

## 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 &amp; 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 Gond 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

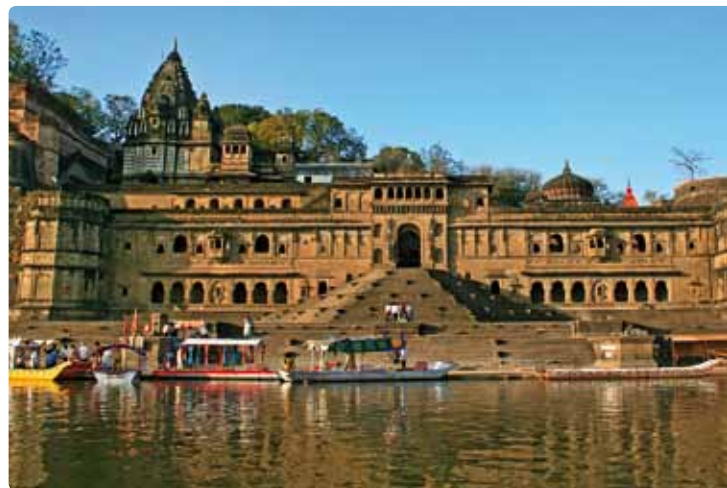
Forts, palaces and temples are reminders of the state's ancient history and its kingdoms. Remnants of the past still cast their glory on the architectural landscape of the state. Madhya Pradesh's royal legacy is experienced through cuisine, sports, hospitality and literature, especially poetry.

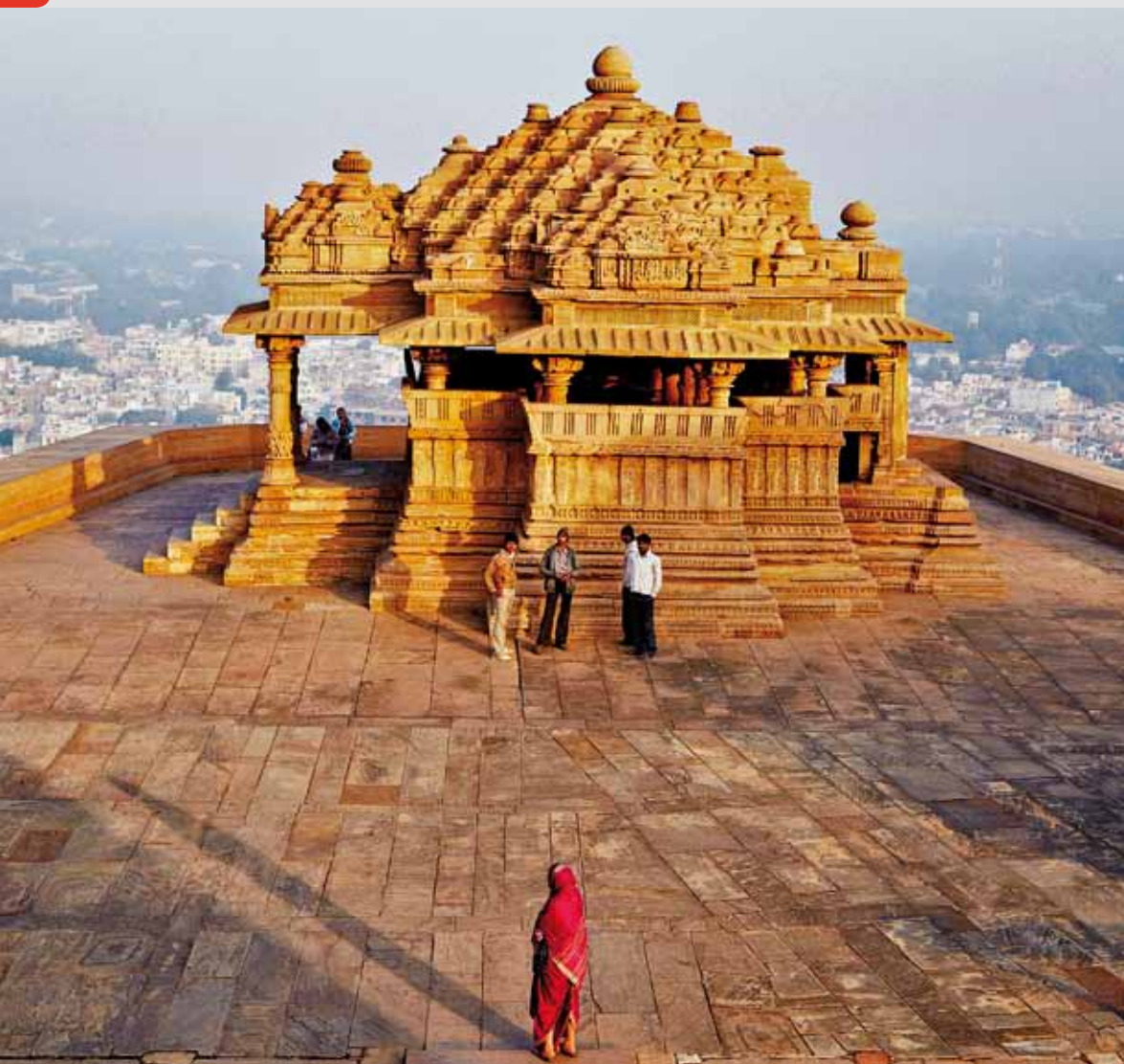
## SPORTING HERITAGE

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

Need to Know .....	8
This is Madhya Pradesh .....	12
10 Top Experiences.....	16
Madhya Pradesh in a Week.....	24
Getting Around .....	26
Eating in Madhya Pradesh .....	28
Tribal Culture of Madhya Pradesh .....	30
Shopping Guide .....	32

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'.

## i 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](http://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 Gypsies 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 (Gypsies) 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 (☎755 274 2212 – 16; Raisen Bypass Road, Bhanpur) and Bombay Hospital ([www.bombayhospitalindore.com](http://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](http://www.mptourandtravels.com); ☎9584003002; 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

