE MAKE IT A MUST-VISIT FOR THE SPIRITUALISTS

The coastal highway from Dwarka to Bhavnagar offers access to some of the most revered Hindu and Jain sites, from the beachside temples of Dwarka and Somnath to the temple-covered summit of Shatrunjaya hill over Palitana.

### DWARKA

One of the seven holiest Hindu temple towns, Dwarka is dominated by the multi-storey shikhara tower of the Dwarkadish Temple looming over the townscape. The Dwarkadish Temple, located at the estuary of the Gomti near a fine beach, forms part of the Vaishnavite Chardham Yatra which includes Badrinath, Puri and Rameshwaram. This temple is a fine work of architecture with carvings along its walls, an impressive shikhara tower and ornate balconies. Besides the sacred sanctum, this is also the site for the *math* (monastic order) of the eighth century reformer Adi Sankaracharya.

For those interested in architecture, the 12<sup>th</sup>-century Rukmini Temple has an

impressive shikhara and delectable carvings. The lingam of Nageshwar near Dwarka is much visited by Lord Shiva's devotees. Marine explorations have excavated a submerged city of great antiquity off the Dwarka shore. A popular excursion from Dwarka is to Bet Dwarka, an island reached by ferry from the historic Okha Jetty. To top it, Dwarka has many pretty beaches too.

From Dwarka to Somnath, the road runs past many important temple sites like the Harshad Mata Mandir.

### PORBANDAR

Porbandar is well-known as the birthplace of Mahatma Gandhi. He was born in a blue-toned courtyard house which is now open for viewing. Adjacent to this house is the Kirti Mandir, a monument built in memory of Mahatma Gandhi and his wife, Kasturba.

Porbandar is also believed to be Sudamapuri. A temple to Sudama, the friend of Krishna, attracts many devotees. South

of Porbandar is Madhavpur Ghed, which is associated with Lord Krishna and Rukmani. A fair of the Mer community takes place near the seashore of Madhavpur Ghed.

### SOMNATH

Somnath is the site for one of the 12 Jyotirlingas, a shrine where Lord Shiva is worshipped in the form of a pillar of light. Considered by many devotees as the prime abode of Lord Shiva and the holiest of all the Jyotirlingas, Somnath's temple was destroyed and re-built six times, and the current structure was built in 1950. Designed like a Chalukyan temple, it has a beautiful seaside location. The other sights of Somnath are the Prabhas Patan Museum near the temple which houses mediaeval architectural fragments, the Somnath Museum offering an insight into the maritime history of the region, the Triveni Tirth, the medieval Sun Temple and Ahilya Holkar's temple at Somnath. A short distance from the main Somnath temple is Balkha Tirth where Lord Krishna is said to have disappeared. Somnath also acts a base for those visiting other holy places like the Krishna shrine of Tulsishyam, Shiva shrine at Bhavnath and the temples atop Mt Girnar overlooking Junagadh.

### PALITANA

Among the myriad temple complexes that run the length and breadth of India, few can match the visual delight offered by the Jain complex of Palitana. The complex of



more than 860 temples crowns Shatrunjaya peak, 600m over the nearest township. Considered by the Jains as one of their most important pilgrimages, the name of the summit, Shatrunjaya, is derived from the words Shatru or enemy, and Jaya or victory, and symbolises the Jain view of victory over evil and material desires.

After the long, stepped and paved climb to the summit, pilgrims and tourists are rewarded by the view of massed domes and exquisite facades of several hundred temples. The temples are divided into enclosures called Tuks, each with its torana archway, and set on two ridges of the summit. Among the impressive temples are the 16<sup>th</sup> century Adinath temple, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Vallabhi temple, the Motisah temple built in 1836, and the Adishvasra temple which dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, with a double storeyed mandap and exquisite gold-crowned idol in the sanctum.

ON NITA AMBANI'S INVITATION, WE HAD GONE TO PUT UP A SMALL EXHIBIT AT THE RELIANCE BUSINESS COMPLEX WHICH IS FABULOUS, AND FROM THERE WE STOLE TIME OUT TO VISIT SOME OF THE HOLY PLACES. WHEN I WENT TO DWARKA AND BET DWARKA I WAS SURPRISED AT HOW BEAUTIFUL THE TRANSPARENT WATER IS... IT'S LIKE THE BEAUTIFUL BLUE CLEAR WATER THAT YOU SEE IN THE MALDIVES AND LAKSHWADEEP. SOMNATH IS AN EXCELLENT PLACE FOR PILGRIMAGE; THE ROADS ARE AMAZING.... BEACHES ON THE WAY ARE CLEAN AND THE VAST STRETCHES OF SAND TAKE YOU FAR FROM URBAN LIFE.

Shyamal & Bhumika, fashion designers



# Land of little wonders

A VISIT THROUGH THE KUTCH OFFERS A RIDE OF COLOURS, CRAFTS AND CULTURES



Placed between the deserts to the north and the Arabian Sea to the south, Kutch is the final frontier of many cultures and crafts. It is well-known for its historic significance, natural wonders and the vibrantly-dressed people.

The district capital, Bhuj, was ruled by the Jadeja Rajputs from 1540 to 1948, with forts, palaces, chattardi (cenotaphs) and old gates standing testimony to its importance as the seat of power of this powerful dynasty. This city has two museums—the Kutch Museum and Bharatiya Sankriti Darshan—which offer an introduction to the history, culture and art of the Kutch district. From Bhuj, you can make a day trip to nearby villages that specialize in different

crafts—pitloom weaving at Bhujodi, single ikat weaving at Ningal, embroidery at Paddhar and Dhaneti, the intricate art of block printing at Dhamadka-Ajrakhpur, bandhani tie-dye at Anjar, pottery and woodcarving.

The road north from Bhuj to Khavda leads through the grasslands of Banni, and is dotted with villages of pastoral groups and artisans. In these villages, one can see many different styles of embroidery, each being the specialty of a particular community. The stitches, techniques and motifs of the embroidery identify each group. Women of Islamic pastoral groups like the Jaths and the Mutwas have their own ethnic styles of embroidery. Migrants from

Sindh, like the Sodha Rajputs and Meghwals, practice styles like suf, khaarek, and paako. Apart from embroidery on fabric or leather, artists here also create handicrafts like pottery, woodcarving, metalwork, etc. Ahead of Khavda, stop at the Kala Dungar Hills for a panoramic view of the Great Rann of Kutch. At the Datatray Temple on one of the summits, it is believed that jackals come to take food offerings when called by priests.

Travelling west from Khavda, you reach Nirona which is the centre for roga (the art of painting fabrics using gooey castor oil based colours), 'Vada-kaam' or laquerwork on wood, and the making of melodic bells, cast in iron and covered with copper.



## HOLY SPOTS

Kutch has many places of religious importance, too. For Hindus, an important pilgrimage leads from Bhuj to Ashapura-no-Madh which has an important temple dedicated to the Goddess Ashapura, the Kul-devi or patron goddess of the Jadeja Rajputs, and Narayan Sarovar—one of the five holy lakes for Hindus—before leading to Koteswar's historic temple facing the sea. An important Sikh monument is the Gurdwara Pehli Patshahi situated at Lakhpat, a walled town in Kutch said to have been visited by Guru Nanak Sahib during his missionary journeys (Udasis) in the 16th century. This Gurdwara bagged the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Conservation Award in 2004. Kutch also has Pirs or Dargahs of many Sufi saints.

## THE RANN UTSAV

It's the time when the large expanse of desert plains takes a glorious snow-white look. It is the time of the Rann Utsav—a tourism festival of the Kutch. The Rann Utsav offers an opportunity to experience the cultural and natural highlights of Kutch. The highlight of this festival is the camel cart safari that goes from the tented village built for tourists into the Great Rann of Kutch. The sight of the white desert, bathed in the light of the full moon, is simply beautiful. The mood of festivity goes to another level with the folk concerts performed by the desert communities.



"I LOVE THE KUTCH AREA. IT IS FULL OF CRAFTS OF GREAT QUALITY. THE CLOTHING OF RURAL AREAS IS A DELIGHT. I ALSO LOVE THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF GUJARAT AND [I] FEEL THE STATE IS VERY SAFE FOR VISITORS."  
Anuj Sharma,  
Fashion designer

"KUTCH IS A WONDERFUL PLACE WITH PLENTY OF WILDLIFE, AND BEAUTIFUL CRAFTS, ESPECIALLY TEXTILES."  
Judy Frater,  
Kala Raksha



"VADODARA, CHAMPANER AND PAVAGADH, TOGETHER WITH NEARBY FOREST AND TRIBAL AREAS, FORM AN IMPORTANT TOURIST TRAIL. THE LUXURY TRAIN, MAHARAJA EXPRESS, HAS INCLUDED THIS ROUTE IN THEIR ITINERARY"

*Karmaveer Singh, Heritage hotelier*



## Where history rests...

GUJARAT AND ITS MANY VILLAGES OFFER A PEEK INTO THE LIFE AND RUINS OF THE PERIOD GONE BY

### HOME TO THE HARAPPAN

Pieces of history rest in Gujarat. The state has some of the most substantial remains of the Harappan Civilisation, as the mature phase of the Indus Valley Civilisation is better known. Dholavira and Lothal rank among the most significant sites of the Harappan Civilisation, which thrived between 2600 and 1900 BC.

### LOTHAL

Lothal, a place about 82km from Ahmedabad, offers an insight into the mature phase of the Harappan Civilisation between 2400 and 1900 BC. A walk through the excavated ruins reveals the acropolis with the remains of twelve baths and a sewer, the sophisticated drainage systems, the town planning, and the lower town that comprised a bazaar, workshops for coppersmiths, bead-makers and potters, and residential quarters. A huge tank found here is believed to be a lock-gated dock, the oldest of its kind in the world. The site museum has a necklace made from 25mm diameter gold beads and

other evidences of the mastery attained by the artisans and bead factories of Lothal. Delicately carved seals that represent the trade links of this ancient port town, accurate weights and compasses testifying to the Harappans' knowledge of geometry and astronomy, superbly made bowls, jars, ceramic and terracotta pots, and toys are some of the other finds here.

### DHOLAVIRA

Dholavira, sited on Khadir Bet in the Great Rann of Kutch, is one of the oldest Harappan citadels found in Indian frontiers. This is an excellent example of the town planning of the period—the sanitary drainage systems, the water-harvesting structures, like reservoirs, wells and canals, were surprisingly sophisticated for the period. The smoothed stone columns, signboard and microbeads are some of the unique finds at Dholavira. There is also a large public area of the kind seen at few Indus sites. A trip to Dholavira can be combined with visiting the Vaghadia Rabari villages nearby, which is famous for its embroidery works.



### CHAMPANER--THE WORLD HERITAGE SITE

The archaeological zone of Champaner and Pavagadh comprises Gujarat's first UNESCO-listed World Heritage Site. Here, you can see an impressive variety of monuments including forts, temples, mosques, stepwells, palaces, pavilions, granaries and manmade water bodies.

The Machi Plateau facing the Pavagadh Hill is about 822 meter high and clothed with woodlands. The ropeway journey from the Machi Plateau, in a Swiss-style six-seat cable car, is a spectacular experience overlooking the woodlands and rock formations. Little tea stalls serving tea and snacks line the Laukalish Temple. Built in the 11th century, this temple is now largely ruined but the standing walls reflect its fine architecture and intricate carvings. From here, one can walk up to the Kali Temple or the Jain Derasar Complex.

The view from the top of Pavagadh is a major attraction; one can also see imposing monuments at Champaner town, which was the political capital of Gujarat for a while. The massive city walls with inscribed gateways still stand, encompassing the customs house, exquisite mosques and funerary monuments. The Shahr Masjid, a mosque



with delicate minarets, stands within the walls.

A short distance from the walled town is the 16th century Jumma Masjid, considered the high watermark of Indo-Saracenic architecture. A magnificent pavilion with delicate screens marks the entrance to the massive courtyard enclosed by cloistered galleries. The main building has a huge three-storey dome, surrounded by large and small domes built at different levels, and two tall minarets rising from its third floor. The hall is dissected by rows of pillars and contains fine stonework.







## Experience the Wild!

THE GIR NATIONAL PARK IS HOME TO THE RAREST SPECIES OF ANIMALS AND BIRDS

The Gir National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary is home to the surviving numbers of the Asiatic Lion, which once roamed a vast area of Eurasia. Covering about 1412 sq.km, the Gir Wildlife Reserve encompasses a variety of habitats including deciduous forests, grasslands, scrub-jungle, water bodies and riverside evergreen flora. According to the latest census, Gir has around 411 lions in total, which comprises the entire world population of the Asiatic Lion. Since Gir also has more than 300 leopards, this is an excellent reserve for big cat sightings with most visitors getting to spot one over a three- or four-day stay.

The drive on one of the permissible routes running through the Gir Wildlife Sanctuary is a pleasant experience, going through scenic hill tracts, forests and grasslands. The star attraction is, undoubtedly, the Asiatic Lion and the leopard, but you can hope to see other wildlife too. The chital (spotted deer), the sambar, which is the world's largest deer, and the nilgai, the world's largest antelope are plentiful. The langur, jackal and small mammals like black-naped hare and mongoose are also commonly seen.

Gir is also home to the Chousingha—the world's only four-horned antelope—

and the Chinkara—the graceful Indian gazelle—but these relatively diminutive species are hard to spot in the foliage of this wildlife sanctuary. It is the habitat of striped hyena, jungle cat, rusty spotted cat, pangolin (scaly anteater), ratel or honey badger, and porcupines, too.

Birdwatchers, too, have a lot in store at The Gir. It houses many globally-threatened birds like the white-backed and long-billed vulture, the lesser florican, greater spotted eagle, Palla's fish eagle and imperial eagle. While driving through the sanctuary, many striking looking birds like the paradise flycatcher, golden oriel, flameback woodpecker, painted sandgrouse, painted francolin, blue jay (roller), etc can be spotted.

Gir is also a habitat for reptiles, boasting a large population of marsh crocodiles. One can spot the Indian rock python too.

Apart from the wildlife, the Gir area is also culturally active. Here, you can see settlements of pastoral groups like the Maldhars and the Sorathi Rabaris. This is also one of the strongholds of the Siddis, a group comprising people of Afro-Arab or African descent thought to have arrived in Gujarat during the seventh or eighth century.



**"THE GIR FOREST NATIONAL PARK AND WILDLIFE SANCTUARY IS A JEWEL OF GUJARAT'S ECOLOGICAL RESOURCES. I LOVE IT FOR ITS BIG CAT CONCENTRATION. THE WILD ASS IN THE RANN OF KUTCH, THE RARE GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD IN THE BIRD RESERVES, THE WORLD'S ONLY FOUR-HORNED ANTELOPE AND THE BLACK BUCK ARE SOME OTHER VALUED SPECIES PROTECTED IN GUJARAT. I ALSO ENJOYED THE FOLK DANCE OF THE SIDDIS TRIBES. THEY STILL LIVE WITH TRADITIONAL AFRICAN CUSTOMS FROM THEIR NATIVE SUDAN."**

*Dr Darshini Vikram Shah, Shalby Hospitals*

## Celebrations galore!

FESTIVITIES, FAIRS AND GRANDEUR ARE A SIGNIFICANT PART OF LIFE IN GUJARAT.

Gujarat is known for its spectacular fairs and festivals, ranging from religious festivals like Janmashtami and Shivratri to tribal fairs like Chitra Vichitra and Kvant. Some of the most popular of these celebrations are Navratri, Uttarayana or the Kite Festival, and the Tarnetar Fair.

### KITE FESTIVAL

Uttarayana is a day like no other in Gujarat. This festival, which falls on Makar Sankranti (14th -15th January) every year, brings everyone—men, women, boys and girls—to their rooftops for kite flying. The kites flown during this festival is called the Indian Fighter, active and easily controllable kites flown with a single line of abrasive thread called the manjha. The right materials and the balance of these kites will ensure their ability to fight during Uttarayana. 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 win over other kites by cutting their manjhas. The kite flying continues from dawn to sunset, and the night is dedicated to tukuls—paper lanterns tied

to the strings of large kites that are flown after dark.

As the kite flying festival has no religious connotation, it is celebrated by all one and all. Families and friends get-together on the rooftop with a variety of food and fight it out with the kites. Since Makar Sankranti is a harvest celebration, a variety of food specialties are associated with this festival.

The Tourism Corporation of Gujarat Ltd and other tourism authorities of Gujarat have been organising the International Kite Festival from 1989 to popularize the event. This festival attracts kite flying enthusiasts, called kitetists, from many countries that have a kite flying tradition.

### NAVRATRI

Navratri is one of the world's longest and most participatory dance festivals. Millions of believers dance, sing, pray and fast to evoke their blessings on the nine nights of Navratri across Gujarat. Regardless of their religion, age or dancing skills, anyone can be part of the garba and dandiya nights that occur at various venues.

In Gujarat, the whole atmosphere is one of revelry and celebration for the nine



**"I LIKE THE FESTIVE SPIRIT OF THE PEOPLE OF GUJARAT. WE CELEBRATE EVERY OCCASION WITH GUSTO, BE IT DUSSHERA OR UTTARAYANA OR NAVRATRI."**  
*Dhwanit Thaker, Radio Jockey and celebrity Gujarati anchor*







nights leading to the eve of Dussera when Durga is said to have defeated the demon, Mahishasura, and Rama is believed to have defeated Ravana who abducted his wife, Sita.

#### TARNETAR FAIR

The Tarnetar Fair occurs annually at the site of the historic temple of Trineteswar. The fair is said to commemorate the victory of Arjuna at the contest held for princess Draupadi. A dip in the temple tank on this day is considered as auspicious as a swim in the holy bathing ghats on the River Ganges.

The fair grounds near the temple come alive as thousands gather to participate in the fair. A unique aspect of the fair is betrothal, with prospective brides having the first choice. It is attended by eligible men from pastoral groups like the Bharwad community and unmarried girls from pastoral tribes, who get to select their husbands in the old 'Swayamwara' tradition. The participants arrive in their finest attire to attract a prospective marital partner. The fair is a blaze of colour as women are brightly dressed and bedecked in jewellery and men wear colourful turbans, embroidered jackets, heavy bracelets and shoes to attract a suitable bride. Eligible men also carry richly embroidered umbrellas. Women select their partner as they would in a 'Swayamwara' or line-up, and families are involved for the arrangements after the selection.



## Saputara: A cosy holiday hideout

Saputara, which literally means the abode of serpents, is a hill station situated about 1000 metre high in the Dang forest area of the Sahyadri Hills. It is a popular hill station, which has all the comforts needed for tourists—hotels, parks and gardens, boat club, theaters, ropeway, a tribal museum and viewpoints. The highlight of Saputara is the lake which is the hub of recreational activities. There are many view points, which offer glorious sights of the sunrise, sunset, the beautiful mountain landscape, and historic forts. Saputara has a fresh, welcoming feel round the year, but is at its best during the monsoon period from July to September when the forests are lush and the misty skies give a haunting look to the hills.

This hill station is the starting point to explore the Dang District and its environs. This district largely comprises of forests inhabited by tribal groups like the Bhil, the Gamit, the Warli, the Kukma and the Kunbi. The drive from Saputara to Ahwa, the district headquarters, runs through forested hills and en route you pass Wagh-Dev Palias or stone totems painted with the image of the Tiger God of the tribal groups in orange and vermilion. The Tiger is a symbol of strength and power, and is always represented in the stone and wood carving of the Dang. The principal Goddess of the tribal group is Kanasri Mata.

The Gira Falls near Mahal Bardipada forest area, beyond Ahwa, ranks among the most splendid sights of Gujarat. The Mahal Bardipada forest, with their moist deciduous trees and bamboo clusters, is a great place for spotting butterflies and seeing orchids.

Legend has it that Lord Rama spent part of his exile in these forests and many sites here are associated with the epic and mythology. The Shabri Dham is an important place of pilgrimage in the Dang. The tribal communities here celebrate 'Dangs Darbar', a few days before Holi, during which tribal chieftains gather for their annual meeting.

# The Buddhist Trail

RELICS, SCRIPTURES, SCULPTURES EXCAVATIONS REVEAL MANY BUDDHA-INSPIRED IMAGES



**I FIND GUJARAT VERY SAFE AND SECURE FOR WOMEN. HAVING LIVED IN DIFFERENT PLACES OF NORTH-EASTERN INDIA TO THE MIDDLE-EASTERN COUNTRIES, I APPRECIATE THAT."**  
*Ranna Parikh, Architect and interior designer*



light after excavations in the area revealed the presence of a substantial Buddhist site with a stupa where a relic casket was found, which is currently housed in Vadodara. According to the inscription on the copper casket, it contained relics of Lord Buddha, gold bottles, burnt sandalwood, beads, gold and silver foil, and silk. A replica of the casket and a model of the stupa with its elongated dome have been exhibited at the nearby Shamlaji Museum, as also some of the Buddhist sculptures found in Sabarkanta district.

#### VADNAGAR

Excavations around the Ghaskol Darwaja area of Vadnagar have revealed an enormous Buddhist site that was probably the town of Anantpur—described by Hiuen-Tsang as a wealthy place with 1,000 Buddhist monks and 10 Buddhist monasteries. The archaeological survey has unearthed Buddhist sculptures, toys and utensils, a plaque depicting scenes from Buddha's life which is about 1,900 years old, and a clay artefact similar to what is found in Sri Lankan and Afghan Buddhist sites.

#### TALAJA

Talaja on the NH8E running south from Bhavnagar to Somnath has 28 caves on a cone-shaped hill that has Jain temples on

Buddhism thrived in Gujarat from the reign of Mauryan Emperor Ashoka in the third century BC. One of his important sets of rock edicts can be seen in Junagadh. After the decline of the Mauryan Empire, Buddhism continued to flourish in Gujarat during the reign of the Western Kshatras from the first to the fourth century AD. The Maitraka rulers patronised Buddhism, together with Hinduism and Jainism, during their rule from 470 to 788 AD. When Chinese travellers like Hiuen-Tsang and I-Tsing visited Gujarat during the Maitraka rule they found thriving centres of Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism.

During archaeological explorations and excavations, Buddhist sculptures have been found at various sites in Gujarat including terracotta Buddha figurines, Boddhistsava images and bronze Buddha statues.

#### DEVNI MORI

Just south of Shamlaji, a bridge leads off National Highway 8 across the Mesho River to a path leading to the village of Devni Mori, spelt Devani Mori or Devnimori in some maps. This village came into the lime-







its summit. The most impressive is Ebhala Mandapa with a large hall fronted by four octagonal pillars. The other important cave is the ruined chaitya-griha with a stupa that has a primitive version of the vedika and chaitya-window (horse-shoe shaped window).

#### SANA CAVES

Turning off at Timbi from NH8E, the road leads to Vakia village after which the plains give way to hills leading to Sana Dungan, a hill marked with caves. In these hills, more than 60 caves have been found, believed to date from the first century BC to the second century AD. The largest is the Ebhal Mandap, which is about 22m wide, 5m high and 20m deep. The Bhimchory cave, sometimes written as Bhima-Chauri, has octagonal pillars and a stone bench. Near this cave is a chaitya-griha which has a plain stupa and an apsidal rear. A Sitaram Babu temple has been built on a hill which has many caves connected to one another by rough hewn rock steps.

#### JUNAGADH

Junagadh has the third century BC rock inscriptions of Emperor Ashoka housed in a building with the English translations of each displayed on the walls for the benefit of the visitors. The caves in the Uparkot Fort at Junagadh have three storeys of cell-like rooms set around a rain water tank. The caves reflect the advanced system of drainage and water utilisation prevailing in the period, and the cells are well-ventilated to

get light and cool air. On the opposite side of Uparkot Fort is another three storey cave complex with 13 cells cut into the rock face called Baba Pyara or Bawa Pyara. A third cave cluster is called Khapara Khodiya with cells set in an L-shape and a rain-water reservoir.

Most of the caves around Junagadh are dated to the second to fourth century AD period. The Junagadh Museum exhibits Buddhist finds from the region including remains of the Boria Stupa discovered in the hills near Girnar which had a solid brick core. Another Buddhist monument found in Junagadh district was a vihara at Intwa in the Girnar hills which is dated to the reign of Rudrasen (199-222AD).

#### KHAMBALIDA CAVES

About 21km south of Gondal, Khambalida has one of Gujarat's most impressive Buddhist caves. The entrance to one of the caves is flanked by sculptures of Bodhisattvas identified as Avalokiteshvara, who is much revered by Buddhists as an embodiment of compassion, and Vajrapani—one of the earliest bodhisattvas of Mahayana Buddhism Buddhist iconography. This cave site is of considerable interest as the only one in Gujarat with perfectly identifiable carvings of Bodhisattvas, beings who assist people to achieve complete enlightenment or Buddhahood. Another site near Gondal is at Dhank where there are some Buddhist caves hewn into a ravine. The first cave has a cell with a shrine door that has a Buddha figure. On the eastern side is a recess from where the image has disappeared but there are noteworthy flying figures.

#### SIYOT CAVES

On the highway from Bhuj to Lakhpat comes the village of Ghaduliya from where a road leads past the village of Siyot to a cave with an east-facing sanctum and an ambulatory, which is said to date to about the first century AD. Brahmi inscriptions and seals have been found at this cave site. This may have been one of about 80 sites that the Chinese travellers reported seeing in the seventh century at the mouth of the Indus River. There is a primitive rock step-well walking distance from the site.

# Miles to go...by the sea

GUJARAT HAS INDIA'S LONGEST COASTLINE, LINED BY PICTURESQUE

Gujarat's 1666 km long coastline, the longest in India, is rich in natural and cultural attractions—beautiful beaches, shore temples, sea facing palaces, picturesque coastal villages, historical cities and towns, and India's first Marine National Park. Easily accessible from the major airport, railway stations and other hubs of Gujarat, these coastal attractions also lie close to the important national highway.

#### MANDVI

About 60km from the Bhuj airport, is the town of Mandvi, which stands near one of the best beaches on the west coast of India. An important port for the Maharao of Kutch, Mandvi became the summer retreat of the Kutch Princely State in the 1940s when the Maharao moved with his family and team to the Vijay Vilas Palace. The impressive palace is built from local sandstone in a blend of Indo-Islamic and European architectural styles. A part of the palace is now open for visitors to see period furniture, paintings and photographs and enjoy the view from the terrace which has umbrella domes, columns, latticework and archways. The Hawa Mahal on the beachside is a pavilion offering an unending view

of the sea.

This beach is one of the few in Gujarat with upmarket accommodation. The Beach at Mandvi Palace, a resort by this beach is designed along the lines of the royal hunting camps. The resort offers direct access to a long, pristine scimitar beach. Beachside facilities include an open-sided bamboo-and-thatch restaurant, beach umbrellas, barbecue grill and loungers.

Head to the town and you can watch huge ocean-worthy dhov vessels being hand-built at the creeks. There is a good handicraft market in Mandvi and it is also a centre for mashru weaving, among other crafts.

Travelling west from Mandvi along the coast takes you other beaches like Pingleswar which is a pretty stretch of sand, has a good birdlife and coastal wildlife, and is located near a Shiva temple.

#### MARINE NATIONAL PARK

Along the southern coast of the Gulf of Kutch, Jamnagar district has about 200 km of coastline. This coastline is famous for India's first Marine Wildlife Sanctuary & National Park, notified in the early-1980s, encompassing 42 islands. The famous



"AMONG THE MANY PLACES THAT COME TO MIND IN GUJARAT ARE THE TITHAL BEACH IN SOUTH GUJARAT, THE TEMPLE COMPLEX OF PALITANA AND THE KUTCH REGION."

*Balkrishna Vithaldas Doshi, internationally acclaimed award-winning architect*





islands are Pirotan, accessible by boat, and Narara Bet which has road access. As you approach the shores of the islands you can watch birds in large flocks feeding on the mudbanks. In the shallow waters along the islands are fringing coral reefs. These reefs support a delightful variety of marine invertebrate life including octopus, sea hare, starfish, brittle star, sea anemone, sea urchin, etc, and many species of fish including the puffer fish.

A really fine beach which is also known for its coral formations is Positara, which is off the Jamnagar – Dwarka Highway. The lovely bays and lagoons of Positara make it a beauty spot while the coral reefs are good for marine life viewing.

#### BEACHES NEAR DWARKA

About 10km from Dwarka is the beautiful Shivajpur beach, a very pretty stretch of white sand running along the sea. Another good beach nearby is at Okha-Marhi, which has a beautiful view. From Okha jetty, a ferry ride will take you to Bet Dwarka, an island known for its temples, but it also has good beaches and reefs. Dolphins are often seen on the crossing to Bet Dwarka and you could see green sea turtles as well.

#### AHMEDPUR MANDVI

Ahmedpur Mandvi is among Gujarat's best beaches. It is well-maintained and well-organised for watersports like parasailing and jet-skiing. Along the Ahmedpur Mandvi beach are some good resort and restaurants. The Magico do Mar is a cottage resort with a garden overlooking the sea.

As you continue along National High-

way 8E you can access the fine sanded Sarkheshwar beach. This beach has much investment potential because it is close to Pipavav port and industrial zones.

#### GOPNATH

Gopnath lies on a scenic stretch of coastline, with limestone cliffs dropping down to the sea and a pretty view of the sea. The Gopnath Bungalow is set on a cliff, flanked by rocks, with a lighthouse on one side and an unending sea view. From the bungalow, the road leads to the Gopnath Temple, a medieval temple where Narsinh Mehta is said to have got darshan of Lord Shiva and the Raas Lila of Lord Krishna. From here, a trail leads down to the scenic beach. Closer to Bhavnagar, historic Gogha is a popular seashore destination for the people living in the city. It offers a good view of the Gulf of Khambat.

#### SOUTH GUJARAT

On the opposite side of the Gulf of Khambat (Cambay) is another string of scenic beaches that lie to the south of Surat. Dumas is a popular beach haunt for the residents of Surat. The most famous beach in South Gujarat is Tithal near Valsad, which is a dark sand beach lined with casuarinas and other coastal vegetation. Another of the popular beaches is Nargol near Vapi. Dotted with Casuarina trees, this beach is also visited by sea turtles. There is a Parsee fire temple, many ashrams and a Swaminarayan temple at Nargol.

Close to Navsari is the historic coastal site of Dandi, where Mahatma Gandhi ended his remarkable Salt Satyagraha March.

**"MANDVI, IN KUTCH, IS BEAUTIFUL IT HAS ONE OF THE BEST BEACHES IN THE WHOLE OF INDIA. IT MAKES A GOOD COMBINATION WITH OTHER ATTRACTIONS LIKE THE LITTLE RANN OF KUTCH AND THE GIR WILDLIFE SANCTUARY."**

*Rushad Ginwala, restaurateur.*





# THE SPARKLING RANN OF KUTCH

GUJARAT HAS SOMETHING  
FOR EVERY TRAVELLER

