

# TODAY'S traveller

CORPORATE BUSINESS, AVIATION, MICE & LEISURE TRAVEL MAGAZINE

APRIL 2022 - ₹50

**GUJARAT -  
A WILDLIFE  
WONDERLAND**

**VALLEYS  
OF INDIA**

**WELLNESS  
DESTINATIONS**

**A TRAVELLER'S GUIDE TO  
CULTURAL INDIA**

TODAY'S  
traveller



**14<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL  
TODAY'S TRAVELLER  
AWARDS 2022**



**SEPTEMBER  
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# GUJARAT

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# GUJARAT - A WILDLIFE WONDERLAND

Skirted by the Arabian Sea and the Rann of Kutch, Gujarat is landscaped by a vast terrain of forests, mountains, rivers, and waterfalls, which makes it an ideal home for splendid wildlife as well as one of the most important hotspots of biodiversity in India.

## TT BUREAU

The vast wildlife of Gujarat holds a variety of flora and fauna with over 2,758 species of animals, more than 498 species of birds, including endangered avifauna like Great Indian Bustard, Macqueen's Bustard, Houbara Bustard, Lesser Florican, and Demoiselle Crane and a huge range of amphibians, reptiles, insects, fishes, and many more.

Gujarat is famous for being the last home of the majestic Asiatic Lion and the Asiatic Wild Ass. The state has 4 National Parks and 21 Wildlife Sanctuaries that include Gir Forest National Park, Marine National Park, Wild Ass Sanctuary, Nal Sarovar Birds Sanctuary, and other well-known sanctuaries and national reserves.

The famous Rann of Kutch, situated in the region of the Thar Desert is a salty marsh area perfect as a wildlife haven, particularly for the endangered population of Wild Asses.

### GIR NATIONAL PARK

The king of the jungle resides in this dry deciduous forest region. Home to the rare species, the Asiatic Lion, the Gir

National Park is the only abode of the Asiatic Lion in its natural habitat. As of June 2020, the estimated population of Asiatic Lions in Gir was 674. The other famous big cat of the Gir forest is the Leopard, a solitary animal difficult to spot and well known for its hunting skills.

### LITTLE RANN WILD ASS SANCTUARY

Home to another precious ecosystem and holding the only remaining population of the Indian Wild Ass, The Wild Ass Sanctuary in the Rann of Kutch region in Gujarat has over 3,000 Indian Wild Asses in the Sanctuary. This quiet haven is home to 32 other types of mammals including Chinkara, Desert Fox, and much more.

### THE VELAVADAR BLACKBUCK NATIONAL PARK

One of the smallest National Parks in the country, covering an area of 34 square km, the Velavadar Blackbuck National Park is an amazing reserve for naturalists and wildlife enthusiasts. Velavadar is a grassland that is one of the finest places to see Blackbucks in their natural habitat.





**THE JAMBUGHODA WILDLIFE SANCTUARY**

Ringed by lush forested hills, like Teak, Mahua, and Bamboo thickets the Jambughoda Wildlife Sanctuary in Panchmahal is a magnificent wildlife reserve, which is home to Wild Boar, Nilgai, Jackal, Hyena, Barking Deer, Sloth Bear, Chausingha and Leopard.

**THE NALSAROVAR BIRDS SANCTUARY**

One of the largest wetland sanctuaries in the country with 120.82 square km of lake, flat plains, wetlands, and marshes, the Nalsarovar Birds Sanctuary is a brilliant bio reserve where you can spot Ducks, Geese, Eagles, Spoonbills, Cranes, Pelicans, and Flamingos. You can often see Wild Ass and Black Buck grazing in the Sanctuary.

**THE SHOOLPANESHWAR SANCTUARY**

Spread for over 608 sq km, this rich deciduous forest with tall trees, rippling streams, and breath-taking waterfalls is home to the shaggy sloth bear. The sanctuary holds over 575 species of flora and 230 species of fauna and is a must-visit in Narmada.

**THE BARDA WILDLIFE SANCTUARY**

Considered a second home to the Asiatic Lion, the lush Barda Wildlife Sanctuary is a great attraction for nature lovers as they will be captivated by this splendid reserve that has over 650 plant species.

**THE JESSORE SLOTH BEAR SANCTUARY**

Located at the foot of the ancient Aravalli hills, the Jessore Sloth Bear Sanctuary consists of mixed deciduous and desert thorn forests and is a natural home to the endangered Sloth Bear and many other rare species of flora and fauna.

**VANSDA NATIONAL PARK**

Home to over 115 species of birds, the Vansda National Park is a green oasis of lush vegetation, tall trees, flowers, and a wide range of flora and fauna. Visitors can enjoy the birdlife paradise as they spot the Great Black Woodpecker, Emerald Dove, Grey Hornbill, Racket-Tailed Drongo, Paradise Flycatcher, and Leaf birds.

**MARINE NATIONAL PARK**

Spread over 458 sq km, India's first Marine Wildlife Sanctuary and first Marine National Park is a wonderland holding seven species of mangroves that provide nursery and shelter to prawns, fishes, birds, and other marine life, including colourful sponges and corals. Visitors will be awe-struck looking at all the unimaginably rich marine life. Many colourful species of the marine world are spotted here during the low tide.

**THE GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD SANCTUARY**

This 2 sq km Bird Sanctuary is one of the smallest bird sanctuaries in India. The Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary is one of the two sanctuaries for the conservation of the Indian Bustard and serves as a perfect adobe for the birds as it feeds on the cereal crops that grow in this semi-desert region.

**GAGA WILD SANCTUARY**

This bird lovers' paradise is an ornithologist's dream. This is a must-visit Sanctuary as it is home to over 88 bird species, like the Great Indian Bustard, Larks, Partridges, Sand Grouses, and Flamingos.

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RAJASTHAN

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# CITY OF MAHARAJAS - JAIPUR

'Jaipur', which is the capital city of Rajasthan is a city with its own magnificent grandeur and majestic history. It is a city that sings the glory of great Indian kings and every atom of its soil carries the spirit of sacrifice.

## TT BUREAU

The City of Jaipur is a remarkable instance of indigenous city planning and construction of the 18th century as it was designed in a grid model according to traditional Indian Vastu Shastra - the Hindu science of architecture.

'The pink city', 'Paris of India', and in the great physicist Dr. CV Raman's words 'The Island of glory' is located just 167 miles from the capital of India, New Delhi. It holds iconic monuments and is designated as a 'world heritage site' by UNESCO in July 2019.

It serves as one of the most famous tourist destinations in India and also is a part of the golden triangle tourist circuit with Delhi and Agra being the two other cities of the triangle.

## HISTORY

It was named after the Rajput ruler Jai Singh II the ruler of Amer who also founded this city in 1727. The king shifted his capital from Amer to Jaipur due to the growing population

and scarcity of water. It took four years to complete the construction of major roads, offices, and palaces.

Divided into nine blocks, this city contained two blocks for state buildings and the rest for the public. The city was painted pink during the rule of Sawai Ram Singh I to welcome HRH Albert Edward prince of wales in 1856. Finally, it became the capital of the Indian state of Rajasthan in 1956 after its independence from the British.

## CULTURE

The heritage city of Jaipur is a fascinating mix of tradition, culture, and urban finish, even as it modernises and blends the old with the new. From its food to clothes, from jewelry to shoes, from art to literature this city has it all. If you want to experience the royal treatment by yourself, then welcome to this city of the most democratic country in the world which still offers you a gist of royalty with its nature and serves your sight with the glorious palaces once belonging to the Maharajas.



## FAIRS AND FESTIVALS

You can witness a large number of fairs and festivals here, mostly belonging to the Hindu culture ready to mesmerize you. Some of the festivals and fairs are Teez, Sitala Mata fair, Mewar festival, Nagpur festival, Desert festival, etc.

## ART AND HANDICRAFT

The famous art and handicraft of Jaipur are carved silver jewellery, Kundan, Meenakari jewellery, wood crafts, blue pottery, and leather goods. Apart from these traditional master crafts, handlooms like zardozi, zari, and bandhani also attract shopaholics. While one of the special artistic creations of Jaipur is bagru block printing and miniature paintings.

## CUISINE

Showcasing one of the most royal cuisines in the country, the Jaipuri cuisine consists of its famous 'lall maas', a meat delicacy as well as culinary delights like 'dal-bati-churma', 'missi roti', 'ghewar', 'gajak', 'chaugun ke laddoo', etc.

## 10 PLACES TO VISIT IN JAIPUR

### HAWA MAHAL

Built in 1799 by Maharaja Sawai Pratap Singh this palace contains a five-storey exterior and nine hundred fifty-three windows traditionally referred to as 'jharokhas.'



This palace was specially built for royal ladies who can easily watch everyday life and festivals celebrated on the streets without being seen by the public. At the top of Hawa Mahal, you can catch a glimpse of the City Palace and Jantar Mantar.

Timings: 9:00 Am to 4:30 Pm every day.

### CITY PALACE

Located at Jaleb Chowk, Jaipur, this palace of complex and unique structures is an amazing architectural wonder.

Until 1949 this beautiful palace served as the ceremonial and administrative seat of the Maharaja of Jaipur. A blend of Rajput and Mughal architecture can be observed here. It consists of unique courtyards, buildings, pavilions, and many temples.

Timings: 9:30 Am to 5:00 Pm every day.

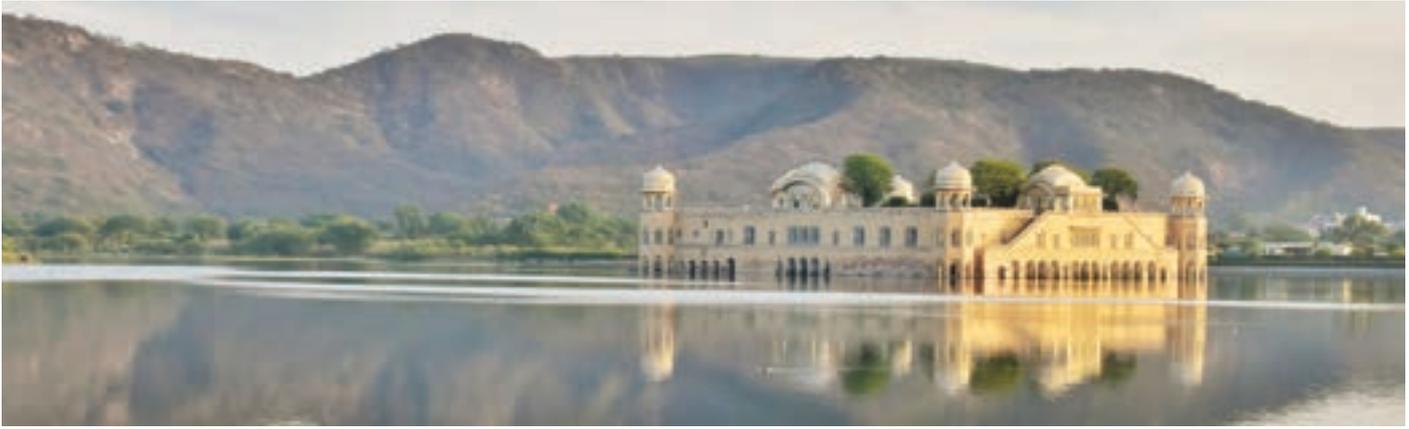
### AMBER FORT

Located in Devisinghpura, this giant fort with architectural brilliance is built on a hilltop setting. In 2013 this fort was declared a UNESCO world heritage site.

Several buildings of this fort were influenced by Mughal architecture. Some of the structures of this fort include the Sheesh Mahal, Sukh Niwas etc. You can even enjoy a light and sound show in the evenings, both in Hindi and English.

Timings: 9:00 AM to 6:00 Pm.





### **JAL MAHAL**

Jal Mahal literally translates into 'the water palace' and is beautifully set in the Man Sagar Lake in Jaipur city. It is a five-storey building built with fine Rajput architecture. Four storeys get submerged underwater when the lake is full and only the top half can be seen. You can enjoy the picturesque view of this palace by taking a boat ride on the Man Sagar Lake.

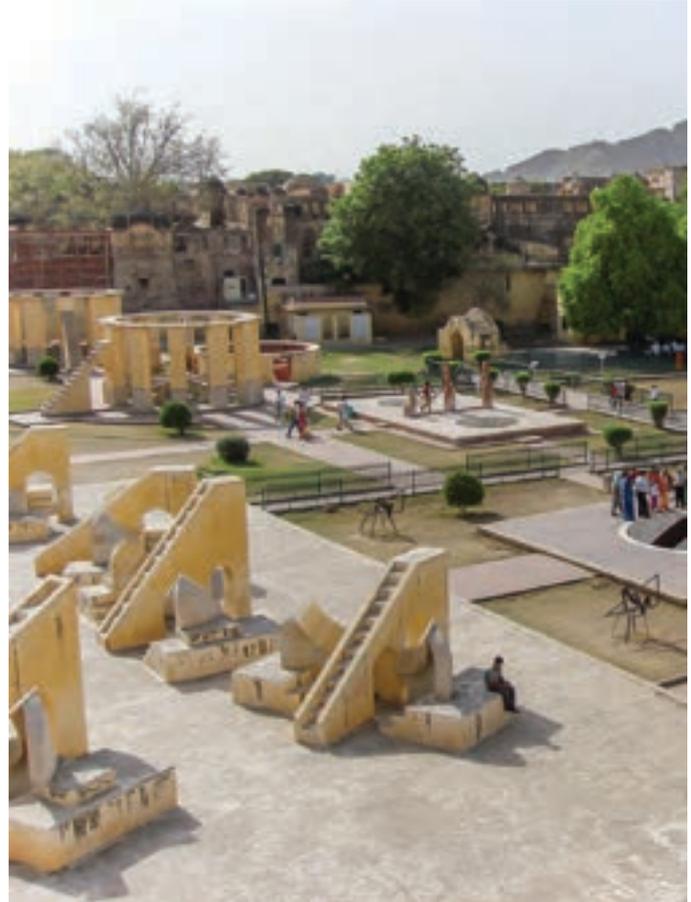
### **JANTAR MANTAR**

Jantar Mantar is a UNESCO world heritage site and this site features the world's largest stone sundial. It contains 19 astronomical instruments and with the help of these instruments, one can observe the astronomical positions with the naked eye. It was built in 1734 by Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh and is located in Kanwar Nagar, Jaipur.

Timings to visit: 9:30 Am to 4:30 Pm every day.

### **RAMBAGH PALACE**

Located at Bhawani Singh road, this palace was once a royal hunting lodge, and later became the majestic residence of the Maharaja of Jaipur. Currently, this palace is serving as a grand luxury hotel.



### CHOKI DHANI

Spend a day in Choki Dhani and experience the rural Rajasthan here. On offer are authentic Rajasthani foods, folk music, puppet shows, dance performances, magic shows, art and crafts, and a lot more.

Timings: 5:00 Pm to 11:00 Pm every day.

### BIRLA MANDIR

Located at Jawaharlal Nehru Marg, Tilak Nagar, this Laxmi Narayan temple made with white marble is one of the most beautiful temples of Jaipur. You can observe various scenes and quotes from Bhagwat Gita depicted on the temple walls.

Timings to visit the temple are: 8:00 Am to 12:00 PM and 4:00 Pm to 8:00 Pm.

### GALTAJI TEMPLE

Also known as Shree Galtha Peetham, It serves as a Hindu pilgrimage located just ten kilometers away from Jaipur in the Aravalli Hills. This temple consists of a series of ancient Hindu temples at one place exhibiting splendid architecture and a peaceful environment.

Timings: 5:00 Am to 9:00 Pm every day.

### ANOKHI MUSEUM

Located at Kheri Gate, Amber, this museum is dedicated to hand printing and woodblock printing. It also contains rich artifacts, photographs, tools, carvings etc.

Anokhi museum consists of the world's best block-painted fabrics and garments. Anokhi even has a brand of its own and set up shops all across India.

The museum also holds a UNESCO certification with the purpose of celebrating the rich craft and culture of Rajasthan.

Timings: 10:30 Am to 5:00 Pm (Tuesday to Saturday) and 11:00 AM to 4:30 PM (Sundays). Closed on Monday.



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# A TRAVELLER'S GUIDE TO INDIA'S FAMOUS CULTURAL DESTINATIONS

India's famous cultural destinations are remarkable in their amazing diversity in the form of dance, dress, literature, poetry, sculpture, art, cinema, and, most significantly, food and yoga.

## TT BUREAU

This has had a major influence on the cognitive processes of people all over the world. Many global visitors come to India on cultural tours to better comprehend this beautiful nation and its people. The innocence of the people, the unity in variety, the various religions, and family values all contribute to India being a one-of-a-kind cultural destination in the world.

### VARANASI, UTTAR PRADESH

Being one of the world's oldest towns, Varanasi preserves cultural significance in the modern world. Varanasi has confused, captivated, and lured people for ages with a fascination that can only be described as ethereal.

This holiest of towns, with its ancient domes, muths, ashrams, and sadhus, gazes boldly over the Ganges. The holy river and its innumerable ghats are illuminated every evening in a rivetting performance of the Aarti. Visit the Kashi Vishwanath temple, the many other shrines and temples dotting the streets and alleys, and feel the devotion and spirit of the pilgrims as they pray to the chant of mantras and ringing of bells.

This ancient city has a wonderful cultural heritage displayed in its local food which is rounded off with the famous Benarsi paan as well as handicrafts, particularly the handwoven, intricate Benarasi saree.

This historic city, which has an unpretentious demeanor, has an important role in Hindu culture and religion and is sometimes described as "the entrance to paradise."

### KHAJURAH, MADHYA PRADESH

Khajuraho is famous for its remarkable and one-of-a-kind temple architecture, which includes erotic statues in various amorous positions.





Rajput Chandela dynasty monarchs built these Nagara-style structures between 950 and 1050 CE. This assemblage of 23 structures, mostly Hindu and Jain in religious nature, is a striking exemplification of the normally silent sensory reality on earth.

Among the most visited remaining monuments at Khajuraho include Lakshman Temple, and Vishvanath Temple, which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Kandariya Mahadeva Temple is iconic in its display of several sculptures that are recognised as great masterpieces of Indian art.

### **KOLKATA, BENGAL**

The City of Joy is known for its celebrations, music, Indian culture, and traditional prayers. Dominique Lapierre's portrayal of Kolkata is eerily accurate. The city is caressed lovingly by the River Hooghly, which was formerly India's capital and is now a prominent cosmopolitan center.

Appreciate European architecture at prominent structures such as the Victoria Memorial, St Paul's Cathedral, Fort William, Marble Palace Kolkata Town Hall, High Court or stroll down Park Street. Do not miss historical marvels like visiting Shaheed Minar or Howrah Bridge.

If you want to get a glimpse of an ancient culture that is vibrant and relevant, visit Kolkata during Durga Puja in October and let the festive mood consume you. Go 'pandal hopping' and see the artistic pandals and idols of Goddess Durga in all her colourful splendour.

Once it comes to flavors, the city offers it all, from traditional lip-smacking street food to exquisite fine dining.

### **MADURAI, TAMIL NADU**

Madurai is a prominent cultural center of South India, with a recorded history extending to the 3rd century BC, including the Pandiyas, Cholas, Madurai Sultanate, Vijaynagar Empire,





Nayaks Carnatic Kingdom, and the British. Madurai is known for Tamil Sangam, the center of Tamil rationalism, as well as Tirumalai Nayak Palace and Meenakshi Temple, the latter of which dominates the Madurai skyline.

The Gandhi Memorial Museum in Madurai displays the remnants of Mahatma Gandhi's stained piece of cloth, which he wore on the day of his assassination.

### **JAIPUR, RAJASTHAN**

Jaipur, often known as the Pink City, is the state capital of Rajasthan. This city was given its name because it was painted pink to greet the Prince of Wales in the year 1853. It is a popular tourist destination, and if you want to see regal India and its deep heritage, Jaipur is one of the greatest locations to go to.

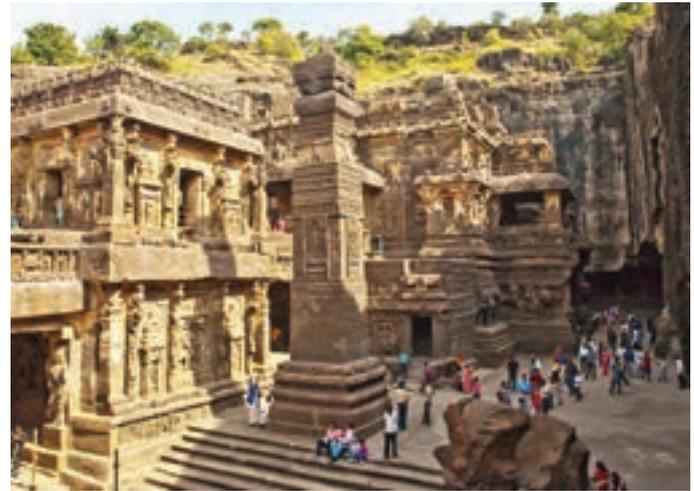
Several monuments and forts stand magnificently and attract many tourists, to the point that tourism is now one of the city's major sources of revenue. The city is a living citadel of history and culture, which comes alive in spectacular forts and palaces, present-day royalty and Maharajas, stories of warriors kings, and colourful festivals, and fairs.

Do not miss sightseeing at ancient architectural marvels like Amber Fort, City Palace, Hawa Mahal, Jantar Mantar, Jal Mahal, Birla Temple, Nahargarh Fort among others.

The bustling bazaars of Jaipur are famous for the traditional craftsmanship of Rajasthan jewellery, fabric, shoes, and curios which are a treasure-trove for shoppers.

### **AJANTA ELLORA, MAHARASHTRA**

When it comes to must-see places in India, one cannot ignore the renowned Ajantha and Ellora caves. The caverns are found in the state of Maharashtra, outside the settlement of Ajantha & Ellora in the Aurangabad region, and include amazing architecture that was handcrafted using just a hammer and



chisel. All of these 28 – 30 rock-cut cave monuments were built between the first and fifth centuries BC.

These monuments are made with works of art that are commonly regarded as artistic masterpieces. The majority of these pieces are considered Buddhist sacred art.

The Ajanta and Ellora Caves have been designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1983, and they provide visitors with magnificent paintings and sculptures.

### **HAMPI, KARNATAKA**

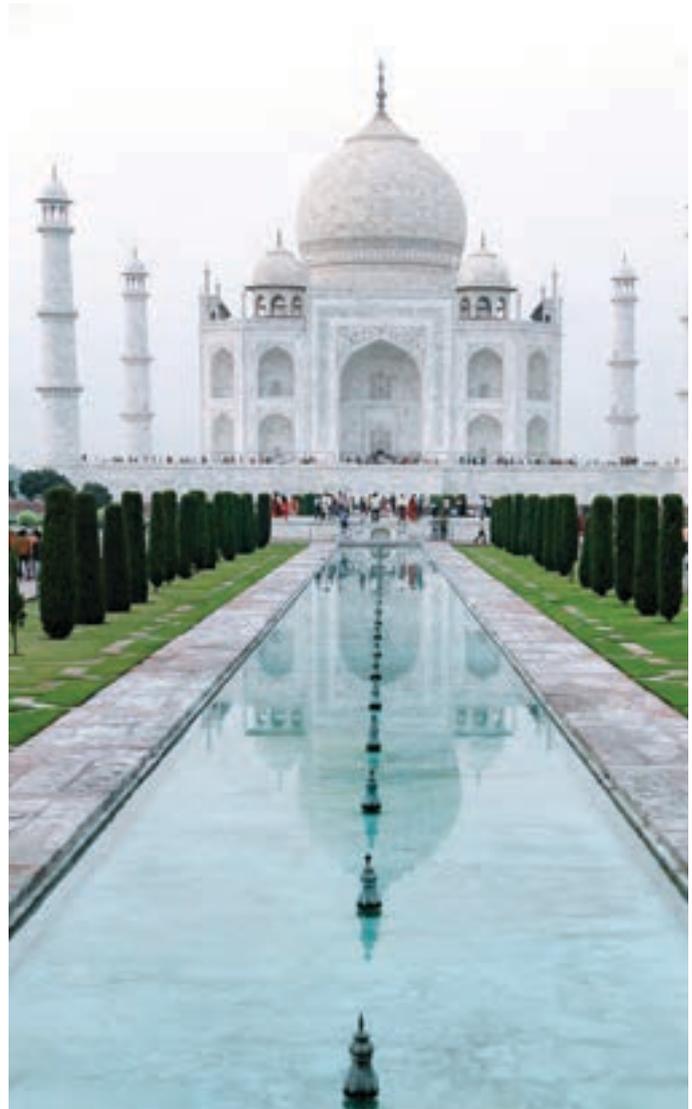
Hampi, often known as the ancient capital of the Hindu empire Vijayanagara (the City of Victory), is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This town in the Karnataka state offers tourists more than 500 monuments that identify it as one of the biggest empires of ancient India.

The monuments' remains stretch back to the 14th century and include intriguing temples, palace basements, remains of aquatic constructions, historic market lanes, royal pavilions, bastions, royal platforms, treasury buildings, and so on.

### **AGRA, UTTAR PRADESH**

Agra, the city in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh is home to the world-famous Taj Mahal. The Taj Mahal, one of the world's Seven Wonders and one of the Unesco World Heritage Sites, is the tomb of Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan's favourite wife, Mumtaz Mahal.

Shah Jahan had the immemorial Taj Mahal constructed in her memory. Its construction took 22 years and was finished in 1653. (1630-1652). More than 20,000 artisans, masons,





and jewelers worked tirelessly to create this symmetrical monument composed of white marble. The grandeur of the monument is unparalleled and provides a wonderful experience.

Agra also includes several other priceless monuments. The overwhelming grandeur and architectural perfection of Fatehpur Sikri and the Agra Fort will take your breath away.

### **MYSORE, KARNATAKA**

Mysore, often known as the “City of Palaces,” is one of India’s most famous cultural attractions. The city’s shrines, palaces, festivities, well-kept gardens, and other monuments highlight the ruling Wodeyar dynasty’s rich legacy, history, and culture. The Wodeyar dynasty were great patrons of art and music and the city remains indebted to them for making Mysore a cultural centre.

The 10 days of festivities during Dusshera are synonymous with Mysore. The celebration includes colourful ceremonies like o the lighting of the palace and all homes in the city, festive display of dolls, and celebrations with sharing of sweets. The high light of the celebration in ancient times was “Jumbo Savari” or the ceremonial parade of the Maharaja on elephant back through the streets of Mysore. Today, it is often a procession of people in celebration of the festival.

This city is also known as the ‘Cultural Capital of Karnataka,’ and is home to the magnificent Amba Vilas Palace, the ancient Chamundeshwari temple, and the magnificent Jagmohan temple.

When in Mysore one shouldn’t forget to try Mysore Pak, a native delicacy.

### **LUCKNOW, UTTAR PRADESH**

Lucknow is renowned as the ‘City of Nawabs’ and the ‘City of Tehzeeb’ with good cause. This city’s cultural past has been heavily affected by the Mughal periods, and these elements may still be evident now.



The city is recognized for its exquisite arts, traditional sumptuous food, magnificent music, Shayari (poetry), fascinating dance forms, and exceedingly hospitable people. Anywhere you look, you can see royal colours. The evocative Urdu language is extensively spoken among the people.

Popular heritage sites that must be visited include Bada Imambada, Shahi Baoli, Nadan Mahal, Chattar Manzi, and Roomi Gate.



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# WELLNESS DESTINATIONS IN INDIA TO HEAL MIND AND BODY

Wellness tourism is synonymous with mental relaxation and peace and figures among the topmost priorities for people electing to travel in 2022.

TT BUREAU

**W**ellness revolves around a sense of well-being that results from tending to the needs of your body and mind, with several different touchpoints that ease the mind-body complex with a sense of rejuvenation.

So what goes into the selection of a good wellness destination? It appears that rich nature, water bodies, pleasant weather, peace and tranquility, yoga, spiritual practices, outdoor activities, good food, and wine are reasons that help travellers select a wellness destination.

While spas and fitness were important in the past in deciding on a wellness destination, the current approach is definitely more holistic and healing therapies like nature, water bodies, tranquility, and outdoor activities are important considerations in 2022, post-pandemic, in considering a wellness destination.

City lights, pollution, and noise also disturb the emotional balance of people. When surrounded constantly by such an

urban ambiance, life in cities gives off a negative aura. This aura affects emotions making people more pessimistic or aggressive and people like to take a short break to rejuvenate and feel well balanced.

Some of India's best wellness destinations to heal your mind and body are:

## LANGZA, HIMACHAL PRADESH

Langza is one of the most beautiful villages not in Himachal Pradesh but in India. The name means the village of the Gods. One would give up everything just to live here. Residing here is truly a gift from the Gods.

Langza is situated on a plateau at an altitude of 4400 metres. One of the most notable attractions is the Buddha statue just watching over the valley silently each day and night.

The beauty of this village cannot be captured by any camera, nothing can do justice to what the human eye captures. It is completely another world.



### **RISHIKESH, UTTRAKHAND**

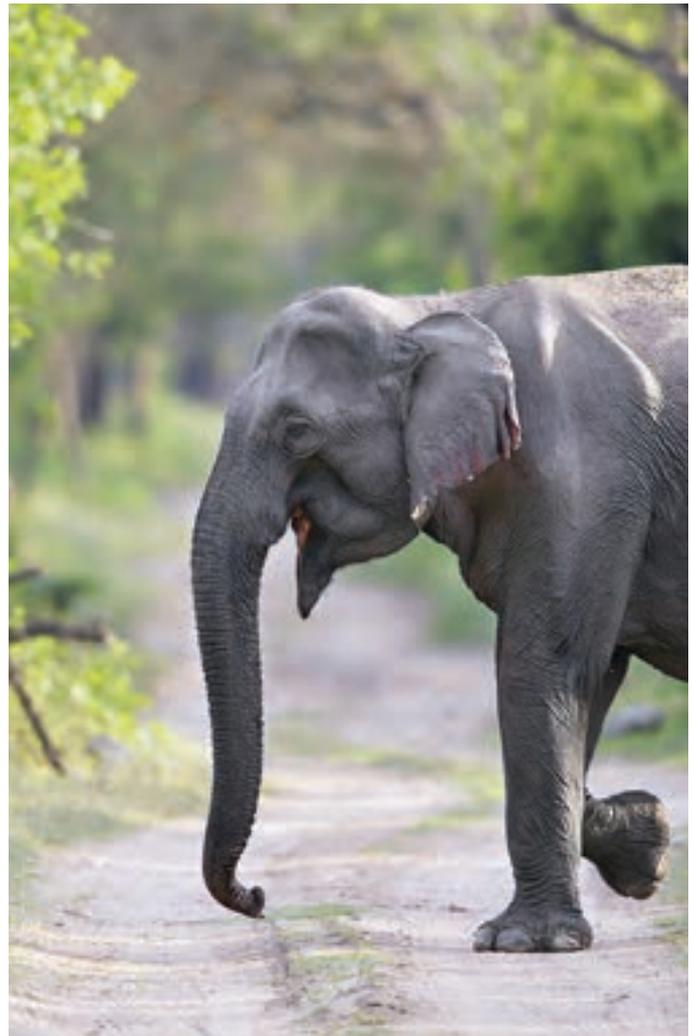
Rishikesh is the spiritual capital of India. The sacred river Ganga embodies energy and tranquility as it flows over rocks and riverbeds. The next day goes to Kaudiyala which is only a few km from Rishikesh to indulge yourself in some outdoor activities like river rafting. Heartbeat races and adrenaline rush are yours for the taking – just like the river. Next, relax your mind and body as you sit by the banks of the river, do some yoga, visit an ashram or experience an Aarti and watch the sunset over this ancient land.

Go on an excursion from Rishikesh to Chilla. In Chilla visit the Rajaji National Park. Stay alert for warning calls given by Sambhar Deer, this means a tiger is nearby. If you spot a tiger, then keep an eye out for elephants too. The magnificent beast goes at a steady pace enjoying eating shoots along the way. After that try some north Indian cuisine in Chhottivalas for a hearty meal.

### **VARANASI, UTTAR PRADESH**

Varanasi is one of the world oldest living cities. It is a fascinating and colourful place, where many small alleys hold surprises for all. It is one of the holiest cities and the sacred river “The Ganga” passes through this city. At more than 100+ ghats the pilgrims come and wash away their sins bathing in the Ganga.

Why is this place is so significant and auspicious? It is believed that people who die here are offered Moksha “ liberation from the cycle of life and death”.





Manikarnika Ghat is one of the most famous ghats but is not for the faint-hearted. Thousands of dead bodies are given last rites and burnt on wood pyres. Every night a ritual takes place, where many pilgrims come and watch. The night is lit up by the thousands of candles, held by the priest offering their prayers to the river Ganga.

When it's time for the city to wake up, there is a sense of peace and calmness sitting near ghats, and watching the river flow forever and ever.

### **KOVALAM, KERALA**

Kovalam is perhaps the best spot to carry comfort to your body, psyche, and soul. Because of the development of plenty of restorative plants and spices, you will get credible Ayurvedic treatment here. Focus on your psychological and actual wellbeing, and book yourself a loosening-up Ayurvedic session in God's own country.

This National award-winning Ayurveda town is the supreme spot for you to heal and rejuvenate. Encircled by rich green vegetation and close to the well-known Kovalam Beach, this town offers Ayurvedic massages and healing therapies including restoration treatment, detoxification, weight reduction, and relieving stress in a serene climate. You can likewise practice yoga, meditation, or go for a long stroll to partake in the wonderful scenic views around.

### **DIVAR ISLAND, GOA**

Divar Island is one of those destinations that we all strive to go to with our friends in our lifetime, and we should make it a reality. The charm of the island is as authentic as it was in the 16th century when it was discovered.

This pint-size place will fill your body with energy and joy because of its serene calm and raw beauty. There are plenty of beach activities and water sports to take part in. Goa also offers



lots of retreats and spas which give you a relaxing time, soothing your mind and body. The most beautiful sites lie on the soft sandy beaches lined with coconut and palm trees.

Divar Island is one of the most beautiful places in Goa. To think that such a place exists in this state, where clubbing is a major activity is a surprise. This place is pristine with dense forests and a small crystal clear lagoon. It is a great getaway place from the hustle-bustle of the mainland.

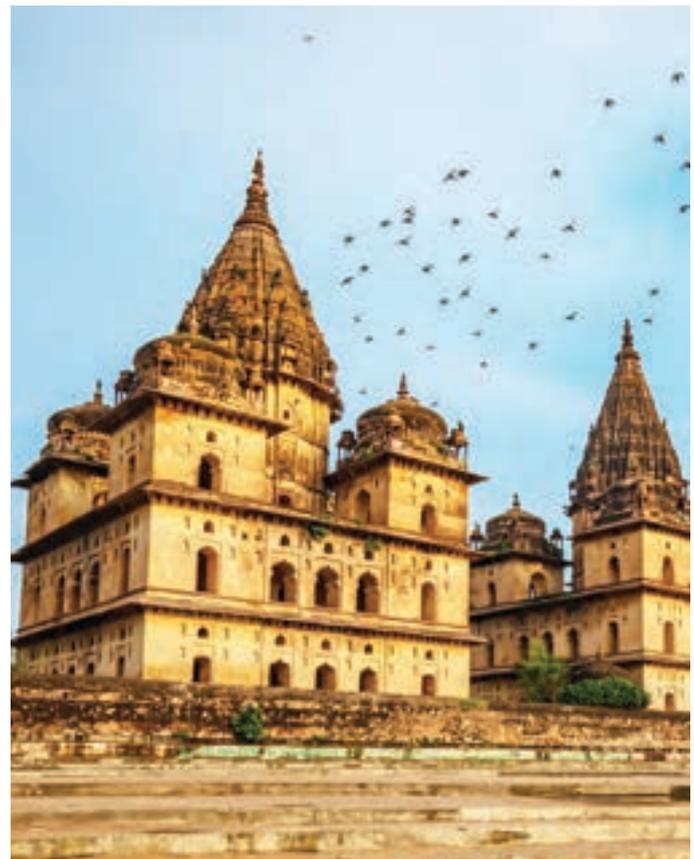
### **ORCHHA, MADHYA PRADESH**

Orchha, the erstwhile capital of Bundel rulers is full of Mughal Influenced Rajput architectural marvels. Built on an island on the Betwa river, the Orchha Fort is an architectural wonder that holds several beautiful temples and palaces like Jahangir Mahal, Raj Mahal, and the famous Rai Praveen Mahal.

This medieval town situated along the Betwa river is less crowded and is a great gateway to the state. As the sun sets the whole town feels like it belongs to another time and that at any moment its historical figures can come alive.

The reflection of the sun just adds to the golden glow of the ancient castles and you can choose to just sit on a nearby hillock and imbibe the evening charm. Even if you don't indulge in any activity you will get lost in your thoughts. The surroundings are such that you will feel refreshed. As you enter the night you can listen to the silence speaking of the new tomorrow.

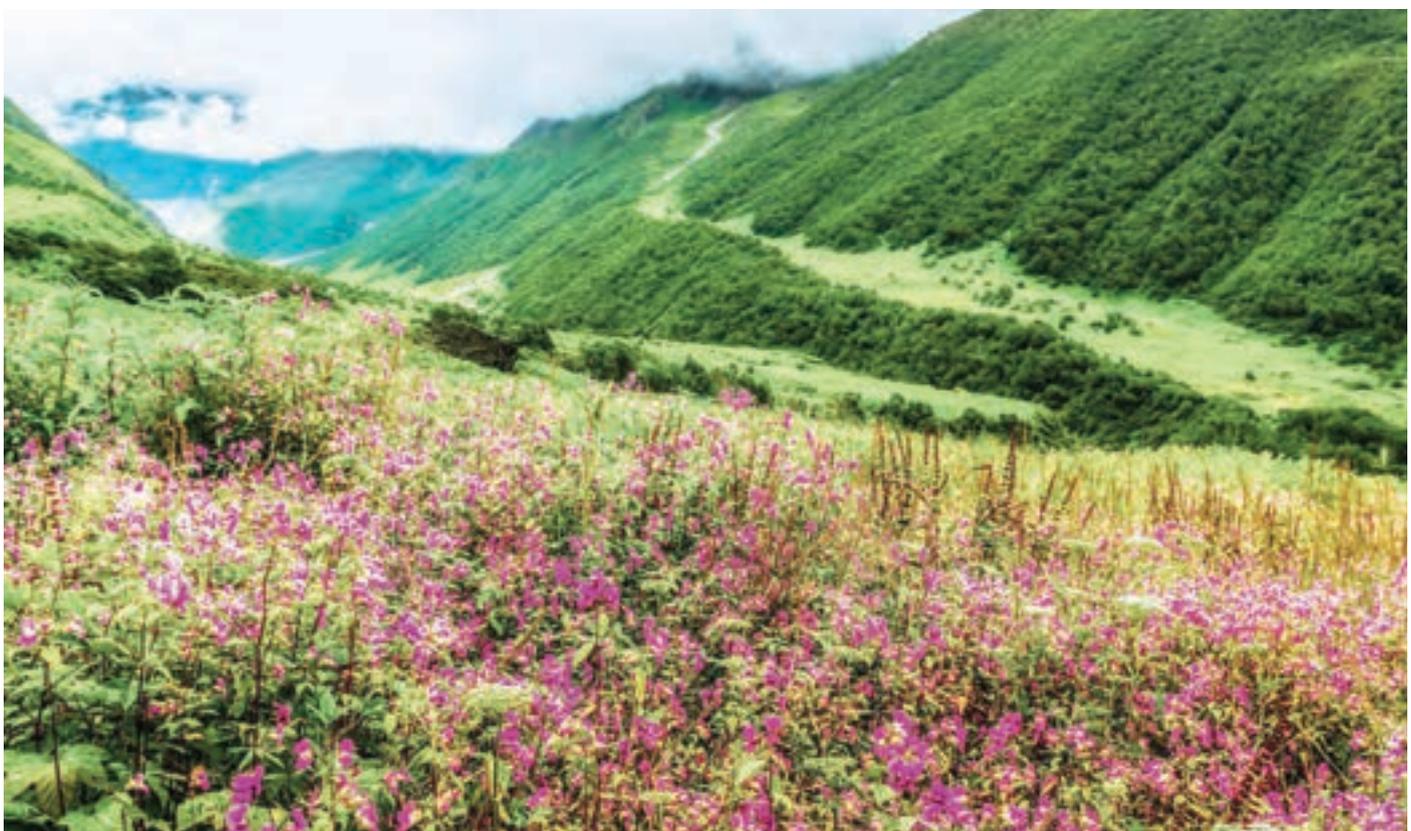
If you want to step into the healing of the great outdoors, go for a thrill and a spill as you experience river rafting in the Betwa river or go for a wildlife safari at Orchha wildlife park or take a stroll in the tranquil Phool Bagh, an ancient garden which holds the Badgir Sawan Bhadon towers built to provide a cooling effect



to the gardens. The water ventilation is further enhanced by a beautiful fountain and another palace called Chandan Katora.

### **HEMKUND SAHIB, UTTRAKHAND**

This beautiful place is one of the holiest Sikh shrines, one would understand that the 10th Guru of Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh meditated on his past birth in this heavenly place.





Imagine seeing your reflection into the pristine “Hemkund” lake at the base of Saptshringi lake.

A legend that goes by is that Lord Lakshmana regained his vitality by meditating near the banks of the lake after the war. A temple has been said to have been built at the place where Lakshmana meditated.

If you want to see something you can’t forget, prepare for a trek to the Valley of Flowers, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Blessed with beautiful rare alpine flowers and exotic Himalayan flora, in the West Himalayan region of Uttarakhand, the trek through the Valley of Flowers winds its way through dense forests, along the flowing waters of the fresh Pushpawati river, and one can traverse meadows and valleys, as one crosses charming wood and stone bridges, waterfalls and even glaciers along the way.

The beautiful Scenery will allow only one thought in your mind “I have seen my life, there is nothing more I can wish for.”

### **DHARAMSHALA, HIMACHAL PRADESH**

Situated under the shadow of the mighty Dhauladar range is the quaint town of Dharamshala. The undulating green meadows and the green canopies of pine, cedar, and oak trees make for a tranquil and charming landscape.

Go on a trek and traverse the fog to reach Triund. This moderate trek is 10 km from McLeodganj and offers breathtaking views of the white range of the Himalayas.



The nearby picturesque Dal lake is a picnic spot where you can enjoy a great lunch along the pristine lakeside. You can also visit Kareri lake which shines with a beautiful aquamarine color reflecting the surrounding landscape.

### **AUROVILLE, PONDICHERRY**

Pondicherry is a beautiful city with beautiful French architecture, beaches, and clean surrounding that fills you up with euphoria.

A visit to Auroville Ashram is an invitation to indulge yourself in various activities and workshops. You can volunteer in activities such as tree plantations and environmentally friendly activities.



Various workshops include classical music sessions, yoga sessions, and even massage sessions. The main attraction is the Matrimandir with its golden spherical structure that is surrounded by a charming garden where you can meditate for hours or spend your time with like-minded people who are alive with wellness and energy.

The township has been built with the purpose to realize human unity and for all to live in peace and progressive harmony. You will find your soul in this beautiful township which is quiet, peaceful, and resounds with peace and goodwill.

### **DARJEELING, WEST BENGAL**

The aroma of the tea will relax your mind, and the first sip will put you in a deeply peaceful state. The birds chirp, the tea

gardens surround, the leaves rustle, and the sound of flowing water deepens your awareness.

Darjeeling is a beautiful place to be in. The colonial hill station which has now imbued the local culture is nicknamed 'Queen of the Hills' on account of its green, lush forests, scenic beauty, quaint houses and old hamlets, rustic villages, eco-parks, and the picturesque Kanchenjunga mountain panorama all around. The locals are friendly and their warmth is a blessing.

Treks to the mountains all around and taking safari rides in the Wildlife parks for those who love nature and the great outdoors are plenty.

An activity you must not miss is to enjoy a ride on the Darjeeling toy train, reliving your childhood, which symbolizes the return of your innocence.



# INDIA'S PICTURESQUE VALLEYS - TO VISIT ONCE IN YOUR LIFETIME

We remember the lofty mountains etched in the sky when we climb or trek their mighty slopes. Stop for a moment and remember the mind-numbing beauty of the lush meadows below. We take you to some of the most beautiful valleys in India that will fill you with awe.

## TT BUREAU

Protected by the gigantic cold mountains, lie small settlements where life is slow, simple, and peaceful. The mountains protect the soft green valleys from the cold Siberian winds preserving the lush green meadows and forests. These valleys are often referred to as sacred spots or spiritual sanctuaries on account of the pristine quality of nature and the very air you breathe in.

Just enjoying a cup of tea with the locals will fill you with euphoria. The children's giggles will return your innocence. A stay experience in these valleys will remain in your heart, embedded in your memory forever.

***We have put together a selection of the most beautiful valleys in India for your next summer trip.***

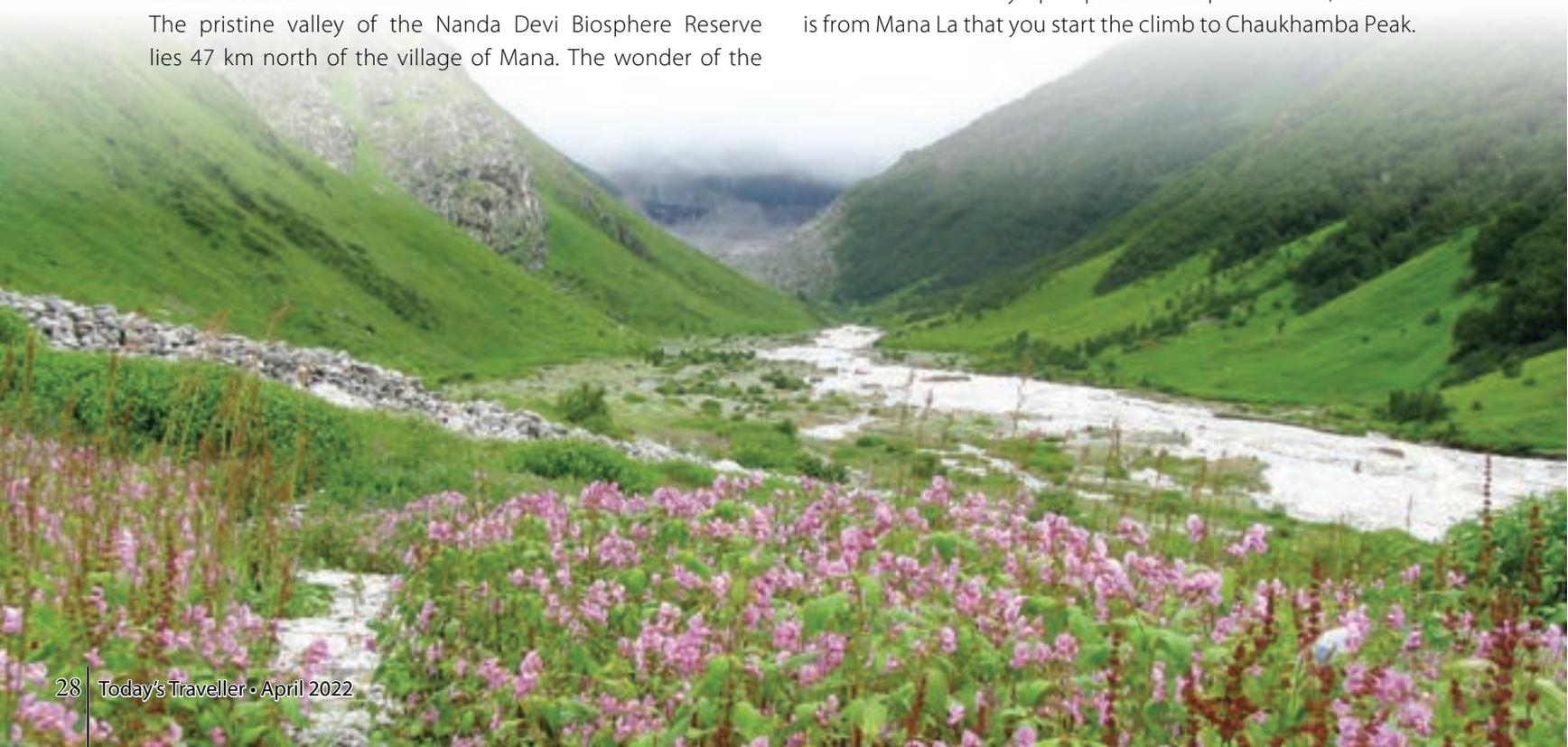
### MANA VALLEY

The pristine valley of the Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve lies 47 km north of the village of Mana. The wonder of the

Nanda Devi National Park and the incredible natural beauty of the Valley of Flowers National Park, which lies between the mountain ranges of the Zaskar and Great Himalaya are World Heritage sites that will blow your mind. Their untouched lustre remains intact because it is so difficult to reach here. Together they create a unique transition zone.

The Mana village, in the valley, holds great significance in Hindu folklore as it is where Maharishi Vyas portrayed the epic of Mahabharata to the god Ganesha. The sacred Badrinath Shrine, one of the holiest pilgrimage places is simply 3 km away from the Mana Village. The Mana Valley likewise holds the source of the longest feeder of the Ganges, the Alaknanda River.

The Mana Village is referred to as the last town of India. The Mana La Pass on the border between India and Tibet is the most noteworthy open pass on the planet at 18,192 ft. It is from Mana La that you start the climb to Chaukhamba Peak.





Don't miss a visit to the two famous caves of Mana – Vyas Gufa and Ganesha Gufa. Other stunning attractions that will take your breath away are Vasundhara Falls, Satopanth Lake and Bhim Pul.

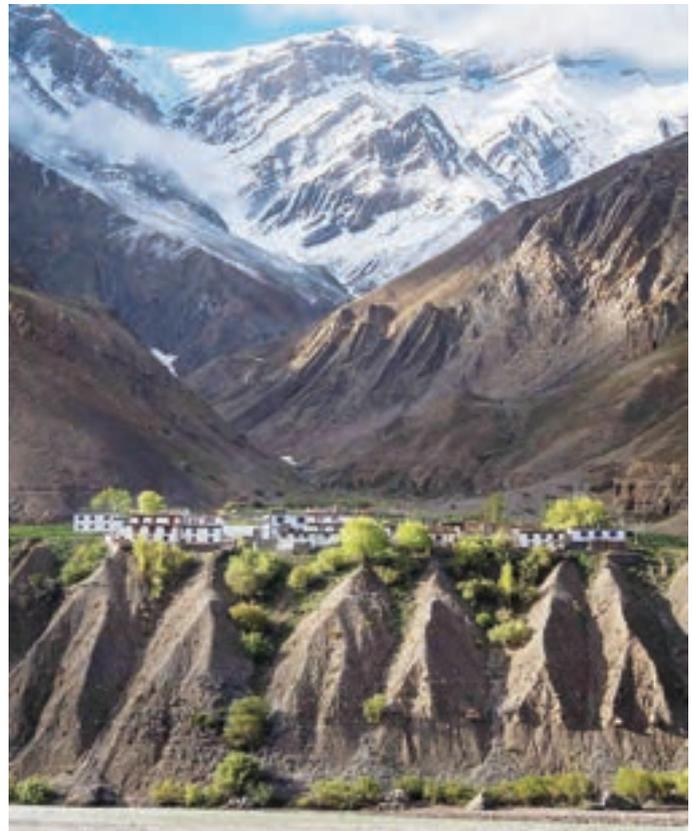
### **DZUKOU VALLEY**

One of the most beautiful valleys of Nagaland is the Dzukou Valley which lies on the boundary of Manipur and Nagaland. The whole valley is a natural wonder because of its amazing topography which is a result of millions of years of nature's erosion. The undulating meadows full of wildflowers are picturesque as they stretch as far as the eye can see. The verdant glens and knolls, meandering rivulets and soft flow of gentle hillocks present a captivating sight.

The Dzukou valley is covered with snow in winter and in summer it gives way for wonderful blossoms to sprout and cover the entire valley giving it an amazing beauty. There are two primary streams in this valley which is the Dzukou waterway and the Japfu waterway. The valley alongside it is filled with delightful glades of blossoms and is known as the 'Valley of Flowers of the North East.' The valley is cherished as nature's pristine cradle by wanderers in search of solitude and meditation amidst nature. On the other hand, some of its higher slopes are considered a paradise for trekkers who walk through wildflowers and brooks.

### **PARVATI VALLEY**

The ethereally beautiful Parvati valley is in Kullu Manali extending from Bhuntar right to Spiti. There are simply so many stunningly beautiful spots that can be visited making this valley one of the most sought after in India. The snake formed cascade called Rudra-Nag, the evergreen pine



timberlands of Khirganga said to be the contemplation spot of Lord Shiva, and above all 'The Pin Valley National Park', which is renowned for its populace of the snow panther - are all wonders of nature at its untouched best. The Pin Valley National park is located in the cold desert area of Lahaul & Spiti of Himachal Pradesh.

The remarkable natural beauty of this area has given birth to many legends, which circle around the god Shiva and goddess Parvati who found the untouched scenic beauty so

brehtaking that they stayed here for 1100 years. The holy site of Manikaran at a height of 1760 m, attracts pilgrims from all over the country who bathe in the natural hot springs found here.

A little-known charming village in the beautiful valley is called Malana whose inhabitants are believed to be descendants of Greek soldiers of Alexander the Great and the good-looking locals have facial features that resemble the Romans.

Rock climbing on the higher slopes and trekking through the powder green meadows of the valley are a visitor's joy. Fishing in the rippling clean fresh waters of the brooks and small rivers requires consent from the Forest office.

### **SPITI VALLEY**

Rudyard Kipling described Spiti as a world within a world - where gods live. This rare landscape is so surreal that it is described as a moonscape with crystal clear Himalayan lakes and ancient monasteries dominating the higher grounds. If

one has not visited Spiti, one can only imagine its untouched splendour.

The Valley of Spiti is situated in the middle of the captivating districts of Ladakh and Tibet. Here is a fascinating cold desert, untamed land of spiritualism, soothing valleys, and quiet villages amidst high windswept mountains.

The best and ideal time to visit the Spiti Valley is from the period of May to October. The tall mountains belong to the ranges of the Great Himalayas. This valley in India is well known for its surrounding snow-clad mountains, flawless cloisters, lovely lakes, and glacial masses. The cold desert valley of Spiti is famous for the 1,015-year-old Tabo monastery at an incredible height of 10,000 ft. This rare mud brick Buddhist monument has ancient caves which are meditation centres, ancient frescos, statues, and mural paintings. It has been nominated for UNESCO's World Heritage list.

Locals in Spiti for the most part follow Buddhism and Spiti is often called the 'place that is known for the Lamas', or Buddhist priests.. Spiti valley has similar vegetation and



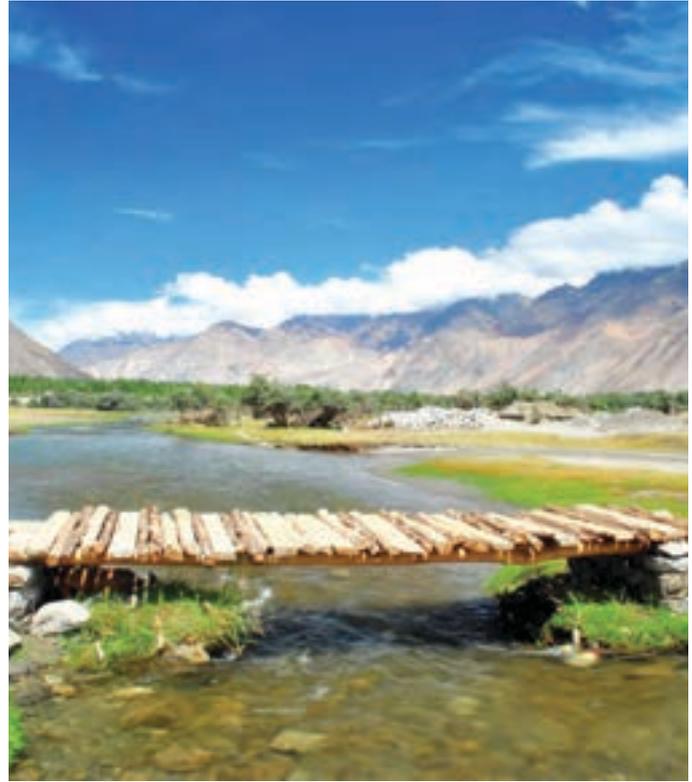


environment as Tibet and is consequently given the name 'Little Tibet'. The valley of Spiti is home to numerous wild animals, particularly the Himalayan fox, the Himalayan Tahr, snow panthers, musk deer and is viewed as close to paradise as possible by wildlife photographers, artists, and spiritual seekers, and nature lovers.

### **KANGRA VALLEY**

The Kangra Valley is a lovely river valley in the mountain region of Himachal Pradesh which is covered with delightful pine tree backwoods, plantations, undulating green meadows, and clear, gurgling cold streams that descend from the Himalayas.

The valley faces winter from October to March so the best time to visit this delightful valley is during March end and April when the mid-year sun starts to sparkle showing the wonderful views of the Kangra Valley. The most spellbinding sight is the astonishing view of an almost vertical incline of the Dhauladhar range shooting up to a height of 15,956



ft. The black granite rock formations rising to high snow-covered jagged peaks are awe-inspiring.

The valley is additionally home to the ancient Kangra Fort, the magnificent rock-cut temple - Masroor Rock-cut Temple and the heritage village of Pragpur, founded in the 16th century with Mughul gardens, terraces, and water pools. The splendid natural landscape of the valley together with the rare Kangra Fort and Masroor Rock cut temple has been nominated for UNESCO's World Heritage list. The locals handcraft exquisitely designed shawls and create the world-famous Kangra school of miniature paintings.

### **NUBRA VALLEY**

Imagine a riot of orchards, panoramic vistas, Bactrian camels, and ancient monasteries - and you have a wonderous valley surrounded by the snow-covered Himalayan range. This is the Nubra Valley, situated in the higher regions of Jammu and Kashmir and also known as Ldumra which means the valley of flowers. The picturesque wide and flat Nubra valley





is crisscrossed by the winding channels of the Shyok and Nubra Rivers and is thus home to fertile plains which make for prime orchards for which it is famous.

The best time to visit the valley is during the months of July to September when the temperature is pleasant and the valley orchards are in full bloom.

The excursion to Ensa, Samstemling, Diskit, and Hunder Buddhist monasteries is fascinating. The cold desert moonscape in winter and green flatlands in summer between Diskit and Hundur is a major novelty for tourists. The cold desert with the surreal sand dunes is a splendid sight.

Riding the Bactrian camels, with their two humps in the cold desert scape makes for an adventurous experience as it feels like another world. These camels are also significant as they point to the importance of the fertile Nubra Valley as

an important trade stopover on the ancient Silk Route. Even today, the valley is famous for its Pashmina wool textiles as well as its fruit produce of apples, apricots, almonds, and walnuts among crops.

### **VALLEY OF FLOWERS**

The valley of flowers in Uttarakhand lies in the Chamoli region and holds an unbelievably lovely setting with rare and exotic Himalayan flora in front of the Zaskar ranges. The valley is known as the Valley of Flowers Indian National Park and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The valley stays shrouded in snow throughout the cold weather months. In summer, it transforms into a paradise with its endemic Alpine flower-covered meadows along with blossoms of every kind. The valley is a picturesque panorama of clear, little streams, elegant knolls, gentle waterfalls and cascades, wildlife, and meadows that stun visitors in their abundance.

This spectacular valley is spread over an area of 87 sq km in the Chamoli district. The entire landscape is covered with exotic blossoms with over 600 flower species. This botanical paradise has primulas, marigolds, orchids, poppies, daisies, and anemones to name a few. The park is bordered by rich alpine forests, birch, and rhododendrons which lend further exotica to the park wonderland.

The valley has remained in pristine shape on account of its inaccessibility. The trek to the Valley of flowers finds its way



An aerial photograph of the Ziro Valley in Arunachal Pradesh, India. The landscape is dominated by terraced rice fields in various shades of green and yellow, interspersed with small ponds and traditional wooden houses. In the center of the image, a large hot air balloon with a yellow and orange pattern is being inflated on a grassy field. The background shows a dense forest of tall trees under a clear sky.

through thick forests, along the Pushpawati river, crossing several bridges, waterfalls, and glaciers along the way. The best time to visit the valley is during the months of March to October.

### **ZIRO VALLEY**

Included in the Tentative List for UNESCO's World Heritage Site for the Apatani cultural landscape, Ziro valley in Arunachal Pradesh is a stunning valley destination known for its rare beauty of terraced paddy fields. Apart from an unmatched natural scenic beauty, the tranquil town of Ziro is known for its unique tribal heritage which attracts sociologists and anthropologists.

It is hidden away in the vast mountain-scape of Arunachal Pradesh and yet its natural beauty is so special that people have found their way here, discovered and explored its sprawling rice fields, ancient village culture, and green rolling hills enveloped in lush, vibrant flora.

The scenic little hill hamlets, its lush green terraced rice fields, and picturesque trails through tall pines and bamboo forests makes it one of the most photographed valleys across the country. While the peace and tranquillity make it a spiritual paradise, its remarkable natural beauty attracts nature lovers, trekkers, artists, meditation seekers, and photographers who come here to soak in the splendour.

Ziro valley is also home to the 'Talley Wildlife Sanctuary' which has the elusive clouded leopards among other wildlife. Apart from the Talley Valley Wildlife Sanctuary, visitors can experience a trek to the Meghna Cave Temple, Kile Pakho, Miley, and Ziro Puto.

The valley is great for adventure seekers too. Sports like paragliding, bungee jumping, and stream boating are popular. The popularity of the 'Ziro Music Festival' put this charming hill town and valley on the map of every music lover.

## YUMTHANG VALLEY

The picturesque Yumthang valley in Sikkim is a unique rhododendron sanctuary with more than 24 types of blooms from March to mid-June and is home to the Shingba Rhododendron Sanctuary. The Yumthang valley is situated in Sikkim at a height of 3564 m, just above the tree line. There is a natural aquifer on the right half of the Yumthang River from where the valley gets its name.

The scenic valley is naturally endowed with lush scented meadows blooming with a rainbow carpet of Himalayan flowers - with rhododendrons, poppies, iris, primulas, and other flora. The beautiful valley echoes the gushing waters of the Teesta river, hot springs, birdlife, and yaks grazing on rolling hillock pastures. No wonder, it is also called the Valley of Flowers.

During the spring the valley blossoms with a million flowers and in winter the snow-covered slopes give it a magical quality so loved by skiers. The valley is popular with anglers because of the well-stocked rivers of Yumthang chu and Puniya chu.

The Yumthang Hot Spring is well known for its medicinal value on account of its rich sulfur content and visitors come to take a dip in the warm waters even in the winters. Another attraction is the famous Shiva Temple. The valley is the starting point for trekkers and climbers who want to scale the beautiful peaks of Panhunri and Shundu Tsenpa.

## SILENT VALLEY

Silent Valley National Park is a beautiful nature reserve holding the last remaining rainforest of Kerala. The valley is



situated in the North-eastern region of the Palakkad region in Kerala in the Western Ghats, one of the richest biospheres in the world. Silent Valley and the forests alongside represent pure 'Ecological islands', with a wide diversity of species and indigenous evergreen and semi-evergreen glades.

There is a soft quietness encompassing the valley from where it gets its name. The valley houses numerous extraordinary plants including 110 types of orchids, 1000 types of blossoms, 200 types of butterflies, and 400 types of moths. This makes the valley a nature's paradise for vacationers.



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# MEGHALAYA - HIDDEN GEM OF NORTHEAST INDIA

Meghalaya, meaning 'Abode of Clouds', is a land of mesmerizing waterfalls and tranquil valleys.

## TT BUREAU

Its lush rolling hills, swaying high pines, tailored streets, English cottages, and the lingering smell of rain and earth with blues music playing in the background are what make Meghalaya an absolute delight.

Meghalaya, a hidden gem of the east, has an overwhelming number of breathtaking destinations, with new places being discovered every now and then. If you are someone looking to unwind in nature and witness nature's best-kept secrets, Meghalaya is the place to be. Here are some great experiences that Meghalaya has to offer:

### EXPLORING THE CAPITAL CITY OF SHILLONG

Known by many names, such as the 'Scotland of the East' or the 'Rock Capital of India', Shillong is the gateway to this





eastern wonderland. Shillong is a cosmopolitan city with a distinct mixture of small-town charm and a sophisticated metropolitan ambiance.

This bustling hill station is the main hub and is home to numerous tourist attractions, like the Shillong Peak, Elephant Falls, Mary Help for Christian Cathedral, Lady Hydari Park, Wards Lake, the Don Bosco Museum, and the Air Force Museum. Shillong also allows you to experience Golf in the hills in its stunning 18-hole Golf course, the Shillong Golf Club, also known as the 'Gleneagle of the East'.

Apart from these, the serene Laitlum Canyons offering a panoramic vista of the majestic Khasi hills, and the picturesque Umiam Lake are a few of the must-visit places around Shillong.

#### **WATERFALLS AND CAVING IN CHERAPUNJEE (SHORA)**

Known to be the wettest place in India, Cherapunjee receives the highest amount of rainfall in the country, which attributes to the numerous waterfalls dotting the region. These waterfalls are splendid and some of the highest plunges fall in the country. Nohkalikai Falls (4th highest waterfall in the world with a height of 1115 ft), Nohsngithiang waterfall (or the Seven sisters falls), Kynrem Falls, and Dainthlen Falls are just a few Major waterfalls of the region.

Another key attraction of the region is its cave systems like The Mawsami Caves and the Arwah Cave. These networks of caves were created by the continuous flow of water and the erosion of limestone and are known to house century-old fossils.



#### **VISITING THE CLEANEST VILLAGE IN ASIA AND CAMPING BY THE UMGOT RIVER**

Towards the southern border of Meghalaya, lies Asia's cleanest village known by the name Mawlynnong. This pristine village is also home to the most iconic place in Meghalaya, the Nohwet Living Root Bridge. These living root bridges are a hallmark of Khasi tradition and were created over generations by weaving the roots of the Ficus Elastica tree around a structure to form the bridge.



Also, the nearby Umngot River's crystal-clear waters, verdant scenery, rural lifestyles, and riverine beaches are ideal for some bonfires and camping in the wild.

### **TREKKING TO A DOUBLE-DECKER LIVING ROOT BRIDGE IN NONGRIAT**

Nongriat is no place for the faint-hearted, as one needs to climb down 3500 steps to reach the village with the marvelous Double-decker living root bridge. This two-tier root bridge is an enigma and a short but intense trek from the bridge leads to the breath-taking Rainbow falls and a hidden natural pool with aqua blue waters.

### **EXPLORING THE FORGOTTEN WORLD OF PYNURSLA**

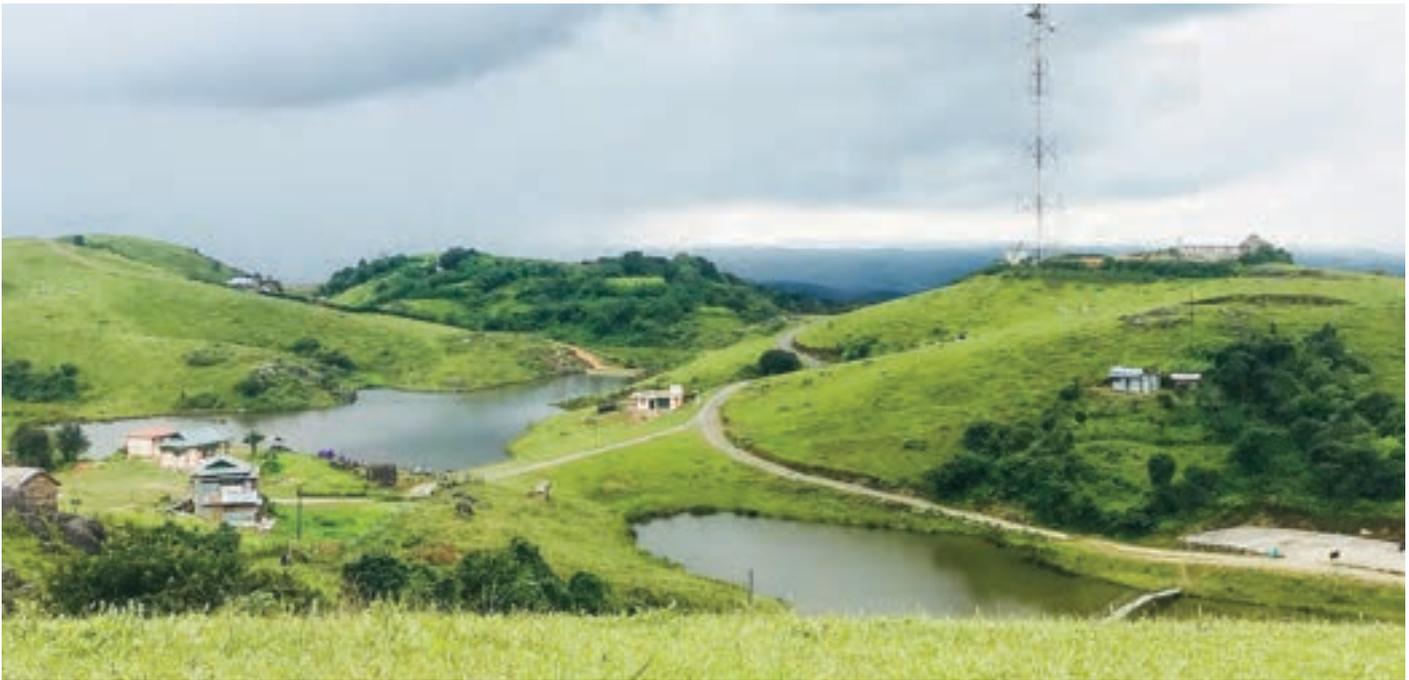
Often overlooked by visitors, Pynursla falls en route to Dawki and Mawlynnong and has a stunning variety of landscapes. It is a forested region with stretches of grasslands and pine-clad countryside.

Not widely known, but Pynursla has multiple living root bridges spread across the region with some gorgeous waterfalls like the Wah Rymben Falls. This place is also considered a getaway to the 'War' community and is heaven for nature photography.

### **KAYAKING IN MAWPHANLUR**

With exceptional roads and surrounding vista, the ride to Mawphanlur is a treat in itself. A lesser-known paradise in





Meghalaya, this place is known as the 'land of seven lakes'. These seven lakes around the tiny village and the lush green meadow, away from the hustle-bustle of the mainland, make Mawphanlur a serene getaway.

#### **MEGHALAYA'S EDEN, THE NOKREK BIOSPHERE RESERVE**

Being one of the bio-diverse hotspots, a vast range of flora and fauna are found here, such as the most endangered ape in India and the Hoolock Gibbon. Nokrek captures the charm of the Garo Hills, and the Daribokgre Trek is one of the greatest opportunities to absorb this wild splendor.

Before entering the pristine forest, this 16-km path will take you through verdant farmland lined with dense forests, plantations, and tidy settlements. Chandigre Village, which has a small resort with traditional cottages, is a point of attraction on the reserve's outskirts. The village is bordered by tea and coffee farms, making it a great place to experience the Garo lifestyle.

#### **THRIFT SHOPPING AND CAFÉ HOPPING**

When in Shillong, one must visit the iconic Police Bazar to experience Shillong in its most authentic form. It is the major shopping hub for both locals and tourists alike. Situated in the heart of the city, it has arrays of tiny shops and a flea market section selling exquisite traditional jewelry, Meghalayan artillery, handicrafts, and local delicacies. Another favorite among shoppers is the Shillong's Bara Bazar, just a few kilometers away from Police Bazar.

Shillong also has an amazing café culture influenced by its romance with Rock and Roll and Blues music. Some of these noteworthy cafes are Dylan's café, Café Shillong, Swish Café, etc.

#### **MEGHALAYAN CUISINE AND ITS STREET FOOD**

Meghalaya's cuisine is influenced by the customs and traditions of its tribes, namely Garo, Khasi, and Jaintia communities. The food here comprises mainly rice, vegetable curry, fish, and meat such as beef or pork. The street food here is another reason to visit the state.



Some must-try dishes are the Jadoh (red rice cooked with pork), Doh-Khlieh (salad), Pukhlein (fried rice balls with jaggery), and steamed momos. Another delicacy of the state is Kyat, a fermented rice beer that forms an integral part of any celebration in the state.

# FESTIVALS IN APRIL THAT CELEBRATE INDIA'S CENTURY-OLD CUSTOMS

April is a period when India is still bathing in the rays of the sunlight, the harvest season has indeed begun, and the lush greenery of spring is giving birth to the lush greenery of the surrounding area.

**TT BUREAU**

People all throughout the nation are busy enjoying festivities in April, which are mostly focused on the harvest season and events that mark the beginning of the blooming season of the flowers.

While the people participating in these festivals exude an incredible amount of enthusiasm, these activities also serve to honour the region's centuries-old customs.

Visitors can enjoy and participate in these celebratory festivals that are held throughout the month of April.

**FLAMENCO & GYPSY FESTIVAL**

**DATE: TO BE ANNOUNCED**

The Flamenco and Gypsy Festival in Jodhpur is one of the most well-known and largest festivals held in the state of Rajasthan. The primary goal of the festival is to preserve a link between Rajasthani folk musicians and Flamenco (Spanish

folk music) and gypsy performers from other areas of the globe, which is the event's primary goal.

April is when the Meharangarh Fort in Jodhpur hosts the event, which takes place in the picturesque setting of the fort. It is a three-day event that begins with Rajasthani musical performances in the morning and ends with international acts in the evening.

**AOLING FESTIVAL**

**DATE: 1 APRIL**

The Aoling festival is the most important celebration celebrated in the district of Mon, and it is held every year in April. It represents the Konyaks' way of life and culture.

In the first week of April, the event is held to commemorate the harvest. It also corresponds with the beginning of the Konak New Year celebrations. It is a harvest celebration held





by the Konyak Nagas, and it lasts for three days. The celebration commemorates the entrance of the spring season, and the participants pray for a successful harvest season in the next year.

### **NENMARA VALLANGI VELA**

**DATE: 3 APRIL**

Nenmara Vallangi Vela, an annual event held in the Nellikulangara Bhagavathy Temple in Palakkad, is one of the most wonderful celebrations held on these shores.

The festival officially begins with a ceremony in which the flag is hoisted to signal the start of the festivities. Every year, on the 13th of April, this event takes place.

The vibrant colours, lights, fireworks, and various art forms on exhibit create an enjoyable and a memorable experience for everyone who attends.

The magnificence of a ritual, which includes an array of 30 tuskers marching through the streets burdened

with heavy ornaments, as well as a beautifully decked canopy, marks the conclusion of the festival.

### **CHITHIRAI FESTIVAL**

**DATE: 5 APRIL**

As per the Tamil calendar, Chithirai is the first month of the year, and on the full moon day of this month, the city of Madurai hosts the world-famous Chithirai festival, which attracts thousands of visitors.

The event, which takes place at Madurai Temple and lasts for fifteen days, is celebrated with tremendous zeal and excitement by the locals. The event is linked with Lord Vishnu, and it also commemorates the start of a new financial year.





### **RAM NAVAMI**

**DATE: 10 APRIL**

Rama Navami is a Hindu annual festival that commemorates the birth of Rama, the seventh incarnation of Vishnu, who was born on this day in history. It is observed on the 10th of April each year. Rama is highly revered in the Vaishnavite branch of Hinduism, where he is known as the Lord of the Universe.

To celebrate the day, worshippers will recite mantras. People will also offer flowers and fruits to Rama, and they would travel to temples or personal shrines at midday to offer prayers to him.

### **MAPRO STRAWBERRY FESTIVAL**

**DATE: 10-11 APRIL**

The Mapro Strawberry Festival, which takes place in Mapro Garden during Easter Weekend in March or April, has become a much-anticipated yearly event for the local community.

It was Mapro who came up with the idea for this one-of-a-kind four-day event that would promote strawberries while also improving general fruit intake and increasing tourism in Mahabaleshwar.



In addition to free strawberry farm tours, Mapro Food Park tours, and other entertainment and cultural events, the four-day event features a free strawberry carnival.

### **KASAULI RHYTHM AND BLUES FESTIVAL**

**DATE: 10-11 APRIL**

The Kasauli Rhythm & Blues Music Event (also known as KRBF) is an annual music festival held in Kasauli, India. The event will be held in Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh, in the stunning Baikunth Resort, which is surrounded by mountains.

Each year, the event is blessed by the presence of well-known musicians from the business. Aside from that, there are a number of independent singers and budding artists that play at this venue.





### **BAISAKHI**

**DATE: 14 APRIL**

Baisakhi is known as the Sikh New Year's Day because it is not only a Spring harvest celebration, but it is also a day commemorating the establishment of the Khalsa Panth of soldiers under Guru Gobind Singh in 1699, which is celebrated on this day.

Each year, on the 13th of April, it is commemorated. Since it is a spiritual holiday, people come to Gurudwaras dressed in brightly colored attire to offer prayers on this day.

### **VISHU**

**DATE: 15 APRIL**

Vishu is the first day of the Medam month according to the Malayalam calendar, and it marks the start of Meda Rashi, the first zodiac sign, as well as the first day of the year.



It occurs during the first day of the Malayalam month Medam (April), which also happens to be the Spring Equinox, when the length of day and night are equal in duration. Vishukanni being seen the early thing in the morning on Vishu is thought to be a sign of the year's success and good luck to come.

### **MAHAVIR JAYANTI**

**DATE: 15 APRIL**

Mahavir Jayanti is the most significant and auspicious holiday of the Jains, since it commemorates the birth of Lord Mahavir, which is the most significant and fortunate festival of all.

The month of April is dedicated to Mahavir Jayanti. In loving remembrance of the 24th Tirthankara of Jainism, who was the final spiritual leader, devotees remember this holy event on the first day of the month of Kartik.



# SCENIC SIKKIM WAITS TO BE DISCOVERED

Nestled by the borders of Nepal, Tibet, and Bhutan, scenic Sikkim is an incredibly beautiful destination in India with a tranquil, meditative environment that is immersive.

**TT BUREAU**

The pristine beauty of the Himalayas, the tranquility of the monasteries, vast lush full forests, and the calm and cool climate of this peaceful place create a lesser-known destination that has an unbelievable charm.

For easy understanding, we have categorized the destination into four regions, so visitors can easily locate and enjoy the amazing attractions in Sikkim.

**NORTH SIKKIM**

This picturesque region is the largest of all the four regions in Sikkim. The waterfalls and mountains make your travel in this

region an everlasting experience. The Phensang monastery, Seven Sister falls, Yumthang Valley, and Gurudongmar lake are must-visit places here. You can reach here by air at the Bagdogra Airport and the Pakyong Airport and by train to the New Jalpaiguri Station.

**PHENSANG MONASTERY**

With vibrant and majestic Buddhist architecture, the Phensang Sangag Choling Monastery is one of the biggest monasteries accommodating the largest population of monks, founded by the 3rd Lhatsun Jigmed Pawo in 1721 and was later rebuilt in 1840.



Visit this place during the festival months from October to December to experience the traditions and rituals. A calm meditation and walk around the serene monastery add a wonderful spiritual experience to your journey. A 40 km road trip from Gangtok will take you to this monastery in Phodong, which is located off the north Sikkim highways.

### **YUMTHANG VALLEY**

Rightly named the 'Valley of Flowers', this destination is situated at a height of 3500 metres and will leave you awestruck with its scenic natural surroundings. This flower sanctuary houses exotic blooms, yaks grazing the pastures and meadows with the river flowing in the midst of the lush mountains and hot springs.

Like an artist's colour palette, Yumthang Valley is filled with colourful species of rhododendron flowers, primulas, poppies, iris, geraniums, and many other floras, apples, and strawberries according to the seasons.

A stroll along the river banks with a picturesque view of the Himalayas makes the trip totally mesmerising. Plan a trip here during the months of March – June to witness the valley beautified by the blossoms. Book a taxi from Gangtok to Lachung and travel to Yumthang.

### **GURUDONGMAR LAKE**

Fenced by the snow-capped Himalayas, the Gurudongmar lake is situated at an altitude of 17000 ft. close to the Tibet and China border. With a crystal-clear reflection of vast blue skies and white snow-covered mountains, the lake is named after the guru Padmasambhava who is said to have visited Tibet through this place. It is believed that the water in the lake holds a boon for childless couples and is respected by both Hindus and Buddhists.



Visit Gurudongmar lake from March to June for a memorable experience. Since the lake is located very near to the border, special permits have to be obtained through tour operators and only Indian tourists are allowed to visit this place. Book a taxi from Gangtok to Lachung and travel to Gurudongmar.





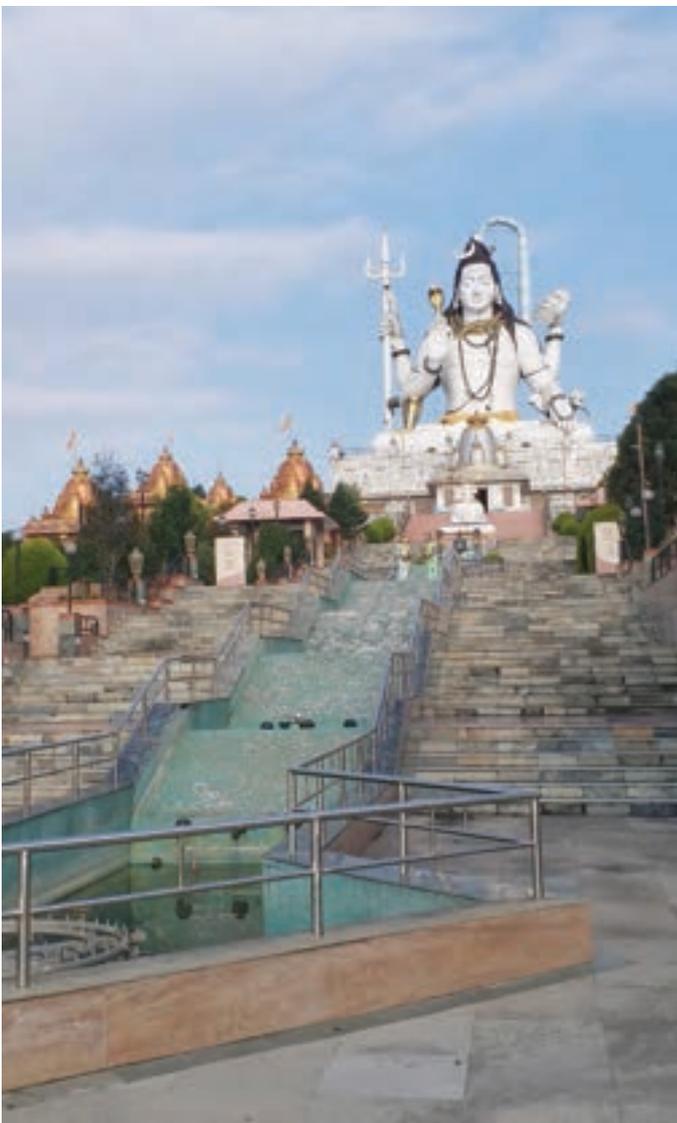
### **SOUTH SIKKIM**

Widespread with agricultural lands and lush forests on lush slopes, the South Sikkim district lies at the altitude of 400 metre to 2000 metre and is the smallest of the four regions. Reach the region by air from Bagdogra airport about 102 km from Namchi in West Bengal or by train from the New Jalpaiguri Station in West Bengal about 96 km from Namchi. Once you reach Siliguri, you can enjoy a calm road trip along the Testa river to Namchi.

### **TAREY BHIR**

Walk your way on this great path amid the tall trees and grassy pastures to witness the jaw-dropping view of the Himalayan ranges and the hills of Darjeeling and Kalimpong. This magnificent cliff is located near Sadam at an altitude of 10000 feet.

Experience the freshness of the region during the trek along the winding path and enjoy the breath-taking view it offers of the merger of the waters of the Teesta and Rangit rivers flowing down the valley. A 16 km road trip from Namchi towards Sadam will take you to this amazing viewpoint. Visit Tarey Bhir and its surroundings during the months of March to May or September to November for a wonderful experience.



### **SIDDHESHWARA DHAM**

With the backdrop of the bright blue sky and majestic mountains, visible in the distance is the magnificent 108 feet statue of Lord Shiva sitting on the platform amid the replicas of the Jyotirlingams Chardham from various parts of the country such as Rameshwaram, Dwaraka, Badrinath, and Jagannath Puri. The platform on which Lord Shiva sits showcases scenes from Shiva Purana such as his marriage to Sati and his tandavas.

Also known as the Char Dham, this place is situated at Solophok hill and is a 5 km drive from Namchi. Opened in 2011, it is believed to be the spot where Lord Shiva presented the divine weapon to Arjuna before the Mahabharata war. The Kirateshwar avatar of Lord Shiva with a bow placed at the entrance is worshipped by the Sikkimese people.

You can visit this place from 6:00 pm – 7:00 pm during summer and from 5:30 pm – 6:30 pm during the winter. You can opt for a bus, jeep, or a taxi ride to reach this place.

### **EAST SIKKIM**

You cannot afford to miss East Sikkim when you plan your vacation. Housing the capital city, Gangtok, this region holds many mesmerizing attractions like vibrant monasteries and tranquil nature. Fenced by the beautiful Himalayan ranges, it falls near the Indo-Tibetan border. Home to many popular tourist places, East Sikkim holds Gangtok, many sacred monasteries, and Nathula Pass - which are hot spots in this cold region.

## GANGTOK

Surrounded by hills, monasteries, waterfalls, snow and a vast range of flora and fauna, Gangtok and its surrounding regions are heaven on earth in their scenic beauty. This place is a treat for all nature and adventure lovers.

Offering a beautiful view of and from the Himalayas, this destination lures people with its natural beauty and attractions such as Tsomgo Lake and Ban Jhakri Falls, and provides a fulfilling spiritual trip through the monasteries such as Ranka Monastery and Enchey monastery.

The Bagdogra airport is the closest airport and New Jalpaiguri is the closest railway station and from there it takes a maximum of 4.5 hours by road to reach Gangtok. The best time to holiday here is during the summer season.

## NATHULA

The Tibetan words, 'Nathu' and 'La' mean listening ears and the whistle of the wind can surprise you as much as the total stillness and silence at other moments in this astonishing destination.

If the location on your mobile shows that you are nowhere, don't be astonished. That's because you are on the trading border of India and China. A staircase amid the snow takes the visitors to the Indo-China International border where the soldiers of both countries can be seen. Just a look around the place will make you feel energised despite the bumpy road travel.

People from several parts of India pay their respects to the soldiers at the Watershed War Memorial and visit the Army exhibition centre and canteen. On your way to the Nathula, plan a visit to the beautiful Tsomgo Lake, Baba Mandir, Menmecho Lake, and Zuluk Wildlife sanctuary for a complete experience.

Make sure to get your permits through travel agencies or at Tourism and Civil Aviation to enter Nathula. This place can be best experienced during the months of May to October.

## TSOMGO LAKE

Located at nearly 12,313 feet from the land, the Tsomgo Lake or the Changu Lake takes your breath away. The clear water



with the reflection of the mountains surrounding it makes the two hours journey from Gangtok memorable.

A rope car near the lake takes tourists from the lake to the hilltop to get a more vivid view of the lake. The line to the rope car is outnumbered by the number of people wanting to go on a yak ride and experience something thrilling and new.





### **RANKA MONASTERY**

Fenced by lush mountains, the Ranka or Lingdum Monastery is the newest addition to the many monasteries in Sikkim. Welcomed by a huge line of prayer bells, the monastery represents tranquillity.

The colourful monastery stands opposite to the prayer bells and the green hills amidst the rolling mist provide a picturesque view. Inside the building is a huge Buddha statue in the prayer hall and the walls are covered with beautiful paintings. The main prayer hall is surrounded by the classrooms of the young lamas. Please note that visitors must take permission before they can click pictures with the lamas. The monastery is open from dusk to dawn for visitors and can be reached by a 20 km ride by road from Gangtok.

### **WEST SIKKIM**

Adventure lovers must visit this place! Being the second-largest region of the four, West Sikkim has diverse landscapes, flora, and fauna, and is perfect for varied adventure activities like trekking, mountaineering, paragliding, and birdwatching. Reach this region by air at Bagdogra airport or by train to NJP railway station and get a cab.

### **KHANGCHENDZONGA NATIONAL PARK**

This biosphere reserve is home to endangered flora and fauna, green valleys, pure lakes, and glassy glaciers. Named after the third-highest peak, Kangchenjunga, this national park and biosphere reserve is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is the first Mixed Heritage site of India.



The Tolung monastery is situated amid the Alpine grasses, oaks, fir, birch, maple, and willow along with the fauna like snow leopard, Himalayan Tahr, Tibetan wild ass, Himalayan blue sheep, serow, goral, and takin, as well as reptiles including rat snake and Russell's viper.

Khangchendzonga National Park also houses about 550 species of birds such as green pigeon, Tibetan snowcock, snow pigeon, impeyan pheasant, Asian emerald cuckoo, sunbird, and eagle. If you are a nature and adventure lover, then obtain the necessary permits and start your trekking at Yuksom or from Dzongri Base Camp!

Experience the national park in pleasant weather during the months of March to May. A 50 km bumpy road trip from Gangtok will take you to this marvellous nature reserve that will leave you enthralled.



*Food*

# FESTIVE FERVOUR: A WONDERFUL WORLD OF TASTY VEGETARIAN DISHES

Festivals make the rounds virtually every month for one reason or the other in incredible India. And, festival fare means a sumptuous meal and imaginative food preparations.

## TT BUREAU

**T**he Holi festival is just over, the festive Chaitra Navratri season in India is upon us, — one of the most auspicious Hindu festivals dedicated to Goddess Durga and her nine incarnations, harvest festivals like Baisakhi and Bihu, Mahavir Jayanthi, Budh Purnima, and later in the year, Dusshera, Diwali, Bhaiya Duj and more.

We have rounded up some great vegetarian dishes you can make at home during the festival season. These dishes are not only delicious, but they are also quick and easy to make. From sumptuous sabudana khichdi to sitaphal shake,

here are some of our top gourmet vegetarian dishes to lift up your festive spirit.

### SITAPHAL MILKSHAKE

Sweet and decadent, sitaphal milkshake is the best welcome drink to greet your guests with. Sitaphal or custard apple is known for its grainy texture and saccharine sweet taste. For this drink, all you need to do is to take the pulp of two custard apples and blend it in a mixer with two scoops of vanilla ice cream and some chilled milk.



This festive season, toss the high-calorie aerated beverages with this fruity drink that is packed with vitamins, potassium, and magnesium.

### **SABUDANA KHICHDI**

Extracted from Tapioca roots, sabudana pearls are high in carbohydrates and fats that keep you full during the fasting season. The addition of peanuts makes this dish a complete meal. To prepare sabudana khichdi, you will need 100 grams of tapioca pearls, washed and dried. Add a tablespoon of asafoetida and cumin seeds in hot oil and let them splutter. Add green chillies and a bit of turmeric for a brilliant golden hue.

Finally, add the tapioca pearls and stir them well. For added crunch, mix in peanuts. Remove from the heat and garnish with coriander leaves. This wonderful preparation of tapioca pearls with crunchy peanuts and fresh herbs makes for a sumptuous vrata meal during the fasting season of Navaratri. Most important it is one of the tastiest vegetarian dishes to be found!

### **CHILLA TOSOS**

This festive season, give the classic tacos an Indian twist by making them with moong dal instead of maize flour. Moong dal is known for its high protein content and keeps you full for hours. Make a paste of soaked moong beans, flavoured with an assortment of Indian spices, such as turmeric, cumin, red chillis, and amchur. Add a cup of semolina flour to add body to the mixture. Make small pancakes of the batter at a medium flame. Serve them with a filling of lettuce and bell peppers, along with homemade salsa and a dollop of fresh sour cream.

### **SINGHARE KI ATTE KA POORI**

Give this roadside delicacy a high-brow twist by using singhare ki atta rather than refined flour. Singhara or a water



chestnut is a fruit that grows underwater. Although it is a winter staple, its flour is available throughout the year. This gluten-free flour is packed with nutrients and is great for weight loss.

Knead the flour well with water and oil and use the dough to make pooris (fluffy pancakes). Serve them with a delicious potato curry, lightly spiced with cumin, turmeric and flavoured with fresh tomatoes.

This vrat (fast) staple makes for a delicious dinner with friends and family, over one of the most nutritious Vegetarian dishes.

### **BANOFFEE PIE**

This pie is a classic party-pleaser. It takes no cooking and can be prepared in minutes. The main ingredient of this dish is the caramel sauce that goes on the top of the pie. All you need is a can of condensed milk that needs to be boiled continuously for two hours.

The result is a rich and decadent caramel sauce that goes on top of a layer of crushed digestive biscuits. Decorate with sliced bananas and finish the dish off with a topping of whipped cream and chocolate shavings.

### **JACKFRUIT BIRYANI**

Jackfruit, a tropical fruit found in large parts of South Asia, makes for a great meat alternative. Its meaty texture and robust flavours make them the perfect substitute for meat. When cooked with spices and yogurt, raw jackfruit kernels can fool even the best of cooks, who might mistake it for mutton., while it's one of the most popular vegetarian dishes found in India.

For jackfruit biryani, you need to boil 200 grams of jackfruit and then cook the kernels with yogurt, spices, and ginger. Boil 200 grams of basmati rice separately. Then in a deep-bottomed vessel, layer the jackfruit curry and rice and top it off with ghee and garam masala. Place it on a low flame and let it cook slowly for at least 45 minutes.

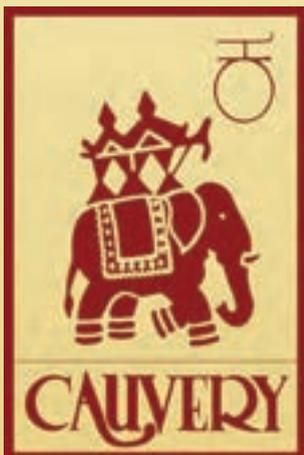
The result is a savoury rice-based dish that is surely going to be the star of the festival dinner. Happily, it's one of the choicest vegetarian dishes on offer.

### **RAW BANANA KEBAB**

For the perfect accompaniment to your biryani, make these kebabs from mashed raw bananas. Boil a couple of raw bananas in salted water. Cool the cooked bananas and mix well with melted butter, garam masala, ginger, rose petal powder, fennel powder, wheat flour, and cornflour. Shape them into kebabs and shallow fry them in canola oil. Serve with a yogurt dip and tangy tomato chutney.

If you crave vegetarian dishes, these easy-to-make, mouth-watering recipes for festivals will get your guests asking for more.





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# THERE'S MORE TO MAHARASHTRIAN FOOD THAN VADA PAV

The delectable cuisine of the people of Maharashtra, India, known as Maharashtrian food or Marathi cuisine has distinct characteristics despite sharing many similarities with other Indian cuisines.

TT BUREAU

**M**aharashtrians have traditionally considered their cuisine to be more austere than others. Mild and spicy meals are served in Maharashtrian cuisine. Wheat, rice, jowar, bajri, vegetables, lentils, and fruit are all staple foods. Vegetables are frequently served with peanuts and cashews.

## PAV BHAJI

It is a world-famous fast food delicacy from the western state of Maharashtra or even the king of street food. The dish is made up of veggies seasoned with a special blend of spices

called pav bhaji masala and served with soft bread rolls called pav. The recipe was created as a quick meal for textile workers, providing the necessary nutrition from the combination of veggies. Serve it with lemon wedges for an additional push to the dish.

## SABUDANA KHICHDI

Sabudana khichdi, cooked with sabudana pearls, boiled potatoes, roasted peanuts, and a few spices, is one of the most popular fasting dishes. It is traditionally prepared during Hindu fasting days such as Navratri, Mahashivratri, or



Ekadashi. It's high in carbohydrates, with peanuts providing the only source of protein. Because sabudana is high in carbohydrates, it makes a satisfying snack. You can garnish the dish with coriander leaves and grated fresh coconut.

### MISAL PAV

It's a traditional spicy cuisine from western India, consisting of a spicy misal stew served with bread or pav. The spicy misal is topped with chivda mix, sev, or farsan, and this meal is unique because of its topping. This spicy and mouth-watering dish is usually eaten for breakfast or as a snack, but it can also be served for lunch or dinner.

### BHARLI VANGI

Stuffed eggplant-based curry recipes are popular in India and can be utilised for a variety of purposes. This dish is a traditional hot curry cooked with purple eggplant and a mixture of packed spices.

It's one of Marathi cuisine's most popular curries, and it's full of goda masala's warmth. It's usually served with Indian flatbread or roti, although it can also be served as a side dish with dal rice.



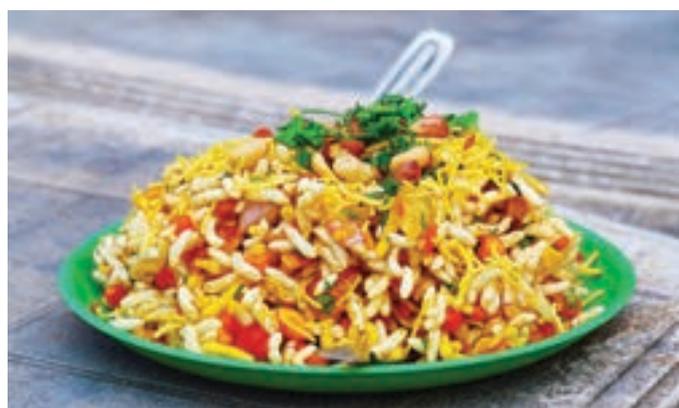
### PITHLA BHAKRI

Pitla is a besan (gramme flour) and onion-based Maharashtrian dish. A spicy base of ginger, garlic, green chillies, and onions is thickened with gram flour and water. Most Maharashtrian families' favourite comfort food is spicy pitla with bhakri, which is also a famous dish at Mumbai's "Zunka Bhakar centres."

Spicy pitla with jowar bhakri (similar to jowar roti) and chilli garlic chutney would make a perfect supper.

### BHEL PURI

Maharashtrian cuisine is famous for its mouth-watering chaat recipes, which are mainly sold by street sellers. The majority of them are gravy or sauce-based snacks with vegetables,



spices, and chaat chutneys. This popular savory street snack recipe uses puffed rice, finely chopped vegetables, and chaat chutneys. It's usually served as a late-night snack with deep-fried flat puris that also function as an edible spoon.



### **POHA**

Poha is a Maharashtrian morning dish made of flattened rice, herbs, and spices. It's a popular breakfast in Maharashtrian households and is enjoyed by all ages. In the two most prevalent variants, poha is made with either potato or onion, or both potatoes and onion. Add boiled peas, grated carrots, roasted peanuts, cashews, coriander leaves (cilantro leaves), and shredded coconut to make it more nutritious.

### **AMTI DAL**

The word amti means tangy, and it refers to a flavor that is a mix of spice and sweetness. It is distinctive and specific to Marathi cuisine because of the blend of sweet, sour, spicy, and acidic flavours. The tanginess comes from the kokum, the sweetness from the jaggery, and the spice from the goda masala. Toor dal/pigeon pea lentil is used in this classic Maharashtrian style dal recipe. It's typically served with plain rice and jeera rice for lunch and dinner.

### **PURAN POLI**

Puran Poli is a delicious flatbread cooked with husked split Bengal gramme (chana dal) and jaggery and filled with a sweet lentil filling. Puran Poli is a traditional Maharashtrian dish that is offered during festivals such as Ganesh Chaturthi, Diwali, and others. Modak, Puran Poli, and Nariyal laddoo are commonly served during the Ganesh Chaturthi festival in Maharashtra. With milk, ghee, or curd, Puran Poli can be served warm or at room temperature (yogurt).

### **SHRIKHAND**

Shrikhand is a popular dessert in the western Indian states of Gujarat and Maharashtra. It is one of the simplest and most delicious desserts available. It is a simple and tasty delicacy made with thick yoghurt and sugar, saffron, and cardamom. This simple dish is the perfect after-dinner treat, whether you use homemade hanging curd or store-bought Greek yoghurt. Top with sliced dried fruits, roasted nuts, or charoli/chironji before serving. Toss in some crushed pistachios as a finishing touch.



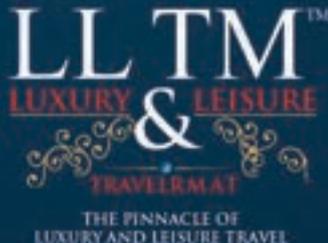
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