

"Passing through, Chundeyrie burst into view like a picture... The hills formed a horse shoe valley, below us lay the town of beautiful dark stone, tall houses, temples, mosques, minarets and gateways."

- Lt. Reginald Craufurd Sterndale

Chanderi, 230 kms southeast of Gwalior, in Ashoknagar district of Madhya Pradesh, is located in the north of the Malwa plateau. Its antiquity dates back to the 11th century when the Pratihara king, Kirti Pal, moved his capital here from Budhi Chanderi (18kms away).

Budhi Chanderi (literally Old Chanderi) is believed to correspond with Chaidnagar mentioned in Puranas. Today a thriving city, Chanderi was once coveted by the rulers of the north for its strategic location as a military outpost on the Malwa - Bundelkhand border. As a result, several dynasties came to hold sway over the town, like the Malwa Sultans, Mughals, Bundelas and Scindias. Furthermore, it has always been a prosperous center of economic and cultural activity.

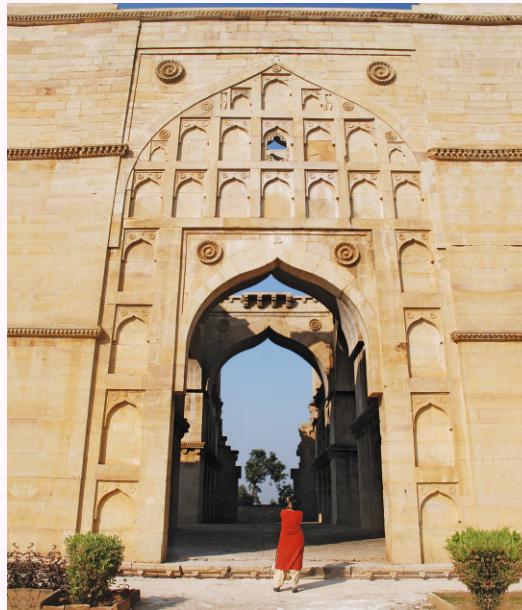


It is the weaving tradition that occupies the pride of place in any account of Chanderi today. While handloom weaving was always a significant activity, for the past 400 years it has been the primary occupation of the town's residents. Today, the fame of this ancient town rests more on the fine silken fabric woven by its skilled artisans, than on its rich history and architecture. The commercial heart of Chanderi is the **Sadar Bazaar**. Situated in the centre of the town, it is abuzz with a number of shops selling jewellery, toys, trinkets, Chanderi saris, scarves, dupattas and yardage. Chanderi saris are famous not only in India but throughout the world.

What to see

Sadar Bazaar : The commercial heart of Chanderi is the Sadar Bazaar. Situated in the centre of the town, the market place is abuzz with shops selling all kinds of ware: clothes, jewellery, household items, toys, trinkets, etc.

Chanderi Fort : The fort of Chanderi, crowning a 200 m high hill to the north of the town, has a commanding presence. Measuring 2 kms in length and over a kilometre across, it was built by Raja Kirti Pal in the 11th century, and is called Kirti Durg in his honour. All subsequent rulers who conquered Chanderi – Alauddin Khilji, Babur and the Bundela kings among others- left their mark on the architecture of the fort,



The splendid interiors of Koshak Mahal

making it distinct.

Shri Jageshwari Temple : Coming down the motorable road from the fort in a small gate followed by steep steps that lead to the much-revered Shri Jageshwari Temple.

Badal Mahal Gate : Arguably Chanderi's most defining monument is the Badal Mahal Gate. Built by the Sultan Mahmud Shah Khilji in 1450, it was meant to serve as the 'welcome gate' for visiting dignitaries. Art Historian Percy Brown writes that it was probably a 'triumphal archway'.

Khwaja Nizamuddin Auliya : A few minutes walk from Badal Mahal takes one to another monument, marked by the most beautiful jaali screens. This houses the tombs of the family of the great Sufi Saint, from Delhi, Khwaja Nizamuddin Auliya.



Shehzadi ka Rauza, one of the most impressive tombs in Chanderi

Jama Masjid : Though many of its architectural gems have succumbed to the ravages of time Chanderi's exquisite, three-domed Jama Masjid, survives to this day as a reminder of the town's unsurpassed architectural heritage. Just outside the inner kot walls, it is barely a few hundred metres from Badal Mahal Gate.

Parmeshwar Tal and Lakshman Temple : If legend is to be believed, Chanderi probably owes its present location to Parmeshwar Tal. Kirti



Lakshman Temple

Pal, the founder of the Town is said to have been cured of disease after washing himself in the waters of the tal, The rest, as they say, is history.

When Kirti Pal chanced upon it, Parmeshwar Tal must have been a natural pool, but today it is an enclosed tank with the Lakshman Temple standing majestically on one end.

Battisi Baoli : Of all the baolis in Chanderi perhaps the most spectacular is Battisi Baoli. Protected by the Archaeological Survey



A colossal statue of the Jain Tirthankar Mahavir

of India, Battisi Baoli stands within a fenced compound and is much better maintained than the other baolis around. It is situated a little away from town, near the Shahi Madarsa, and can be reached both by a motorable road as well as 15-minute walk from the madarsa.

Shehzadi ka Rauza : Only a few medieval tombs of Chanderi have survived intact. Domes of some have fallen down and walls of some others have given way, yet two things are clearly discernable – the delicate jaali works and the carvings, both of which have been used on a large scale.

Shahi Madarsa : A little off from Shehzadi ka Rauza bordered with thick lantana bushes is the Shahi Madarsa. Standing on a raised platform, this 15th century structure is marked by its striking jaali work.

Koshak Mahal : Of the secular buildings in

Chanderi, Koshak Mahal, 4 kms from the town Centre, is the most significant. Set in landscaped gardens, the stunning edifice rises four floors high, a remarkable feat of engineering for the 15th century.

Kati Ghati Gateway : To the south of Chanderi town is an impressive arched gateway, cut into the mountainside. This is the Kati Ghati Gateway(Kati meaning cut, and Ghati meaning Valley, in Hindi). Though not striking in structure or embellished, with carvings, the gate is in itself an architectural feat and a symbol of the power of human will. The gate is over 10 m high and 25m wide.

Shri Chaubisi Jain Temple : Jains are a prominent community in Chanderi, and perhaps the most prosperous of all. This accounts for the presence of several Jain temples here.

Shri Digambar Atishay Khandagiri : The Jain temples were carved out of the rock about seven hundred years ago. At the start of the flight of steps, leading up, is a colossal statue of the Tirthankar, the spiritual guide, Mahavira. Shoes have to be removed at the bottom of the flight of stone stairs.

More standing and seated images of the Tirthankaras have been carved into the cliff and are protected by pillared and arched porticos.

Chanderi Museum : Archaeological Survey of India's Chanderi Museum is located a couple of kilometers from Delhi Darwaza. Inaugurated in 2007, it is housed in a swanky new building, surrounded by manicured lawns that double up as a sculpture garden. The two-storyed museum has six galleries of which only four have been opened.

Things to do:

One may visit the weavers of Chanderi Sarees.

Other Places to See

Idgah, Hauz Khas, Ramnagar Museum, Ahmad Nagar ke Sultan ka Maqbara (Tomb), Chakala Baori, Hazrat Ismaeel Tomb, Tomb of Hazrat Kamal Shah, Baiju Bawra's Samadhi, Johar Smarak, Hath Sal. Rajghat Dam Project Near Chanderi is also worth visiting.

How to Reach

By Air: The nearest airport is Gwalior (230 kms)

By Rail: The nearest railhead is Lalitpur (36 kms away) on the Delhi-Chennai main line

By Road: Cars can easily be hired from Jhansi (130 kms) and Lalitpur

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