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TO GO OR TO NOT GO

D ains are magical in India. The Season of bliss, beauty and relief, monsoon brings exuberance to nature. And so there is a certain charm in vacations during downpours. Relaxing, sightseeing, adventure in those gentle winds, light raindrops and petrichor sounds like a great idea! Want to follow nature trails? Let's walk through the most scenic destinations of Gujarat. So are you one of those who do not consider this as a good time to travel? We still have an iconic destination for you to explore nature's vivid forms without getting drenched (a little maybe). How about trekking through the colours and cuisines of Ladakh? The magical and unexplored wonderland of Himalayas, Ladakh is a must-visit with its arid mountains, dramatically crowned rocky outcrops, picturesque gompas, meditation mani walls and multi hued flags. Read on!

July 2021



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Trekking Through Colours and Cuisines of



Markha Valley Trek

TREKKING THROUGH COLOURS AND CUISINES OF LADAKH

With its stark spectacular landscapes and an unforgiving environment, Ladakh can offer you an exciting stay. Its climatic features and topography are unique and offer the adventurous trekker a far different experience.

Ladakh is divided into two districts, Leh and Kargil. The altitude ranges from 8370 ft. to 25400 ft. above sea level. For comparison. Delhi is at 709 ft above sea level, Shimla is at 7400 ft. and Mount Everest is 29000 ft. above sea level. About 74 percent of the land surface in Ladakh, is above 14,750 ft. Ladakh has superlative features to its credit. Due to its rarefied atmosphere and low humidity, its ultraviolet radiation levels are among the highest in the world. The temperature variation ranges from -35 degrees centigrade in winter to +35degrees centigrade in summer. The annual rainfall range is 10 cm to 30 cm, which primarily comes from snow. New Delhi has an annual precipitation of 60 cm. All these features give Ladakh the epithet as one of the highest and driest inhabited places on earth. Most human settlements are

situated at elevations of 10000 ft. to 13500 ft. above sea level. Treks are full of surprises. It can take you from a soft periphery of greens to the dun world of parched rugged mountains. A trek from Chilling to Markha Valley, a trek of five days with a gradual ascent from 10500 ft. to 12700 ft. The trek begins from Chilling and the first halt is at Skiu, a tiny village in the Markha river valley.

It would be worthwhile to explore the cuisine of the local place. The staple diet of the region is barley, which is roasted and ground for use as flour. It is also used to brew beer called Chhang. Kholak is the most commonly used food that involves no cooking. The flour is made by grinding the roasted grains of barley. It is ground to a fine powder. Kholak is made by adding the powder to any liquid or semi-liquid. This can then be added to tea and salt to taste.

Thukpa is a common name for soups with wheat or barley flour as the medium with thick consistency. Sometimes dried cottage cheese, made from Yak milk, is added.



Meditation Cave

In a land of sparse vegetation, different varieties of food are made from the same items. The foods are normally simple and easy to make and designed to keep the cold out.

Skiu to Sarah is an easy with gradual ascent. But the walk is through unforgivable terrain. For most part it is devoid of any vegetation. The crumbly pathways are not easy to walk on. However the breaking monotony is the number of streams that you need to cross over rickety wooden bridges. You tend to cross one, with a prayer on your lips. You are reminded of Tintin's trek through these regions, in the comic strip, Tintin in Tibet.

Buddhist meditation caves are common here. Why are there caves in these remote harsh regions? I had seen similar caves in Spiti, the Tabo caves, going back thousands of years. Do the caves assist in meditation? Is it necessary to be bereft of all the comfortable amenities of life to attain Moksha? Is it what Lord Buddha's Four Noble Truth all about? *Life is suffering*

The cause of suffering is desire The cause of desire must be overcome When desire is overcome, there is no more suffering

At many places, you walk parallel to the river stream. The water flows at a rapid pace. Sometimes when you need to wade across, only then do you realize the icy temperature of the waters. Nonetheless it is a pleasant experience to sit on a rock with your tired feet in the river.

The third leg of the trip is from Sara to Markha. Here on a clear day, you can get that rare glimpse of the second highest mountain in the world, a mountain that is technically more difficult to climb than Everest. K2 has the highest fatality rate among all the 'eight-thousanders', i.e. mountains in excess of 8000 meters or 26000 ft. There are only 14 of them in the world, all of which are located in the Himalayan and Karakoram mountain ranges in Asia. Their summits are in the death zone. After an easy trek of about 4 hours, you reach Hankar. I could see a beautiful monastery that seemed to balance precariously on a cliff. From a distance the monastery appears to magically emerge from the cliff itself. The recurring thought that occurs to you is that why are the monasteries built in such far flung areas, perched high up in the mountains, making it difficult to access? And once you are inside, you are practically incarcerated, not because you are not allowed to come out, but the sheer distance you need to travel to reach human development? It is a world by itself.

You also come across a number of stupas encasing relics of a saint from an era long past. These white structures stand out brightly against the backdrop of barren ridges and mountains. It was definitely a welcome sight.





TREKKING THROUGH COLOURS AND CUISINES OF LADAKH



Hunkar to Nimaling brings you in sight of the snow-clad Kang Yatse Mountains. When you see these mountains, you unconsciously try to assess if these mountains are climbable and you also begin to wonder of the world beyond. I would like to dwell on the colors of Ladakh. As we trekked along, the colors of those desolate mountain ranges took on multiple shades of brown. From desert sand to dark brown, covering a whole range of spectrum in between. Then of course, there are the ubiquitous brilliantly coloured Tibetan flags. They are prayer flags meant to spread peace and blessings to one and all, but I strongly suspect the brightly coloured strips of printed clothing, fluttering in the gentle zephyr, was also meant to enliven the barren monotony of the surroundings.

For most part of the trip we were blessed with cerulean skies. Spectacular blue skies with startlingly white puffs of clouds were a poet's delight. To quote an African proverb, "When the heart overflows, it comes out through the mouth!"

The daytime is pleasant, however towards evening when the temperature begins to dip, you realize that you are among the elements of nature. The feeling can be a little unsettling. At night as you look up to the midnight blue skies, the infinity of heavenly bodies is a sight never ever seen in a city. The descent journey from Nimaling to Chokdo via Kongmaru La is the piece de resistance. At Kongmaru La, you can see the vast Himalayan ranges. At this point, you reach the highest altitude of the trip. Headache or nausea at this stage of the trip is not uncommon here. But the sight of the mountains stretching away makes you want to explore those regions. It is with a little bit of regret that you turn away for the descent to Chokdo!



Ladakh has many monikers. It goes by 'the Moon land', 'Little Tibet', 'the last Shangri-La' and 'Roof of the World', 'the Land of Passes' etc. When you fall in love with a person, a pet or place, you instinctively look for a term of endearment. An unbreakable bond is created. The extremely harsh environments of Ladakh, notwithstanding, people who come visiting here, take back with them a souvenir of this beautiful harsh land, indelibly printed in their minds.

Gujarat's Premium Wedding Destination: Tent City Narmada

How would you describe your ideal wedding? Glamorous? Or, classic? Would it be timeless? Or, simply iconic? No matter what kind of wedding you conceptualize, we know exactly how you can translate it into reality!

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So, hold your dream wedding at this magnificent and luxurious resort, right in the lap of bountiful nature, where you have an engineering marvel of the scale of Sardar Sarovar Dam on one side, the mighty Statue of Unity on the other, and plenty of fresh air all around you!





Incredible India



NATURE TRAILS IN GUJARAT

ON WORLD NATURE CONSERVATION DAY, VISIT THESE HILLY PLACES THAT ARE BEAUTIFUL IN THE MONSOON.



WALK IN THE POLO FORESTS

POLO FOREST





he Godadara Polo forests of the Vijaynagar taluka resound with fluty bird calls and the kor-rr-katroo-katroo of the brown-headed barbet. While trekking, you could see grey hornbills, green pigeons and barbets feeding on the figs of banyan and peepal trees. Those driving on the roads at night can hope to sight a sloth bear, a leopard or even a giant brown flying squirrel gliding through the trees. Just three hours from Ahmedabad, it is difficult to picture a better place to take your children for a nature walk.

Besides natural history, the forests also have remains of fine 15th and 16th century sandstone monuments - Saraneshwar Mandir, which is a living temple, the 15th century Shiv Shakti Temple, which has fine sandstone carvings of Lord Surya suggesting it was originally a Sun Temple, and the impressive Jain temple cluster at Abhapur. To visit some of the temples, be prepared to walk in the forests and sometimes even to wade through ankle-deep water.





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ENJOY THE WATERFALLS AND FORESTS OF SHOOLPANESHWAR



Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary

S ome of the finest forests of Gujarat lie in the Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary. Earlier called the Dumkhal Sloth Bear Sanctuary spanning 150.87 sq km, the protected area was enlarged to 607.70 sq km and renamed Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary. This sanctuary primarily comprises semi-evergreen and moist deciduous forests with a profusion of bamboo brakes. The sanctuary is also a botanically interesting area with more than 575 species of flowering plants reported by the Forest Department. The main predator of the sanctuary is the leopard or panther. The sloth bear, listed as vulnerable by IUCN, largely feeds on fruits, ants and termites using its long lower lip and palate to suck out insects. Since both the leopard and the sloth bear are largely nocturnal you need to be lucky to spot one.

Spotted deer, barking deer and the chowsingha, the world's only four horned antelope, are the main herbivores in the sanctuary. Wild boar sightings are fairly frequent. There are many smaller mammals in the sanctuary like civets, jungle cat and porcupine. The giant brown giant squirrel and rusty spotted cat are some notable species that have been recorded in this area.

The sanctuary is very interesting for birdwatchers with notable species like the heart-spotted woodpecker, eagle owl, grey and red jungle fowl, and recent reports of the nocturnal frogmouth. The Dediapada taluka is the prime habitat of raptors like the crested serpent eagle, changeable hawk eagle and oriental honey buzzard. With many fruit bearing trees, the forests are also very good for frugivorous birds like grey hornbill, tropical green fruit pigeon, barbets and parakeets. The scenic highlight of the sanctuary is Malsamot and the nearby Ninai Falls in Dediapada taluka. The waterfall is most spectacular during and just after the monsoon. The water falls 30 ft to a pool set in thick forests. Sagai-Malsamot Eco Campsite is located in this area for those who want to spend the night. Another spectacular waterfall in Narmada district is Zarwani waterfalls, 28km from Rajpipla near the Thawadia checkpost of Shoolpaneshwar Sanctuary. A visit to this waterfall can be combined with the Sardar Sarovar Dam and the new Shoolpaneshwar Temple.

Zarwani

Ninai Waterfalls

NATURE TRAILS IN GUJARAT

Zarwani Campsite

HOMESTAY

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Galaxy Homestay, Galaxy Corporation, "Aastha" B/H Saibaba Mandir, Opp. Mudra Press, Navapara, Rajpipla, Dist.Narmada - 393145. Mobile: 8141731100, 8141748999

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Sagai-Malsamot Eco Campsite

EAST GUJARAT HILLS

Jambughoda Wildlife Sanctuary

Bhim Ni Ghanti

Jand Hanuman Temple

ambughoda Wildlife Sanctuary in the Panchmahal is a well-forested hilly area. This is the habitat of leopard, sloth bear and other wildlife. The main attractions for visitors are the two water reservoirs – one at Kada and the other at Targol. The Jhand Hanuman Temple here also has a scenic location.

From here, travel to Kevdi Eco-tourism Site. This forested area is a home to sloth bear, panther, hyena, giant flying squirrel and other wildlife. The main attraction of the campsite is the flying squirrel, which can be spotted in the evening.

Continue to Devgadh Baria, which is a princely town set among forests. Nearby Ratanmahal Sanctuary is a prime habitat of sloth bear.



NATURE TRAILS IN GUJARAT

State Palace

Targol Dam

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Ratan Mahal Wild Life Sanactuary

service and subservice and

VANSDA NATIONAL PARK

NATURE TRAILS IN GUJARAT

VANSDA WILDLIFE SANCTUR



MALABAR TROGON

Vansda National Park is a botanical wonderland with a variety of orchids, flowering plants, bamboos and tall trees. The forests are delightful for butterfly spotting. Walk around the forests to look for Western Ghats specialties like Great Black Woodpecker, Malabar Trogon, Shama and Emerald Dove, as well as the Grey Hornbill, Racket-Tailed Drongo, Paradise Flycatcher, Gold-fronted Leaf birds, Malabar Rock Thrush and Sunbird. The highly endangered Forest Owlet is also seen in this region. The Waghai Botanical Gardens nearby area is worth a visit as is the princely town of Vansda or Bansda with its palatial buildings.



HOMESTAY

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PICTURESQUE DIVERSOUS





n July during the Odia month of Djesto, the Rath Yatra is one of the most spectacular processions in India. Djesto begins with the Chandan Yatra, special replicas of the three temple deities are taken to the Narendra Sagar where for 21 consecutive days they are smeared with chandan (sandalwood paste) and rowed around in a ceremonial, swan-shaped boat. At the end of this period, in a ceremony known as SnanaYatra, the three go for a dip in the tank, after which they head off for fifteen days of secluded preparation for Rath Yatra. For the Rath Yatra, Lord Jagannath and his brother and sister are placed in their chariots and dragged by 4200 honoured devotees through the assembled multitudes to their summer home, the Gundicha Ghar ("Garden House"), 1.5km away. The immense chariots are draped with brightly coloured cloth and accompanied down Grand Road by elephants and a cacophony of music and percussion. Each chariot has a different name and a different-coloured cover, and is built anew every year to rigid specifications laid down in the temple's ancient manuals. Balabhadra's rath, the green




BALABHADRA'S RATH, THE GREEN ONE, LEADS; SUBHADRA IS NEXT, IN BLACK; AND LASTLY, IN THE THIRTEEN-METRE-TALL CHARIOT WITH EIGHTEEN WHEELS AND A VIVID RED AND YELLOW DRAPE, SITS LORD JAGANNATH HIMSELF.

one, leads; Subhadra is next, in black; and lastly, in the thirteen-metre-tall chariot with eighteen wheels and a vivid red and yellow drape, sits Lord Jagannath himself. It takes eight hours or more to haul the raths to their resting place. After a 9-day holiday, the sequence is performed in reverse, and the three deities return to the temple to resume their normal lives. Conventional wisdom has it that the procession commemorates Krishna's journey from Gokhul to Mathura; historians cite the similarity between the raths and temple towers to claim that it's a hangover from the time when temples were made of wood. Whatever the reason for the Car Festival, its devotees take it very seriously indeed. Early travellers spoke of fanatics throwing themselves under the gigantic wheels as a short cut to eternal bliss (hence the English word "Juggernaut", meaning an "irresistible, destructive force"). Contemporary enthusiasts are marginally more restrained, but like most mass gatherings in India, the whole event teeters at times on the brink of complete mayhem.

Lord Jagannath, Puri



During this holy month, pilgrims gather at the Jagannath Mandir, one of the four dhams or divine abodes, like Dwarka in Western India, the Garhwal temple yatra of Northern India and Rameshwaram in Southern India, which makes it one of the major pilgrimages for Hindus. The temple has four entrances - the southern gate has equestrian figures, the northern gate has elephant figures, the western gate has tiger figures, and with the other yatris we entered by the eastern one with huge moustached lions flanking the gate walking past a 10m high monolithic Aruna Stambha pillar

PICTURESOUE PURI



brought here from Konarka in the 18th century in front of it. The temple has a 55m high shikhara and four shrines in a

Like all Orissa's temples, this one too has an assembly hall called Jagamohan, a hall for offerings called the Bhoga Mandapa, a dance theatre for ceremonial performances, and the central hallway. The panda shows that 30 subsidiary shrines and a yatra is complete when you visit three or more of them, and take a holy dip in one of the four sacred tanks, but we avoided the crowds there and after booking our Prasad for the offerings, we filed towards the main shrine and saw the idols of the Lord Jagannath, his brother Balabhadra and sister Subhadra. The temple employs about 20,000 people including 6,000 pandas and more

row.

than10,000 others like craftspeople who produce all the materials required for the daily round of rituals and 'servants' who keep the idols clean. The food prepared by about 400 cooks in the temple kitchen, known as maha prasad, is carried in pieces of broken pots, as devotees believe only Lord Jagannath is perfect in this world, and after the blessings of Lord Jagannath, this mahaprasad is given to the priests. You can sample some of the delicious offerings in the streets around the temple in the evening.

The Sun Crafts Museum houses an extensive collection of images of the deity and his siblings in various forms. There is also a workshop where little wooden replicas are carved and painted, before being dispatched to ISKCON centres around the world.



The Sudarshan workshop is one of the few traditional stone-carvers' yards left in Puri. For once, the sculptors and their apprentices seem more interested in pursuing their art than selling it to tourists, but gladly point potential customers in the direction of the factory shop next door. Most of the pieces here are large religious icons carved out of khondalite - the multicoloured stone used in the Sun Temple at Konarak.

From Puri, drive to the 13th century Sun Temple built by Narasimha deva, when he was prince and completed after he was crowned. The temple was destroyed partly by Islamic invaders and completely fell to ruin over the centuries. In the 20th century, the British restored the temple and planted trees to prevent further erosion.

Chariot Wheel Architecture, Konark Sun Temple

Considered the ultimate example of the rich architectural legacy of Orissa, Konark's Sun Temple has many statues and shrines are laid out around the main building, which forms the core of the complex. Intended both as a shrine to Lord Surya and a symbol of the passage of time, the temple's layout is like a chariot with seven horses representing the days of the week pulling the chariot facing sunrise in the east, and the raised platform resting on

12 pairs of exquisitely carved wheels that are an enduring symbol of Orissa (the Bhubaneshwar Airport has replicas of these wheels set around it!) representing the months of the year with eight spokes each for the stages of a woman's day. The plinth has elephant friezes, scenes of elephants being trapped and other animals among its many carvings, the platform and walls depict life of the Kalinga empire courtly scenes, hunts, war deities, elephant fights - and many of the carvings are erotic themes showing entwined couples, sexual positions and solitary figures. The pyramidal roof has three tiers of vivid carvings of musicians and dancers, and a remarkable Natraj, and culminates in a fabulous amalka, while the walls have superb stories to tell.

The main shrine has Surya carved in green chlorite stone which is a masterpiece with a life-like depiction of the god in his riding boots, and Aruna, the charioteer, holding the reins of the seven horses at his feet.



EXCURSIONS FROM PURI

CHILKA LAKE: One of the main attractions around Puri is the Chilka Lake or Chilika, a glass-like lagoon separated from the sea by sandbars that is considered the largest lake in India spanning about 1100 sq km at its maximum. This is a birdwatchers paradise in winter with waterfowl conservation organisations rating it as one of the best sites for wetland birds in all of Asia. The evening boat-ride from Rambha or Sannakudda visits the Kalijai island which enshrines a local girl who drowned here on the way to her wedding across the lake, as her voice was subsequently heard calling from under the water which uplifted her to the status of a Goddess, the Bird Island where birds roost in the evening and Honeymoon Island with ruins of an old palace where gulls can be seen on the mudbanks for views of sunset. The best morning boat tour is to NalabanaIsland from Barkul, Satapada or Sannakuda. On a boat-ride here from Sannakuda, we saw Palla's Fish Eagle perched on

fishermen's poles near the islands, rafts of Spot-billed Ducks, Cotton Pygmy Goose, Red-crested Pochard and other ducks floating over the waters near our boat, Cormorants fishing in the shallows, waders like Sandpipers, Redshanks, Ruff and Reeve, Black-tailed Godwit and Pratincoles on island shores, and gulls and terns swooping for fish. An Irrawady Dolphin suddenly surfaced for water exciting my daughter. But the highlight was getting close views of a flock of flamingo as they waded in the shallows in front of our boat making a graceful spectacle with their long rosy white arched necks and heavy pink bills looking striking in the morning light. There are pleasant beaches on the eastern side of the lake and also the island palace of the kingdom of Parikud. OTDC has hotels at Barkul, Rambha and Satapada.

SAKHIGOPAL: This charming temple about 22km from Puri is dedicated to infant Krishna.

RAGHURAJPUR: Raghurajpur is a heritage crafts village known for its master Pattachitra painters.



IRANS

On World Tiger Day, we look at the best tiger reserves of Central India.



ne of the most important tiger reserves in India, the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve is located in three ranges: Moharli, Tadoba and Kolsa in West Chandrapur Forest Division. The Tadoba National Park was declared in 1955 and is one of the oldest national parks of India, and with the Andhari National Park it forms a 62,540 hectare

tiger reserve. The park is said to gets its name from a ruler named Taru who was killed by a tiger and has a shrine in his memory – a tribal fair is held in his name in December -January. The reserve comprises Southern Tropical Dry Deciduous Forests, which are interspersed with several large meadows that attract large herds of deer and



Indian bison. The park checklist includes 41 species of mammals, 30 species of reptiles, 5 species of amphibians, 74 species of butterflies, 26 species of spiders and 23 species of fishes. The Tadobalake, Kolsa and Jamni lakes here are visited by large flocks of winter migratory birds. Moharli Lake on the outskirts also attracts birds. The lesser adjutant is one of the many interesting birds seen here. The park drives in Tadoba are excellent for watching mammals. There is a good chance of seeing tiger, leopard and sloth bear. Other mammals worth looking for Indian





bison, nilgai, dhole, striped hyena, small Indian civet, jungle cats, sambar, spotted deer, barking deer and four-horned antelope. Tadoba has a wide choice of good quality accommodations including resorts, camps and lodges. North of Tadoba and forming a corridor with it through forest along Wainganga river, Umred Karhandla Wildlife Sanctuary is a home of big mammals like tiger, leopard, sloth bear, wild dog, bison, nilgai, spotted deer, sambar and wild boar, and also small ones like flying squirrel.



From Tadoba, travel to the Nagzira Wildlife Sanctuary, which has good forests set around lakes – the reason it is called the Green Oasis of Vidharba. There are simple accommodations on different sides of the main Nagziralake. This lake and Chorkhamaratank are good for watching birds like waterfowl and fish eagle, especially during the winter months. The lake is rich in fish and amphibians. This sanctuary has a sizable population of tiger and leopard but you need luck to spot the big cats. Indian bison, sambar, nilgai, chital, wild boar, sloth bear and wild dog could be seen over two or three days stay. Near Nagzira, Navegaon National Park has tiger, leopard, bear jungle cat, civet,



Pench National Park

Kanha National Park

wolf, jackal, Indian bison, deer and wild dog, but the main highlight is the picturesque lake set among low hills covered with forests. It is said that the medieval Gond queen of central India, Rani Durgavati invited some experts from Rajasthan to construct this lake. Subsequently, the lake was maintained by the Nizam of Hyderabad, Bhosale

Kings and finally, the British before it became a reserve of the Maharashtra Government.

From here, drive to Pench National Park, which is one of the premier tiger reserves of India straddling across two states - Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. The Meghdoot dam built across Pench River at Totladoh has

created a large water body of 72 sq. km. out of which 54 sq. km. falls in Madhya Pradesh and rest in the adjoining state of Maharashtra. As summer approaches, the water recedes leaving behind lush green meadows, which are excellent for viewing sambar, spotted deer, nilgai, wild boar. Indian bison and other herbivores. Pench is the hunting ground of tiger, leopard, dhole or wild dog, jungle cat and small Indian civet. The Bor Tiger Reserve is nearby. From Pench, you can travel to Kanha National Park, which is deservedly one of India's most visited Tiger Reserves. Few are disappointed by the striking beauty of the Maikal Hills of Kanha, the



forested slopes of the Kanha, Banjar, Halon Valleys, the plateaux and plains covered with grasslands and low scrub, called maidans or meadows, fringed by bushes and trees. High herbivore densities are characteristic of these maidans. Huge herds of chital or spotted deer, looking strikingly beautiful in the dappled light of the shady forests, the larger sambar deer and the hard-ground barasinga swamp deer whose resurgence has been as much of a success story of Kanha's conservation project. These open maidans offer the best chances of seeing tiger when they leave the safety of forest cover in search of the large deer herds.

From Kanha, it is a drive of about 260km



to Bandhavgarh National Park, which is one of India's best places for tiger spotting. The national covers about 1162 sq km of forests around the historic Badhavgarh hill fort. The drive goes through lush sal and bamboo forests, interspersed with riverine forests, open grasslands and marshes. The forests and wetlands are excellent for birdwatching. While Kanha and Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserves have become very popular with tourists, Panna National Park still offers some serene places away from the crowds. Declared a Tiger Reserve in 1983, Panna was notified as a Biosphere Reserve on 25 August 2011.





TIGER TRAILS







A safari through the pristine forests with teak, sal, crocodile bark, jamun and other trees offers splendid views, and the possibility of spotting tiger, leopard, sloth bear and wild dog, besides spotted deer, sambar deer and four-horned antelope, while there are also open grasslands that are habitat of gazelle and Indian wolf. Look for changeable hawk eagle, honey buzzard, King vulture, blossom headed parakeet, paradise flycatcher, slaty headed scimitar babbler and other birds during the forest drive, while the rivers and water bodies can yield storks, barheaded goose and ducks sightings. Besides the forests, Panna is worth visiting for the Ken River which is a Yamuna River tributary flowing through the Bundelkhand region of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. A boat ride on the river can be good to watch birds, crocodiles and large fish like the mahseer. The Ken Gharial Sanctuary is one of the best places to watch the rare fish eating crocodile called Gharial best seen near the confluence of the Ken and Khudar rivers. The 60 km long and 150–180 m deep gorge on the river is spectacular with formations of crystalline rock in varying shades of colours ranging from pink and red to grey. The Raneh Falls is one of the top scenic attractions here in October and you could also visit the Pandav Falls. The famous temples of Khajuraho can also be visited from Panna. I

Incredible India

TEMPLE TRAIL IN SAURASHTRA

WITH THE TEMPLES OPENING THEIR DOORS AFTER A LONG TIME, WE LOOK AT A TEMPLE TRAIL ALONG THE SAURASHTRA COASTLINE.



PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE

Dwarka

C tart your temple trail at Dwarka, in far west of the Indian Openinsula looking out to the Arabian sea. The townscape is dominated by the elaborately carved tower or shikhara of the medieval Dwarkadish temple. The temple has fine carvings on the wall. You can visit between 7 AM and 12.30 PM or between 5 PM and 9 PM. An architectural gem of Dwarka, the small but superbly carved Rukmini temple stands near the sea. The temple has carvings of elephants, flowers, dancers and Shiva in several of his aspects covering every wall. Continue from here to Tupani, where the Charanganga shrine is located. This shrine gets its name from the only fresh water spring in the midst of saline plains. According to legend, Lord Krishna and Rukmini came to this site when escorting a sage. Lord Krishna dug the fresh water spring for Rukmini using this feet. The sage disturbed by the act cursed them that would not be worshipped together. This, believe locals, is the reason for the distance between Dwarkadish Temple and Rukmini Temple. Further towards the coast, Nageshwar is worshipped as a Jyotirlingam. From Okha, you can take a ferry to Bet Dwarka, which is an island with a Hanuman temple, a gurdvara and other holy places.

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TEMPLE TRAIL IN SAURASHTRA





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Dwarkadish Temple - Carvings

PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE

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TEMPLE TRAIL IN SAURASHTRA







Sudama temple

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Somnath and Girnar

Drive from Porbandar to Somnath temple in Prabhas Patan. The site it is said was dedicated to Soma, the juice of a plant used in rituals and greatly praised for its enlightening powers in the Rig Veda. The temple of Somnath itself is believed to have been built from gold by the sun god, by the moon god in silver, in wood at the command of Krishna and in stone by Bhimdeva. The recorded history of the temple says it was rich with donations by the 10th century. The temple was destroyed by Mahmud of Ghazni and after that there were many spells of destruction of the temple. The temple's reconstruction began in 1950. The highlight of the temple is the Mandapa with its tall pillars. The main pujas are held at 7am, noon and 7pm. Walk to the museum, which contains most of the architectural treasures saved from the temple – statues, lintels, sections of roof pillars, friezes and toranas from the 10th to 12th centuries.

Devotees also gather at Triveni Tirth, at the confluence of the Hiran, Saraswati and Kapil rivers as they flow into the sea, a historical Surya Mandir, and Bhalka Teerth which is the final resting place of Lord Krishna.

TEMPLE TRAIL IN SAURASHTRA







PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE

Continue from Somnath to Junagadh.

n the morning visit Mount Girnar a major pilgrimage centre for both Jains and Hindus, considered sacred since before the third century BC. The path of five thousand irregular steps climbs through eucalyptus groves and forests before zigzagging across the sheer rock face.

The hill is best known for its Jain temples, architectural marvels. Neminath, the 22nd tirthankara who is said to have died on Mount Girnar after seven hundred years of meditation and asceticism, is depicted as a black figure sitting in the lotus position holding a conch in the marble Neminath temple. At the top, a temple dedicated to the Hindu goddess Amba Mata attracts both Hindu and Jain pilgrims, particularly newlyweds who come here to be blessed by the mother goddess and to pray for a happy marriage. Steps lead down from this temple and then up again along a narrow ridge towards Gorakhnath Peak, where a small shrine covers what are supposedly the footprints of the pilgrim Gorakhnath, and further to a third peak where the imprints of Neminath's feet are sheltered by a small canopy. At the most distant point of the ridge, a shrine dedicated to the fierce Hindu goddess Kalika, the eternal aspect of Durga, is a haunt for near-naked Aghora ascetics who express their absolute renunciation of the world by ritually enacting their own funerals, living among corpses on burial grounds, and smearing themselves with ash from funeral pyres.

TEMPLE TRAIL IN SAURASHTRA



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PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE

Palitana

Travel from Somnath to Palitana, one of the principal Jain pilgrimage sites in India. The Shatrunjaya hill is crowned by more than 860 temples, many of them richly carved and made from marble. This hill, said in legend to be a chunk of the mighty Himalayas from where the Jains' first tirthankara, Adinath, and his chief disciple gained

enlightenment. The hill was a tirtha as far back as the fifth century but most of the temples were built in the 16th century.

The view as you ascend is magnificent; spires and towers swoop upwards,

hemmed in by mighty protective walls. You should allow at least two more hours to see even a fraction of the temples.

The individual enclosures called tuks are named after the merchants who donated for the temples. Together they create a formidable city, laid over the two summits and fortified by thick walls.

TEMPLE TRAIL IN SAURASHTRA

You can see temples whose walls are exquisitely and profusely carved with saints, birds, animals, buxom maidens, musicians and dancers. Many are two or even three storeys high, with balconies crowned by perfectly proportioned pavilions. The shikharas (spires) are hollow on the inside, their conical ceilings swarming with carved figures that flow in concentric circles outwards from a central lotus blossom. The largest temple, dedicated to Adinath, is in the Khartaravasi tuk on the northern ridge. The spectacular Adishvara temple is on the southern ride, at its western corner. 📼





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