

With golden-sand beaches, tangled palm trees touching the sky, and a relaxed atmosphere, Goa stands in stark contrast from the other bustling urban destinations in India. Even just a short visit to this beach paradise feels like a vacation within a vacation. The beauty and serenity of Goa will rejuvenate you, while its robust calendar of events and activities give you plenty of things to do during your free time.

Popular coastal hot spots, like **Colva Beach** and **Palolem Beach**, draw tourists to Goa from around the world. But beaches are just the beginning of what makes Goa one of the most beloved places to visit in India. The destination also has unique **Portuguese-influenced cuisine**, historical **churches and temples**, vibrant **wildlife**, and fascinating **spice farms**. No matter how long you spend in Goa, you'll wish you had a few extra days to explore.

For more ideas to help plan your trip to India, see our list of the top tourist attractions in Goa.

Beaches play a starring role among the attractions in Goa, contributing to why it's one of the best places to visit in India.

Nearly every tourist who visits the area spends a day at **Palolem Beach**, a crescent-shaped stretch of white sand that overlooks the Arabian Sea in south Goa. While simply hanging out and soaking up the scenery is a perfect way to enjoy this beautiful area, Palolem Beach also offers an array of activities to fill your time. Choose from **kayaking**, **yoga classes**, **dolphin-sightseeing trips**, and **swimming**. You can also spend the night in one of Palolem's **rustic coco huts**, which are erected at the start of the high season.

Colva Beach is another one of the most famous beaches in Goa, especially among Indian tourists. It has swaying palms and a broad stretch of bronze sand, where you'll occasionally see herds of cows sunbathing next to tourists. You can **rent Jet Skis**, hop on a **thrilling banana boat ride**, and get a bird's-eye view of the beach on a **parasailing** adventure.

Homestay accommodations in the area will give you an authentic local-style experience – plus easy access to Colva Beach.

While known for their spectacular scenery, the popular beaches in Goa tend to get crowded during high season, leaving some travelers eager for a quieter natural escape. Fortunately, Goa brims with undiscovered beach attractions and things to do that give you some distance from the throngs of tourists while still treating you to glorious sand and surf.

One of the best hidden gems in Goa is **Butterfly Beach**. It has a curving expanse of sand flanked by boulders that create a postcard-worthy cove, brimming with butterflies and blossoms. It's also a great spot to watch dolphins swim in the distance.

You'll need to embark on a boat ride from **Palolem Beach** or **Agonda Beach**, or tackle a challenging forest hike, to reach Butterfly Beach – but the obstacles to getting here help to thin out the crowds. You might even have the place to yourself.

While more developed than Butterfly Beach, **Utorda Beach** is another stunning getaway from the more crowded beaches around Goa. It features clean, blue water; silky sand; and a few small beach shacks. Look closely as you wade in the water, and you may spot some small **starfish**.

South India has been known for its abundance of spices, like black pepper, cardamom, and cloves, for centuries. In fact, these natural flavorings were a major appeal for Portuguese traders who came to Goa hundreds of years ago.

Tourists can see what the local spice scene is all about by touring **Tanshikar's Working Spice Farm & Ecological Rest House**. This agritourism attraction grows seven different spices: pepper, vanilla, nutmeg, turmeric, cardamom, and chili, using totally organic farming methods.

Tours of the farm, often led by its owner, will give you an in-depth understanding of these flavor-charged crops and a chance to see some of the other products, like betelnut, coffee beans, pineapple, and banana, grown on the premises. Tanshikar's also keeps bees and produces its own all-natural honey.

Spice farm tours aren't the only fun thing to do at Tanshikar's. Guests can also take a **vegetarian cooking class**, visit a **bubbly lake**, trek to **Mainapi Waterfall**, and train to become a yoga teacher. It's an attraction that has something for everyone.

Address: Netravali, near Smriti Yoga, Sanguem, Goa

Food is a major attraction in Goa. This part of India has a distinctive cuisine that blends Portuguese and Goan flavors, setting it apart from all the other food around India. Expect fiery flavors, fresh-caught seafood, and an abundance of coconut in the dishes.

You can't leave Goa without trying its signature dish, vindaloo, a super-hot meat curry made with palm vinegar and dried red chili peppers. **Hospedaria Venite** in the capital of Goa, **Panaji**, wows tourists with its mouthwatering vindaloo. **Dominick**, a **Benaulim Beach** mainstay, is another favorite spot for vindaloo – plus it offers front-row seats for world-class sunsets.

Another Goan specialty is xacuti, a rich curry with poppy seeds, chili, and coconut. Try it at **Souza Lobo**, a beachfront restaurant in **Calangute**, or **Fat Fish**, a well-trafficked spot in **Baga**.

Tourists hankering for some fresh seafood are spoiled for choice around Goa. **Zeebop**, on **Utorda Beach**, offers delightful fish curry, prawn stew, and mackerel doused with spicy red sauce.

You also can't go wrong with dinner at **Copperleaf**. The upscale restaurant in **Porvorim** has a fish thali that you'll be dreaming about long after you've finished.

While many tourists visit Goa for the beaches, countless others consider the trip to be a pilgrimage to important religious sites, like the Basilica de Bom Jesus.

This Old Goa attraction dates back to the late 16th century and contains the remains of the **St. Francis Xavier**. The "**Apostle of the Indies**" co-founded the Society of Jesus religious order with friend St. Ignatius Loyola and spearheaded an extensive mission in India. The basilica has been a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** since 1999.

The modest yet imposing structure is a mix of Doric, Corinthian, and Baroque style with intricate carvings. Interestingly, the building was stripped of its lime plaster in the mid-20th century, making it the only church in Goa without plaster. The Basilica de Bom Jesus has since become worn by monsoons.

You can tour the church on your own, or hire one of the independent guides near the entrance for a small fee. Inside, you can see huge ornamental screens, along with the body of the resident saint in a casket that was once covered in precious stones. It's a compelling place that will transport you back in time.

Every year, the **Feast of St. Francis Xavier** draws big crowds to this church in late November and early December. It kicks off with a **nine-day novena** and open-air masses before concluding with the major holiday on Dec. 3.

Address: Old Goa Road, Bainguinim, Goa

Aquatic adventures go beyond the beach in Goa. The state is also home to Dudhsagar Falls, a **spectacular four-tiered waterfall** that towers some 310 meters above the earth. It's **one of India's tallest waterfalls** and a perpetually popular attraction for day trips around Goa and **Karnataka**.

To reach the falls, you'll need to make your way to the village of Colem by taxi or train. Depending on which train route you take, you may get a glimpse of Dudhsagar Falls along the way. Then, you'll hop aboard a shared jeep through the jungle, passing **Devil's Canyon** along the way. Around 45 minutes later, you'll scurry over some boulders to finally reach the falls.

The best time to visit Dudhsagar Falls is right after the **monsoon**, when the water is gushing. Tourists who wish to take a dip can rent a life jacket from vendors at the attraction.

Hot tip: Only 300 jeeps are allowed to enter Dudhsagar Falls every day, although tour operators have been requesting to increase the capacity during high season. Make reservations in advance, or prepare to wait in long lines if you wish to visit.

Goa is home to a ton of markets, but none offer the liveliness or selection of products found at Anjuna Market. For roughly 50 years, hundreds of vendors have been setting up shop on **Anjuna Beach** every Wednesday to tempt free-spirited travelers with hippy-inspired trinkets and **souvenirs**.

Ornate textiles, woven bikinis, sculptures of deities, dreamcatchers, hammocks, magnets, t-shirts with sassy slogans, beaded jewelry, toys – you name it, you can probably buy it here.

But even if you don't want to shop, you should still make a point to visit Anjuna Market for the sightseeing. The flea market is a swirling array of colorful wares, salespeople driving hard bargains, big bags of fresh spices, and street food galore. The vibe alone is one of the reasons why Anjuna Market is one of the top places to visit in Goa.

Address: 10 St. Michael's Vaddo South, Anjuna, Goa

Make your way to the laid-back city of **Panaji** to visit another one of Goa's historic churches: The Church of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception.

The pristine white church, which dates back to the early 17th century, stands atop a zig-zagging staircase that resembles the tiers of a wedding cake. Its perfectly symmetrical **Portuguese Baroque architecture** is a sight to behold. At night, twinkle lights make the church look like something out of a fairy tale.

While not ornate, the church's interior boasts bright, colorful decorations. Tourists can see the elegant main altar (dedicated to Mary, mother of Jesus) and gilded pillars with elaborate carvings. Vines of blue and white blossoms often adorn parts of the vaulted ceiling around various holidays.

Dec. 8 marks the **Festival of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception**, a major holiday at this church. Swing by to see it decked out in tons of colorful lights.

Address: Rua Emídio Garcia, Altinho, Panaji, Goa

See what houses in Goa looked like during the 17th century at Braganza House, a **historical mansion** that flanks the village square in **Chandor**. It's divided into an east and west wing, both of which are available for tourists to poke around at their leisure.

The east wing is home to members of the Pereira-Braganza family. It boasts a massive ballroom with an impressive marble floor, along with a small chapel that contains one of St. Francis Xavier's fingernails. This part of Braganza House also brims with antiques and international artifacts.

The western side preserves the original grandeur of Braganza House. Owned by the Menezes-Braganças, the museum-like space features an expansive library with 5,000 leather-bound books from the private collection of journalist Luis de Menezes Braganza, who played an important role in the Goan independence movement. Tourists can also see breathtaking Belgian glass chandeliers, antique portraits of the family, and Chinese porcelain.

Address: Guddi-Chandor Road, Culsabhatt, Chandor, Goa

Located just 12 kilometers north of **Molem**, Mahadev Temple gives tourists a chance to see a structure that has been standing since the 12th century. Its remote location helped it survive centuries of conquests by the Portuguese and Muslim colonialists. Legend has it that the **black basalt temple**, which was built to honor Lord Shiva, has a resident king cobra. Step inside to see the detailed work of artisan carvers, including the lotus flower on the ceiling.

Goa's unique culture and heritage are on full display at Mangeshi Temple, a beautiful spiritual attraction that's been standing for roughly 450 years. The pastel blue, gold, and white temple features a **seven-story tower** that pays homage to one of the Hindu god Shiva's many incarnations: Manguesh. The temple structures surround a **sacred pool of water**, which is thought to be the most historic part of this religious site.

You can watch devotees perform *pujas* (worship rituals) at the temple every day. If you happen to be there on a Monday, you can watch the Manguesh idol taken out for a procession, complete with music, in the late afternoon or early evening.

Address: Dinanath Mangeshkar Road, Mangeshi Village, Mardol, Goa

Lace up your most comfortable pair of walking shoes and head to **Panjim** for a stroll around Fontainhas, one of Asia's only Latin quarters. Once the headquarters for the Portuguese government in Goa, the UNESCO-recognized Heritage Zone features colonial houses and cottages decked out with pastel and fluorescent façades. Each of the houses get a fresh coat of paint after the monsoon season every year, ensuring that they always look vibrant for visitors. Don't miss the district's namesake **Fountain of Phoenix**.

You can explore the area on your own, or book a **walking tour** for a more in-depth look at the history of this fascinating neighborhood. Either way, you'll definitely work up an appetite as you wander the narrow cobblestone streets and snap photos in front of the candy-colored buildings. Refuel at one of the decades-old cafés or bakeries in the neighborhood. **Confeitaria 31 de Janeiro**, a bakery near Mary Immaculate School, is known for having a wide selection of tasty Goan cakes and sweets.

Wildlife lovers should put Bhagwan Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuary at the top of their Goa travel plans. The state's largest protected wildlife area, which spans 240 square kilometers and is also home to **Molem National Park**, is home to all kinds of amazing creatures, including the **black leopard**, **Bengal tiger**, **Malabar giant squirrel**, **wild boar**, **slender loris**, **Indian rock python**, and **ruby-throated yellow bulbul** (Goa's state bird).

Hiring a guide through a travel agent, and visiting the sanctuary in the early morning or late evening increases your chances at catching a glimpse of these animals. During the daytime, you can see the

natural wonders of **Dudhsagar Falls** and **Devil's Canyon**. You can also check out the **Tambdi Surla Temple**, a temple that has survived since the 12th century, thanks to its remote location in the forest. The structure is adorned with intricate carvings of the Hindu gods Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma.

Dating back to 1493, Reis Magos Fort was once a defense structure aimed at protecting the area's then-capital, Goa Velha. Today, the fort is a top attraction in Goa for tourists looking to take a break from the beaches and dive into the state's fascinating history.

The site has a storied past not only as a military outpost, but also as a hospital and a jail. Tourists can see cannons, a small museum exhibit on the fort's history, and jaw-dropping views of the **Mandovi River**.

After your visit, head to the town's other famous attraction: **Reis Magos Church**. The pristine white church is one of just a handful of churches in Goa that has processions and re-enactments for the Feast of the Three Kings (Epiphany). Inside the structure, you can see an impressive multi-colored wood relief of a scene that depicts the Three Wise Men handing gifts to the Baby Jesus.

Address: Nerul-Reis Margos Road, beside Three Kings Church, Bardez, Verem, Goa

Mumbai is a city of contrasts. Arguably India's most cosmopolitan city, it brims with gourmet restaurants, five-star hotels, the fancy living quarters of Bollywood megastars, and renowned attractions. But remember: An estimated 20 million people call this bustling metropolis home, giving India's largest city a distinctively chaotic, energized feel.

It's easy to experience India at its most authentic in Mumbai. You'll see Hindu devotees picking up garlands from the massive flower market near **Dadar railway station**, "dabbawalas" (translated as people who carry containers) delivering hundreds of thousands of freshly cooked lunches to the city's office workers from **Churchgate railway station**, the swirling colors of the bustling "**Thieves Market**," and people of all walks of life enjoying the sunset from the sugary sand at **Marine Drive Chowpatty**. Mumbai is equal parts overwhelming and inspiring, and you'll never forget your first visit to this city.

Tourists are spoiled for choice when it comes to things to do in Mumbai. Plan your adventure in this incredible city with our list of the top tourist attractions in Mumbai.

Standing proud on the banks of the Arabian Sea at the Apollo Bunder waterfront area, the Gateway of India is one of Mumbai's most popular and treasured landmarks. The 26-meter basalt archway, which combines the architectural styles of Roman triumphal arches with traditional Hindu and Muslim designs, was built as a gesture of welcoming for King George V and Queen Mary when they visited British India in 1911. Ironically, it was under this very archway that the last British troops exited India in 1948, after the country declared its independence from Great Britain.

Nowadays, the Gateway of India is one of the most popular gathering spots in Mumbai for tourists and locals alike. Watch the yachts and ferries take off to sea from the **five jetties** that flank the arch. **Enjoy some of the famous *bhelpuri*** (a crunchy, savory snack made of puffed rice and doused in tamarind sauce) from the street food vendors. Or just spend an hour or two people watching at this lively attraction.

Afterwards, walk 10 minutes southwest to the **Colaba Causeway Market**, a vibrant bazaar selling everything you can imagine and more. It's one of the best places to visit for **cheap shopping** in Mumbai.

Address: End of C. Shivaji Maharaj, Apollo Bandar, Colaba, Mumbai

No trip to Mumbai would be complete without a cruise down Marine Drive. The 3.6-kilometer-long, C-shaped boulevard offers epic views of the coast. However, just as amazing are the sightseeing opportunities on the other side of Marine Drive. The street is lined with stunning **Art Deco buildings** that have earned status as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

After your mini road trip, head out on foot for some more sightseeing along the **Marine Drive promenade**. The best time to go is at sunset. That's when tourists and Mumbaikars gather on the sands of **Girgaum Chowpatty** to see the cotton candy skies fade to dark while noshing on Mumbai's famous street food from nearby stalls.

Hot tip: Wonder why Marine Drive is also known as "Queen's Necklace"? Just look up at the street lights—they were positioned to make the road resemble a pearl necklace from above.

One of Mumbai's most iconic sites is a cable-stayed bridge known as the Bandra-Worli Sea Link. Opened in 2009, the eight-lane bridge connects the central business district with the western suburbs over the open sea, offering some much-needed relief from the congestion on the **Mahim Causeway**. It has become the Mumbai equivalent of New York's Brooklyn Bridge or Sydney's Opera House.

For the most impressive views of the Bandra-Worli Sea Link, head to the **Bandra Fort**, a historic watchtower built by the Portuguese in 1640. It's also worth driving across the bridge, as well. By day, you can see the crashing sea on both sides of the bridge. And at night, watch the bridge light up with spectacular colors.

Tourists can find another popular site right near the **Gateway of India**: The Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai and Tower. More than a century old, India's first luxury hotel is revered for the grandeur of its brownstone exterior. The windowed facade infuses its Renaissance architecture with Islamic touches, like corner turrets topped with onion domes, pointed archways, and covered balconies.

Fun fact: The Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai hotel is one of India's most photographed places. Walk by and snap your own picture from street level. Or, better yet, step inside the hotel's colonial-style restaurant, **Sea Lounge**, in the afternoon for an elaborate high tea.

Address: Apollo Bunder, Mumbai

While Mumbai may look like a shiny, modern city at first glance, it also has some ancient sites that will leave you in awe. Spend a day at **Sanjay Gandhi National Park** exploring the Kanheri Caves, a complex of monuments that were carved out of the basalt formations around 2,000 years ago. Inside the 109 cave entrances, you'll see large stupas (a hint that this was once a sacred place for Buddhists), congregation areas, and prayer halls. Look for the **incomplete paintings of the Buddha** on the ceiling of cave 34.

Address: Borivali East, Mumbai

Visiting the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya Museum is also high on the list of the top things to do for tourists in Mumbai. Previously known as the Prince of Wales Museum of Western India, this is one of India's most important art and history attractions.

You'll need at least a full day to take in the museum's expansive permanent collection of 70,000 items, which include Indian miniature paintings, Himalayan art, antique Asian coins, jeweled swords, and much more. Afterward, poke around the streets of the **Fort neighborhood** near the museum—they're filled with **stunning Gothic buildings**.

Address: 159-161 Mahatma Gandhi Road, Fort, Mumbai

Discover Mumbai's peaceful, quiet side at the Global Vipassana Pagoda. Inspired by Myanmar's Shwedagon Pagoda, the colossal 96-meter-high stupa is covered in real gold that gleams in the sun. The hollow pagoda features a massive hall with room for 8,000 people to meditate in tranquility together.

Not sure how to meditate? Take one of the free 10-minute-long **Anapana meditation courses** offered at the pagoda continuously throughout the day. There's also an extensive **vegetarian food court** on-site with some downright delicious dosas.

Address: Next to Esselworld, Gorai Village, Borivali (West), Mumbai

Many Hindus have their favorites of the religion's 33 million gods. Devotees who favor Ganesha (the potbellied deity with the elephant head who is known as the "remover of obstacles") make pilgrimages to the Shree Siddhivinayak Temple.

Slip off your shoes and head in to see the idol of the deity, draped with marigold garlands and offerings, with hundreds of other visitors eager for a glimpse (and perhaps a granted wish). It's a cultural experience like none other. And if you're interested in other sacred places dedicated to Ganesha, check out the **Vazira Naka Ganpati temple** and the **Garodia Nagar Ganpati temple**.

Address: S.K. Bole Marg, Prabhadevi, Mumbai

Gandhi is one of India's most revered figures, and there's no better place to learn about him in Mumbai than at the Mani Bhavan Gandhi Museum. The building traces its history back to the anti-colonial nationalist himself, when Gandhi made it his local headquarters for nearly two decades, beginning in 1917.

Tourists can pay tribute to the Indian hero at the **Gandhi statue** within the museum, see **vintage photographs of Gandhi** lining the staircase, and catch a glimpse of two of his **famous spinning wheels**. There's also a room on the second floor of the museum that displays paintings depicting important moments in Gandhi's life.

Fun fact: Barack Obama paid a visit to the Mani Bhavan Gandhi Museum in 2010.

Mahalakshmi Temple is one of Mumbai's oldest and most famous temples. Dedicated to Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth, this temple draws crowds through its ornate gate and into the shrine with the idol. Visitors will also spot idols of other deities, including Tridevi (the patron deity of music and education) and Kali (the goddess of destruction), adorned with gold ornaments. For another spiritual attraction, take a trip to the **Haji Ali Dargah**, a floating Muslim shrine just a 15-minute walk from the Mahalakshmi Temple.

Address: Bhulabhai Desai Road, Mumbai

oodies, eat your heart out: Mumbai has some of the best street food in all of India. Not only is it colorful and spicy, street food in Mumbai also offers the best bang for your buck. You're never too far from a great hawker, but it's worth seeking out the best ones.

Try *chatt* (a spicy snack typically made of potato dumplings, fried noodles, onions, chilies, and more) from the popular **food stalls near Churchgate Station**. On **Marine Drive** and outside the **Gateway of India**, you'll find street food vendors whipping up *chana jor garam* (seasoned chickpeas). Or, head to **Carter Road** for global street food, including shawarma, momos, and even corn on the cob with lime juice.

Bollywood, India's largest film industry, has been rooted in Mumbai since the 1930s, when the Bombay Talkies movie studio was founded in the city. Bollywood now churns out as many as 1,000 movies each year, ranging from historical epics and curry westerns to courtesan films.

You can get a behind-the-scenes look at this blockbuster factory on a full-day private Bollywood tour. On this adventure, tourists will explore Bollywood film studios, take photos with the stars (subject to schedule availability), see Bollywood dancing and learn some choreography, and take a drive through the posh community where the top Bollywood actors and actresses live

No matter how obscure your shopping list is, you'll probably find everything on it at the Chor Bazaar. Translated to the "Thieves Market" after the legend that all stolen goods in Mumbai end up for sale here, the Chor Bazaar is one of the biggest attractions for tourists, as well as the go-to place for picking up cheap goods.

Antique clocks, spiritual idols, used books, pottery, phone cases, handicrafts, shoes, coins, luggage, vintage cameras, Victorian furniture—you name it, you can shop for it among the chaotic hodgepodge of vendors. **Pro tip:** The side streets around the Chor Bazaar are home to some of the **best kebab sellers** in Mumbai.

Address: Mutton Street, Ajmer, Kumbharwada, Mumbai

Glitzy Dubai is the United Arab Emirates' holiday hot spot. This city of high-rises and shopping malls has transformed itself from a desert outpost to a destination du-jour, where tourists flock for sales bargains, sunshine, and family fun.

Dubai is famous for contemporary sightseeing attractions such as the Burj Khalifa (the world's tallest building) and shopping malls that come complete with mammoth aquariums and indoor ski slopes. But this city has many cultural highlights and things to do, as well as all the glamorous modern additions.

Take a wander around the Al Fahidi quarter, and you'll discover the Dubai of old, then cruise along Dubai Creek in a traditional dhow, and you'll soon realize there's more to this city than its flashy veneer.

Learn more about the best places to visit with our list of the top attractions and things to do in Dubai.

Dubai's landmark building and major tourist attraction is the Burj Khalifa, which at 829.8 meters is the tallest building in the world and the most famous of the city's points of interest.

For most visitors, a trip to the observation deck on the 124th floor here is a must-do while in the city. The views across the city skyline from this bird's-eye perspective are simply staggering.

The slick observation deck experience includes a multimedia presentation on both Dubai and the building of the Burj Khalifa (completed in 2010) before a high-speed elevator whizzes you up to the observation deck for those 360-degree views out across the skyscrapers to the desert on one side and the ocean on the other.

Wrapping around the Burj Khalifa are the gardens of Burj Park, with walkways dotted with modern art sculptures. Burj Park is where you come to see the Dubai Fountain display on Burj Lake.

Modeled on the famous Fountains of Bellagio in Las Vegas, this is the world's tallest performing fountain, with water displays shooting up to 150 meters high into the air.

The 30-minute-long displays take place regularly after dark, and although the display itself is free, there are entrance charges to access the add-on experiences.

The floating platform of the Dubai Fountain Boardwalk is one of the most popular experiences for close-up views, while there are also opportunities to take an abra (traditional wooden boat) onto Burj Lake to see the fountains from the water.

Dubai Mall is the city's premier mall and one of the city's best places to visit for a day of shopping and indoor activities to keep the kids busy. It provides entry to the Burj Khalifa as well as the Dubai Aquarium.

There is also an ice-skating rink, gaming zone, and cinema complex if you're looking for more entertainment options.

The shopping and eating are endless, and there are nearly always special events such as live music and fashion shows within the mall. The most famous of these are the annual Dubai Shopping Festival in January and February and the Dubai Summer Surprises Festival in July and August.

Location: Doha Road, just off Sheikh Zayed Road

One of the city's top tourist attractions, the Dubai Aquarium houses 140 species of sea life in the huge suspended tank on the ground floor of the Dubai Mall.

Although there is free viewing from the mall, the highlight of a visit here is entering the Underwater Zoo, with its three-story high, 270-degree views along the length of the glass-panel tunnels.

As well as viewing the vast amount of marine life, the Dubai Aquarium offers plenty of aquatic experiences and things to do for visitors who want a close-up encounter with some of the aquarium's inhabitants, from hand-feeding eagle rays to diving with reef and tiger sharks.

Address: Dubai Mall, Sheikh Zayed Road

Atlantis Aquaventure Waterpark, based at Atlantis, The Palm on the Palm Jumeirah—Dubai's famous man-made island development—is a great place to cool off after a few days of hectic shopping and sightseeing.

The waterslide action here is excellent and world-class, with the Aquaconda, the world's longest water slide; a nine-story-tall slide, aptly named the Leap of Faith; and water coaster rides.

There's also underwater safaris using Sea TREK helmets; a dedicated water play area for smaller children with slides; and for when all your energy has been used up, a 700-meter sweep of white-sand beach.

Address: Crescent Road, Palm Jumeirah, Dubai

Both the dune fields and desert of the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve and the orange-hued dunes of Maleha (actually in the Emirate of Sharjah) are within day-tripping distance of the city.

Desert adventure tours can combine a range of activities, from sandboarding, camel rides, and 4WD safaris to traditional Arabian falconry displays and desert dinners under the stars. There are also options for overnight camping under the stars.

The typical tour itinerary, giving visitors a taster of desert life, is easily slotted into even a short trip to Dubai, taking around six hours door to door, with a mid-afternoon departure from the city.

For a less rushed tour experience, choose one of the companies that operate inside the Dubai Desert Conservation Reserve, where trips can include wildlife drives to spot the reserve's free-roaming herds of gazelles and, if you're lucky, Arabian oryx.

The Burj Al-Arab is the world's tallest hotel, standing 321 meters high on its own artificial island on the Dubai coastline.

Designed to resemble a billowing dhow sail, the exterior of the building is lit up by a choreographed, colored lighting show at night.

Decadent in every way possible, the Burj Al-Arab is one of the most expensive hotels in the world, with the most luxurious suites costing more than \$15,000 for one night.

For those without unlimited credit, the way to experience the over-the-top opulence is to book afternoon tea at Sahn Eddar (a minimum spend is required) in the soaring atrium lounge.

Non-guests can also book dinner at the Ristorante L'Olivo at Al-Mahara where floor-to-ceiling glass panels in the dining room walls allow you to view sea life while you eat, or you can enjoy French and Italian classics for lunch or dinner with city vistas at the **Michelin starred** Al Muntaha.

Address: Jumeirah Road, Dubai

From October through April, this entertainment park provides family-friendly entertainment themed around taking visitors on a journey around the world.

Global Village's 26 country pavilions, ranging from Iraq to Japan and Russia to South Korea, each offer an individual experience of that country's culture, entertainment, and heritage. It's a unique option in the city for evening entertainment for families with little ones in tow.

As well as the pavilions, there are plentiful dining and shopping options on-site. Younger members of the family will enjoy the fun-fair-style Carnaval with plenty of rides, such as bumper cars, carousels, Swiss swings, and a big wheel, along with faster rides and a roller coaster.

Address: Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Road, Dubai

India is a vibrant land of startling contrasts where both the traditional and modern worlds meet. The world's seventh largest nation by area and the second largest in terms of population, India boasts a rich heritage that's the result of centuries of different cultures and religions leaving their mark.

Things to do in India include the opportunity to experience an array of sacred sites and spiritual encounters, while nature lovers will enjoy its sun-washed beaches, lush national parks, and exciting wildlife sanctuaries.

From the magnificent Taj Mahal in Agra to the holy sites of Harmandir Sahib (formerly the Golden Temple) in Amritsar and the Mecca Masjid mosque in Hyderabad, visitors to this exotic country will discover a trove of spiritual, cultural, and historical treasures.

To help you make the most of your time in this amazing country, refer often to our list of the top tourist attractions in India.

Perhaps India's most recognizable building, the Taj Mahal is also the world's most famous testimony to the power of love. Named after Mumtaz Mahal, the favorite wife of Emperor Shah Jahan, this most beautiful of mausoleums was begun upon her death in 1631 and took 20,000 workmen until 1648 to complete.

Incorporating many elements of Islamic design including arches, minarets, an onion-shaped dome, and black calligraphy inlaid around the entrance, the Taj Mahal is largely constructed of white marble. Adding to its splendor are delicate inlaid floral patterns and precious and semi-precious stones such as jade, lapis lazuli, diamonds, and mother of pearl.

The best time to visit is either at dawn or dusk when the atmosphere is brilliantly altered by the change in lighting. If possible, try to catch a view of the Taj Mahal's reflection from the far bank of the Yamuna River-it makes for a memorable (and safe) selfie.

Address: 64 Taj Road, Agra-282001

Dating back to the 8th century BC, Varanasi is one of the oldest still inhabited cities in the world. A major pilgrimage center for Hindus, this holy city has long been associated with the mighty Ganges River, one of the faith's most important religious symbols.

[Varanasi offers many reasons to visit](#), not least of them the chance to explore the **Old Quarter** adjacent to the Ganges where you'll find the **Kashi Vishwanath Temple**, built in 1780. The New Vishwanath Temple with its seven separate temples is also of interest.

Bathing in the Ganges is of great importance to Hindus, and numerous locations known as "ghats" feature stairways leading to the water where the faithful bathe before prayers. The largest are **Dasashvamedh Ghat** and **Assi Ghat**. The latter, at the confluence of the Ganges and Asi rivers, is considered particularly holy.

Also worth seeing is **Banaras Hindu University**, established in 1917 and noted for its massive library with more than a million books, and the superb **Bharat Kala Bhavan** museum featuring fine collections of miniature paintings, sculptures, palm-leaf manuscripts, and local history exhibits.

Founded in 1577 by Ram Das, Amritsar is an important hub of Sikh history and culture. The main attraction here is Harmandir Sahib, opened in 1604 and still often referred to as the Golden Temple for its beautiful gold decoration.

The holiest of India's many Sikh shrines (it also attracts many Hindus and people of other faiths), the temple was built in a blend of Hindu and Islamic styles. Its lower marble section features such flourishes as ornate inlaid floral and animal motifs, while the large golden dome represents a lotus flower, a symbol of purity to Sikhs.

In addition to its splendid design, visitors are equally impressed with the temple's spiritual atmosphere, an effect enhanced by the prayers continuously chanted from the Sikh holy book and broadcast throughout the complex.

Part of the overall experience – and visitors are welcome to participate – is the chance to enjoy one of the 50,000 free meals the attraction serves up to visitors each and every day.

Address: Golden Temple Road, Amritsar, Punjab 143006

So named for the yellow sandstone used in most of its buildings, the Golden City of Jaisalmer is an oasis of splendid old architecture that rises from the sand dunes of the **Thar Desert**. Once a strategic outpost, today the city is filled with splendid old mansions; magnificent gateways; and the massive **Jaisalmer Fort**, also known as the Golden Fort, a daunting 12th-century structure that rises high above the town.

In addition to its palaces, temples, and fine old homes, the fortress boasts 99 bastions along with massive gates leading to its main courtyard where you'll find the seven-story-tall **Maharaja's Palace**.

Started in the early 1500s and added to by successive rulers right up until the 19th century, the palace offers sections open to the public, including areas beautifully decorated with tiles from Italy and China, and intricately carved stone doors.

There are also a number of Jain temples dating from the 12th to 16th centuries, each decorated with fine marble and sandstone images, palm-leaf manuscripts, and brightly painted ceilings. Be sure to also check out the well-preserved 1,000-year-old library, Gyan Bhandar, with its many 16th-century manuscripts and antiquities.

Built by Shah Jahan in 1648 as the seat of Mughal power – a role it maintained until 1857 – the magnificent crescent-shaped Red Fort in New Delhi, named after the stunning red sandstone used in its construction, covers a vast area of more than two square kilometers, all of it surrounded by a large moat.

Highlights include its two largest gates: the impressive **Lahore Gate** (the fort's main entrance) and the elaborately decorated **Delhi Gate**, once used by the emperor for ceremonial processions.

A fun part of a visit is exploring **Chatta Chowk**, a 17th-century covered bazaar selling everything from jewelry to silk garments, as well as souvenirs and food items. While you can explore the fort yourself, guided tours are offered and provide a fascinating insight into the life and times of the Shah, including a peek into the stunning white marble Hall of Public Audiences (Diwan-i-Am) where he received his subjects.

Hot Tip: Try to stick around for the sound and light show held each evening featuring important events in the fort's history.

Standing an impressive 26 meters tall and overlooking the Arabian Sea, the iconic Gateway of India is a must-see when in Mumbai. Built to commemorate the arrival of King George V and his wife Queen Mary in 1911, this stunning piece of architecture was opened with much pomp and ceremony in 1924 and was, for a while, the tallest structure in the city.

Constructed entirely of yellow basalt and concrete and notable for its Indo-Saracenic design, the Gateway of India was also the scene of a rather less jubilant procession of British soldiers in 1948 when India gained its independence. These days, the huge archway provides a stunning backdrop that is as popular among locals as it is tourists.

Hot Tip: After visiting the Gateway of India, pop over to the adjacent **Taj Mahal Palace and Tower** for a delectable High Tea, a fun thing to do in Mumbai since this lovely luxury hotel opened in 1903

Construction of Hyderabad's Mecca Masjid, one of the world's largest mosques – and one of the oldest in India – began in 1614 during Mohammed Quli Qutub Shah's reign and took almost 80 years to complete.

Large enough to accommodate 10,000 worshipers, this beautiful mosque's 15 enormous arches and pillars were each wrought from single slabs of black granite dragged to the site by huge cattle trains reputedly consisting of up to 1,400 bulls.

Taking its name from the bricks above the central gate that were brought here from Mecca, this impressive complex features highlights such as its main gateway, a huge plaza, and a large manmade pond. There's also a room that houses the hair of Prophet Mohammed.

Other notable features include inscriptions from the Quran above many of the arches and doors, the exquisite roof of the main hall, and the cornices around the entire mosque structure. Look out for the exquisite floral motifs and friezes over the arches.

Address: Hyderabad, Telangana 500002