

Gujarat

The unspoiled trails of wonders

Nestled on the banks of the mighty Narmada, Gujarat, also known as the 'Jewel of Western India', is one of the most sought after tourist destinations in India. Gujarat is full of surreal natural beauty with Rann of Kutch and Saputara Hills to adorn the state. Birthplace of great figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Vallabhai Patel, this state truly has a lot to offer to the tourists. Often, one must have heard of the campaign, 'Kuch din to guzaariye Gujarat mein (Spend at least some days in Gujarat)', the state is definitely worth a few days stay as it will cast a spell on your touristy mind while forcing you to stretch your stay. Here is a list of best offbeat places in Gujarat which you must visit:





RANI KI VAV

The UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the finest stepwells of the country Rani kiVav is an incredible example of the kind of water conservation that was practised in India during the ancient times. Interestingly, Rani kiVav was commissioned by Rani (Queen) Udayamati in 1603 in the memory of her husband and King Bhimdev I of the Solanki dynasty. This stepwell built in Maru-Gurjara architectural style is situated in Patan. The 'vavs' of Gujarat weren't only used for collecting water and socializing, they hold spiritual significance as well. Here visitors can find carvings of stone deities. The steps begin at ground level, leading the visitors down through several pillared pavilions accompanied by the breeze to reach the deep well below. Rani kiVav is designed as an inverted temple and is adorned with over 800 elaborate sculptures among seven galleries. Dasavataras or ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu is the stepwell's central theme that includes Lord Buddha. The avatars are accompanied by 'sadhus', 'brahmins' and 'apsaras' adorning them. A special attraction lies at the water level where visitors will come across a carving of Sheshashayi-Vishnu, where Vishnu is depicted reclining on the thousand-hooded serpent Shesha, it is said he rests in the infinity between ages.

LAXMI VILAS PALACE

Laxmi Vilas Palace is an exquisite building with unparalleled opulence and splendour. It was built in the Indo-Saracenic school of architecture. Laxmi Vilas Palace is reputed as the largest private dwelling constructed till date and is four times the size of Buckingham Palace. It remains the residence of the royal family of Baroda. Its ornate Darbar Hall is decked with a Venetian mosaic floor, Belgium stained glass windows and walls with intricate mosaic decorations; it is sometimes the venue of music concerts and other cultural events. Outside of the Darbar Hall is an Italianate courtyard of water fountains. Laxmi Vilas Palace houses a display of an extraordinary collection of old armoury and sculptures in bronze, marble and terracotta by Fellici. The Palace compound which is of over 500 acres houses several significant buildings including MotiBaug Palace, Maharaja Fateh Singh Museum building and LVP Banquets & Conventions. The palace also houses Gaekwad Baroda Golf Club. Maharaja Fateh Singh Museum contains a marvellous collection of paintings by Raja Ravi Verma. The collection includes portraits of the Royal family as well as paintings based on Hindu mythology which Raja Ravi Varma was renowned for. The museum also houses works of foreign art and copies of famous masterpieces of Italian Renaissance. Maharaja Fateh Singh Museum also has a headgear gallery where vibrant headgears from Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra collected by Maharaja RanjitsinhGaekwad are displayed.





POLO MONUMENT AND VIJAYNAGAR FOREST

Situated within the forest of Vijaynagar, the temples of Polo were built between 10th and 15th centuries under the Gurjara-Pratiharas and later the Rathores as a hiding place from enemies, citizens, wives and even from the sun. While there are several medieval temples in the polo region of this period, the most famous are SarneshwarMahadev temple, LakhaDera Jain temple and Shiv Shakti Temple (also called Sun Temple). Structure and design of the temples reveal Islamic traces in the use of domes and lattice screens; it also follows the layout of traditional Hindu temples. The dry mixed deciduous forest in Gujarat spread across 400 sq km Vijaynagar Forest is most lush between September and December after the monsoon rains when the rivers are full but at any time of the year, it provides a rich wildlife experience. There are over 450 species of medicinal plants, around 275 of birds, 30 of mammals and 32 of reptiles. Visitors can spot bears, panthers, leopards, hyenas, waterfowl, raptors, passerines and flying squirrels. During winter migratory birds occupy the forest whereas during the rainy season there are wetland birds.



CHAMPANER-PAVAGADH

The deserted city of Champaner is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. With some area perched on a rocky hilltop and lined with forts, mosques, temples and palaces, Champaner-Pavagadh Archaeological Park is located in Panchmahal district. It is situated around the historical city of Champaner, it was founded by VanrajChavda, the most prominent king of the Chavda Dynasty, in the 8th century. A major area of Champaner lies in ruins today, with the remains of numerous old mosques and palaces reflecting a beautiful blend of Islamic and Jain tradition. The Kalika Mata Temple, located on top of the 800 m (2,600 ft) high Pavagadh Hill, is a significant Hindu shrine in the region. Here visitors can witness 11 different types of heritage monuments belonging to the 16th century such as tombs, gateways, mosques, temples, fortresses and walls, palaces and pavilions, helical wells, custom houses. Kevda Masjid and Cenotaph, Jami Masjid, Lila Gumbaj Ki Masjid, Pavagadh fort, Lakulisa temple and Helical Stepwell are some of the popular places to visit in Champaner-Pavagadh Archaeological Park. Also here you can find many Chalcolithic Indian Sites from the Stone Age era.



MANDVI BEACH

Located close to the Arabian Sea, Mandvi Beach offers absolute bliss and tranquillity. Mandvi is famous for its beach and centuries-old shipbuilding yard. Although it is a lesser-known beach, it provides various avenues for amusement. At the Mandvi Beach travellers can indulge in thrilling water sports such as surfing, skiing, speed boating, water scooting, parasailing as well as camping adventures or to simply chill with family or friends. Watching the sunset from this beach while walking barefoot on the golden sand, is a simple pleasure that should not be missed. The accommodation options available at Mandvi beach range from posh beach resorts to budget cottages. Gaze at the windmills and birds. Take camel rides by the beach shore which is a unique experience. Tourists can also visit the nearby Vijay Vilas palace which is a representation of the opulent architectural style and design.

GIR NATIONAL PARK

One of the largest domains of the ferocious Asiatic Lions, Gir National Park is like a jewel of Gujarat. The national park is spread across an area of 1,412 sq km of land. Along with witnessing lions in all their glory, this forest is also home to over 300 avian species such as Great horned owl, Crested serpent eagle and other members of the cat family such as leopards. There are 29 species of reptiles, 33 species of mammals, 93 species of invertebrates, 96 trees and 448 flowering plants. The local Maldhari community has lived here for generations and coexists magnificently with the wilderness. They sustain themselves by grazing their livestock and harvesting what they need from the forest. Also, the national park is notable for its silk cotton trees; its bright orange flowers add dashes of colour to this dusty brown landscape. The best time to go for jeep safari at Gir National Park is between March and May.

NARALA ISLAND

The Narala Island and Pirotan are located in the Arabian Sea near the shore of the mighty state of Gujarat. It falls under the jurisdiction of Jamnagar district of the state and is one of the very few islands of the area where entry is permitted. It is a small island just three sq.km in area and is characterised by mangroves including species of Ceriops, Avicennia and Rhizophora. It is also a region of high tides therefore, swimming for long hours and long distance should be avoided at all costs. The main attraction here is the holy shrine of Khwaja Khizer Rahmatullahialaih. Another important site is the 25m high lighthouse which was used for navigation. It is a protected marine area and thus, special permissions are required to visit this island. However, if you do get the permission then winters is the best time to visit.



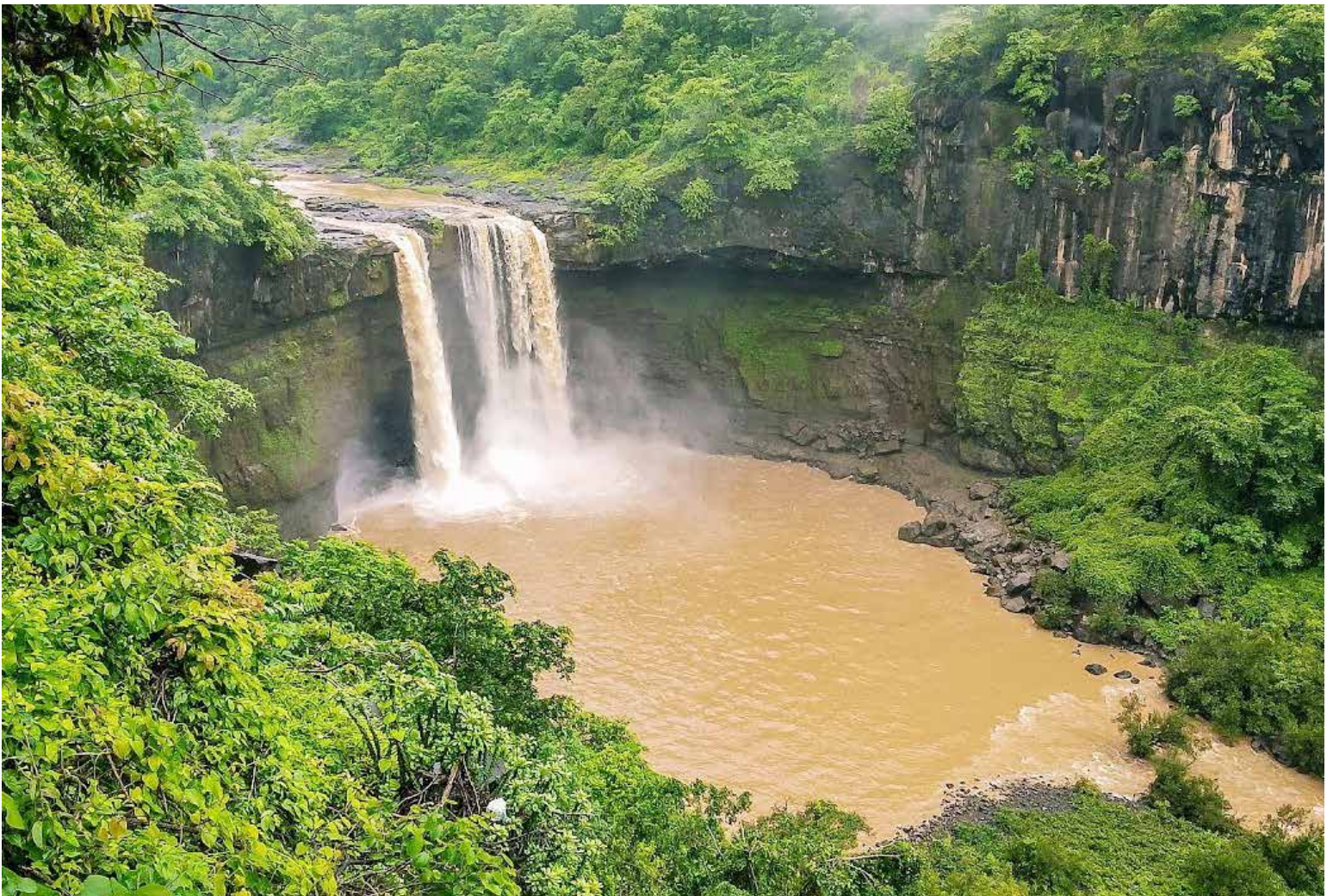
NAVLAKHA TEMPLE

Navlakha Temple is situated in Ghumli and built in the 11th century by Jhetwa Rulers. It is devoted to the Sun God, Lord Surya. It is deemed to be one of the oldest sun temples of Gujarat. It is believed to have the largest foundation base of all the temples in the state. Earlier, it had a beautiful arch at the entrance which was destroyed with other parts of the temple when Ghumli was attacked. The pillars and balconies are still examples of awe inspiring beauty. Many sculptures are present within the premises. The statues of Brahma – Savitri, Shiv – Parvati, Vishnu- Lakshmi are the main attractions. Unique to Solanki style of architecture, three intertwined elephant tusks can also be spotted here. The authorities have taken good care of the site and have restored most parts of the temple.



PATAN

Patan is an ancient town located in Gujarat, which was founded by Chavda Rulers in 745 AD. For quite a long time, it functioned as the capital but was destroyed in an attack in 13th century. A new town was formed but many buildings of the area are still in ruins. This has been declared a World Heritage Site. Patola of Patan is another important tourist attraction in this region and apart from these, many stepwells, temples and lakes are present which attract several tourists. The area of the old city is a site of archaeological importance and must be visited by all the history buffs. Modern day Patan has all that must be present in a modern city and accommodation is easily available besides, reaching Patan should also not be a problem.



GIRMAL WATERFALL

Girmal waterfalls are at an approximate distance of eight km from the village of Nishana. With a total height of more than 100 feet, this is the highest waterfall in Gujarat. The spectacular natural beauty of this place will leave you completely mesmerised. Due to the height and fast speed of the water, the weather is often foggy and a rainbow can be easily seen. The best time to visit is the monsoon season. The surrounding area is an amazing picnic spot. Lush green trees surround the waterfall. This is an amazing getaway for the weekend. Many tourist attractions such as Gavdahad View Point, Purna Sanctuary, Dang Darbar, Saptashringi Devi Mandir and Botanical Garden are nearby. This place is well connected by roads and reaching here should not be a problem.