

THE WEEK

# Plus



FESTIVALS  
OF  
VIBRANT GUJARAT





# INTERNATIONAL KITE FESTIVAL

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GUJARAT HAS SOMETHING  
FOR EVERY TRAVELLER

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Text: Anil Mulchandani Photos: Dinesh Shukla Design: Flashbulbs

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## Festivities for all seasons

FESTIVALS IN GUJARAT SYMBOLISE PEOPLE'S CULTURAL, SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS ASPIRATIONS

**I**n Gujarat, every month of the calendar year is enlivened by a number of festivals. These religious, seasonal or tribal festivities are a riot of colour, customs, feasting, rejoicing, music and dance. For a visitor, the fairs and festivals of Gujarat offer an opportunity to experience the handicrafts, cuisine, traditions and spirit of celebration that are characteristic of this diverse and culturally-rich state.

While most of the festivals are held on new moon or full moon days, Uttayana or Makar Sankranti marks the start of the northern journey of the sun, and its date, 14th January, therefore remains constant on the international calendar. This is the time of the kite festival. On 14th January, the blue winter sky of Gujarat is brightened by a number of colourful paper kites, called the Indian Fighter Kites, that are skillfully flown using glass-coated threads called manjha. The rooftops in Gujarat's cities throng with people who enjoy the kite flying and the competitive atmosphere of 'kite fighting'. During this period, Gujarat Tourism organizes the International Kite Festival (IKF) which brings kite enthusiasts from across India and countries with a kite flying tradition to cities like Ahmedabad where they showcase their kites and kite flying skills. January is also the time for the

Modhera Dance Festival, when performances of classical and other dances can be watched against the backdrop of the exquisitely carved 11th century Modhera Sun Temple, illuminated for the festival. February-March is the time for Shivratri, celebrated with rituals at the many Shiva temples in Gujarat. One of the most important festive events of Shivratri is the Bhavnath Fair near Junagadh.

Holi is a festival held during the March full moon and marks the spring harvest with its promise of plenty. Bonfires are lit to celebrate the victory of good over evil through the burning of a the demoness Holika and on the next day, Dhuleti, people rejoice by throwing coloured powder and sprinkling water on each other. Countless pilgrims visit Dakor on this day for the Fagon Purnima festivities in this temple town. During the March-April harvest season, there are a number of tribal festivities that occur in eastern Gujarat like the Dangs Durbar in southern Gujarat, the Kvant Mela near Chhota Udepur in Vadodara district, and the Chitra Vichitra Fair near Poshina in the northern hills. In August-September, there are a number of fairs of pastoral communities like the Tarnetar Fair which brings a large gathering of Bharwads to the Trinetshwar temple in Surendranagar district, and the Ravechi Fair which is held at the Ravechi Temple in Kutch, specially important for Ra-



**Festivals in Gujarat are celebrated with great gusto and religious sentiment promoting unity and feeling of brotherhood. Festivals like International Kite Festival, Modhera Dance Festival and Saptak Music Festival are unique to Gujarat.**





-baris. The Tarnetar Fair is an occasion for betrothal for the colorful Bharwad community. Janmashtami is an important festival in Saurashtra and a large fair commemorates the birth of Lord Krishna at Dwarka. The nine nights of Navratri in September-October, come alive with music and dance. This is a participatory festival when visitors can take part in the dances. The dance events are extremely colourful, with adults and children wearing brightly hued clothing and artistic ornaments for the nightly performances.

Diwali is one of the most celebrated festivals in Gujarat, and this also marks the beginning of the Hindu New Year in the state. Houses are lit up with wick lamps called diyas and the night sky bursts with spectacular fireworks. In winter, Gujarat Tourism organizes the Rann Utsav, held during the full moon night in the Great Rann of Kutch, an expanse of sparkling white salt-encrusted desert that is stunning in the moonlight.

This festival showcases the cultural and natural attractions of Kutch, together with its brilliant handicrafts. A number of other events are held between November and January like the Ahmedabad Heritage Festival, arts festivals in Ahmedabad and Vadodara, the sports carnival called Khel Mahakumbh, marathons in Ahmedabad and Vadodara, paragliding events at Saputara, and the child-friendly Kankaria Festival during the Christmas holidays at Ahmedabad's much-loved lakefront.

The significance of Gujarat fairs and festivals is that they take you closer to the rich cultural diversity of the people there. One gets to see the customs, ethics, values and beliefs of the people of Gujarat. Besides these, a number of religious festivals of the Hindus, Jains, Muslims and Parsees in the state are held at their respective holy places. In this supplement, we have covered a cross-section of fairs and festivals, which can be attended on a tour of Gujarat's many rewarding tourist attractions.







## Joy of kite flying

THE SKY IS THE LIMIT FOR GUJARATIS ON MAKARSANKRANTI

Utrayana or Makar Sankranti is like no other day in Gujarat. Commemorating the journey of the sun to the northern tropic bringing a promise of plenty, this is the time of the kite festival. On this day, the clear blue winter skies are enlivened by kites of every hue, as men and women, boys and girls, gather on terraces to fly kites, and enjoy snacks and sweets made using fresh produce of harvest. There is a spirit of friendly competition as each flyer skilfully manoeuvres the line to 'cut' other kites out of the air.

The kites flown on this day, called the Indian Fighter Kite, are made by expert artisans. They are made from light weight paper stuck on a bamboo frame of a bridle and spars, with a tail for stability. The balanced construction of the kite makes it possible for the flyer to manipulate them using a single line while withstanding reasonably strong air currents and gravity, lift and drag. The design, crafting and quality of materials determine the spin, pull and wind withstanding performance of the kite. Much detail goes into setting the bridle position and balance of tension on the bamboo spars. The flyers use a line called the 'Manjha' to fly the fighter kites. This is

typically a cotton thread coated with a mixture of finely crushed glass, glue and various abrasives. On the pavements of Gujarat's cities, it is a common sight in January to watch manjha makers encrusting the threads with the mixture that gives it the cutting edge and reeling the line onto spools or bobbins called 'phirkis'.

As the kite festival approaches, temporary markets come up in the cities and towns to sell kites and manjha. These markets are a hive of activity on the eve of Utrayana, with buyers gathering to select the best kites and lines for the festival days. The markets in the cities of Gujarat like Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat, Rajkot, Bhavnagar, etc, are vibrant and activity. Shops decorate their frontage with ornamented kites, schools and clubs hold competitions for kite flying, kite decoration and kite painting, and many announcements are made for kite flying events.

On 14th January, the residential areas come alive with kites. The rooftops throng with kite flyers, their family and friends, with blaring music and joyous yelling adding to the festive atmosphere. Since Makar Sankranti is a harvest festival, cel-



*The festival of Makar Sankranti symbolizes the onset of autumn. The sky is filled with dazzling, colourful and innovative kites with kite enthusiasts coming from all around the globe to participate in the International Kite festival sponsored and organized by Tourism Corporation of Gujarat every year.*



celebrating the arrival of warm sunshine to the northern tropics, food is very much part of the celebrations. Sugarcane, juices, sweets and snacks made from the regional produce like groundnuts, grains and sesame seeds are regulars on the rooftops. In most parts of Gujarat, the sought-after dish for lunch is Undhiyu, a variety of vegetables cooked in spices. This is a winter favourite of almost every Gujarati family, looked forward to in January when many vegetables are in season. An undhiyu comprises green beans, kand (purple yam), muthiyas which are like gram flour kebabs often coated with green vegetables, seasonal green vegetables and gourds, cooked in a variety of spices. Traditionally, this is a casserole with the vegetables roasted in an earthenware pot, buried upside-down in the ground, and hence the name Matka Undhiyu, matka for the pot and undhiyu for the upside down position in which it is fired. While Matka Undhiyu is a delicacy, specially in the fertile regions of Surat and Khambatt, there are now various fried, steamed and pot-roasted versions. Along the southern coast of Gujarat, undhiyu often has herbs, grated coconuts, palm sugar and lentils. Undhiyu is usually eaten with puri. With growing health consciousness, baked or steamed low-oil Undhiyus are now served with rotis.

The maximum excitement is generated by the kite fights, called pench, which are informal line cutting contests. The idea is to manipulate the kite by pulling or releasing

the string, which will make it go slower or faster, curve a graceful arc or spin on a wing tip. Line management is a vital part of flying a fighter kite. By releasing the line and applying tension at the right moments, the kite will move in the direction that the flyer requires. Once two lines are in contact, the respective flyers will work on pull cutting or release cutting methods to win the fight. It is a test of the construction and quality of the kite, the quality of the manjha, and the skill of the flyer. When a kite flyer is successful in cutting another kite off its line, there is much excitement on the flier's rooftop with yells of 'kaade, kaade' or 'kapyo chhe' (well cut). It is a picnic atmosphere on the terraces where families and friends munch sugarcane, 'chikkis', snacks, fruits and vegetables typical of the January harvest season, enjoy alfresco lunches of undhiyu, and root for kite flyers during the 'pench'.

After dark, tukuls ( paper lanterns carrying lit candles ) are tied to the strings of large kites. The night skies are a stunning sight with lanterns suspended in the air. Spectacular displays of fireworks burst out in the night sky to mark the end of the day. Kite flying often continues on the next day to use up the balance kites.

The best places to experience the excitement of the kite festival is in old quarters of Gujarat's cities, like the 'pols' of Ahmedabad where there is a large concentration of kite flyers.





Gujarat Tourism organises the International Kite Festival in January which offers kite flying enthusiasts from different parts of the world to exhibit their kites, enjoy flying the Indian Fighter Kite in the cities of Gujarat, and see some of the tourist attractions of the state. This event has attracted kite flyers from across India and from many countries of the world that have a kite flying culture, from China, South-East Asia and Japan to European countries and North America. It is specially popular with the people of Gujarat who come to the venues where it is held to watch kites from around the globe –decorative kites, stunt kites, sport kites, kite trains, steerable kites, butterfly kites, dragon kites, mythical theme kites, opera kites, hi-tech creations, designer kites, etc are all on display here.

The festival often features contests and competitions, exhibitions, workshops (in 2012, a Japanese kite making workshop was part of the festival), aero-sports demonstrations, and sightseeing tours. 87 kite enthusiasts from 24 countries were seen flying kites at the Sabarmati Riverfront in Ahmedabad during the International Kite Festival in January 2012. Exhibitions are held during the festival for the benefit of visitors.



For those interested in kites, a must-visit is the Kite Museum in Sanskar Kendra, the museum building designed by Le Corbusier. Designed by an artist and kite enthusiast, Bhanu Shah, this museum has an excellent exhibition of kites and interesting pieces of information about the history of kite flying.







## Festival of Dance

NAVRATRI IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S LONGEST DANCE FESTIVAL.



*Women and men perform Garba and Dandiya raas as part of Navaratri celebrations wearing colorful costumes. Garba is performed in a circle. The dance with idol of Goddess in centre symbolizes that cycle of time revolves, from birth, to life, to death and again to rebirth, the only thing that remains unchanged in a constantly changing universe is the creator*

**F**or nine autumnal nights in September-October, millions of men and women, girls and boys in Gujarat dance to devotional music dedicated to the nine mother goddesses. This is a participatory festival where visitors following the traditional dress code are welcome.

The preparations for Navratri begin months before the festival. Everywhere in Gujarat, from hobby classes to dance academies, dance classes attract patronage of children and adults who want to look poised and graceful when they dance during the festival. From traditional to trendy steps and styles, these classes offer the gamut to children and adults who want to dance their best at various venues. Much handwork and labour goes into creating the brightly coloured dresses that are worn during the festival. The traditional attire of women is the set called chaniya - choli - odhni. The chaniya, also called lahenga or gaghra, is a heavily gathered drawstring skirt. The choli is a brightly coloured blouse and the odhni is a scarf or stole. The more exclusive chaniya-choli sets are lavishly embellished with embroidery, beads, tassels and brocade, and can weigh several kilograms. More trendy choli or blouse with cut-out backs, front-

opening buttons, low or V necklines, halter necks and string criss-crossing down the backless of the choli with figure flattering cuts are worn by the fashion conscious dancers. The women and girls buy artistic jewellery to go with their dresses.

Male dancers wear embroidered jackets called kediyas worn over colourful jabba kurtas paired with brightly coloured lahengas or pyjamas, often accompanied by colourful turbans and embroidered footwear called mojdis. The streets and markets of Ahmedabad, Vadodara (Baroda), Surat, Rajkot, Bhavnagar, Jamnagar, and other cities of Gujarat, as also the towns, are lined with costumes and ornaments for sale.

It is possible to buy chaniya choli sets at the upmarket shops and boutiques of Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat and Rajkot, at market roads like Ratan Pol in Ahmedabad's walled city, cottage emporia across the state, and at the night market around Law Garden in western Ahmedabad. Some shops exclusively deal in festive chaniya cholis, like Jagruti Exports and Jainam Handicrafts in Paldi. Asopalav, Deepkala, Rupkala and Radhika stores that have a presence in big cities like Ahmedabad, Vadodara and Surat, offer upmarket chaniya choli, while Jade



Blue is good for traditional men's wear. Boutiques like Bandhej, which has two stores in Ahmedabad, also turns out good Chaniya Cholis. The traditional favourite destination remains Ratan Pol, in the walled city of Ahmedabad, where you can get dresses and jewellery for the garba nights. Ajanta Shopping Centre on Ashram Road and the boutique stores of CG Road should be explored. Ramakda Market near Teen Darwaja in the walled city of Ahmedabad is a good place to look for dandiya sticks and decorations. For inexpensive silver jewellery, dandiya sticks and other souvenirs of the Navratri season, the night market around Law Garden in Ahmedabad makes for great bargain shopping.

Come Ashwin Sud, the first night of the Hindu month of Ashwin, and Gujarat turns into a blaze of colour. Colourfully dressed dancers can be seen on the streets and lanes. Vibrant events are held at clubs, in their schools and colleges, or on stage at theatres. It is a social event and community activity, with entire neighbourhoods becoming part of the festivities. In Gujarat, the whole atmosphere is one of revelry and celebration for the nine nights culminated on the eve of Dusserra. A popular dance during Navratri is the Garba during which women dance in a circle, clapping hands, snapping fingers or striking small sticks to the tal or beat. The garba gets its name from the perforated, illuminated pot called garbi, placed on the floor of every house during Navratri. According to some scholars, the fire in the garbi is a symbol of fertility and worships the mother goddesses as the bearers of life. Indeed, the word Garba is derived from the Sanskrit word Garbadeep, which means a light inside a pot and represents the Almighty shining through the perforations of the pot, which symbolizes the universe. Often women dance balancing the garbi pot or mandvi on their head.

The dandiya raas is a group dance during which people of both sexes participate. It gets its name from the dandiya or stick that is struck together during the circular dance movements, and the raas represents the circular pattern of the dance. Traditionally, dances are usually centred around a mandvi, a structure erected for the purpose of holding diyas (wick-lamps) in niches. The Garba songs usually have religious themes in honour of the goddesses. Bhajans (devotional songs), dayros (folk songs) and garba songs are a feature of the Navratri festival.



While traditionally Navratri dances, called Sheri Garbas, were typically neighbourhood affairs, the contemporary form of Navratri gathers people to venues for large participatory events. The passes and tickets of events that have well-known singers or celebrity guests are specially sought-after. For instance, Mahesh Desai of Friends Cultural group is known for his thematic Navratri night programs, in Ahmedabad, with great attention in detail in the decoration the gates, the grounds and the stage, and lighting design. These programs are spectator friendly for people of all age groups from toddlers to senior citizens who do not dance. There is a 'Centre Stage' for professional performing groups whose costumes and repertoire of vigorous and graceful steps make the audience enjoy watching the dance and get the feel of having seen the folk dances at their highest standard.

The dandiya dhamal programs organised by SOI group of companies have become iconic in Ahmedabad for their professional management. Besides having well-known singers and troupes at their programs, SOI also offers a platform for emerging talent through contests and related events. The large crowds at such events attract corporate sponsorship for prizes for best performers and best dresses. Their innovative theme decor and design adds to the attraction of their dandiya nights. In Vadodara, United Way of Baroda and Maa Foundation Trust of the corporate Sandesara group are iconic. Large garba gatherings are held in the Naulakhi Grounds, Karelibaugh, Ankara garba ground, Nyay Mandir area, etc of Vadodara, and the Race Course Ground in Rajkot. The Leo-Pioneer Group, Rajkot, is well-known for its large Navratri programs with different troupes and cultural groups invited on different nights.





For a more traditional look at Navratri, visit the Shaktipitha of Ambaji, and other Mataji temples at Bahucharaji, Pavagadh, Ashapura Matano Madh, Bhavnagar's Khodiyar Mata temple, Chamunda Mata temple on Chotila hill, Harshad Mata near Dwarka, Khed Brahma, etc. Pali is a huge celebration of particular communities at a site near Gandhinagar.

For art connoisseurs, a unique aspect of Navratri is the Kalamkari paintings done in honour of Durga. Mata ni Pachhedi, paintings on cloth in honour of the mother goddess, have special significance in when they are bestowed at shrines to the goddesses as temple curtains. These narrative kalamkari cloth paintings can also be bought in Ahmedabad as also its less expensive block-printed version. These paintings are called Mata ni Pachhedi because they depict the mother goddess in her manifestations of destroying evil forces enshrined in an architectural space with processions of people showing devotion to the goddess, deities of the Hindu pantheon, and narrations of stories from the epics in columns around it.

The typical Mata ni Pachhedi has the mother goddess in fighting attitude as Amba, shown clutching weapons in each of her ten hands, at the centre, with images of other deities, priests, devotees and narratives from epics arranged in columns around her. The themes, dimensions and proportions of the images in a Pachhedi



vary considerably according to the visualisation of the artist. Sun and the moon motifs in the upper corners symbolise constant features of life. Often Chadarvos and Pachhedis depict garba, the dance in honour of the mother goddesses, and other festivities. During Navratri, these paintings are used as portable shrines too when communities like the Vagharis dance the garba and dandiya in honour of the mother goddess around a mandvi (a wick-holding structure) and the narrative paintings. You can buy the kalamkaris or inexpensive block printed versions of these paintings from the artisans or at emporia.







## Kaleidoscopic Kutch

KUTCH IS AT ITS COLOURFUL AND EXOTIC BEST DURING THE RANN UTSAV

**B**ounded on all sides by either the Arabian Sea or the marshy desert plains of the Rann of Kutch, Kutch is a place that stands apart. Shot through with the colours of the heavily embroidered attires of its people, Kutch is one of the most colourful regions of India and offers a glimpse of Gujarat at her exotic best. Visitors are enchanted by the villages, medieval forts, majestic palaces, historic ports, temples, monasteries and beautiful beaches of Kutch. Here, with little effort, you can travel from the arid grasslands of Banni and white salt encrusted desert of the Great Rann of Kutch to the pretty beach of Mandvi, from the walled city of Bhuj or the modern city of Gandhidham to remote villages where you will be mesmerised by the rainbow of colourful attires worn by the women, the exquisiteness of the embroideries done by women working from home, the rich repertoire of other handicraft skills, and the picturesque mud-plastered round houses called bhungas lovingly decorated with hand-paintings and mirror inlays.

Gujarat Tourism's annual event, the Rann Utsav, offers a glimpse of the incredibly diverse attractions of Kutch. From the tourist village set up at Dhorodo, the Great Rann of

Kutch, tourists are taken in camel cart to salt flats of the Great Rann of Kutch, an expanse of about 30,000 square kilometres of salt desert and seasonal marshland that lies between the Gulf of Kutch and the Indus River. The area was once the shallows of the Arabian Sea before geological uplift closed off the connection of the sea, leaving behind a vast lake which turns into a desert in the dry months. Held during the full moon period in winter, this festival gives tourists the rare opportunity to see the Great Rann of Kutch in the moonlight. As the camel carts journey across the plains to the selected site in the white desert, you can witness the brilliance of the desert sunset in the clear blue winter sky. Enjoy folk music of Kutch while waiting for nightfall when the white salt covered plains are bathed in the light of the full moon. The festival is geared up to offer tourists a unique experience in the Great Rann of Kutch. Food is served in the desert wilderness and dinner is accompanied by a concert of music like Sindhi Bhajans and Sufi songs.

During the Rann Utsav, tours are organised to explore the many attractions of Kutch. An exciting trip from Dhorodo is to Kala Dungar, literally Black Hills. The drive winds



*Rann Utsav offers an opportunity for visitors to attend folk dance, camel safari, live-in-tents, musical moments, sanctuary visits, watch artisans at work, shop directly from NGO's craftspeople and village co-operatives, to see the great historical monuments and many more activities.*





up a hill to the Dattatray Temple which is one of the highest points in the Kutch district. From this site you can get a panoramic view of the vast expanses of the salt desert of the Great Rann of Kutch. Trek in the surrounding scrub vegetation which thrills with the calls of bulbuls, larks and other birds. One of the most dramatic sights of Kala Dungar is that of watching jackals come for temple offers. When the priests from the temple call, Lo-Aang, Lo-Aang, packs of jackal come out from the scrubland to feast on the temple offerings laid out for them.

The festival also features folk performances, competitions and handicraft demonstrations. Dhorodo lies in the heart of the Banni grasslands where pastoral villages produce some of India's finest hand-embroidery. Suf embroidery is counted on the warp and weft of the cloth in a surface satin stitch worked from the back. Motifs are never drawn. Each artisan imagines her design, then counts it out in reverse, thus requiring much detailing. The craftswomen fill symmetrical patterns with tiny triangles, and accent stitches. Khaarek is a geometric style also counted and precise. Paako is a tight square chain and double buttonhole stitch embroidery, often with black slanted satin stitch outlining. The motifs of paako, sketched in mud with needles, are primarily floral and generally arranged in symmetrical patterns. Visit the villages that dot the Banni scrub-and-grassland like Sumrasar Sheikh, Bhirendiaro, Hodka, Gorewali, Dhorodo, Ludia, etc to watch women doing embroidery. Each community has its own distinctive style of embroidery. The Muthwas, the Jaths, the Sodhas, the Meghwals, the Ahirs, the Raba-

Rabaris and other communities are each known for their embroidery. Woodcarving, leather crafts and pottery also thrive in the Banni villages. Khavda is the centre for many interesting weaves.

Northwest of Bhuj, the villages of Zura and Nirona are home to many lesser-known crafts skills. At both Zura and Nirona, it is possible to watch luhars (blacksmiths) hand-casting melodic bells. After crafting the cylindrical body and domed crown from iron, the Luhar families start the processes of coating the bell with copper. The sound of each bell depends on its making and the luhars take pride in the music that their bells can produce when struck though they themselves have no musical training. These villages are also known for their lacquered woodcrafts.

The folk art that is now limited to just one family is rogan, which involves an intricate process of creating colours by mixing pigments with castor oil. When the mixture dries it becomes a gooey paste. The artisans use an iron rod to paint the fabrics with this thick colour mixture.

Kutch has many religious and archaeological attractions. Dholavira, in eastern Kutch, has one of the most substantial remains of the Harappan or Indus Valley Civilisation found in India. Western Kutch has the Ashapura-nomadh temple, Narayan Sarovar which is one of the five holiest lakes for Hindus, the shore temple of Koteswar and the historic Gurdvara at Lakhpat. There are important Jain temples along the coast from Naliya to Badreshwar.







## The Betrothal Fair

TARNETAR FAIR IS A FREE-FALL INTO A WHIRLWIND OF COLOURS, ROMANCE AND MUSIC

**T**he Tarnetar Fair is a unique event – during this fair, young women from the Bharwad community and other pastoral groups of Gujarat meet to select their bridegrooms in a manner reminiscent of the Swayamawaras of historic India. Swayamwara was a practice of choosing a husband, from among a list of suitors, by a girl of eligible age.

It is believed Tarnetar was once the seat of power of Panchal Naresh Drupad, king of the Panchal region. In order to win the hand of Drupad's daughter, Draupadi, the suitor had to hit a fish's eye with a bow and arrow. This fish was just an image on a rotating wheel, which was rotating on a rod. The rod was placed in a pan filled with water. The many suitors had to pierce the eye with a bow and arrow aiming by means of the reflection in the water. Arjuna won the hand of Draupadi in this Swayamwara, one of the most important events in the epic, Mahabharata. According to another legend, the Ganges flew through this area before changing course, the kund or temple tank here being considered as holy during the fair as the Ganga. This is also believed by legend to be the place where Brahma appeased Shiva

with an offering of lotuses including a netra kamal which became his third eye, the reason this temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva.

The fair is set in the countryside near the Trineteshwar Temple, said to have been an ancient shrine. This temple was largely erected in the late 19th and early-20th century during the reign of the Maharaja of Baroda. The temple follows the traditional layout of an entrance portico supported by columns, an assembly hall and the main sanctum surmounted by a towering shikhara dome. During this fair, devotees gather for bhajans and tirtans in the temple courtyard and crowd for darshan of the Shiva idol in the temple. The holy pond called the kund is the place for ritual bathing. The fair site near the temple teems with people arriving in colourfully bedecked bullock carts, jampacked jeeps, buses, trucks and tractors. You can even see decorated horses and camels at this site. Since this is a betrothal fair, the youth of marriageable age come dressed at their most colourful. At a fair where women have the first choice, the Bharwad bachelor is quite a peacock, brightly dressed in an embroidered jacket called kediya, waistcoat







called a kabja or sleeveless jackets called bandis with colourful peacock motifs and other patterns, round turbans with twisted plaits, waistbands, embroidered mojdi footwear, and chunky gold and silver earrings, finger and neck ornaments, and chunky kadas on their wrists. Young women wear ghagra skirts with choli tops and odhnis covering their heads, all three pieces embroidered and block printed in brilliant colours set with mirrors, and artistic silver ornaments on their ears, necks and toenails are characteristic of a Bharwad girl. The camels and bullocks are also gaily painted and decked up for the occasion with colourful reigns and canopied carts, and high quality purebred Kathiawadi horses can be seen at the fairground.

Many traditional customs continue right from the flag hoisted over the Trineteshwar by the Mahant of Paliyad, one of the important priestly families of Gujarat's Kathiawad region that announces the start of the fair. The fairgrounds around the temple are crowded with people enjoying themselves on the ferris wheels, taking parts in competitions, and meeting others of their commu-

nity after years. Some of the groups seen during the fair are also nomadic or semi-nomadic. The eligible men sport umbrellas of richly embroidered and mirror-inlaid fabrics, with brightly coloured cloths hanging from them like tassels, a unique feature of the fair.

As the music reaches a crescendo, people break into traditional folk dances. At Tarnetar, the most typical dance is the Hudo Raas popular with the Bharwads during which men and women pair up facing one another, clapping each other hands and beating the ground with their feet according to the beat, and this can get vigorous and attractive to watch as the group gets into a synchronised rhythm.

As the fair progresses, you may see young women approaching prospective bridegrooms, talking to each other and probably deciding upon suitability of a match. The final matchmaking will probably take place after the fair is over when the pairs who have met at Tarnetar when the families get involved to select the auspicious day and time for the wedding.



*"The youth of marriageable age come dressed at their most colourful. The Bharwad bachelor is quite a peacock, brightly dressed in an embroidered jacket called kediya, waistcoat called a kabja or sleeveless jackets called bandis with colourful peacock motifs and other patterns"*





## Fairs - Windows to Gujarat's Culture

GUJARAT'S TRIBAL AND RELIGIOUS FAIRS OFFER A GLIMPSE OF THE RICH CULTURE OF GUJARAT

### SHIVRATRI FAIR AT BHAVNATH

The Bhavnath Fair marks the festival of Mahashivratri, in February-March, at Bhavnath in the hills near Junagadh. Legend has it that when Shiva and Parvati were traveling over the Girnar Hills their divine garment fell over the water body (kund). This makes the kund an important site for Shiva devotees. During the Mahashivratri period, naga bawas (naked sadhus or ascetics) do a 'parikrama' (pilgrimage circuit) of the Girnar Hills. They are known to bathe in the holy kund before joining the Mahashivratri procession. A maha-puja, a great ritual prayer, takes place at the temple, when the naga bawas can be seen blowing conch shells. Many of these sages coming on colourfully decorated elephants, an added attraction for tourists. Stalls come up with vendors selling prayer objects, devotional art, ritual utensils and interesting artefacts. Gujarat's folk theatre, called Bhavai, can often be seen during the Bhavnath Fair.

### KVANT FAIR

A number of colourful tribal fairs take place during the Holi and Dusserra in Eastern

Gujarat, including parts of Vadodara, Panchmahal, Dahod and Narmada districts. One of the largest of these is the Kvant Mela which is held at Kvant village near Chhota Udepur during the Holi period. This fair offers an unrivalled opportunity to experience the culture of tribal groups like the Rathwa who come in large numbers from Gujarat and neighbouring Madhya Pradesh to Kvant. Women, bedecked in colourful clothes and attractive ornaments, are seen walking to the fair in large groups. Jeeps, buses and trucks are jam-packed with people at their festive best heading towards the site of the fair. Sometimes, groups of men playing the flute and women playing cymbals (manjeera) can be seen on the road to Kvant. At Kvant, the atmosphere is festive. Men with painted bodies, peacock feathers adorning their turbans, and sometimes masks to match enjoy dancing, play musical instruments and forming human pyramids. As the dances progress, the music reaches a crescendo and the rattling of stones inside the gourds hung on the belts of the dancing men adds to the rhythm. A number of rituals can be seen at Kvant on the day of the fair.





### CHITRA VICHITRA FAIR

In March-April, after Holi, there are hugely attended tribal fairs at Koteswar, Chitra Vichitra Mahadev, Ambamahuda near Poshina and other sites in North Gujarat. One of the largest of these is the Chitra Vichitra Fair about a fortnight after Holi. This fair is celebrated at a Mahadev Temple sited above the confluence of two tributaries with the Sabarmati River. According to a local legend, this site is associated with Chitragada and Vichitravirya, sons of Satyavati and Śaṅtanu in the Hindu epic Mahabharata. On the dark night called Amawas, tribal people gather in large numbers to mourn at the confluence of three rivers at night. In the morning, offerings are made to the river and mourning continues. As the day progresses, the fair develops with tribal and pastoral people coming in large numbers to enjoy the amusements on offer at the fair. This fair is a good place to experience the culture and traditions of the Garasia Adivasi, a tribal group. Garasia women wear brightly coloured attires and attractive silver jewellery. Some of them have attractive tribal tattoos. Matchmaking occurs during the fair and eloping is a Garasia tradition.

### DANGS DARBAR

The annual three-day festival called the Dangs Darbar is organized before Holi to honour and hand over annual pension to erstwhile tribal chieftains at Ahwa, the capital of the Dang district in South Gujarat. The tradition continues today in this tribal-dominated district, as many of the former Rajas and Naiks are still accorded status unlike the princely families whose titles and privy purses were abolished. Before Independence the five tribal kings of Dang often challenged the might of the British. According to tradition, at a battle in Lashkaria Amba, all five erstwhile states got together to protect Dang from British rule. As per the compromise in the mid-19th century, the British were allowed to use the forests and their natural products against which they had to pay certain amount to the tribal kings. Continuing this tradition, a monthly political pension by the Government of India. This is the time for great festivity at Ahwa, the district headquarters, and at the hill resort of Saputara. For visitors to the Dangs, this festival is a great opportunity to see tribal communities like Bhils, Kunbis, Warlis and Gamits in their traditional attire. The fair begins with a ceremonial procession. Tribal dances of the region are spectacular to watch. People move in concentric circles holding each other by the waist, dancing to

the beat of percussion and wind instruments. Many musical instruments are typical of this district. At the Dang Darbar in 2012, the achievement of the Dang district in agricultural and social development was highlighted.

### RAVECHI FAIR

The Ravechi Fair, at the Ravechi Mata Temple near Rapar in eastern Kutch, is one of the most colourful fairs of Kutch District. The centre of focus is Ravechi Mata Temple, a major pilgrimage centre for Rabaris. This fair, in August-September, attracts a large gathering of Waghadia Rabaris, Ahirs and other pastoral groups. A number of amusements are a feature of this fair.

### VAUTHA LIVESTOCK FAIR

During Kartika Poornima, one of the most important full moon days in the Hindu calendar, a number of livestock fairs occur in Gujarat, two of the most important being the camel fair at Sidhapur and the livestock fair at Vautha. The Vautha fair attracts pastoral groups like the Jath with tens of thousands of donkeys, herds of cattle and camels. The livestock mart comes up at the confluence of seven rivers (tributaries of the river Sabarmati) near the village of Vautha. The donkeys are painted in an array of colours, and decorated to suit the occasion. Camels are also colourfully bedecked and sold on the sand dunes along the rivers. The fair offers opportunities to experience the culture of pastoral groups. Trading and auction of livestock takes place at the fair, and it can be interesting to watch herdsmen carefully selecting their animals. On the day of the full moon, pilgrims take dips in the holy river confluence, give offerings to the river, and pray at the site With Kartikeya.





# Religious festivities

GUJARAT HAS KEY PLACES OF PILGRIMAGE FOR MOST OF THE MAJOR RELIGIONS IN ASIA

**E**id and Mahurram are celebrated with great pomp and large congregations in Ahmedabad which has many impressive mosques and mausoleum complexes. The Tazia procession of Mahurram in Ahmedabad has considerable historic significance – Mughal Emperor Jehangir and Noor Jehan are said to have watched it from the city's Teen Darwaja. The mausoleum of the spiritual mentor of the Sultans of Ahmedabad, Ahmed Sheikh, at Sarkhej, is an important heritage site and architectural marvel where large fairs are held.

On the full moon night of Fagun month (March-April), thousands of devotees can be seen walking to Dakor on a Padayatra (pilgrimage walk) to attend the Holi celebrations. This is a huge congregation of people in numbers beyond comprehension in this temple town. According to legend, a Krishna devotee Bholanath used to walk all the way to Dwarka from Dakor on every full moon night to worship Lord Krishna. Following the wish of the devotee, Lord Krishna is said to have come to reside at Dakor (Dhankpuri). The priests at Dwarka temple tried to get back the Ranchhodrai Krishna idol. The priest of Dwarka knew that Bholanath was a poor man. So they told him that he should either pay for the stone idol in gold or return it. The only golden ornament the poor devotee had was his wife's nose ring. When the idol and the nose ring were placed in the scales they were found to be equal in weight. That is how Krishna changed his residence from Dwarka to Dakor for the convenience of a devotee, according to local belief. Thus, Dakor remains an important place of Krishna pilgrimage.

A large number of pilgrims visit Ambaji, in north Gujarat, on full moon days. One of the most important is the Badharvi Poornima, in August-September, during which a great congregation of pilgrims walk to Khedbrahma and Ambaji to attend the festival. According to the story, Daksha performed a yagna with a desire to take revenge on Lord Shiva because his daughter Dakshayani also known as Sati had married the 'yogi' Shiva against his wish. Daksha invited all the deities to the yagna except for Shiva and Shakti.

The fact that she was not invited did not deter Shakti from attending the yagna. She had expressed her desire to attend to Shiva who had tried his best to dissuade her from going. Shiva eventually allowed her to go escorted by his followers. Unable to bear her father's insults towards Shiva, Sati invoked her yogic powers and immolated herself. The angered Shiva destroyed Daksha's sacrifice, cut off Daksha's head, and later replaced it with that of a male goat as he restored him to life due to the prayers of all demi gods and Brahma. Still immersed in grief, Shiva picked up the remains of Sati's body, and performed the Tandava, the celestial dance of destruction, across all creation. The other gods requested Vishnu to intervene to stop this destruction, towards which Vishnu used the Sudarshana Chakra, which cut through the corpse of Sati. The various parts of the body fell at several spots all through the Indian subcontinent and formed sites which are known as Shakti Peethas today. As per this legend, the piece of the heart of Sati fell at the top of Gabbar, a hill at Ambaji. Ambaji, being consecrated for Goddess Amba, is also extremely important during Navratri.

Palitana, Girnar, Shankeshwar and other Jain temples are key places for Jain festivals and large fairs. Palitana is one of the five most important places of Jain pilgrimage. It offers the magnificent spectacle of more 863 temples clustered on two ridges of the Shatrunjaya Hill. Walking around the temples, you can see delightful marble carvings, jewelled images and ornate shikhara towers, with the backdrop of scenic landscapes. A large fair is held near the foot of Shatrunjaya Hill in March-April.

The pilgrimage centres of the Parsees or Zoroastrians are festive on Nouroz which falls in March and Pateti, a day of introspection in August-September. Following the Islamic conquest of Iran in the seventh century, a large group of Zoroastrians fled to western India and found refuge at Sanjan. Over the centuries, they lit their highest grade of ritual fire, called Atashbehram, at Udvada, Navsari and Surat in Gujarat, and Mumbai in Maharashtra.







# THE MYSTIC RANN UTSAV

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GUJARAT HAS SOMETHING  
FOR EVERY TRAVELLER