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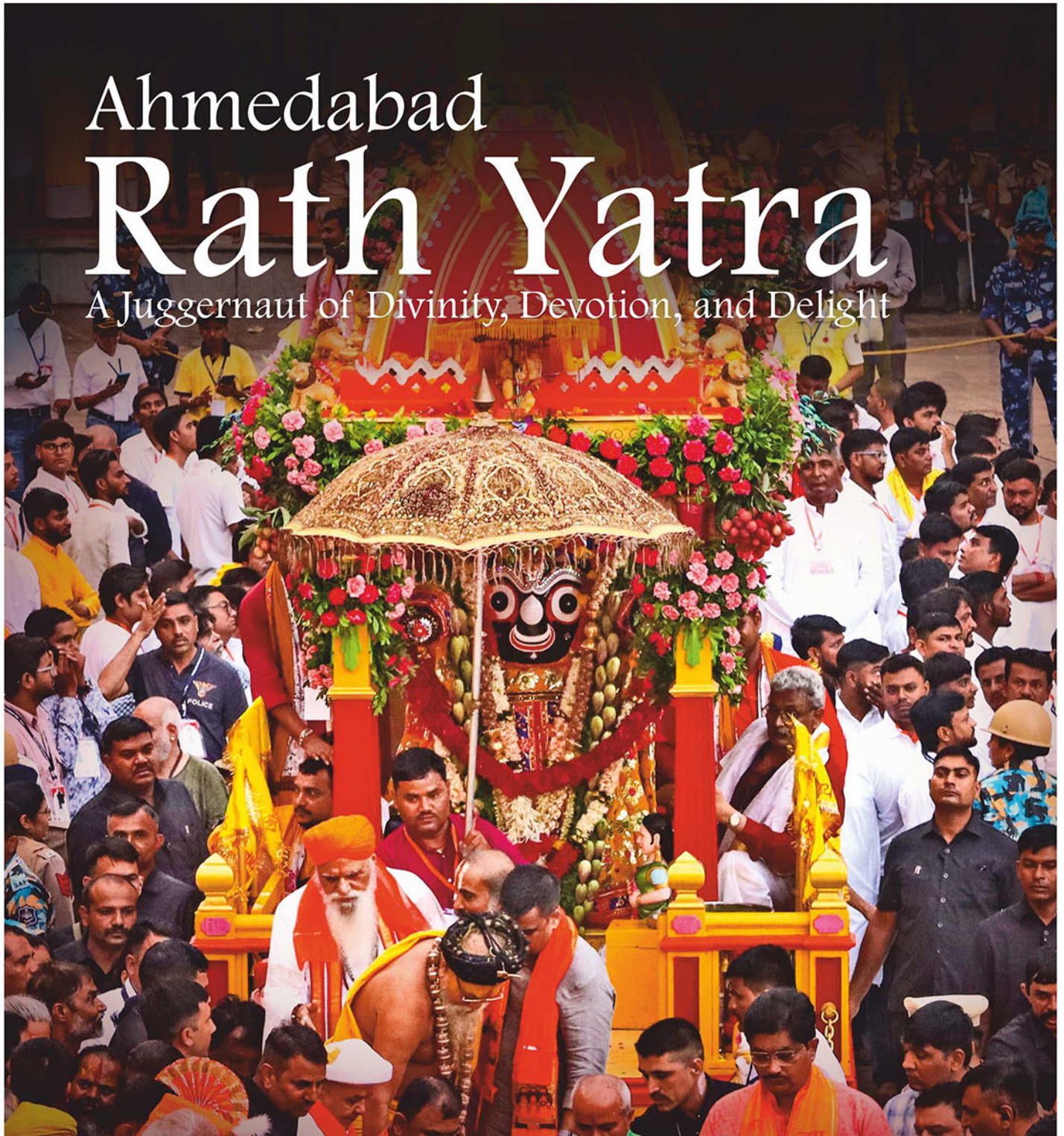
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Ahmedabad

Rath Yatra

A Juggernaut of Divinity, Devotion, and Delight





Photos by Dhaval D. Shah

From Rath Yatra to Reefs : June Journeys Begin

Monsoon has set in. However, it hardly dampens the spirit of a true-blue traveller eager to explore India. I believe this is the right time to plan trips, as popular destinations are less crowded. Moreover, packing becomes easier—no need for full pants, just a couple of shorts and T-shirts. Arguably, this is the best way to travel when the goal is to explore new places.

This month, our cover story has a strong connection with the rainy season: The Rath Yatra of Lord Jagannath in Ahmedabad. Devotees believe that Lord Indra showers monsoon rain on the chariots of Krishna, Baldev, and Subhadra—three divine entities who tour the city. This grand procession also marks the beginning of the Kutchi New Year in Gujarat and is considered auspicious by Hindus across the state. Our special feature on the Rath Yatra includes fascinating facts, figures, and photographs capturing the scale and spirit of this religious juggernaut, which begins early in the morning and concludes by late evening.

Dr Indira Nityanandam time-travels to the glorious days of the Chola dynasty in South India and unearths a gem known to the world as the Gangaikondacholisvaram Temple. One of the 38,000 temples in Tamil Nadu, Gangaikondacholisvaram is a quintessential example of Dravidian architecture—steeped in history, mythology, and magnificence.

Treading the untrodden path, Namrata Shah, our contributor, encourages readers to be adventurous and explore the Western Ghats of India, where a social enterprise is redefining the way travellers experience the region. Namrata also shares a thoughtful list of travel-themed gifts you can give your parents—each option rooted in the spirit of exploration.

The world celebrated International Yoga Day on June 21. To mark the occasion, we interviewed Yoga expert Urmi Pandya, whose entire family is dedicated to this ancient art of aligning the body, mind, and soul in perfect harmony.

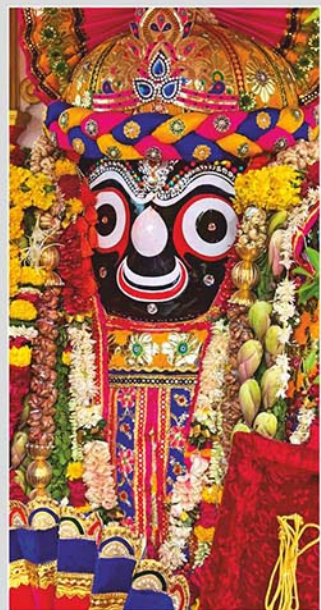
Dr Kirit Trivedi, a retired professor of English and a global traveller, shares his reflections in a powerful poem titled *Serves Them Right*. It responds to the recent terrorist attack on Indians and salutes the Indian Army's fitting reply.

Whispers Around the Reefs of Lakshadweep is a personal account by Madhumay Mallik, a conservation writer and photographer. Madhumay takes us into a magical underwater world full of marine marvels. If you're fascinated by the sea—not what's served from it—this narrative will captivate you with its oceanic detail.

Finally, our Scrumptious Recipe Corner section features four palatable plates: Karela (Bitter Gourd) Skin Pakoras, Watermelon Feta Cheese Salad, Melange Shorba, and Sukhdi.

Read the June edition of *Tourism One* and share your feedback with us at tourismone@praveg.com.

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A JUGGERNAUT OF
DIVINITY, DEVOTION,
AND DELIGHT

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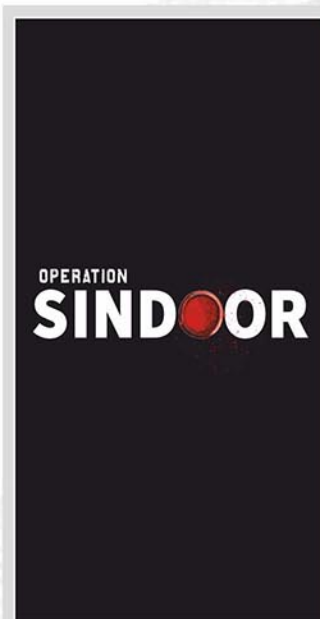
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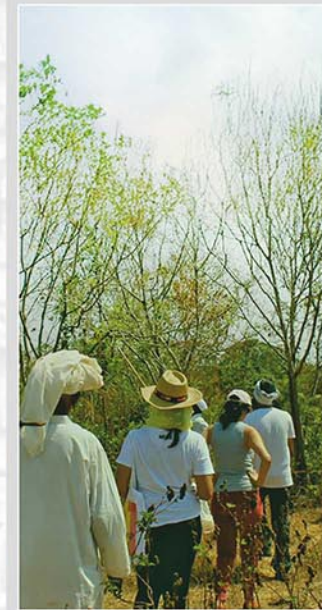
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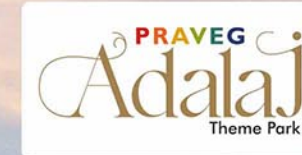
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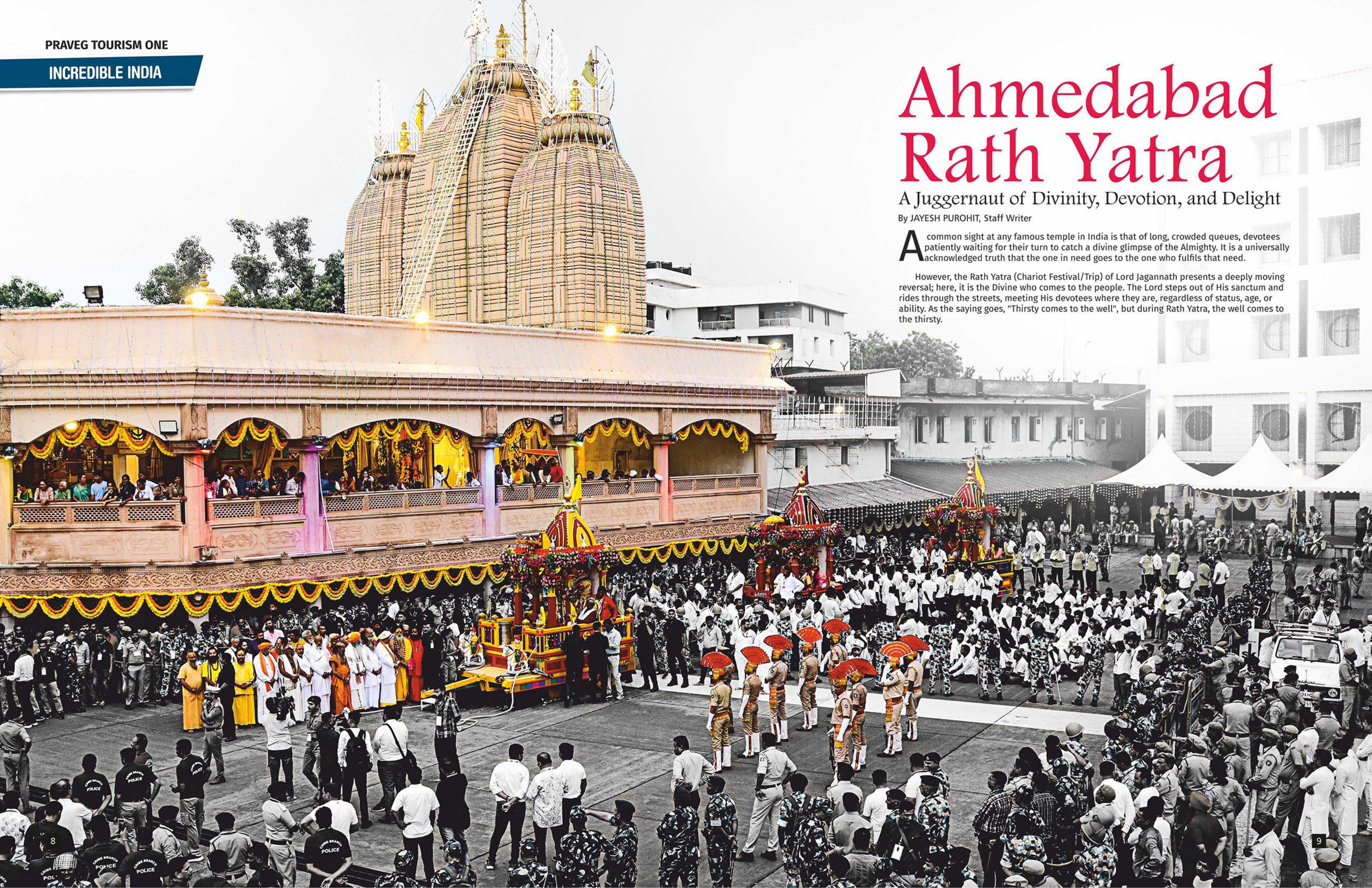
Ahmedabad Rath Yatra

A Juggernaut of Divinity, Devotion, and Delight

By JAYESH PUROHIT, Staff Writer

A common sight at any famous temple in India is that of long, crowded queues, devotees patiently waiting for their turn to catch a divine glimpse of the Almighty. It is a universally acknowledged truth that the one in need goes to the one who fulfils that need.

However, the Rath Yatra (Chariot Festival/Trip) of Lord Jagannath presents a deeply moving reversal; here, it is the Divine who comes to the people. The Lord steps out of His sanctum and rides through the streets, meeting His devotees where they are, regardless of status, age, or ability. As the saying goes, "Thirsty comes to the well", but during Rath Yatra, the well comes to the thirsty.





A city that has enchanted globetrotters for over 600 years with its rich tapestry of history, heritage, culture, and commerce. Among its many vibrant traditions, the Rath Yatra stands out as a spiritual spectacle that continues to inspire millions.

This century-old celebration features majestic Temple Rath (chariots), traditional Akhadas, decorated trucks, caparisoned elephants, Prasad (consecrated food), and an overwhelming sense of devotion.

What began as a symbolic journey of Lord Krishna, accompanied by His elder brother Baldev and sister Subhadra, has today become a beloved festival embraced by the entire city, turning streets into sanctuaries and devotion into celebration.

The temple's history dates back nearly 460 years when Shree Hanumandasji, a Rambhakt Maruti devotee, first established an idol and simple shrine here, giving the early temple its humble origins.



Significance

Rath Yatra was introduced in 1878 by Mahant (Head Priest) Shree Narsinhdasji Maharaj. It is celebrated annually on Ashadha Shukla Dwitiya. Throughout the year, devotees visit the temple for Darshan of Lord Jagannath. On Rath Yatra day, Lord Jagannath comes out to bless the devotees, especially those who are disabled or unable to visit the temple.

Ashadhi Bij is the Kutchi New Year, celebrated primarily by the people of Kutch in Gujarat. It falls on the second day of the Shukla Paksha (waxing phase of the moon) in the Hindu month of Ashadha.

This is the 148th Rath Yatra in Ahmedabad. The infographic takes you on a quick tour of the history & religious significance of Rath Yatra for devotees in Ahmedabad.

The Procession



The procession begins early morning with the Pahind Vidhi (ceremonial sweeping of the path), performed by the Chief Minister of Gujarat.

The procession includes:

- 15 to 20 elephants in decorative attire leading the way
- Decorated trucks showcasing religious floats
- Theme-based Trucks: Trucks with tableau and installations to showcase current affairs
- Prasad truck is loaded with Sprouted Moong, Black plums (Jambu), and Cucumber
- Distribution of chocolates and goodies, toys, school bags, and stationeries for kids
- Akhadas (traditional martial arts groups) performing aerobic stunts
- Bike & bicycle stunts
- Disciples carrying decorative flags of the temple
- Bhajan mandalis, Raas Garba performers, and marching bands

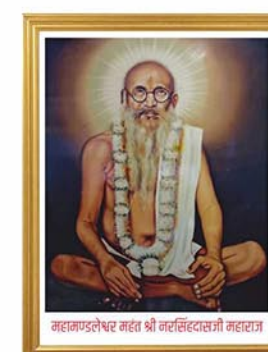
- The Holy Trinity (Jagannath, Baldev, and Subhadra) on beautifully adorned chariots pulled by devotees
- Every year, members from Khalasi (sailors) community pull the three Chariots; this tradition has been upheld for generations
- Stall distributing water, sherbet, and buttermilk
- Watch towers are erected for police personnel, CRPF, and drone surveillance to keep vigil on the route
- Flower shower from the chopper on the chariots and Mahant
- Orange stoles distributed among devotees by Mahant of Jagannath Temple
- The procession halts at Saraspur, where residents host and feed the entire group of devotees
- In the evening, the Rath Yatra returns to the main temple
- Mounted Police (Ghoda Police) spring into action during the Rath Yatra
- Every year, the leaders of the Muslim community present a chariot made from silver to the temple's Mahant



Mahants

Mahants are the head priests of the Jagannath Temple. They, along with their assistants, oversee the temple's daily rituals, traditions, and overall functioning. The position of Mahant is passed on at regular intervals, with each new appointment made by the temple trust.

Here is a list of the Mahants who have served at the temple over the years: 10



Rath Yatra Photos by Dhaval D. Shah / Mahant Photos by Rakesh Bhavsar

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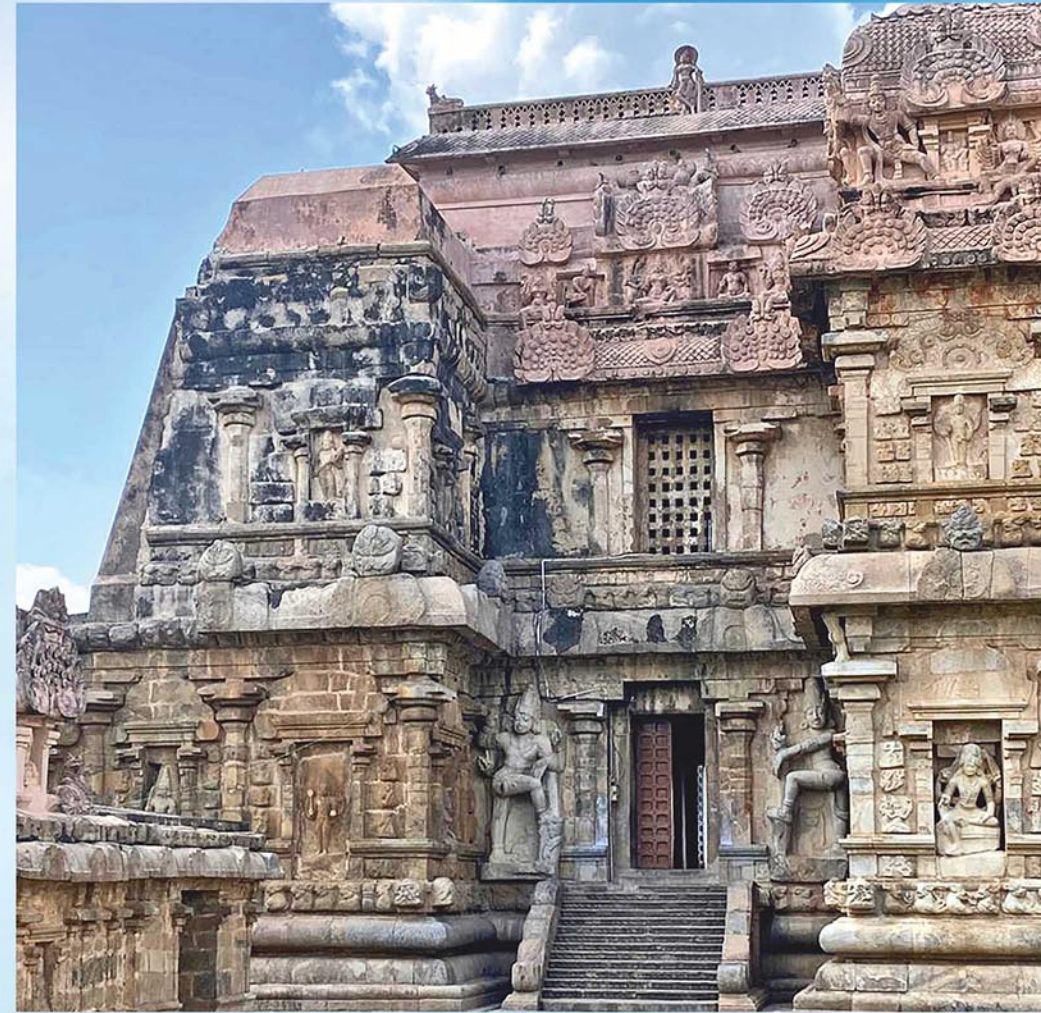


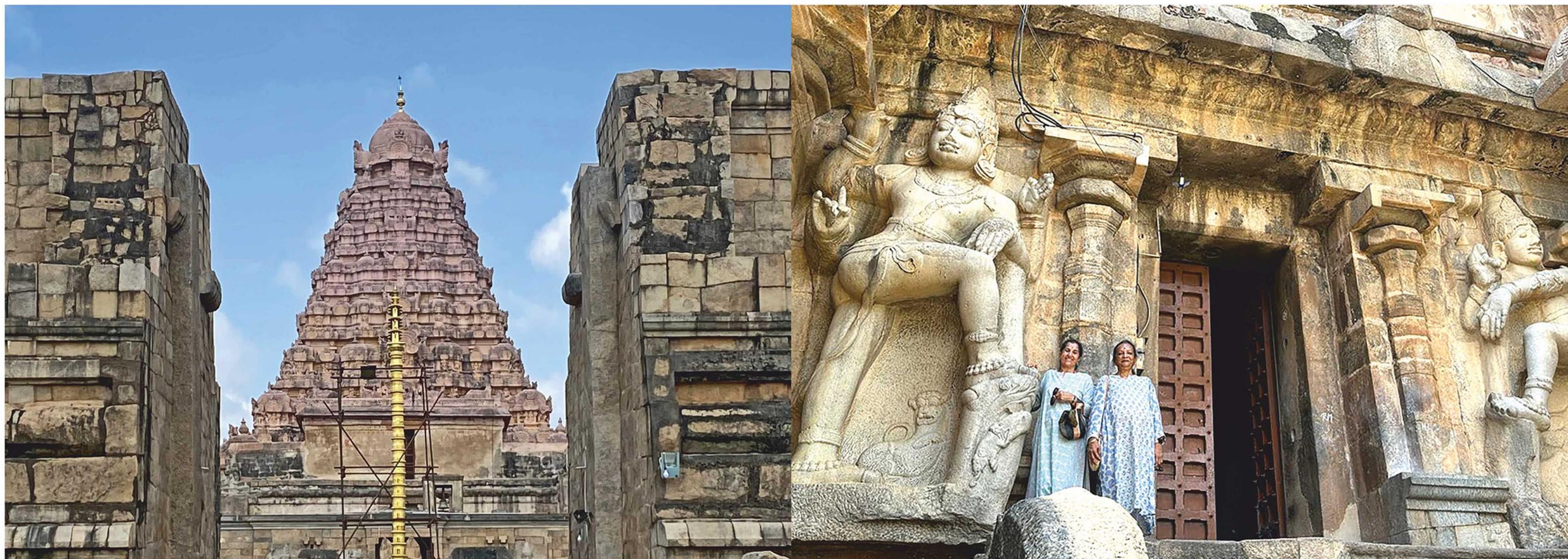
Gangaikonda Cholapuram

Dr. Indira Nityanandam, Contributor

A Great Living Chola Temple

Dr Indira Nityanandam time-travels to the glorious days of the Chola dynasty in South India, and unearths a gem known to the world as Gangaikondacholisvaram Temple. One of the 38,000 temples in Tamil Nadu, Gangaikondacholisvaram is a quintessential Dravidian temple steeped in history, myths, and marvellous architecture. Temple's symmetrical design, cool sanctum, and beautiful sculptures make it a must-visit. Read this article and share your feedback with us at tourismone@praveg.com.





Multiple gopurams and mandapams house the many deities. We see a pillared hall, which is common in later temples, though maybe one of the earliest is here

According to the Tamil Nadu Hindu Endowments Board, there are 38,615 temples scattered all over Tamil Nadu. Many of them are believed to be at least 800 to 2000 years old. The Subramanya Temple in Mahabalipuram/ Mamallapuram is one of the oldest. And each of these temples has its own Sthala Puranam as well as annual festivals. Many of these temples are associated with certain dynasties or specific kings. Gangaikondacholisvaran is one of them.

From the ninth to the thirteenth centuries, with the centre being the fertile valley of the Kaveri (also known as Ponni or golden), the Chola dynasty was indeed an expansive maritime empire and hence called a Thalassocracy.

With mention in the Sangam literature, as students of Indian history we generally read of them along with the Pandyas and the Cheras. Of the Cholas we know that they had numerous naval campaigns, which resulted in the capture of Pegu as well as ports of Srivijaya in Malaysia. This led to political alliances too. We need to look at the heights of excellence achieved during the Chola period in art, religion, music and literature with proof in the temples and sculptures (in stone and bronze), as well as works like *Tolkappiyam* and *Periapuranam* as well as *Kamba Ramayanam*.

During the reign of the Cholas for almost four and a half centuries, temples were built almost all over South India as well as some of

The lingam in the sanctum sanctorum and the Nandi in the courtyard are common features in all Shiva temples

the neighbouring islands. As the Cholas were Saivites, most of the temples are dedicated to Shiva with some minor Vaishnava and Buddhist influences.

Though the Brihadisvara temple at Thanjavur is hailed as the greatest among all of them, we now look at Gangaikondacholisvaram, also known as the Brihadisvara Temple at Gangaikonda Cholapuram. It is located about 280 km southwest of Chennai and 50 km from Chidambaram. It is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Though inland, the temple is near the Kollidam river, within the Cauveri River delta, with access to the Bay of Bengal and through it to the Indian Ocean.

The etymology of 'Gangaikondan' is

important and interesting. It refers to the title adopted by the Chola king Rajendra I (1014-1044CE), son of the great Rajaraja Chola I, (985-1014 CE) and literally means 'one who has conquered the Ganges'. It is a combination or concatenation of four words: Gangai (Ganga), Konda (conquered), Chola (the dynasty) and Puram (city). This actually refers to the city that he founded to commemorate a victory, after which water was obtained from the Ganga. Legend tells us that Rajendra demanded that the defeated kingdoms send pots of water from the Ganga and pour it into the temple well. The victory was over the Pala dynasty. This town (now a small village) became the new capital of the Cholas and remained so for almost 250 years till it was razed to the ground, though the temple was spared and remains intact to this day.



Goddess Saraswati is always found with the Veena in her lap. However, this temple shows her image without Veena

Dedicated to Lord Shiva, the temple was completed in 1035 CE by Rajendra Chola I. This magnificent temple is built on an elevated structure. It is among the largest Shiva temples in South India, and though similar to the Brihadisvara temple in Thanjavur, it is considered to be more refined, even though smaller.

It continues to be an active temple, which means daily rituals as well as yearly festivals are still held here (many of our ancient temples are not active because if the main deity is broken or fragmented, it cannot be worshipped). It is today under the Archaeological Survey of India and is one of the Great Living Chola Temples, along with the Brihadeeswarar Temple at Thanjavur and the Airavatesvara Temple at Darasuram.

A Dravidian style temple, in addition to Shiva, other Hindu deities within the complex are Vishnu, Surya, Durga, Harihar, Ardhanarisvara etc. (I was lucky to have a staff member of ASI present there who agreed to be our unofficial guide: very important though my dear friend (Kamala) and companion on this trip already knew so much!).

The inner sanctum is always cool because it is believed that Chandrakantha or moonstone, a rare and precious gemstone, has been installed under the lingam. The main temple tower is 55 metres tall. The entire imposing building is covered with sculptures. The size of the tower, the bronze sculptures and the numerous inscriptions all contribute to making a visit to this temple noteworthy



Many of our ancient temples are not active because if the main deity is broken or fragmented, it cannot be worshipped

and memorable.

Even to a layman like me, what is most striking is that the entire architecture is in a square plan. The square and the circles within all follow the principles of geometric symmetry. It is believed that some of the mandapas were later added or restored by other Hindu dynasties, and maybe by the British in the nineteenth century.

Multiple gopurams and mandapams house the many deities. We see a pillared hall, which is common in later temples, though maybe one of the earliest is here. The lingam in the sanctum sanctorum and the Nandi in the courtyard are common features in all Shiva temples. However, here the Nandi, made of limestone, is not inside a pavilion

but is open to the sky. Interestingly, Rajendra Chola I ensured that the height of the temple was kept lower than that of the Thanjavur temple as a mark of respect for his father's masterpiece.

Some scholars are of the view that the Tanjore temple is masculine, with its straight lines and angles, while this temple is feminine, with its curvilinear contours.

None of the inscriptions were by Rajendra I, which suggests that the temple was probably not completed during his lifetime.

History and legend intermingle to make a visit to this temple memorable. Other structures, like palaces or the habitation of the common people, are probably scattered around, and we did not visit any of them. 10

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Interview of Yoga Expert Urmi Pandya

By JAYESH PUROHIT, Staff Writer

Yoga is far more than a daily routine or a series of postures

Urmi Pandya is not just a yoga teacher, she's a luminous force whose life flows with the grace, strength, and serenity that yoga inspires. For her, yoga is far more than a daily routine or a series of postures; it is a living, breathing philosophy - a golden alchemy that transforms the body, soothes the mind, and elevates the soul. Every breath she takes, every movement she makes, is steeped in the sacred rhythm of this ancient science.

What truly sets Urmi apart is the way she embodies yoga even through life's most transformative phases. While many women choose to slow down during pregnancy, Urmi flowed deeper into her practice - gracefully bending, breathing, and surrendering to the moment, even in her eighth month. To her, yoga during pregnancy isn't just safe, it's

essential. It nurtures emotional balance, builds inner resilience, and fosters a sacred connection between mother and child. She believes a peaceful womb creates a peaceful world.

Since beginning her yoga journey in 2017, Urmi has crossed milestone after milestone—not just on the mat, but in the hearts she's touched. Her most cherished achievement? Bringing her entire family into this soulful rhythm. Her parents, husband, and in-laws now roll out their mats beside her, breathing together in harmony. In a world that's always rushing, here is a family that has chosen stillness, balance, and breath. A family that flows together, grows together.

Dive into this inspiring conversation with Urmi, and if her story moves you, do let us know at tourismone@praveg.com.





INTERVIEW OF YOGA EXPERT URMI PANDYA

5. Yoga means different things to different people. Some view it as a physical exercise, while others see it as spiritual healing. What does yoga mean to you?

For me, yoga is a way of life—a complete journey of the self, through the self, to the self. It's not just about postures or flexibility; it's about how you breathe, how you speak to yourself, how you manage your emotions, how you connect with others, and how you approach life with awareness and compassion.

Yoga is my space of silence, my tool for healing, and my source of strength. Through yoga, I've learned to connect with my body, quiet my mind, and listen to my soul. It has made me more patient, more grounded, and more grateful. Whether I'm on the mat or off it, yoga keeps me aligned with my inner truth.

6. Do you practice other forms of wellness, fitness, or alternative healing along with yoga?

Yes, I do! While yoga is at the core of my daily routine, I love exploring and incorporating other wellness practices that complement my lifestyle.

I enjoy mindful walking in nature—it's a simple yet powerful way to connect with the earth and clear the mind. I also practice journaling and gratitude writing to maintain emotional balance and mental clarity. Occasionally, I indulge in sound healing and Ayurveda-based self-care rituals like oil pulling, abhyanga (self-massage), and eating sattvic food.

As a wellness coach, I believe in a holistic approach—nurturing the body, mind, and spirit together.

7. How do you balance personal and professional life as a yoga teacher, mother, and entrepreneur?

Balance is not always easy, but it's definitely possible with clarity, discipline, and love. I believe that when you love what you do and do it with purpose, everything finds its rhythm.

1. Let's begin with a bit about you. Could you tell us about your background—where you were born, your schooling, and your educational journey?

A. I was born in Vijapur, Mehsana district, in Gujarat, India. I completed my schooling up to the 12th standard at Ash Secondary School, Vijapur. Later, I moved to Ahmedabad for further studies and pursued my graduation from JG College of Commerce. Alongside academics, I actively pursued dance, learning and teaching, which shaped my creative expression early on.

During college and afterwards, I worked in diverse fields such as the stock market, including at reputed companies like HDFC and Reliance. I also taught 11th and 12th-grade students, managing both academic and creative careers.

2. How did your journey with yoga begin? What sparked your passion for yoga, and how many years have you been practising and teaching it?

A. pivotal moment came while I was teaching a dance class at a friend's studio. One of the students' parents commented, "You have great flexibility!" That one sentence planted a seed. Being deeply curious about life and always eager to explore different paths, I was drawn to entrepreneurship. Out of curiosity and a passion for self-discovery, I began practising yoga in 2017.

For six continuous months, I immersed myself in daily self-practice - reading, studying, and training for over 10 hours a day. That intense internal work helped me realise that although I was a strong practitioner, if I truly wanted to share this gift with others and build a meaningful career, I needed to learn how to teach yoga professionally.

In September 2017, I travelled to the yoga capital of the world—Rishikesh—and enrolled in a 200-Hour Teacher Training Course (TTC) at the Patanjali International Yoga Foundation. That experience transformed my life. I deepened my knowledge of asana, pranayama, meditation, and yogic philosophy, marking the true beginning of my spiritual and professional journey.

After returning to Ahmedabad, I began by offering personal and small-group yoga sessions. Over time, I founded Urmi Yoga Academy and opened the first branch in Ahmedabad.

Today, I proudly teach yoga across the world. I lead classes, workshops, and retreats in Ahmedabad, Rishikesh, Goa, and online across various countries. My students range from beginners to advanced practitioners, and I specialize in teaching authentic yoga with a modern, personalized approach.

3. Yoga is constantly evolving. Renowned practitioners like Bikram Choudhury and B.K.S. Iyengar introduced their styles and postures. Have you ever created or modified any asanas or techniques based on your own experience?

A. At present, my practice is rooted in ancient Hatha and Ashtanga yoga, with a focus on traditional techniques and deep internal awareness. Currently, I'm maintaining a steady and mindful approach, allowing space for alignment and presence. As my journey evolves, I may gradually incorporate variations or structured sequences. For now, it's about cultivating consistency, conscious breath, and honouring this phase of disciplined practice with patience and intention.

4. Your mother is also a yoga expert. Tell us more about her. Has she played a significant role in shaping your journey? How has her presence influenced your approach to yoga?

A. My mom has played such a beautiful role in my life. She has always been my biggest inspiration. I love her even more at this stage of life. At 53, she practices yoga fluently—her flexibility, strength, and mental power are truly amazing.

She began her yoga journey in 2017, the same year I started mine and became a yoga teacher. She used to watch my videos and one day said, "See, I can do this too!" I smiled and replied, "Amazing! I'll teach you from tomorrow." That's how our mother-daughter yoga journey began. I started guiding her with techniques, corrected her postures, and she's been super punctual ever since. She practices yoga daily—never misses her asanas or Surya Namaskars.

Honestly, I grew up watching my father practice yoga, pranayama, and meditation every day. He's always been health-conscious and spiritually aware. But back then, I never imagined I would walk this path too.

In 2017, something shifted within me. I felt a deep calling toward yoga and told my dad that I wanted to make it my life. He asked, "Are you sure?" I said, "Yes, Dad. Yoga is my life now." He smiled and said, "This is the best decision you've made. You'll always be happy with it." And he was right.

Today, not just my parents—my whole family is into yoga: my mom, my dad, my brother, my in-laws, and my husband too. And now, our little Krishna is part of this journey. She's growing up in a home full of love, breath, movement, and mindful living. A family of yogis—it's the most beautiful blessing I could ask for.





My day starts early with my yoga practice and meditation. That gives me the inner strength to handle everything else. I prioritise my family, especially my daughter, Krishna, while also giving my 100% to my work—be it classes, content creation, or planning workshops and retreats.

I'm blessed to have a supportive partner and family who respect my work and help me maintain harmony at home. I also make sure to take breaks, rest when needed, and ask for help without guilt.

Being a mom has made me more efficient, more compassionate, and more connected. I've realized that it's not about doing everything perfectly, but about being fully present in whatever I'm doing—whether I'm teaching a class or feeding my daughter. That presence is the real balance.

8. Do you think yoga has the potential to become India's most powerful cultural export?

Absolutely! Yoga is already one of India's most respected and cherished contributions to the world. Its universal appeal lies in its simplicity and depth. Whether someone is looking for physical health, emotional balance, or spiritual growth, yoga offers tools that are timeless and transformative.

The beauty of yoga is that it transcends religion, age, gender, and geography. It's deeply rooted in Indian philosophy, yet it speaks a universal language of peace, awareness, and unity.

As more people globally seek holistic wellness and meaning in life, yoga is becoming more relevant than ever. With the right intention and authenticity, we can share this ancient science with the world while preserving its essence. I feel proud to be part of that mission.

9. Tell us about a memorable yoga retreat or event you conducted that deeply impacted your students.

One of the most memorable retreats I led was a 7-day yoga and meditation retreat in Rishikesh - the birthplace of yoga. The setting was magical - on the banks of the Ganga, surrounded by mountains and the sound of flowing water.

The group included people from different parts of India and

abroad, each carrying their own stories, stress, and aspirations. Throughout the retreat, we practised asanas, breath work, silence, journaling, and self-inquiry.

On the final day, during a sunset meditation near the river, several participants broke down—not from sadness, but from a deep sense of release and gratitude. One woman told me, "I came here feeling lost and numb. Today, I feel alive again."

Moments like these remind me why I do what I do. Yoga has the power to heal not just the body, but the heart.

10. What's your message to readers who want to take up yoga but feel they're not flexible or young enough?

Yoga is not about touching your toes—it's about what you learn on the way down.

You don't have to be flexible, young, or fit to start yoga. You just need an open mind and a willing heart. Yoga meets you where you are and gently guides you forward. Whether you're 18 or 80, it's never too late to begin.

Start small—maybe with 10 minutes of breath awareness or simple stretches. Don't compare yourself to others. This is your journey, your body, your healing.

Consistency is more important than perfection. And remember, the real yoga begins the moment you close your eyes and connect with your breath. That's where the magic is.

11. For expectant mothers, guidance is essential. What are the safest and most beneficial ways to practice yoga during pregnancy?

For moms-to-be who haven't practised yoga before pregnancy, it's still safe and beneficial to begin with gentle, pregnancy-specific yoga under proper guidance. Pregnancy brings many changes, and the right support can help you feel strong, calm, and confident. Simple things—like eating healthy, getting enough rest, and receiving kind words—also make a big difference.

Starting yoga slowly and mindfully, while listening to your body, can help you stay comfortable and emotionally balanced throughout your pregnancy. With proper care and guidance, both

mother and baby can enjoy a healthy, peaceful journey.

12. Can yoga be practiced anywhere, anytime? Even during the monsoon, when outdoor activities are limited, how can one stay consistent with their yoga routine?

Yes, yoga can be practiced anytime and anywhere. However, when you're just starting out, it's important to ensure your stomach is empty. If practicing around noon, wait at least three hours after a

INTERVIEW OF YOGA EXPERT URMI PANDYA

meal. Ideally, yoga should be done in the early morning or evening. Morning sessions are great for fresh energy and pranayama practice.

Make sure your practice space is safe, dry, and well-ventilated. With these simple considerations, you can easily stay consistent—even during the monsoon.

13. Many people start yoga but struggle to stay consistent. What would you say to those who are irregular, unmotivated, or simply feel too lazy to continue?

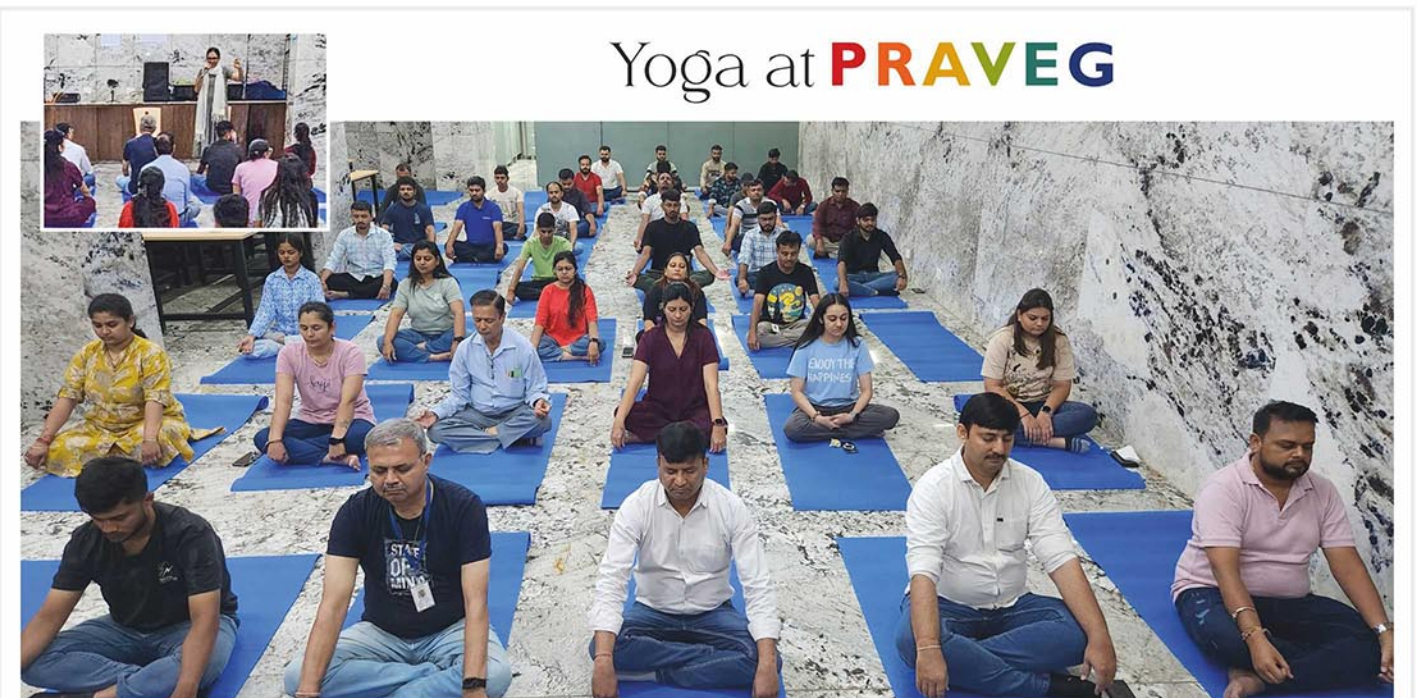
It's common for people to start yoga with enthusiasm but struggle to maintain consistency. Often, laziness or a busy schedule takes over. But think about this—just as we don't skip meals or sleep, we shouldn't ignore our health.

Yoga isn't just a workout; it's a lifestyle practice. Even 30–40 minutes every morning can energise you, lift your mood, and enhance your focus and confidence. If you want to feel active and perform at your best throughout the day, make yoga a non-negotiable part of your daily routine. Take care of yourself from the inside out.

14. You're based in Goa now. What made you choose this vibrant destination as your home? While Goa is famous for its beaches and nightlife, do you think it also fosters a space for peace, wellness, and spiritual practices like yoga?

I'm originally from Vijapur, Mehsana in Gujarat, and lived in Ahmedabad for over 15 years. Today, I divide my time between Goa, Rishikesh, and Ahmedabad—teaching yoga and running my academy in all three locations. So, I wouldn't say I'm permanently based in Goa. Instead, I travel frequently and operate out of these beautiful cities in India, sharing yoga and deepening my practice.

Goa, despite its reputation for beaches and nightlife, has a deeply spiritual and peaceful side. Surrounded by nature, serene beaches, and a vibrant wellness community, it creates a wonderful space for inner work, healing, and growth. 🧘



One of the most hackneyed phrases of our time is 'Health is Wealth'. However, the cliché never goes out of fashion. On the occasion of International Yoga Day, we lived this mantra of health and performed

Yoga and Meditation under the tutelage of Priyanka Jadeja. During this one-hour session, we went through a revitalising experience and achieved mental balance and physical rejuvenation.

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OPERATION SINDOOR



Serves Them Right

by Kirit Trivedi, Contributor

Operation Sindoor – India's resolute response to the recent terror attack in Pahalgam – has stirred the hearts and minds of citizens across the nation. Among the many voices paying tribute to the bravery of the Indian army, Dr. Kirit V. Trivedi once again rises with poetic grace. Known for capturing the spirit of current affairs in verse, the retired professor of English literature offers this poignant sonnet that reflects the collective emotion of a grieving yet unyielding India. True to his signature style, the 'sonneteer' delivers a piece that is both heartfelt and stirring.

Titled 'Serves Them Right', the poem resonates with the national sentiment. In just 14 lines, Dr. Trivedi encapsulates sorrow, rage, pride, and a call for justice. His clever use of the line "Sindoor marks a new red line" is particularly striking—playing on the traditional symbol of marital status now transformed into a metaphor for a boundary of national resolve. By referencing Colonel Sofiya and Vyomika—now household names—he not only honours the valour of our forces but also underscores the power and presence of women in India's military might. Through this sonnet, Dr. Trivedi pays tribute to unity, sacrifice, and the unwavering strength of a nation that refuses to be cowed.

Read this heroic poem by Dr. Trivedi and share your thoughts with us at tourismone@praveg.com.

Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth
In this context, NOT uncouth
SINDOOR marks a new red line
Borders now will be redefined

Innocent tourists killed in cold blood
Our eyes have tears like a flood
Our army is like a solid rock
Can give the enemy a hard knock

Colonel Sofiya and Vyomika get a salute
Precise, disciplined, and resolute
Our army can strike deep inside
The enemy's friends say this aside

In many capitals, fingers are crossed
If you encourage terror, you take the loss.

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From Routes to Roots

Travel the Untrodden Path!

By Namrata Shah, Contributor

Let us travel not to escape life, but to engage deeply with land, food, and people.

When Paulo Coelho wrote, "If you think adventure is dangerous, try routine. It's lethal," he echoed our sentiments on travelling and exploring. Imagined a world without travelling? For a mundane and claustrophobic world that grips us tight to choke, travelling is our catharsis, a way of 'being liberated', and an activity that puts life back into our otherwise hardened minds and hearts.

Often when asked why we travel, pat comes the reply, "Well, isn't it pretty much obvious that one travels for leisure, for fun, to relax, to rejuvenate." For some, exploring a place acts as a rejuvenating force while for some indulging in local cuisine, food and drink, culture and music is a way of living life. And that is the true essence of being a wanderlust - to immerse oneself in the surrounding environment - an environment that sums up everything - flora, fauna, food, drink and the prevailing socio-cultural practices.



Let's rediscover travel as immersion into landscapes, flavours, traditions, and stories that awaken our spirit.

Moving away from our concrete world, we do realise Mother Nature has every trick up her sleeves to surprise us.

And why not?

Be it the pristine blue waters of the oceans and seas or the sparkling beach sands to echoing mountains and deep valleys. From mystic forests and mangroves; to gigantic deserts to magnanimous waterfalls and glaciers; from caves and dunes to volcanoes and auroras - our bucket list will keep adding names. These are just a handful of delights, among the other countless unparalleled creations by Nature along with other manmade marvels that draw us towards them. Just like the Pied Piper who lured with his music, we cannot resist but travel and explore them.

Over the years our way and definition of travel has changed a lot. Given how technology has taken over our lives, we've been trying every moment to escape its fatigue. Travel seems to be the easiest escape; ironically only to be trapped more in its clutches. We've been waiting to shut off the cacophony and immerse ourselves into the tranquillity of undisturbed nature around us, only to add more stress to the environment around us. We are compelled to show our escapades on the 'Gram', because if it is not on the Gram, have we travelled? And in our attempt to keep pace with the ever-expanding bucket list of influencers and social media personalities, we've not only added more FOMO to our lives but also added FOMO to the places we visit.

We are no longer travellers - We are now tourists who see what we've come to see.

To match up with the pace of 'being on everyone's list' and to cater to everyone's needs, it is sad to see nature's brilliant creations trimmed or altered to convert it into a 5-star luxury experience. We hardly know that in our eagerness to explore the wilderness of nature, we have invariably carried baggage of industrialisation and modernisation. Bit by bit, year after year, the original unspoiled Indigenous essence of the place is replaced by what we call 'Modern Day Living Amenities.'

But what if we become travellers again? What if we see travel as a wholesome experience, as a means of engagement with land, food and people?

India is a land blessed with rural and tribal heritage. Every nook and corner springs up surprises for us and each region, offering a different flavour of lifestyle, food, cultural and ethnic practices, sums up the same emotion - worshipping Nature and her way of survival, sustenance and proliferation.

Kutch in Gujarat is one such place where rural life and

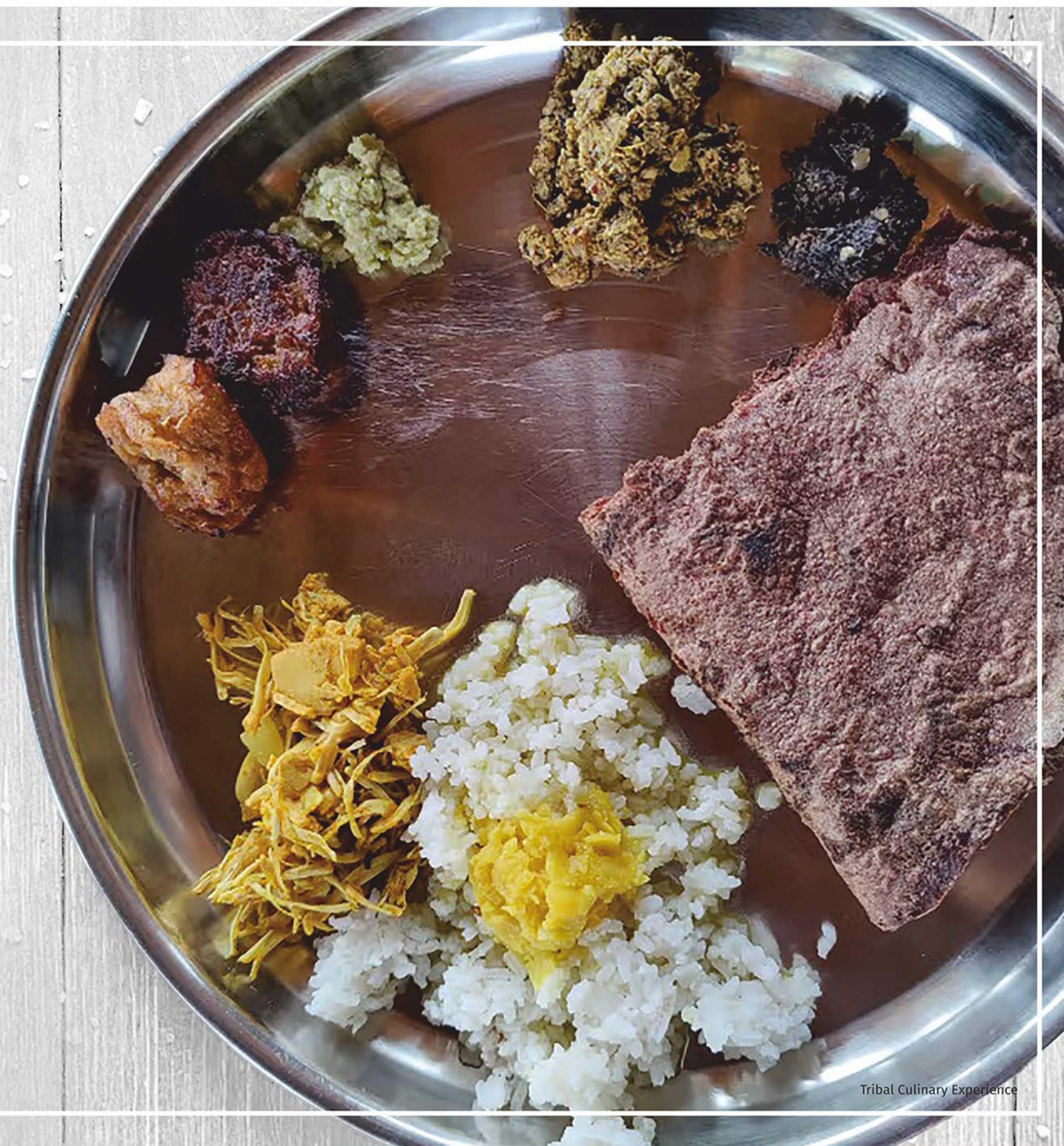
its serenity have attracted thousands. Remote places in this arid region offer visitors an experience that not only broadens their perspective about life but also enriches individuals with socio-cultural fulfilment. It speaks volumes about frugal living and how even in these meagre resources, one finds contentment. Ever tried piping hot Bajra Rotla (pearl millet bread) made on tavdi (perforated cooking pan made of mud) with some Dora / Kerda Pickle (berry pickle or Indian green berries)? The soul-stirring sweetness and delight one finds in this simple local preparation lingers on the taste buds keeping memories of Kutch fresh in our heart and mind.

India's Western Ghats in the state of Maharashtra are another such treasure trove. While we think of the Western Ghats, especially places like Karjat, Mahabaleshwar, Lonawala, Nasik, Raigad, Wai and many similar others, we often associate them with either a particular season or a quick weekend getaway. Hardly do we think of it as a blessed land, inhabited by amazing flora and fauna and these majestic ghats being called home by many indigenous tribes.

How can we speak about Western Ghats or Maharashtra and not think of Mango? Talking about these 'Aam' (Mango in Hindi) has never been 'Aam baat' (trivial talks). We all have our favourites and, Alphonso or the Aaphus mango variety from Ratnagiri, Devgad region of Maharashtra is inevitably the forerunner. But what if you were told that Akole region in the Western Ghats is home to over 60 varieties of mangoes - each of them distinct in shape, size and of course, the flavour. While we, the not-so-Aam Janta know hardly one or two out of these and have only those handful, all of these amazingly delicious yet different varieties are kept alive and are still popular among the local Koli tribal communities of Western Ghats.

If you ever wish to explore the true Western Ghats, you can do it the Monks Bouffe way! Monks Bouffe, a social enterprise in Mumbai, is redefining how we see Western Ghats. Slowly and quietly they are working to make travel not just another leisure activity, instead as an experience of what it is to be in complete harmony with the environment and its offerings. Their activities highlight the importance of Food, Farming (Ecological) and Nutrition and range from Forage in the forest walks to helping farmers/farming enthusiasts get back to organic farming. They're ensuring a synergy between the environment, and its people and also helping them grow, flourish and prosper.

This World Environment Day let us get back to travelling and ditch the tourist mindset. Let us truly live instead of merely existing because the undisturbed, not-so-modern life underlines that living in synergy with our environment is different but certainly not difficult. 🌿



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Gifts Guide TRAVEL-THEMED GIFTS FOR PARENTS *Who Raised Adventurers*

By Namrata Shah, Contributor

Parents are a different tribe, aren't they? They make difficult tasks look easy, and when asked to handle the easy ones, they aren't always confident. Take, for example, the daunting task of raising an adventurer like you — see, there's that grinning smile on your face, isn't there?

No matter how difficult it might have been during their time — raising children, taking care of growing family needs, and seamlessly managing social commitments — they never showed the slightest discomfort. They've always made their children the priority and ensured they got the very best.

Since they've always strived to give you the best of everything, why not now gift them the best of memories? Nothing beats travel when it comes to creating unforgettable moments. So, why not use this magic wand and surprise our parents with little — or not-so-little — gifts this Global Parents Day?

Here's a handy list to help you pick the most appropriate ones for your beloved parents.



Escapades and Experiences

Let your parents put on their travelling boots — if not literally, then at least figuratively! From luxury indulgences to adrenaline-pumping adventures, from serene spa retreats to awe-inspiring wonders of the world, it's time to gift unforgettable experiences to parents.

Still need help? We're sure this curated list will tempt you to pack your bags too!

- Hot Air Balloon Rides
- Private Yacht Rides
- Luxury Spa Retreats
- Helicopter Rides
- Private Jungle Safaris
- First-Class Flight Experiences

Travel Books

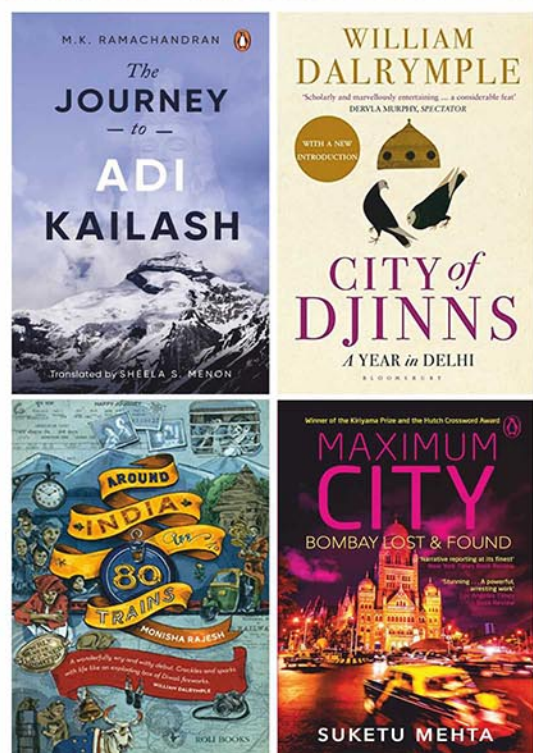
"That's the thing about books. They let you travel without moving your feet." — Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*

Why not take this thought to heart and gift your parents some great travel books? There's no greater joy than going around the world from the comfort of a reading chair, perhaps with a hot beverage in hand.

Travelogues, history books, travel guides, magazines, fiction — one can never run out of good books about exploration and travel.

Here are a few suggestions:

- **The Journey to Adi Kailash**
M.K. Ramachandran
<https://www.amazon.in/dp/0143461346>
- **City of Djinns - William Dalrymple**
<https://www.amazon.in/dp/9385936557>
- **Around India in 80 Trains**
Monisha Rajesh
<https://www.amazon.in/dp/8174369139>
- **Chasing the Monsoon**
Alexander Frater
<https://www.amazon.in/dp/B004TSAR7K>
- **Maximum City**
Suketu Mehta
<https://www.amazon.in/dp/0144001594>
- **Eat, Pray, Love**
Elizabeth Gilbert
<https://www.amazon.in/dp/1408844486>
- **Lonely Planet Traveller Magazine**
<https://www.amazon.in/dp/1838694595>



Travel Gear and Accessories

We often underestimate the utility of good travel gear. It not only helps pack essentials safely, but also ensures optimal use of space, making travel lighter and hassle-free. Apart from saving space, some accessories also reduce physical strain — exactly what we want for our parents, don't we?

We've curated a list of travel gear and accessories that would be a great help for your parents while travelling:



Compression Socks
www.amazon.in/dp/B06XHFBGKW?th=1&psc=1



Anti-theft Slash-proof cross body Bag/Backpack
www.amazon.in/dp/B0F6N8M9Z?th=1



Waterproof Phone Pouch
www.amazon.in/dp/B09YV6DZ5M?th=1



Packing Cubes
www.amazon.in/dp/B0CJC3478N?th=1



Pocket Blanket
www.amazon.in/dp/B08TQ853ZH



Personalised Luggage Tags
www.amazon.in/dp/B0BQWJQ5G3?th=1

Gadgets

Wondering what difference gadgets can make for your parents? Wait until they receive one from you. Before you know it, they'll be planning their next trip just to put your gift to use!



Collapsible Water Bottles
www.amazon.in/dp/B0D459RLP4?th=1



Tripods / Drones
www.amazon.in/dp/B0F9X7N9C7



Power Banks
www.amazon.in/dp/B0DFGZW6JG?th=1



Noise Cancellation Headphones
www.amazon.in/dp/B0C664NHV6?th=1



Mini handheld Portable Fan
www.amazon.in/dp/B0DJXH3YV4?th=1



Portable Multiplug Chargers
www.amazon.in/dp/B082WYMTWF?th=1

Travel holds a different meaning for everyone. While we chase new experiences every time we step out of our homes, we also chase memories that stay with us forever.

Here's to passing on that same joy, and the same excitement of discovery, to our parents.

Happy Gifting! 10

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Sukhdi

A Bite of Gujarati Warmth

By JAYESH PUROHIT, Staff Writer

Made simply from wheat flour, jaggery, and ghee, this melt-in-your-mouth square, also called Golpapdi or Gurpapdi, evokes early morning warmth and comforting memories of temple prasad in Mahudi.

Ingredients:

For Sukhdi
(serves ~20–25 pieces)

- **Whole-wheat flour** : 2 cups (≈250 g)
- **Ghee** : 1 cup (≈240 ml) (plus extra to grease plate)
- **Grated jaggery** : 1 cup (≈200 g)
- **Milk** : 2 Tbsp (optional; stops jaggery from turning chewy)
- **Cardamom powder** : ¼ tsp (optional aroma)
- **Almond slivers or dry coconut** : 2–3 Tbsp for garnish (optional)

Benefits

- Nourishing energy from whole-wheat flour & jaggery
- Healthy fats from ghee
- Easy to digest and made from minimal, unrefined ingredients
- Long shelf life. Ideal for travel.



Tips for Perfection

- Low-heat roasting avoids burning and preserves aroma.
- Switch off flame before jaggery: Prevents chewiness by avoiding jaggery over-caramelization.
- Well-grated jaggery melts faster and produces smoother bars.
- Extra ghee gives softer texture.
- Variation: Use amaranth (rajgira) flour during fasts for a gluten-free version.

Serving Suggestions

Enjoy Sukhdi warm with a cup of tea, or pack a few squares as a travel snack; it stays good at room temperature. In Gujarat, it's often had fresh at Jain temples after offerings, and folk wisdom says don't take the warm prasad home or you might invite bad luck!

Method:

Prepare plate: Grease a thali or baking plate lightly with ghee.

Roast flour: In a heavy pan over low–medium flame, melt ghee then add flour. Roast 10–17 minutes, stirring constantly, until golden-brown and fragrant; light in texture.

(Optional) Add milk & cardamom: Lower heat, stir in milk and cardamom immediately after roasting to cool slight and infuse flavour.

Finish with jaggery: Turn off heat, then quickly add grated jaggery. Mix thoroughly; heat from flour melts the jaggery; avoid cooking further or sukhdi will turn chewy.

Set and cut: Pour mixture onto greased plate, smooth surface with back of spoon. Let sit ~5 minutes until warm, then cut into squares or diamonds.

Garnish & store: Top with almond or coconut. Cool completely, separate pieces, and store in an airtight container.

Karela Skin Pakoda

(Crispy Bitter Gourd Peel Fritters)

Travel-inspired snack that transforms leftover karela skins into crunchy delights.

By JAYESH PUROHIT, Staff Writer

Waste not. Leave wanting more. These Bhajiyas are crunchy, tangy, and utterly snackable; a witty twist on sustainability in the kitchen. It turns leftover bitter gourd skins into a snackable & light appetizer.

For Soaking & Prep

- **Karela skins** : from 4 large bitter gourds
- Salt – 1 tsp

For Pakora Batter

- **Besan (gram flour)** : 2.5 Tbsp
- **Split moong dal** : 1 cup (soaked 3–4 hrs, drained)
- **Raw mango** : 2.5 Tbsp, finely chopped
- **Cashews** : 2 Tbsp, chopped
- **Red chilli powder** : 1.5 Tbsp
- **Coriander seeds** : 1 tsp, lightly crushed
- **Fennel seeds** : 1 tsp, crushed
- **Green chillies** : 2, chopped
- **Fresh coriander** : ¼ cup, chopped
- **Salt** : to taste
- **Baking soda** : a pinch (optional, for extra crispiness)
- **Oil** : for deep frying



Benefits

- Converts food scraps into a delicious snack
- Retains karela's potent health benefits
- High in fiber, aids digestion & immunity
- Protein-rich (lentils & cashews)
- Gluten-free if using naturally gluten-free dal

Tips & Variations

- Want less bitterness? Soak strips in salted water for 10 minutes before squeezing.
- For a crispier texture, add a pinch of soda water to the batter.
- Swap raw mango with 1 Tbsp amchur (dried mango powder) if raw mango isn't available.
- Turn it gluten-free by using only moong dal and skip besan.

Method:

Prep karela skins: Rinse and salt them lightly; rest 10 min, then squeeze out excess moisture.

Soak & grind dal: Wash soaked moong dal and coarsely grind with a splash of water to form a thick paste.

Make batter: In a bowl, mix dal paste, besan, chopped raw mango, cashews, chillies, coriander, chilli powder, crushed spices, salt, and baking soda. Rest 5 min.

Fry fritters: Heat oil in a wide pan. Using wet fingers or a spoon, drop small portions of the mixture into hot oil. Fry on medium heat until golden brown, then drain on paper towels.

Serve: Enjoy hot with tamarind-date chutney, mint-yogurt dip, or ketchup.

Enjoy this delightful, memory-making treat!

Watermelon & Feta Salad

Best Served Fresh & Chilled

A light, vibrant dish that sings of summer breezes and sun-drenched memories.

By JAYESH PUROHIT, Staff Writer

Summer is a flavour. This Watermelon & Feta Salad celebrates summer with its sweet, juicy melon, creamy feta, crisp cucumbers, and fragrant mint or basil, all tied together by a zesty lime-honey vinaigrette. Instantly refreshing, this salad captures Mediterranean sunshine in every bite. It's perfect chilled for brunch, a picnic, or as a carefree side at a backyard barbecue.

Ingredients

- For the Salad**
- **Watermelon, cubed :**
4 cups (~1 small melon)
 - **Cucumber, peeled & cubed :**
1-2 cucumbers (~2 cups)
 - **Feta cheese, crumbled :**
½ cup (~110 g)
 - **Fresh mint leaves, chopped :**
2 Tbsp (or basil as an option)
 - **Thinly sliced red onion :**
¼ cup (optional)
- For the Dressing**
- **Olive oil :**
2 Tbsp
 - **Lime juice (or lemon) :**
1 Tbsp
 - **Honey :**
1 tsp (optional for mild sweetness)
 - **Salt & pepper :**
to taste



Benefits

- High in hydration and electrolytes (watermelon & cucumber)
- Rich in antioxidants (vitamin A, C, lycopene)
- Good source of calcium & protein (feta cheese)
- Supports heart health & immunity
- Low-calorie, nutrient-packed

Method:

- High in hydration and electrolytes (watermelon & cucumber)
- Rich in antioxidants (vitamin A, C, lycopene)
- Good source of calcium & protein (feta cheese)
- Supports heart health & immunity
- Low-calorie, nutrient-packed

Notes & Variations

- Add-ins:** Try avocado, basil, jalapeño, or balsamic drizzle for creative flair.
- Onion trick:** Soak red onion in lime juice for 10 min to soften its bite.
- Mint alternatives:** Basil works beautifully and adds a different herbal note.
- Leftover tips:** Prep produce and dressing ahead, but assemble and dress just before serving to avoid sogginess.
- Enjoy this chilled summer staple that which is as quick as it is captivating.

Melange Shorba

Protein-rich soup made with a medley of lentils and vegetables

By JAYESH PUROHIT, Staff Writer

Here's a recipe for Melange Shorba—a light, creamy, and protein-rich soup made with a medley of lentils and vegetables. This comforting Indian dish is ideal for chilly winter evenings. The refreshing touch of lemon and the aroma of fresh coriander not only soothes the stomach but also delights the taste buds. Try it once, and you'll savour every last spoonful.

Ingredients

- 1 tsp Split Moong Dal (Moong Dhuli)
- 1 tsp Red Masoor Dal
- 1 Onion
- 1 Tomato
- 1 inch Ginger
- 4 – 5 cloves of garlic
- 1 – 2 Green chillies
- 1/2 tsp Black Pepper Powder
- 1/2 tsp Red chilli powder
- 1/4 tsp Turmeric Powder
- 6 -7 Almonds Blanched
- Salt to taste

- Tadka**
- 1 tsp Ghee/ Oil for tadka
 - 1/4 tsp Kashmiri Red Chilli Powder
 - Fresh Coriander Leaves for garnish
 - 1 Lemon



Method

- Wash the dals and roughly chop the vegetables and almonds. Pressure cook everything (except tempering ingredients) with 3 cups of water for 5 whistles. Let the pressure release naturally.
- Blend the cooked mixture until smooth, then strain to extract the clear soup. Discard the pulp.
- For tempering, heat ghee, add Kashmiri red chilli powder, and pour over the shorba. Stir in lemon juice, garnish with coriander and crushed pepper. Serve hot with toasted bread or parmesan sticks.

Tips for melange shorba recipe

- Feel free to customise the recipe to suit your taste.
- Swap coriander leaves with basil or even rosemary for a twist.
- You can use just one type of dal if preferred, and a tablespoon of coconut milk can be added to elevate the flavour of the Indian lentil soup. ¹⁰

Courtesy: <https://www.indianfoodforever.com/>

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Whispers Around the Reefs of Lakshadweep

Life Underneath the Waves

By Madhumay Mallik, Contributor



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At least a dozen curious eyes were wobbling in and out of the shadows, cautious, yet equally fascinated by my presence. As long as I kept moving, they kept their distance. I needed to calm myself to draw out the inhabitants, and soon enough, they were poking all around. I was surrounded by a group of surge damselfishes, the most spirited dwellers in the coral reefs of the Lakshadweep Islands. Highly territorial, these small fishes are well known for their curiosity. I was an alien in their world, and they knew I was interested!

The marine world had always fascinated me, and as luck would have it, this was the second time in as many years, I was snorkelling around the atolls of Kavaratti, one of the 36 islands in the Lakshadweep archipelago. Emerald green from above and a burst of colour and life underneath, this is among the most biodiverse marine ecosystems in India. Coral reefs have been a lifelong fantasy, and to see them come alive around me was nothing short of magical.



Colonies of Fish in the Coral Reefs, Lakshadweep

Diving into the Reefs of Lakshadweep



Moray Eel, Lakshadweep

It was the perfect day for a dive in Kavaratti. The cool, soft wind and minimal sea current made it feel as though I was swaying in a hammock. With safety checks complete, Vishnu, my PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) instructor, indicated that we deflate and descend. More than anything, I could already see a whole new world looming up. Soon, I was kneeling on the glittering white sand reef, taking a moment to simply observe and absorb colours I wouldn't have known to have existed, burst into view

with pastel wrasses, captain parrotfishes, dusky fin hinds, yellow-edged lyretails and a dazzling array of butterflyfish, bannerfish and surgeonfish. An eagle ray, too, glides gracefully past. The reef itself, a living, breathing and sentient being, was popping with colours – blues and reds, against the white sandy bed, and the glittering mesh of sunlight from above, made the most glamorous of displays. I was in awe the entire time.

Underwater, conversations take the form

of sign language, teaching you to take notice. Unlike on land, this is a world where you have to open your eyes, stay calm, be mindful of your surroundings and use your mouth to breathe. Once you are one with the ways that the reef works, you begin to hear its many whispers – the blubber among Christmas-tree worms, squirrel fishes inside coral crevices, the snapping of crabs and a range of grunts, purrs and croaks. A healthy coral reef system is, in fact, a noisy place. After all, the more the residents, the more stories there would be to share.

The most incredibly biodiverse spaces in the world

While coral reefs cover less than 0.1% of our oceans, they are the most incredibly biodiverse spaces in the world and support as much as 25% of all marine life. Yet over the past few decades, we have been steadily losing this vital ecosystem to accelerating climate change and global warming. Rising sea temperatures have been turning these colourful reefs into ghastly spaces. Adding to this is the threat of overexploitation of marine resources and pollution.

Awareness on the importance of coral reefs

In Mithapur, Gujarat, a team from Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) has been working with the forest department and local community to recover the reefs through artificial nurseries and declaration of no-fishing zones. In the past 17 years, the project team has been able to create a total of 2,110 artificial reefs spanning more than 5,300 sq. m, leading to an increase in the lost marine biodiversity in the area. Across India's coast and islands, organisations like WTI have been working to raise awareness on the importance of coral reefs and bring the community together for the common cause.

Saving our reefs and, in turn, ourselves will require collective effort. As Sir David Attenborough explains, "the most important place on Earth is not on land, but at sea". The oceans are our only hope against the climate crisis, and each one of us has a role to play.

The Equally Mysterious Tide Pools of Tinnakkara



Staghorn Coral (Acropora Cervicornis)

Above the surf, tide pools are unquestionably the best way to initiate yourself to the marine realm. My first experience with tide pooling was at Narara Marine National Park in Gujarat, back in 2016. It was a backpacking trip, my first ever, across Gujarat. I vividly remember lifting a pufferfish into my palms and bursting out in awe at its emerald green eyes. It was like looking into a galaxy just inches away from you! Narara was also the first place I felt the power of the tentacles of an octopus.

This time around in Tinnakkara, the spectacle was even more unique. Apart from the wolf crabs, sea urchins and sea stars, this was the realm of blue dragons, moray eels and peacock mantis shrimps. The blue dragon, or the Pteraeolidia semperi, is a species of nudibranch that can directly harness the sunlight and has been a thing of

fascination to many scientists.

To me, the multitude of blue hair-like tubes and filaments running across its body made it look nothing short of a fictional animal that is aptly named after. Skittering across the tide pool and hunting underneath dead coral boulders were the peacock mantis shrimps. From above, they looked unassuming. However, as has been my habit, every movement deserved closer attention. The moment I lowered myself to the shallow tide pool, in front of me was the creature of my wish-list.

The peacock mantis shrimp is known to possess the superpower of the most excruciating punches in the animal world, perhaps second to the pistol shrimp. This little marvel can match the speed of a .22-calibre bullet at about 50 mph and uses it to crack shells and stun small fishes. You don't

want to be within its striking range! With its beautiful peacock-like patterns, this creature was certainly among the highlights of my trip, and I spent a good amount of time following them around.

Leopard morays, on the other hand, were always a treat to watch. Snake-like in appearance and equally intimidating with needle-like teeth lining their mouths, they evoke caution and curiosity. When they were out in the open, mostly near the shallow pools formed near rocky beaches, I ensured not to intrude into their territory. The waters were clear, and on a fortunate day, I witnessed a moray curling around an Indo-Pacific sergeant, another common reef fish in the atolls of Lakshadweep. The struggle lasted about a minute before the moray retreated into its coral burrow with its head hanging out, keeping check on its neighbourhood.

But the Magic is Disappearing, Faster Than We Can Imagine

But all wasn't good beneath the waves. I also witnessed the truly silent spaces in what was once a bustling underwater ecosystem. These were the spaces where the reef had been dead and colourless for a while. There were no fish around – only brown algae

dangling on the skeletal remains of the corals. Under one such overarching reef, crept a silhouette of what I would later figure out to be a porcupinefish. Lurking in the shadows, I was at once taken aback. I made several attempts to get closer, but at the same time, apprehensive

of the strange creature, the silence and lack of colour around added to the eeriness. Porcupinefish, while known to be passively aggressive, are the loners of the marine community, and the lack of life around probably made them the perfect recluse for the species. ¹⁰

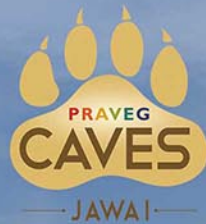
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