

Destination

INDIA

EXPLORE | DISCOVER | EXPERIENCE



Where the mind is without fear
and the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken up
into fragments by narrow domestic walls;
Where words come out from the depth of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its arms
towards perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason
has not lost its way into the
dreary desert sand of dead habit;
Where the mind is led forward by thee into
ever-widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father,
let my country awake.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE



We welcome you

MESSAGE FROM AMBASSADOR



I take great pleasure in welcoming you to the vibrant land of diversity - India - through this booklet 'Destination India'

India celebrated 75 years of her independence in 2022. She is a young nation state but an ancient civilization, blessed with breathtaking landscapes and a vibrant tapestry of cultures.

India is a global brand recognized for its rich history, philosophy, diverse traditions, a burgeoning economy, and a voice for peace in a divided world.

Travelling across India presents a captivating tapestry of experiences from the serene backwaters of Kerala to the majestic Himalayan peaks, from the bustling streets of Delhi to the tranquil shores of Goa. Here, you will encounter a wealth of traditions, languages, cuisines, and art forms that have thrived for generations. Whether you are exploring the timeless city of Varanasi on the banks of the Ganges, savoring the spicy flavors of South Indian cuisine, or admiring the intricate architecture of historic monuments, you will be mesmerized by India's heritage.

India's natural beauty is equally captivating, with diverse landscapes that range from lush forests to arid deserts. The pristine beaches along our extensive coastline invite relaxation, while our national parks and wildlife sanctuaries promise encounters with majestic creatures like tigers, elephants, and rhinoceroses. It is not just the sights and sounds that make India special but also the warmth and hospitality of her people. The spirit of "Atithi Devo Bhava," meaning "The Guest is God," resonates deeply in Indian culture, as does "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam"— the World is one Family. You will find the people to be welcoming, ready to share their stories, hear yours, and eager to ensure your visit is unforgettable.

As you go on this journey, you will discover that India is not just a destination - it is an experience that will leave an indelible mark on your heart and soul. Ms. Preeti Kathuria has put together this booklet with great care and I thank her for that. But this is just a teaser to whet your appetite.

On behalf of the Embassy of India in Vienna, I extend my best wishes for your journey through India.

Jaideep Mazumdar



Brihadeeswar Temple, Tamil Nadu



Fatehpur Sikri, Uttar Pradesh

Travel to India

LAND OF MAGNIFICENCE

India is a land of experiential significance where myth meets history, storytellers revive legends and where beauty blooms in diversity. As a popular tourist destination India is home to the finest architectural heritage and offers aesthetic cultural scapes that are absolutely unparalleled, immersive journeys. The geographical radar is embellished with destinations which are meditated, conscious sojourns away from the ordinary.

We recommend some unassuming escapes that are the best cure from the numbness of mundane living!





Trichy, Tamil Nadu



Rath Yatra, Jagannath Puri, Odisha

Vast kaleidoscope

BE SOMEWHERE ELSE TOGETHER

One of the oldest civilisations in the world, India is a mosaic of multicultural experiences.

As the seventh largest country in the world, India has a distinct geographical entity marked by the mountains and the sea. The land is famous for its ancient history, varied landscapes, and diverse culture and there are endless reasons why everyone should visit India.

It is a land that can offer mountains and plains, beaches and backwaters, wildlife and adventure activities, secluded islands and bustling metropolitan, culinary delights and local delicacies, spiritual holidays and romantic vacations! Head to the mountains, enjoy a beach retreat or cruise through the golden Thar, India has options galore for all. The challenge faced by the traveller will always be to ascertain how to navigate and choose amidst these myriad choices!



MAPPING INDIAN HERITAGE



Soak your Soul HERITAGE TOURISM



India is a magnificent diverse land with glorious, opulent dynasties, powerful kings and rulers, flourishing civilisations and profound history. The splendid heritage is woven and reflected in its architecture, arts, crafts, languages, cultures and even religions. While formidable forts, rock architecture, ancient temples and grand palaces testify the grandeur of times gone by, the various museums and galleries scattered across the country act as tangible cultural inventories of India's history. UNESCO has identified several heritage sites in India that are unique marvels of history.

With a history dating back to over 5000 years, contemporary India is a land of co-existing polarities where tradition and modernity blend and mingle seamlessly. Introducing itself as a tourist destination, India offers space for learning about various civilizations, spiritual leaders and founders of religions. India is a wealthy trove of art, culture, crafts, mysticism, philosophy, tradition, music and architecture that has always lured travellers, scholars and history buffs across the globe.

We invite you to relish the experience of exploring the country's ancient relics and architectural ruins rising over teeming cities, streets and roads.





HUMAYUN'S TOMB, DELHI

The Humayun's Tomb is a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Delhi. Built for Mughal Emperor Humayun in the year 1570, it is the first grand dynastic garden mausoleum of the subcontinent. The tomb was constructed on the banks of the Yamuna river near the Nizamuddin Dargah. Spread across an area of 30 acres, it offers a panoramic view of the majestic Char Bagh - a Persian style garden with pools connected to intersecting water channel pathways. The unique octagonal shape of the monument makes it one of the finest examples of Mughal architecture.





SANCHI STUPA MADHYA PRADESH

Suffused with serenity and spirituality, Sanchi is a treasure trove of stone edifices surrounded by hills of rolling green. A prominent site in the Buddhist circuit, Sanchi has been bestowed a rich legacy of Buddhist monuments - from the Sanchi Stupa to the Ashokan Pillar. Walking through the many edifices one can't help but be taken back to the times when saffron-clad Buddhist monks must have thronged Sanchi, perhaps chanting "Buddham Sharanam Gacchami". The tranquil beauty of Sanchi is a testament to the power of one man, emperor Ashoka of the mighty Mauryan dynasty.

Sanchi has been a silent yet a patient witness to the rise and fall of empires, quietly assured of its place in history and mythology. The intricate carvings adorning the numerous monuments document the many teachings one can get from the life of Lord Buddha.

It is said that Ashoka, in a turn of events, transformed from a violent warrior to a benevolent ruler. This change of heart is said to have come about after the vicious battle of Kalinga that took many lives. The experience changed Ashoka and he ordered the building of stupas to safeguard the many Buddhist relics and to propagate Buddhism. He ardently believed that the philosophy of Buddhism held the potential of positive transformation that the world needed. The earliest Buddhist architecture of Sanchi has been dated to the early Mauryan period in 3rd century BC and the youngest is attributed to 12th century AD. Several new edifices were raised during this time and the Great Stupa was decorated with balustrades, a staircase and a harmika. The Andhra-Satavahanas added elaborate gateways to stupa 1 in 1st century BC



HAMPI, KARNATAKA

A legendary lost city that was once the powerhouse of an ancient kingdom and an auspicious temple town standing on the banks of the mighty Tungabhadra river, history and mythology come to life in Hampi, Karnataka. A queen's bath, a spectacular Lotus Palace, a royal stable or a temple, which is said to have been the place where the wedding of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati took place, this UNESCO World Heritage site reveals a facet of history at every turn.

Albeit in ruins, the magnificent structures here stand in testimony to Hampi's rich past under the powerful Vijayanagara empire (1336 – 1646 AD). Hampi finds mention in the Hindu epic Ramayana as well. It is said to be the location of the monkey kingdom, Kishkindha. No wonder then that Hampi has ranked second in the must-visit destination list for the year 2019 by the New York Times! The grandiose site of Hampi was the last capital of the Vijayanagara kingdom, one of the most significant in southern India. Its rich kings built exquisite temples and palaces, which won the admiration of travellers between the 14th and 16th centuries. Though plundered later, Hampi still retains more than 1,600 monuments, including palaces, forts, memorial structures, temples, shrines, pillared halls, baths and gateways. The architectural ruins are set against a surreal landscape dotted with heaps of giant boulders perched precariously over kilometres of undulating terrain, attracting rock-climbers, trekkers and other adventure sport enthusiasts. The rusty hues of these rocks are offset by jade-green palm groves, banana plantations and paddy fields. Today, this laid-back city is a tourists' hub, flocked by devotees, adventure-lovers and thrill-seekers.



MEHRANGARH FORT, RAJASTHAN

A renowned landmark of Jodhpur, Mehrangarh Fort is one of the largest forts in the city. An ideal vantage point for the panoramic view of Jodhpur, one can trek to the top to see the city spread like a blue ocean at the foot of a hill. The fort is a magnum opus known for its exquisite latticed windows, carved panels, intricately decorated windows and walls of the Moti Mahal, Phool Mahal and Sheesh Mahal that sit pretty within the vast, sprawling complex of the fort.

Head next to the Elephant Howdah gallery on the southern side of Shringar Chowk, which displays the elephant seats used by the royals of Jodhpur. The most striking of these is the silver howdah presented to Maharaja Jaswant Singh I (1629-1678), the ruler of Marwar, by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, as a symbol of honour.

You can then proceed to the palanquin gallery, displaying the primary means of transport of royal ladies; the Daulat Khana, literally translating to wealth store, where the royal treasury was kept; the painting gallery, showcasing a marvellous collection of miniature paintings of the Marwar School; cloth gallery, where the plush carpets, rich brocades and heavy velvets of the royals of Jodhpur have been preserved; the Silah Khana, which was the royal armoury; and galleries where exquisite wooden crafts, cradles and turbans of the princely families can be viewed.

There are seven gates that need to be crossed in order to reach the fort. The gates still bear the marks of the battles fought in the past.

MAPPING WILDLIFE SITES



Find your Wild WILDLIFE TOURISM



The dense jungles of India are just perfect for a thrilling wildlife safari. Whether you are on a tiger trail or wish to enter the realm of the one-horned rhino, India is certainly the place to be. The lush forests, nestled in all parts of the country, are home to bountiful wildlife and are protected as national parks & wildlife sanctuaries. Go for jungle safaris, enjoy birding and playfully indulge in various hiking and scouting activities in the thick jungles with expert guides to lead you into the forest.

Let us check out some of the national parks in India that promise you stunning forest ambience, daring safaris, birding expeditions and the thrill of the unknown lurking in the dense darkened forests.





RANTHAMBORE NATIONAL PARK, SAWAI MADHOPUR, RAJASTHAN

The popular Ranthambore National Park and Tiger Reserve was once the private game reserve of the royal family of Jaipur. Located 155 km from Jaipur, Ranthambore's diverse topography with a mix of rolling hills and crags, meadows, lakes and rivulets, offers some of the finest opportunities for sighting the magnificent tiger in the wild. Apart from the tiger, other wildlife in the park includes sloth bear, leopard, jackal, fox, hyena, Indian wolf, chital, sambar deer, blue bull antelope or nilgai, rhesus macaque, langur and an incredible variety of birds. The 10th century Ranthambore fort dominates the landscape of this dry-deciduous forest.

The Bakula region is among the thickly forested areas of the sanctuary that has various waterholes and pools. Thus, an abundance of wildlife can be found here.





GIR NATIONAL PARK, SASAN GIR, GUJARAT

Deep in the dry jungles of Gujarat, this realm of the majestic Asiatic lions is a perfect place for a thrilling safari. Book a forest accommodation, and all you need is an expert guide & some good luck, to catch the mighty lions in action. Other inhabitants here include leopards, hyena, deer, honey-badger, and many more.

This forested, hilly, 1412-sq-km sanctuary about halfway between Veraval and Junagadh is the last refuge of the Asiatic lion (*Panthera leopersica*). The sanctuary was set up in 1965 and a 259-sq-km core area was declared as a national park in 1975. Since the late 1960s, lion numbers have increased from less than 200 to 674 (Census 2020). Taking a safari through the thick, undisturbed forests is pure bliss, even without the added excitement of spotting lions, other wildlife and myriad bird species.

Twelve kilometers west of Sasan Gir village at Devalia, within the sanctuary precincts, is the Gir Interpretation Zone, better known as simply Devalia. The 4.12-sq-km fenced-off compound is home to a cross-section of Gir wildlife. Chances of seeing lions and leopards here are guaranteed, with 45-minute bus tours departing along the trails hourly.



PERIYAR TIGER RESERVE, KERALA

Periyar is a kingdom of wilderness. The reserve has majestic tigers roaming its grounds among the greens. Consider yourself lucky if you can catch sight of one relaxing and lazing about. The tigers with their grandeur and physique will leave you awestruck. Periyar is one of the 27 tiger reserves in India. It is also the oldest wildlife sanctuary in Kerala, along with being renowned for having the largest protected area. The tiger reserve spans 192,001 acre of land and is blessed with a picturesque landscape home to various flora and fauna. The sanctuary also has boating facilities at its scenic lake. Travellers can see herds of elephants and grazing deer here with the sweet sound of birds chirping in the trees. The sanctuary is about 110 km away from Munnar.

It is home to as many as 1,965 species of flowering plants; this includes 171 grass species and 143 orchid species. The *Podocarpus wallichianus*, one of the only South Indian conifers, also grows here. As for mammals, there are more than 60 species found, including leopard, sambar deer, Indian bison, Indian wild dog, Asian elephant, and barking deer. You can also spot the smooth-coated otter if you take a boat ride in Periyar Lake. The endangered long-tailed macaque, bonnet macaque, and Nilgiri langur can be seen playing amongst the trees. The forest has 265 species of birds, some of which are the Malabar grey hornbill, Indian pied hornbill, white-bellied treepie, Malabar Trogon and more.



KHANGCHENDZONGA NATIONAL PARK, SIKKIM

Khangchendzonga National Park encompasses an area covering 1784 sq km. It is bounded in the north by the Tent Peak and the ridge of the Zemu glacier. The eastern boundary of this park comprises the ridge of the Mountain Lamaongden. The southern boundary includes Mount Narsing and Mount Pandim. The western boundary comprises the mighty Kanchendzonga which presides over its namesake park and the Nepal Peak. Being bounded by such formidable features, it is no wonder that the park has remained ecologically untouched and therefore has provided a natural protection to the flora and fauna it shelters. The fauna includes the Snow leopard, Himalayan Black Bear, Red Panda, Barking deer and many other species. The Park is surrounded by a biosphere which combines nature conservation with scientific research, environmental training, environmental education monitoring and demonstration.

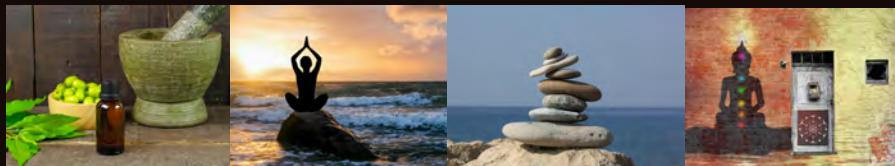


MAPPING WELLNESS & CURE



Rejuvenate & Replenish

WELLNESS TOURISM



The ancient sciences of Ayurveda and Yoga make India an ideal destination for a holistic wellness retreat. The natural healing processes and therapies are a pure blessing for people battling with various lifestyle diseases. A combination of spa plus vacation, loosely called Spacation, is an ideal opportunity for travellers who aim at a relaxing and rejuvenating India holiday.

India's sun-kissed coastlines, peace-permeated hill stations and breezy riversides offer a host of nutritious food, spas, yoga, detox therapies, Ayurveda, naturopathy, Vedanta and meditation techniques, retrieved and curated from the most ancient of sciences and arts. With innumerable ways to keep both the mind and body aligned, peaceful and in perfect health, the country is the perfect stopover to holiday at a softer pace.

It's all in the mind, and reflected on the body... And our ancestors were well versed with this simple concept, owing to which many ancient sciences and techniques are still in practice. These have received worldwide renown and still continue to grow. Let us take a look at the few destinations in India that offer a range of Ayurveda, spa, and yoga courses to help you de-stress, and rejuvenate in a luxurious ambience. Set in beautiful landscapes, these Yoga & Ayurveda retreats are perfect for self-indulgence and quiet reflection.





KERALA



This tropical state aptly called the Land of Ayurveda, is home to Ayurveda roots since times immemorial. Its tropical climate fit for growing medicinal plants, qualified practitioners, and serene ambiance promise you a perfect setting for regaining harmony of body, mind & soul. Relax your body with various detoxification therapies, aroma massages, and yoga practices at the many wellness resorts in Kerala. Set amid the emerald backwaters, lush plantations, and misty hills, these lavish resorts help you unwind in a luxurious ambiance.

Commonly referred to as the science of life, the practice of Ayurveda is as old as time itself. It is believed that Ayurveda, which originated in India, was passed down from the gods to the sages. Brahma, who is one-third of the Trinity is believed to have formulated this ancient science. Based on traditional Hindu medicine systems, the idea behind it is to procure a balance in the body systems through yogic breathing, herbal treatments and diets.

The top institute for Ayurveda is located in capital city Delhi. The All India Institute of Ayurveda carries out research and tries to blend modern practices with this branch of ancient wisdom to enhance the benefits.

For Ayurvedic treatments of ailments, one can head to the Ayurvedagram Heritage Wellness Centre spread over a generous seven acre. Around 21 km from the city lies the international headquarters of The Art of Living – the Bangalore Ashram.

In the picturesque hill station of Dehradun in Uttarakhand lies Vana, a wellness retreat that promises to heal with a combination of Ayurveda, Tibetan healing (Sowa Rigpa), yoga and natural therapies along with modern-day spa, fitness and aqua techniques.

Igatpuri, 45 km from Nashik, is home to the Vipassana International Academy, which teaches meditation for self-purification. In Goa lies Devayaa, The Ayurveda and Nature Cure Center, which offers solutions inspired by Ayurveda and Naturopathy for emotional and mental healing.

Located in the attractive Chamundi Hills, in Mysuru, is the Indus Valley Ayurvedic Centre that offers detox treatments, massages and weight-loss and beauty packages for complete rejuvenation of mind and body. One can also undertake courses in Ayurvedic treatments and cooking here.





UTTARAKHAND

With its deep-rooted history of Ayurveda, Yoga and mediation, Uttarakhand has risen to fame as a world-known wellness retreat in recent years. Its little town of Rishikesh, set at the Himalayan foothills, on the banks of the holy Ganges, is home to a range of Ayurveda spas and yoga centers. From simple ashrams to five-star luxury resorts offering an array of therapies, Rishikesh is rightly nicknamed the Yoga Capital of the World. Go for some Ayurveda therapies to let go of the stress, take aroma massages, and indulge in yoga on the banks of the Ganges- the experience is rejuvenating!

Over 5,000 years old, the practice of yoga, renowned all over the world, has been benefitting mankind for generations and also finds mention in the Indian epic, Rig Veda. A synchronised art of movement, breathing and meditation, yoga helps expand awareness, improve balance, increase intellect, lowers anxiety and helps manage weight and overall good mental, physical and emotional health. The word 'yoga' means to unite and symbolises the union of body and consciousness. India, the home of this practice, hosts a variety of wellness resorts, ashram retreats and yoga meditation centres that provide a peaceful and tranquil environment to indulge in yoga meditation and also offer classes to those who wish to learn it.

There are a variety of yoga styles taught and practiced in India. The most popular is the Vinyasa yoga, which is a series of fluid motions, almost like a dance, done in accord with breathing techniques. It is generally done in a dark room or with eyes closed. The Ashtanga yoga or the traditional yoga synchronises movement and breathing and is usually performed without oral instruction and music. To get a feel of more challenging postures, the Iyengar yoga is your best bet. Taught at a slower pace, this style of yoga involves the use of props like straps, blankets and blocks. For beginners, Hatha yoga is preferred as it is an umbrella term for all physical yoga practices. Kripalu yoga is a technique to explore spirituality, with a focus on meditation, self-realisation, relaxation and pranayama.

Set against the backdrop of stunning mountains in the holy town of Rishikesh, in Uttarakhand, Parmarth Niketan is an ideal spot for a wellness vacation. From offering accommodation to visitors and yoga classes to beginners to boasting a rich Vedic heritage and teacher training courses, the ashram provides a sublime spiritual experience. It also plays host to the famous International Yoga Festival, a week-long event held annually in March. The Ganga arti performed every evening is a unique experience that should not be missed. Tourists can also visit the award-winning spa resort Ananda that integrates Ayurveda, yoga and Vedanta to create unique wellness experiences.



MAPPING ADVENTURE SITES



Bucketful of Adventure

ADVENTURE TOURISM



Scale the heights of thrill, or plummet to the depths of excitement or if you're truly daring, survey gorgeous lands and waters, while suspended in the sky. All this and more awaits you as you explore land, water and sky adventures in the country. From trekking, mountain biking and mountaineering in the secluded snow-capped Himalayas to surfing, rafting, scuba diving and snorkelling, there are a multitude of options for thrill seekers.

India's diverse terrain ensures optimum adrenaline-pumping for those looking to tread on the exhilarating side of a holiday. The north beckons adventure seekers with the gregarious spirit of the Himalayas that offer visitors thrilling experiences in destinations like Manali, Dharamsala, Ladakh, Srinagar, and Kedarnath. In the south, you can visit Ootacamund and Yercaud, while Goa, in the western part of the country, is a delight for water-sport enthusiasts.





SKIING, GULMARG, JAMMU & KASHMIR

With one of the best ski slopes in Asia, Gulmarg is the most popular skiing hotspot in the country. It is ranked 7th among skiing and snowboarding sites in Asia, and has also received the Best Ski Destination award from CNN International. The height of slopes in Gulmarg vary between 8,700 ft and 10,500 ft and their gradient challenges both beginners and experts. The snow level goes up as much as 8 ft in January and February, making Gulmarg one of the most sought-after sites.

Apart from skiing, snowboarding and tobogganing (riding on a type of sled) are popular activities here. There are options for heli-skiing (skiing after being dropped off from a helicopter) as well, along with snow cycling or playing snow rugby and snow baseball. In case you are not familiar with any of these, there are several resorts that offer training in winter adventure sports. Experts can head to the Pir Panjal range, at an altitude of 14,000 ft, to get a carpet of powder snow, ideal for adventurous sojourns.





TREKKING, LADAKH

The stark and pristine landscape of Ladakh, bound by rugged mountains, deep gorges and harsh terrain is ideal for adventure sports like trekking, mountain climbing, camping, etc. Moreover, the gurgling Indus and Zaskar rivers cutting through the scenery provide perfect backdrops for adventure in the water.

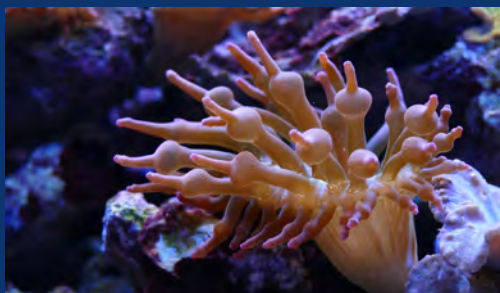
Chadar Trek can only be enjoyed during the winter months in Ladakh. It gets its name from the fact that, during winter, the rivers freeze and form a blanket of ice that forms the main terrain of this trek. Throughout the adventure, trekkers are walking on precarious icy formations, staying in caves filled with stalactites and stalagmites and encountering other snowy landscape. It is very important to have an experienced guide who leads the trek. The trek covers a distance of approximately 62 km, which takes about nine days to cover and scales a height of up to 11,000 ft. The trek is mostly covered on the frozen River Zaskar and begins from the village of Chilling. February is considered to be the best time to complete this trek as the ice is most stable during that month.

Leh-Ladakh's diverse terrain includes mountains, valleys and rivers, making it a haven for trekking enthusiasts. These treks navigate through remote villages and pristine locations, offering a peek into the life of villagers. Some of these treks may last for a few hours or a few days. Some popular routes include Lamayuru to Alchi trek, Ripchar Valley trek, Padum to Darcha trek, Lamayuru to Stok Kangri trek, Markha Valley trek, Jhulum Hemis trek and the famous Chadar trek. The Chadar Trek can only be enjoyed during the winter months in Ladakh.



SCUBA DIVING, ANDAMAN & NICOBAR ISLANDS

Scuba diving is the greatest action on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The best months for diving are from December to April. One can enjoy the underwater marine life and view the rarest of corals by snorkelling and scuba diving at North Bay, Carbyn's Cove, Chidiya tapu, Havelock, Jolly Buoy, Redskin Island and Ross and Smith islands. The coastal belt surrounding these islands is the abode of one of the richest coral reef ecosystems in the world and most of this area is still untouched by human activity. Many of the islands are surrounded by reef fringes, often several hundred meters wide and are separated from the shore by a lagoon of even width. Cinque Island is one of the best diving sites in the islands, with its clear emerald waters providing a visibility of up to 80 ft. The deep dive offers views of a variety of marine life, including black coral, and is ideal for the experienced diver. For others, there are trainers who can help you get the hang of the sport.





PARAGLIDING, BIR-BILLING, HIMACHAL PRADESH

Bir Billing is the paragliding capital of the world and invites adventure seekers from across the globe. There is also a sizeable Tibetan community there, along with several Tibetan monasteries that one can visit.



MAPPING SPIRITUALITY



An Inner Journey

SPIRITUAL TOURISM



A spiritual journey is one when a person travels in search of a new or expanded meaning about oneself, life, nature, or for a higher good. The passage may clear the mind and lead to a personal transformation, after which the pilgrim returns to their daily life. The absence of daily distractions make way for the vast invisible supreme energy to expand and synergize with the traveller. Some journeys create new realities, clear the mind and discern what's pending. Pilgrimages frequently involve a journey or search of moral or spiritual significance. It is a journey to a shrine or any other location which is of importance to a person's beliefs and faith.

Kumbh Mela is one of the largest gatherings of humans in the world where pilgrims gather to bathe in a sacred or holy river. The location is rotated among Prayagraj, Haridwar, Nashik, and Ujjain. Pilgrims enter the Badrinath Temple in Uttarakhand, India for a darśana. Another popular pilgrimage site is the Char Dham (Four Holy pilgrimage sites) which comprises of Puri, Rameswaram, Dwarka, and Badrinath (or alternatively the Himalayan towns of Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, and Yamunotri). Some of the major Temple cities are Puri, which hosts a major Vaishnava Jagannath temple and Rath Yatra (Chariot Procession) celebration; Katra, home to the Vaishno Devi Temple; Three comparatively recent temples of fame and huge pilgrimage are Shirdi, home to Sai Baba of Shirdi, Tirumala - Tirupati, home to the Tirumala Venkateswara Temple; and Sabarimala, where Swami Ayyappan is worshipped. Ajmer Sharif Dargah is a Tomb of the Sufi saint Khawaja Moinuddin Chishti, located at Ajmer Shareef, Rajasthan, has been a site for pilgrims venerated by followers of Hinduism and Islam since medieval times.





VARANASI, UTTAR PRADESH

One of the oldest living inhabitations of the world, the sacred city of Varanasi, Kashi or Benaras, nestled on the banks of the holy Ganges river, has been attracting pilgrims for centuries. Celebrated author Mark Twain, who visited India in the last decade of the 19th century, described the city as “older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend.”

Believed to be the abode of Lord Shiva, Varanasi is among the seven sacred cities in the country. Centuries of history, art and tradition have conflated to add colourful layers to Varanasi's aura, which is most spectacularly evident at its ghats (stepped banks of a river). An abode of travellers in search of holiness and divine providence, the ghats of the Ganges are the highlight of the spiritual scene of Varanasi. From the famous Ganga arti (a fire ritual) to cremation ceremonies, the ghats are the site of time-honoured rituals that are performed to this day.

Legend has it that Lord Shiva channelled the celestial Ganga on earth, and that is why the river is considered holy. Thousands of devotees from all over the country come to bathe in its waters as it is believed that taking a dip in the holy Ganges absolves one of their sins. It is also believed that those cremated here achieve moksha (salvation). For many, the sacred Kashi Yatra (pilgrimage to Kashi, as Varanasi was earlier called) is one of the most important rituals to undertake during their lifetime.

In recent years, the city has turned into a purveyor of philosophy, yoga, the ancient medicinal science of Ayurveda, and astrology.



A visit to Varanasi cannot be complete without a visit to the ghats running along River Ganges. The ghats have been a source of inspiration for artists, film-makers, photographers, writers and musicians for centuries. There are about 88 ghats in the city and most of them are used as bathing sites while a few, like Manikarnika Ghat, are exclusively designated for cremation purposes. As a dip in Ganga is considered holy in the Hindu religion, most of the ghats are dedicated to religious rituals, the most popular being Dashashwamedh.





ST. FRANCIS CHURCH, GOA

Christianity was introduced to India by Thomas the Apostle, who came to Muziris in Tamilakam in AD 52. It is India's third-largest religion with approximately 30 million followers, constituting 2.3% of India's population. Out of which, over 20 million are Catholics thus the Catholic church is the largest Christian church within India. Christians are in majority in four Indian states, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya and make significant percentages of population in Goa, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Sikkim, Manipur, and Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Located in the main square of Old Goa, the Church of St Francis of Assisi is around 10 km from Panaji. The church was established by eight Franciscan friars who arrived in Goa in 1517. Retaining the Portuguese-Manueline style portal of its older structure, which was built in 1665, the Church of St Francis of Assisi, offers a fascinating visual contrast between its simple exterior facade and its lavish Baroque interior. Featuring Corinthian influences, the interior is beautifully decorated. The main altar is the highlight, with a large statue of St Francis of Assisi above it, along with another of Jesus Christ. It is flanked on either side by paintings on wood depicting the life and times of its patron saint.

The church started off as a chapel was upgraded to a church in 1521 and consecrated in 1602 with the present structure being built in 1661. Contiguous to the church is the convent, which is now home to a museum. Set up by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in 1964, it houses paintings, sculptures and other artefacts related to the history and culture of Goa. The church, facing west, contains a nave with three chapels on both the sides, a main altar and a choir.



GOLDEN TEMPLE, PUNJAB

The Golden temple is located in the holy city of the Sikhs, Amritsar. The Golden temple is famous for its full golden dome, it is one of the most sacred pilgrim spots for Sikhs. The Mandir is built on a 67-ft square of marble and is a two storied structure. Maharaja Ranjit Singh had the upper half of the building built with approximately 400 kg of gold leaf.

The Golden Temple is surrounded by a number of other famous temples like the Durgiana Temple. The fourth Guru of Sikhs, Guru Ram Das, who had initially constructed a pool here, founded Amritsar, which houses the Golden Temple or Harmandir Sahib. It is here that Sage Valmiki wrote the epic, Ramayana. Rama and Sita are believed to have spent part of their fourteen-year exile in Amritsar, the epicenter of Sikhism. To the south of the temple is a garden, and the tower of Baba Atal. The Central Sikh Museum is atop the Clock Tower. The 'Guru Ka Langar' offers free food to around 20,000 people everyday. The number shoots up to 100,000 on special occasions.

The Guru Granth Sahib is kept in the Temple during the day and is kept in the Akal Takht or Eternal Throne in the night. The Akal Takht also houses the ancient weapons used by the Sikh warriors. Guru Hargobind established it. The rugged old Jubi Tree in the north west corner of the compound is believed to possess special powers. It was planted 450 years ago, by the Golden Temple's first high priest, Baba Buddha. Guru-ka-Langar or the communal canteen is towards the eastern entrance of the temple complex, and it provides free food to all visitors, regardless of colour, creed, caste or gender.

Travel to India

FAIRS & FESTIVALS

India's vibrant character and a diverse ethnicity are revealed in its colourful fairs and festivals celebrated all over the country. Dyed in vivacious hues, and pulsating with energy, these celebrations give you a taste of Indian religion and culture. Religious rituals, tribal culture, tourism festivals, and thousands of years of beliefs; Indians leave no chance to celebrate their illustrious legacy. Often called the intangible heritage of India, these endearing celebrations with glittering fireworks, colourful jamboree, dance & music, and mouth watering delicacies are a rocking experience.

If you are planning a trip to India, here are some of the festivities you must add to your travel itinerary. Vibrant, vivid and versatile, these fairs and festivals are certainly one-of-a-kind experiences.



Holi- The Festival of Colors

Held mostly in northern India, in March, Holi is celebrated by throwing colors on each other. Rooted in mythology and playful chronicles of Radha-Krishna, this colorful festival celebrates love, life, and the arrival of spring. Holi celebrations in Mathura-Vrindavan and the Lathmaar Holi of Barsana are too colorful to be missed.



Diwali- The Festival of Lights

This festival of lights, celebrated in October or November, symbolizes the triumph of good over evil. On Diwali, people light earthen lamps, candles, and pretty fairy lights to light up a dark moonless night. Celebrated widely across the country, Diwali traditions include the exchange of gifts, traditional sweetmeats, card parties, and fireworks.



Pushkar Fair, Pushkar, Rajasthan

This vivid cattle fair flaunts the rich & vibrant traditions of Rajasthan. Check out the colorfully adorned camels that participate in jocular competitions like camel beauty pageants, and rejoice in the unique festivities at Pushkar fairground. The vibrant fair is celebrated in October/November and runs about for a week.



International Yoga Festival, Rishikesh, Uttar Pradesh

Feed the soul seeker in you at this week-long Yoga festival by the Ganges in Rishikesh. Join us at this little town at the Himalayan foothills and indulge in the wellness of yoga on the banks of the holy river Ganges.



Hornbill Festival, Nagaland

Take a sneak peek into the tribal heritage of Nagaland at the Hornbill Festival, celebrated every December in Kisama Heritage Village near Kohima. Traditional tribal dances, food, cultural galas, and sports of the various Naga tribes are the highlights of the Hornbill Festival.



Kumbha Mela

Recognized as the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO, Kumbh Mela is deeply rooted in Hindu mythology. Celebrated once every 12 years in four river-bank pilgrimages in Prayagraj, Nashik, Haridwar, and Ujjain, Kumbha Mela is the largest gathering of human beings on the planet. Holy baths, religious discourses, and feasts & festivities are a part of the celebrations. The dates of Kumbh Mela may vary based on the lunar calendar.



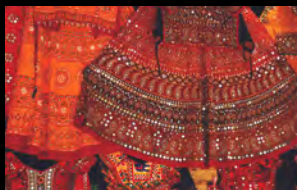
Durga Puja, Kolkata, West Bengal

Age-old rituals, joined with boisterous revelry and mouthwatering cuisines are the highlights of Durga Puja, that celebrates the many forms of the Goddess. Check out the magnificent pandals (gatherings), savor delicious food, and mingle with the festive crowds during Durga Puja celebrations. The festival is celebrated in September or October.



Hemis Gompa Festival, Ladakh

Marking the birth of Guru Padmasambhava and celebrated at the beautiful Hemis Monastery, this monastic festival is much known for its Cham Dance, performed by the monks, dressed in fineries and magnificent colorful masks. It is a two-day event that is celebrated on the 10th day of the fifth month of Tibetan Calendar, which is the month of June/July in Gregorian Calendar.



Rann Utsav, Kutch, Gujarat

Rann Utsav is a celebration of the white desert and is the longest celebrated festival in India. It starts in November and continues till February, each year. This colorful extravaganza celebrates the culture, crafts, and cuisines of Gujarat. Stay in the white tent city, go for camel safaris, and soak in the festivities at the largest salt desert in the world.



India Art Fair, New Delhi

India Art Fair is a leading platform to discover modern and contemporary art from South Asia. This is an annual event that takes place in the months of January or February that brings a large collection of contemporary art practices to the fore.



Serendipity Arts Festival, Goa

From its launch in 2016, the Serendipity Arts Festival in Goa has evolved into one of the largest annual interdisciplinary cultural extravaganzas in South Asia. The event is a celebration of the richness and diversity of culture and creativity, showcasing a variety of contemporary and traditional art forms — dance, music, theatre, arts and crafts.



Jaipur Literature Festival, Rajasthan

The festival features panel discussions on a wide range of topics such as literature, culture, politics, and society with participation from authors, poets and thinkers from around the world. It is a congregation of a diverse mix of the world's greatest writers, thinkers, humanitarians, politicians, business leaders, sports people and entertainers on one stage to champion the freedom to express and engage in thoughtful debate and dialogue.



Kochi-Muziris Biennale, Kerala

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale is an international exhibition of contemporary art being held in Kochi, Kerala every two years. It is India's first biennial of international contemporary art and its story is unique to India's current reality—its political, social and artistic landscape.



Nagaur Cattle Fair, Rajasthan

The fair is marked by traditional music and dance performances as well as cultural activities and sports such as camel and horse races, acrobatics, turban tying competitions, and cultural contests. The fair is known for its storytellers, jugglers, puppeteers, etc. It is held at Jodhpur every year during January-February and continues for eight days.



Modhera Dance Festival, Gujarat

This festival of dance known as Uttarardh Mahotsav, derives its name from the planetary and astronomical configuration of the Sun. The festival which takes place every year after Uttarayan, at the Modhera temple dedicated to the Sun God venerates the rotational cycle of the earth around the Sun. It is a three-day celebration of art, music, dance, and culture.

Indian Cuisine

NURTURING THE SENSES



Plan a trip now!
TRAVEL INFORMATION



The tourism experience is intertwined with the safe and quality tourism services. India and the respective State Government and Union Territory administrations continue to work with the respective agencies to ensure the safety and security of the tourists. In case of any emergency, the following numbers should be contacted:

Tourist Helpline – 1363 or 1800 11 1363
Helpline number for foreign national - 91-8750871111
Police - 100 Emergency - 112

Contact

Deputy Secretary (IT)
Ministry of Tourism, Transport Bhawan
Sansad Marg, New Delhi

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Published by the Embassy of India, Vienna, Austria
Design & Layout: Preeti Kathuria