

A guide to the heart of Madhya Pradesh



Pocket MADHYA PRADESH

All you need to know about Madhya Pradesh

- Top 10 attractions of Madhya Pradesh
- Options for staying, eating and shopping
- Everything you need to know while planning a trip
- Packed with travel tips from experts

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Our job is to make amazing travel experiences happen. We visit the places we write about each and every edition. We never take freebies for positive coverage, so you can always rely on us to tell it like it is.

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This guide is researched and written by
Supriya Sehgal

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FOREWORD

The Heart of India

**DEVENDRA BUNDELA**

The heart of central India, Madhya Pradesh beats to the rhythm of heritage, natural beauty, culture and traditions in the country.

NATURAL WEALTH

Madhya Pradesh has abundant natural resources. Its forests, virgin and otherwise, are a haven for magnificent wildlife, beasts and birds and rich forest cover. It's no wonder that its many sanctuaries and national parks are a huge draw for the traveller with a love for the wild and the great outdoors. The majority of India's tiger reserves and wildlife sanctuaries are located here, attracting tourists from the rest of India and abroad to witness the beauty of these animals in their natural surroundings. The state is keen on conservation and protection of its flora and fauna.

ARCHITECTURE

Madhya Pradesh's grand monuments and temples are architectural wonders. The monuments bring alive the history of the past and the various faiths that contributed to the heritage of the state. The World Heritage site of the stunning temples at Khajuraho; the stunning stupa at Sanchi that bears testimony to the Buddhist faith, the festivals that bring people together for special rites, and the forts and palaces of the former royal dynasties of Gwalior, Indore, Ujjain, Rewa, Holkar and Bundela are all major attractions.

CRAFTS & TRADITIONS

Madhya Pradesh's pride is its hardy people. Its many tribal communities have yielded fascinating customs, crafts and art traditions. The state's textile heritage from Maheshwar and Chanderi speak of the expertise of its artisans. The Gonds and their paintings adorn not just the walls of their own homes but art galleries and museums in Madhya Pradesh and across the country and the world at large. Lesser known but no less special is the state's cuisine. If the royal hunting history of the past offered sumptuous recipes of game meat, Madhya Pradesh's chefs celebrate the state's

multicultural influences on cuisine (Bhopali, Bundeli, Maratha) and the merging together of its Islamic and Hindu traditions to create an unbeatable repertoire of dishes.

ROYAL LEGACY

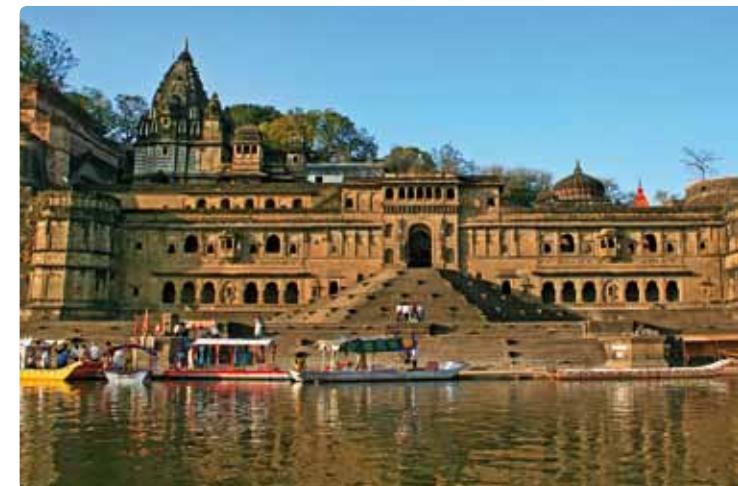
Forts, palaces and temples are reminders of the state's ancient history and its kingdoms. Remnants of the past still cast their glory on the architectural landscape of the state. Madhya Pradesh's royal legacy is experienced through cuisine, sports, hospitality and literature, especially poetry.

SPORTING HERITAGE

Madhya Pradesh has a long legacy of robust sporting traditions. Cricket is a popular sport and we have three international cricket stadiums across the former kingdoms of Gwalior and Indore, and the royal descendants are keen patrons and players of the game. Hockey is popular as are football and traditional sports like langdi and kho kho.

The author is a first class cricketer and has been playing for Madhya Pradesh for over two decades. The domestic cricketing hero lives in Ujjain.

Boat rides offer panoramic views of Maheshwar's ghats





Plan Your Trip

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The majestic medieval hilltop fort at Gwalior

Need To Know



Jungle safaris offer a unique travel experience in Madhya Pradesh

Madhya Pradesh has a varied and fascinating history. Many dynasties and empires have left their footprints on this soil whose imprints can be felt even today.

Apart from a rich repository of historic gems, it is one of the subcontinent's most restful, laid-back states which offers an opportunity to enjoy the art of 'doing nothing'. The only time you are shaken out of your comfort is when you traverse the jungles that fill almost 11,000sq km across the state. It's the best place to hear the roar of a tiger or the chatter of macaques. It's not surprising that Madhya Pradesh has the highest number of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries in the country.

The state also boasts of religious and cultural diversity. It offers a treasure trove of cultural experiences – whether it's the Buddhist structures of Sanchi or the temples at Orchha, the vibrant markets around the ancient mosques in Bhopal or the pulsating energy of festivals in Ujjain.

Apart from being home to a third of India's forests, the state has a rich cache of towering forts, ancient temples and almost fairy-tale like structures that have stood the test of time. Its royal past is seen throughout the state in the form of architecture, modern institutions and heritage monuments and hotels. The state's efficient tourism infrastructure makes it welcoming for visitors.

WHEN TO GO

Oct–Feb Expectedly, the plains of MP are best to visit during the winter.

Mar–Jun The four major national parks are best seen in the hotter months of March–May. Wildlife enthusiasts often extend their visits until June end to scan the 'tiger hotspots'.

Quick Facts

- **Languages:** Hindi, English.
- **Money:** ATMs of both nationalised and private banks are available in all major tourist towns.
- **Phone Connectivity:** BSNL numbers do work in remote areas. Get a pre-paid SIM if you must stay connected.

• **Internet Access:** Wi-fi is mostly available at hotels in Bhopal, Indore, Khajuraho and other major cities. In some cases, wi-fi may be available only in the lobby area or if paid for.

• **Tourist Information:** The head office of the Madhya Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation Ltd (MPSTDC) is in Bhopal. (Paryatan Bhawan, Bhadbhada Road; 10am–5pm; closed on Sun, 2nd and 3rd Sat and state holidays). Their website www.mptourism.com gives ample information. Brochures of main destinations are available at MP Tourism counters at airports, and private and MPSTDC-run properties throughout the state.

Price Ranges

Throughout this book, reviews use the following price ranges. Rates quoted don't include seasonal pricing, taxes, unless otherwise specified.

Key to Rates

Accommodation

₹₹₹	over ₹5000
₹₹	₹2000–5000
₹	below ₹2000

Eating

₹₹₹	over ₹500
₹₹	₹200–500
₹	below ₹500

Abbreviations

s	single rooms
d	double rooms
ste	suites

Top Tip: Booking for safaris

March and April are busy months for wildlife lodges, so it is best to book at least one month ahead. There is a limit on safari Gypsys that can enter each day, so you need to instruct the resort to arrange them for you beforehand. Even though tickets and 4-wheel drives (Gypsys) are available at the park gates, it is best to ask your hotel or resort to arrange this. The premium of approximately ₹500 is worth it.

FIRST TIME IN MADHYA PRADESH

- Advance Planning:** There is merit in planning train tickets two months in advance for availability and flights for better rates. If visiting the national parks, book your safaris with your accommodation, as limited vehicles (Gypsy) can go into the jungle on each day. Many hotels near the national parks shut down during the off-season (July–Oct), so checking ahead will help. Many hotels remain open during non-peak period so you can avail of discounted tariffs.

HEALTH & SAFETY

- Hospitals:** Carry your own specific medication if needed. Bhopal and Indore have good medical facilities, but the smaller towns will not be able to handle complicated medical issues. Bhopal Memorial Hospital & Research Centre (2755 274 2212 – 16; Raisen Bypass Road, Bhanpur) and Bombay Hospital (www.bombayhospitalindore.com; Indore Ring Road) are Indore's best general hospitals.

- Travelling Alone:** Madhya Pradesh is safe to travel alone, but as a precaution, arrive at your accommodation by 8pm (later for Bhopal and Indore) if you're travelling alone. It is recommended to cross the areas bordering Uttar Pradesh before sunset.

WHAT TO PACK

Expect hot and dry summers (40-42°C) and sharp winters (touching a low of 10-15°C), so pack clothing accordingly. Essentials should include sunscreen, hats, caps and walking shoes that will withstand long treks through forts, a tryst with the jungles and ones that you can easily ditch when entering a temple or a weaver's home.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

- Air:** Madhya Pradesh is well-connected to the rest of the country by a

number of airports, but for travellers, these are the most important ones: Raja Bhoj International Airport (Bhopal), Devi Ahilyabai Holkar Airport (Indore), Gwalior Airport, Jabalpur Airport and Khajuraho Airport. These are close to the tourist sectors and connected to major Indian cities by a fleet of service providers like Air India, IndiGo and Jet Airways.

- Rail:** Rail connectivity extends to the major tourist areas of Madhya Pradesh including Gwalior, Jhansi, Khajuraho, Bhopal, Jabalpur and Jhansi. Jabalpur is a major junction on the Western Railways Division of India, and other cities like Bhopal, Gwalior, Khajuraho and other parts are also well-connected. The New Delhi–Bhopal, Habibganj Shatabdi (Train No 12002) is a popular train that connects Gwalior, Lalitpur and Bhopal. The main station, Gwalior Junction, is centrally located and more than 30 daily trains go to Agra's Cantonment station and Delhi, and to Jhansi (for Orchha and Khajuraho).

- Road:** Madhya Pradesh lends itself to great road trips. Even though many of the interiors have single lane highways, the roads are in decent condition. It is better to hire a cab (Ola /Uber) for extended trips. Recommended MP Tour and Travels: www.mptourandtravels.com; 29584003002; day trips from ₹1800 onwards, longer trips ₹9–11 per km (min 250km/day) plus ₹200 driver allowance/day).

Bhil tribal women at a local festival



This is Madhya Pradesh

The second largest state in India, Madhya Pradesh offers eclectic charms, prehistoric art, tiger parks, fantastic relief work on the World Heritage-listed temples, monuments, palaces and a wealth of tribal crafts, villages and markets.

THE HEARTLAND

The landlocked state, plugged into the map of India, is where the country's geographical heart ticks. It lives up to its serendipitous location in showcasing the most exquisite vistas of the subcontinent – each so diverse from the other – that it takes some time to mentally yank yourself out from one experience and completely immerse in another.

Madhya Pradesh is surrounded by Maharashtra to the south, Rajasthan to the west, Uttar Pradesh to the north and Chhattisgarh to the east, which was carved out from Madhya Pradesh itself. The linguistic, culinary and cultural influences blending into the state from all these directions offer a fantastic opportunity to experience a multi-cultural diversity.

Splendid Mughal architecture marks the 17th century Jehangir Mahal in Orchha

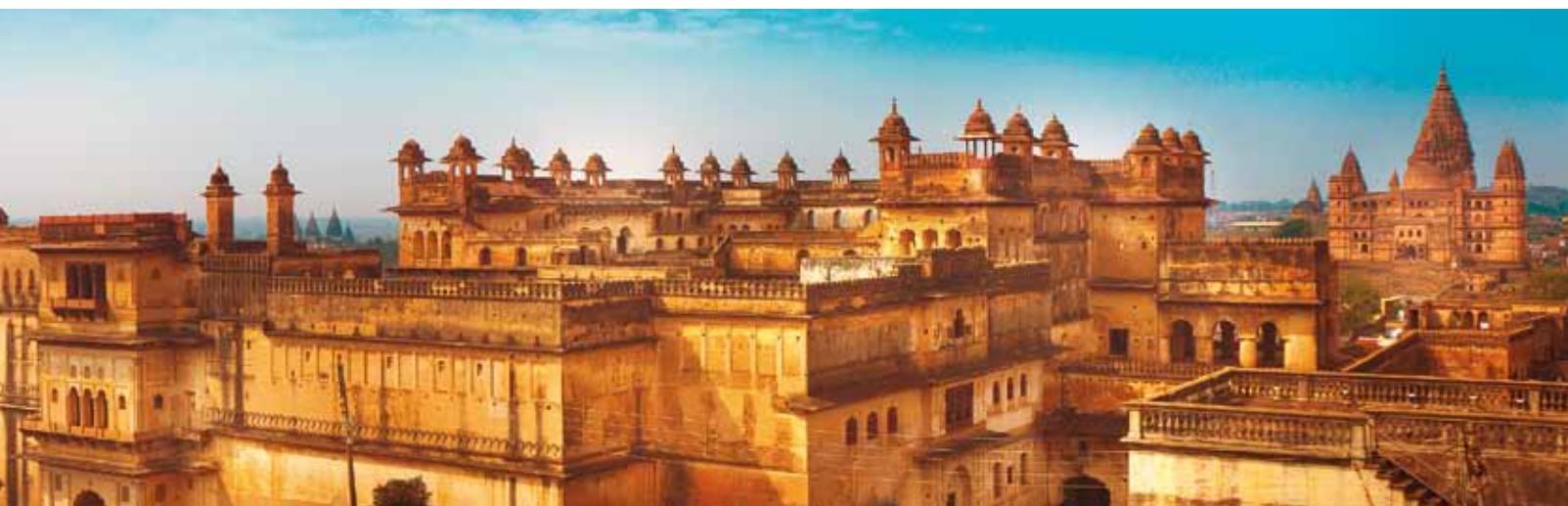
HISTORIC LEGACY

The mighty emperors of India, from Ashoka to the Gupta and Satavahana kings had marched on this soil, leaving behind their signatures in the form of architecture, royal legacies and a people who are culturally attuned and hard working. The beautiful monuments, temples, mosques and stupas that hark back to the past tell us of the multicultural heritage of this state.

Orchha and Gwalior are complemented with the delightfully mischievous erotic shrines of Khajuraho, created by the Chandelas possibly between 900–1100 AD. Madhya Pradesh has a glorious prehistoric past. The cave paintings at Bhimbetka rock shelters and pottery remains are testimony to active human settlements in the region and an antiquity that leads travellers to the early days of human life almost 10,000 years ago. The rock shelters with black and red stick figures give explicit orientation to hunting methods, celebrations and the harmony between man and the wild.

KIPLING'S COUNTRY

The state's literary legacy further complements its mosaic of geographical richness. Madhya Pradesh has the largest green cover in India. It is a state with vast swathes of natural woodlands, forested areas and large tracts that offer sanctuary to man, bird and beast.





Ochre hued crags, emerald Satpura mountain ranges, dense green jungles, are home to a rich and varied wildlife here. Its rivers include the mighty Narmada that snakes through the state, the Betwa and the banks of the holy Shipra River where the pilgrims of the Kumbh Mela congregate. This mosaic of varied geographical zones has resulted in Madhya Pradesh having six tiger reserves, 10 national parks and 25 wildlife sanctuaries. This is tiger country, and five of the parks and sanctuaries are rooted in conservation of the Royal Bengal Tiger. Kanha (p140), Pench (p162), Bandhavgarh (p150), Panna (p158), Satpura (p168) and Sanjay Dubri promise a seamless landscape of sal or teak canopies and nothing but shades of green as far as the eyes can see. The big wildlife loop is one of the most stunning experiences of the state.

CITIES & CULTURE

It is not only the history that leaves the traveller awestruck, but also the living culture of its cities. For instance, Bhopal (p78), the state capital, echoes the vibe of any modern city in India. However the old part is time-

Kanha National Park is called the pride of Madhya Pradesh for its abundant wildlife

locked in the slim alleys, where around the historic mosques, are lanes crammed with excellent street food. Poha-jalebi is the staple breakfast food of the city. In the more reserved Chanderi (p48), the only clamour comes from the house of the weavers, who create magic in silk and cotton, bent over their looms. The music of Gwalior's (p38) famous son Tansen (p42) and the craftsmanship of Gond artists (p30) speak of Madhya Pradesh's varied cultural and artistic traditions. The regal splendour of the Bundelas, Scindias and Holkars echoes in Gwalior, Rewa, Orchha (p56), and Maheshwar among other towns and cities.

Beyond the jungles, exquisite temples and forts, it is the impact of the diversity of Madhya Pradesh that is truly impressive. Commemorative cairns in Sanchi (p97) for Buddhists, the delirious devotion seen at the temples and melas across the state and the camaraderie during Eid in Bhopal all make Madhya Pradesh extraordinary as a state.

10 Top Experiences



① KHAJURaho

Despite being abandoned for a millennium, the ancient Khajuraho shrines (both Jain and Hindu) are now a UNESCO World Heritage Site and people are awestruck by the splendid structures. Built between the 10–12th centuries by the Chandela kings, the temple town faded away to obscurity until Captain TS Burt, a British explorer (p67), pegged it on the travel map of India in 1883. Of the 85 temples that stood until the end of the 12th century, only some 20 remain, scattered over a small region of 6sq km. Ever since, this unassuming but historically rich town has been at the top of the list for many travellers. The primary highlight is the temple circuit, especially a few that have a profusion of erotic sculptures and intricate carvings draping the surfaces. This, and the travel hostels, cafes and a lazy vibe to match, has made Khajuraho a decidedly bohemian destination.

② NATIONAL PARKS OF MADHYA PRADESH

The big national park loop of Panna (p158), Bandhavgarh (p150), Kanha (p140), Pench (p162) and Satpura (p168) shelter tigers, leopards, wild boars, sloth bears, jackals, hyenas, dholes and many species of birds, reptiles and diverse flora. With 10 national parks, of which six are tiger reserves, Madhya Pradesh is one of the greenest regions in the Indian subcontinent. You can look beyond the superlatives to hear the roar of the tiger, the rutting of the deer or the eerie quiet of the jungles from the comfort of high-end wildlife lodges. Be immersed in the forest life with the help of naturalists, who accompany you on the safaris. No other testimony works better to describe this stunning lush region, other than the fact that it sparked the writing of Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book*.



③ SATPURA WALKING TRAIL

Satpura (p168) injects a fresh dose of excitement for wildlife enthusiasts who tread on the land that their favourite animals walk on. This is one of the few national parks in the country that allows 'on-foot' discoveries with a specific walking trail chalked out for visitors. Although the trail lies on the periphery of the jungle, it is not hard to spot animals at close proximity.



Even if you don't sight them, a rustle in the leaves is sure to send nervous excitement soaring. This is ideal for those who are interested in reptiles – monitor lizards, snakes and frogs. Forest guards, equipped with guns, offer company and share anecdotes during the walk.

④ CHANDERI

Start your trip to Chanderi (p48) by visiting the ancient but well-maintained fort. The 11th-century town that dominated trade routes through Central India held the interest of several Mughal and Rajput kings, resulting in its streets resounding with the sound of battle and flowing with the blood of soldiers. The town is dotted with Mughal and Bundela relics that rise from the otherwise dusty lego-like townscape. Add to that the sound of working looms in almost all the



households, and the town makes for an essential stop for travellers who want to veer off the regular itineraries. The weavers behind the looms may not have stepped out of this small town, but the Chanderi saris that they magically churn out, are regulars in international and national markets. The craft goes back to the 2nd century and there is no sign of its slowing down as geometric and floral designs continue to decorate the silk, silk-cotton and cotton yardages produced.



⑤ UJJAIN KUMBH MELA

Historic Ujjain (p108) is one of the four holy cities (the others being Allahabad, Haridwar and Nashik) in India that is reserved as a venue for the once-in-12-years religious festival, Kumbh Mela (p114). This is a time that offers many photo-opportunities. The banks of the Shipra River in Ujjain are inundated with devotees attending the Poorna Kumbh Mela, one of the most fervent Hindu festivals in India. The event draws ascetics and devotees from every nook and corner who arrive here in waves to take a dip on specific holy

days. The last Kumbh Mela was held in 2016, so the next big date is a decade and more away. According to believers, a dip in the river, on the shahi snan (royal bath) day, offers salvation from the cycle of rebirth.

6 BHOPAL STREET FOOD

They say that Bhopal's (p78) diverse culture is best sampled on a plate. A culinary extravaganza unfolds on the slim network of lanes in the old city



with a 'jalebi-poha-sev' staple breakfast combo being the showstopper. The striking line-up includes lassi, dahi vada, papri chaat, nihari, biryani, mutton stew, moong dal halwa, Sulaimani chai, kebab bun and much more, dished out both from its Muslim kitchens and Hindu camps – no better landscape than the stomach to find such secularity. The 'stand around the stall' culture of eating allows for more people to fit into the already crammed streets, adding atmosphere to the collective love of food.

7 BHIMBETKA ROCK SHELTERS

The unimpressive craggy hill sprawled over 10sq km opens an ancient world of art by cave dwellers almost 10,000 years ago. Representation of life in the bygone era is showcased at the Bhimbetka rock shelters (p82)

in distinct red and white depictions on the inner walls of the cave shelters. Co-ordinated animal hunting and celebrations make the two key themes of this stick figure artwork. The mammoth caves are numbered with signage outside, but it's best to take a guide who can complement the information with their own twisted anecdotes and inferences. After all, that's what makes travel fun.



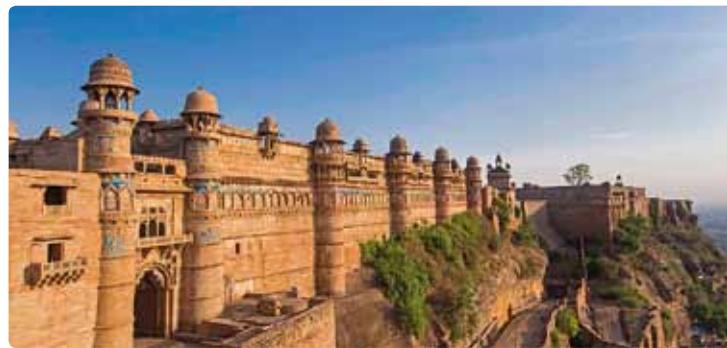
8 ORCHHA

Pleasantly bereft of over-commercialisation, the erstwhile 16th-century royal citadel of Bundela chief, Rudra Pratap, Orchha (p56) is ideal for those who like paced-out travel plans minus the well-oiled slick hospitality of overtouristic cities. Orchha's charm lies in its location by the rocky Betwa River, its handful of monuments and the chance to raft down the river and cycle to explore some green belts on the outskirts. The cenotaphs commemorating the erstwhile rulers of Orchha stand out against the backdrop of the river and blue sky. The offbeat traveller is likely to find this stop worthwhile. Among many other legends that make a trip here interesting, the one about the Ram Raja Temple (p58) stands out – it is the only place in India where Lord Rama is worshipped both as a king and a deity.



9 GWALIOR FORT

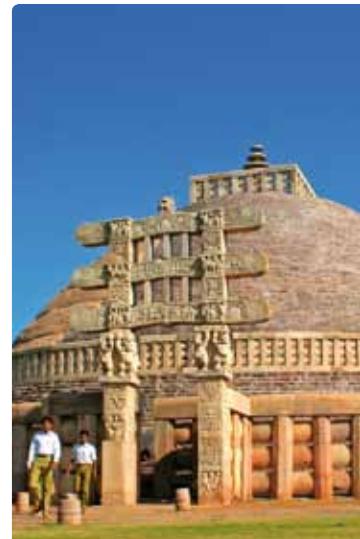
Gwalior, and the twin sub-cities of Lashkar and Morar, stand in the looming shadow of the 8th-century hill-fort. The fort had a distinct and practical 3km wall to ward off any attack by the Mughals – adversaries of the Bundelas in the region for a long time. So enamoured was the Mughal king, Babur,



with the fort, that he called it the 'pearl amongst the fortresses of Hind'. The ornamented Man Mandir Palace is the most stunning part of the fort. Do trek around to see the step-wells, palaces, underground pools and temples within the complex.

10 SANCHI STUPA

A definitive reminder of Madhya Pradesh's unique social and historical composition, the Sanchi Stupa (p94) stands not only as the main among the Buddha's relics but as the veritable symbol of the state's diversity. Built in the 3rd century BC with additions until the 12th century AD, it is the oldest stone structure in India that covers the relics of the Buddha with its hemispherical brick-work. The stupa was commissioned by Emperor Ashoka as a bid to spread the religion across India. The mortal remains of the Buddha were distributed across the country and Sri Lanka and this was the spot chosen by the king in Central India. Since then Sanchi has been an integral part of the Buddhist travel circuit.



Madhya Pradesh in a Week

The state deserves plenty of time to immerse oneself in its natural and historical destinations. But if you have only a week available for Madhya Pradesh, this plan would offer an ample introduction. Taking a cab is recommended so you can see the countryside and stop as you please.

DAY 1 – GWALIOR

Arrive in Gwalior in the morning and spend the day viewing and walking around the grand fort. Visits to the tombs of the great musician Tansen and his mentor Gaus, and the State Museum with its many artefacts are worthwhile. In the evening, catch the 45-minute sound and light show and drive to Orchha (124km; 3hr) to spend the night.

DAY 2 – ORCHHA

Settle for a more relaxed day at the small town, by cycling to all the monuments – especially the cenotaphs. Relax by the Betwa River or try your rafting skills if there is ample water in the river. Use the late evening after the

Bhopal is marked by its beautiful twin lakes



amazing sound and light show to dash off to Khajuraho (175km; 4hr) by train so that you can start your temple tour early the next morning.

DAY 3 – KHAJURAHO

Visiting the Western group of temples can take over three hours just looking at the fine intricate sculptures on the temples. After sightseeing, a spa session at one of the luxury accommodations in town will alleviate your travel weariness and the heat of the day.

DAY 4 & 5 – BANDHAVGARH & SAFARI TIME

Keep enough time on the tarmac to reach Bandhavgarh for the afternoon safari. Kankati, Bamera and other tiger spots are well-known tourist clinchers as they offer sightings pretty regularly. Rows of four-wheelers (Gypsies) work as tiger spotting beacons. Also keep your eyes peeled for sloth bears, jackals, dholes and wild boars for some more wildlife action. Spend the evening at a wildlife lodge in the company of other enthusiasts and naturalists.

Reserve the next day for another safari. Set aside ample time to relax in the midst of birdsong at the lodges that are mostly located at the fringes of the forest. King's Lodge is recommended for this. Leave the tiger reserve in the afternoon to reach Bhopal, the capital of Madhya Pradesh.

DAY 6 & 7 – BHOPAL & AROUND

It is imperative to keep at least two days for this city to understand the cultural diversity of the state. The tribal and state museums, Taj-ul-Masjid, street food scene and visits to other monuments are likely to take up the whole day. Spend the evening by the lake at Bharat Bhawan and watch the water light up with the reflection of the city's acknowledgment of the night.

A swift half-day trip to the Bhimbetka cave shelters or Sanchi is a good detour. If you are quick enough, and have more time back in the city, a brisk stroll by the lake will offer the local flavour of the city. That would be a perfect way to end the trip.



Safaris help to get close to the wild in Madhya Pradesh

Getting Around

Madhya Pradesh is well-connected to the north, west, east and south Indian cities. Major airports include the ones at Bhopal, Indore and Khajuraho. However, the trains form an elaborate network within cities, making it convenient to get around. It's prudent to plan ahead and book your tickets two months in advance. Within cities and around, it is recommended to hire a cab.

Top Tip: Highway Treat

This is a MPSTDC (Madhya Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation) initiative and it's easy to spot Highway Treat restaurants and hotels along the major highways of the state. They are open until 10pm and have clean toilet facilities. Some Highway Treats also provide rooms to stay.

Kushinagar Express (Train No 11015) and Mumbai CST–Amritsar Express (Train No 11057) are the popular trains from Mumbai. More than 20 trains ply between all the prominent Madhya Pradesh cities and Delhi or Mumbai. Look up www.indianrail.gov.in for details.

ROAD

A number of national and state highways criss-cross the length and breadth of Madhya Pradesh. The road conditions are not superlatively good and the roads are sometimes just single lanes, obstructed by highway traffic of large vehicles, but the rewards of verdant topography and forest areas are worth the slowing down.

AIR

Air India, Jet Airways and IndiGo are the main air carriers that operate in the state. These connect Bhopal, Khajuraho and Indore for travellers coming in from Delhi, Bengaluru, Kolkata and Mumbai. Other major cities like Hyderabad and Chennai are also connected, but may have stops in the middle.

TRAIN

Some of the most convenient trains that should be on your radar are the Delhi–Bhopal, Habibganj Shatabdi (Train No 12002) that runs between New Delhi and Bhopal, covering Gwalior as well.

Kushinagar Express (Train No 11015) and Mumbai CST–Amritsar Express (Train No 11057) are the popular trains from Mumbai. More than 20 trains ply between all the prominent Madhya Pradesh cities and Delhi or Mumbai. Look up www.indianrail.gov.in for details.

CABS

Taxis are the best way to get around as they offer flexibility. Ample cab services in major cities like Bhopal, Indore and Gwalior allow smooth travel between the travel sectors of the state. The approximate rates of all cab companies are ₹9–11 per km for a minimum of 250km per day and an extra ₹200 for daily allowance for the driver. Tolls and parking fees are separate. Use this rough calculation to fix the rate ahead and Ola/Uber are good bets.

AUTORICKSHAWS

Autorickshaws are easily available in big cities. Minimum charges are ₹20 but fix a price earlier so that there is no squabbling. Tourist savvy towns like Khajuraho and Orchha also offer cycles for the day.

Highway Treats are comfy pit stops along the state's highways



If You Like: Tropic of Cancer

Located 30km northeast of Bhopal, a small village, Chhola, is famous for the fact that the Tropic of Cancer runs through it. Drive here to get a bite of excitement.

Eating Out

If there is one thing that dominates the cuisine in Madhya Pradesh, it is the diversity. A mixed religious lineage and seasonal and local availability of meat and veggies make each regional cuisine distinct in the state.

FLAVOURS FROM HISTORY

Madhya Pradesh cuisine offers a tempting variety. The Baghelkhand region of the Vindhya, Bhopal, Bundelkhand and Malwa (p76), each bears its signature dishes, flavours and spices. A good variety of vegetarian and meat preparations are available in the state.

Wheat, maize, jowar-made breads or rotis and lentil-based dishes are staples here.

In Bhopal, the streets around Jama Masjid thrum to the retail cacophony of bazaars. In here, old stalwarts dish out biryani, nihari, Sulaimani chai and kebabs as a nod to Bhopal's nawabi heritage. The Mughals, who repeatedly

A thali offering Gwalior's staples of dal bati churma



showed interest in this trading city, brought their gastronomical traditions here. Rogan josh and murg mussalam are popular meat dishes here. The nargisi kofta, a dish of eggs coated in mince, is a popular snack.

The influence of Maharashtrian, Gujarati and Rajasthani cuisines is also evident in the Malwa region. It must have been the work of the Peshwas of Pune, who, along with allies like the Holkars of Indore, the Scindias of Gwalior and the Bhonsles of Nagpur left more than just a historical imprint – they left their love for poha, although the dash of sev and jalebi is a bonafide Madhya Pradesh touch. This is true for the Indori poha too which is a treat in itself. Halt at the Scindia's bastion of Gwalior for golden pearls of motichoor ladoo and, given the Maratha past, local dishes like dal ka shorba or the charo ka ras (chicken broth).

Bundelkhandi cuisine can be found along the northern border of the state, close to Uttar Pradesh's appetite. Though difficult to find at hotels, local homes still keep up with the Bundeli recipes of anwariya (Indian gooseberry curry), thopka (savoury), thonmar (jowar porridge) and besan ke aloo (chickpea flour and potatoes) amongst others, with rice and makki ki roti making their appearance.

QUICK TREATS

MP has a fine tradition of snacks that can double as easy meals on the go. The palak puri, a household treat earlier, has rightly stepped out into eating outlets across the state. These are piping hot puris made of wheat with a layer of palak or spinach sautéed with spices. A dip of mango chutney or pickle by the side is best when wolfing down these finger-licking treats. The dahi puri or bafla (ghee fried wheat wedges) are quick treats as well.

DESSERTS

Travellers with a sweet tooth may want to go in search of the popular corn and milk dessert or raas ki kheer, chakki ki shaak, mawa baati, Morena gajak, khopra pak and malpua.



Snapshot: Mahua

One of the most visible trees in Madhya Pradesh and around is the mahua. The butter tree or *Madhuca Indica* and its flower is a recurring motif in festive rituals here. The tree sheds its creamy flowers which are picked by the forest people and used in a variety of ways. While some roast the flowers in dishes, the mahua is popularly consumed as a toddy. The local alcohol is distilled from the flowers and makes for a potent drink.

Tribal Culture

Journeys into Madhya Pradesh's tribal heartland are full of interesting surprises. The state that harks back to the times of the Mahabharata thrums with cultural traditions. The arts and crafts of the people are a real showcase of their aesthetic sensibility.

TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

The once unfragmented state of Madhya Pradesh was home to almost 40 per cent of India's tribal population, especially the Gonds, the largest tribe here, followed by the Bhils. Since the time Chhattisgarh was carved out of Madhya Pradesh, the state is now left with a tribal population that comprises Gonds, Bhils, Baigas, Korkus, Bhariyas, Halbas, Kauls, Mariyas and Sahariyas. The Gonds are scattered around the Narmada, Satpura and the Vindhya regions and the Bhils around Dhar, Jhabua and Khargone. Today the Bhils and Gonds, in certain areas, have inchéd closer to urban life. Many of them work in the lodges close to the jungles, so interaction with them is imperative. Others stay in smaller villages in the countryside and largely depend on farming.

FOLK TRADITIONS

You are likely to encounter Gond villages during your trip to Madhya Pradesh. The village homes, which are not yet touched by rapid urbanisation, are a showcase for their indigenous aesthetics. The walls are often painted indigo, ochre and black. The process of painting motifs on them is called dhigna. The Gonds are also known for their love for storytelling, music, dancing and singing. The main dance forms include karma, saila, rina, dadaria and sua. Art forms like swang, gammat or tamasha are not prevalent on tourist circuits, but a detour to the villages will reward you with these sights. Local knowledge and calendars are imperative.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Evidence of cave art on the cave shelters and rock galleries in Madhya Pradesh is testimony that art was a preoccupation with the prehistoric people here. Pottery, bamboo weaving, stone cutting and weaving are still practised in the interior villages. Gond painting, using natural dyes and pigments, has now become widely recognised as an art form outside the state too.

Top Tip: Bhopal Tribal Museum

The best way to get a perspective into the tribal life of the state is a visit to the Tribal Museum in Bhopal (p80), where tribal life is accurately depicted. Exhibits of utensils, clothing and crafts showcase an elaborate presentation of an indigenous age-old society under one roof.

Shamla Hills; Indian/foreigner ₹10/100, camera ₹50; noon–8pm Tue–Sun

FESTIVALS

Tribal festivals are mostly associated with the seasons – Bidari Puja, Hardhili, Navakhani, Jawara, Madai, Chherata and Bakbad are celebrated with great enthusiasm even now.

Nagaji Fair is held at Posa village in Morena district in November or December. The fair is held in honour of Saint Nagaji who resided here 400 years ago. It doubles as an animal fair where selling and buying of monkeys and domestic animals take place for over a month along with the setting up of food and children's stalls.

Music, arts and crafts mark the state's folk festivals and fairs



Shopping Guide

Fabulous textiles, vibrant art and metal craft all make for great buys while travelling around Madhya Pradesh. Be it for your collection or for souvenirs and gifts, the state emporiums and craftsmen in the local areas have much to offer.

Experience the joy of personalised retail therapy by having conversations with local craftspeople and shop owners who can give you an idea of the provenance or the making of a particular textile or a craft piece in MP.

Tikamgarhi Brass Metal Craft – Tikamgarh in Orchha has been the home to bell metal craft for hundreds of years. A few households are still engaged in the making of curios like canons and war weapons (earlier used by royalty) and bullock carts, cattle bells and temple decorations as symbols of daily life.

Shops on the main temple street of Orchha

Morena Gajak – Get a box or two of the ‘melt-in-your-mouth’ Morena gajak from none other than Daulatram Gupta, the unmatchable maker of the dessert. He imported the recipe from his wife’s namesake village. The shop is in Gwalior (p45) but one can also visit the factory on the outskirts with prior planning and permission.

751 2327190; Shri Anturam Shivhare Chowk, Naya Sadak, Lakshar; 10am–9pm

Chanderi Textiles – Geometrical and flower motifs make for key designs on the Chanderi fabric in silk, silk-cotton and pure cotton. The origin of the saris can be traced back to the Mughals, indicated by some designs that bear resemblance to the ashrafi coins of the era. At Chanderi, shop at Motamal Handlooms though the state-run Mrignayanees in key cities are the best for a reasonable variety.

Motamal Handlooms 754 7253321; Rajghat Rd; 10am–6pm, or any shop on Rajghat Rd

Maheshwari Saris – The tassel-ended cotton saris from Maheshwar have a fan following. The thin gauzy fabric is comfortable for the harsh summer and a favourite in the northern parts of India.

Weaving centres at Maheshwar; Mrignayaneem emporiums www.mphandicrafts.com

Bagh Prints – Craftsmen continue the 400-year-old block print tradition of their ancestors from Sind, better known for its Ajrak prints in MP even

today. Textiles and saris of Bagh wooden block prints are available at all state emporiums. Roopayan, next to Malwa Resort in Mandu (41km), is a small shop selling good-quality scarves, shawls, bedspreads, and clothing of Bagh prints.

Roopayan, Main Rd, Mandu; 9am–7pm; Mrignayaneem across the state

Thappa & Thussa Jewellery – Gold and copper sheets are beaten together and then stamped with floral and geometric patterns to make the Thappa and Thussa jewellery. The talented goldsmiths of Bhopal braid them together after beating them into thin sheets and then turn them into exotic neckpieces and bangles.

Chowk bazaar, Bhopal; dawn–dusk; ₹500 onwards

Gond Paintings – Colourful Gond paintings that reflect the affinity of the tribes to the flora and fauna of the land are popular buys. Gond art is also available as table-top objects, souvenirs and other curios.

Mrignayaneem; Bhopal; 755 2554162; www.mphandicrafts.com; 10am–6pm; ₹200 onwards

Dhurries from Siron – Pit looms in Siron, Jhabua and Jabalpur areas produce colourful carpets, mostly hand-woven by women, who incorporate geometric and floral motifs on them.

Mrignayaneem; www.mphandicrafts.com; 10am–6pm; ₹200 onwards

Tikamgarhi brass metal crafts make for souvenirs and gifts





MP's Best Trips

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Wander the palaces and battlements of Orchha for a slice of heritage

Madhya Pradesh at a Glance

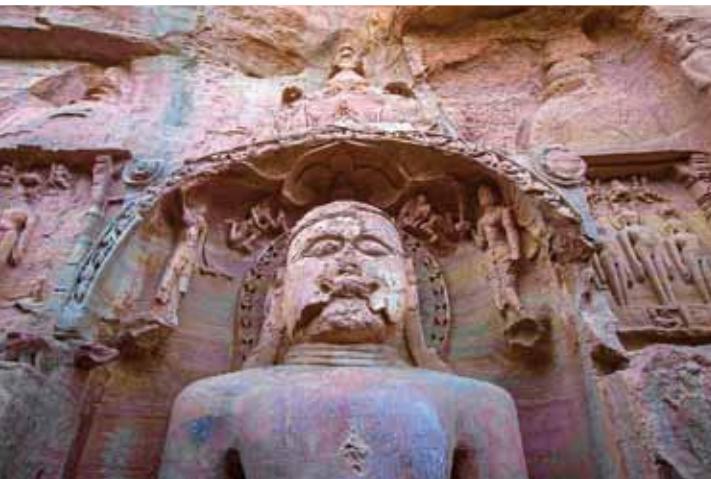
Tracking tigers at one of India's two best tiger parks: Bandhavgarh National Park or Kanha National Park while wandering the plains of Pench; blushing at the erotic carvings on the exquisite temples in Khajuraho; watching the sun set over the sculpted stone temples in Orchha; dining like a prince at Ahilya Fort in Maheshwar; cooling off under a waterfall in Pachmarhi; marvelling at the Jain rock sculptures at the magnificent Gwalior Fort; seeking devotional fervour in Ujjain or beholding vibrant tribal art, Madhya Pradesh is truly the heart of all experiences.

GETTING AROUND MADHYA PRADESH

TRAIN More than 20 daily trains go to Agra's cantonment station and to Jhansi for Orchha or Khajuraho and Delhi, while more than 15 go to Bhopal.

CAB & AUTORICKSHAW Cycle-rickshaws, autorickshaws and taxis and cabs for hire are plentiful across all cities and towns.

The rock caves are records of Jainism's footfall in Madhya Pradesh





GWALIOR

Why Go?

Famous for its medieval hilltop fort described by Mughal emperor Babur as ‘the pearl amongst fortresses in India’, Gwalior makes an interesting stop en route to some of the better-known destinations in this part of India. The city also houses the elaborate Jai Vilas Palace, the historic seat of the Scindias, one of the most famous royal families of the region.

Quick Facts

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Road travel to Gwalior from the northern cities is convenient. The Taj Express Highway upto Agra has greatly reduced time for travellers from Delhi.

Within the city, cabs (₹9–11 per km, min 250km, plus ₹200 per day driver allowance) and autorickshaws

are available for hire. Ola cabs can be hired by downloading the app.

WHEN TO GO

Oct–Feb

GREAT FOR



The 8th-century fort is Gwalior's towering landmark

Sights

Gwalior Fort

This majestic 8th-century hilltop fort overlooks Gwalior. Much of it is now occupied by the Scindia School, established by Maharaja Madhavrao Scindia in 1897. A sound and light show is held nightly in the amphitheatre. From the east a series of gates lead up to the fort. At the bottom, the first gate is the 17th-century Gwalior Gate (Alamgiri Gate) that leads to the State Archaeological Museum. The next is Badalgarh, named after Badal Singh, Man Singh's uncle. Further up is the 15th-century Ganesh Gate. Nearby is Kabutar Khana, a pigeon house, and a small Hindu temple to the hermit Gwalipa, after whom both the fort

A pair of crystal chandeliers hanging in the Durbar Hall of Jai Vilas Palace



and town are named. Chaturbhuj Mandir, a 9th-century Vishnu shrine is before the next gate, Hathiya Paur (Elephant Gate), is now the entrance to the palace grounds (as the last gate, Hawa Gate, no longer exists). Sound and light show English, Indian/foreigner, children ₹130/300/60; English 7.30pm, Hindi 6.30pm, winter timings are an hour later

Jain Rock Sculptures

An impressive set of sculptures (mid-15th century) are carved into the rock between Urvai Gate and the inner fort walls. They represent figures of Tirthankaras (the 24 great Jain teachers). There are more than 30 images, including a splendid 17m-high standing sculpture of the first Tirthankara, Adinath.

Enter via the fort

Man Singh Palace

This imperial-style palace, inside the fort, has unusually decorated monuments: the outer walls include a frieze of yellow ducks. These and mosaic tiles of elephants, tigers and crocodiles in blue, yellow and green give it an alternative identity. Built by Tomar ruler Man Singh between 1486 and 1516, this is a fine example of early Hindu architecture. The counter has tickets for the ruins of Shah Jahan Palace, Karan Palace and other palaces northwest of the fort.

Indian/foreigner ₹5/100, video ₹25; dawn–dusk

If You Like: Gwalior Darshan

MP Tourism's little yellow bus, Gwalior Darshan, takes passengers on a full-day city tour, taking in all the main sights, including Gwalior Fort and Jai Vilas Palace. Enquire at the tourist office at Tansen Residency, where the tour begins. Minimum eight passengers.

₹751 2340370; MP Tourism, Tansen Residency; adult/child ₹155/80

Jai Vilas Palace & Scindia Museum

The museum occupies some 35 rooms of the Scindias' opulent Jai Vilas Palace, built by Maharaja Jayajirao in 1874 using prisoners from the fort. The convicts were tasked with the 12-year job of weaving the hall carpet, one of the largest in Asia. The Durbar Hall ceiling has two 12.5m-high, 3.5-tonne chandeliers, each with 250 light bulbs – said to be the largest pair in the world. The rooms are filled with cut-glass furniture, stuffed tigers and a ladies-only swimming pool with its own boat. The cavernous dining room displays a model railway with a silver train that carried after-dinner brandy and cigars around the table.

Enter the palace from the west; Indian/foreigner ₹75/450, camera/video ₹70/50; 10am–5.30pm Tue–Sun

State Archaeological Museum

This museum is within Gujarji Mahal, just through Gwalior Gate. Built in the 15th century by Man Singh

for his favourite rani, it holds a large collection of Hindu and Jain sculptures, including the famed Salabhanjika (an exceptionally carved female figure), plus copies of the Bagh Caves frescoes.

Indian/foreigner ₹10/100, camera/video ₹50/200; 10am–5pm

Sahastrabahu (Sas-Bahu) Temples

The Mayan-like Sas-Bahu (a corruption of Sahastrabahu or thousand armed one) temples, date from the 9th–11th centuries. The big temple, dedicated to Vishnu, and the smaller temple, dedicated to Shiva, are stacked with sculptures.

Dawn–dusk; entry free

Teli ka Mandir

Used as a drinks factory and coffee shop by the British after the First War of Independence in 1857, this 30m-high, 8th-century temple is the oldest monument in the compound. The gold-topped gurudwara nearby is dedicated to Sikh hero Guru Har Gobind, who was imprisoned in Man Singh Palace from 1617 to 1619.

Dawn–dusk; entry free

Snapshot: Mian Tansen

The cultural gem from Gwalior is Mian Tansen, the 16th-century musician and composer. Ramtanu Pandey was bestowed the honorific title of maestro or mian by Emperor Akbar, and was hailed as one of the nav ratans or nine gems of the emperor's court.

Tansen's music was a product of the cultural influences of his time. Hindustani, Persian and Central Asian music, Bhakti and Sufi traditions, compositions in Brajbhasa birthed unique gharanas in Hindustani music. Ragas prefixed with Mian, like Mian ki Malhar, Todi, all refer to Tansen's musical signature and the Gwalior Gharana.

Tansen Samaroh (p46) is held in December at Behat village in Gwalior and is one of India's oldest music festivals.

Tansen Samadhi Parivar; ☎ 8109409002; www.tansensamaroh.com

Tomb of Tansen

Tucked away in the winding lanes of the old town, and in the same compound as the resplendent tomb of Mohammed Gaus, is the smaller, simpler tomb of Tansen (see box above), the father of Hindustani classical music. The Tansen Samaroh (p46) is held through day and night in December every year in Gwalior. A pilgrimage for music lovers and artists from across the country, it is held where the 16th-century legend Tansen lies buried. 8am–6pm; entry free

Rani Lakshmi Bai Samadhi

The resting place of the great Bundela warrior, Rani Lakshmi Bai, lies in the middle of a well-manicured park, the Phool Bagh. Her statue in black stone stands tall in front of an eternal flame, exemplifying her valiant image.

Phool Bagh; dawn–dusk; entry free

Sarod Ghar Museum

The ancestral residence of the Bangash family of sarod maestro Amjad Ali Khan is now a museum for tracing the history of classical music in Gwalior.

Haifz Ali Khan Rd, Jiwaji Ganj; 10am–5pm; Mon closed; entry free

Old City

Stroll by the old city of Gwalior for period structures, including tombs of Sufi saints, temples and historic lanes that showcase the past. The Bada, a market place in Gwalior is fun, especially during Diwali.

Kila Gate

Accommodation

Usha Kiran Palace

HERITAGE HOTEL ₹₹₹

₹ 751 2444000; www.tajhotels.com; Jayendraganj; d from ₹6500 This grand,

nearly 130-year-old building was built as a guesthouse for the Prince of Wales (later King George V). Every room features heritage luxury – and the villas even come with their own private pool! There's a gorgeous main pool, the soothing Jiva Spa (massage treatments from ₹1900), the excellent Silver Saloon restaurant and the spiffing Bada Bar (beer ₹415).

Deo Bagh

HERITAGE HOTEL ₹₹₹

₹ 751 2820357; www.deo-bagh.com; neemranahotels.com; Jadhav Koti, opp Janaktal, d ₹4283–6187 (incl breakfast) Deo Bagh takes you back to the 17th century, complete with two Maratha temples within the property itself. Aside from the exemplary hospitality, 15 rooms overlooking Nau Bagh offer complete solitude to unwind after a day's sightseeing.

Tansen Residency

MPSTDC ₹₹₹

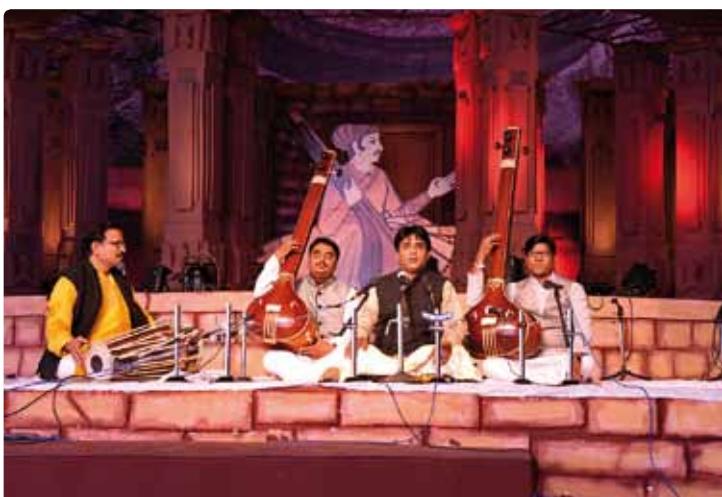
₹ 751 4056789; www.mptourism.com; 6A Gandhi Rd; d from ₹2990–4290 (incl breakfast & bed tea) A mid-range hotel run by MP Tourism, the rooms are modern, with updated bathrooms. There's a bar and restaurant and the location is central. Don't skip the North Indian fare at Malhar, the multi-cuisine restaurant in the hotel. Beer ₹415.

Hotel Gwalior Regency

BUSINESS HOTEL ₹₹₹

₹ 751 2340670; www.hotelregencygroup.com; Link Rd; d ₹5600–7400 (incl breakfast) The Indian business hotel offers standard rooms that are perfectly decent, though the central air-conditioning struggles to make much of an impact. You

Performers at Tansen Samaroh pay musical homage to the 16th-century maestro



can pay an extra ₹700 to ₹1000 for 'grande deluxe' rooms with modern furnishings. There's a bar with DJs each night as well.

Hotel Landmark HOTEL ₹

751 4011271; www.hotel.landmark.gwalior.com; Manik Vilas Colony, close to Railway Station; d from ₹3650–9999 (incl breakfast) Ideal for business travellers, the hotel offers swift service, a travel desk, reasonably comfortable and well-lit rooms and an enviable location close to the business centre.

Hotel DM HOTEL ₹

751 2342083; Link Rd; d from ₹600, with AC from ₹1500 The rooms are a bit cramped but they are slightly better than the other budget options around town and the wi-fi certainly helps. All have clean bathrooms.

Hotel India HOTEL ₹

751 2341983; Station Rd; d ₹1360, with AC ₹2000 Basic rooms and facilities are on offer at this 2nd-floor hotel across from the train station, where you'll have the added advantage of room service from Indian Coffee House, which owns and operates the hotel. Perch yourself on the 2nd-floor breezeway looking out on to the street below and watch India run.

Eating

Silver Saloon INDIAN ₹₹

Usha Kiran Palace, Jayendraganj; mains ₹500–1100; 7am–11pm Mouth-watering Indian

and Continental dishes, as well as some Thai, Nepali and Marathi specialities, are served in the AC restaurant or the palm-shaded verandah of this exquisite heritage hotel.

Moti Mahal Delux NORTH INDIAN ₹

Link Rd next to bus stand; mains ₹170–440; noon–11pm The flavours pop at this stylish non-veg Delhi transplant, as they have done for nearly 100 years. They work their special magic on Northwest frontier cuisine.

Kwality Restaurant MULTI-CUISINE ₹

Captain Upamanyu Singh Marg; mains ₹250–500; 11am–11pm This is a favourite address for the locals for generic Indian or Chinese food. The vegetarians tend to veer towards hara bhara kebab and the non-veg towards murg musallam.

Volga MULTI-CUISINE ₹

Jayendraganj, Shinde ki Chhawani; mains ₹250–500; 11am–11pm Supposedly the oldest restaurant in Gwalior, go here for a quick meal.

HQ BAR ₹

Hotel Gwalior Regency, Link Rd; minimum spend ₹500; 2pm–midnight This small but trendy bar inside the Gwalior Regency does good cocktails (₹250 to ₹380) set to choice tunes led by a DJ.

If You Like: Morena gajak

The famous Morena gajak (made of sesame, sugar and ghee) is from the family of Daulatram Gupta, though the proprietor admits that it was from his wife's home in Morena that he imported this recipe. The 40-year-old no-fuss shop can arrange for a trip to the factory if one is interested.

751 2327190; Shri Antaram Shivhare Chowk, Naya Sadak, Lakshar; 10am–9pm

Gajak from Morena is a treat



Indian Coffee House SOUTH INDIAN ₹

Station Rd; mains ₹45–250; 7.30am–10.30pm This popular branch does all the breakfast favourites – coffee, dosas, scrambled eggs – and has a main-course menu, including excellent thalis (₹120 to ₹220), in a separate 1st-floor family section.

Shopping

Mrignayanee HANDICRAFTS

Shekh ki bagiya; www.mphandicrafts.com; 11am–8pm The state-run emporium is an easy shopping destination for elegant Chanderi and Maheshwari saris and textiles, artefacts, Gond art, jewellery, souvenirs and handicrafts.



EXPERT RECOMMENDATION

MP's cultural festivals

Musician and singer **Vidya Shah** worked in Madhya Pradesh at the grassroots level. Here she lists some of the prominent music and dance festivals of the state.

Think MP and you think culture. MP is one of the largest states in India and culturally too it matches up in scale. Over the years it has evolved into a rich centre for the performing arts including beautiful performance spaces. The Bharat Bhavan in Bhopal and the Khajuraho temples are a beautiful juxtaposition of the traditional and contemporary. There are several festivals that take place across the state and most of these are a serious and enjoyable celebration of traditional music and other performing arts.

GWALIOR

The Tansen Samaroh (or Festival) held through day and night, in December every year, in Gwalior, with artists from across the country is an absolute pilgrimage for the music lover, especially for classical Indian music. Organised where the 16th-century legend Tansen lies buried, the festival pays homage to the maestro with musicians from all over performing.

MAIHAR

A festival is held annually in February in this quaint town in the name of one of the legends of India, Baba Alauddin Khan who taught the likes of Pandit Ravi Shankar and Ustad Ali Akbar Khan. If in luck you might also get to hear the legendary Maihar Band that was originally set up for the common man way back in 1918. The festival may not be peaking in its glory but the place has a lot of historical sanctity.

KHAJURAHO

For dance, Khajuraho is a magical experience. The stunning sandstone carved temples, provide the backdrop before which the festival takes place usually in February. Here you can witness the performances of the various traditional dance forms from across India. Entry to the festival is free.

For more details check <http://www.mptourism.com/>



The Khajuraho dance festival is a big cultural draw in Madhya Pradesh



CHANDERI

Why Go?

The proud stone monuments that dot the brown-green scrubland of Chanderi are silent reminders of the heritage of the Bundela Rajputs and Malwa Sultans of the past. The constant clack of looms that weave the gossamer Chanderi fabric across homes breaks the quiet of the town. Textile tradition and a medieval past make Chanderi an interesting stop.

Quick Facts

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Train: Lalitpur is the closest railway station to Chanderi (100km), which falls on the Delhi–Bhopal Habibganj Shatabdi route. From here, cabs at ₹100 are available for hire to reach the town.

Cab: Gwalior lies 210km from Chanderi. Cabs can be hired at

₹2500–3000 one way (depending on the car) from Gwalior to Chanderi.

WHEN TO GO

Nov–Mar

GREAT FOR



The delicate handwoven textile is a hallmark of Chanderi

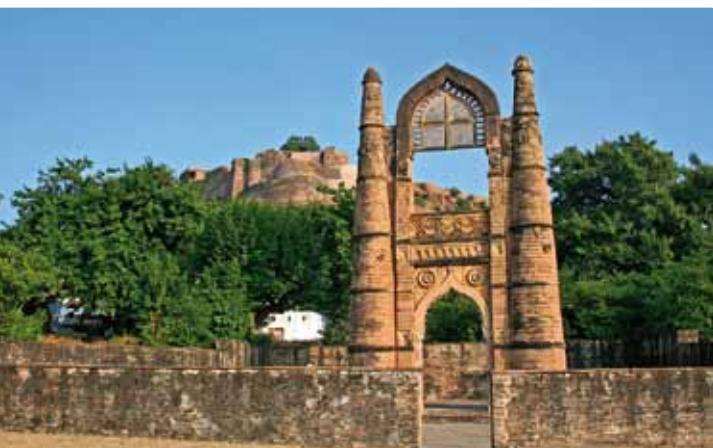
Sights

Chanderi Fort

The well-kept hilltop fort was also known as Kirtidurg, built by Raja Kirti Pal in the 11th century. The wide courtyard and mixed architecture illustrate how subsequent rulers – Bundela Rajputs, Malwas and Mughals – left their signature imprint. Noteworthy are a tombstone of the 15th-century Dhrupad singer, Baiju Bawara, and Jauhar Smarak. Wind down the southern part of the fort to walk through the large Khooni Darwaza (bloody gate), a name derived from the bloody battles held here. The fort is lit up between 7–8pm every day and is a spectacle to behold.

Dawn–dusk; entry free

Badal Mahal Gate was built by Sultan Mahmud Shah Khilji



Badal Mahal Gate

The striking Badal Mahal stands tall against the backdrop of the fort. Built by Sultan Mahmud Shah Khilji in 1450, its well-manicured garden and the tall imposing structure greet curious visitors spellbound by its beauty.

Dawn–dusk; entry free

Jama Masjid

Bang in the middle of the city, stands the mosque with three prominent domes and a wide prayer courtyard. Built by Ghiyasuddin Balban in 1251, the elegant structure is a place of prayer and comes alive during Eid.

Dawn–dusk; entry free

Lakshman Temple

Legend has it that Kirti Pal, the founder of the town, bathed in a pool (Parmeshwar taal) adjoining a temple to Lord Lakshman and was cured

Top Tip: Baolis of Chanderi

Walk around the town and you can spot a number (nearly 1200 of them) of ancient step-wells (baolis), which were most probably constructed in the 15th century. The Battisi Baoli, named after the 32 steps that lead down to its base, is the most famous.

of leprosy. The ancient bone-white temple's reflection looks splendid in the shimmering water. Morning and evening aartis are held here.

Dawn–dusk; entry free

Shehzadi ka Rauza

A dignified memorial to love, the lover's tomb (1420–35 AD) stands opposite the Parmeshwar taal. According to legend, Mehrunissa, the daughter of the governor, was in love with the army chief. Her father disapproved and sent his men to kill the chief. The mortally wounded chief dropped dead at this very spot; a grief-stricken Mehrunissa rushed to the same place and killed herself upon seeing her dead paramour. The repentant father built the tomb as a commemoration of their love.

Dawn–dusk; entry free

Shahi Madarsa

Originally a tomb, the impressive stone-clad Shahi Madarsa was converted into a learning centre. The verandahs with intricate jaali-work on the other three sides amplify its beauty.

Bypass Rd; dawn–dusk; entry free

Singpur Mahal

The Singpur Mahal was the last bastion of the Bundelas and used as the Chanderi museum for a long time by the Madhya Pradesh government. A large open courtyard and jaali work on the walls around still bear testimony to the lively court proceedings or entertainment that once took place in the courtyard.

Pichor Rd; 10am–5pm; entry free, camera ₹25

Koshak Mahal

Built by the Sultan of Malwa in the 15th century to celebrate victory over Jaunpur, Koshak Mahal is a grand building. It is a complex made up of four smaller mahals, in local sandstone. Ornamental carvings and jaali work can be seen on the walls. Isagrha Rd; dawn–dusk; entry free

Kati Ghati

This rock-gate in the southern part of the town is legendary. According to local folklore, the rock was cut down overnight by the Emperor Babur, to make a passageway to attack Chanderi. A mosque-like sculpture is hewn on one of the stone walls where the Mughals said



You can shop for saris at the weaving centres in Chanderi.

their prayers before going to battle. The second fable revolves around Jiman Khan, the son of the then Governor of Chanderi, Sher Khan. He had commissioned this gateway and announced a reward to anyone who could cut down the rock soonest. A mason agreed to complete the project overnight. When Khan inspected the gate in the morning, he found that there were no hinges on the rock gateway to install doors,

Top Tip: Chanderi Museum

This well-kept museum displays sculptures and relics from different eras of Chanderi's history. The museum has six galleries. The cut-off stone head of a Jain Tirthankara and an intricately carved wild boar deserve special mention.

Mugawali Rd; 10am–5pm, Fri closed, entry Indian/foreigner ₹5

and refused to pay the mason. The distraught mason committed suicide at the same spot over Khan's broken promise. Even today this massive rock gateway bears no doors.

Shri Chaubisi Jain Temple

The many Jain shrines in the town bear testimony to the fact that Chanderi was a major seat of Jain culture. The most prominent is the Shri Chaubisi Jain Temple. A Jain Tirthankara, chiseled out of rock,



If You Like: Weaving centres

Even though Pranpur, on the outskirts of Chanderi, has been developed as an exclusive village for tourists to see the entire process of weaving, one can walk into the lanes of the old part of town and peep into any home to get an idea of the weaving heritage of the town. If interested, visit the NGO, Chanderiyaan (9am–6pm), located in an old historical structure near Raja-Rani Mahal. A double storey facility is dedicated as a skills training sector. The older, Institute of Textile Technology, inaugurated in 1910, is yet another learning and development centre for the Chanderi weavers. Chanderiyaan;  9691280958/9907082823; located close to the Musa Baodi

stands at the end of a long staircase. Meditation caves perched on top of a craggy hillside can be seen from the bottom.

Next to Raja-Rani Mahal; dawn–dusk; entry free

Tomb of Nizam-Uddin

Few people visit the large complex wedged in the middle of the old part of town. The complex has a number of tombstones dedicated to Saint Nizam-Iddin and his kin.

Dawn-dusk: entry free



Accommodation & Eating

Tana Bana

MPSTDC ₹

₹7547 252222; www.mptourism.com; Rajghat Rd; dbl deluxe/AC ₹2290/1990; Run by MP Tourism, Tana Bana is a well-kept facility, with exquisite Chanderi-themed tiles that run along the building, adding a dash of atmosphere to the otherwise basic

rooms. The amenities include a TV, hot shower, clean bedding and laundry. The in-house restaurant (11am-7.30pm) offers reasonably tasty meals.

Hotel Shrikuni

HOTEL ₹

 8989616247; near Dak Bungalow; dbl AC/non-AC ₹1250/600 This new facility offers clean rooms with en suite bathrooms with hot showers and an in-house restaurant that looks out onto a cheerful lawn. This is a good stop in the centre of town to stay or even grab a quick meal.



Shopping

 7547 253321; Rajghat Rd; 10am–6pm
A number of shops on the Rajghat Road in Chanderi offer the fruit of its looms in silk and silk-cotton combos. Motamal Handlooms offers a large variety, neatly stacked as per price, so one can stick to a budget of sari shopping.



EXPERT RECOMMENDATION

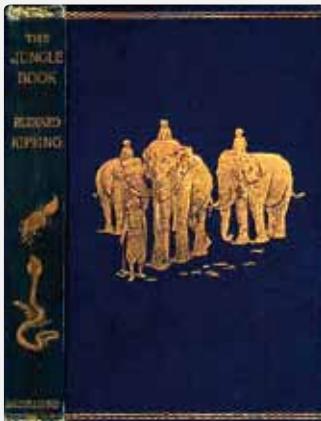
Best books on Madhya Pradesh

Anikta Mukherji is Senior Editor, NDTV and produces and anchors the prime time show News First at 10. Here's her essential reading list if you're planning a trip to the 'Heart of India'.

Jungle Book, Rudyard Kipling

Kipling's book says Mowgli the man-cub was reared in the Seonee hills by the wolves but modern day Seoni in Madhya Pradesh bears little resemblance to the Council Rock where Akela held court. But dig a little deeper and the forests of Pench are not that far removed from

Embossed cover from the original edition of Kipling's *The Jungle Book*



Kipling's magical yet at times flawed and dangerous landscape.

Divine Ecstasy, The Story of Khajuraho, Shobita Punja

Khajuraho draws more visitors to Madhya Pradesh than any other landmark. Read Shobita Punja's exhaustively researched *Divine Ecstasy. The Story of Khajuraho* if you want to go beyond the glossy coffee table books on the subject. Punja weaves a convincing narrative to explain the reason behind the existence of these erotic sculptures basing her theory on the Shiv Purana. This is art history at its most compelling.

Five Past Midnight in Bhopal, Dominique Lapierre and Javier Moro

Bhopal is very far removed from the dusty, congested middle Indian town one expects. It's serene lakes and surrounding hills might make you forget that it was also the site of the world's deadliest industrial disaster. *Five Past Midnight in Bhopal* chronicles the Union Carbide gas

tragedy through the eyes of those affected most deeply by it, and yet, it's less about death, destruction and pain and more about the triumph of the human spirit.

Animal's People, Indra Sinha

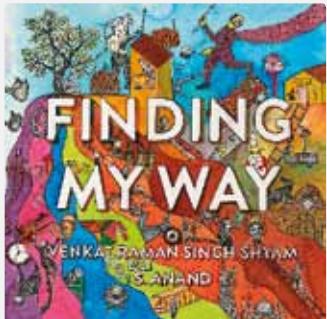
The 2007 Booker-shortlisted work of fiction is based on the Bhopal gas tragedy. The book's narrator is a 19-year-old orphan affected by the gas disaster and is called the Animal.

Rani Lakshmi Bai, the Valiant Queen of Jhansi, Deepa Agarwal

For young travellers, this is the best introduction to one of the bravest women warriors in India's history—little Manikarnika, born with a fierce sense of her own destiny, became the brave Queen of Jhansi fighting against the British in what would come to be known as the first War of Indian Independence.

Finding My Way, Venkat Raman Singh Shyam and S. Anand

Gond artist Venkat Raman Singh Shyam's wonderful book transports the reader to the forests of Central India among a people we rarely hear about. Discover the longstanding heritage of tales and legends of the Gondi tribals and the vivid colours and creatures that populate their world. This is a volume to cherish long after your holiday is over.



Gond artist Venkat Raman Singh Shyam tells the story of his people in this book

Cooking Delights of the Maharajas, Digvijaya Singh

Lip-smacking recipes are interspersed with fascinating anecdotes from the royal house of Sailana.

The Waterhouse Albums, The Alkazi Foundation

Fascinating portraits of the Bhopal begums, that rare lineage of women rulers, in one of the earliest photo albums from this part of the world.

Yogini Cult and Temples, Vidhya Dehejia, for the National Museum

Imagine a cult of women who could fly, would partner with 64 men at the same time, and were the terror of everyone around them. The temples are almost all in MP and the Khajuraho brand of Tantrism is closely linked.



ORCHHA

Why Go?

On the banks of the boulder-strewn Betwa River, Orchha is a supreme showcase of Mughal architecture, stunning 16th-century temples and grander palaces and cenotaphs dotting the pastoral landscape as well. The atmosphere in Orchha is laid-back which makes for a relaxing stay.

Quick Facts

GETTING THERE & AROUND

The closest airport from Orchha is Gwalior (124km/3hours) but the best way is by train from Jhansi. By road, take a cab (approx ₹4000–4500 return or ₹9–11/km, minimum 250km/day plus driver allowance of ₹200 per day).

Autorickshaws are available within

the city, but most people walk or cycle (₹50/day) to get around.

WHEN TO GO

Oct–Feb; just after the monsoon for rafting.

GREAT FOR



Cenotaphs and imposing palaces dot the skyline in Orchha

Sights

Palaces

Crossing the granite bridge from the village centre brings you to a fortified complex dominated by two imposing 17th-century palaces – Jehangir Mahal and Raja Mahal.

Jehangir Mahal (dawn–dusk), of steep staircases and precipitous walkways, represents a zenith of medieval Islamic architecture with Hindu sculptural elements. Behind the palace, sturdy camel stables (dawn–dusk) overlook a green landscape dotted with monuments. It also serves as a wedding destination. In the nearby Raja Mahal, the caretaker will open the painted rooms where Rama, Krishna and Orchha royalty wrestle, hunt, fight and dance across the walls and ceilings.

Downhill from the palace compound,

Pavilions and sculpted halls embellish Orchha's palaces



are the smaller Rai Praveen Mahal (9am–5pm), a pavilion and formal Mughal garden, and Khana Hammam (dawn–dusk), with some fine vaulted ceilings. On the other side of the village, Palki Mahal (9am–6pm) was the palace of Dinman Hardol (the son of Bir Singh Deo), who committed suicide as he was accused of having an affair with his brother's wife. His memorial is in the adjacent Phool Bagh (9am–6pm), a traditional charbagh (formal Persian garden, divided into quarters). Prince Hardol is venerated as a folk hero here.

Sound and light show (Raja Mahal; Indian/foreigner ₹130/300; in English 7.30pm, in Hindi 6.30pm)

Chhatris

Cenotaphs to Orchha's rulers, including Bir Singh Deo, are in the form of immense and serene chhatris that rise beside the river about a kilometre south of the village. They're best seen at dusk, when cinematic sunsets drop across the Betwa River for photo ops.

9am–5.30pm; entry free

Ram Raja Temple

At the centre of a lively square is the Ram Raja Temple. Built as a palace for Madhukar Shah's wife, legend has it that a temple was built when an idol of Lord Rama, temporarily installed by the rani, proved impossible to move. Don't miss the evening aarti at 8pm and the change of guard ceremony.

Top Tip: Combined ticket

The combined ticket (Indian/foreigner ₹10/250, camera/video ₹25/100) covers Jehangir Mahal, Raja Mahal, Rai Praveen Mahal, the camel stables, the chhatris, Chaturbhuj Temple and Lakshmi Narayan Temple and is sold only at the ticket office (8am–5pm) at Raja Mahal.

9am–1pm & 7–11pm Oct–Mar, 8am–1pm & 8–11pm Apr–Sep

Chaturbhuj Temple

Ram Raja is overlooked by the spectacular towers of Chaturbhuj Temple, an immensely solid building. Buy a cheap torch from the bazaar and climb the internal stairs to the roof where, from among the mossy spires and domes, you get the best view in town.

9am–5pm; entry free

Lakshmi Narayan Temple

Lakshmi Narayan Temple, on the road out to Ganj village, has fine rooftop views and well-preserved murals on the ceilings of its domed towers.

9am–5pm; entry free

Accommodation

The Orchha Palace

HOTEL ₹^{rr}
+91 9516006201; www.orchhapalace.com; Swant Nagar; delux ₹6490, d ₹4500 (off season) onwards Comfy and spacious interiors, in-house restaurants and amenities make this a good pick and a destination wedding venue too.

Amar Mahal

HOTEL ₹^{rr}

+91 7680 252102; www.amarmahal.com; s/d from ₹4600/5600, ste ₹9900 Kick your feet up like a maharaja in rooms featuring lovely wood-carved four-poster beds set around a gorgeous courtyard with white pillar verandas or the large pool. There's an Ayurvedic massage and yoga centre beside the pool (which non-guests can use for ₹300). This is probably Orchha's most luxurious stay.

Bundelkhand Riverside

HOTEL ₹^{rr}

+91 7680 252612; www.bundelkhandriverside.com; s/d ₹2990/3990 Owned by the grandson of Orchha's last king, Vir Singh, this hotel has antique-style furniture and some of the maharaja's personal art collection displayed in the corridors. Exquisite rooms overlook either the river or the graceful gardens, which contain some 16th-century monuments as well as a small swimming pool (non-guests ₹250). Cheaper cabins overlook the river but lack air-con. One of Orchha's best restaurants, Turquoise Diner, is here as well.

The Orchha Resort

HOTEL ₹^{rr}

+91 927188882; www.orchharesort.com; Kanchanaghata 1; tent s/d ₹2250/2750, room

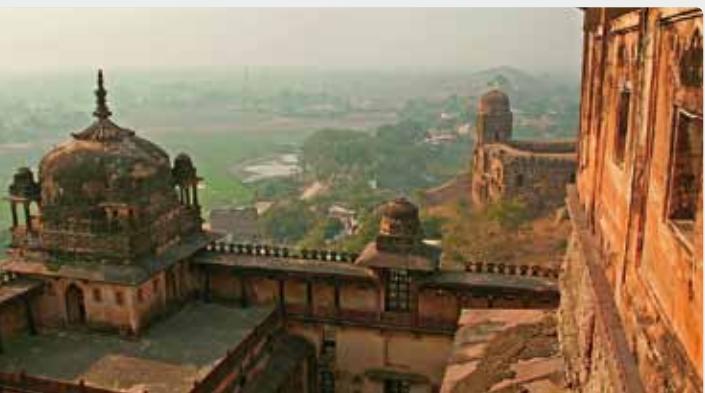
s/d ₹3650/4250 onwards In tune with the heritage vibe of the town, this resort offers large ornate rooms and Swiss tents, right by the river. Notch up the luxury by using the in-house spa and swimming pool.

- Hotel Sheesh Mahal** MPSTDC ₹
 ☎ 7680 252624; www.mptourism.com; Jehangir Mahal; s/d ₹1790/2590, ste ₹3990 onwards This palatial hotel is located in a wing of Jehangir Mahal. The surrounding architecture is stunning – arches, columns, lattice windows – and the rooms themselves are
- Betwa Retreat** MPSTDC ₹
 ☎ 7680 252618; www.mptourism.com; tents/cottages ₹2590/2590, ste ₹3990 onwards This MPSTDC property, overlooking the river with views of the chhatris, makes an excellent family choice and a wedding destination. With TVs and minibars, the rooms are comfy. See if you can spring for the heritage suite, built within a 17th-century changing room surrounded by a large, beautifully manicured lawn.

Detour: Datia

Located 49km north of Orchha, Datia is a small town that represents the architectural genius of the Bundelas. The Peetambara Peeth (one of the shaktipeeths of the country), Beer Singh Deo Mahal, Rajgarh Palace and the Datia chhatris (tombstones of the royal family) are worth your while. All of this can be covered in a day's time.

The chhatris at Datia showcase Bundela architecture



gorgeous too, with regal touches such as throne-like toilets.

If You Like: Seondha Fort

Ditch the usual and stay for a couple of nights in the 400-year old historic Seondha Fort (67km, north of Orchha). Enroute, halt at the Ratangarh Mata temple, which seems to work miracles on snake-bite victims, and the chhatri that Ahilya Bai built for her father-in-law. The lady of the palace, Mrs. Uma Kumari, is great company and will ensure that nothing disturbs you from the copious amount of relaxation that lies in store here.

₹8146653511; Seondha; d ₹3000 full board

Hotel Laxmi Temple View

HOTEL ₹

Lakshmi Narayan Temple Rd; s/d ₹600/800, with AC ₹1200/1400 If you don't mind being a little on the outskirts of the action, this 10-room guesthouse on the road to Laxmi Narayan Temple offers the best budget rooms in town with spacious, freshly tiled bathrooms and flat-screen TVs. True to its name, the rooftop affords memorable views of the temple.

Monarch Rama

HOTEL ₹

₹7680 252015; Jhansi Rd; s/d ₹400/500, with AC ₹900/1250 Rave traveller reviews about value here are not unfounded. The basic rooms on offer are cleaner and more affordable than the competition and the staff is friendly and accommodating.

Eating & Nightlife

Jharokha Restaurant

INDIAN ₹

Hotel Sheesh Mahal; mains ₹110–380; 7am–10pm Good food, cold beer and friendly waiters at this government-

run hotel offer Indian, Chinese and Continental dishes. The Indian dishes (especially tandoori items) are recommended.

Betwa Tarang

INDIAN ₹

Jehangir Mahal Rd; mains ₹80–180; 8am–10pm This budget place does excellent pure-veg food – the thalis (₹130–₹200) are particularly good. It also has the attraction of a rooftop terrace, where you can sit and enjoy stupendous views of Jehangir Mahal. Beers are off menu but available.

Ram Raja Restaurant

INDIAN ₹

Jehangir Mahal Rd; mains ₹60–320; 7am–11.30pm No hygiene awards here, but this friendly, family-run street side restaurant offers eggy breakfasts, tasty vegetarian fare and a decent espresso under the shade of a large tree.

Bhola Restaurant

INDIAN ₹

Jehangir Mahal & Tikamgarh Rd; mains ₹50–100; 7.30am–10pm A great spot for people-watching and fresh juices.



EXPERT RECOMMENDATION

Get the best photos

Sanjoy Ghosh is one of India's leading photographers whose assignments have taken him across India and abroad. Here are his tips to get the best photos from your travels across Madhya Pradesh.

KHAJURAHO, SANCHI, GWALIOR & UJJAIN

Madhya Pradesh offers a stunning range of architecture which makes for good images for your album. You are in luck if you pick a good sunny day to visit the monuments across these cities, as the natural light will pick out the chiselled marvels of the sculptures, cupolas and pillars. Monuments like the temples in Khajuraho (p66) are lit up at night for some moody vignettes. The stupas in Sanchi (p94) and the sculpted Buddhist relics make for heritage keepsake images. Madhya Pradesh's towering forts and palaces of the former kingdoms of Gwalior like the main fort (p40), Jai Vilas Palace (p41) and Sun Temple make for arresting images.

FESTIVALS & CULTURAL EVENTS

These are seasonal images. If you end up in Madhya Pradesh during the festival season, you can be sure to come back with

pictures of interesting people and panoramas. The live dance or music performances during the cultural festive season in Khajuraho or the Tansen Samarooh (p42) in Gwalior make for dramatic images. The Kumbh Mela (p14), that is held every 12 years in Ujjain, is a riot of people, action, festivity and interesting images.

KANHA, BANDHAVGARH, PENCH, PANNA & SANJAY

The state's best pictures are of its wildlife, especially the tiger. Across the sanctuaries and wildlife parks, the light, speed and angle for taking pictures cannot be predetermined and depend on your luck and a little waiting. A safari on a vehicle may yield good sightings and you have to be quick to get the best that you can when a tiger ambles across your path during a visit to the many parks. Keep your eyes peeled for other creatures that can offer interesting photo ops as well.



The wildlife in Madhya Pradesh's national parks offers many photo opportunities



KHAJURAHO

Why Go?

The erotic carvings that swathe Khajuraho's three groups of UNESCO World Heritage Site-listed temples are among the finest temple art in the world. The Western Group of temples, in particular, contains some stunning sculptures. Legend has it that Khajuraho was founded by Chandravarman, the son of the moon god Chandra, who descended and saw a beautiful maiden as she bathed in a stream.

Quick Facts

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Direct flights from Delhi are available. Khajuraho is small enough to move around in autorickshaws. Cabs cost ₹9–11 per km (minimum 250 km per day, plus ₹200 for driver allowance).

Yashowaran Taxi Driver Union is opposite Gole Market. Fares include all taxes and tolls: airport (₹300),

train station (₹300) and Raneh Falls (₹800).

WHEN TO GO

Oct–Feb

GREAT FOR



The Parsvanath Temple is the largest in the Jain enclosure in Khajuraho

Sights

Temples

The temples are superb examples of Indo-Aryan architecture, but it's their liberally embellished carvings that have made Khajuraho famous. Around the outsides of the temples are bands of exceedingly artistic stonework showing a storyboard of life a millennium ago – gods, goddesses, warriors, musicians, and real and mythological animals. Sensuous, posturing surasundaris (heavenly nymphs), apsaras (dancing nymphs) and nayikas (heroines) have been carved as playful figures dancing and swirling out from the temple. The mithuna (erotic poses) display the dexterity of the sculptors.

The artistic talent of the Chandelas are best found in Khajuraho

WESTERN GROUP TEMPLES

Khajuraho's most striking, best-preserved temples are those within the fenced-off section of the Western Group and are the only temples you need to pay to see.

Indian/foreigner ₹30/500, video ₹25; dawn-dusk An Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) guidebook to Khajuraho (₹60) and a 1½-hour audio guide (₹100) are available at the ticket office. Officially licensed guides cost ₹1190/1508 for a half-/full day, plus ₹476/635 for languages other than English or Hindi.

A nightly sound and light show sees techni-colour floodlights sweep across the temples of the Western Group as Indian classical music soundtracks a potted history of Khajuraho. Photography is prohibited.

Indian/foreigner/child ₹250/700/120; English 7.40pm, Hindi 6.30pm



Snapshot: History

Most of the 85 original temples (of which some 20 remain) were built from 950 to 1050 AD under the Chandela dynasty. The wider world remained largely ignorant of their existence until British officer TS Burt was apparently guided to the ruins by his palanquin bearers in 1838.

Lakshmana Temple

The large Lakshmana Temple took 20 years to build and was completed in about 954 AD during the reign of Dhanga, according to an inscribed slab in the mandapa (pillared pavilion in front of a temple). This is arguably the best preserved of all the Khajuraho temples.

You'll see carvings of battalions of soldiers here. More sensuous figures intertwine between the elephants in the frieze ringing the basement, while some superb carvings can be found around the garbhagriha (inner sanctum). Lakshmana is dedicated to Vishnu, although it's similar in design to the Shiva temples – Vishvanath and Kandariya Mahadev. Varaha, dedicated to Vishnu's boar incarnation, and the locked Lakshmi are two small shrines facing the large Lakshmana Temple. Inside Varaha is a wonderful, 1.5m-high sandstone boar, dating from 900 AD and meticulously carved with a pantheon of gods.

Kandariya Mahadev Temple

The 30.5m-long Kandariya Mahadev, built between 1025 and 1050 AD is the largest temple and represents the high point of Chandela

architecture. It also has the most representations of female beauty and sexual acrobatics. There are 872 statues, most nearly 1m high – taller than those at the other temples. One frequently photographed sculpture illustrates the feasibility of the handstand position. The 31m-high shikhara here is like a linga. It's decorated with 84 subsidiary spires, which make up a mountain-like rooftop scene reminiscent of the Himalayan abode of the gods.

Mahadeva Temple

Mahadeva, a small ruined temple on the same platform as Kandariya Mahadev and Devi Jagadamba, is dedicated to Shiva, who is carved on the lintel of its doorway. It houses one of Khajuraho's finest sculptures – a sardula (mythical beast – part lion, part other animal – possibly human) caressing a woman.

Devi Jagadamba Temple

Devi Jagadamba was originally dedicated to Vishnu, but later to Parvati and then Kali. The carvings include sardulas accompanied by Vishnu, surasundaris, and mithunas frolicking in the third uppermost band. Its three-part design is simpler



than the Kandariya Mahadev and Chitragupta temples.

Chitragupta Temple

North of Devi Jagadamba, Chitragupta (1000–1025 AD) is unique in Khajuraho – and rare among North Indian temples – in being dedicated to the sun god Surya. It has some fine carvings of apsaras and surasundaris, elephant fights and hunting scenes, mithunas and a procession of stone-carriers. In the inner sanctum, Surya drives his seven-horse chariot, while in the central niche on the south facade is an 11-headed statue of Vishnu, representing his 10 incarnations.

Parvati Temple

Continuing around the enclosure from Chitragupta, the closed-up Parvati Temple is on your right, a

Sculpted torans adorn the temple's main gateway in perfect symmetry

small temple originally dedicated to Vishnu and now with an image of Gauri riding a godha (iguana).

Vishvanath Temple

Believed to have been built in 1002 AD, the Vishvanath Temple is reached by steps on the northern and southern sides. Elephants flank the southern steps. Vishvanath is another superlative example of Chandela's architecture. Its sculptures include sensuous surasundaris writing letters, cuddling babies and playing music. At the other end of the platform, a 2.2m-long statue of Nandi, Shiva's bull vehicle, faces the temple. The basement of the 12-pillared shrine is decorated with an elephant frieze.

If You Like: Old village temples

The Eastern Group includes three Hindu temples scattered around the old village and four Jain temples further south. All temples are open from dawn to dusk.

Hanuman Temple

The temple contains a 2.5m-tall statue of Hanuman. It's little more than a bright orange shrine, but the interest is in the pedestal inscription dating to 922 AD, the oldest dateable inscription in Khajuraho.

Brahma Temple

The granite Brahma Temple, with its sandstone shikhara overlooking Narora Sagar, is one of the oldest in Khajuraho, dating from about 900 AD. The four-faced lingam in the sanctum led to it being incorrectly

Matangesvara Temple

Skirting the southern boundary of the fenced enclosure, Matangesvara is the only temple in the Western Group still in everyday use. It may be the plainest temple here (suggesting an early construction), but inside it sports a polished 2.5m-high lingam (phallic image of Shiva). From its platform you can peer into an open-air storage facility scattered with temple finds, but it's not open to the public.

named, but the image of Vishnu above the sanctum doorway reveals its original dedication to Vishnu.

Javari Temple

Javari Temple (1075–1100 AD) stands just north of the old village. This is dedicated to Vishnu and is a good example of small-scale Khajuraho architecture with its crocodile-covered entrance and slender shikhara.

Vamana Temple

The Vamana Temple (1050–1075 AD), 200m further north of Javari Temple, is dedicated to the dwarf incarnation of Vishnu. It has quirky touches such as elephants protruding from the walls and there are a few erotic scenes.

Chausath Yogini Temple

The ruins of Chausath Yogini, beyond Shiv Sagar, date to the late 9th century and are probably the oldest in Khajuraho. Constructed entirely of granite, it's the only temple not aligned east to west. The temple's name means 64 – it once had 64 cells for the yoginis (female attendants) of Kali, while the 65th sheltered the goddess herself. It's reputedly India's oldest yogini temple.

EASTER GROUP TEMPLES

Parsvanath Temple

While not competing in size and erotica with the western-enclosure temples, Parsvanath Temple, the largest of the Jain temples in the walled enclosure, is notable for the exceptional precision of its construction as well as for its sculptural beauty. Some of the best preserved of Khajuraho's most famous images can be seen here, including the woman removing a thorn from her foot and another applying eye make-up, both on the southern side.

Although the temple was originally dedicated to Adinath, a jet-black image of Parsvanath was substituted about a century ago. Both an inscription on the mahamandapa doorway and its similarities with the slightly simpler Lakshmana Temple date it to 950–970 AD.

Women gather to offer prayers at the Chausath Yagini Temple

Adinath Temple

Adjacent to Parsvanath Temple, the smaller Adinath has been partially restored over the centuries. With fine carvings on its three bands of sculptures, it's similar to Khajuraho's Hindu temples, particularly Varmana. Only the striking black image in the inner sanctum triggers a Jain reminder.

Shanti Nath Temple

Shanti Nath, built about a century ago, houses components from older temples, including a 4.5m-high Adinath statue with a plastered-over inscription on the pedestal dating to about 1027 AD.

SOUTHERN GROUP TEMPLES

Duladeo Temple

A dirt track runs to the isolated Duladeo Temple, about 1km



south of the Jain enclosure. This is the youngest temple, dating to 1100–1150 AD. Its relatively wooden, repetitious sculptures, such as those of Shiva, suggest that Khajuraho's temple builders had passed their artistic peak by this point, although they had certainly lost none of their zeal for eroticism.

Chaturbhuja Temple

The ruined Chaturbhuja Temple has a fine 2.7m-high, four-armed statue of Vishnu in the sanctum. It is Khajuraho's only developed temple without erotic sculptures.

Bijamandala Temple

Just before Chaturbhuja there's a signed track leading to Bijamandala Temple. This is the excavated mound of an 11th-century temple,

Perfect symmetry marks the structures at Khajuraho

dedicated to Shiva (judging by the white marble lingam at the apex of the mound). Although there are some exquisitely carved figures, unfinished carvings were also excavated, suggesting that what would have been Khajuraho's largest temple, was abandoned as resources flagged.

OTHER SIGHTS

Raneh Falls

The 30m-high Raneh Falls is a worthwhile nature excursion, 18km from Khajuraho, if it has just rained. The cascading falls are located on River Ken with falls of varying levels that make for an impressive sight.



Archaeological Museum

The Archaeological Museum, announced by a wonderful 11th-century statue of Ganesh dancing sensuously, has a small but well-presented collection of sculptures from around Khajuraho.

Main Rd; entry free with same-day Western Group ticket; 9am–5pm Sat–Thu

Tribal Art Museum

The Tribal & Folk Art Museum gives a taste of Madhya Pradesh's vibrant tribal culture through paintings, terracotta sculptures, masks and statues.

Chandela Cultural Complex; 12noon–8pm; Open all days, except Mondays and government holidays

Accommodation

Hefty discounts (20% to 50%) are available out of season (April to September), although it's worth

Raneh Falls on the River Ken is a good day trip from Khajuraho

bargaining at any time of year. Hotel staff are more than happy to organise tours and travel.

Lalit Temple View

HOTEL ₹₹₹

7686 272111; www.thelalit.com; Main Rd; r from ₹8570, with temple view ₹14,080 Sweeps aside all other five-star pretenders with supreme luxury, impeccable service and high prices. Rooms are immaculate with large-screen TVs, wood-carved furniture and tasteful artwork. If you're not fussed about temple views, it has a block of 'budget' rooms hidden away from the main grounds – all the same amenities for half the price.

Hotel Isabel Palace

HOTEL ₹₹₹

7686 274770; www.hotelisabelpalace.com; Temple Rd; r from ₹1500, with AC ₹2250–2800 (incl breakfast) This newish

hotel, tucked away off a quiet dirt road in a far more pastoral village than Khajuraho's main drag, is a star. Sparkling-clean rooms are spacious, varying according to view (garden or sunrise), all with sizeable bathrooms and comfortable furnishings (the ₹1500 non-ACs feel like a steal). Surendra, the manager, is delightful and takes his family's hospitality business very seriously (as he does his great masala chai). You could eat off the floor in the stylish restaurant, which offers sunset views, as does the extraordinary rooftop terrace which is the best by far in town and candlelit for romantic dinners.

Hotel Harmony

HOTEL ₹

7686 274135; www.hotelharmonyonline.com; Jain Temples Rd; s/d ₹800/1000, with AC ₹1200/1500 Cosy, well-equipped rooms off marble corridors are tastefully decorated and come with mostly effective mosquito screens and cable TV. Great food is available at the Zorba the Buddha restaurant and you can eat under the stars on the rooftop. Wi-fi is charged per day.

Hotel Surya

HOTEL ₹

7686 274144; www.hotelsuryakhajuraho.com; Jain Temples Rd; d ₹400–1000, with AC ₹800–1600 There's quite a range of rooms in this sprawling, well-run hotel with whitewashed corridors, marble staircases and a lovely courtyard garden out back. Some rooms have TV. Some have balconies. Yoga, massage, cycling tours and cooking classes are available. Wi-fi costs ₹50 per day.

Hotel Zen

HOTEL ₹

7686 274228; www.hotelzenkhajuraho.co.in; Jain Temples Rd; d/tr ₹500/600, with AC ₹1000–1300 (incl breakfast) A popular backpacker hang-out. The upstairs rooms are the brightest and overlook a series of courtyards with lotus ponds, winter bonfires, candles flickering at night and a decent restaurant. Rooms have cable TV.

Osaka Guesthouse GUESTHOUSE ₹

7686 272839; off Basti Rd; ₹500–600, with AC ₹1000–1200 Spacious rooms here are pretty basic but have a homey feel to them. The owner and family are very welcoming, and there are some nice temple views from the

The Lalit Temple View offers five-star luxury amenities



If You Like: MPSTDC hotels

MPSTDC offers comfortable and budget-friendly accommodation options in Khajuraho.

• Hotel Jhankar

7686 274063; www.mpstdc.com; Dist Chattarpur; r from ₹2290

• Hotel Payal

7686 274064; www.mpstdc.com; Dist Chattarpur; r from ₹1990, with AC ₹2590

• Tourist Village

7686 274062; www.mpstdc.com; 43 Tulsi Vihar Bag Sevania; r from ₹2290

rooftop. It's set away from the main street so is quieter than elsewhere.

Eating

Raja's Cafe

MULTI-CUISINE ₹

www.rajacafe.com; Main Rd; mains ₹140–380; 8am–10pm Raja's has been at the top of its game for more than 35 years, with espresso coffee, English breakfasts, wood-fired pizzas, superb Indian, Italian and Chinese dishes, and an otherwise eclectic menu full of things you might miss, depending on your passport (rosti, fish and chips, lasagna). The location, with a temple-view terrace, is great, as is the restaurant design, with a delightful courtyard shaded by a 170-year-old neem tree. But it's the food that steals the show. Wi-fi downstairs only.

Blue Sky Restaurant

MULTI-CUISINE ₹

Main Rd; mains ₹80–260, tree house per person ₹50; 7am–10.30pm An ordinary restaurant with an extraordinary seating arrangement: a rickety wooden platform, three storeys up, leading out to the most unusual place to eat in Khajuraho – a one-table tree house with an unrivalled view of the western temples.

Madras Coffee House

SOUTH INDIAN ₹

Main & Jain Temples Rds; mains ₹50–200; 8.30am–9.30pm Three generations of tasty South Indian fare – dosa, idli,

Agrasen

MULTI-CUISINE ₹

Jain Temples Rd; thalis ₹130–380; 7am–10.30pm While perhaps not India's best, the thalis at this otherwise unthrilling restaurant are extremely good and come with perhaps the best dal fry in the country. The fact that it tends to fill nightly with locals, not tourists, speaks volumes. A 1st-floor terrace is lit up nicely after dark.

Mediterraneo

ITALIAN ₹

Jain Temples Rd; mains ₹200–440, pizza ₹350–460; 7.30am–10pm Far removed from its Italian roots, Mediterraneo manages acceptable Italian fare served on a lovely terrace overlooking the street. Dishes include chicken, salads, organic whole wheat pasta and surprisingly good wood-fired pizzas. Beer and wine are also available.



uthapam, thali – as well as coffee (Madras style with chicory) and chai, served in a narrow cafe. Ideal for breakfast. The unique house speciality is the tasty egg, cheese and veg dosa (₹200).

Lassi Corner

INDIAN ₹

Jain Temples Rd; meals ₹15–60, lassis ₹15–45; 9am–9.30pm This tarpaulin-covered bamboo shack is a great place for a quick chai break, lazy lassi, breakfast and simple Indian fare.

Shopping

Mrignayanee

HANDICRAFTS

7686 274233; Opp Lalit Hotel, Temple Road (Western temples) The state-run emporium is an easy shopping destination for elegant Chanderi and Maheshwari saris and textiles, artefacts, Gond art, jewellery,

Khajuraho's restaurants offer pizzas and other multi-cuisine options

souvenirs and handicrafts. It has a non-bargaining policy. The shop is located at the Madhya Pradesh Tourism office.

Kandariya Art & Culture

HANDICRAFTS

7686 274031; Jhansi Rd; 9am–9pm A huge emporium where full-size replicas of some of Khajuraho's temple carvings can be bought – if you have a spare ₹10,000 to ₹1,000,000! Smaller, more affordable versions, along with textiles, wood carvings and marble inlay, can be found indoors. Nightly one-hour folk-dancing performances (₹550) can be seen at the comfortable indoor theatre here, starting at 8pm and 9.45pm.



EXPERT RECOMMENDATION

Cuisine from Central India

Pushpraj Singh Judeo, head of the royal family of Rewa, is a foodie. He lists his favourite dishes from the four culinary regions of Madhya Pradesh.

MALWA

Black soil and proximity to Gujarat and Maharashtra add the groundnuts, coconuts and sweetness to the dishes.

Dal Bati & Churma: Dal (lentils), urad or arhar, are mixed with curry leaves, mustard, methi seeds and a little sugar. The dough is shaped into balls and smoked on hot coals or steamed and is served with jaggery or panjeeri, a crunchy mix of wheat flour, sugar and jaggery.

Poha: Poha now can be called a staple breakfast of Madhya Pradesh. In Malwa, they keep it simple. Cooked rice flakes tempered with mustard seeds, turmeric, curry leaves, onions and boiled or lightly fried potatoes with a dash of sugar. Sev and pomegranate are often added as dressings.

Imarti with milk: This favourite dessert from Malwa is jalebi soaked in sugar syrup and dipped in milk with cream. It is both a breakfast and dinner delight.

BAGHELKHAND (VINDHYA)

Baghel or the lair of the white tiger has red and black soil and the rocky terrain of the Vindhya. Chickpeas and maize are popular, as are mutton dishes.

Indrahaar: This is a mixed dal preparation using urad, chana, arhar, moong and masoor, tempered with red chillies, curry leaves, mustard seeds and curd. The dal is ground and fermented and cut into slabs, deep fried and served with chat masala. It is eaten as an appetiser or a snack with tea; or floated in a gravy of gram flour and curd. It gets its name from the food of god Indra and the royals of the region were known to freely partake of this.

Sone ki machhi: A saur is marinated and coated in a paste of green chillies, coriander, ginger, garlic and peanuts and grated coconut. The pieces are steamed in a wrap of chiula leaves and served with chutney.

BUNDELI

Nestling between the mountainous terrain of the Vindhya and the Indo Gangetic plain, Bundelkhand offers a clay-pot cooked sparse cuisine that reflects its Hindu and Jain past.

Thadula: Rice, dal and wheat flour are ground to make a dough spiced with coriander, ginger, garlic and chilli paste and rolled into puris and deep fried.

Gulgula: This is a sweet dish using wheat flour, dry ginger and chironji mixed with jaggery and deep fried and floated in sugar syrup.

BHOPALI

The lakes and hilly terrain of Bhopal and its Hindu and Muslim population have influenced its cuisine. Seekh kebab, keema and other mutton dishes are a nod to Bhopal's royal feasting traditions.

Biryani pulao: Cream, ghee, flavoursome spices, combined with chunky pieces of meat, make for this aromatic biryani. While mutton is preferred, modern versions use chicken too in the biryani. Keema or mince pulao is also popular.

Bafla: This maida or wheat cake with a generous dollop of ghee makes for a tasty accompaniment with dal.



Jalebis for breakfast offer a sweet start to the day



BHOPAL

Why Go?

Bhopal offers two starkly contrasting cityscapes. In the north is the Muslim-dominated old city of mosques and crowded bazaars. The south has modern shopping complexes and upmarket hotels and restaurants nestled comfortably in the Arera and Shamla Hills. Both offer quiet surprises for the traveller.

i Quick Facts

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Air India and Jet Airways fly daily from Delhi and Mumbai. Airport to city costs ₹300 by autorickshaw; ₹800 by taxi. The New Delhi-Bhopal Habibganj Shatabdi Express/12002 is a convenient train. Inside the city, autorickshaws charge by conjecture. Try Ola cabs (get the app); else, try a cab service MP Tour and Travels, Vikas Singh Baghel; www.mptourandtravels.com; ☎9584003002; day trips from

₹1800 onwards, longer trips ₹9–11 per km (min 250km/day) plus ₹200 driver allowance/day

WHEN TO GO

Oct–Feb

GREAT FOR



The Jama Masjid in Bhopal was built in the 19th century

Sights

Tribal Museum

Step into this well-kept museum dedicated to the seven tribes and sub-tribes of Madhya Pradesh. Opened in 2013, the artistic space was built by 1500 tribals using local materials from their villages. The stunning results are divided into five galleries featuring hyper-examples of tribal life. There's also a very interesting museum shop.

Shamla Hills; Indian/foreigner ₹10/100, camera ₹50; noon–8pm Tue–Sun

Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya

Do drop in to this place, a kind of tribal safari park spread out over an open-air hillside complex that was a prehistoric settlement and is now an

The metal carpet seller displayed at the Royal Art Gallery

anthropological museum.

Museum of Man; www.igrms.com; Shamla Hills; Indian/foreigner ₹10/500, video ₹50; 10am–5pm Tue–Sun Nov–Feb, 11am–6pm Mar–Sep

State Museum

This first-class archaeological museum spread over 17 galleries includes some wonderful temple sculptures as well as 87 Jain bronzes unearthed by a surprised farmer in western Madhya Pradesh. Keep an eye out for the tiny, but remarkably animated, metal carpet seller in the Royal Art Gallery.

Shamla Hills; Indian/foreigner ₹10/100, camera/video ₹50/200; 10.30am–5.30pm Tue–Sun

Taj-ul-Masajid

In 1877, Bhopal's third female ruler, Shah Jahan Begum set about building Taj-ul-Masajid, one of the largest mosques in the city. It was



If You Like: Bhopal on wheels

A guided tour on an open bus departs from Palash Residency and winds through the hills and the old city. Stops include Lakshmi Narayan Temple, MP Tourism Boat Club and Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya.

₹755 3295040; 3½hr tour ₹100; 11am–5pm Tue–Sun

still incomplete after funds had been diverted to other projects, and construction did not resume until 1971. Fortress-like terracotta walls surround three gleaming white domes and a pair of towering pink minarets with white domes. From Hamidia Rd to Taj-ul-Masajid, an autorickshaw costs ₹40.

Noon–3pm Fri

Jama Masjid

The gold spikes crowning the squat minarets of the Jama Masjid, built in 1837 by Qudsia Begum, glint serenely above the skull caps and veils swirling through the bazaar below.

Chowk Bazaar Rd; dawn–dusk

Gohar Mahal

This is another architectural gem by Qudsia Begum who built this sprawling palace in 1820 and is said to have resided here. It was named after her as Gauhar or Gohar, colloquially. It is a fine example of Hindu and Islamic architectural elements. The venue hosts sales of handicrafts and textiles too.

Behind Shaukat Mahal, Upper Lake

Dhai Seedi Ki Masjid

Bhopal's oldest and teeniest mosque is inside the grounds of Hamidia Hospital. The prayer hall is really small, about 16sq m and the mosque was built some 400 years ago. Kohefiza; dawn–dusk

Gol Ghar

Originally, Gulshan-e-Alam, this relic from the reign of Nawab Shah Jahan Begum (1868–1901) is now named Gol Ghar. The circular building was inaugurated in 2013 as a monument that is now open to the public. Crane your neck to see the ornate dome, swathed with colourful flowers and motifs. The Jannat Bagh that surrounds the structure tempers the bright colours of the

Gol Ghar. Formerly the structure was first the office of the Nawab and later an aviary. It is said that gold threads lay strewn around so that the birds could weave their nests here. One such nest was presented to Queen Victoria.

Aali Manzil Rd; 10am–5pm

MP Tourism Boat Club

The club offers motorboat rides (₹210, five minutes, minimum three



people), pedal boats (₹60 per boat, 30 minutes), jet skiing (₹400 per person) and even parasailing (₹500). An autorickshaw here from New Market costs ₹80.

₹775 3295043; Lake Drive Rd; 10.30am–6.30pm

Qadimi Hammam

Built in the early 1700s, a Turkish bath, the Qadimi Hammam, is still a major draw. Separate sections for men and women are well maintained. Naseem, the lady of the house, doubles as a deft masseuse.

Bhopal's Upper Lake offers water sports for recreation

₹9303090998; Lane no. 2, Kamla Park; open Nov–Mar, 9am–3pm, for women, 6–11pm for men; massages start from ₹400

Bharat Bhawan

An amphitheatre, garden sculptures, theatre and live performances make Bharat Bhawan a good place to visit. The cool air from the adjoining lake helps if you want a walk around. The bhawan also has a Museum of Fine Arts, a repertory, Centre of Indian Poetry, a library of classical and

Detour: Bhimbetka & Islamnagar

The Bhimbetka rock shelters, 45km from Bhopal, still exhibit traces of life on earth from as long as 10,000 years ago. These ancient rock paintings depict hunting scenes and life as it was in the Stone Age and after. Entry Indian/foreigner ₹50/100; 7am–7pm

Islamnagar is about 11km on the Bhopa-Berasia Road and 20km on the Bypass Road. It was the palace of Bhopal's Afghan rulers and its impressive architecture makes it worthy of a halt.



Snapshot: Bhopal gas tragedy

At five minutes past midnight on 3 December 1984, 40 tonnes of deadly methyl isocyanate (MIC) gas leaked out over Bhopal from the US-owned Union Carbide chemical plant. Blown by the wind, a 40-foot wall of toxic cloud hugged the ground and coursed through the city.

There were 5295 initial fatalities according to official figures, but the continuing death toll stands at over 25,000. The charity **Sambhavna Trust Clinic** (₹755 2730904; www.bhopal.org; Berasia Rd, Bafna Colony; 8.30am–3pm), opened in 1996, treats more than 200 Union Carbide victims a day

using yoga, ayurvedic treatments, conventional medicine and herbal remedies. Volunteers and visitors are welcome and donations can be made. If walking from Hamidia Road, turn right after about 500m and ask for Sambhavna.

The Remember Bhopal Museum

(www.rememberbhopal.net; HIG 22, Housing Board Colony, Berasia Rd, near Triveni Heights; 10am–5pm Tue–Sun) opened in 2014 near the now-derelict Union Carbide factory site, preserving the belongings and pictures of victims and over 50 audio recordings from survivors, doctors and experts.

folk music and a centre for classical cinema. Check monthly events on the website.

₹755 2660239; www.bharatbhawan.org; 10am–6pm



Accommodation

Jehan Numa

Retreat

HERITAGE HOTEL ₹₹₹

₹755 660 6600 www.jehannuma.com; Near Van Vihar, Dr. Salim Ali Road, Prempura; cottages ₹14,000 (incl breakfast) The sprawling resort doesn't hold back on the plushness, complete with a spa, luxurious surrounds and birding for outdoorsy activities among others.

HERITAGE HOTEL ₹₹₹

Jehan Numa

Palace Hotel

HERITAGE HOTEL ₹₹₹

₹755 2661100; www.hoteljehanumapalace.com; 157 Shama Hill; patio s/d ₹5480/6700, s/d from ₹7920/9140, ste from ₹19,500 (incl breakfast) This former 19th-century palace lost none of its colonial-era charm through its conversion into a top-class hotel. Arched walkways and immaculate lawns lead you to beautifully decorated rooms. The fact that you can sleep in a patio room – perfectly great in a five-star hotel is unbelievable. Worth a splurge. There's a palm-lined pool, an excellent health spa, three restaurants, two bars and a coffee shop.

Snapshot: Begums of Bhopal

Between 1819–1926, Bhopal had the unique distinction of having four female Muslim rulers. It wasn't easy to begin with, though. Opposition to having a female ruler came from all quarters – meddlesome neighbours who looked at an opportunity to annex the kingdoms and avaricious male members who laid claim to the throne. Even the British East India Company opposed it until the first begum had to gently remind them that Britannia was ruled by a female sovereign. Qudisa was the first begum; she was succeeded by her daughter Sikandar who was followed by her daughter Shah Jahan. The last was Sultan Jahan who abdicated the throne in favour of her son, the first male Nawab of Bhopal after five generations.



Shah Jahan Begum was the third female ruler of Bhopal

Noor-Us-Sabah Palace HERITAGE HOTEL ₹₹₹
 ☎ 755 4223333; www.noorussabahpalace.com; VIP Rd; s/d ₹6500/7500, ste from ₹16,500 (incl breakfast) Perched on a hilltop overlooking the lake, the Welcom Heritage acquired hotel leaves nothing to the imagination where luxury is concerned. The building was constructed in the 1920s and is still dotted with remnants of the royal past – black and white photographs, ornate artefacts and even the city's first car.

Lake View Ashok HOTEL ₹₹₹
 ☎ 755 2660090; www.lakeviewashok.com; 157 Shamla Hill; s/d ₹5299/5700, ste from

₹8799 (incl breakfast) Ask specifically for rooms overlooking the lake since this is the speciality of the hotel. This is one of the stalwarts of Bhopal's hospitality, so one can't go wrong with the clean and spacious rooms. It's the balcony you will find hard to tear yourself away from.

Hotel Amer Palace HOTEL ₹
 ☎ 755 4292770; www.hotelamerpalace.com; MP Nagar; s/d from ₹3640/4540 (incl breakfast) Conveniently located, Hotel Amer Palace offers more than just spacious and clean rooms; in-house dining, a famous bakery called the Amer Bakery Hut and a health club are ample reasons to book this hotel.

Palash Residency

MPSTDC ₹
 ☎ 755 2553066; palash@mptourism.com; TT Nagar; s/d from ₹3860/4220 This stately mid-range MP Tourism hotel is walking distance from New Market. Breezy corridors lead to smart rooms with heavy wood furniture, wall-mounted flat-screen TVs, kettles and complimentary toiletries. There's free wi-fi in the lobby, a spa, bar, three restaurants and a new pool. An MP Tourism office is based here.

Hotel Sonali Regency

HOTEL ₹
 ☎ 755 2740880; www.hotelsonaliregency.com; Radha Talkies Rd; s/d from ₹650/750, with AC from ₹1350/1550 (incl breakfast) Excellent service, right down to the errand boys, makes this a great option near Hamidia Road. Newly renovated AC rooms have new floors, funky-shaped beds and working hot showers. Skip the lowest category; executive non-AC rooms (from ₹900) are every bit as comfortable as the AC rooms. Amenities include towels and toiletries hygienically wrapped in plastic and a morning newspaper. From Hamidia Road, turn left down the lane alongside Hotel Ranjeet and follow it around to the right.

Hotel Tilak

HOTEL ₹
 ☎ 755 4273333; www.tilakhotel.com; Maharana Pratap Nagar; s/d from ₹1500/3000 with AC (incl breakfast) Newly opened, Hotel Tilak promises clean and spacious rooms and ample cheer in its hospitality – all of this

makes up for the rusty housekeeping and slightly noisy rooms. Even then, this is one of the most reasonable places to stay if you're looking for a budget accommodation in the middle of town.

Hotel Ranjeet

HOTEL ₹
 ☎ 755 2740500; www.ranjeethotels.com; 3 Hamidia Rd; s/d from ₹450/700, with AC from ₹750/1000 (incl breakfast) Even in the cheapest rooms you get your own soap, towel, bottle of mineral water and a complimentary breakfast at Ranjeet. On our pass through, rooms were under the knife getting a contemporary facelift, so expect shiny new floors and woodwork, contemporary bathrooms and higher rates than those listed here. The restaurant is good, there's a bar, and it's convenient to get to the bus and train stations from here.

Eating

Under the Mango Tree INDIAN ₹₹₹
 Jehan Numa Palace Hotel, 157 Shamla Hill; mains ₹380–750; 7:30–11pm Jehan Numa Palace's best restaurant specialises in barbecue kebabs and tandoori items. The pankhi chicken kebab (marinated chicken wings) is melt-off-the-bone astonishing, but drowning yourself in flavour with the sampler platter (from ₹830) is the way to go. Good food, wine, draught beer (Woodpecker, a local swill) and cocktails all combine under a romantic white pavilion and

If You Like: Street food in the Old City

The street food of Bhopal requires special mention. Tucked away in the labyrinth of lanes in the old part of town, a trip here can leave you breathless for more reasons than one – the sheer number of options to eat and the jostling through crowds that you might have to do. If you want a quick spin of the place, autorickshaw driver cum guide, Syed Masood Ali is your best bet ☎9179479885.

Mamaji Jalebi Wale

Jalebi and poha are the two specialities of this old shop. No counsel can get you through the crowds – just some plain ol' elbowing. Anything for a hot jalebi. ☎9039313139; Lakherapura; mains less than ₹100; 8am–11pm

Zam Zam

A standing-room-only crowd swarms this fast-food hotspot day and night for some of Bhopal's best biryani, but it's the finger-lickin', outrageously good chicken tikka, grilled over hot coals before your eyes and dipped in house green-chilli yoghurt sauce that's the true showstopper. It's so cheap, we ordered both!

Hamidia Rd; mains ₹50–100; 11.30am–midnight

Delhi Zayaka

Try the Chicken Afghan – it beats everything else on the menu. As a contrast to other 'stand and eat' shops, here you can sit comfortably and get a view of the road.

☎9644653948; Sultania Rd; mains ₹200–400; 11am–midnight

Jai Jinendra

A swift, no-nonsense service style is the only way that this shop has been keeping customers happy for the last 23 years. The dahi vada and papri chaat are to die for.

☎9893040392; Jain Mandir Rd; mains less than ₹100; 8am–10pm

Kalyan Singh Swad Bhandar

Look at nothing else but this pit stop for the poha-sev and jalebi breakfast at Itwara Road.

☎755 2731495; Itwara Rd; mains less than ₹100; 8am–8pm

Sulaimani Chai

All along the Itwara Chowk, dusty shanties dish out the best sulaimani chai. Jamal Bhai's shop is more popular than the others; it might have something to do with his extra polite demeanour.

Itwara Rd; mains less than ₹100 (chai for ₹5); 6am–12.30am

Haji Lassi

The best lassis in town dance in pink and green-tinted-tall glasses. No surprise then that politicians, Bollywood stars and the who's who of India have stopped here for a swig. ☎9826064603; Itwara Chowk; mains less than ₹100 (falooda for ₹65, lassi ₹45 per glass); 10am–midnight

Jameel

Stalwarts in dishing out the best nihari, biryani, mutton stew and moong dal halwa, Jameel doesn't need to spruce up the restaurant. The food does all the talking. Ibrahimpura; mains less than ₹100; 10am–noon

Hotel Gazala

The nali-nihari combo at this busy shop in Chatori Gali moves quickly. So get here quick to pack some or

eat at the basic restaurant itself. Chatori Gali; mains less than ₹100; 8am–8pm

Salim Bhai Kebab Bun

For a quick snack of kebab bun, head straight to Chatori Gali. The shop is the first one to your right, with no distinguishable signage.

Chatori Gali; mains less than ₹100; 8am–8pm

Famous Biryani

Only a plate of biryani from here can make you dig into it as early as 8 in the morning. The mutton biryani is incomparable to anything that you might have eaten before.

☎9893841745; Itwara Chowk; mains less than ₹100; 8am–8pm

Bhopal's street food offers a treat for smoked meat and more





Sample bhel puri and other street food in Bhopal

the heavy boughs of a venerable centenarian mango tree.

Bapu ki Kutiya INDIAN ₹₹₹

755 4220849; MP Nagar; mains ₹500–750; 10.30am–11pm Simple fare, largely North Indian, at the immensely popular Bapu ki Kutiya, is its forte. The pure vegetarian restaurant is usually packed with locals – a little waiting time is expected. It is heartwarming to see that the restaurant has not disturbed a tree that cuts through the ceiling, with holy strings attached to it. This used to be the resting place for a peer.

Bhopal Express INDIAN ₹₹₹

755 2660802; opp Doordarshan premises, Lake View, Shambha Hills; mains ₹500–750; 11am–11pm Themed and designed after the coaches of an

Indian train, the decor trumps the food here. Try the railway cutlets, a classic on the menu.

Wind n Waves MULTI-CUISINE ₹

755 2661523; Van Vihar Rd, Shambha Hills; mains ₹175–450; 9am–11pm The Madhya Pradesh Tourism's cheerful restaurant offers Continental, Indian and Chinese fare and can mix a mean cocktail for sundowners.

Indian Coffee House SOUTH INDIAN ₹

New Market Rd, New Market; mains ₹50–260; 7am–11pm As always, Indian Coffee House is a top spot for breakfast, and this is one of the nicest outlets in India. Waiters in fan-tailed hats dish out filter coffee plus South Indian favourites.

Manohar INDIAN ₹

6 Hamidia Rd; mains ₹30–150, thaali ₹130–160; 8am–11pm This bright, clean,

canteen-style restaurant does brisk business in South Indian breakfasts, thaalis, snacks, shakes and a load of presumably more-hygienic versions of many Indian street-food favourites. In truth, it's a bit of a madhouse and rightfully so. Has an impressive range of cakes, cookies and sweets at a side counter, one of the best in town.

Shopping

Mrignayanee

755 2554162; www.mphandicrafts.com; Shopping Centre, TT Nagar; 10am–6pm The state-run emporium is an easy shopping destination for elegant Chanderi and Maheshwari saris, textiles, artefacts, jewellery, souvenirs and handicrafts.

Tribes India

755 2579644; Inner Court GTB Complex; 10am–8pm Shop here for a variety

of souvenirs, textiles, jewellery and local handicrafts.

Activities

Heritage Walk

9899692790; info@indiacitywalks.com; ₹500 per person and more for groups Contact the National Award winner India City Walks as this is one of the better ways to get close to the interesting parts of Bhopal. Walks follow thematic experiences that include heritage as well.

Kerwa Dam

ZIP LINING

Drive about 15km from Bhopal's New Market area to reach Kerwa Dam, a picnic spot. Trekking and zip lining activities make for a day's fun. The MPSTDC's Kerwa serves easy meals and snacks.

Colourful Gond art on boxes make for giftables





EXPERT RECOMMENDATION

Crafts of Madhya Pradesh

Uma Tewari works with traditional craft techniques. She is the founder of Then & Now, a sustainable project.

Successive ruling dynasties of Madhya Pradesh have lent their patronage to different skills resulting in a plethora of craft techniques.

TEXTILES

Delicate stripes and checks with floral and geometric borders and the fine Maheshwari sari traditions were encouraged by none other than Rani Ahilyabai of the Holkar dynasty of Indore. Chanderi has been a weaving centre of royal repute since Vedic times. Its delicate zari motif has evolved from the traditional circle to many intricate designs – floral, peacocks and geometrics. On the banks of the River Bagh are a group of printers, migrants from Sindh, Pakistan. The waters of this river have a high copper content that give depth to the colour. The Bagh print is characterised by red and black on a white or beige background, floral geometrical prints and large cross borders. These textiles are sold as saris, dupattas, stoles, bedcovers or just fabric.

HANDICRAFTS

Zardozi (gold embroidery) has been prevalent in Bhopal for the last 300 years. The city's tiny bejewelled purses are very well-known. A small group of artisans in the capital city also makes colourful wood toys and containers. Ujjain has a few families of wood carvers who make idols, especially for tribals. They are also famous for making combs with geometric patterns. This city is also known to make figurines and masks of papier mache. Indore, Dewas, Gwalior and Bilaspur have been known for leather footwear. Today, they have moved onto making leather toys of international repute.

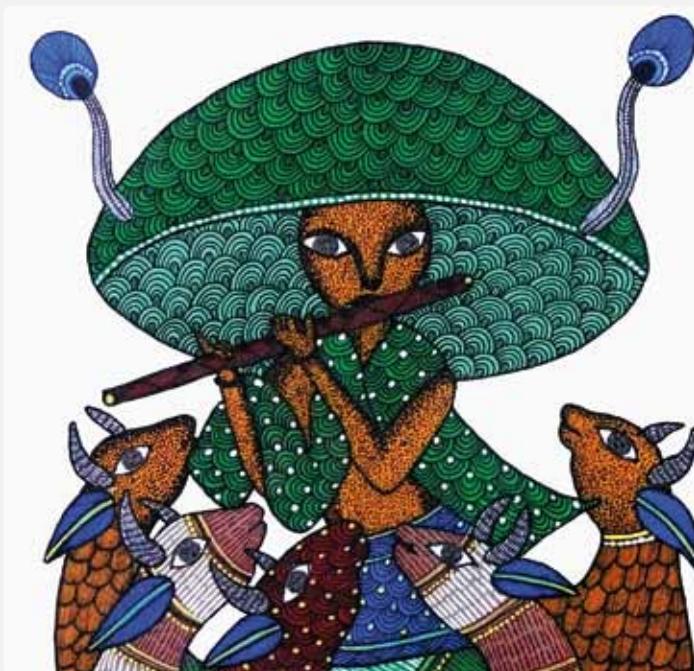
SCULPTURE

The Scindias of Gwalior patronised sandstone carving. Intricate lattices with geometric Islamic patterns exemplify the skill of the artisans. Today, stone sculptures are also made. Woollen carpets have been woven here since Mughal times. Stone carvers are based around Jabalpur too, famous for its marble rocks. Boxes, trays and small objects

are made from white, black and green sandstone.

The tribal communities of Dindori district carve wood to make masks and figurines used in rituals. Potters make terracotta toys used as offerings during festivals. Utility items of natural materials such as bamboo and cane are also available.

This belt is well known for the paintings of the Gond community. These tribal paintings which depict nature, local gods and legends are vivid and colourful. Dots and lines are delicately patterned to fill in the empty spaces as animals and birds merge with the flora and fauna.



Gond artist Rajinder Shyam's work on Krishna and his cattle friends



SANCHI

Why Go?

Sanchi, 48km northeast of Bhopal, is a rounded hill topped with some of India's oldest Buddhist structures. Today, the remarkably preserved Great Stupa is the centrepiece of Sanchi's Buddhist monuments, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It's from here that Emperor Ashoka spread his message of peace and it is one of the best maintained Buddhist monuments in the country. Plan a day trip from Bhopal.

Quick Facts

GETTING THERE & AROUND

A cab from Bhopal is the best way to reach Sanchi. The train is also a decent option from Bhopal and takes less than an hour so there's no need to book a seat.

In Sanchi, autorickshaws charge by conjecture. Pay ₹20 minimum fare for short distances and bargain for anything else. Best if you have your own cab from Bhopal.

WHEN TO GO

Nov–Mar

GREAT FOR



India's oldest Buddhist structures are at Sanchi

Sights

Buddhist Monuments

In 262 BC, repentant of the horrors he had inflicted on Kalinga, the Mauryan emperor Ashoka embraced Buddhism and built the Great Stupa at Sanchi, near the birthplace of his wife. The hilltop Buddhist monuments (Indian/foreigner ₹10/250, video ₹25; dawn–dusk) are reached via a path and stone steps at the end of Monuments Road where the ticket office (dawn–dusk) is located. If you don't want to walk up the hill, autorickshaws will deposit you at the top for ₹30. Official central government guides mill about and charge ₹1035/1310 for half/full day. If you're going up

The Great Stupa's northern gateway was built by Emperor Ashoka



to the stupas for the sunrise, buy a ticket the day before.

Stupas

Stupa 1 (Great Stupa) is beautifully proportioned and is the main structure on the hill, directly in front of you as you enter the complex from the north. Originally constructed by Ashoka, it was later enlarged and the original brick stupa enclosed within a stone one. Presently it stands 16m high and 37m in diameter. Encircling the stupa is a wall with four entrances through magnificently carved toranas (gateways) that are the finest Buddhist works of art in Sanchi, if not in India.

Stupa 2 is halfway down the hill to the west (turn right at Stupa 1). If you come up from the village by the main route you can walk

back down via Stupa 2, although be prepared for some fence-hopping at the bottom. Instead of gateways, 'medallions' decorate the surrounding wall – naive in design, but full of energy and imagination. Flowers, animals and people – some mythological – ring the stupa.

Stupa 3 is northeast of the Great Stupa (you pass it on your left as you approach the Great Stupa from the main entrance) and similar in design, though smaller, with a single, rather fine gateway. It once contained relics of two important disciples of Buddha: Sariputta and Maha Moggallana. They were moved to London in 1853 but returned in 1953 and are now kept in the modern vihara (resting place).

Only the base is left of the 2nd-century BC Stupa 4, which stands behind Stupa 3. Between Stupas 1 and 3 is the small Stupa 5, unusual in that it once contained a statue of the Buddha, now displayed in the museum.

Toranas

The Great Stupa's four toranas (gateways) were erected around 35 BC, but had all fallen down by the time the site was rediscovered. They have since been repositioned. Scenes carved onto the pillars and their triple architraves (main beam across the top of columns) are mainly tales from the Jatakas, episodes from Buddha's various lives. At this stage in Buddhist art, Lord Buddha himself was



Sanchi is an important stop on the Buddhist circuit in India

never represented directly – his presence was only alluded to through symbols. The lotus stands for his birth, the bodhi tree for his enlightenment, the wheel for his teachings, and the footprint and throne for his presence. The stupa itself symbolises Lord Buddha.

Northern Gateway

The Northern Gateway, topped by a broken Wheel of Law, is the best preserved of the toranas. Scenes include a monkey offering a bowl of honey to Gautama Buddha, who is represented by a bodhi tree. Another panel depicts the Miracle of Sravasti – one of several miracles represented here – in which the Buddha, again in the form of a bodhi



tree, ascends a road into the air. Elephants support the architraves above the columns, while delicately carved yakshis (maids) hang nonchalantly on each side.

Eastern Gateway

The breathtaking carved figure of a yakshi hanging from an architrave on the Eastern Gateway, is one of Sanchi's best-known images. One of the pillars, supported by elephants, features scenes from the Buddha's passage to nirvana. Another shows Buddha's mother Maya's dream, which she had when he was conceived, of an elephant standing on the moon. Across the front of the middle architrave is the Great Departure, when the Buddha (a riderless horse) set out to find enlightenment.

A meditating Buddha at the main entrance of the Great Stupa

Southern Gateway

The back-to-back lions supporting the Southern Gateway, the oldest gateway, form the state emblem of India, which can be seen on every banknote. The gateway narrates Ashoka's life as a Buddhist, with scenes of Gautama Buddha's birth and another representation of the Great Departure.

Also featured is the Chhaddanta Jataka, a story in which Bodhisattva (Buddha before he had reached enlightenment) took on the form of an elephant king who had six tusks. The less favoured of the elephant king's two wives was so jealous of the other that she decided to starve herself to death, vowing to come

back to life as the queen of Benares. Her wish came true, and as queen she ordered hunters to track down and kill the elephant king. A hunter found the great elephant but before he could kill it, the elephant handed over his tusks, an act so noble it led to the queen dying of remorse.

Western Gateway

Pot-bellied dwarves support the architraves of the Western Gateway, which has some of the site's most interesting scenes. The top architrave shows Lord Buddha in seven different incarnations, manifested three times as a stupa and four times as a tree. The rear of one pillar shows the Buddha resisting the Temptation of Mara (the Buddhist personification of evil, often called the Buddhist devil).

Pillars

Of the scattered pillar remains, the most important is Pillar 10, erected by Ashoka but later broken. Two upper sections of this beautifully proportioned and executed shaft lie side by side behind Stupa 1: the capital (head of the pillar, usually sculpted) is in the museum. Pillar 25, east of Stupa 1, dating from the Sunga period (2nd century BC) and the 5th-century AD Pillar 35, west of Stupa 1, are less impressive.

Temples

Temple 18, behind Stupa 1, is a chaitya (prayer room or assembly

hall) remarkably similar in style to classical Greek columned buildings. To its left is the small, also Greek-like Temple 17. Beyond both of them, the large Temple 40 dates back to the Ashokan period, in part.

The rectangular Temple 31, beside Stupa 5, contains a well-executed image of Buddha.

Monasteries

The earliest monasteries were made of wood and are long gone. The usual plan was of a central courtyard surrounded by monastic cells. These days only the courtyards and stone foundations remain. Monasteries 45 and Monastery 47, standing on the eastern ridge to the left of Stupa 1, date from the transition from Buddhism to Hinduism, with strong Hindu elements in their design. The former has two sitting Buddhas. The one housed inside is exceptional. Behind Monastery 51, partway down the hill towards Stupa 2, is the Great Bowl, carved from a boulder, into which food and offerings were placed for distribution to the monks.

OTHER SIGHTS

Vihara

The vihara, literally 'resting place,' was built to house the returned relics from Stupa 3. They can be viewed on the last Sunday of the month. The vihara is immediately on your left as you enter the complex.

9am–5pm

Archaeological Museum

This fine museum has a small collection of sculptures from the site. The centrepiece is the 3rd-century BC lion capital from the Ashoka Pillar 10. Other highlights include a yakshi hanging from a mango tree, and beautifully serene Buddha figures in red sandstone. There are also some interesting photos showing the site, pre-restoration. Next door is the preserved Gothic-style 'bungalow' of Sir John Marshall, former director of the Archaeological Survey of India.

Admission incl stupa ticket; 9am–5pm
Tue–Sun

Accommodation & Eating

Gateway Retreat MPSTDC ₹

7482 266723; www.mptourism.com;
Bhopal-Vidisha Rd; s/d ₹990/1170, with AC

Vishnu in his boar avatar in Udaigiri



from ₹2140/2690 (incl breakfast) This family-friendly MP Tourism hotel is the most comfortable place to stay in Sanchi. AC bungalows are set among well-kept gardens, with a children's play area and a big slide leading to a small kiddie pool. Note that non-AC rooms are not located here but nearby at Gateway Cafeteria.

The restaurant (mains ₹110 to ₹290) is Sanchi's best and there's a bar.

New Jaiswal Lodge GUESTHOUSE ₹

9983941274; Monuments Rd; s/d/tr ₹450/550/650 This friendly place has basic but colourful rooms and small private bathrooms with sit-down flush toilets. It does basic meals and air-coolers can be provided if needed.

Krishna Hotel GUESTHOUSE ₹

7482 266610; Bhopal-Vidisha Rd; s/d from ₹200/450 Simple rooftop rooms, some with sit-down flush toilets, are slightly more expensive than the darker, noisier rooms at the front. It's above Sai Chemist Shop. Pancakes and a few traveller favourites are available from the kitchen.

Gateway Cafeteria INDIAN ₹

Monuments Rd; mains ₹70–100; 8am–10am, noon–3pm & 7–10.30pm This simple MP Tourism place has a very basic Indian menu and coffee in addition to housing the non-AC rooms of Gateway Retreat.



Detour: Vidisha, Udaigiri Caves & Heliodorus Pillar

Vidisha

This small but thriving market town was a commercial centre in the 5th and 6th centuries BC. These days it's an interesting place for a wander or a chai break en route to the Udaigiri Caves.

There are a number of brightly coloured temples dotted around the old town, which is located to the left of the main road from Sanchi.

Past the town, and over the railway line, is the dusty District Museum (Sagar-Vidisha Rd; Indian/foreigner ₹5/50, camera ₹50; 10am–5pm Tue–Sun), which houses some beautiful sculptures recovered from local sites. The most impressive is a 3m-high, 2nd-century BC stone statue of Kubera Yaksha (treasurer of the gods) on display as you enter.

8km from Sanchi; cabs on hire for a day cost approx ₹2500

Udaigiri Caves

Cut into a sandstone hill, about 5km northwest of Vidisha, are some 20 unique Gupta cave shrines. These are special as they are some of the most ancient Hindu rock face sculptures. They date from the reign of Chandragupta II (382–401 AD). Most are Hindu but two, near the top of the hill, are Jain (Caves 1 and 20) – unfortunately both are closed due to unsafe roofs.

In Cave 4 is a lingam bearing Shiva's face complete with a third eye. Cave

5 contains the finest carving – a superb image of Vishnu in his boar incarnation topped with a frieze of gods, who also flank the entrance to Cave 6. Lotus-ceilinged Cave 7 was cut out for the personal use of Chandragupta II. On top of the hill are ruins of a 6th-century Gupta temple dedicated to the sun god. 13.5 km from Sanchi; dawn–dusk; Cabs on hire for a day cost approx ₹2500; autorickshaws cost ₹400

Heliodorus Pillar

The Heliodorus Pillar (Kham-Baba), just beyond the Udaigiri Caves turn-off, was erected by a Greek ambassador, Heliodorus from Taxila (now in Pakistan), in about 140 BC, and dedicated to Vasudeva. The pillar is worshipped by local fishermen who chain themselves to the pillar on full-moon nights. A large tamarind tree nearby is bristling with old nails as a result of local exorcism rituals.

The pillar is close to the Udaigiri Caves. Once you cross the Betwa River, carry straight on, rather than turning left for the caves, and you'll soon see a sign directing you up a small lane on your right, which leads to the pillar.

11km; 8am–6pm; cabs on hire for a day cost approx ₹2500



PACHMARHI

Why Go?

Swaying sal trees, cool hilly peaks and jungle calls make tourism the mainstay here. An army occupied 'cantonment town,' Pachmarhi is the other slice of the Satpura Biosphere, which holds nothing in common with its low-key neighbour, the Madai region of the Satpura Tiger Reserve.

1 Quick Facts

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Bhopal is the closest airport to Pachmarhi (195km). From Bhopal, cabs are the best option. Cabs can be hired at ₹9–11 per km, minimum 250km, plus driver allowance. Alternatively, Pipariya railway station lies 47km from the town on the main Mumbai–Howrah line; a cab to Pachmarhi can cost upto ₹1000 or more.

WHEN TO GO

Oct–May

GREAT FOR



Pachmarhi is also called the 'Queen of Satpura'

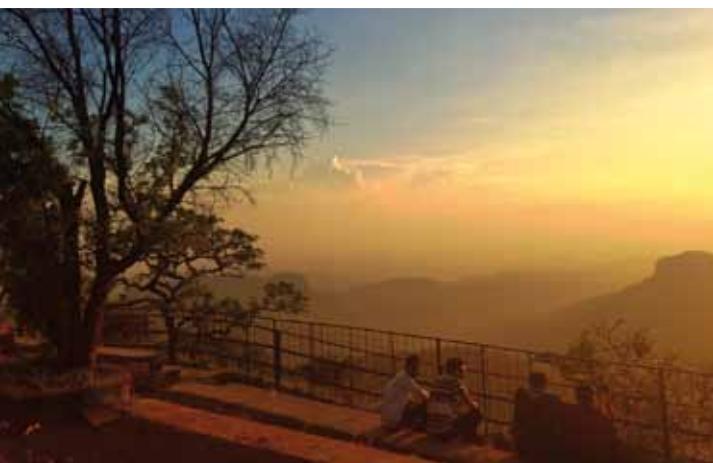
Sights

Bison Lodge

Captain Forsyth named Bison Lodge after a herd of 'bison' (gaur) he spotted here. It's now an interpretation centre focusing on the history, flora and fauna of the Satpura region. The complex also doubles up as the Eco Paryatan Tourism Office where one can buy tickets for the sights that fall under the forested region, hire vehicles (read Gypsy) and guides, both mandatory.

9am–5pm Thu–Tue, to 1pm Wed; forest entry charge ₹60 per head or ₹960 for upto 7 people is incl of guide, Gypsy (4WD) ₹1425 per day (₹2500 peak season)

Dawn and dusk at Pachmarhi offer great valley views



Chauragarh Loop

South of Jaistambha is the road that leads towards Chauragarh (1308m), Madhya Pradesh's third-highest peak. The Shiva shrine at the top attracts tens of thousands of pilgrims during the Shivaratri Mela (Jan–Feb). On the way, stop at Handi Khol, also known as Suicide Point, to gawk down the 100m canyon at the dense forest. You'll spy Chauragarh in the distance from here as well as Priyadarshini (Forsyth Point), further along the road. About 3km beyond Priyadarshini, the road ends at Mahadev Cave (7am–7pm), where a path 30m into the damp gloom reveals a lingam with an attendant priest. This is the beginning of the 1365-step pilgrim trail to Chauragarh (five hours return hike).



If You Like: Satpura Adventure Institute

The ground next to the airstrip is rife with adrenalin as parasailing (₹600), ATVs (₹300–500), zip lining (₹500) and other sporting activities are getting booked by mostly frenzied first timers. The equipment looks haggard with overuse but the camp works like a well-oiled machine.
9am–6pm

Jata Shankar Temple

This cave temple is in a beautiful gorge about 2.5km along a good track that's signed just north of the town limits. The small Shiva shrine is hidden under a huge overhanging rock.

Rajat Prapat

Known as the Big Fall, the route to Rajat Prapat steps up from the snack stall by Apsara Vihar leading to a point with magnificent views of the gorge and of Rajat Prapat, the tallest of Pachmarhi's waterfalls at 106m, which tumbles down a gully over a sheer cliff.

Apsara Vihar

Known as Fairy Pool on the other side of Jaistambha, about 1km past Pandav Caves, is the trailhead for Apsara Vihar, a pool underneath a small waterfall, which is the best of Pachmarhi's natural pools for swimming.

Bee Falls

Originally named Jamna Prapat, after a local lady who chanced upon

these falls, they are now named as 'bee' falls after the stinging sensation that you feel when the water plummets down on you. There are two levels to the falls. The easier spot is a short walk down where tiered and more tamed water allows people to bathe or dip their feet sitting at the edge of rocks. Climb down 350 steps to see the real wonder where the falls crash down onto rocks. This is also accessible to a more enthusiastic crowd.

9am–3.30pm; ₹600 for a local jeep that drives you from the parking lot for 3km down to the first level – only if you haven't already hired a jeep for the day

Reechgarh

More famous for the shooting of the Bollywood blockbuster *Asoka*, rather than the jaw droppingly gorgeous rockscape, Reechgarh is worth your time. It's a short loop of a cave, which one can easily duck into and walk along for a small stretch before emerging back in the light. The Reechgarh caves can be reached by a short walk from the parking lot. The spot lies in the main city.

Duchess Falls

The only fall that closes down during the monsoon, this is where the famous Liril ad of yesteryears was shot. The falls lie about 8km away from town. This is accessible by a Gypsy, but one needs to leg the last 1.5km stretch. Once there, a 35ft tall cascade of water comes thunderously down with force. Hire a cab for the day for all the spots, including Duchess Falls. Gypsy (4WD) ₹1425 per day (₹2500 peak season)

Accommodation

Most of the staying options can be found in the Jaistambha area, 2km southwest of the centre of town. Even though there are more than 350 accommodation options jammed into this small town, don't get here without a booking during peak season.

The Golf View

HOTEL ₹₹₹

755 2466515; www.golfview.in; Mahadev Rd; dbl Royal club/Regal club/Forsyth suite/Victorian suite ₹7000/8000/9000/10000 Originally constructed by the Roman Catholic Mission Estate in 1926–27, this is now a refurbished version by

one of the best heritage chains of the country. Overlooking the golf course of Pachmarhi, this is ideal for those looking for something plush. Think period furniture, mini bar, an LED TV and all the trappings of a luxury resort. Expect discounts on booking through their website.

Glen View

MPSTDC ₹₹

7578 252533; www.mptourism.com; Rajbhanvan Rd; s/d ₹4000/4600, heritage s/d ₹4700/5600 (incl meals) Large, comfortable AC tents and cottages are dotted around the gardens. A huge colonial-era cottage has also been converted to house the luxury 'heritage' rooms, all of which empty out onto a sweeping verandah. There's a restaurant and bar.

Evelyn's Own

HOTEL ₹₹

7578 252056; Saptura Retreat Rd; ₹2000–4000 This rustic colonial-era cottage, built by a British priest, was later converted into a charming guesthouse by the gruff-but-good-hearted Colonel Balwant Rao and his indomitable wife Pramilla. The main cottage, full of family portraits and period furniture and garden are quaint delights. Despite



being comfortable, some of the guest rooms themselves lead to bathrooms that are a little too crusty for the price. The wi-fi is fussy.

Rock-End Manor

MPSTDC ₹₹

7578 252079; www.mptourism.com; d ₹5390 (incl meals) A gorgeous colonial-era building, whitewashed Rock-End is perched above the parched fairways of the army golf course. Six spacious rooms have wonderfully high ceilings, and the furnishings are luxurious with quality upholstery, framed paintings and full-body massage showers.

Woodland

Adventure Resort

HOTEL ₹₹₹

7578 252416; dbl AC only rooms ₹7000 A family-friendly spacious resort

The Duchess Falls cascade down a steep and jagged rockface

it offers adventure activities on the property – a climbing wall, ATVs and Burma Bridge are hugely popular with guests. There are only 6 cottages and Swiss tents and ample space, so the experience is bound to be without clutter.

Hotel Saket

HOTEL ₹₹₹

7578 252165; www.sakethotel.in; Patel Rd; r from ₹600, with AC from ₹1500 There is a wide range of rooms at this welcoming hotel, one of a myriad paint-by-number options in town. The attached restaurant, Raj Bhoj (mains ₹60 to ₹200) does good and cheap Gujarati, Bengali, Chinese and South Indian dishes.

If You Like: Pick a guide

A good guide can amp up the trip to Pachmarhi including treks and visits to horticulture parks. Here are two listed :

Makrand 9407269532

Purushottam 9406937936



Champak Bungalow from MP Tourism offers a cosy place to stay

Vanasthal Cottages HOTEL ₹

9424439679; www.vanasthalcottages.co.in; VIP Rd; dbl ₹4800 (all incl) The location is one of the few things going for the privately run resort. It beats the clutter with its vantage address, away from the main town. A mix of Swiss tents and cheerful cottages make up the accommodation. Large and rather unkempt, it's the kind of place a group can play music late into the night and ask for a bonfire in the cooler months.

Champak Bungalow MPSTDC ₹

7578 252034; www.mptourism.com; dlx/ac/swiss cottage ₹4890/4490

One of the more prominent options amongst the MP Tourism offerings, Champak Bungalow boasts of a functional pool, a gym and cycles for hire along with excellent rooms and Swiss tents with lavish interiors. The rooms overlook a large garden, at the end of which stands the in-house restaurant.

Hotel Highlands MPSTDC ₹

7578 252099; www.mptourism.com; Pipariya Rd; r (incl breakfast & bed tea) ₹2140 This MP Tourism property has great-value rooms with high ceilings, dressing rooms, modern bathrooms and verandahs, which are dotted around well-tended gardens. There's a children's play area and a bar-restaurant. Wi-fi is in the lobby only.

Eating

New Hotel and Open Garden Restaurant INDIAN & CHINESE ₹

7581 013370; Mahadev Rd; mains below ₹500; 7am–11pm A rowdy gang of monkeys watches keenly over hungry tourists digging into plates of Gujarati, Chinese, Bengali, South Indian or generic North Indian paneer and dal dishes. They often swoop down at unsuspecting guests if the three young waiters clad with catapults are distracted from their vigilance. One has to admit that no other meal at Pachmarhi trumps such entertainment.

China Bowl INDIAN & CHINESE ₹

Mains below ₹500; 8am–10.30pm Choose the open-air garden seating over the cosy restaurant inside, at the atmospheric China Bowl. The large airy verandah also has tables, making full use of the spacious colonial building. It is the breakfast that comes as a pleasant surprise.

Rasoi INDIAN & CHINESE ₹

Near Company Garden; mains ₹90–500; 8am–11pm Not your average roadside dhaba. A scrumptious, long-winded non-veg, South Indian and Chinese menu is served here by uniformed waiters in several open-air seating areas covered by corrugated roofs. Credit cards are accepted!

Nandavan Restaurant INDIAN ₹

Mains ₹50–300; 8am–11pm An outdoor restaurant and a sort of reverse zoo, as monkeys sit outside watching

humans eating in a cage. Good wide-reaching Indian menu.

Shopping

Mrignayanee HANDICRAFTS

Pachmarhi town; 10am–5pm The state-run emporium is an easy shopping destination for elegant Chanderi and Maheshwari saris, textiles, artefacts, Gond art, jewellery, souvenirs and handicrafts of the state.

Prakrit BOUTIQUE

7578 252093; Raipur Rd; 11am–7pm The silk-themed boutique with a manufacturing showcase section of Hoshangabad silk, is a great place to pick authentic silk stoles, saris and textiles. Contemporary designs are also available. The walkthrough of the production unit is not charged.

North Indian fare is available in Pachmarhi's many restaurants





UJJAIN

Why Go?

Look beyond Ujjain's chaos to wander down the ghats by the river and its maze of alleyways. Here, discover an older city, once called Avantika, that drew traders and pilgrims for hundreds of years and inspired Kalidasa's Meghdoot. Little surprise that it is one of Hinduism's seven sacred cities.

Quick Facts

GETTING THERE & AROUND

The best way to get into Ujjain by air is via Indore (55km/1hour). Ujjain is well-connected to key cities of India. Recommended from Delhi: Ujjaiyani Express, Train No 14310. Cabs will cost about ₹1000–1200.

Within the city, cabs are ₹9–11 per km, min 250km per day and ₹200 as driver allowance. Autorickshaws

are a cheaper alternative to move around in the city.

WHEN TO GO

Nov–Mar

GREAT FOR



A devotee takes a holy dip in the River Shipra

Sights

Mahakaleshwar Mandir

While this is not the most stunning temple, tagging along behind a conga-line through the underground chambers can be magical. At non-festival times, the marble walkways are a peaceful preamble to the subterranean chamber containing one of India's 12 sacred Shiva shrines known as jyotirlingams – naturally occurring lingams believed to derive currents of shakti (creative energies perceived as female deities) from within themselves rather than being ritually invested with mantra-shakti by priests. The temple was destroyed by Iltutmish in 1235 and restored by the Scindias in the 19th century.

Banks of Rudra Sagar; Harsiddhi Mandir Square; 3am–11pm

Vedh Shala

Ujjain has been India's Greenwich since the 4th century BC, and this simple but interesting observatory

was built by Maharaja Jai Singh in about 1730. He also built observatories in Jaipur, Delhi, Varanasi and Mathura, but Ujjain's is the only one still in use. Observatory; Jantar Mantar; admission ₹10; 8am–5pm

Gopal Mandir

The Scindias built this marble-spired temple, a magnificent example of Maratha architecture, in the 19th century. Muslim pillagers originally stole the sanctum's silver-plated doors from Somnath Temple in Gujarat and installed them in Ghazni, Afghanistan. Mohammed Shah Abdali later took them to Lahore (in present-day Pakistan), before Mahadaji Scindia brought them back here. The alleyways north, east and west of here are wonderful places to explore. Banks of Rudra Sagar; dawn–dusk

Harsiddhi Mandir

Built during the Maratha period, this temple enshrines a famous image of the goddess Annapurna. At the

Heart If You Like: Festivals & events

Kumbh Mela (Apr–May) Ujjain is also one of four sites in India that hosts the incredible Kumbh Mela (p114) during which millions bathe in the Shipra. It takes place here every 12 years, normally during April and May. The last was from 22 April to 21 May in 2016.

Navaratri (Sep–Oct) Navaratri leading up to Dussehra is celebrated with particular fervour in Ujjain. Lamps on the large pillars in Harsiddhi Mandir are lit up.

Snapshot: History

The Guptas, the Mandu sultans, Maharaja Jai Singh (of Jaipur fame), the Marathas and the Scindias have all had a controlling hand in Ujjain's long and chequered past, which stretches back to when the city, originally called Avantika, was an important trade stop. When the Scindias moved their capital to Gwalior in 1810, Ujjain's prominence declined rapidly.

entrance, two tall blackened stone towers glowing with burning lamps are a special feature of Maratha art. They add to the spectacle of Navaratri in September/October, when filled with oil and lit up.

Banks of Rudra Sagar; dawn–dusk

Devotees halt to pick up floral offerings at the temples

Ram Ghat

The most central and popular of Ujjain's river ghats is best visited at dawn or dusk when the devout beat cymbals and light oil lamps (or candles in modern times) at the water's edge.

Dawn–dusk





A girl dressed as a goddess as part of folk rites

Accommodation & Eating

Anjushree MPSTDC ₹

734 6999111/222/333; www.anjushree.com; 72, Goyal Khurd, Indore Rd, ₹4,500 With a range of options including deluxe rooms, family rooms and suites this is a contemporary hotel with modern amenities.

Shipra Residency MPSTDC ₹

734 2551495; shipra@mpstdc.com; 0.5km from Railway Station; ₹2,990 onwards; Given its proximity to the railway station this is a good option and you can expect comfy rooms.

Hotel Grand Tower HOTEL ₹

734 2553699; 1 Vikram Marg; s/d from ₹1420/1640 In a very busy part of town convenient to get to the train station, the all-AC GT has large, clean, well-kept rooms plus efficient service and the very good Zharokha restaurant serving excellent Kashmiri, Punjabi and Chinese food (mains ₹90 to ₹140).

Hotel Rama Krishna HOTEL ₹

734 2553017; www.hotelramakrishna.co.in; Subhash Rd; s/d ₹500/650, with AC ₹900/1000 This cleaner-than-average hotel has the best air-con rooms of those considered, with white-tiled floors, TVs, stylish trimmings and tight bathrooms. The non-ACs are well-worn versions of the same. Sit-down flush toilets throughout. New Sudama restaurant does inexpensive North Indian food (mains ₹60–100).

Hotel Pleasure Landmark HOTEL ₹

734 2557867; www.hotelpleasurelandmark.com; 98 Mahakal Marg; r ₹900, with AC ₹1200 Basic rooms here cop a bit of noise and are a tad cluttered with chunky wooden furniture, but there's some historic character and it's a great location from which to launch yourself into the old town. Squat toilets only.

Shree Ganga SWEETS, SOUTH INDIAN ₹

50 Amarsingh Marg; sweets per kilo from ₹360, mains ₹40–120; 7am–11pm Since

If You Like: S&L shows, heritage walks

734 2552263; www.mptourism.com; 10am–6pm Mon–Sat. Located in the grounds of Mahakaleshwar Mandir contact the office for details about the sound and light shows, heritage walks etc.

1949, this epic sweet shop has been satiating Ujjaini sugar cravings. There's no English sign or menu, but the friendly owner can steer you in the right direction. Upstairs, there's a great savoury menu that includes creative South Indian (green chutney masala dosa) and Chinese. It's right of Baker's Lounge.

Shivam Restaurant INDIAN ₹

Hotel Satyam; mains ₹60–160; 8am–5pm & 7.30–10.30pm This popular veg

restaurant in the basement below Hotel Satyam has an extensive menu with detailed descriptions of every dish. Choose from tandoori kebabs, a selection of paneer dishes, koftas and a variety of stuffed vegetables. Skip the uneventful thali.

A ritual platter is offered to devotees at the temples





EXPERT RECOMMENDATION

The Kumbh Mela

Karuna Ezara Parikh is a travel TV host and writer. She attended the Kumbh Mela in Ujjain in May 2016. Here are her tips to navigate a travel trip during this festival.

The Kumbh Mela, held every 12 years in Ujjain, is a major draw for people from near and far, the pilgrim and the travel thirsty enthusiast.

- Fly to Indore and pre-book a taxi to Ujjain. The drive takes about an hour.
- Once in Ujjain, you will have to use the festival buses to enter. Remember to carry printouts of your camp name, location and booking.
- Travel light – there's a good chance you will have to carry your bags for certain stretches, so anything with wheels should be avoided. A light duffel/rucksack is best.
- Dress modestly. Though no one will skin you for it, avoid western clothing.
- Carry rubber slippers, you'll need them both at the camp and at the ghats.
- Book your camp beforehand. Though you can stay in a hotel,

the camps are safe and clean, and provide wi-fi, lockers, coolers and three meals a day. They also allow you to be right next to the action.

- Find out well in advance what the important holy dates are. The auspicious dates will be significantly more crowded. If you're happy to brave that, then make sure your trip has at least one such date, as you get to then witness the Kumbh in all its glory. If it makes you queasy, then avoid the dates on which you'll be surrounded by millions.
- Greet the babas and sadhus with respect. "Om Namo Narayana," is the correct greeting, but a simple "Namaste" will do too. Do not touch the Naga sadhus. They will bless you if they wish to.
- Always ask sadhus before taking a photo.



Pilgrims congregate at the Kumbh Mela in Ujjain



INDORE

Why Go?

The Holkar dynasty left behind some fine buildings here, but Indore – Madhya Pradesh's business powerhouse – is used by tourists as the gateway to Omkareshwara, Maheshwar or Mandu. That said, it's a fine spot to reload.

i Quick Facts

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Air India flies daily to Delhi and Mumbai. Jet Airways also flies similar routes out of Bhopal. More than 20 daily trains go to Agra's Cantonment station and to Jhansi for Orchha or Khajuraho and Delhi, while more than 15 go to Bhopal.

In the city, autorickshaws and taxis are plentiful. An autorickshaw to the airport, 10km northeast of the centre, will cost at least ₹200.

WHEN TO GO

Nov–Mar

GREAT FOR



The Rajwada is a symbol of the Holkar footprint in Indore

Sights

Lal Bagh Palace

Built between 1886 and 1921, Lal Bagh Palace is the finest building left by the Holkar dynasty. Replicas of the Buckingham Palace gates creak at the entrance to the 28-hectare garden. The palace is dominated by European styles. An autorickshaw from the town centre costs about ₹50.

Indian/foreigner ₹5/100; 10am–5pm
Tue–Sun

Central Museum

Housed in a fine Holkar building, this museum has one of Madhya Pradesh's best collections of medieval and premedieval Hindu sculptures, along with tools, weaponry and copper-engraved land titles. The well in the garden

European style interiors gleam at the Lal Bagh Palace



was poisoned during the First War of Independence.

AB Rd; Indian/foreigner ₹10/100, camera/video ₹50/200; 10am–5pm Tue–Sun

Gandhi Hall

This gorgeous Gothic town hall, built in 1904 and originally called King Edward's Hall, stands incongruously on MG Rd like a ghost of the Raj. Dawn–dusk

Rajwada

The palatial structure is a remnant of the rich architectural style of the Holkars of the Maratha empire. Now, this is used as a venue for the sound and light show.

Indian/foreigner ₹10/250; 10am–5pm; sound and light show Indian/foreigner ₹100/250; English/Hindi 7.45pm/6.45pm

Krishnapura Chhatris

The majestic Krishnapura chhatris, with their spires and sculptures,

If You Like: Choral Resort

The MP tourism property, over 41km from Indore, overlooks a scenic water front that's best for boating. Do enjoy a glass of wine with a variety of multi-cuisine options, including Chinese chow.

₹8349994778; www.hotelamarvilas.com; Mhow; d AC delux ₹3290

on the banks of River Ken
commemorate the Holkar kings.
Near Rajwada

Kaanch Mandir

The serene Jain shrine gets a fair share of tourists walking between people meditating to see its resplendent glass-studded walls, columns and ceiling. It was constructed in 1903 by a local trader, who imported craftsmen from Iran to do the ornamentation here.
92 Sir Hukumchand Marg; 10am–5pm

Accommodation

Hotel Somdeep Palace

HOTEL ₹
₹731 3321000; www.somdeeppalace.com; M 10 Rd, near Vijay Nagar Square; s/d ₹2500/₹3500 onwards (incl breakfast)
With spacious rooms, in-house dining options, reasonable amenities and even a small rooftop swimming pool, one can't ask for more.

Sayaji Hotel

HOTEL ₹
₹731 4006666; www.sayajihotels.com; Scheme No.54, Vijay Nagar; s/d ₹7000/₹8000 onwards (incl breakfast) A longstanding establishment, Sayaji looks relatively old but the rooms

have a contemporary spin to them. A pool and seven in-house dining options make it ideal.

Amar Vilas

HOTEL ₹

₹731 4281111; www.hotelamarvilas.com; Chandra Nagar, AB Rd; s/d ₹3300/₹3900; ste ₹5900 onwards (incl breakfast) The spacious rooms at Amar Vilas and a spate of in-house dining options, makes it suitable for both business and leisure travellers. The executive room is large enough to accommodate a family with an extra bed.

Hotel Shreemaya

BUSINESS HOTEL ₹

₹731 2515555; www.shreemaya.com; 12 RNT Marg; s/d from ₹2880/3700 Professionally run friendly business hotel with modern rooms in immaculate condition. Rooms feature flat-screen TVs, coffee makers and balconies with potted plants. Rates include breakfast and airport drop-off, while the multi-cuisine restaurant is one of the best in town (mains ₹155 to ₹350).

Hotel Neelam

HOTEL ₹

₹731 2466001; 33/2 Patel Bridge Corner; s/d from ₹450/650, with AC ₹750/950 One

Top Tip: Sarafa Bazaar for street food

The city is best known for its street food and there is no better way other than Sarafa Bazaar to experience it in Indore. Try the Kachori Corner (11am–9pm), Vijay Chaat (9am–9pm), Hira Lassi (8am–9.30pm), Madni Darbar for chicken ultimate (10.30am–11.30pm), Nafees for haleem and biryani (12pm–11.30pm), and Chaat Gali for a row of shanties that toss up a delicious chaat plate.

of the few budget places near the train and bus stations that happily accepts foreigners. Neelam is well run and has simple but clean rooms with upgraded bathrooms off a central atrium.

Hotel Chanakya HOTEL ₹

731 2704497; 57/58 RNT Marg, Chhawni Chowk; s/d from ₹800/900, with AC from ₹1270/1430 Rooms here aren't as flashy as the disco-lit Krishna waterfall in the entrance hallway but they are functional nonetheless. The cheapest have no windows and it's worth paying ₹100 more for the air-cooled 'semi-deluxe' AC rooms. The staff is friendly and the hotel is right in the heart of an interesting section of the old town. There's no English sign. Autorickshaws know it by the famous sweet shop, Mathurawala, below it.

Eating & Nightlife

Mediterra MEDITERRANEAN ₹₹

731 4004848; Hotel Sayaji, Vijay Nagar; mains ₹490–950; 7.30–11.30pm This

romantic open-air rooftop restaurant is on Indore's main avenue of upscale shopping. Mediterranean fare is on order, everything from honey-roasted rack of lamb to great mezze and Moroccan stews. Cocktails (₹330 to ₹400) and wines are served up in a trendy lounge atmosphere with modern city views.

56 Dukan

CAFE ₹

Old Palasia, 56 Dukan St; mains below ₹100; 6am–11.30pm A row of shops (56 once, now much less) makes for a local favourite hangout. Young Tarang (poha and jalebi), Johnny Hotdog (sizzling egg benjo or mutton burger), Vijay Chaat (nariyal patties) and Sam's Momos and Rolls are some of the most famous shops here. Though the street opens as early as 6am, the action is in the late evening.

Shreemaya Celebration CAFE ₹

Tuko Ganj; mains ₹40–190; 7.30am–10.30pm This modern bakery next to Hotel Shreemaya sells pastries, sandwiches and cakes, as well as South Indian, Chinese and pizza. It's also a good pick for breakfast.

Aspi & Co.

CAFE ₹

731 3012490; Darshan Mall, Race Course Rd; mains ₹100–200; 11am–midnight Its swanky interiors don't give away the fact that the establishment has been around since 1928. Its legendary status comes from four homemade brews, of which Ice-cream Soda Mirchna is the most famous.

Guru Kripa

INDIAN ₹

731 2465080; opp bus stand; mains ₹250–500; 10am–12am You might need to holler your order over the buzz, but that's only a sign of how popular this veg restaurant is. Great for a quick, no-fuss Indian meal.

Indian

Coffee House

SOUTH INDIAN ₹

MG Rd; mains ₹50–200; 8am–8pm Drink coffee with Indore's judiciary at this Indian Coffee House set inside the grounds of the commissioner's office near the district court. A top spot for breakfast, with dosas and particularly good idli sharing the menu with eggs and toast.

Hotel Apna

INDIAN ₹

Opp Sarvate bus stand; mains ₹80–190; 11am–11.30pm This restaurant, right opposite the Sarvate bus stand, has been around more than 50 years and serves up delicious veg and meat dishes from an all-Indian menu.

Ghamandi Lassi

INDIAN ₹

Next to the bus stand; mains less than ₹100; 9am–midnight Located right next



Indore's Sarafa Bazaar is the spot for street food

to the bus stand, this restaurant is worth a stop for its lassi. Also the name, which literally translates to being vain, is sure to make you smile.

Shopping

Mrignayanee

HANDICRAFTS

731 2541945; Mahatma Gandhi Rd

The state-run emporium is an easy shopping destination for elegant Chanderi and Maheshwari saris, textiles, artefacts, Gond art, jewellery, souvenirs and handicrafts of the state under one roof.

Detour: Omkareshwar & Maheshwar

OMKARESHWAR

Browse the colourful stalls or join pilgrims at Shri Omkar Mandhata Temple in this pilgrim town. This cave-like temple, which houses a jyotirlingam is one of many Hindu monuments on the island. From the old bridge, head left to the 11th-century Gaudi Somnath Temple, from where you can descend the hill to the northern tip of the island, where sadhus bathe in the confluence of the holy Narmada

A weaver working her loom in Maheshwar, famous for its gossamer saris



and Kaveri rivers. Don't miss the beautifully sculpted Siddhanatha Temple with marvellous elephant carvings around its base.

79km from Indore/103km from Mandu (₹9–11 per km, min 250 km per day, plus ₹200 driver allowance)

MAHESHWAR

The peaceful, riverside town once called Mahishmati, still draws pilgrims to its ancient ghats and temples on the holy Narmada River. The town is dominated by a 16th-century fort built by Emperor Akbar, while the Maheshwar Palace and the temples were added during the reign of 18th-century Holkar queen Ahilyabai. The palace is part public courtyard, part posh hotel.

From the ramparts of the fort you can see boats (return trip per person/boat ₹50/500) and incense smoke drifting across the water to Baneshwar Temple, located on a tiny island in the middle of the river. Near the palace a small doorway announces the NGO Rehwa Society (www.rehwasociety.org; 10am–6pm Wed–Mon, shop open daily), a craft cooperative for the welfare of the weavers. Maheshwari saris are famous for their unique weave and simple, geometric patterns. You can buy shawls, saris, scarves and fabrics.

Mandu–Maheshwar 63km; cabs charge ₹8–10 per km, for 250km per day plus driver allowance.

Accommodation & Eating

OMKARESHWAR

Narmada Resort MPT RESORT ₹

 7280 271455; Near NVD rest house, Khandwa; d ₹2990 This MPT property is a smart option to stay. The in-house restaurant offers simple homely North Indian, read Punjabi fare with dal, subji and dahi.

Manu Guesthouse GUESTHOUSE ₹

 9826749004; omkar_bagh@yahoo.co.in; r with shared bathroom ₹350 Rooms are simple and bathrooms are shared but kept clean. If you ask in advance, your hosts can whip up a delicious thali (₹100). This is pretty much the only place to stay on the island itself that isn't a dharamsala.

Ganesh Guesthouse GUESTHOUSE ₹

 7280 271370; sumitbohi113@gmail.com; ₹250 Budget rooms with thin mattresses await you here. Upstairs rooms are brighter and have air-coolers, while a shaded garden restaurant overlooking the ghats has a multi-cuisine menu including western breakfasts.

MAHESHWAR

Ahilya Fort HERITAGE HOTEL ₹₹₹

 7771004811, reservations 9810306178; www.ahilyafort.com; r Indian/foreigner from ₹11,750/₹18,050 (incl all meals)

Demi Moore, Mick Jagger and Sting have all indulged in this heritage hotel owned by Prince Shivaji Rao Holkar, a 14th-generation Indian-American direct descendent of Ahilyabai. Part of Maheshwar Palace, the best rooms come with fabulous river views. Rates include all meals as well as boat trips on the river. Booking ahead is essential. Non-guests who fancy a night to remember should not miss dining here.

Narmada Retreat MPT RESORT ₹₹₹

 8349994784; Narmada Retreat Rd, Khargone; d ₹5220, tents/suite ₹6500 The MPT resort by the waterfront is a good option with its gardens, pool and free parking. There's a multi-cuisine restaurant too.

Laboo'z Cafe GUESTHOUSE ₹

 7771004818; santosh.ahilyafort@gmail.com; s/d ₹900/1210, with AC from ₹1430/₹1650 (incl breakfast); cafe 6.30am–8pm Not only a delightful cafe in a glorious tree-shaded courtyard, but also a place with six wonderful rooms to stay in. Each room is decorated with care.

Hansa Heritage HOTEL ₹

 9827857097; Kila Rd; ₹700, with AC ₹1050, ste ₹1450 Smart, modern rooms have a rustic feel with wooden furniture and coloured-glass windowpanes. Bathrooms are modern and spotlessly clean. Indian breakfasts and thalis are available.



EXPERT RECOMMENDATION

MP's cricketing legacy

Shamya Dasgupta is Senior Editor with Wisden India and author of *Bhiwani Junction – The Untold Story of Boxing in India*, and *Cricket Changed My life – Stories of Hope and Despair from the IPL and Elsewhere*.

Madhya Pradesh has had a long innings with cricket. The erstwhile royals have been patrons and players. The game has a loyal following in the state and its cities have been witness to some great games.

Indore

Cricket flourished here under the patronage of Yeshwantrao Holkar II in the pre-independence years. The great Syed Mushtaq Ali benefitted from that benevolence, and the Holkar team won the Ranji Trophy four times between 1940 and 1955. The city's Nehru Stadium (capacity: 25,000) has hosted nine One-Day Internationals, the last in 2001. The new Holkar Stadium was where Virender Sehwag scored 219 against the West Indies in a one-day match in December 2011.

The city has become a cricket hub over the years. Gorakhpur-born Narendra Hirwani cut his cricketing teeth in Indore, as did Rajesh Chauhan (from Ranchi), Amay Khurasiya (from Jabalpur) and Naman Ojha (from Ujjain). Two of the state's best modern-day cricketers –

Devendra Bundela and Jalaj Saxena – are also Indore boys.

Bhopal

Mansoor Ali Khan, the late nawab of Pataudi and among India's greatest cricket captains, was born here.

Gwalior

Madhavrao Scindia – titular head of the once-princely clan, the Scindias – was president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India. This is when the Captain Roop Singh Stadium, originally a hockey venue, became a cricket stop – a rarity in that it's a cricket stadium named after a hockey legend. It recorded the first-ever one-day double century (by Sachin Tendulkar).

Sagar

Sau (hundred) and garh (fort), Saugor and now Sagar, was where Chandu Sarwate, who played nine tests between 1946 and 1951, was born. He also has the distinction of being one-half of the highest partnership in first-class cricket between the last two batsmen.



Madhya Pradesh's cricketing history includes memorable matches



MANDU

Why Go?

Perched on top of a pleasantly green forested 20sq km plateau, picturesque Mandu is home to some of India's finest examples of Sultanate architecture as well as impressive baobab trees, originally from Africa. It is dotted with stunning palaces, tombs, monuments and mosques.

Quick Facts

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Indore is the closest nodal junction to Mandu (95km) and is well-connected by trains, flights and road. From Indore, hire a cab at ₹9–11 per km, minimum of 250km per day, plus driver allowance of ₹200.

Cycles (₹100 per day) and autorickshaws are available, but fix the price before setting out.

WHEN TO GO

Jul–Mar

GREAT FOR



Jahaz Mahal was built in the 15th century

Sights

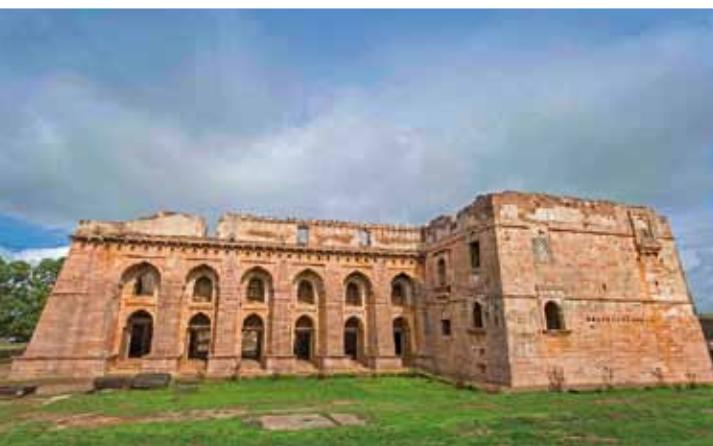
There are three main groups of ruins in Mandu: the Royal Enclave, the Village Group and the Rewa Kund Group. Each requires its own separate ticket. All other sights are free.

Royal Enclave

The Royal Enclave ruins are the only ones fenced off into one single complex. There's a Publication Sale Counter (9am–5pm) selling guidebooks, and a shaded garden canteen selling tea, coffee and snacks just to the right of the main entrance.

Indian/foreigner ₹5/100, video ₹25; dawn–dusk

Hindola Mahal or 'Swing' Palace has unique architecture



Jahaz Mahal

Dating from the 15th century, this is the most famous building in Mandu. Built on a narrow strip of land between the Munja and Kapur tanks, with a small upper storey like a ship's bridge (use your imagination), it's far longer (120m) than it is wide (15m) and is a testament to the evolved water harvesting systems of the time. Ghiyas-ud-din, who is said to have had a harem of 15,000 maidens, constructed its lookouts, scalloped arches, airy rooms and beautiful pleasure pools.

Jahaz Mahal Rd; Indian/foreigner ₹5/100; 6am–7pm

Taveli Mahal

These former stables now house a small archaeological museum which features a handful of artefacts



Snapshot: Historical legacy

Raja Bhoja, of Bhopal fame, founded Mandu as a fortress retreat in the 10th century before it was conquered by the Muslim rulers of Delhi in 1304. When the Mughals captured Delhi in 1401, the Afghan Dilawar Khan, governor of Malwa, set up his own little kingdom and Mandu's golden age began. Although Dilawar Khan established Mandu as an independent kingdom, it was his son, Hoshang Shah, who shifted the capital from Dhar to Mandu and raised it to its greatest splendour.

In 1526, Bahadur Shah of Gujarat conquered Mandu, only to be ousted in 1534 by the Mughal Humayun, who in turn lost the kingdom to Mallu Khan, an officer of the Khilji dynasty. Ten more years of feuds and invasions saw Baz Bahadur eventually emerge at the top spot, but in 1561 he fled Mandu to avoid facing Akbar's advancing troops.

After Akbar added Mandu to the Mughal Empire, it kept a considerable degree of independence until taken by the Marathas in 1732. The capital of Malwa was then shifted back to Dhar, and the slide in Mandu's fortunes that had begun with the absconding of Baz Bahadur, became a plummet.

found here, including 11th- and 12th-century sculptures and stone slabs with Quranic text dating back to the 15th century.

9am–5pm

Hindola Mahal

Just north of Ghiyas' stately pleasure dome is Hindola Mahal, so-called because the slope of the walls is supposed to create the impression that they are swaying. While it doesn't give that impression, it's an eye-catching design nonetheless. Swing Palace

Palace & Shop of Gada Shah

The house is within the enclave, but the shop is outside on the road to Delhi Gate. As the buildings' size and internal workmanship suggest, their

owner was more than a shopkeeper. His name, which means 'beggar master', is thought to identify him as Rajput chief Medini Ray, a powerful minion of the sultans. The 'shop' was a warehouse for saffron and musk, imported and sold at a handsome profit when there were enough wealthy people to shop here.

Mosque of Dilawar Khan

Built by Dilawar Khan in 1405, this mosque is Mandu's earliest Islamic building. There are many Hindu elements to the architecture, notably the pillars and ceilings inside, which was typical for this era.

Champa Baoli

So called because its water supposedly smelled as sweet



Champa Baoli is a step-well named after the champa flower

as the champak flower, Champa Baoli is a step-well surrounded by subterranean vaulted chambers, some of which you can explore.

Turkish Bath

Stars and octagons perforate the domed roofs of this tiny hammam (Turkish bath), which had hot and cold water and a hypocaust (underfloor heated) sauna.

Village Group

The Village Group located by the bus stand in the centre of the village, contains three monuments. The ticket office is at the entrance to Jama Masjid; one ticket covers all three sights.

Indian/foreigner ₹5/100, video ₹25; dawn-dusk

Jama Masjid

Entered by a flight of steps leading to a 17m-high domed porch, this disused red-stone mosque dominates the village of Mandu. Hoshang Shah began its construction around 1406, basing it on the great Umayyad Mosque in Damascus in Syria, and Mohammed Khilji completed it in 1454. Despite its plain design, it's reckoned to be the finest and largest example of Sultanate architecture in India.

Hoshang's Tomb

Reputed to be India's oldest marble building, this imposing tomb is crowned with a crescent thought to have been imported from Persia or Mesopotamia. Inside, light filters into the echoing dome through stone jaalis (carved lattice screens), intended to cast an appropriately subdued light on the tombs. An

inscription records Shah Jahan sending his architects – including Ustad Hamid, who worked on the Taj Mahal – here in 1659 to pay their respects to the tomb's builders.

Ashrafi Mahal

Mohammed Shah originally built his tomb as a madrasa (Islamic college), before converting and extending it. The overambitious design later collapsed – notably the seven-storey circular tower of victory. The building is an empty shell, but intricate Islamic pillar work can be seen at the top of its great stairway.

Rewa Kund Group

A pleasant 4km-cycle south of the village Mandu, past Sagar Talao, brings you to two more ruins. Tickets for both should be bought from outside Baz Bahadur's Palace.

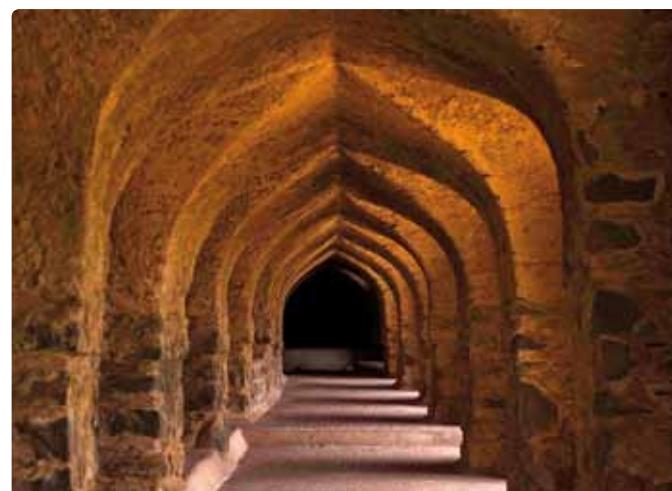
Indian/foreigner ₹5/100, video ₹25; dawn-dusk

Baz Bahadur's Palace

Baz Bahadur was the last independent ruler of Mandu. His palace, constructed around 1509, is beside the Rewa Kund tank where a water lift at the northern end supplied water to the palace. A curious mix of Rajasthani and Mughal styles, it was actually built decades before Baz Bahadur came to power.

Rupmati's Pavilion

Standing at the top of a cliff plunging 366m to the plains, Rupmati's Pavilion has a beauty unmatched by the other monuments – and some legends on love





Murals depict folktales on the walls of the Jain Temple

of the dinkiest stone staircases you'll ever climb. According to Malwa legends, the music-loving Baz Bahadur built it to persuade a beautiful Hindu singer, Rupmati, to move here from her home on the plains. From its terrace and domed pavilions, Rupmati could gaze down at the distant glint of the sacred Narmada River.

In fact, the pavilion was built in two or three phases and the style of its arches and pillars suggests it was completed 100 years before Rupmati's time. Nonetheless, the love story is a subject of Malwa folk songs – not least because of its tragic ending. Lured by Rupmati's beauty, the emperor attacked the fort and Baz Bahadur fled, leaving

his lover to poison herself go the legends.

OTHER SIGHTS

Neelkanth Palace

If you're looking for a great reason to cycle out into the countryside, consider visiting this unusual former palace turned temple. It stands at the head of a ravine, on the site of an earlier Shiva shrine – Neelkanth or the God with a Blue Throat – and is now once again used as a place of worship. A stream, built by one of Akbar's governors, trickles through a delightful spiral channel and is usually filled with sweet-scented water.

To get here, cycle south along Main Road for less than 1km until you see a large white water tower. Turn right here and follow the road as it twists and turns past villages all the way to Neelkanth (about 2km). You can continue from here, past more remote villages, for about another kilometre to reach the still-standing gateway of the now ruined Songarh Fort, from where there are more great views.

Jain Temple

Entered by a kaleidoscopic potpourri of colour, this complex is a splash of kitsch among the Islamic monuments. The richly decorated temples feature marble, silver and gold Tirthankaras with jade eyes and behind them is a theme park-like museum with a walk-on replica

of Shatrunjaya, the hilltop temple complex at Palitana in Gujarat. In the colourful murals, bears devour sinners' arms, crocodiles chew their heads, and demons saw one evil character in half, lengthways.

Saturday Haat

This colourful weekly haat (market) behind Jama Masjid, is similar to ones held all over the Bastar region, a tribal stronghold of Chhattisgarh. Adivasis (tribespeople) walk kilometres to come here to buy and sell goods ranging from mountains of red chillies to dried mahua (a flower used to make a potent liquor of the same name). A local variety of tamarind that is sold outside makes for a tangy snack.

10am–dusk

Accommodation

You get noticeably less for your money in Mandu and wi-fi is hard to come by.

Hotel Rupmati

HOTEL ₹₹

7292 2652; Main Rd; r from ₹1750, with AC ₹2100 Clean and colourful rooms with large bathrooms are perched on the edge of a cliff with great views of the valley below. Air-con itself (and a little less upkeep) is the only difference between the non-AC and AC rooms. There's a restaurant and delightful lawn for outdoor eating with views.

Bite into piping hot samosas during a halt at Mandu



Malwa Retreat

MPSTDC ₹₹

7292 263221; www.mptourism.com; Main Rd; r/tents ₹2050/3650, with AC ₹3230 This is MP Tourism's cheaper option, with air-cooled and air-con rooms and nicely appointed tents with valley views. The newish spick-and-span Malwa Retreat Cafeteria is a step up for Mandu's dining scene and the reception doubles as the Tourist Interpretation Centre, where you can arrange local guides, (half-day ₹375), being close to the village.

Malwa Resort

MPSTDC ₹₹

7292 263235; www.mptourism.com; Main Rd; r with AC from ₹4070 The best thing about this family-friendly MP Tourism property, 2km south of the village, is the morning chai in the lakeside gazebo, watching local fishermen cast their nets over Sagar Talao lake. Otherwise, there are large gardens dotted with comfortable cottages, children's play areas, and a pool, restaurant and bar.

Rama Guesthouse

GUESTHOUSE ₹

7292 263251; ₹300, without bathroom ₹200 Made up of a row of simple rooms off a courtyard that leads to the small Rama Temple, accommodation here is slightly more atmospheric than fellow budget choices. Some bathrooms have showers and sit-down flush toilets, but these are still very basic digs. Walk through an archway between two shops by the bus stand to get here. The reception is beyond the rooms, inside the temple grounds,

**Eating****Shivani Restaurant**

INDIAN ₹

Main Rd; mains ₹60–180, thali ₹80–180; 9am–10pm The subtle canteen-style interior of this no-nonsense diner with plastic tables and chairs is appreciatively understated compared with the gaudy exterior, but it's the good, honest and cheap food that overshadows both. The menu is extensive and includes solid thalis plus local specialities such as Mandu kofta (dumplings in a mild sauce). South Indian breakfasts are also available, as are lassi and coffee. It also has open-air 'garden' seating across the street.

Yatrika

INDIAN ₹

Main Rd; mains ₹90–280; 8–10am, noon–3pm & 7–10pm This small cafe at Malwa Retreat dishes out veg and non-veg Indian meals in very flashy contemporary premises with an open kitchen. If you want a cold beer you'll need to head to the sister property, the Malwa Resort.

**Shopping****Roopayan**

HANDICRAFTS

Main Rd; 9am–7pm Next to Malwa Resort, this small shop sells good-quality scarves, shawls, bed spreads, and garments made from material that has been block-printed in the nearby village of Bagh.

**Snapshot: The filmi connection**

Madhya Pradesh has a long time association with Bollywood. Stars like Johnny Walker, Jaya Bachchan and Arjun Rampal hail from here. Renowned singer Lata Mangeshkar was born in Indore. The Madhya Pradesh government instituted the Lata Mangeshkar award in the 1980s in her honour.

Bhopal Express (1999) The film about a young married couple who fall victim to the gas leak tragedy in 1984 starred Kay Kay Menon, Nethra Raguraman and Naseeruddin Shah.

Asoka (2001) Bollywood A-listers Shah Rukh Khan and Kareena Kapoor acted in this period epic drama on Emperor Ashoka. The film's locations included Pachmarhi, Hoshangabad, the majestic Ahilya Fort and the marble rocks off Bhedaghat among other picturesque locations across the state.

Peepli Live (2010) The modern satire on televised fake news was filmed at Badwai village and in and around Bhopal.

Rajneeti (2011) A political thriller with Ranbir Kapoor, Katrina Kaif and Arjun Rampal. Locations included Moti Masjid and Kotra Sultanabad.

Aarakshan (2011) Bhopal's Badi Jheel or Upper Lake and Bhojtal played backdrop to dramatic scenes in this Bachchan starrer.

Paan Singh Tomar (2012) The biopic of the sportsman turned dacoit of the Chambal valley was filmed across Morena in MP.

Bhopal: A Prayer for Rain (2014) Martin Sheen, Mischa Barton and Kal Penn act in this drama about the gas tragedy at the Union Carbide factory in Bhopal.

Lion (2016) The biopic film on little Saroo from Khandwa in MP who was adopted by a family in Australia won hearts and awards.

The marble rocks feature prominently in Asoka





JABALPUR

Why Go?

Domestic tourists mostly come here to visit the Marble Rocks, an attractive river gorge, but foreigners use it mainly as a launch pad for the famous tiger parks – Kanha, Bandhavgarh and Pench.

Quick Facts

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Air India flies to Delhi on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. SpiceJet flies to Delhi and Mumbai daily.

More than 10 daily trains leave for Satna, from where you can proceed to Khajuraho. For Bandhavgarh National Park, take a train to Umaria.

In the city, a cycle-rickshaw from the train station to Russel Chowk is ₹25.

Autorickshaws are usually double the price.

WHEN TO GO

Nov–Mar

GREAT FOR



White mineral deposits gleam on the Marble Rocks on the River Narmada

Sights

Rani Durgavati Museum

A collection of 10th-century sculptures is on display, while upstairs are galleries for stone and copper inscriptions, ancient coins and photographs of Bhedaghat's 64 Yogini Temple.

Indian/foreigner ₹10/100, camera/video ₹50/200; 10am–5pm Tue–Sun

Tiger Safari

This agency – involved in tiger conservation – can customise safari tours throughout eastern MP. Photography wildlife tours are a speciality, and they handle birding and cultural itineraries as well.

₹8120445454; www.thetigersafari.com; ₹13,500 to ₹66,000 per day for customised safaris for two people all-inclusive of vehicle, accommodation, tours etc

Marble Rocks

Carved by the Narmada River, this naturally occurring gorge looms over the river for 3km. The name 'marble' is attributed to the high-on-magnesium white look of the craggy rocks. It makes for a picnic spot. The

boatsmen also sing local ditties as they row you down the river.
Bhedaghat, 22km from Jabalpur

Tilwara Ghat

A ghat on the Narmada River, stands in memory of Mahatma Gandhi, whose ashes were also brought here after his death. Visit the Tilwadeswar Temple for Shiva here. Near Marble Rocks; dawn–dusk

Beohar Palace

Visit the historic and striking palace of the Beohars. The palace was a focal point when Gandhi, Nehru and other leaders stayed in the army city of Jabalpur in 1933. Gandhi's memorabilia are also showcased. Beohar–Niwas Rd

Accommodation & Eating

Hotel Wardhman

HOTEL ₹

₹7614006002; www.hotelwardhman.com; Russel Crossing; s/d from ₹1440/1680 (incl breakfast) The Wardhman is Russel Chowk's best deal. Rooms are new and clean – save the odd musty



River Narmada is the lifeline of Madhya Pradesh

Kalchuri Residency

MPSTDC ₹

₹7612678491; www.mptourism.com; South Civil Lines; s/d from ₹3860/4200 (incl breakfast) One of the nicest MP Tourism properties in the state, this government hotel is located in the quieter Civil Lines area just south of the train station. It has large, modern deluxe AC rooms with spacious bathrooms. Standard AC rooms are nearly as good. There's a nice restaurant (mains ₹130 to ₹310) and a spacious pub (beer from ₹225).

Lodge Shivalaya

HOTEL ₹

₹7612625188; Napier Town; s/d from ₹460/560, r with AC from ₹1200 (incl breakfast) Rooms are basic, but are clean enough for one night and come with TVs and small bathrooms. The first floor rooms open onto a large shared balcony.

Yellow Chilli

NORTH INDIAN ₹

www.theyellowchilli.com; Dixit Pride, Napier Town; mains ₹240–360; noon–midnight This higher-end Indian chain, the domain of celeb chef Sanjeev Kapoor, is a gastro-godsend in Jabalpur. The khurcha saag murgh was our favourite dish in all of MP.

Saheb's

Food Junction

MUGHLAI ₹

Russel Chowk; meals ₹80–300; 11am–11.30pm Offering the best non-veg in Russel Chowk, this restaurant isn't

afraid to spice things up with their fiery gravies (mutton curry, kadhai chicken). Eat up.

Indian Coffee House SOUTH INDIAN ₹
www.indiancoffeehousejabalpur.com; Hotel India; coffee from ₹10, mains from ₹60; 7am–10pm Classic for filter coffee and South Indian breakfasts.

Shopping

Mrignayanee

HANDICRAFTS

Civic centre, Marhatal The state-run emporium is an easy shopping destination for elegant Chanderi and Maheshwari saris, textiles, artefacts, Gond art, jewellery, souvenirs and handicrafts of Madhya Pradesh under one roof.

Detour: Ghughua Fossil Park

The Ghughua Fossil National Park, in Dindori district, has yielded precious plant fossils over 60 million years old that date back to the Gondwana supercontinent time. It was declared a National Park in 1983. Plant fossils of 18 family species have been discovered here, including eucalyptus, date palm, banana, jamun and more. These are displayed in a tiny museum. 105km west from Jabalpur railway station; best reached by road



KANHA NATIONAL PARK

Why Go?

Madhya Pradesh is the king of the jungle when it comes to tiger parks, and Kanha is the most famous. The precious forest of Kanha is vast, a real Kipling territory, offering you a complete safari experience. Tigers, leopards and huge populations of deer and antelope, including the rare barasingha (deer) reside in the sal forests and vast meadows. The park is also home to more than 300 bird species.

Quick Facts

GETTING THERE & AROUND

The closest airports to Kanha lie in Jabalpur (133km) and Nagpur (261km). From here, pick-ups can be arranged by the resort you're staying in at an additional cost. Jabalpur, Nagpur and Gondia serve as rail junctions. Mumbai and Delhi are connected to these by a vast network of trains.

There are three entry points for Kanha, of which only two have major

tourist activity. Khatia Gate in Khatia village is quite popular; other gates into the park include Mukki, 45km southeast of Khatia, and Sarhi, 60km northeast.

WHEN TO GO

Mar–May

GREAT FOR



Kanha is a famous park to spot tigers on a safari

Sights

The Forest

There are four zones inside the forest; Kanha, Sarhi, Kisli and Mukki. Of these, Kanha is the most attractive to visitors, affording more sightings than the others although this obviously depends on the movement of animals. The River Banjar cuts through the forest as the key water provider to the animals.

Gonds and Baiga tribals live in this region, still keeping their traditions alive, but slightly urbanised thanks to the resorts that employ many of them. A walking trip to these villages makes for an interesting orientation to the tribal culture of the region.

You'll see plenty of langur monkeys, the odd gaur (Indian bison) maybe even a family or two of wild boar and the odd lone jackal or two. There are two safari slots each day: morning (roughly 6am to 11am) and afternoon (roughly 3pm to 6pm). The morning safaris are longer and tend to produce more tiger sightings.

Kanha zone Indian/foreigner ₹1980/4010, other zones Indian/foreigner ₹1370/2690, Gypsy (4WD) ₹2500/3000 (depending on the pick-up point) plus ₹300 for forest guides

Timings: Summer 5.30–11am, 3.30–6.45pm; Winter 6–11am, 2.30–5.30pm

Kanha is home to tribals, woodlands and wild animals



Top Tip: Knowing the big cats

The highlights of the forest include Munna, the male, which has prominent stripes on his forehead that spell CAT. Link 7, Kingfisher, Bawa, Chhoti Mada and Bheem are the other popular tigers. The hard ground swamp deer (barasingha) is unique to this topography – it is not found anywhere else in Central India.

Accommodation & Eating

Inside the forest

Note, while lodgings in the buffer zone enjoy a wonderfully natural forest location, there are no facilities that are available in the village that lies just outside the park. You'll need to have a room booked here in advance in order to get past security at Khatia Gate. If you're walking in, book at the MP Tourism Tourist Information Booth next to Khatia Gate. Certain resorts offer the American Plan (that includes the cost of meals too besides lodging). Check while booking.

Banjaar Tola

RESORT ₹₹₹
9303651100; www.tajsafaris.com; Kanha National Park; d ₹50,500 (incl 2 safaris, all meals) The super luxury camp set up by Taj Safaris is known to transport you to an ethereal atmosphere. Expect other worldly amenities and facilities, despite having a camp-like feel to the accommodation. The tented suites are pitched next to the Banjar River; bird songs and the sound of the river are as relaxing as a lullaby.

Kipling Camp

HOTEL ₹₹₹
11 65196377; www.kiplingcamp.com; Mocha Village; American plan d deluxe/ private cottage ₹9400/10,500 (incl activities) A wonderful, laid-back wildlife lodge hosted by one of India's most formidable tiger proponents, former Nat Geo photographer Belinda Wright. It's as informative as it is relaxing to stay in this jungle setting where wildlife discussions follow excellent communal meals (Indian for lunch, Continental for dinner) and guests retire to rustic-chic lodges slightly scented with the essence of English colonialism. Nature abounds in the fenceless grounds where

If You Like: Corbett Foundation

Visit the prestigious foundation for an insight into wildlife conservation, awareness, tribal livelihoods through a museum and special initiatives for the local community.

7636 290300; www.corbettfoundation.org; Kanha office, village Baherakhar, Near Baihar, P.O. Nikkum, Dist. Balaghat

langurs and chitals make regular appearances, only to be outshined by an occasional tiger and leopard flyby. You can also swim in the river with Tara, the camp's memorable 55-year-old elephant, a truly extraordinary experience.

MUKKI GATE

Singinawa Jungle Lodge RESORT ₹₹₹

124 4908610; www.singinawajunglelodge.com; near Mukki Gate; American plan d from ₹14,500 Award winning hospitality awaits at Singinawa. Apart from the luxurious rooms with superior amenities, it is the 1000sq ft museum celebrating the history of the Gond and Baiga tribes that is the most fascinating part of the lodge.

Infinity Resorts RESORT ₹₹₹

9650193662; www.infinityresorts.com; near Mukki Gate; American plan d from ₹8000 Choose from large villas or tented style rooms at Infinity Resorts, where the local Gond art is integrated with the design. The resort has an amply rustic vibe about it that fits in well with the travel theme. It is fairly close to the park and the resort can arrange the safaris with ease for you.

Chitvan Jungle Lodge RESORT ₹₹₹

8860518887; www.chitvan.com; near Mukki Gate; American plan ste from ₹8000 The four different kinds of suites in the resort echo with the jungle atmosphere. Soothing colours of the

decor and furnishings, and rooms overlooking a small lake or a copse of trees is all one wants to be one with nature. Chitvan offers just that. The personal terrace is the most coveted place for the guests, where they can slowly sip their tea and take in the sounds from the jungle.

Salban– The Kanha Homestay HOMESTAY ₹₹₹

7692835206/9818403038; facebook/salbankanahomestay; for bookings salbankanha@gmail.com; Baherakhar Village; s/d ₹5000/7000 (incl meals) Foodies first, a former travel publisher and a wildlife professional came together to build a home in the jungle. What's to complain about? You get up and close to the jungle and enjoy the comforts of homey living in this sprawling homestead with sal and fruit trees. Huge verandahs, roomy ensuite bedrooms and a library make your stay comfy. They also arrange jungle walks, lake visits and safaris, if you request in advance.

Muba at Mukki RESORT ₹₹₹

9303037453; www.mubaresorts.com; Village Bahmani; d mud house/deluxe/cottage ₹4800/5000/8000 Located slightly away from the gate of the jungle, Muba offers a taste of the rustic countryside in its surroundings, in contrast with the plush interiors that you can relax in at the resort. The great part of Muba is that it offers multiple options in different price brackets, ensuring that it appeals to a larger variety of

travellers. Surrounded by a thicket, you feel that you're in the heart of the jungle anyway – the sounds of the forest only enforce the sense of nature and solitude.

KHATIA (KISLI SIDE)

Kanha Earth Lodge RESORT ₹₹₹

124 2970497; www.kanhaearthlodge.com; near Khitia Gate; American plan d from ₹18,000 Located adjacent to a small tribal hamlet, Kanha Earth Lodge sits on 16 acres of natural forest land and prides itself on converting even the most ardent wildlife non-enthusiast into a nature lover. The warm hospitality and attention to detail is commendable, as is the knowledge of the naturalist and manager of the

resort, who accompany guests to the forests.

Tuli Tiger Resort RESORT ₹₹₹

7489 611006; www.tulihotels.com; near Khitia Gate; American plan cottage/tent d from ₹6,500/11,000 Wake up to the sound of chirping birds or the cheeky calls of langurs close to your window. Bamboo thickets and mixed trees grow on the property itself, inducting you into the jungle just as you step in. The refreshing yellow colour adds an endearing charm to the ambience of the ivy-clad cottages. A swimming pool, spa and pavilions to relax are part of the resort.

Salban–The Kanha Homestay offers a comfy stay in the jungle





Courtyard House HOMESTAY ₹₹₹

9425153571; www.courtyardhousekanha.com; near Khatia Gate; American plan d from ₹6,500 The home styled Courtyard House is one of the most charming properties in Kanha. Choose the upper floor that has rooms that overlook the pool below and the forest canopy in the distance.

Kahna Earth Lodge brings you close to the jungle experience

Pugmark Resort HOTEL ₹₹₹

7649 277291; www.pugmarkresort.com; American plan d luxury cottage/pool villa room ₹9500/25000 These spacious village-like cottages in Khatia are just a step above basic but bright

If You Like: MPSTDC options

Mocha Baghira Jungle Resort 7649 277244; near Kisli Gate; ₹3,790–4,990 Located on the banks of the Banjar River, the resort offers AC rooms and can arrange nature walks and village visits.

Kanha Safari Lodge 7636 290715; 500km from Mukki Gate; ₹3590–4,990 This is a good mid-range option and is family friendly.

and airy and set around a pleasant garden. It's a well-oiled family-run operation, and Rahul, the owner/manager, nails five-star service for three-star prices. From breakfast on, the food is outstanding – they even use milk from their own two Holsteins. Wi-fi throughout.

Motel Chandan HOTEL ₹₹₹

7649 277220, 9425855220; www.motelchandan.com; ₹1000–1400, with AC ₹2100 You get great-value modern rooms, some with teak-wood accents, right in Khatia village. The owner organises safaris with four of his own 4WDs and two resident naturalists. American plan (meals included) runs ₹500 extra per person.

Machan Complex GUESTHOUSE ₹₹₹

9993672827; dm ₹100, ₹500–700 Machan has bucket hot-water rooms in different buildings, set around a huge banyan tree. There's a new dorm building, basic mud-hut doubles, and larger rooms with sit-down flush toilets. The owner, Anil, is a naturalist and extremely welcoming. About 1km before Khatia Gate, on the right.

Shopping

Kaladirgha HANDICRAFTS

7642 291859; 6am–10pm; closed July–Oct Located close to Mandla gate, the shop is packed with wildlife themed bric-a-brac – tees, magnets, caps etc. The other half has metal

handicrafts made by the tribals of the region. It has a lot to choose from for small souvenirs.

Aranyak

HANDICRAFTS

Khatia Gate, Opp Motel Chandan; 9am–9pm Aranyak Art Emporium is one of the few bonafide souvenir shops near the Khatia Gate of Kanha National Park. Tribal inspired handicrafts are available here. The shop may remain closed during off-season.

A breakfast buffet at Singinawa Jungle Lodge





EXPERT RECOMMENDATION

Safari watch

Dr K. Ullas Karanth is Director for Science-Asia, Wildlife Conservation Society. He shares some tips on how sensitivity goes a long way whilst on a safari.

- Are you on a tiger safari? Follow all the rules of the park and listen to your guide. Some basics first: no music, no loud chatter, no leaning out of or getting off your vehicle. Wear field clothes that blend with nature: monkeys and birds that warn other creatures do spot obvious colours. Take a pair of binoculars along and a camera with a 300 mm or longer telephoto lens if you are a photographer.
- Tigers are generally shy of being watched; what you can expect is a fleeting glimpse in most parks. Yet, due to persistent efforts some tigers can be spotted, particularly in the reserves of Central India and Rajasthan. This affords you a wonderful opportunity, which even a sharp hunter or mighty king had not enjoyed. Be grateful for that; reflect for a moment about the hard work and past sacrifices of many foresters, conservationists and local people who have opened a window for you now. Think of how you can help local conservation efforts.
- For a quality 'tiger experience', learn to appreciate the cues all around you—alarm calls of various species, tracks in the dust, a distant growl. Total silence enhances the quality of such a 'tiger experience'; even when you do not actually see the cat.
- Your vehicles or elephants crowding around a tiger, which clearly shows its unease by growling, snarling or twitching its ears is not at all a worthwhile 'tiger experience'. Do not practise or encourage such bad behaviour. Maintaining the officially prescribed distances and time interval specified for watching tigers will improve the quality of experience for both visitors and tigers! Conservation India's excellent guidelines (www.conservationindia.org/resources/ethics) should be taken to heart.
- The jungle is full of other interesting sights, sounds and smells that you can soak up. There are myriad other animals, plants and even rock formations that are fascinating in their own right. Get rid of the trivial mindset that you are in the jungle *only for the tiger*, and not for these other natural wonders around you. If you really want to see only tigers, go to the nearest good zoo. It is cheaper and more efficient.



A spotted deer and langur in Bandhavgarh



BANDHAVGARH NATIONAL PARK

Why Go?

If your sole reason for visiting a national park in India is to see a tiger, look no further. Bandhavgarh is India's top tiger playground and a couple of days here should net you a tiger sighting in this relatively small park.

i Quick Facts

GETTING THERE & AROUND

The closest airport to Bandhavgarh National Park is Jabalpur (200km) and flights ply from Delhi/Mumbai. By train, reach the closest nodal junctions of Umaria (35km, ₹1000 by cab), Katni (100km, ₹2500) or take an overnight train from Bhopal. If you are covering a larger park trail by road, cabs are the best bet; else ask your hotel for a pickup.

The forest has three gates, of which

Tala is the best option. There are 20 Gypsies that enter from this gate each time. The other gates, Khitali and Mugdhi, allow 15 and 20, respectively. Most resorts lie on the Tala side.

WHEN TO GO

Mar–May (Jun–Oct park closed)

GREAT FOR



Bandhavgarh National Park is India's popular tiger destination

Sights

The Forest

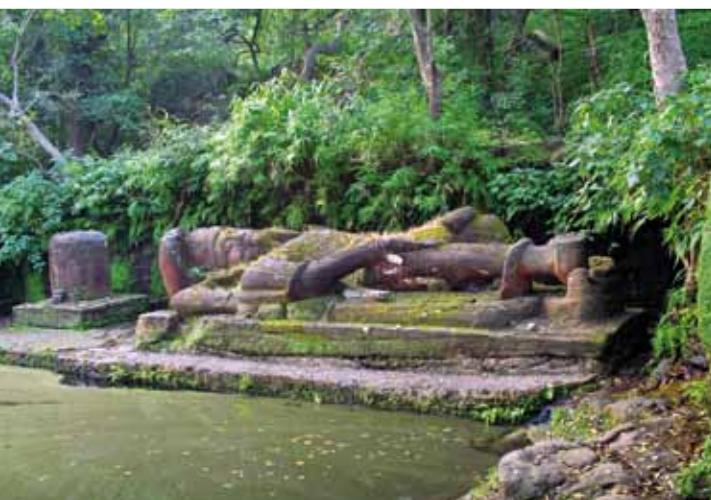
Primarily a sal tree forest, Bandhavgarh National Park stretches over 1150sq km and came under Project Tiger in 1993. As an erstwhile hunting reserve of the maharajas of Rewa, this land was a rich repository of tigers, with 111 of them becoming game by 1914. The forest became world renowned when a small population of white tigers was found here. Go here to immerse in the cathartic atmosphere of the rich biodiversity of the forest.

The forest boasts of a high density of Royal Bengal tigers (68 as of 2013). There are also more than 40 rarely seen leopards and more commonly

sighted animals such as deer, wild boar and langurs.

The park takes its name from an ancient fort perched on top of 800m-high cliffs. According to the Ramayana, the fort was a brother's home-gift, or Rama's gift to Lakshmana. Its ramparts provide a home for vultures, blue rock thrushes and crag martins. There are other monuments that lie dilapidated now with centuries of weathering. Below that, the forest is a blanket of green with a mix of sal and bamboo trees, and the River Charnaganga runs through it. A couple of days here should reward you a tiger sighting as this is a

Bandhavgarh's ancient ruins refer to the Ramayana legend



Top Tip: Animal watch

Bameria, a handsome male tiger, who died in June 2016, has inspired legends around his sightings. Monnga, Kankati, Bheem and Bhagoda are the other big cats who are star attractions for tiger watchers and wildlife enthusiasts. Other animals like wild boar, sambar, sloth bears, leopards, jackals, hyenas and over 250 species of birds and a large number of amphibians are also present in the forests.

relatively small park.

www.bandhavgarhnationalpark.com

Tala Indian/foreigner ₹2690/5330, others Indian/foreigner ₹1370/2690 plus Gypsy ₹2200 plus ₹500 for the forest guides (per 6 in a Gypsy)

Timings: Summer 5.30–11am, 3.30–6.45pm (sunset), Winter 6–11am, 2.30–5.30pm (sunset); timings change by a few minutes daily

Interpretation Centre

Find interesting exhibits at this museum detailing the history and legends of Bandhavgarh, plus some superb tiger photos on the 1st floor. It's on your right just before the village.

11am–1.30pm & 6–8pm, closed Wed evening

MP Tourism Canter

Book one of MP Tourism's two 12-seat canters, which only traverse the Magdhi and Khitali zones of the park for a safari experience.

7627 265366; www.mptourism.com; White Tiger Forest Lodge; Indian/foreigner ₹1200/2400

Accommodation & Eating

Bagh Sarai

RESORT ₹₹₹

9818680958; www.baghsarai.com; American plan deluxe private bungalow ₹6950 Bagh Sarai offers private bungalows in the thick of the forest. The centre building is where all guests meet in the evenings to discuss the sightings of the day. A drink from 'Jackal's House'; the in-house bar follows.

Bandhav Vilas

RESORT ₹₹₹

9810726252; www.bandhavvilas.com; American plan d villa ₹9000 Bandhav Vilas has over 1,000sq feet spread out with rooms that are refreshingly luxurious with open showers, herbal accessories and plush decor. Despite that, one feels in rhythm with nature. Maybe it has something to do with more earthy influences like a large stone statue of sleeping Vishnu, which greets visitors at the entrance of the resort. A wide courtyard doubles as an amphitheatre where local performances are held in the

evening, surrounded by the dining area and a few rooms.

Samode Safari Lodge RESORT ₹₹₹
 ☎ 9810726252; www.samode.com; d American plan ₹66,550 (incl 2 safaris) Located away from the entry gate of the forest, Samode allows you to experience and immerse yourself in the local culture as well as orientation to one of the best jungles of India. Unmatched hospitality and luxury is the theme of the lodge that tops honeymoon and safari lists for travellers from across the world. Its vernacular architecture is the best part of the resort.

The MPSTDC-run White Tiger Forest Lodge is near the park



Kings Lodge HOTEL ₹₹
 ☎ 124 2970497; www.pugdundeesafaris.com; d American plan ₹18,000 Located in the heart of tiger country, Kings Lodge is one of the old resorts that etched the importance of eco conscious accommodations in the region – in its own rustic yet luxurious way. Steeped in love for wildlife, this is usually the pad for many photography workshops and talks. Every evening is reserved for wildlife themed movies. You can choose between rooms that are close to the main building with the dining room, or away into the silence.

Nature Heritage Resort HOTEL ₹₹
 ☎ 7653 265351; www.natureheritageresort.com; American plan d from ₹7500 A wonderful mid-range choice with a slick safari operation. The very comfortable adobe-toned cottages, strewn amid a wealth of bamboo-accented everything, approach boutique levels, and service is on point. Rooms 109 and 110 catch the lobby-only wi-fi. The owner survived a tiger attack in 2003 – ask him about it!

Treehouse Hideaway HOTEL ₹₹
 ☎ 124 4222657; www.treehousehideaway.com; s/d American plan ₹15,000/17,000, Jungle Plan ₹28,000/30,000 With undoubtedly the most special beds in Bandhavgarh, these five massive tree houses clock in at 625sq m each and are dismantled

and reassembled each season 5m off the ground in all their luxurious glory. Beautiful four-poster beds and spacious outdoor porches frame the jungle surrounds, and privacy is paramount.

White Tiger Forest Lodge MPSDTC ₹₹
 www.mptourism.com; Village Tala; American plan ₹4490, with AC ₹4990 onwards Located just 2 km from the Bandhavgarh National Park, this MPSTDC property offers furnished rooms featuring modern amenities. A bar, restaurant, swimming pool and massage centre offer plenty of options to indulge. The resort is used for conferences and tours to the National Park.



Luxury set in rustic surrounds awaits at Kings Lodge

Tigergarh LODGE ₹₹
 ☎ 7489826868; www.tigergarh.com; s/d ₹4000/4500, d American plan ₹5000/5500 (incl breakfast) This 11-room relative newcomer sits under the nose of the surrounding mountains and integrates with nearby villages in an organic manner. The peaceful place and the fashionable country-style cottages provide comfort for the price, including four-poster beds and rain-style showers.

Malaya Cafe CAFE ₹₹
 Tala Main Rd; snacks ₹10–120, breakfast ₹350; 9.30am–8pm This welcoming cafe run by an extroverted Gujarati woman does fabulous three-course brunches (bookings essential) that are the perfect finish to a

morning safari. Real filter coffee or lemongrass chai, fresh fruit, porridge and lentil pancakes typically find their way to your plate. This is also an excellent souvenir shop – Neelam spends two to three months per year driving herself around India picking up wares – and is also the local Western Union rep.

Kolkata Restaurant DHABA ₹₹
 Tala Main Rd; mains ₹70–330, thali ₹140; 8am–9pm Friendly chef-owner Amal Jana is a one-man show at this glorified dhaba in the middle of the village where he whips up homely and tasty thalis – he reckons it's due to the mustard oil – that can be kicked up a notch with a side of his spicy tomato chutney. Omelettes, Chinese and limited Continental dishes are also available.



EXPERT RECOMMENDATION

Beyond the big cat

Bhavna Menon works as a project coordinator with Last Wilderness Foundation, an NGO working towards wildlife conservation. Here is her list for animal watch.

- **Bandhavgarh** With the highest density of tigers, this is the best chance to spot the big cat and for photo ops. The park has leopards, sloth bears, jackals, foxes, gaur and herbivores like sambar, chital, barking deer etc.
- **Satpura Tiger Reserve** Named after the 'seven hills' range, this picturesque reserve has hills, ravines, gorges and backwaters. This tiger reserve also has leopards and sloth bears and migratory birds. Resorts offer boating on Denwa backwaters, night walks and village walks.
- **Panna Tiger Reserve** Panna, with its stunning landscape and a healthy tiger population, offers many photo opportunities including riverscapes and dappled grasslands. Visit Dudhwa to sight vultures and the occasional falcon. Jungle cats, leopards, wild dogs, sloth bears, sambar, chital, nilgai and porcupines coexist with the big cats.
- **Pench Tiger Reserve** Kipling's inspiration, the forests are true Bagheera country, dotted with hills and rocky terrains with the Pench River snaking through the reserve. Tiger sightings are good as are sightings of other animals. A photographer's delight.
- **Kanha Tiger Reserve** The best maintained park in central India, Kanha, with its lush sal forests, is stunning. It is also home to the endangered barasingha (swamp deer) not found in other central Indian parks. Kanha is also popular for birding.
- **Sanjay – Dubri** Sanjay – Dubri is part of the same contiguous forest. Sanjay is a tiger reserve and Dubri forms the wildlife sanctuary with blackbuck, common Indian fox and civet populations. Sanjay has a successful tiger breeding programme.



Madhya Pradesh has a large population of avians like this Tickell's blue flycatcher



PANNA NATIONAL PARK

Why Go?

Refreshingly remote, the Panna experience is more relaxed than the other forests, where the scramble to see a tiger can sometimes overtake the experience of the jungle. Incessant birdsong and the gurgle of the Ken River keeps you company. Keep your fingers crossed to see a tigress walk her cubs nonchalantly in front of you.

Quick Facts

GETTING THERE & AROUND

The nearest airport to Panna is Khajuraho (24km). The city is well-connected to major Indian towns, especially those in the tourist sector like Varanasi and Delhi. Satna is the closest rail head (75km). In fact, the roads from key cities and from Bhopal are also good, but during the monsoons, add a couple of hours to your commute.

WHEN TO GO

Mar–May (Jul–Oct park closed)

GREAT FOR



Panna National Park by the Ken River offers a picturesque jungle experience

Sights

The Forest

In 2009, Panna National Park was devoid of all tiger population and came under the project of rehabilitating those from Kanha and Bandhavgarh. The 547sq km of forested land is replete with other animals like the leopard, chital, chinkara, nilgai, sambhar and sloth bear. This, along with over 200 species of birds and ample reptiles, makes the forest an essential on the travel list. The ghariyals (crocodiles) in the Ken River that flows for over

The Ken River Lodge offers a unique night safari

72km inside the park are something that no other national park in the region can offer. The deep gorges formed by the Ken River are the highlight of the forest – they make the topography unique. There are two entry points to Panna National Park: Madla and Hinauta, of which the former is used more actively. Indian/foreigner ₹1320/2640 per jeep plus Gypsy cost and forest guard ₹300 per jeep. (6 people in one jeep) plus ₹2000 per Gypsy Timings: 5.30–10.30am and 4.00–6.45pm (changes everyday by 10–15 minutes depending on the sunrise and sunset)

Night Safari

A night safari organised in the buffer zone, is also an exclusive aspect of



the Panna National Park.

₹773 2275235; www.kenriverlodge.com; Indian/foreigner ₹6000/7000

Boat Ride on the River

A boat ride on the Ken River offers an exciting opportunity to see the river crocodiles up close. Indian per boat/foreigner per head ₹200/1000.

Accommodation & Eating

Ken River Lodge

LODGE ₹₹₹

₹773 2275235; www.kenriverlodge.com; d American plan cottages/huts ₹11,000/8000 The wooden dining pavilion overlooking the Ken River is clearly the best spot in the resort. You need to cross a narrow bridge to reach the main resort area. The passionate naturalists and owner of Ken River Lodge make all the difference to your experience. This is one of the few resorts in the area that remains open during the monsoon. They also organise a night safari.

Sarai at Toria

LODGE ₹₹₹

₹124 4062481; www.saraiattoria.com; d cottage ₹19,800 full board The eight cottages of Sarai at Toria are flanked by tall grasses that highlight the outdoorsy effect of the resort. The main dining area and the library are abuzz with travellers in the evenings, eager to share stories from the

forest. The main building overlooks the Ken River below.

Panna Tiger Resort

HOTEL ₹₹₹

₹712 6653666; www.tulihotels.com; American plan d ₹6550 Choose the outer wing of the Panna Tiger Resort that overlooks the River Ken. The bright white rooms and the outside pavilion shine through as great features for the resort.

Jungle Camp

MPSTDC ₹₹₹

₹773 2275275; www.mptourism.com; tent d ₹2990 (breakfast additional) Run by Madhya Pradesh Tourism, Jungle Camp is a superior tented accommodation with en suite bathrooms, complete with a jungle gym for kids and an in-house restaurant. It's a popular haunt for many here to stop for a meal. The restaurant dishes out quick Chinese, Indian and Continental fare.

K Raj Tiger Resort

HOTEL ₹₹₹

₹773 2275260; www.krajtigerresort.com; d ₹1500 (breakfast additional) The simple but clean rooms are comforting, but what really steals the show is the extremely warm hospitality of the K Raj staff. The bright rooms seem a bit off, considering one is in the vicinity of a jungle and attuned to camouflage colours, but the comfortable stay trumps everything. This is an ideal pick for a budget stay.



PENCH NATIONAL PARK

Why Go?

Pench has a touch of green paradise with its sturdy teak tree thickets spread over 758sq km. The national park is named after the Pench River that runs through it, dissecting its rugged topography. Go here to spot Collar Wali, the star tigress, gangs of dholes and families of nervous deer that flit swiftly through the jungle.

1 Quick Facts

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Jabalpur (210km) and Nagpur (95km) are the nodal points to reach Pench. Both cities are connected by airports to major cities in India. A 4WD pick-up can be arranged at an extra cost by the resort that you book. If you're coming from the Bandhavgarh side, then expect a day-long drive of 330km.

WHEN TO GO

Mar–May

GREAT FOR



A safari is the best way to go tiger-spotting in Pench National Park

Sights

The Forest

A mixed forest with a prominent teak tree line, Pench is a popular addition to the tiger trail. It has two major routes inside the forest that overlap in the middle, and by largely reducing the clutter of jeeps, offer a fairly peaceful tryst with the jungle. Apart from keeping your eyes peeled for wildlife, also look out for the 'ghost tree' (white kulu) that serves as a beacon in the thick forest. Pench has the largest population of herbivorous animals (largely deer) in the region. Apart from these, it's easy to spot dholes (Asiatic wild dogs), jackals, wild boar and cheeky macaques. Along with them is a healthy population of tigers, sloth bears, leopards, jackals, 150 plus species of birds, vultures, gliding squirrels and many varieties of snakes. The Asian paradise

flycatcher (state bird of MP) can also be seen here.

Access

Pench National Park has three entry points, Jamtara, Turia and Karmajhiri. Of these, Turia is the most popular one, with many resorts converging around this gate. Jamtara and Karmajhiri lie far away with only a handful of resorts around them. If you do not want to have a package tour ambience, then staying at these resorts might be better. The number of 4WD vehicles (Gypsy) allowed at every entry point is what determines the popularity of a section. Jamtara and Karmajhiri allow six in a day, while Turia has 40 that leave its gates carrying excited travellers.

Indian/foreigner ₹1370/2640 per jeep plus Gypsy cost Karmajhiri/Turia/Jamtara

Go on an exciting tiger trail in Pench



Snapshot: Cat call

Collar Wali, a tigress that had been previously collared for tracking, still roams with the contraption. Other well-known tigers include one named BMW and a tiger with the distinguishable marking of an inverse T on his head.

₹2500/3000/3000 plus forest guard ₹300 per jeep (6 people in one jeep)

Timings: 5.30–10.30am and 4.00–6.45pm (changes every day by 10–15 minutes depending on the sunrise and sunset)



Accommodation & Eating

TURIA GATE

Tathastu

HOTEL ₹₹₹

✓ 7695 232838; www.tathasturesorts.com; d villa/treehouse/tent/cave room ₹13,000/16,000/16,000/18,000 There's an uncomfortable haphazard kitsch to the interior design at this Pench newcomer, but that's immediately forgotten by the incredible value in the villas. Each enormous three-bedroom villa comes with a living room, kitchen, dining room, dip pool and a dedicated cook, waiter and housekeeper. The Flintstonesy cave rooms, the 10m-high tree houses and well-appointed tents are great as well, but are all more expensive than the unbelievably priced villas.

Baghvan Taj

LODGE ₹₹₹

✓ 7695 232847; www.tajsafaris.com; d ₹47,000 full board (incl 2 safaris in

shared jeeps) Taj Hotels has luxury properties at all of MP's major tiger parks, but this discerning choice is the most jungle-y and worth the splurge. Twelve massive bamboo and sal cottages are hidden away amid the forest and feature exquisite artwork and furniture (including gorgeous antique Rajasthani porch swings), indoor-outdoor showers and massive elevated machans (open-air patios). The open-air common areas follow suit, only to be pleasantly offset by the occasional retro appliance, giving an air of whimsy to the place. The food is expectedly divine. A lush pool area and massage room (treatments from ₹2500) round out the luxury.

Mahua Vann

HOTEL ₹₹₹

✓ 9911087646; www.mahuaresorts.com; American plan machan cottages/super deluxe cottages/deluxe cottages d ₹12,000/10,000/8000 Mahua Vann is blessed with thick foliage around for one to be tuned into nature immediately. Cottages with a vintage vibe and a decided dash of luxury create an atmospheric accommodation. While there are plenty of spaces in the resort to relax in, it's the library that one finds hard to tear oneself away from.

Top Tip: Weekend getaway

Many properties at Pench tend to remain open during the monsoon as well, as this is only 167km from Nagpur and is used as a veritable weekend getaway. The more serious, wildlife inclined lodges close down between July and October.

Tuli Tiger Corridor HOTEL ₹₹₹

7695 232859; www.tulihotels.com; American plan cottages/tent cottages from d ₹7,000/11,000 Ultra-luxury cottages dot the 22 acres lush property on the fringes of Pench. This resort satiates all hunger for a luxury holiday blended with the wildlife experience – you'll see that in the spa, swimming pool and superior dining experience that is offered to the guests.

Kipling's Court MPSTDC ₹₹

7695 232830; www.mptourism.com; dm/r American plan ₹1090/3990, r with AC from ₹5690 This government-run property wins in both the budget category (considering prices include all meals, the two well-kept six-bed dorms here are good value) and family category (it boasts the best playground in Turia, and 30-odd rabbits!). The private cottages aren't bad either and are dotted around dutifully manicured gardens. There's also a bar. It's 2km past Turia, about 1km before the park gate.

The Riverwood Forest Retreats HOTEL ₹₹₹

9711326357; www.waxpolhotels.com; American plan d ₹5900 Choose the

garden-facing rooms over the others for a view of the well-manicured lawns and a relaxing setting where one can unplug. Apart from the clean and spacious rooms, the resort offers a pool, spa and activities like nature walks and star gazing.

Jungle Home Resort & Spa HOTEL ₹₹₹

11 46035500; www.welcomheritagehotels.in; d deluxe/suite/cottage ₹7000/9000/7500 (all meals incl) A Welcom Group property, Jungle Home Resort and Spa has a package tourism vibe to it as it entertains a lot of weekend vacationers from Nagpur; but those who are interested in unwinding in the pool and the barbecue area, might enjoy the relaxed no-fuss atmosphere of the place. Serious wildlife enthusiasts are likely to find the place sub par.

Pench Jungle Camp HOTEL ₹₹₹

9999742000; www.penchjunglecamp.com; d ₹11,000 (incl all meals) With cottages tucked away behind small thickets and manicured gardens, Pench Jungle Camp has a family-vacation vibe to it. In fact, you may want to choose the large family

rooms if you're travelling with kids – these are large rooms with two double beds, and not crammed.

Three in-house dogs (Tarzan, Jane and Bagheera) are also a part of the hospitality team that works to make the stay extremely special.

KARMAJHIRI GATE

Pench Tree Lodge LODGE ₹₹₹

11 46035500; www.pugdundeesafaris.com; American plan d ₹18,000 The fact that there are only six treehouses on the property, ensures that one never feels crowded out and yet one gets a lot of attention from the staff. The main pavilion is where one can dine, swim or hang around the first floor common area. The stay throws you right in the middle of a 'Jungle Book' experience with many an anecdote from the staff and plenty of warnings to not carry any food to the luxury treehouse, (in case an animal or a reptile slithers in for a bite). The balconies of the rooms overlook a vast expanse of undergrowth – a soothing melange of green.

JAMTARA GATE

Jamtara Wilderness Camp LODGE ₹₹₹

9190618805; www.jamtarawilderness.com; full board d ₹39,501 (incl 2 safaris) Luxury tented accommodation with all the trappings of a high-end resort ensure super luxurious comfort. Of all the types, the star bed steals the

show; it lies on a wooden platform from where you can gaze at the clear skies.

Mowgli's Land, Forest Rest House REST HOUSE ₹₹

7695 232830; American plan d ₹18,000 Vintage styled and high-ceilinged, Mowgli's Land is a good choice. The rooms are basic but clean. In fact, a smaller wing of six rooms lies just inside the gate. Penny pinchers or earnest wildlife enthusiasts, both tend to book this place.

The Pench Tree Lodge offers a 'Jungle Book' experience up in a treehouse





SATPURA

Why Go?

Deep canyons cut by rivers, walking safaris, a roaring leopard population and a promise to run into a sloth bear makes Satpura one of the most distinct topographies and experiences of Madhya Pradesh's wildlife. Experience the tranquillity of the forest without the noisy touristy bustle.

Quick Facts

GETTING THERE

Bhopal is the closest airport to Satpura, at less than 200km/3 hr. Take a cab from Bhopal for a drop to the reserve's entry point, where the resorts are located (₹9–11 per km, minimum 250km per day, plus additional ₹200 for driver allowance). You can also check with your hotel at Satpura for a pickup.

WHEN TO GO

Mar–May

GREAT FOR



The Satpura biosphere is made up of three wildlife regions

Sights

Satpura Biosphere

Satpura Biosphere includes the region which encompasses both Satpura (Madai region) and Pachmarhi. The Satpura Biosphere is made up of three wildlife regions; Satpura (524sq km) the Bori range and the Pachmarhi range (together add up to 903sq km). It is a large area that spans more than 1427sq km.

Nature walks are a good way to spot animals in the wild



km with the rivers Son and Denwa fracturing the topography as they flow inside the forested region.

The access to the forest (Satpura Tiger Reserve) is via the Madai region, which is interchangeably used as Satpura. Move 93km east of this part and the forest melts into Pachmarhi (p100), a town that stands in the verdant backdrop of the same jungle, but whose focus lies on sightseeing spots – caves, waterfalls, lakes and temples. There is little chance of experiencing the forest in a safari like manner. For that, the Madai region is your best bet.

Forest Circuits

The three main circuits here are Jhinhini Mahal and the more popular Keria and Lagda routes. Churna is a full day loop that keeps you in the forest from 5am until sunset. Imagine the thrill of spending the whole day in the company of beasts and jungle stories from your forest guide. This is one of the very few jungles where people can experience the forest on foot. There are two trails (Bagha Nala and Peeliya), both not more than 10km in length.

There are five ways to experience the jungle – jeep safari, elephant safari, boat, walking and canoe ride. One needs to hop across the Denwa River to start the safari. For the canoe and boat safaris you will be picked up from the edge of the river, where the forest ticketing counter



Snapshot: The legacy of Forsyth

The name Forsyth crops up often in conversations at Satpura. The reason is not hard to find. Captain James Forsyth was a British officer in the 19th century, who was assigned to survey and record Central India's natural resources. His in-depth documentation resonated with love for this vast terrain, its original tribal inhabitants and its wildlife. His book, *The Highlands of Central India*, has eventually served as a rich repository for understanding this region even a whole century later.

stands (on the same bank as the resorts).

Skirting the backwaters of the Denwa River along the forest is a handful of wildlife conservation inclined resorts that have developed this sector with the support of the forest department. In fact, such teamwork is what sets apart Satpura from other noted sanctuaries and national parks. This comparatively lesser-known Tiger Reserve is actually brilliant for serious wildlife enthusiasts who would come here minus the lure of the big cat.

Safari on Foot

The draw lies in the one-of-a-kind walking safari. A healthy population of sloth bears and elusive leopards affords easy sightings here. The backwaters also make this an ideal spot for birders. Those fascinated with reptiles will find ample opportunities to spot snakes, frogs and monitor lizards. Only 15 jeeps enter the forest every day, making this one of the few parks where you may go without seeing another jeep for your entire safari.

₹755 2674302; www.mpforest.gov.in; the boat crossing alone is ₹50 per head for all; jeep safari Indian/foreigner ₹3200/4000 per head (full day I/F ₹6000/8000), incl guide, jeep for 6–7 people, forest permit and boat crossing; elephant safari I/F ₹500/700 (incl of guide and forest permit); boat I/F ₹2000/2500 per boat; walking I/F ₹3750/1400 per head; 3 seater canoes I/F ₹950/1050

Timings: Summer 5–10.30am, 4–6.45pm, winter 6.30–11am, 3–5.30pm

Accommodation & Eating

Denwa

Backwater Escape

JUNGLE

LODGE ₹₹₹

₹9810253436; www.denwabackwaterescape.com; cottages/trehouse d ₹17,000/20,000 full board (safari not incl) Spread over 10 acres of naturally maintained forested land, the Denwa Backwater Escape is a luxury property that overlooks the backwaters of the Denwa River. The main pavilion with the swimming pool is perfect to relax after a safari, but the highlight is in



Reni Pani offers accommodation in tents and cottages

the thrill of visiting the jungle with the knowledgeable naturalist of the property. The hospitality is nuanced with every little detail taken care of – from the morning cup of tea before you leave for the jungle, packed breakfast to eat when you're there, and the refreshing lemonade that meets you just as you return.

Bison Resort MPSTDC ₹₹₹

₹9425011294; www.mptourism.com; ₹3,590 onwards (with breakfast) The state owned resort offers 12 AC deluxe rooms and a multi-cuisine restaurant.

Reni Pani JUNGLE LODGE ₹₹₹

₹755 2661100; www.renipanjunglelodge.com; cottages d ₹22,000 (incl all meals)

When contemporary style meets local aesthetics, the stay is nothing less than gorgeous. The luxury property draws inspiration from local life but infuses luxury seamlessly into it. There are three kinds of units: nullah (brook), hill and forest. Of this, the nullah rooms are situated along the small brooks; the constant sound of water is soothing

Forsyth Lodge JUNGLE LODGE ₹₹₹

₹9302625334; www.forsythlodge.com; cottages/cottages with machan d ₹31,050/₹34,155 full board (plus 2 safaris in shared vehicles) Set on 44 acres of reclaimed forest land, Forsyth Lodge is one of the most eco-inclined luxurious properties of Satpura. Local nuances are reflected in everything in the lodge – the decor, warm local hospitality and even aesthetics inspired from the Gond

tribals of the region. A swimming pool, bush dinner and astronomy sessions on the terrace are some of the favoured experiences, other than a trip into the jungle itself.

The Madhai Resort HOTEL ₹₹₹

₹9424437150; www.themadhairaresort.com; Bijakhari; d AC/non AC ₹2500/2200 (breakfast not incl) The 12-room basic property is one of the few that is suited for budget travellers. The 12 rooms are divided into three blocks that overlook an insipid garden and the kitchen. Don't expect well thought out hospitality or insights about the forests from the locals who manage this. The good part: it is a short walk away from the ticket counter to the forest.

Madhai Riverside Lodge HOTEL ₹₹₹

₹94250443620; www.madhairiversidelodge.com; Sarangpur village; deluxe/super deluxe/luxury room d ₹2500/₹3000/₹3500 (meals not incl) This accommodation may not be the most swank stop in town, but has certainly bagged the best vantage point. All 13 rooms look onto a small garden that stretches into the backwaters of the Denwa River. The rooms are nothing to write home about, but are easy on the pocket, as compared to the plush properties in the region. It lies walking distance from the ticketing counter.

Denwa Backwater Escape has a pavilion that looks into the junglescape



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RESEARCHED AND AUTHORED BY:

Supriya Sehgal' has worked on over 37 books for Lonely Planet and other India-based travel books. It's been a thrilling decade of being on the road for long stretches – an addiction which throws up withdrawal symptoms if she doesn't get on a bus or a train for a month. Madhya Pradesh had remained elusive for a long time until this book gave her an opportunity to explore it. Wild encounters aside, it was Chanderi's raw historical backdrop and Bhopal's stirring food scene that left her smitten – coming from a non foodie, that's all the testimony one needs.

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Senior Commissioning Editor

Sudha G Tilak

Design Manager

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Andrews

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