

PRAVEG'S TOURISM ONE

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January 2023

Happy New Travel Year!

2023 is here and we can't wait for all the possibilities it holds in store - the fun of exploring new destinations, the thrill of new adventures, and of course, the memory-making that comes from exploring new destinations.

Join us as we admire the Mediterranean adventure in Istanbul. Come along as we embark on the majestic cruise along the Bosphorus, one of the most popular activities that one can indulge in. Shift away from the hustle and bustle of the city as we bring you to the unusual landforms of Cappadocia in Central Anatolia. There's no more waiting for someday, someday is now. It's the year of the traveler, so let us help you make it your best trip yet.

Read on!



Istanbul Bosphorus Bridge



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Alexandria, Egypt

Far Far Away

A MEDITERRANEAN ADVENTURE



Istanbul Bosphorus



Hagia Sophia



At the confluence of Asia and Europe, of Christianity and Islam, Istanbul or Constantinople of yore is a Mecca for travellers. It transitioned from a seat of Christianity, established in 360 AD by Emperor Constantine till 1450, when the city was taken over by the Ottoman empire. Today, the Turkish population is approximately 99.8% Sunni Muslims.

The Ottoman Empire, also known as the Turkish Empire, controlled much of Southeast Europe, Western Asia, and Northern Africa, between the 14th and early 20th centuries. The Ottoman Empire was at the centre of interactions between the Middle East and Europe for

six centuries. The Ottomans consequently suffered military defeats in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, when much of its lands were ceded, resulting in the formation of new nations. The large swathes of the Middle East were still under its suzerainty.

However, the Ottoman Empire's defeat and the occupation of part of its territory by the Allied Powers in the aftermath of World War-I resulted in its partitioning and the loss of its Middle Eastern territories. Col Thomas Edward Lawrence, more popularly known as Lawrence of Arabia, had a major role in their defeat. Lawrence turned Arab Bedouin tribes into a powerful guerrilla army to fight against the Turks. Subsequently, the Turkish War of Independence led to the emergence of the Republic of Turkey and the abolition of the Ottoman monarchy.

A full republican constitution was

adopted on April 20, 1924; it retained Islam as the state religion, but in April 1928, this clause was removed, and Turkey became a purely secular republic.

Hagia Sophia, also called Church of the Holy Wisdom, is easily the most visible monument of Turkey. It was built as a Christian church in the 6th century CE. In subsequent centuries, it became a mosque, a museum, and finally a mosque again. The building is a palimpsest of the two religions exhibiting the changes that it had undergone over the centuries. There are inscriptions of Islam as well as the lavish display of mosaic works of Christianity. It is known for its complex pattern of domes, semi-domes, and vaults, decorated richly with gold and marble. The minarets were added by the Ottomans. It was destroyed and rebuilt several times.



Bosphorus Strait

Maiden's Tower

Turkey is also known for the shimmering blue waters of the strait that connects the Black Sea with the Mediterranean. The spectacular blue skies of Turkey are reflected in the waters. Bosphorus Cruise is one of the most popular activities that one can indulge in. A cruise on this strait will take you to historical sites, including Ottoman palaces, fortresses, museums. It passes under the bridge connecting

Europe and Asia. The Bosphorus strait was always sought by competing nations in the past due to this linkage.

The Maiden's Tower is one of the oldest landmarks in Istanbul and due to its aloof location, it is shrouded in mystery. The tower is depicted in the James Bond film, The World is not

Enough. In the film, the terrorist Renard tries to detonate a nuclear submarine in the heart of the Bosphorus, while Elektra, the beautiful oil heiress has kidnapped Bond's boss M and taken her to a special jail – the Bosphorus' famous Maiden's Tower.

The tower, built in the Byzantine period, is located on a small islet at the southern entrance of the Bosphorus

strait, at the Asian part of Istanbul. It first served as a toll station and then in the 18th century as a lighthouse. It is now a throbbing tourist point with an upscale restaurant. It gives a 360-degree panoramic view of the European and Asian parts of Istanbul.

The Galata Tower is also one of the dominating landmarks of Istanbul. Built

in 500 AD, it was used as a watchtower to help defend the city. The tower was later converted into a prison. The Ottomans used the tower to look out for fires. The tower was destroyed several times. In 2020, the Tower was restored and reopened as a museum. It is popular today as an observation deck for the city of Istanbul.

Shifting away from the hustle and bustle of the city to the historical region in Central Anatolia brings you to unusual landforms of Cappadocia - the cone-shaped hills of Cappadocia. It is an unusual world of dramatic landscape of

soft volcanic rock, shaped by erosion into towers, cones, valleys, and caves. From afar, the place resembles a scene from a Harry Potter movie.

Rock-cut churches and underground tunnel complexes from the Byzantine and Islamic eras are scattered throughout the countryside. The place has been inhabited since the 3rd millennium BCE. Tens of thousands of clay tablets have been recovered associated with the Assyrian merchants. Owing to its rugged terrain, Alexander the Great bypassed Cappadocia but

sent troops under his General. Many of the surviving churches from this period are richly decorated. The most-visited attractions here are the sprawling underground cities. These cities were built as a shelter by the Christian community to escape persecution by the Romans and Arabs.

Volcanic Mt. Ararat, near the Turkish border with Iran with a perfectly cone shaped mastiff presents a majestic view. Fortunately, it has not been active for

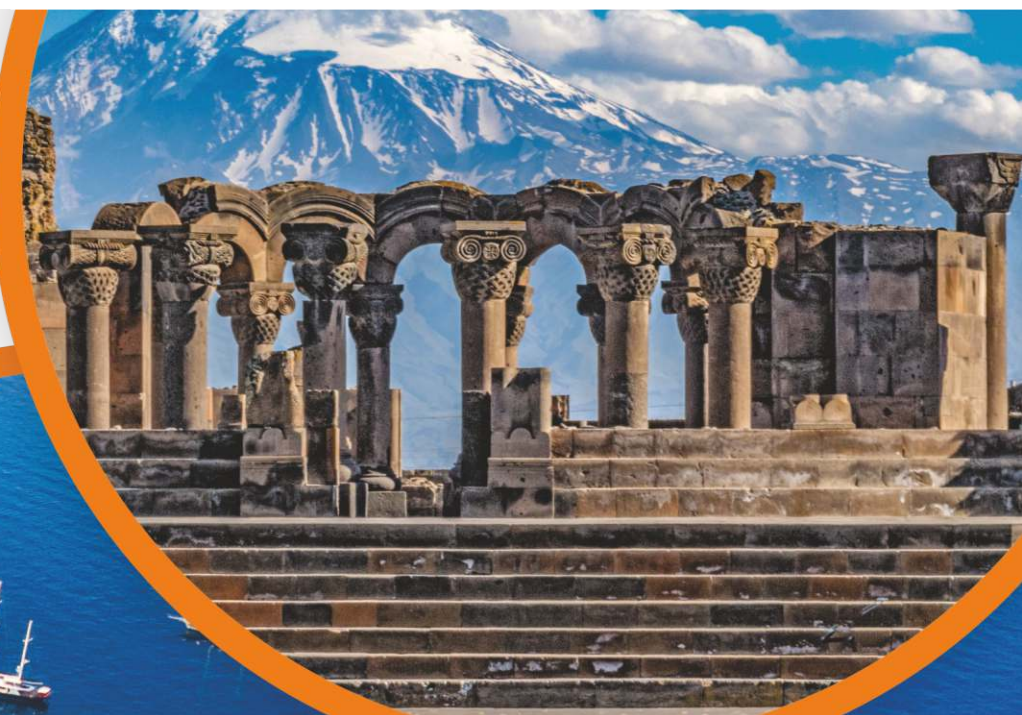
the last 10,000 years. In 2007, the mountain had come into the limelight, not for any volcanic activity, but for a claim made by a team of explorers who reported to have found Noah's ark beneath snow and volcanic debris on Mount Ararat. They claim to have found seven large wooden compartments buried at 13,000 feet above sea level. Many Christians believe the mountain in Turkey is the final resting place of Noah's ark. But the claims have not been substantiated yet.

Bodrum, in Southwestern Turkey, is well known for its nightlife. This

beautiful port city on the Aegean coast is hugely popular among tourists, writers, artists and musicians. The beachfront is like a perpetual carnival. The place has earned a reputation as a party town with scores of bars pulsing with music. This perpetually sunny beach resort has a watering hole to suit almost every taste. It has good food and gaiety all around with spectacular views of the Aegean coastline.

This country on the Mediterranean coast has a lot to offer. As a tourist, you

would be hard pressed to select the places. Turkey is not an expensive place to visit. Getting around the cities in Turkey is easy. In major cities, there is a good network of trams, metro, and buses. The tram is the most affordable way to travel. However, the best way to see a city, to feel its pulse, to enjoy its street foods, is by walking. For that, you need a good pair of walking shoes! 📌



Mt Ararat



Bodrum

Tram

Millet Trails in The Deccan

As the world celebrates International Year of Millets 2023, we recommend some places to enjoy a millet-based meal.

A FOOD JOURNEY IN SOUTH MAHARASHTRA

Maharashtra is a top producer of sorghum, called Jowar or Hurda. ICAR established the Centre of Rabi Sorghum at Solapur (Maharashtra) in 1991. Mangalwedha Taluka has a GI mark for its special sorghum called Mangalweda Jowar. Madhur Phule is a new rabi sorghum genotype developed for Hurda, a roasted sorghum favourite of Solapur. Winter is the time for Hurda Parties in Solapur.

Start your journey at Pune. Pune is a city of many faces. Visit the Cantonment or Camp area of Pune and you find colonial buildings, the Race Course started in the 1830s and popular during the racing season and its famous Derby, and other reminders of its past as the monsoon headquarters of the Raj in western India. Explore Koregaon Park and you see the international spiritual scene of the Osho International Meditation Resort, ashrams, spiritual centres and cafes. Visit the University area with its cosmopolitan mix of students from around India and international students, and you know why Pune is called the Oxford of the East. Other parts of Pune are hubs for automobile industry, electronics industry and IT parks. As a result of its colleges, institutions and IT industry, Pune has a large number of pubs, bars and cafes. And in the walled city of Pune are the 'peths', neighbourhoods with old

houses called Wadas often featuring carved balconies and ornate facades that have their rooms around open courtyards for temperature control, shading narrow lanes that lead between public squares called 'chowks', traditional markets, and historical buildings. Shaniwar Wada Palace in Kasha Peth, the heart of the old city is one of the landmarks of the Peshwa-period in Pune - this 1736 AD palace was built by Bajirao, one of the best known of the Peshwas and Maratha generals credited with expanding the Maratha Empire to its zenith. From here, you can walk to explore the lanes with temples, old houses and traditional markets. The Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum is an inspiring museum exhibiting a selection from the huge collection of the late Dr Dinkar Kelkar (an award winning poet who passed away in 1990) and his wife, Kamala. The museum has exquisitely carved wooden doors, pillars and beams from Gujarat, Rajasthan and other states. The bewildering variety of artefacts are specially interesting as many of them relate to the use of art in the daily life of an Indian family and could be found in houses even today - the Kelkar's passion for art and even his sense of humour are reflected in the way he has found beauty and artistry in everyday utensils and objects.

Typically, a Maharashtrian meal or 'thali' that you get in restaurants

contains breads like Ghadichi Poli (chapati) or Bhakri (jowar or bajra roti), Bhaajis or meat dishes, Rassa (a soupy dish with vegetables or meats), varan (dal), rice and sweets like Pooran Poli, Surnali or Seera. Koshimbir is a very common and healthy addition to the plate. Typically made from raw vegetables mixed with yogurt and ground roasted peanuts, the distinctive flavours comes from the use of condiments and spice mixes - goda masala, kala masala, pungent masalas, tamarind, anshul jaggery, coconut, kokum, are some popular flavouring. For example, the Amti is a dal, which uses both tamarind and jaggery to give a sweet and a sour taste at the same time. Kolhapur, Pune, the Konkan coast (there

is also the Malvani cuisine of Sindhudurg district that is distinct from the rest of Maharashtra's coast), Vidarbha, Marathwada, Khandesh, and other regions also have their own specialties. For traditional Puneri and other Maharashtrian meals, Shreyas, Chitale Bhandu, Good Luck Restaurant and Vaishali Restaurant are iconic places near the Tilak Road. 96k, Durvankar, Kangan, Mathura, Seasonal Tastes and

Shabree are popular places for regional cuisine. Jowar Bhakri can be enjoyed at vegetarian places but there are also eateries where you can get it with mutton curry.



Maharashtrian Thali



Baingan Bharta with Jowar Bhakri

About 30 km from Pune, the hill fort and valley of Sinhagad is reached by a scenic drive that goes past water bodies and viewpoints. Sinhagad is most popularly associated with Tanaji, a warrior in Shivaji's army. At small

eateries and home-style eateries near the fort, one of the popular combos is Pithla Bhakri. You can see women roasting the pithla made from besan (chickpea flour) on the fire, and rolling out the bhakris or flatbread made from

jowar atta. This combination is served with condiments like thecha, green chilli chutney hand-pounded with a slightly coarse texture.

From Pune, as you drive south on the highways, you will find many garden restaurants that have jowar bhakri with pithla or other dishes on the menu. Some of them serve the combo with dahi thecha i.e. thecha mixed with curd. Solapur has Kadak Jowar Che and Bajrichi Bhakri made from sorghum or pearl millet flour that you can buy. At eateries around Solapur, you can have the bhakri with Shenga Chutney, peanuts roughly ground with red chilli powder, garlic, salt and oil. The chutney may also be mixed with curd. Most of all, Solapur is known for its hurda made from tender hurda. Besides the dhabas and other eateries, you could also get fresh hurda at one of the farms. Hurda parties are a feature of Solapur in winter.



Pithla

MILLET TRAIL ALONG THE COROMANDEL COAST



Millet Pancake

Millet trail along the Coromandel Coast comprises a major producing zone of finger millet, barnyard millet and foxtail millet. A drive from Bhubaneswar to Chennai offers an opportunity to not only enjoy superb views of the Bay of Bengal but also to tuck into some satiating millet meals.

For more than two millennia, the coast of Odisha and neighbouring Andhra was a major maritime empire. Once part of the Kalinga kingdom that Ashoka conquered in a landmark battle that made him convert to non-violent Buddhism in remorse, Odisha's architecture reached great heights when the Keshari and Ganga dynasties built some of India's most famous temples in Odisha.

Millet dishes are offered in more than 100 eateries across Odisha. Start at Bhubaneswar with breakfast at Bocca Café at Master Canteen Square in the heart of the city. Bocca Café is well-known for its coffee, international food and desserts. They also have a millet selection developed by them with the Odisha Millet Mission. Ask for their millet pancake and other millet items for breakfast.

From here, you can set out to Bindu Sagar, where you can explore some of the city's most famous temples. The most elegant of these, the mighty Lingaraj Mandir is carved with beautiful sculpture exhibiting the music and dance associated with the temple. This is a living shrine and a holy place of pilgrimage. The main market of Bhubaneswar is located near the lake. From here, head to the outlying areas to see the Tribal Research Institute's anthropological museum, the state museum and the caves. For lunch, you can choose from millet-based meals at one of the many restaurants in Bhubaneswar. For Koraput coffee with millet idlis in the afternoon, head for Café Steam Engine. This venture was started to support tribal girls, and has continued post covid. Bhubaneswar has many restaurants that offer millet

dishes or breads. You can also shop for millet products from some of the stores like Select Fresh - Store & Café.

From Bhubaneswar, follow the coast to the Gopalpur beach. From Gopalpur, drive to the hills of Koraput. Here, the tribal people make fantastic millet dishes like Mandia Anda (Ragi flour with broken Rice), Mandia Tampa (Ragi flour with broken rice and warm water), Mandia Roti (Ragi flour roti), Mandia Pitha (Ragi flour in between Banana Leaves), Mandia Kandul Raav (Ragi flour with Whole Arhar dal with some masala) and Mandia Sukua Raav (Ragi with dried fish and masala). You can explore the tribal villages in this area.

After a day in the tribal belt, continue to the coastal city of Visakhapatnam with its beautiful Beach Road. Eat at Millet Rasoi, which conjures up the spirit and flavours of rural Andhra Pradesh with ragi mudde, millet noodles and a comforting jowar biryani. Visakhapatnam or Vizag also has other millet-based food eateries.

Proceed inland to the Godavari and Krishna deltas, with the Telugu cultural hubs of Rajahmundry and Vijayawada. 8 Millet House at Vijayawada excels in millet dishes like Ragi Sangati served with vegetarian or non-vegetarian Andhra curries. They also offer many dishes made from foxtail millet and barnyard millet. From Vijayawada, you can take a trip to Guntur famous for its chillies and the millet restaurant called Abhiruchulu.

Proceed down the coast to Tamil Nadu, stopping enroute to see the Pulicat Lagoon with its rich birdlife. Chennai has several traditional eateries like Adyar Ananda Bhavan, which has millet meals, snacks and tiffin items as part of its menu at its Anna Nagar, Velachery and Porur branches, Hotel Saravana Bhavan and Prem's Graama Bhojanam in Adyar. Millet Magic Meal, Amuthu Millet Restaurant and others in Chennai also advertise their millet menus. Even restaurants in big hotels like the Dining Room at Hyatt in Chennai have millets on the menu.



Millet Idli



Ragi Sangati with Bone Soup

THE MILLET TRAIL TO MYSORE

Karnataka has a large number of dishes made using ragi and jowar.

At Bengaluru, Kaulige Millet Corner is one of the places, where you are sure to get millets on their thali - bisi bele bath made with foxtail or proso millet, and millet payasam are among their favourites. For a more modern take on millets, Café Natural has 40 items made from foxtail, little, kodu and finger millets encompassing dosas, sandwiches, pizzas and more, Millet Mama is another place that has millet pizzas (made with amaranth and millets) and millet dosas as well as various millet rotis served with their curries. One of the pioneers of the millet revolution Vaathsalya Millet Café is now largely a cloud kitchen.

Ragi mudde, also called ragi sangati or ragi kali in Andhra, is one of the main foods of Kolar, Mandya, Hassan, Mysore and Tumkur districts in Karnataka. As you take the road to Mysore, you will find many places for ragi mudde. Kamat Lokaruchi is one of the famous ones where you could find people waiting in line for a table. Ragi balls are served alongside a saaru, chutney and gojju. Use your fingers to break down the ragi balls and dip the pieces into the curry, then swallow - ragi mudde is not chewed.

End your day at Mysore with a great ragi dosa.■



Foxtail Millet Kheer or Payasam



Ragi Mudde



Ragi Dosa



Edinburgh Castle



Edinburgh Castle

The Edinburgh Castle holds a commanding position, historically as well as location wise, in Scotland. Set in the heart of Scotland, it stands 135 meters above sea level on a steep, rugged rock, and overlooks the city of Edinburgh. Like most castles all over the world, this too has a turbulent history.

The rock on which the castle is situated is known locally as the Castle Rock. It has been the site of human activity for three millennia. The first king of Scotland had made his residence on Castle Rock. His pious wife Queen Margaret, who was the mother of three future kings of Scotland, died in the castle in 1093. Known for her charity and compassion for the poor of Scotland, she was later canonized as St. Margaret of Scotland and is commemorated in St. Margaret's Chapel. The chapel which was built between about 1130 and 1140 is the oldest surviving building on the castle grounds.

Its turbulent period started in 1296 and then in 1341, when both times the castle was captured by the English and regained by Scots. Huge cannon named

Mons Meg was installed in 1457 and can still be seen. It was employed during the sieges until the middle of the 16th century. The gun remained in Edinburgh Castle till 1754, after which it was shifted to the Tower of London. Sir Walter Scot, the famous poet, playwright and novelist, the creator of fictional hero, Ivanhoe, campaigned for its return. The gun was returned to the castle in 1829 and has remained there ever since.

An adjacent building called the Royal Palace is the room where James VI, the future King of England, was born in 1473. When he was thirteen months old, he was crowned the King of Scots, after his mother, Mary Queen of Scots was forced to abdicate the throne, because she married the man who was suspected to have killed her husband.

The last monarch to stay in Edinburgh Castle was Charles I. In 1649, he was executed for defying the English parliament.

In the mid-18th century, the castle housed prisoners of war captured by the British soldiers during the battles: the Seven Years' War, the American Revolution, and the Napoleonic Wars.



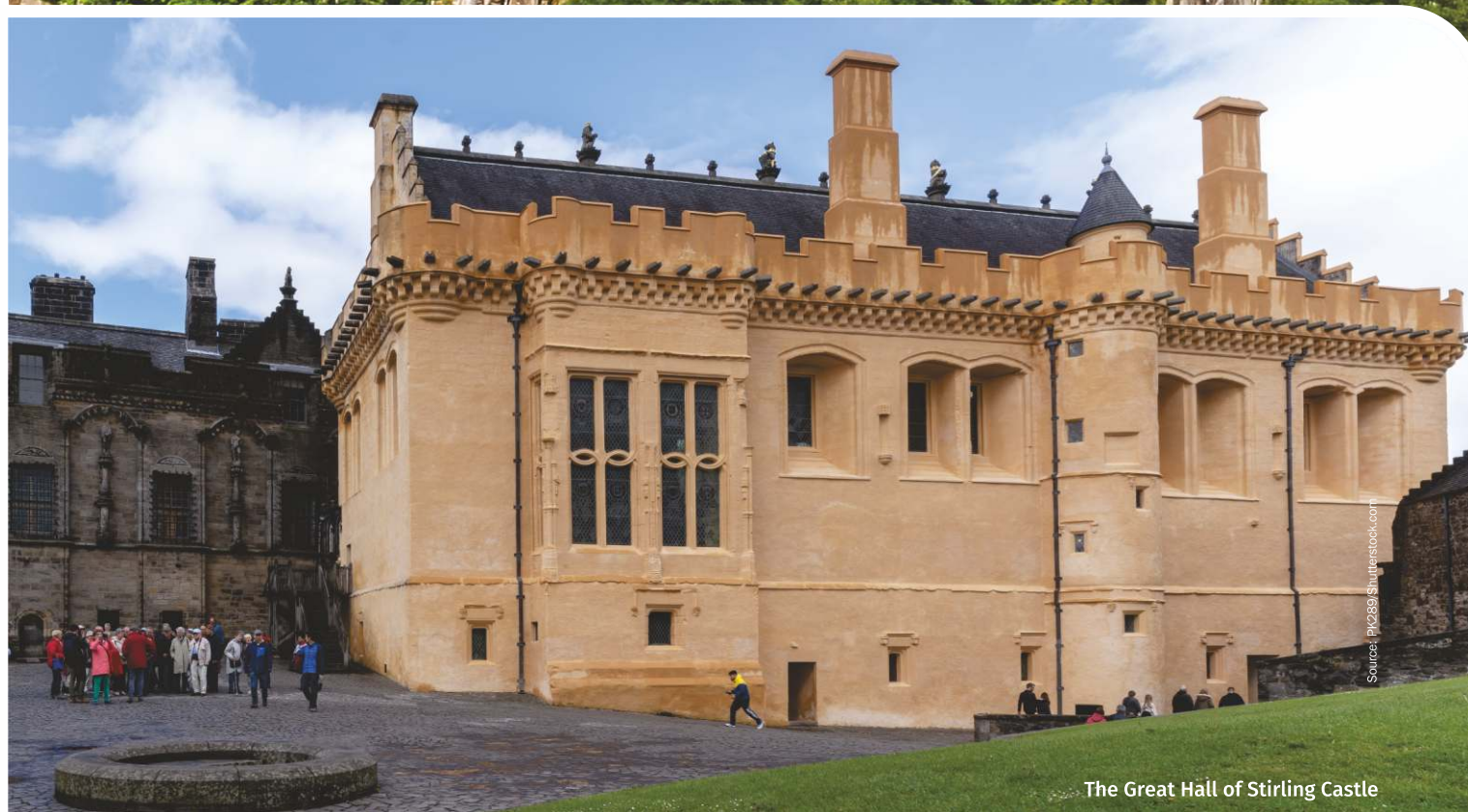
Mons Meg



St. Margaret's Chapel at Edinburgh Castle



Stirling Castle



The Great Hall of Stirling Castle



The Palace is home to the Honors or Regalia of Scotland, the Scottish Crown Jewels. The Honors or Regalia are the regalia that were worn by Scottish monarchs at their coronation. They are kept in the Crown Room in Edinburgh Castle. They date from the 15th and 16th centuries, and are the oldest surviving set of crown jewels in the British Isles. The Crown Jewels are on display in the Crown Room.

Another important item on display is Scotland's coronation stone, variously known as the Stone of Destiny, or the Stone of Scone. It is a block of sandstone upon which Scottish monarchs were traditionally crowned. It is most likely of Scottish origin, but is associated with an interesting myth. According to legend, the stone was used by Jacob - the ancestor of the people of Israel - as a pillow when he was in Jerusalem. The stone was removed from

Scotland by Edward I of England, sometime in the 13th century and was made a part of the English Coronation Chair in Westminster Abbey. The stone was finally returned to Scotland and to the castle in 1996. Stirling Castle is one of the grandest castles of Scotland. Perched on a 250-foot cliff that rises steeply from the pastoral land, this imposing castle dates from the 12th century. Surrounded on three sides by steep cliffs, the castle was

effectively secured from invasion. Mary, Queen of Scots and several Scottish Kings and Queens, were crowned here. The castle had been developed over the centuries by its royal occupants. It is a complex monument of diverse buildings and spaces added over time. The King's Old Building was built for James IV in 1496. The Great Hall or Parliament Hall was added by James IV around 1503. With dimensions of 42 by 14 meters across, the Great Hall is the

largest of its kind in Scotland. James VI commissioned the Chapel Royal (1501), which was built in just seven months for the baptism of his son and heir, Prince Henry. However, the chapel was not propitious for the young prince who died at the age of 18. It was in this chapel that Queen Mary was crowned in 1543. Like many other ancient castles that have seen much bloodshed, the Stirling Castle has its share of a poltergeist

roaming its interiors. A woman known as the 'Green Lady' is said to dwell here. She is known for her long hair and green gown. In 1997, a crypt of skeletons was unearthed during an excavation of the castle. The excavated area was the site of an old chapel which fell into disuse, when Chapel Royal was built. The crypt contained the skeletons of at least six males, one female, and two infants.

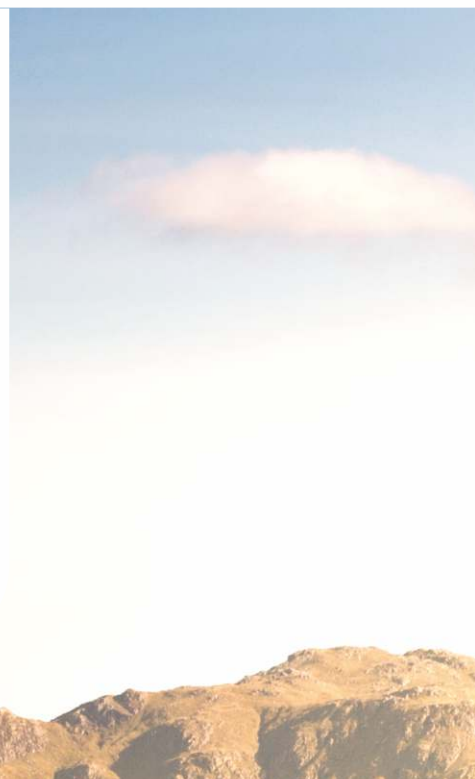
The castle Eilean Donan, on the island of Donan, is named after the 6th century Irish Saint, Bishop Donan who came to Scotland around 580 AD and set up a monastic cell. He probably chose this island for its tranquil setting. What began as a small hermitage, subsequently in the early 13th century expanded and was fortified against the Vikings. These seafaring people came from the lands of present-day Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, who were known for raiding and pirating. At that point of time, the original castle had encompassed the entire island. However, over the centuries, periodically the castle was torn down and reconstructed.

In 1719, the British Government learned that the castle was occupied by Jacobite leaders along with a garrison of Spanish soldiers. The Jacobite Rebellions were a series of 17th and 18th century uprisings in Scotland intended to restore the Catholic James VII and his heirs to the throne of Great Britain. The British sent warships to confront the rebels. Much of the castle was destroyed in the ensuing battle. For the next two centuries, the castle remained deserted and abandoned. Subsequently in the early 20th century, the castle was reconstructed to its original form.

Today it stands as one of the most beautiful castles in Scotland. Strategically situated on a small patch

of land at the point where three sea-lochs meet, it has a commanding view of the placid stretch of the sea and the mountains. Looking at it from the vantage of one the hills surrounding, it is not difficult to surmise, why an Irish saint many centuries ago chose to come to this isolated place for introspection and renunciation from the material world.

Today, many castles in Scotland have been converted into museums. Once these castles were throbbing with the sounds of daily life in motion, sometimes of scheming and intrigue, sometimes of fun and laughter. They all leave behind a tale that is fascinating and romantic. 🏰



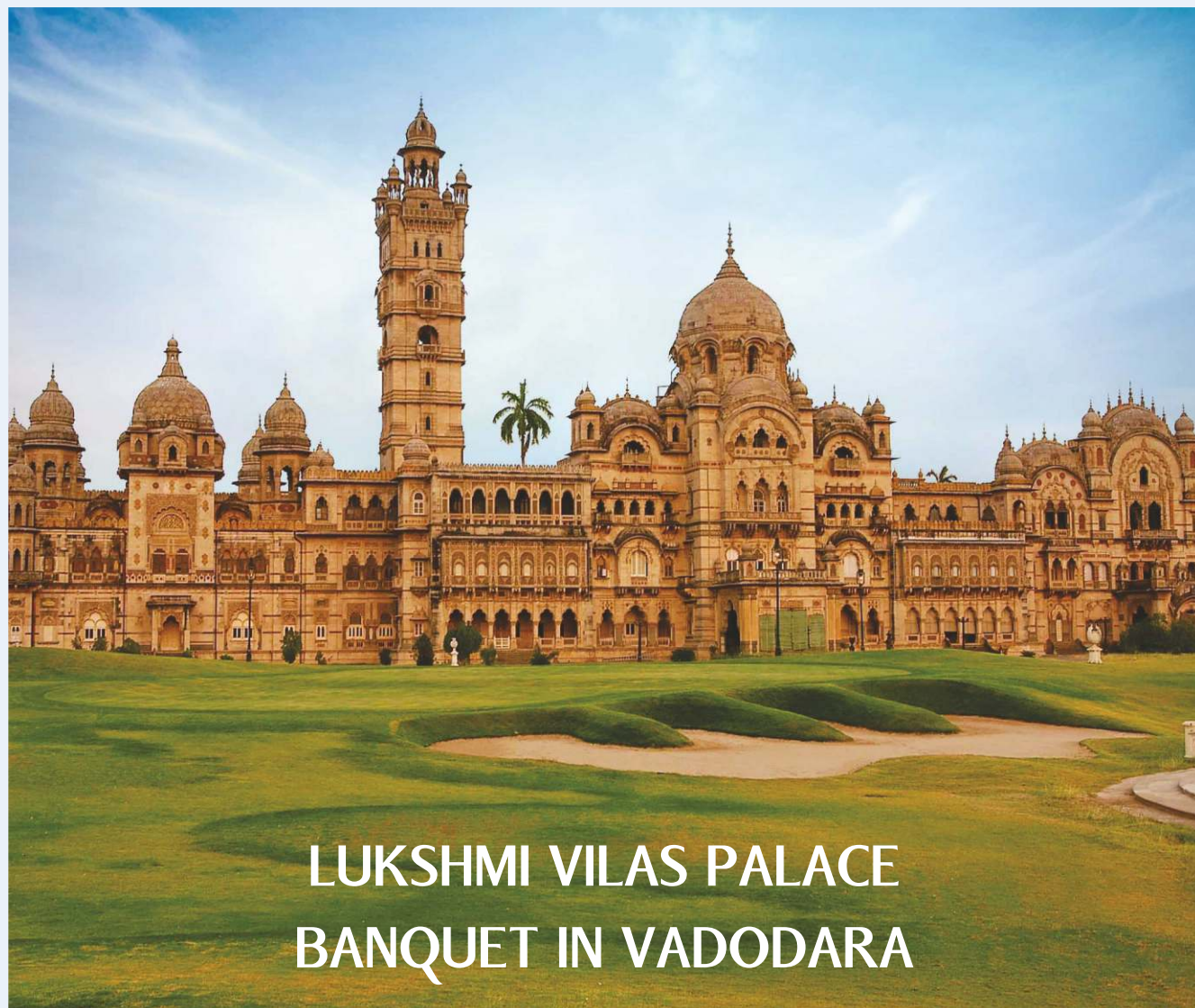
Eilean Donan Castle

Words by VIJAY KURUP



GET WEDDED IN GUJARAT

From golf clubs to palaces,
castles and beaches,
Gujarat offers a wealth of
exciting places for
destination weddings.



LUKSHMI VILAS PALACE BANQUET IN VADODARA

One of India's grandest palaces, Lukshmi Vilas stands tall as a grand backdrop for a royal-theme wedding.

This palace was built in 1880 by Major Mant and completed in 1890 by Chisholm, a British architect who pioneered the British Indo-Saracenic style of architecture - A revivalist architectural style mostly used by British architects in India in the late 19th century. This was the largest private residence built in the 1800s, and it is four times the size of Buckingham Palace. With its tower, domes, jharokhas and carved

brackets, the palace presents a spectacular façade from any side. The grounds are decorated with sculptural pieces of horses, bulls and maidens.

There are a wide variety of locations in the palace for wedding venues like the sunken garden, the lawns and the LVP Banquet building. The Durbar Hall Lawn can accommodate 1200 people, with a backdrop of the palace. Guests can see the spectacular gilded mosaic behind the Durbar Hall. The mural depicts a mixture of Hindu and Western symbolism.

The largest of the LVP Banquets is the 'Star of the South', which has lawns on either side for those who want to

have both inside and outdoor areas for their wedding. With 2622 sq.ft. of pillar free space, the wooden interiors and ornate chandeliers of this hall enhance the royal ambience.

The Poolside Lawns with a backdrop of the Moti Bagh Palace has expansive greens with views of the swimming pool and golf course.

The LVP team has in-house catering and events consultation services making it a complete wedding venue. If you are planning a destination wedding, Vadodara has a good choice of 3 to 5 star hotels.

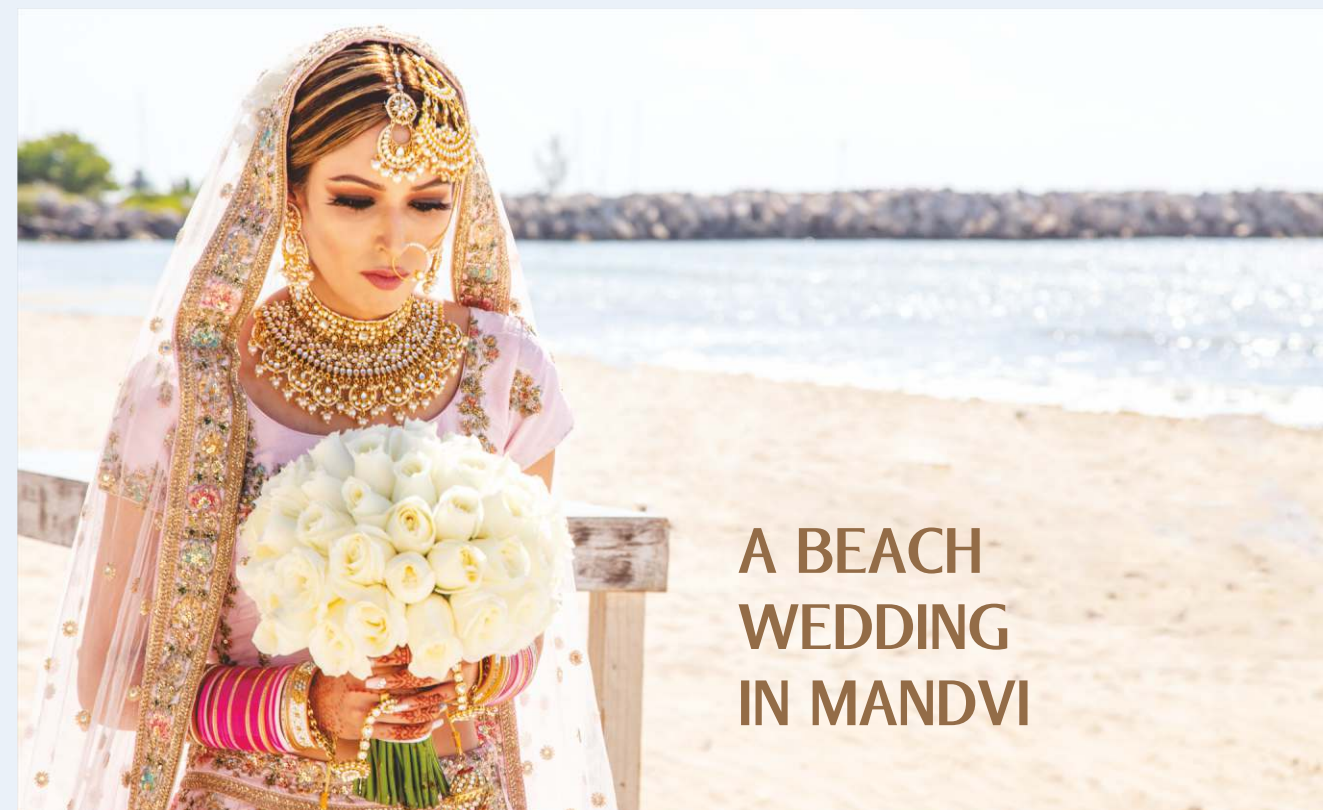
QUASR-E-SULTAN, THE SUMMER PALACE AT DUMAS

The Summer Palace at Dumas is one of the grandest backdrops for a wedding in Surat. The palace was built in 1911 by the Nawab of

Sachin as his summer residence near the sea. Entered by an impressive gate, the palace has a majestic façade with gabled roofs, arches and ornate balconies. The palace lawns can be hired

for functions with more than 1000 guests. The two massive lawns have a gazebo between them. The palace has wide-ranging facilities for a wedding, including green rooms for changing, resting room for the bride and bridegroom, washrooms, and a kitchen area available for the caterers.

The palace is also perfect for pre-wedding video and photo-shoots with pillared galleries, halls and staircases.



A BEACH WEDDING IN MANDVI

Mandvi in Kutch is one of Gujarat's prettiest beaches. The beach has long stretches of sands facing waters that are shallow and safe for swimming. This breezy beach location has the summer palace of the Maharao of Kutch, Vijay Vilas Palace, looming up amid hundreds

of acres of grounds. The palace grounds and adjacent beach can be a great events location.

For a beachside resort wedding, Serene Beach Resort has lawns that can be booked for weddings with 1200 guests, a terrace with a capacity of 500 guests and a hall that can accommodate 120 guests. Laguna Lawn

is ideal for a beachside part with 300 guests, and there is also a poolside deck that can take 200 guests.

The 50-acre resort has 26 luxury tents, pool villas and other accommodations. For a destination wedding, Mandvi also has other resorts, hotels and camps.

NILAMBAG PALACE AT BHAVNAGAR



The Nilambag Palace Hotel was built in the late-1800s as the garden retreat of the Maharajas of Bhavnagar. It was extended in the 20th century to become the royal residence and since the last few decades has largely been a heritage hotel.

Set in over 10 acres of grounds, the palace has tall trees that act as a façade against the city bustle of Bhavnagar. The entrance portico leads to the front hall with Burma teakwood carvings, king-size portraits, chandeliers, gilded paintwork, stuffed animals and princely memorabilia. In the centre are a pleasure pool and a courtyard

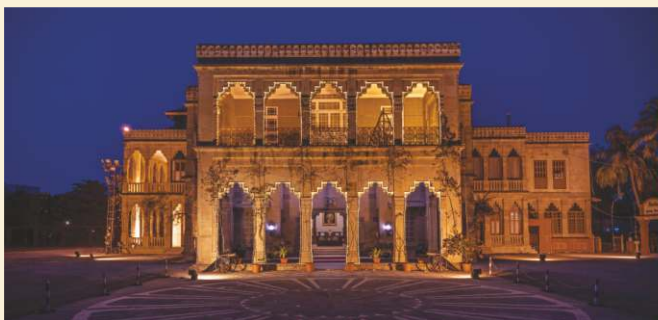
called Bird's Court as the walls are spanned by bird paintings commissioned by the Bhavnagar princes to a well-known Bhavnagar artist. The dining hall has chez chandeliers, Belgian mirrors, old crockery and antiques. This leads to a marble floored banquet hall that opens to the palace gardens. The hall and garden can be booked for a grand wedding or other events with the splendid backdrop of the palace façade lit up at night. If you book all the rooms of the palace, you could also find venues like courtyards and terraces for hosting folk performances of Kathiawadi music and dance for your guests. Some of the rooms are furnished with original early-20th century furniture and artefacts.

One of the highlights of the Nilambag is the swimming pool, designed in Roman bath style with columns, arches and scrolls. It is part of the Vijaymahal Club, which also has tennis courts and a gym.

The palace grounds are given out for occasions such as weddings with a colossal capacity of up to 2500 guests.

The palace offers accommodation in 20 rooms within the main building and seven rooms in the Royal Cottage. In addition to this, the adjoining Narayani Heritage also has accommodations.

Since Bhavnagar also has other hotels and resorts, it can be a great wedding destination.



HERITAGE KHIRASARA PALACE NEAR RAJKOT

On the outskirts of Rajkot, a heritage property on a hillock has been converted into the Heritage Khirasara Palace Hotel. The seven acres estate has many wedding venues including the gardens and courtyards, some of which have panoramic views of the surrounding countryside. Just 14 km from Rajkot's city centre, Khirasara Palace offers an opportunity to stay in a historic castle set on an elevation with serene views, without missing out on modern conveniences.

As you drive from Rajkot's bustling Kalawad Road to Khirasara

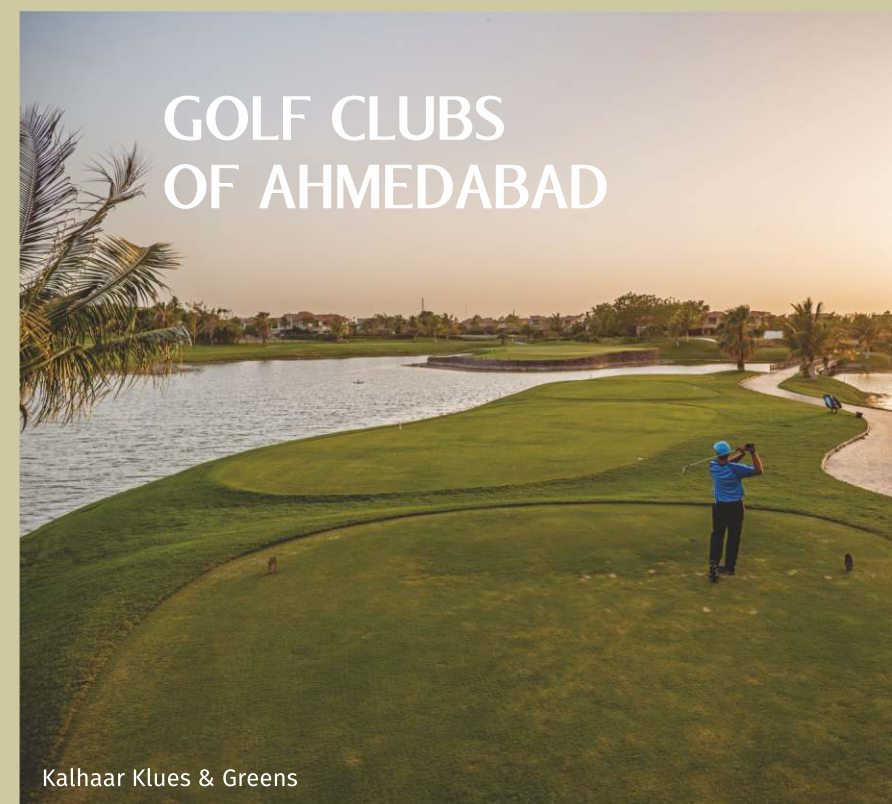
Village, you see the castle rising up on a small hill with its reflection in a water body just before the heritage hotel, which is reflected in the lake. Khirasara was received by Bhimji, a Jadeja Rajput, from his father, Thakore Saheb Kaloji of the Dhrol Princely State in the 17th century. His descendant, Thakore Ranmalji, built the palatial property that stands today. Ranmal's spiritual mentor was 'Nale-Sat-Pir', a Sufi fakir from Sindh whom he is said to have visited when the property kept collapsing though he had employed 350 masons for the construction. The Pir's tomb still stands here. The feudal fiefdom Khirasara was modernised by

Thakore Sur Sinhji, educated in England and Dehradun, in the early-20th century. In recent years, the palatial property has been restored, renovated and converted into a heritage hotel.

As you enter through the imposing gateways, you come to sprawling lawns that are the centerpiece of the property. The two lawns, called Urvashi and Vaishali Lawns, can easily accommodate 3500 guests for an event. For indoor events, the Darbar hall at Heritage Khirasara Palace can accommodate 1200 guests. The pillar-free hall is carpeted and has a pre-function area.

Around the lawns are the wings that contain 25 rooms, including the Maharaja Suite, which is appointed with a king-sized four poster bed and plenty of carved furniture. All the rooms have Wi-Fi, Minibar, 32" LCD TV and modern bathrooms.

GOLF CLUBS OF AHMEDABAD



Kalhaar Klues & Greens

The golf clubs make spacious places for weddings. A short drive from Ahmedabad, Gulmohar Greens Golf & Country Club has a nine-hole golf course, swimming pool, sports area, deluxe rooms and other facilities. For a wedding, the Gulmohar Lawns have a huge capacity of 8000 guests. For something quainter, the 800-capacity Banyan Tree Lawn has a historical tree as its centerpiece. The club helps with all arrangements from bridal make up to decorations, catering and event management services.

Kensville Golf & Country Club and Kalhaar Klues & Greens are also beautiful wedding venues with plenty of lawns, trees and water features.

A RESORT WEDDING AT KANDLA

The port of Kandla has become the hub of resorts. One of the best of these is the Holiday Village Resort on Anjar-Galpadar Road.

The resort as the name suggests is designed like a village with cottages set around a huge lawn. There are different areas in the property like the resort, the wedding venue and

banqueting area, and the club. The Cottage Lawn has a capacity to accommodate 800 to 1000 guests, while for even bigger functions they have lawns with capacity from 1500 to 3000. For smaller events, Mandour is an option. Events also can be done at Chatpata, which has a water park. For indoor events banquet halls can accommodate up to 700 guests. The

property offers about 100 rooms, including suites, swimming pools and sports facilities.

Another resort in the area, Radisson Kandla offers the Banni Lawn, an outdoor area with space for up to 2000 guests, Radisson Lawn with room for up to 4500 guests, and a pillarless indoor space that can accommodate up to 1000 guests.

Holiday Village Resort

A DESERT WEDDING AT THE WHITE RANN RESORT

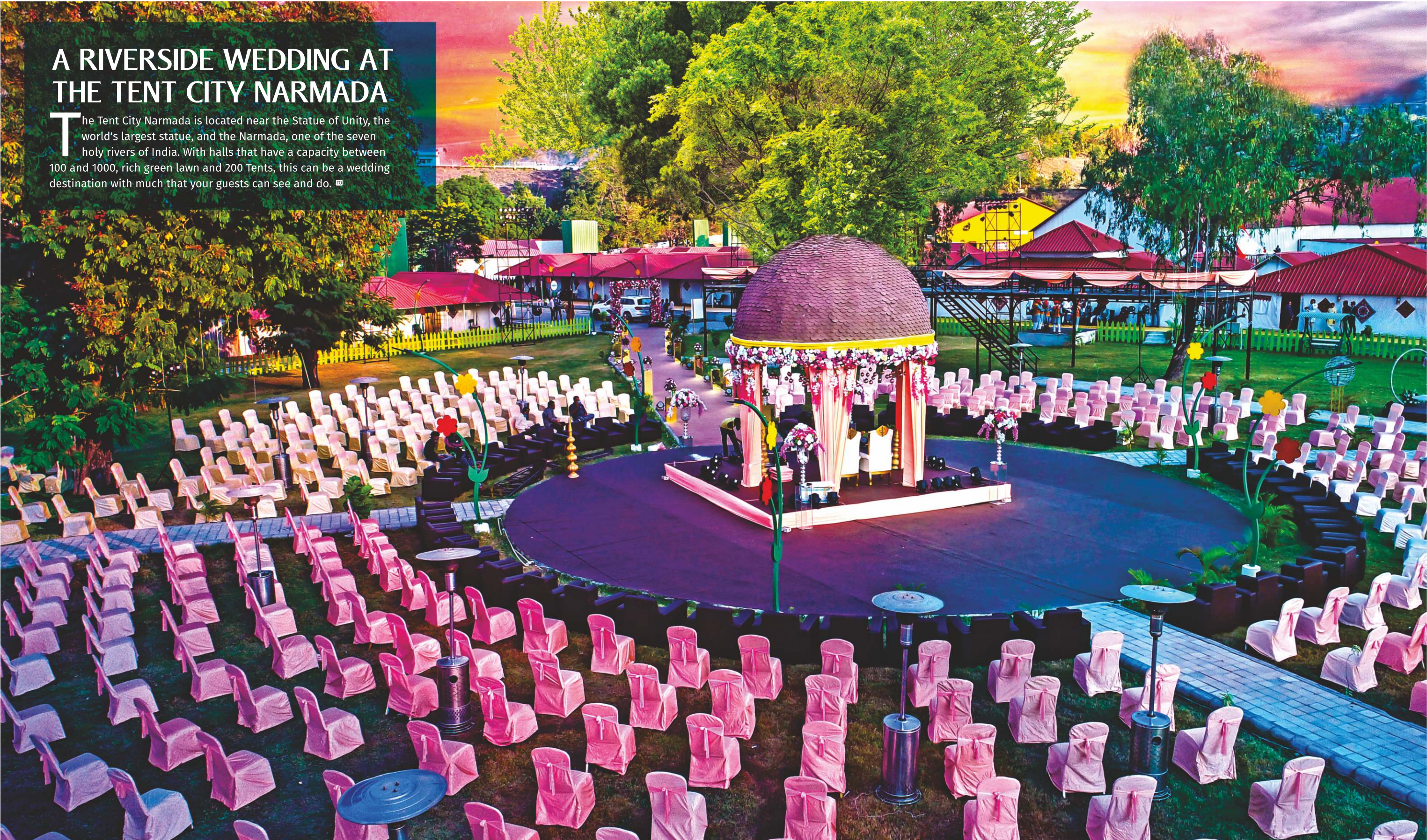
The Great Rann of Kutch is an enchanting place - the salt encrusted desert looks especially beautiful in the moonlight while on dark nights you can enjoy seeing the constellations of stars.

If you are looking for intimate functions away from the hustle and bustle of urban life, White Rann Resort is situated right at the edge of the white desert. The resort has AC cottages and deluxe tented accommodations, areas for dining and ceremonies, and dining hall. Guests can enjoy visiting the Great Rann of Kutch in an open-top double-decker Rann Safari bus.



A RIVERSIDE WEDDING AT THE TENT CITY NARMADA

The Tent City Narmada is located near the Statue of Unity, the world's largest statue, and the Narmada, one of the seven holy rivers of India. With halls that have a capacity between 100 and 1000, rich green lawn and 200 Tents, this can be a wedding destination with much that your guests can see and do.



Far Far Away

A Subterranean MARVEL

It was September 1990. A donkey was threading its way on an open ground in the outskirts of Alexandria.

Suddenly the ground gave way and the animal slid into a hole. Unable to rescue itself, the herder had to dig the hole around to pull that donkey out. But the hole appeared to lead into a deeper

hole. What the animal had stumbled into was to become one of the seven wonders of the medieval world - the catacombs of Alexandria, also known as Komel-Shoqafa or "mound of shards" in Arabic.

The city of Alexandria was established by Alexander the Great in 332 BC. It soon became the cultural and

commercial centre in the Mediterranean region. The city flourished during the Ptolemaic period, named after its founder Ptolemy I who took control of Alexandria after the death of Alexander the Great. The city of Alexandria grew in stature and importance and soon came to be known as the Athens of Africa.



Alexandria, Egypt

The catacombs are situated in the heart of Alexandria, surrounded by modern dwelling units. This subterranean structure has a staircase that spirals deep into the bowels of the earth. It is an underground cemetery consisting of tunnels and rooms with recesses especially gouged out, to insert coffins. The structure reaches a depth of about 115 feet or 35 meters - the height of a 10-storey building. It is built in three levels.

At the bottom, there is a domed circular room, known as a rotunda that leads out to several chambers, almost like a labyrinth. At regular intervals, the walls have been dug out for coffins to be placed. Further, as one goes into the eerie interior, there is a large room, which is a dining hall. It is believed that after the burial and on commemorative days, the relatives and friends of the deceased would come to this room to dine. On the walls of this dining hall are niches to hold the torches for the benefit of the diners. The food would be brought in earthen

pots and jars, along with plates.

After the meal, it would be considered ill omen to bring the used plates and jars back up to the surface. To ward off bad tidings, all the crockery items were broken in the hall itself. When catacombs were discovered, the people found the place was littered with mounds of fragments of pottery, thus giving it the name, "Komet-Shoqafa" or "mound of shards".

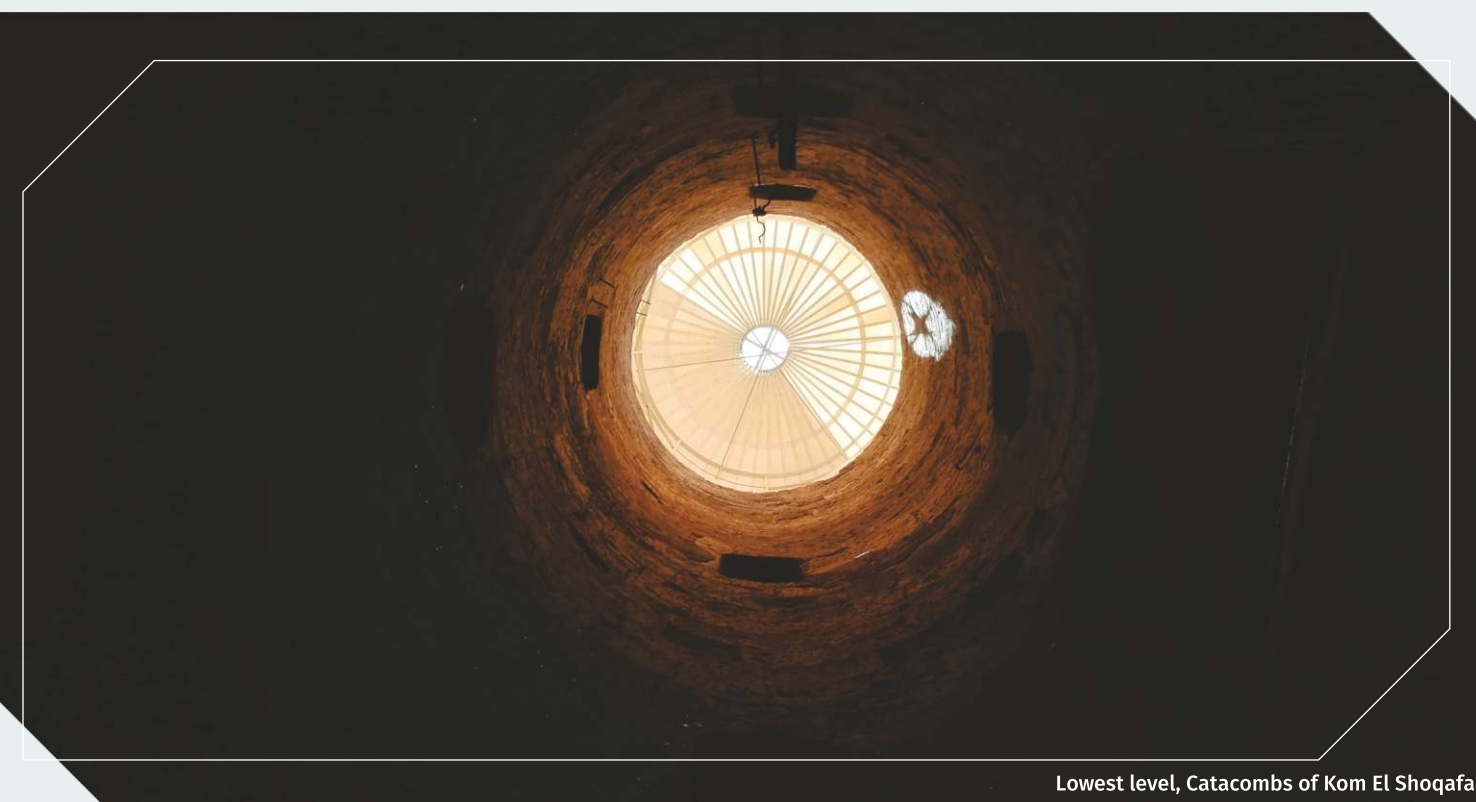
Why was this subterranean structure built at all? Most likely the catacombs started out as a private affair for a noble family of the city of Alexandria. There is a statue of a man and woman in one of the niches of the principal tomb who were believed to be the owners of the tomb. However, with the passage of time, in the 4th century CE, the structure became a public cemetery. For centuries thereafter, the dead were lowered into the catacombs, mummified, and kept in one of the niches. In all, the complex could accommodate 300 corpses.



Outside View, Catacombs of Kom El Shoqafa



The catacombs of Kom El Shoqafa



Lowest level, Catacombs of Kom El Shoqafa

In one of the chambers, archaeologists found large numbers of human and horse bones. It is believed that the remains belonged to the victims, who were massacred by Roman emperor Caracalla in 215 CE. There are stories abound with the reasons for the massacre. Citizens of Alexandria, under the yoke of Romans, were a discontented lot. Out of spite or otherwise, the Alexandrians made jokes about the Roman emperor Caracalla, murdering his brother and co-ruler Geta, whom he had killed in front of their mother. The enraged emperor plotted a deadly retaliation. He invited Alexandria's young men to gather at a designated place, for an inspection for military service. Once they assembled, Caracalla's soldiers descended on them,

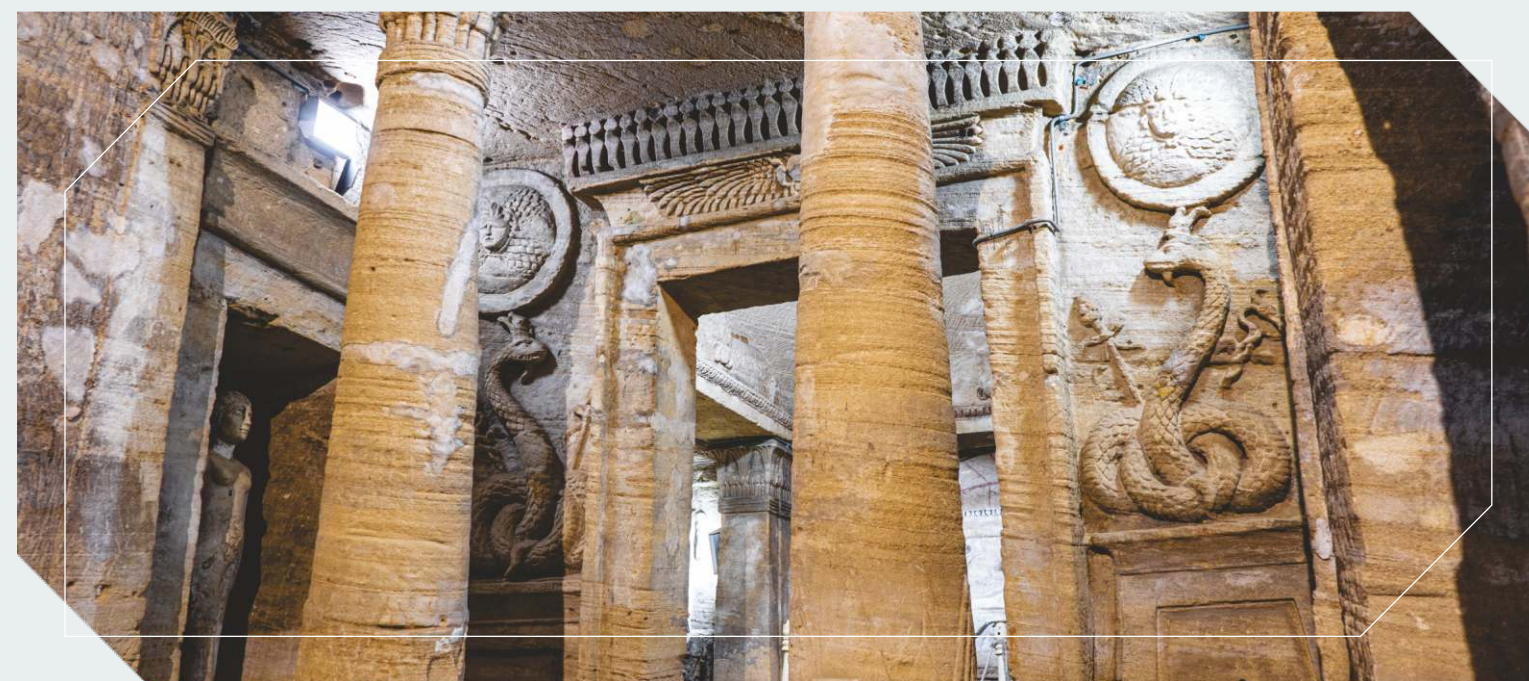
killing all of them. The bodies of the massacred citizens of Alexandria were then thrown into the catacombs.

The bones of the horses, kept in one of the niches can be seen even today. It is believed that the bones may have belonged to one of the star race horses.

Catacombs have a rich display of carvings and statues that depict a mixture of Roman, Hellenistic, Pharaonic, and ancient Egyptian influences prevalent at the time. Some of the sarcophagi are decorated in Roman style with garlands, heads of gorgons, and a skull of an ox. There are depictions of an Egyptian god of afterlife, death and resurrection. Egyptian bull god Apis can be seen receiving gifts from a pharaoh. The walls are rich with relief carvings of Egyptian

religious scenes. One of the sarcophagi has a figure of a reclining woman, believed to be the image of the deceased person. Some sarcophagi have the image of Medusa, the most famous of the monsters in Greek mythology. Whoever gazed into her eyes would turn to stone. The terrifying image of Medusa on the sarcophagi was to discourage grave robbers from desecrating the graves.

With the passage of time, catacombs, due to their association with death, were either avoided or ignored and were buried under the sands of time. However, its serendipitous discovery in the early 20th century brought forth an intriguing structure that comes from the distant mists of time, but still has the power to enthrall the visitor even today. 🏛️



Ruins of Old Alexandria

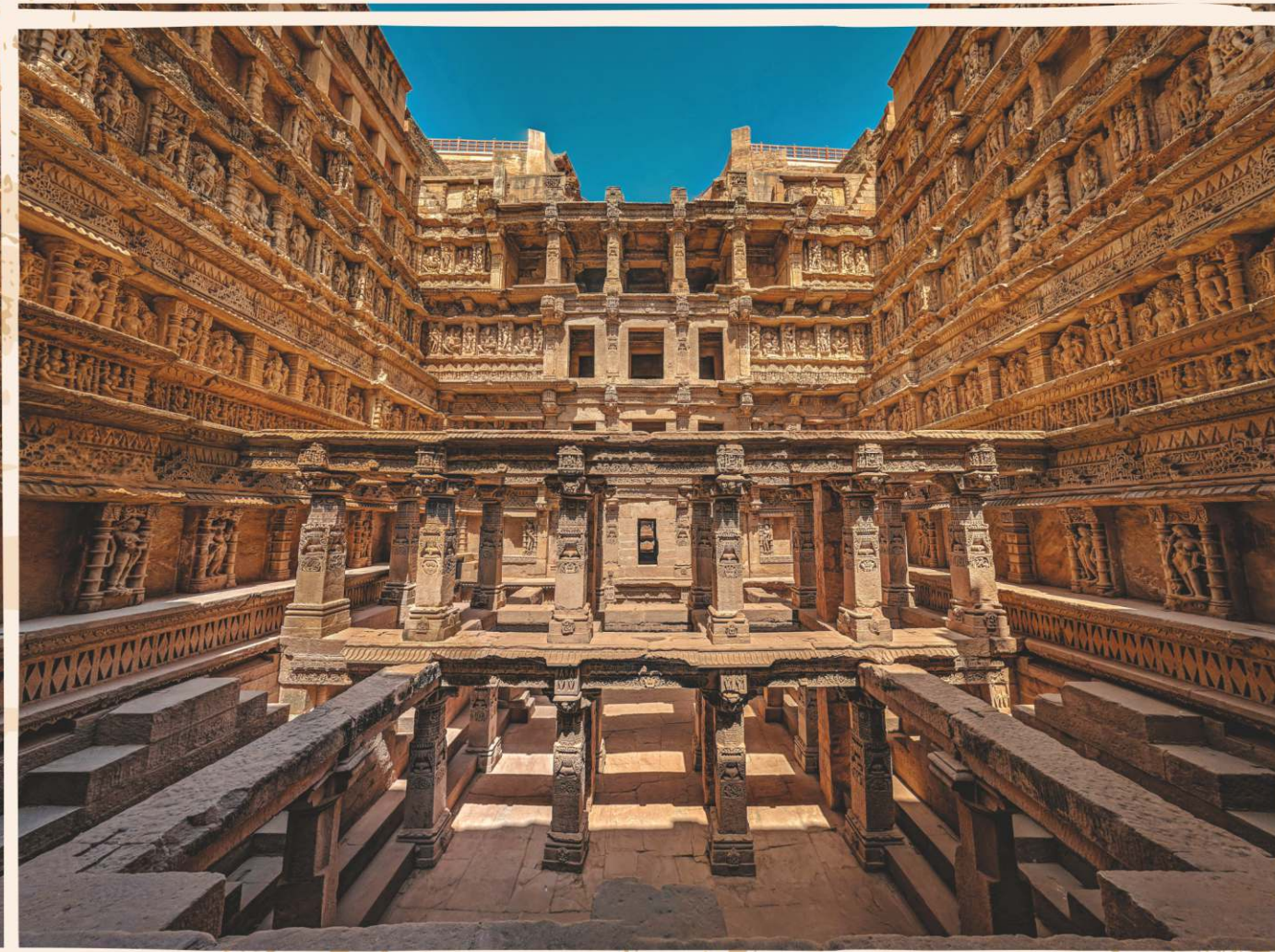


Inside view of Catacombs of Kom El Shoqafa

Source: Lev LennyShutterstock.com

Words by VIJAY KURUP

Puzzling secrets of RANI KI VAV



Rani ki Vav or the Queen's stepwell is situated in the town of Patan in Gujarat. And like most monuments in India, regardless of its antiquity, this stepwell is astoundingly beautiful with intricate carvings. It also reveals the lifestyle of people in the 11th century. But it also withholds many intriguing facts.

The western part of India has scanty rainfall. Stepwells were built for the pilgrims or a drifter not just to satiate

their thirst, but also to offer a temporary succour in their peregrinations.

Sometimes stepwells are built as a memorial to the departed person. Located on the banks of the Saraswati River, this is one of the oldest and well-preserved stepwells in Gujarat. Written documents indicate that Queen Udayamati had built this stepwell in Patan. It also mentions that the stepwell was commissioned in 1063 and took 20 years to complete it. Rani Udayamati

belonged to the Chalukya Dynasty that had ruled large parts of southern and central India between the 6th and the 12th centuries.

However, there is no inscription on the walls of the stepwell that could reveal the name of the person who built this structure. The only evidence that the stepwell may have been built by a queen, is based on a statue found on the premises. The statue appears to be that of the queen.

The contours of the stepwell are unique. A careful examination of the structure would reveal that it was made in the form of an inverted temple. Praveen Mohan, a travel vlogger demonstrated the veracity of this fact. He made a mould in the shape of the stepwell and filled it with plaster-of-paris. The cast was then taken out. When the cast inverted and kept upright, it had all the resemblance of a small sized temple. The

cast clearly displayed different parts of the temple, with the mandap and vimana clearly demarcated. It begs the question, why was a stepwell made to resemble an inverted temple at all?

In the stepwell the statues of men can be seen using modern tools like a torch, protractors for angle measurements, and many other items that bear a strong resemblance to modern instruments. It defies rational

explanation. How are they displayed here in the stepwell? Are they modern instruments? This stepwell was built almost 1000 years ago.

The walls of the stepwell have figurines of voluptuous Madanika. They are often painstakingly carved on the walls of many Indian temples too in various seductive poses exuding feminine charm and grace. They are slim, beautiful and elaborately

ornamented with earrings, anklets, necklaces and belly chains. They can be seen applying some colouring matter on their lips or mascaras on their eyes. A sculpture depicts a woman with her hair wrapped in a towel. In another sculpture, she is drying her hair by using a contraption. The sculptures are compelling in their revelations of quotidian activities of a woman.

Some figurines are very explicit in

revealing the genital parts of the women with the vaginal mound boldly displayed. The statues of men look amorously at the women, some look at them beseechingly. One woman has opened her robe revealing her naked body. On the folds of her robe there is a scorpion. Is it conveying the perils of illicit relationships? Women can be seen handling children and pets. A variety of emotions are displayed on the walls of

this step well. There are statues of Gods too among these figurines, standing in complete oblivion of the distractions around. What is the message being conveyed here? Is it a pointer to the failings and follies of human beings? Is it conveying a message to transcend from earthly desires that can only lead to one's downfall? Is it showing a path to nirvana? So, is this structure also a temple? An inverted temple?



Reportedly the excavations of this stepwell are still not complete. There is a tunnel under the well. There are still many areas left to be excavated and discovered. Sometime after the construction, it is not certain when, but the entire structure was silted up, possibly due to flooding. However, due to the enormity of the work involved in desilting the

stepwell, it remained neglected and was eventually forgotten. When archaeologists Henry Cousens and James Burgess visited it in the 1890s it was completely buried under sand. Only the shaft and few pillars were visible, to indicate the presence of a subterranean structure. Counter intuitively the siltation to a large extent preserved the structure of the stepwell in its pristine condition over

the centuries. The stepwell was rediscovered in the 1940s, and the Archaeological Survey of India restored it in the 1980s.

As a stepwell Rani Ki Vav stands unique among the monuments in India. It has a definite message to convey. Apart from being a place for the weary traveller to rest and quench his thirst, this stepwell is also a place for spiritual awakening. ■





rann utsav

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