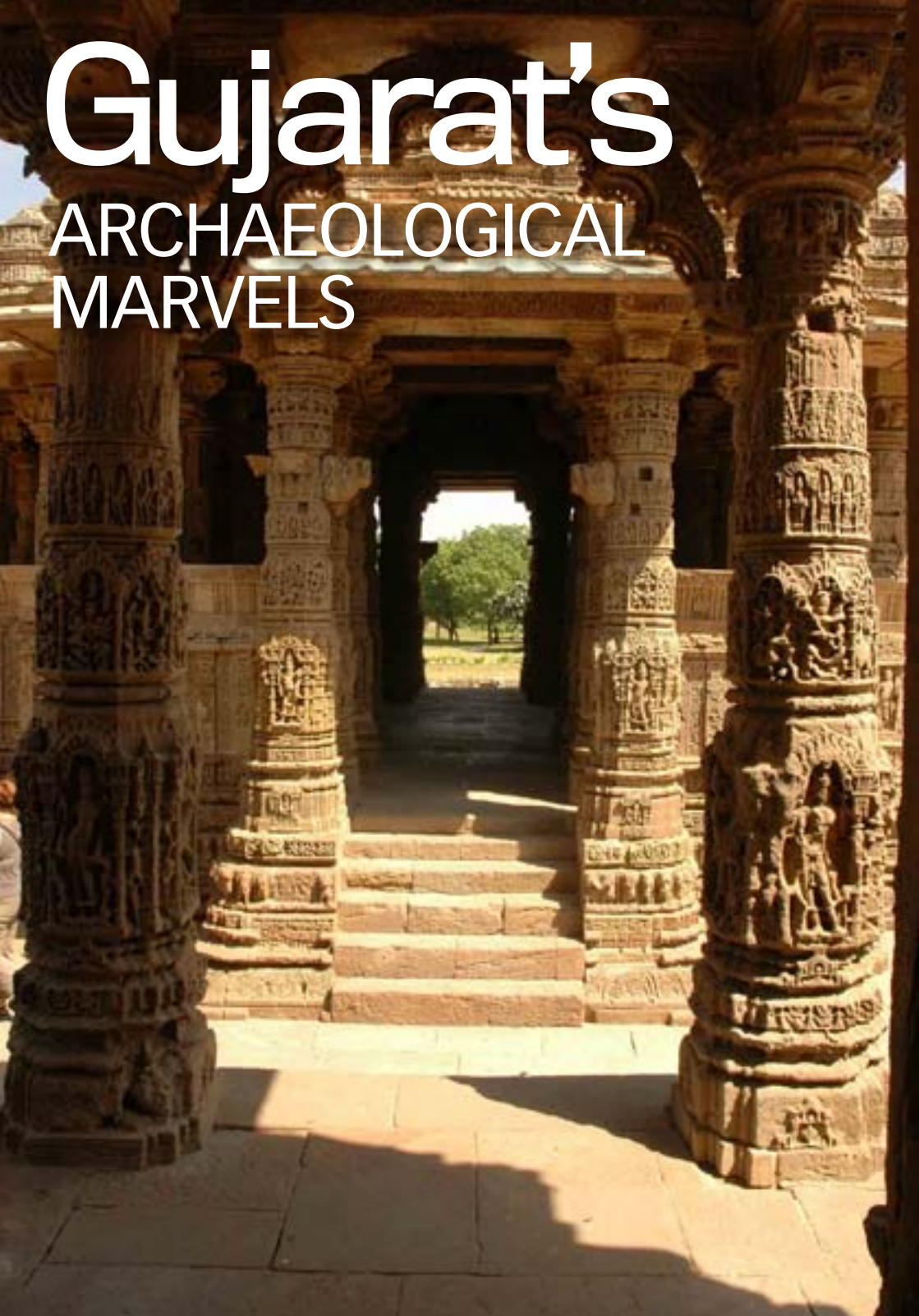


# Gujarat's

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL MARVELS



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## On the Tourist's Trail

**The citadel:** Remains of the fortifications that Mahmud Begda had envisioned and put into place can still be seen — the large, rectangular entrance gates, especially Halol and Godhra, as well as portions of the great wall, once rising nearly 10m high, and forming the first line of defence (Sadan Shah Gate, cut through solid rock, is especially impressive); stone frames for the catapult stands and stone balls found in the area speak volumes about his readiness, once, to fight enemy intrusion.

**Hindu and Jain temples:** Here you will find the earliest-known Hindu temples of Lakulisa (10th to 11th-century AD) and Kalika Mata (also of the same period). It isn't easy to please the latter deity; you have to humour her first by undertaking the two-to three-hour, five-kilometre trek along a jungle footpath, something pilgrims have been doing for ages irrespective of the changing fortunes

of Champaner. Today, the easier alternative of a cable-car ride to the top is available. There are also other Hindu and Jain temples (13th to 15th-century AD) in the area.

**Mosques:** Champaner is a fascinating study of mosques. There's Jami Masjid with its carved entrance and imposing courtyard. More carvings and great views from the top await you at Kevada Masjid; Lila Gumbai Ki Masjid flaunts a hanging *kalash* in the prayer hall, while Nagina Masjid enchants with a cenotaph bearing impressive carvings on columns and niches.

## GUESS WHAT...

Champaner was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2004.

## CHAMPANER-PAVAGADH

It isn't surprising for a fort's ownership to change hands several times in the course of history. Each time, its character takes on newer shades so that decades later, when you visit as a tourist, you are struck by the intermingling of different elements, faiths and symbols. Champaner, which is spread on and around the hill of Pavagadh, started out as part of the Chavda Kingdom in the eighth century and later became the Chauhan Rajput capital around 1300

AD. It then passed into the hands of Gujarat sultan Mahmud Begda, known to have spent nearly 23 years renovating and improving the fortifications of Champaner, now renamed Muhammadabad. To little avail, for the fort was soon annexed by the Mughals in 1535. For long Champaner had flirted with glory, but no more! It went into a steady decline soon after and was overrun by wilderness until a rediscovery of sorts was made by the British.

### Go Now

#### Where:

Champaner is 45km from Vadodara. It is accessible by bus or private vehicle. Hire a car if you want to combine your journey here with other sites like Jambughoda.

#### Entrance:

Indian/ foreigner ₹ 5/ 100

#### Time:

10am-6pm

#### Accommodation:

Hotel Champaner is basic but provides good views from its balconies.





## ADALAJ VAV

**A**T its most prosaic, a well is for drawing water from. It is a meeting point for men and women from the village to discuss their homes and current affairs as they go about stocking water for their needs. Sometimes, it also doubles as a resting place for pilgrims and passing caravans. It is in Gujarat though that it takes on the feel of a museum; for what else do you call a structure that oozes poetry

just like the water it holds? The Adalaj Vav, built in 1499 by Queen Rudabai, is one such brilliant specimen.

### Go Now

#### Where:

The city of Ahmedabad is about 18km away.

#### Entrance:

Free

#### Time:

9am-6pm

#### Accommodation:

Isher International Hotel is conveniently located close to Adalaj Vav (Tel: 00-91-079-23600060).



## All Is Well

The five-storey underground structure has three entrances that meet on the first floor landing. The octagonal roof has openings to allow air and some light to pass through. It is on the stone walls here that art finds expression, as deities inspiring devotion, kings sitting on stools and common men going about their business — from churning buttermilk to making love. The style combines Islamic patterns with Jain and Hindu symbolism. Look for Ami Khumbor — a pot containing the water of life and Kalp Vriksha — the tree of life, both carved out of a single stone. For divine protection from evil spirits, there's the representation of the *Navagrahas* — the nine planets — along the edge of the well. The intricate carvings are all but vanishing in a number of spots here, but where they remain, they are indicative of the extreme skill and talent possessed by the artisans of days gone by. Remember to look closely, for the beauty is in the detail, and you may just miss it.

## GUESS WHAT...

Neither the flight of steps nor the landings in the well receive sunlight except fleetingly at noon, making the Adalaj Vav nearly six degrees cooler than the outside. Talk about natural air-conditioning!



## VADNAGAR TORAN

**T**HE little town of Vadnagar is a mosaic of different surviving fragments from history; one such piece is the *toran* left behind by the Solankis. The name denotes a pair of 12th-century AD columns supporting a graceful arch that rises 40 feet high. Built in red and yellow sandstone and edging Lake Sharmistha, the *toran* is one of the few surviving entrance gates that were so typical of the Solanki period. The battle and hunting scenes inscribed on the panels suggest that it was erected to celebrate victory at war, but exactly what it was an entrance to remains a mystery.

### Go Now

#### Where:

The nearest railway station is Siddhapur, 42km, on the Ahmedabad-New Delhi railway line. By road, Mehsana is 47km away. Non-metered auto rickshaws make for local transport.

**Accommodation:** The Gemini Guest House is a cheap option, but you will find better places in Ahmedabad (83km).

## GUESS WHAT...

In a sense, Vadnagar Toran is a gateway that leads nowhere. It may have served as an entrance to a large temple complex but no such remains have been found here.



## LOTHAL

**L**OOKING at the scattered ruins, it is hard to imagine that 4,500 years ago, this must have been one of the more bustling ports in the sub-continent. The name — Lothal, or Mound of the Dead — certainly does nothing to inspire such confidence, though evidence discovered from 1955-62 states otherwise. A glimpse of the dockyard alone reveals just how scientifically advanced its people must have been. At the time, it must have been capable of holding 30 ships of 60 tonnes or 60 ships of 30 tonnes, a capacity matched by the modern port of Vishakhapatnam. Seals have been found that indicate the port's possible trading ties with Mesopotamia,

Egypt and Persia. The crumbling remains of private residences, with neatly built kitchens and brick-paved baths, meticulous drainage systems and street layouts further hint at the sophistication of the people and align the settlement with the once-flourishing Indus Valley Civilisation.

### Go Now

#### Where:

Lothal is 78km from Ahmedabad. It's a three-hour journey from the capital city by bus.

#### Entrance:

Free

#### Time:

Dawn to dusk

#### Accommodation:

Slightly pricy, Palace Utelia just oozes atmosphere and is only 7km from the site (Tel: 00-91-79-26445770).



## Enduring Images

**The Archaeological Museum** (Entrance: ₹ 2; Time: 10am-5pm, Sat-Thu) preserves relics of the lost civilisation and throws more light on its history, if you are interested. There is an artist's visualisation just to give you an idea of what Lothal may have looked like in its prime. It will help put things in perspective when you go about exploring the ruins. The following exhibits too may hold your attention: **Beads:** Bead-making was a flourishing industry then and micro-beads under 0.25mm have been discovered; a telling example of their expertise in the field.

**Weights and measures:** These are surprisingly precise and seem to have been standardised across the empire.

**Earthenware:** Large ceramic jars, games and toys as well as human and animal figurines are on display here.

**Tools:** They are handy yet beautifully crafted with human and animal figurines.

## GUESS WHAT...

Evidence found at the archaeological site of Lothal links it to the magnificent Indus Valley Civilisation of Mohenjo Daro and Harappa now both in Pakistan.



## RANI KI VAV

**T**HE grandeur of Rani Ki Vav takes you by surprise. Nothing about the unassuming town of Patan, home to the step-well, prepares you for it. Located 130km northwest of Ahmedabad, Patan was once an ancient Hindu capital before master pillager Mahmud of Ghazni came and ransacked it. Fortunately, the well was built later in 1063, making it one of the oldest, finest and most well-preserved

specimens in the state today. It was commissioned by Rani Udayamati in memory of her husband King Bhimdev I of the Solanki dynasty. Saved from Ghazni but not from the flood, the step-well went under River Saraswati later. Only this time, centuries of silt worked to preserve the carvings in pristine condition. In the 1980s, it underwent a friendly restoration by the Archaeological Survey of India, thus bringing it to light once more.

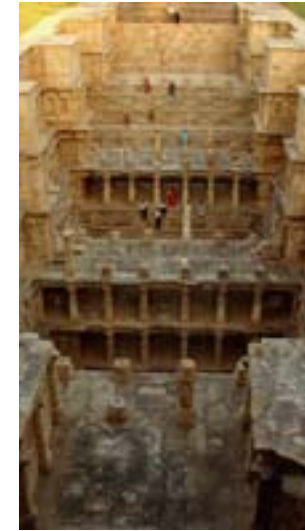
### Go Now

**Where:** The nearest town is Mehsana, about an hour's ride by the intercity bus. You can also opt for shared jeeps.

**Entrance:** Indian/ foreigner ₹ 5/ 100

**Time:** 8am-6pm

**Accommodation:** Luxurious and centrally located, the Fortune Park Landmark is close to Rani ki Vav and is easy to find in the city (Tel: 00-91-079-39884444).



## Down Under

Begin your journey at ground level; several steps and pillared pavilions later, you find yourself at the well. More than 800 sculptures featuring the *Dasavatara*s, or 10 incarnations of Lord *Vishnu*, greet you in this underground gallery. These are accompanied by the usual retinue of sages, brahmins and *apsaras*. It is at the water level that Lord Vishnu manifests himself as Sheshashayi, the lord reclining on a thousand-headed serpent.



## GUESS WHAT...

It is to reaffirm the sanctity of water that step-wells feature deities carved in stone. Rani Ki Vav, in that sense, isn't just a step-well; it is an underground temple that pays homage to water.

# MODHERA SUN TEMPLE



ONCE, at equinox, the sun must have risen at dawn, the still-gentle rays striking the temple before erupting into radiant light. It must have made a marvellous sight. Even otherwise, the Modhera Sun

Temple is nothing short of breathtaking. Its pedigree is astonishing, having been built as far back as 1027 AD by King Bhimdev I of the Solankis. Even the ravages of time and Mahmud of Ghazni have not managed to dull its shine.

## Go Now

**Where:**  
The railway station of Mehsana is just 35km away.  
**Entrance:**  
Indian/ foreigner ₹ 5/100  
**Accommodation:**  
Mata Modheshwari Temple



## Temple Tour

The majestic exterior of the temple is alive with demons and deities, as are the 52 pillars that escort you to the inner hall, recreating popular stories from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* on their intricately-carved panels. Everything from costumes and jewellery to medicinal plants, performing arts and love-making find expression in stone here. The hall, or *sabha mandap*, gives itself up entirely to the Sun God, the 12 sculpted *Adityas* tracing his journey through the 12 months in as many niches. The sanctum sanctorum, or *garbhagruha*, no longer features the Sun God; it must have exuded light and life, once. Leading up to all this is the step-well of Ramakund at the front with its many shrines. The more notable ones of Lords Ganesh, Vishnu and Shiva have been arranged along three sides so they face the Sun Temple on the fourth. It's a worthy first impression! If you visit in January, do catch the three-day classical dance festival that is held here.

## GUESS WHAT...

Modhera Sun Temple predates the more popular Konark Temple in Orissa by more than 200 years.





## DHOLAVIRA

**W**HY would you travel hard and long to see a hundred hectares of semi-arid land stretching endlessly before your eyes? Because hidden in the folds of this parched landscape

is the story of the rise and fall of a civilisation. If Lothal was the trailer, this is the big picture. In fact, some ongoing excavations make you want to be Indiana Jones embarking on an exciting new adventure. Imagine

what precious artefacts lie waiting to be unearthed! But you will need more than just imagination to get to Dholavira, considering the remoteness of the location; the journey takes nearly six-and-a-half hours and

there is no accommodation except for a guest house. It has its rewards though, for the terrain takes you through the desert plains of the Great Rann, home to chinkara and nilgai and flamingos and other birds.

## The Lost Civilisation

Terracotta pottery, beads, seals, tools, animal figurines and gold and copper jewellery — these are just some of the remnants of a lost civilisation to be seen at Dholavira. Notable among them are what could be the world's earliest signboards — 10 large stone inscriptions in the Indus Valley script that continues to elude us to this day. The town itself shows evidence of sound planning: well-laid-out lanes connect the citadel in the centre to the middle and lower towns, and the underground drainage system shows a healthy regard for sanitation. Dholavira has the world's earliest water conservation systems that enabled it to flourish in an arid land. And then there were none... the ruins also trace the civilisation's gradual downfall and annihilation, but not before newer settlers had had a go at a return to a simpler, more rural way of life.

### Go Now

#### Where:

Dholavira is 250km from Bhuj and is reached via Bhachau and Rapar.

#### How:

If you intend to make this an overnighter, take the bus from Bhuj at 2pm and arrive at 8.30pm. Leave at 5am the next morning and return to Bhuj by 11.30. Or rent a vehicle.

#### Accommodation:

The TCGL Toran Hotel is a comfortable and convenient stay option (Tel: 00-91-2837-277395).

## GUESS WHAT...

Dholavira is one of the two largest Harappan sites in India and fifth largest on the subcontinent. Like Lothal, it passed through all the stages of Harappan culture from circa 2900 BC to 1500 BC.

# Uparkot Fort



**N**O journey to Junagadh is complete without a visit to Uparkot Fort. Its architecture is full of intrigue and was designed to stop the enemy in its track. Imposing walls, as high as 20m in some places, must have made climbing up an impossible task and if someone did manage to scale them, a moat plunging nearly 300ft deep and infested with crocodiles lay in wait inside the walls. Stay above and risk exposure to an attack or dive into the mouths of the hungry reptiles below... these

were the only options. Such fortifications are what allowed the town to withstand a 12-year siege.

## Go Now

### Where:

It is 102km from Rajkot and easily accessible by ST bus from most cities in Gujarat.

### Entrance:

₹ 2 (₹ 10 for vehicle)

### Time: 7am-7pm

### Accommodation:

Harmony Hotel has basic rooms and is located close to the fort; a good option if convenience is of utmost importance (Tel: 00-91-285-2634254).



## VIEW FINDER

Once inside pay your respects to the Lords Ganesh, Hanuman and Shakti and examine the insignia of those who reigned over Uparkot. Two medieval cannons — Neelam and Manek — forged by the Turks, are among the battle souvenirs on display. Also worth a visit are:

**Adi-Kadi Vav:** Two stories claim to explain why this step-well, built in the 15th-century AD, is named so. One tells the tale of a king who ordered the step-well to be built. But when no water was found, the priest proposed that two unmarried girls be sacrificed at the altar. The two girls were Adi and Kadi and their sacrifice ensured that the water was struck soon after. The other tale is more probable, that the two girls were actually royal servant girls who fetched water from the well every day. No matter what story they believe in, people pay their respects by hanging up pieces of cloth and bangles. Unlike the other step-wells in Gujarat, which were dug out of layers of soil and rock and later given a structure by erecting stone columns, floors, stairs and walls, Adi-Kadi Vav was carved entirely of hard rock and goes down 120 steps.

**Navghan Kuwo:** This step-well is much older and was built in 1026 AD or even earlier. It is partly constructed like the other wells, partly carved out of soft rock and plunges down 170ft. The stairs take you down round the well shaft itself. The water from Navghan Kuwo is what enabled Uparkot to survive the long sieges.

**Jama Masjid:** This mosque

with a covered courtyard — quite unusual for Indian mosques — looks like a fort and was actually the palace of Ranakdevi. Sultan Mahmud Begda had it converted when he conquered the princes of Saurashtra.

**Buddhist caves:** They are really rooms for monks carved out of stone and date back nearly 2,000 years. The oldest of them go by the name of Khapara Kodia and comprise a rectangular wing and an L-shaped wing that was used for shelter during the rains. They were built around the time of Emperor Ashoka but were later abandoned after cracks in the roof caused water to seep into the living quarters. Khapara Kodia faced damage due to subsequent quarrying and only the highest storey now remains. Across Uparkot from Khapara Kodia are the more-intact Baba Pyara caves.

They comprise a group of caves to the north and south. The southern ones include a spacious court and *chaitya* hall with beautifully-carved pillars and door jambs. There are 13 rooms spanning three storeys and adorned with Buddhist symbols.

The most recent of the caves are to be found next to the Adi-Kadi Vav (Entrance: Indians/ foreigners ₹ 5/ 100).

## GUESS WHAT...

The upper citadel of Uparkot is nearly 2,300 years old.

## Palatial Splendour



testimony to its battle-readiness at the time. Today this palace/ tower houses the Lakhota Museum boasting artefacts from the 9th to the 18th-century AD including pottery from nearby villages and the skeleton of a whale. Scenes of battles fought by the Jadeja Rajputs adorn its walls. The fort, connected to the banks by causeways, is accessible only from the north. The lake itself is one lively *chowpatty* with *chai*, *kulfi* and *chaat* stalls for foodies and boating facilities for those wishing to take a paddle. Bird watchers will be delighted by the nearly 75 species, including pelicans, flamingos, spoonbills, ducks, terns, and gulls, that flock to this area.

### Go Now

#### Where:

Jamnagar, home to this tourist site, is 92km from Rajkot and connected by both state transport and private luxury buses to Gujarat's main cities. The domestic airport is at a distance of 10km, an inexpensive rickshaw or taxi ride away.

#### Entrance:

Indian/ foreigner ₹ 2/ 50

#### Time:

10.30am-2pm, 2.30-5.30pm

**Accommodation:** The Hotel President is an affordable and comfortable option (Tel: 00-91-98242-27786).



## LAKHOTA PALACE AND MUSEUM

**S**URROUNDED by the placid waters of Lakhota Lake is the Lakhota Tower, ordered to be built by Jam

Ranmalji after the monsoon played truant in 1834, 1839 and 1846. Designed as a fort, it could be well-defended; soldiers were posted around

it to fend off enemy attack and the lake itself doubled as a moat. The guardroom, armed with muskets, swords and powder flasks, is further

# GUESS WHAT...

Lakhota Palace was originally built as a fort to help withstand droughts.

## Gateway to Glory



## POLO MONUMENTS, VIJAYNAGAR

**N**O relation to the sport, Polo is derived from the Marwari *pol*, or gate, and refers to an ancient city built around River Harnav in the 10th-century AD by the Parihar kings of Idar. Its strategic location meant it was a gateway between Gujarat and Rajasthan. In the tug of war that so often happens in history, ownership passed on to the Rathod Rajputs of Marwar in the 15th-century AD. From there on, how it came to be abandoned is anybody's guess. Fragments of the city's fortifications and a temple complex are the only reminders. Covered in delicate carvings, the structure merits a closer look, simply for the intricacy of the art displayed on its walls. To the tourist who

makes it a point to visit here (and more of them certainly are, thanks to the efforts of a few who are trying to promote its beauty), the area yields a wild harvest — nearly 450 medicinal plants, around 275 bird species, 30 mammals and 32 reptiles. To name a few, there are bears, panthers, leopards, hyenas, water fowl, raptors, passerines and flying squirrels. If you visit in the rains, the 400sqkm dry, mixed deciduous forest takes on a lushness that attracts wetland birds. In winter, they make way for migratory species. As long as you respect that this is nature's territory, not meant to be disturbed in any way other than by taking in its beauty through your eyes, the area can throw up a wonderful, off-the-beaten-track experience!

### Go Now

#### Where:

Vijaynagar, the nearest town, is 120km from Udaipur and 160km from Ahmedabad. It is accessible by NH8. Public transport is available but not very reliable.

#### Accommodation:

It is possible to stay with guides at a campsite after obtaining permission from forest officials.

## GUESS WHAT...

Sandwiched between the peaks of Kalaliyo in the east and Mamrehchi in the west, the ancient city of Polo did not receive any sunlight. That probably explains why it was mysteriously abandoned.





## HERITAGE WALKS, Ahmedabad

There are two guided heritage walks around the old city of Ahmedabad

**T**HE old city hums with life. People sitting out on doorsteps swapping stories as they go about their daily chores... Bazaars bustling with sellers demanding a high price and buyers bargaining hard for a low one... Street-food carts making naught of your best dieting intentions. And along with everything else, gods offering divine blessings as if to reaffirm that all is right in this world at least. If you want a taste of all this, you must ditch motorised transport and set out on foot, for the walled city with its narrow lanes is no friend of the motor car. There are two ways to appreciate this rich heritage: a guided heritage walk offered by the

municipal corporation and a recorded guided tour offered by the House of MG. Take your pick.

### Go Now

The municipal corporation-led heritage walk starts at Swaminarayan Temple at 8am and concludes at Jama Masjid at 10.30am.

Indian/ foreigner ₹ 30/ 50  
Tel: 00-91-79-2539181/  
00-91-9824032866.

The other recorded guide tour starts at the House of MG and ends at Jama Masjid (80 minutes; ₹ 200 for audio equipment).

**Accommodation:** The Comfort Inn President in Ahmedabad is a comfortable stay option (Tel: 00-91-79-26467575).



## On The Way

### Swaminarayan Temple:

A daub of colour in an otherwise grey city, this one is carved in Burmese teak. In the tradition of most Swaminarayan temples, every architectural detail is painted in bright hues. The temple, the first of the sect to be built, features



several idols installed by Swaminarayan himself and displays some of his personal items and sculptures. It is located near Kalupur in the eastern part of the old city (Time: 6am-7pm).

**Pols:** They are typical of



the old city, these small neighbourhoods bustling with people going about their trade from the comfort of their homes. Marking these areas are *chabutros*, or bird feeders, tall poles erected to resemble trees that have been cut down, and crevices to enable birds to make their nests.

**Manek Chowk:** It changes its character like the earth changes its seasons. In the morning, this town square is a vegetable market bursting with fresh produce. Come afternoon and it takes on the glint of a jewellery bazaar, only the second biggest in India. And at night when the day's work is done, out come the food stalls. The *chowk* is said to be named after 15th-century AD saint Baba Maneknath, famous for putting a spoke in the wheel of Ahmed Shah who wanted to build a new capital. Every day he would weave a mat while the walls were being built and every night he would unravel it and bring the walls down. His efforts came to an unceremonious end when the shah dared him to use his magic to fit himself into a jar; as soon as

he did, the shah sealed it and had it buried.

**Jama Masjid:** Built in 1423 AD during the reign of Ahmed Shah I, Ahmedabad's founder, this mosque features a prayer hall with 260 columns supporting a roof with 15 domes. The building itself is of beautiful yellow sandstone while the courtyard uses marble in its flooring. The detailing is



intricate and borrows motifs like the lotus flower (Jain) and the bell hanging on a chain (Hindu) in a fusion of different faiths.

**Note:** Maintain decorum; keep your head covered during prayer. No women are allowed in the main hall.

## GUESS WHAT...

There are two guided heritage walks around the old city of Ahmedabad.

# Think Tank



## SARKHEJ ROZA



**G**ATHERED around a great stepped tank constructed by Sultan Mahmud Shah I, like men huddled for some rest and idle chit-chat, are a collection of Islamic buildings. There's the tomb of Ahmed Khattu Ganj Baksh (1445 AD), the mosque, the tombs of Mahmud Shah Begada and his queen and the palace and pavilions.

**GUESS WHAT...**  
The group of buildings that makes up the Sarkhej Roza is certainly Islamic but features no arches; instead pierced stone trellises are evident throughout.

### Go Now

**Where:** Sarkhej Roza is eight kilometres from Ahmedabad. You can hire a return rickshaw to Sarkhej Roza and back from the capital.

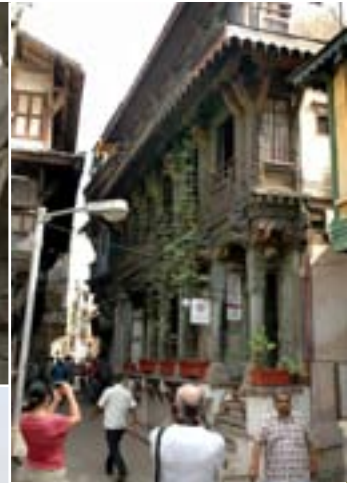
**Entrance:**

Free

**Time:**

6am-10pm

**Accommodation:** Hotel Neelkanth Bliss is an affordable and convenient stay option (Tel: 00-91-79-26600816).





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