This is where azure seas meet sparkling sands, thick forests echo with the roar of lions and the chirrup of nesting birds. Here pristine temples reflect the craftsmanship of dexterous hands, ancient palaces shimmer in the sun and water parks beckon for a day of fun. Gujarat, where tribal life is a celebration, and life in general revolves around music, dance and multihued traditions. Gujarat is also the land of inveterate travellers where business is transacted through trust in all spheres.

AHMEDABAD

Most renowned for its association with the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi, another feature that Ahmedabad eminently boasts of is its rich textile culture. Perhaps, it was Bapu's spinning wheel that set into motion this textile revolution founded on his preaching of self-reliance in pre-Independent India. But venture into any alley in the city, you will still find weavers working on block printing of fabrics and sarees spread out to dry on the banks of the river Sabarmati. Steady power and water supply have tempted corporate houses to install mega projects in and around Ahmedabad, with cellphone, textile, chemical and power majors operating here, in the city that was founded by Sultan Ahmed Shah in 1411 A.D. Legend has it that he decided to build the capital at Ahmedabad because he saw a rabbit attacking one of his hunter dogs. It occurred to him that if the rabbits of the region were so brave, the people must be even braver. Modern day Ahmedabad, the capital of the state of Gujarat is its largest city and a leading industrial centre. Popularly known as the Manchester of the East, Ahmedabad boasts of the largest denim production in the world.

City Lights

Though the Sultan adorned his kingdom with monuments, mosques, pavilions and mausoleums and marked the beginning of the Indo-Saracenic style of architecture, many of Ahmedabad's buildings bear the signatures of world-renowned architects like Le Corbusier, Louis Khan, Doshi and Correa. The Jumna Masjid, built in 1423 in yellow sandstone, combines the best of Hindu and Muslim styles of architecture. It stands on 260 pillars supporting 15 domes at varying elevations. Shaking Minarets are a wonder at the Siddhi Bashir mosque, which are designed in a way that whenever one shakes, so does the
Sabarmati Ashram, 7 km towards the north of the city, houses the simple retreat that Bapu set up in 1915. **Hridaya Kunj**, his cottage, is preserved as it was in the Mahatma's lifetime. The sound and light show at the memorial centre here, should not be missed. **The Pols** are residential units dating back to 1714 with intricately carved façades. Noteworthy are Mhrurat Pol, Mandvi-ni-Pol, and Lakh Patelnai-Pol. **Sarkhej Roza**, about 8 km from the city, is an elegant architectural complex. Grouped around a great stepped tank is the tomb of the saint, Ahmed Khattu Ganj Baksh (1445), the mosque, the tombs of Mehmud Shah Begada and his queen and the palace and pavilions. **Teen Darwaja**, the imposing entrance to the Royal Square, the highly ornate **Hatheesing Jain Temple** are the other mandatory sights worth a visit in the state capital.
Festivals

If you can time your visit around Udaipur, Calcutta, Chennai, other major cities and towns of India and several other tourist centres. **By Road:** State transport buses and private luxury coaches connect various cities of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi and Rajasthan. **Distances:** Mumbai (555 km), Delhi (1076 km via Udaipur and Jaipur). **Getting Around:** Metered or tourist taxis are best, apart from auto-rickshaws. **Best time to visit:** October to March.

**City Code:** 079
**Air India:** 6585633, 2865211
**Indian Airlines:** 5503061, 2869233
**Jet Airways:** 7543304, 2866540
**Gujarat Airways:** 2868770
**Railways:** 131/135
**Roadways:** 2144764
**Tourist Office:** Gujarat Tourism: 26560151/3,
**TGCL:** 6589172
**Banks:** Bank of Baroda: 27541093, Citibank: 26562906, HDFC: 26563465
**Hospitals:** Civil Hospital: 2121372/3, ESIC (General): 2743935,
**Chemists:** Anil Medicals: 22747260, Chetan Medical Stores: 26578092

Taj Residency Ummmed: 2864444/2869999, Fortune Hotel Landmark: 27552929 Holiday Inn: 5505505
**SOMNATH**

Gujarat

Incredible India 277
The Shore Temple of Somnath, housing one of the 12 most sacred Shiva shrines in India, is the greatest pull of Somnath. Legend has it that the temple was originally built out of gold by Somraj, the moon God. Rebuilt by Ravana in silver, then again by Krishna in wood, and yet again by King Bhimdev Solanki in stone in the 10th century. However, raids by Mahmud of Ghazni in 1024 AD and six destructions have deprived it of the glitter, but its aura still remains. It was rebuilt the seventh time in 1950 with the support of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

Access: By Air: Nearest airport is at Keshod (47 km), which is connected with Mumbai. By Rail: Veraval (5 km) is the closest railway station. By Road: 79 km from Junagadh and 25 km from Chorwad, State transport buses and private luxury coaches connect various parts of Gujarat with Somnath. Best time to visit: November to March, though a visit during the full moon at Kartik Purnima in November/December is a special experience.

City Code: 0285
Gujarat Tourism: 2621201, 2621203

145 km from Keshod, a seaside resort little away from the sun-kissed virgin beaches, is a renovated palace and the main charm of the place. Delvada Railway Station (9 km) connects it to the Ahmedabad-Veraval line.

South of Dwarka, this ancient port city of Saurashtra is well known as the birthplace of the Father of the Nation, Porbandar is situated 145 km from Rajkot. Apart from the memorials to Mahatma Gandhi, Porbandar also has a beach with villas.

Access: By Air: Nearest airport is Keshod (47 km), though Rajkot is more convenient as it has better connections to Mumbai. By Rail: It is a terminus station on the Porbandar-Dholar metre gauge section of the Western Railway, as well as a small branch on the Jamnagar-Junagadh railway line. By Road: State transport buses and luxury coaches ply from all over Gujarat to Porbandar.

City Code: 0286

Hotel Indraprastha and Hotel Kuber.

Palitana could well be termed as India’s most picturesque pilgrim centre. Located on Shatrunjaya Hill, which lies about a mile south of Palitana town and is 603 metres above sea level, are 863 temples built over a
span of 900 years. Exquisitely carved in marble, this principle centre of Jain pilgrimage in Gujarat is associated with Rishabhdev, the first Jain Tirthankar, called Adinath or Adishwar.

Access: By Air: Nearest airport Bhavnagar (56km). By Rail: Palitana is on the Western Railway, metre gauge, line and takes about 10 hours to reach. By Road: Palitana takes about two hours. By Road: Palitana is 215 km from Ahmedabad by road. State transport buses and luxury coaches connect Palitana with other towns and cities in the state.

The central part of Lothal is an excellent example of the advanced architectural feats, the civilization of Harappa were capable of. Visitors can stay at the Toran Tourist Bungalow or Palace Utelia, to see for themselves the excellent drainage system and town planning of yore.

Famous for its sun temple that is said to rival the magnificence of the Konark sun temple of Orissa. The pillars of this temple reflect scenes from the Hindu epics.

Gujarat is as famous for its Wild Ass herds as it is for its lions. A sanctuary spreading over 4,953 sq. km provides protection to more than 2,100 wild asses inhabiting this area. In the Little Rann of Kutch, the asses are attracted by grass covered expanses known as 'bets' (islands where coarse grass springs up during the monsoon). The sanctuary also has blue bulls, blackbucks, chinkaras, wolves and jackals.

Access: By Air: Bhuj (150 km) is the nearest airport. It has regular flights from Mumbai. By Rail: New Bhuj Railway Station is 1 km north of Bhuj. By Road: State transport, luxury coaches, autorickshaws and taxis are available from Bhuj.
Janmashtami (birthday of Lord Krishna) devotees throng this temple from the world over. Dwarka also is home to Sharda Peeth – one of the four seats of Hinduism learning, established by Adi Shankara, the renowned reformer saint.

Access: Keshod airport has flights to Mumbai while trains connect Dwarka and Jamnagar (132 km). Dwarka lies on the metre gauge link between Viramgam and Okha. Distances: Mumbai (945 km) via Rajkot (270 km) and Ahmedabad (453 km).

Popular as the city of palaces and gardens, there are many monuments too – the Sayaji Bagh Museum, the Maharaja Sayaji Rao University building, the hugely frescoed Kirti Mandir Royal Mausoleum among others. There are other attractions too: the Tambekarwada Haveli, the Jumma Masjid and 1586 stepwell in Qutub-uddin Masjid. One can go up to the 13th century Dabhoi Fort or Champaner, that houses Indo-Saracenic architectural monuments. From Pawagadh, tourists can take a ride on a ropeway to the hilltop that offers a full view of Champaner.

Gujarati thaali, Punjabi dhaba or Mexican food everything is available here. Kansar and Hotel Surya are renowned for the thaali while Mirchi Masala offers fabulous Punjabi cuisine. Peshwari at WelcomHotel Vadodara offers excellent North West Frontier cuisine. Lazeez is also a popular eatery for Mughlai dishes.

Access: By Air: The airport is about 6 km from downtown. There are regular Indian Airlines, Jet Airways and Gujarat Airways flights between major metros. By Rail: Express and superfast trains link Vadodara with Delhi and Mumbai as also Ahmedabad. By Road: Bus services of Road Transport Corporations of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan connect the city to the rest of the states. For enquiries call 2794700. Getting Around: No yellow-top taxis available here, however tourist taxis can be hired from travel agents, hotels and from taxi stands.

City Code: 0265
Indian Airlines: 2794747
Jet Airways: 2337051
Gujarat Airways: 2339643
Tourism Corporation of Gujarat: 2431297
Tourist Information Office: 2794456


Sprawling over 1,424 sq. km, the dry deciduous forests of Sasan Gir are endowed with abundant flora and fauna. Apart from being home to several species of mammals, reptiles, insects and birds, Gir is the only place in the world, outside Africa, where the lion can be seen in its natural habitat.
The number of lions in Gir had dwindled to a mere 15 by the turn of the century, due to extensive trophy hunting. The forest was notified as a wildlife sanctuary in 1969, and six years later, its core area of 140.4 sq. km, constituted into a national park which has since been expanded to cover 258.71 sq km. With continuing efforts, the lion population has gone up to 312.

The Gir lion measures 2.75 metres in length, with a rich tail tassel and a prominent belly. It is more shaggy and lighter brown in colour than its African counterpart.

The common trees here are the stately teak, laburnum, acacia, tendu, ber, jamun, almosa, bel and twin-leaved vikalo. The forest also harbours a number of smaller birds and animals. Other predators are the panther and the hyena. The largest Indian deer, Sambar, Chital (spotted deer), Nilgai (blue bull), Chinkara and the unique Chowsingha (four horned antelope) are found here along with the bear and the long tailed langur. Bird-watchers can never return unrewarded given the variety of birds: the crested serpent eagle, crested hawk eagle, brown fish owl, king vulture, jungle quail, paradise flycatcher, pygmy woodpecker, hard headed oriole, etc. Adholia, Valadera, Ratanghuna and Pilipat are ideal for bird watching.

Another attraction is a crocodile farm developed in the forest.

**Access:** **By Air:** Nearest airport Keshod (90 km via Veraval). **By Rail:** Metre gauge rail line of 395 km from Ahmedabad. **By Road:** Ahmedabad (400 km via Rajkot, Junagadh and Mendarada), Veraval (43 km) and Junagadh (65 km via Mendarada). State Transport buses run from Junagadh and Veraval between November and June. **Best time to visit:** Mid-October to mid-June. The sanctuary is closed during monsoons.

**City Code:** 02877

Forest Guest House at Sasan Gir; The Taj Gir Lodge: 285521/285528, Maneland Jungle Lodge: 285555.
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