Balaji

Among the most popular global pilgrimage places, Tirupati, in Andhra Pradesh, is a stopover for those seeking spirituality and sanctity. Situated at the foot of Tirumala Hills, this lively pilgrim place attracts devotees all year round. Tirupati Balaji or the Lord Venkatesha Temple is the main attraction here. Said to be one of the richest temples in the country, it sees an estimated footfall of 60,000 every day. Devotees donate their hair and various riches in the temple in order to please the god.

Though the temple is an overwhelming presence in the town, Tirupati also houses one of the oldest and the rarest geological formations in the world – a natural stone arch. Lying in close proximity to the temple, the stone arch or Sila Thoranam (garland or festoon of rocks) has been categorised as Precambrian and is believed to be 1,500 million years old! Tirupati has been ruled by various kingdoms such as the Pallavas around the 9th century, Cholas in the 10th century, and Vijayanagara between the 14th and 15th centuries. It is believed that the rituals in this temple town were formulated by Shri Ramanujacharya, a Hindu theologian and philosopher, in the 11th century.

The Tirumala Hills, which is a group of seven hills namely, Seshadri, Vedadri, Garudadri, Anjanadri, Vrishabadri, Narayanadri and Venkatadri, add to the beauty of the town. When viewed from the top, these hills appear to be in the form of a coiled serpent. It is believed that they were once the resting place of Lord Vishnu.

One of the richest temples in the country and a major tourist spot in South India, Lord Venkatesha Temple is popularly recognised as Tirupati Balaji. The temple is dedicated to Lord Venkateshwara, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu and its sacred shrine has been mentioned in holy scriptures such as the Garuda Purana, Brahma Purana and many others. The temple is situated at a height of 853 m above sea level and is positioned on Venkata Hill, which is one of the saptagiri (seven hills) of Tirumala Hills. These seven peaks are said to be the hoods of sheshnag (serpent god). The awe-inspiring sacred shrine of the temple is covered in pure gold and is a sight to behold.

The temple is flooded with devotees all year round and the average time taken for a devotee to reach the main idol can range from three to five hours. However, one can book online tickets to avoid the long queues and visit the main shrine devoid of hassles. The temple follows the rituals prescribed by Saint Ramanujacharya in the 11th century. Prayers start at 3 am and end with Ekanta Seva (a ritual in which a priest sings lullabies to put the lord to sleep) at 1 am. A popular practice in the temple is the donation of hair and various riches in order to please the god. The architecture of the temple building is spectacular and reflects the Dravidian style. Three entrances lead to the sanctum sanctorum - the first is called Mahadwaram. A gopuram (gateway), measuring 50 ft, is placed in front of the entrance. There are two circumambulation (parikrama) paths. While the first one comprises many-pillared halls and flagstaffs, the second has many sub-shrines and other edifices along with the main kitchen. The main shrine houses a gold-plated tower that is called Ananda Nilayam, and a temple inside the tower houses the main deity. Devotees also visit a holy pond located on the northern side of the temple.

Padmavati

This beautiful temple dedicated to Goddess Padmavati is situated in Tiruchanur, a small town near Tirupati. Also called as Alamelumangapuram, the temple is believed to be very significant for Hindus as Goddess Padmavati is said to be very benevolent and readily forgives her devotees. The temple has an inscription that expounds on the history of the place. According to it, there was a temple dedicated to Lord Venkateshwara in Tiruchanur originally. Since it was quite cramped, it was difficult for priests to perform rituals and all activity was moved to another premise. Eventually, only two important rituals were performed at the original site. Over time, even this stopped and the place faded into insignificance. However, in the 12th century, it again came into the limelight when the Yadava kings built the Shri Krishna Balaram Temple here. Later, in the 16th and 17th centuries, the deity of Sundara Varadaraja was installed and a temple was built for Goddess Padmavati. Legend has it that the goddess was born in a lotus pond that is now a tank within the temple.

Goddess Padmavati is said to be the consort of Lord Venkateshwara, the presiding deity of Tirupati. The idol in the temple features the goddess sitting in padmasana posture and holding two lotuses. Other idols that are housed are those of Lord Krishna, Lord Balram, Sundararaja Swami and Surya-narayana Swami. A flag that has been hoisted from the temple bears the image of an elephant, which is said to be the carrier of the goddess. The best time to visit the temple is during Navratri (a holy nine-day festival), Dussehra and Theppotsavam (boat festival) and during the month of Kartheeka, when the Lord is said to send gifts to Goddess Padmavati.

1.Ajanta Caves

Located about 107 km from Aurangabad, the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Ajanta Caves are a famous cluster of 32 Buddhist caves. The rock-hewn caves at Ajanta are either chaityas (shrine), chapels or prayer halls, or viharas (monasteries) or residential cells.

Caves 9 and 10 are chaityas, which contain the earliest known remnants of paintings in India. Caves 19, 26 and 29 are chaityas of the Mahayana period and all the other caves are viharas. Ajanta displays the Gandhara and Mathura schools of art from the Kushana period; the Sarnath school of art from the Gupta period; and the Amaravati school of art from the late Satavahana and Ikshvaku periods.

The Ajanta paintings recount the life of Lord Buddha, including his previous earthly experiences and the Jataka tales. The caves are divided into two chronological phases, the early Buddhist caves (2nd century BCE to 1st century CE) and the Mahayana caves (5th century CE).

Since Ajanta is located on the ancient trade route of Dakshinapatha, the early phase of Ajanta was funded mostly by traders. The second phase received patronage from the Vakatakas. Stories of these donors are inscribed and painted. The narrative murals about Lord Buddha, Avadana stories of Bodhisattva, Jataka stories and panels based on Mahayana themes from Vipulya Sutras are extremely interesting. The monasteries were in operation till 8th century CE but were lost and forgotten till 1819.

Bibi ka makbara

This is the burial place of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb’s wife, Dilras Banu Begum (popularly known as bibi). She was given the title of Rabia-ud-Durrani, or the modern day Rabia. The title refers to the memory of Rabia Basra, who was an Iraqi aristocratic woman, well known for her generosity and kind-heartedness.

Situated about 3 km from the city, the maqbara was built by Aurangzeb’s son, Azam Shah, in 1678. Made in the memory of his mother, the monument is very similar in design to the iconic Taj Mahal, and is popularly known as the Taj of the Deccan. It is one of the few grandiose Mughal monuments in the Deccan because of Aurangzeb’s long-term association, as the governor, with the region. The mausoleum is flanked by spacious Mughal gardens with axial ponds, fountains, water channels, broad pathways and pavilions. The gardens at Bibi ka Maqbara are designed in the Char-Bagh pattern, the signature style of most Mughal gardens. These are gardens with a four-fold plot that have a large enclosure with essentially four geometric gardens in it. The monument has four minarets, about 72 ft high, and the raised plinth is surrounded by an octagonal lattice-screen of white marble.  The tomb itself is surrounded by octagonal screens of marble lattice work. There are a lot of marble plates and screens that adorn the mausoleum and have repeated patterns of lotus medallions, rosettes and floral patterns.

The chief architect of this monument was Ustad-Ata-Ullah, a Persian. Such was its renown that it has been mentioned in the work of French travel writer, Jean Baptiste Tavernier, who gives a lot of details about the initial stages of its construction. According to inscriptions, the cost of the construction of this grand monument was INR 665,283.

Basilica of Bom Jesus

Probably the most famous church in Goa and one of the most revered by Christians globally, the Basilica of Bom Jesus in Old Goa is famed for housing the mortal remains of St Francis Xavier. This complex, along with some other churches of Old Goa, features on the UNESCO World Heritage list. Its exterior facade, built using black granite, is noted for Baroque architecture combined with Doric, Corinthian and composite influences.

Inside, the main altar is 30-ft-broad and 54-ft-high and its pillars have been erected using basalt from Bassein (now Vasai, a town in Maharashtra), approximately 300 km away. Richly gilded, it features the figure of infant Jesus Christ, above which is a statue of St Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuit order. The latter gazes at a medallion, and above this is depicted the Holy Trinity (Father, Son and the Holy Spirit). The southern side of the basilica houses the chapel wherein are preserved the sacred relics St Francis Xavier. The church's interior is richly adorned with wood carvings and paintings that depict scenes from the lives of St Xavier. A silver casket, which contains the sacred relics of the saint, is divided into seven panels each of which contains two plates that are representative of the incidents of the saint's life.

The Basilica of Bom Jesus is the only church in the state to not have plastered exterior. On November 24, 1594, the foundation stone of the church was laid and it was consecrated on May 15, 1605 by the Archbishop of Goa, Fr Alexia de Menezes. It was raised to the status of basilica in 1946.

Mahalasa Temple

Situated in the village of Mardol, about 22 km from the state capital, the temple of Mahalasa Narayani is a beautiful structure. The presiding deity, Mahalasa, is a Hindu goddess, who is considered to be the female incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The temple is famed for some unique characteristics like the tall samai (lamp) or the dnyandeepa, a historic bell, a grand copper roof and more.

Legend has it that a beautiful goddess once appeared at Verna village, and was first seen by a shepherd, Sahastrapal. He was asked by the goddess to bring his master but the shepherd hesitated and said that his cattle was thirsty. The goddess, with her nupur (musical ornament worn on ankles), created a spring that is said to exist till today. Though the shepherd went to get his master, he could only manage to bring back his son-in-law, named Mhal Pai, who was told by the goddess to construct a temple to enable her to reside there as Mahalasa Narayani. With huge wooden pillars and a silver-framed doorway, the beautiful temple of Mahalasa has a huge brass ornamental pillar lamp, 40 ft high. It is a sight to behold when the pillar lamp is lit during the annual jatra days. The temple also celebrates Jaiyanchi Puja around August and Kojagiri Poornima on full moon days after the monsoon and these are attended by devotees from across the state.

2.Undavali Caves (Andhra Pradesh)

Dating back to the 7th century BC, the Undavalli Caves, carved out of a single sandstone, are a prime example of India's rock-cut architectural heritage. The inviting design of the caves speaks volumes about the advanced architectural skills of the ancient Viswakarma architects and temple builders. The caves are said to have been associated with the influential Vishnukundina dynasty, which ruled over important parts of India between 420 AD and 620 AD. These caves are a fine specimen of Gupta architecture as well, and the detailed design on the second floor reflects Chalukyan architecture. The largest cave has four floors and houses a huge statue of Lord Vishnu in a reclining posture. It is said that this sculpture was carved out of a single block of granite. The first storey of the caves houses sculptures of Jain tirthankaras (saints) that suggest that they once served as a home for Jain monks. The walls on the first floor are covered with stunning frescoes that depict scenes from mythological stories. The facade of the third floor hosts numerous sculptures that include depictions of lions and elephants. Nearby is another unique cave dedicated to Lord Brahma, Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva.

  The architecture and green surroundings of the Undavalli Caves will remind you of Bhubaneswar's Udaygiri Caves.

Guwahati (Assam)

Lying on the southern fringes of the mighty Brahmaputra river, Guwahati, the largest city of Assam, holds spirituality and adventure at its heart. Home to the much revered Kamakhya Temple, dedicated to mother goddess Kamakhya, an incarnation of Goddess Sati, the 8th-century temple attracts devotees throughout the year.Apart from temples, river cruising in the feisty Brahmaputra is a magical experience, with rock climbing at the Elephant Rocks in Morigaon, about 78 km away, coming a close second.

With a number of trekking trails and breathtakingly-beautiful camping sites to its credit, Guwahati offers travellers a plethora of thrilling opportunities. Crisscrossed by waterways that pass through wildlife sanctuaries strewn around Guwahati, the city enjoys a rich bounty of flora and fauna. Driving through the jungle for safaris can be a stimulating experience. Feel your heart leap with excitement as you spot a flying fox jump across the forest, or the Indian cobra slither sinfully by. Watch out for the elusive dolphins that call the waters of the Brahmaputra their home, along with beautiful endemic and migratory birds that take shelter nearby.

While its wild side languishes in serenity, the city's cosmopolitan centre bustles with the vibrancy of festivals, fairs, music, dance and arts and crafts. From the renowned Bihu dance and folk music to the energetic bhortal nritya, the city holds its culture close to its heart and displays it in an array of colours and merriment that leave tourists in awe.

To sample the local flavours of the city, head to the old quarters by the river. Dotted with palms, ponds, quaint temples and imperial mansions, the area speaks of the glorious history of the region when it was ruled by the Ahom kingdom and the Koch Hajo. The city was once known as Pragjyotishpura or the Light of the East and is said to have been a powerful kingdom during the days of Mahabharata.

Guwahati is also known for the resplendent silk saree and its yardages, known as Assam silk or Muga silk.

Thrissur (kerala)

Often referred to as the cultural capital of Kerala, Thrissur is a centre point of energetic festivities. This city hosts its own film festival, the Thrissur International Film Festival, among many other cultural events throughout the year. It invites tourists for its rich culture and heritage as it carries a strong influence of Indian, European and Arab sources from medieval and colonial times.

Thrissur is most popular for a form of body art that is practiced here. It is known as Puli Kali or Kaduvakali and is mostly showcased during the festival of Onam. Another festival to look out for is Thrissur Pooram, when decorated elephants march through the city to the Vadakkunnathan Temple. A visit to the Indian coffee house that was established in 1958 is also worth the while as it is called the cultural hub of the city.

The area of Thrissur played an important part in fostering trade relations of Kerala with other parts of the world. Earlier, the city was called Trichur and it is said that it was founded by Lord Parasurama, the sixth avatar of Lord Vishnu.

Raj Ghat

Built in the memory of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who is revered as the Father of the Nation, Raj Ghat is a marble platform where he was cremated on January 31, 1948. Lying on the banks of the Yamuna river, Rajghat is fringed by lush well-manicured lawns that are dotted with trees. The mortal remains of Gandhiji were cremated at this ghat.

The samadhi is a true reflection of the man himself and exudes a simplicity that he came to be associated with. A brick platform where his body was burned and a black marble platform are surrounded by a marble fence. The words 'He Ram', which was the last thing Gandhiji said, have been inscribed on the memorial. An eternal flame stands adjacent to it.

Various trees that dot the landscape have been planted by dignitaries like Queen Elizabeth II, former US president Dwight Eisenhower, former Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitman etc., and bear their names on a plaque.

Visitors are required to remove their shoes before paying homage to the leader. A ceremony is held every Friday to mark the day he died. There are two museums nearby, which are dedicated to Gandhiji.

The memorial was designed by Vanu G Bhuta, and this national shrine was bestowed with a number of awards for its architectural design. The memorials of various other leaders such as Lal Bahadur Shashtri, Indira Gandhi , Jawaharalal Nehru, Rajiv Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi are also located inside Raj Ghat.

3.Taj Mahal

Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, the creator of the Taj Mahal, said that the beauty of the monument made “the sun and the moon shed tears from their eyes”. It has also been described as a “teardrop on the cheek of eternity” by Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore. Every year, thousands of tourists from around the world make a beeline for this breathtakingly ethereal marble monument, considerd by many as the most beautiful building constructed by man. The monument was built as a memorial by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan for his deceased wife, Mumtaz Mahal. It is one of the seven wonders of the world and is a monument of pride for not just Agra but also India.

A UNESCO World Heritage Site, it is featured in almost all literature about India and is one of the most enduring images of the country. Its name is believed to have been drawn from the Persian language: ‘taj’ means crown and ‘mahal’ means palace, thus making this the palace of the crown. Interestingly, the queen it was built in memory of, originally named Arjumand Begum, held the name Mumtaz Mahal, which meant the crown of the palace. Although it is best known as a symbol of love, a grieving emperor’s ode to his deceased queen, another legend sees the Taj Mahal as an embodiment of Shah Jahan’s vision of kingship. The story goes that he sought to build something akin to heaven on earth, a spectacular, unbelievably beautiful monument that reinforced the power as well as the perceived divinity of the monarch as next only to the Almighty.

It is also widely believed that emperor Shah Jahan invited artisans from Italy and Persia to work on this marble monument. It is said that Ustad Ahmad Lahori was the chief of the project while Ustad Isa Afandi made the site plan. The calligraphic work has been credited to Amanat Ali Khan Shirazi. A fascinating aspect of this structure is that it looks the same from all four sides, except the one that faces River Yamuna. This side is said to have been especially embellished to serve as the main entrance for the emperor. Shah Jahan would approach the Taj Mahal from the river, aboard a barge, while the entrance used by tourists today served, at the time, as an entryway for soldiers and common people. There are intricate inscriptions on all four entrances, while marble carvings and pietra dura mosaics adorn the walls. Lapis-lazuli, cornelian, mother of pearl, agate and emerald are some of the precious gems and stones that were once used in its design. It is said that work on its construction began in 1631. Legend has it that it took 20 years to complete this architectural marvel!

It is also riddled with optical illusions and masterful architectural safeguards. As one first beholds the monument from the main gate, for instance, the Taj Mahal looks large and imposing, but as you move closer, it appears to shrink in size. Also, the minarets surrounding the edifice, while perfectly upright to the naked eye, have actually been constructed to lean away from it so that, should a disaster like an earthquake come about, they would fall away from and not on the mausoleum.

4.Agra Fort

Built by Mughal emperor Akbar in 1565 AD, Agra Fort is a majestic sandstone built as an ode to the magnificence of the Mughal empire. Encompassing within its 2.5-km-long enclosure walls a stunning imperial city, the fortress is shaped like a crescent, its eastern wall flanked by River Yamuna. It is said that the construction of the fort was originally begun by emperor Akbar, but completed by his grandson Shah Jahan, who added most of the marble monuments here. There were originally four gates for entrance, two of which were walled up and only one is open today – the Amar Singh gate. The first thing that captures one's attention as they enter is Jehangir (Jahangir) Mahal, a palace said to have been built by Akbar as the women’s quarters and named after his son, Jehangir (Jahangir). Simple and elegant, it is home to a large stone bowl upon which are carved Persian verses. Local lore holds that this bowl once contained rose water. Adjacent to Jehangir (Jahangir) Mahal lies the palace built for Jodha Bai, said to be Akbar’s favourite queen.

Agra Fort is widely considered to be a masterpiece of planning, design and construction. Some of its other internal structures include the stunning Moti Masjid, Diwan-i-Khas (hall of private audience) and Diwan-i-Aam (hall of public audience), once home to the legendary Peacock Throne that was eventually taken to Red Fort in Delhi when Shah Jahan shifted his capital there. There are two prominent mosques inside the fort - Nagina Masjid was built by Shah Jahan as a private mosque for the ladies of the court and Mina Masjid is believed to have been built by him solely for his own use.

The Musamman Burj is another interesting structure - it is an octagonal tower with an open pavilion, and is believed to be where emperor Shah Jahan breathed his last, imprisoned and gazing at his beloved Taj Mahal. Structures relating to other Mughal emperors here include the Khas Mahal, said to have been built in honour of Jahanara Begum (eldest daughter of Shah Jahan), and Sheesh Mahal or the glass palace. The story goes that it was once the dressing room for the queens, and its walls are inlaid with several tiny mirrors.

The Department of Tourism, Government of Uttar Pradesh has initiated a sound and light show at Agra Fort that not only provides a peek of the fortress' glorious history but is also a visual treat. Agra Fort is also known as the 'Lal Qila', 'Fort Rouge' or 'Qila-i-Akbari' and is an unmissable site in the city.

Jhulta Minar

Popularly known as Shaking Minarets, these unique structures have left architects and engineers dumbfounded for centuries. So far, no one has been able to explain why if one of them shakes, the other starts vibrating too even though the connecting passage between them remains stationary and free from vibrations. One of the icons of Ahmedabad, each of these minarets is three storeys tall with balconies displaying intricate carvings. Of the two pairs of these minarets, one is situated opposite Sarangpur Darwaja, and the one named Malik Saranhther, near the Kalupur Railway Station area. The one near the Darwaja is within the compound of the Sidi Bashir Mosque, which was built in 1452 AD by a slave of Sultan Ahmed Shah. These minarets, along with the central gateway, were once a part of the Sidi Bashir Mosque.  
Demonstrations of the minarets shaking or vibrating are no longer carried out for public. In 1753, the main building was destroyed during a war between Marathas and Gujarat Sultanate. In an attempt to unravel the mystery behind the shaking of these minarets, an Englishman tried to demolish them but could do no harm to the structure.

5. Mamallapuram

Sitting along the Coromandel Coast of the Bay of Bengal, the seaport town of Mamallapuram or Mahabalipuram, in Tamil Nadu, is a beautiful beach destination that is slowly becoming the surfing hub of the country. Speckled with several UNESCO World Heritage Sites, courtesy of the ancient Pallava dynasty (3rd - 9th century BC), who were great patrons of art and crafts, Mamallapuram holds a baffling visual treat around every corner. Its awe-inspiring cave temples, sculptures and monuments leave one marvelling at the skill of the craftsmen of that time. With its striking bas reliefs and rock-cut temples, Mamallapuram is practically an open-air museum. Many of the temples, built with granite, relate the stories from the Hindu epic Mahabharata. Once a thriving port, Mamallapuram is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site complex, also famous for its seashell jewellery, seafood, cafes and markets and a breathtaking ocean-front. While you can soak in history visiting various historical sites, Mamallapuram's pristine beaches fringed by lush groves with a warm sun, invite surfers. With perfect sea waves between June and September, the beaches host surfing training sessions conducted by experts. The town is also a major stopover for visitors coming from Chennai and Puducherry.

Mahabalipuram was a well-established seaport between the 7th and the 10th centuries. It earned its name for the legend of demon king Mahabali being killed at the site by Lord Vishnu. Taken over by the kings of the Pallava dynasty, who shifted their capital from Kanchipuram to Mamallapuram, giving glory to king Narasimhavaranam, who was bestowed with the title of “Mammala” for his wrestling skills. During the rule of the Pallavas, many great artists, dancers, poets, writers found a foothold here and left their mark. The Pallavas made Mamallapuram a hub where they emerged as pioneers of new styles of art and architecture, making good use of their resources. However, the ingenuity of the Pallavas remained hidden from the world for centuries. When the region received its fair share of the limelight, it quickly became popular for its architectural marvels, gorgeous beaches, absolute serenity and mesmerising temples, and not to mention the fascinating legends of the Pallavas.

Jantar Mantar

Built in 1724 by Maharaja Jai Singh II of Jaipur, Jantar Mantar is one of the five astronomical observatories built by the king in Northern India. Its striking combinations of geometric forms have caught the attention of architects, artists and art historians from around the world. It was designed for the observation of astronomical positions with the naked eye. It is a part of the tradition of the Ptolemaic positional astronomy, which was common in a lot of civilisations.

Jantar Mantar comprises 13 astronomy instruments that were used to predict the movements and timings of the planets, the sun and the moon. Astronomical tables and charts were compiled to get an accurate idea of the celestial bodies. The major attractions of Jantar Mantar are Misra Yantra, Samrat Yantra, and Jayaprakash Yantra.

The Samrat Yantra is a large sundial that stands parallel to the earth’s axis and helps to check the time. The Jayaprakash Yantra is shaped like a hemisphere and is used to align the position of stars to markings. Meanwhile, the Misra Yantra is used to find the shortest and the longest days of the year. All of these instruments have been built with brick and rubble and have been plastered with lime. Tourists can also visit a small Bhairava temple that is located towards the east of Jantar Mantar.

Legend has it that Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II was fascinated by the movement of celestial bodies and thus commissioned the construction of Jantar Mantar so the distance, location and speed of these could be calculated.

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus

A monument of significant historical importance that houses one of the finest railway stations in the world, the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus sees a footfall of over 3 million daily. The railway terminus was named Victoria Terminus in honour of the British Queen, Victoria, on Golden Jubilee Day (1887) to mark fifty years of her reign. It was subsequently renamed as Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus in 1996 to honour the founder of the Maratha empire and is currently known as Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (as of 2017). This was the very first terminus station in the subcontinent. British architects joined hands with Indian craftsmen to build this heritage building, an outstanding example of Victorian Gothic revival architecture blending with themes derived from traditional Indian architecture, thereby forging a style unique to then-Bombay. Designed by British architect F W Stevens, this heritage structure is known for its magnificent stone dome, cantilevered staircase, ornamental turrets, elegant columns, pointed arches, high vaulted ceilings and a host of expansive decorative sculptures and carvings. The main gate of the building is flanked by two columns, with sculptures of a seated lion representing Britain atop one and a crouching tiger representing India on the other. The facade has snarling heads of gargoyles jutting out, leaping griffins, peacock with its feathers open like a fan and a cobra locked in a fight with a mongoose. Because of its elaborate, intricate and three-dimensional stone carved decor, the terminus took almost 10 years to build. Mumbai, known as the city of dreams, opens its gates to a multitude of people every day and a large part of these people arrive on trains. The majestic and awe-inspiring Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus is the first structure that they usually see and many have written of the overwhelming effect this massive heritage site has on them.