

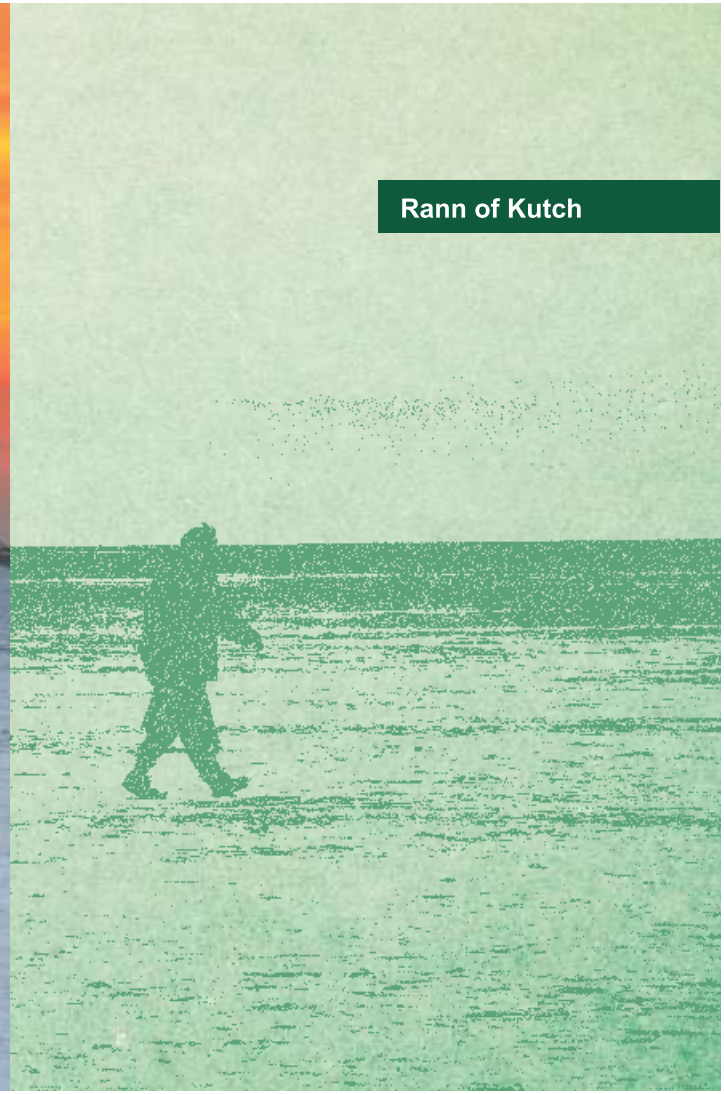


Kaleidoscopic Kutch





Rann of Kutch



About Kutch

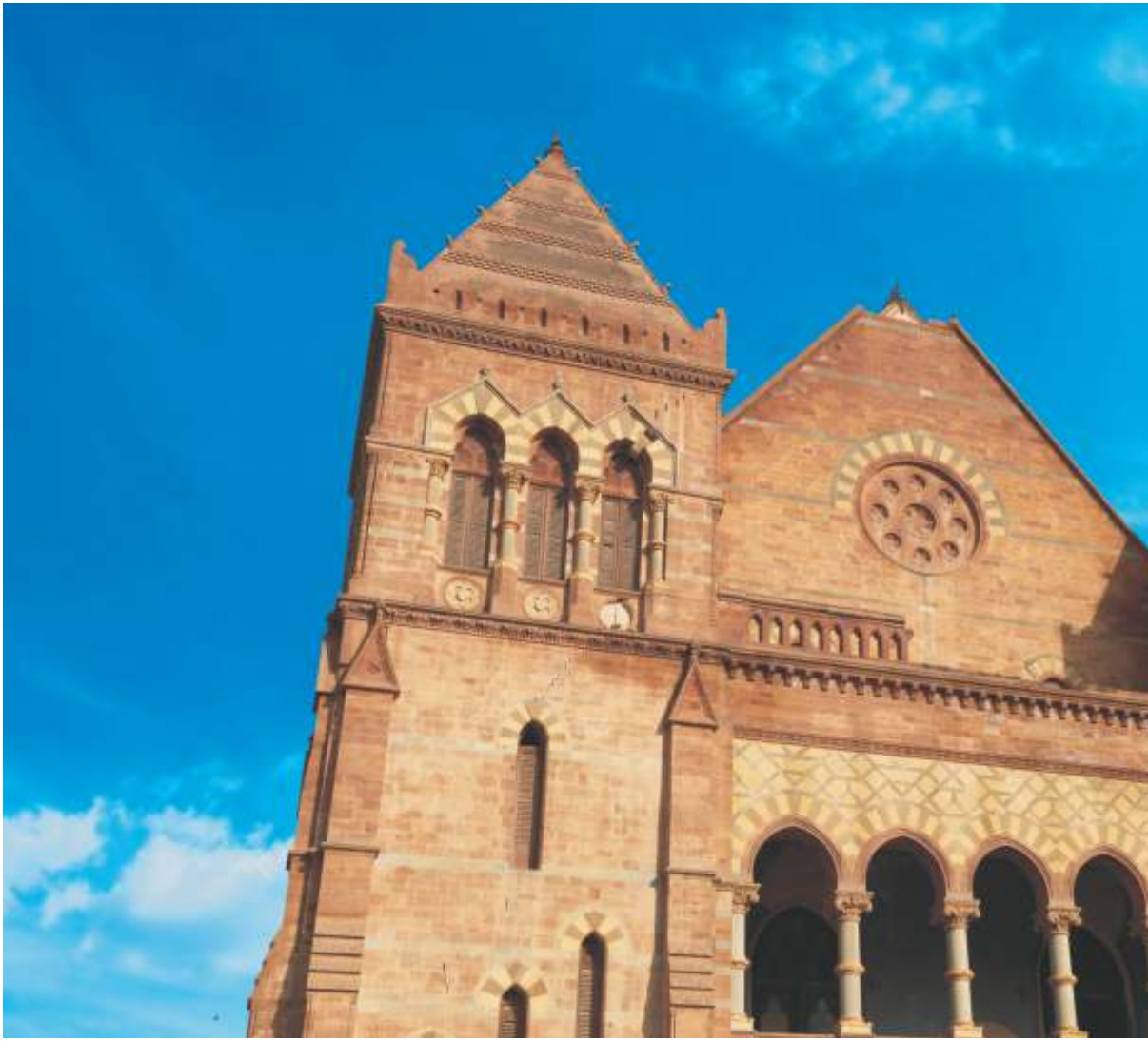
Kutch literally means something which intermittently becomes wet and dry. A large part of this district is known as the Rann of Kutch, which is a shallow wetland which submerges in water during the rainy season and becomes dry during other seasons. The word Kutch is also used for a tortoise in Sanskrit.

Legendary heroism and romance lend enchantment to Kutch, a land of great antiquity forming the northwestern part of Gujarat. The early Stone Age man lived in this area which finds mention in the Mahabharata and the Puranas. The adventurous people of this land, who once built ships and crossed the oceans, have a rich heritage of handicrafts.

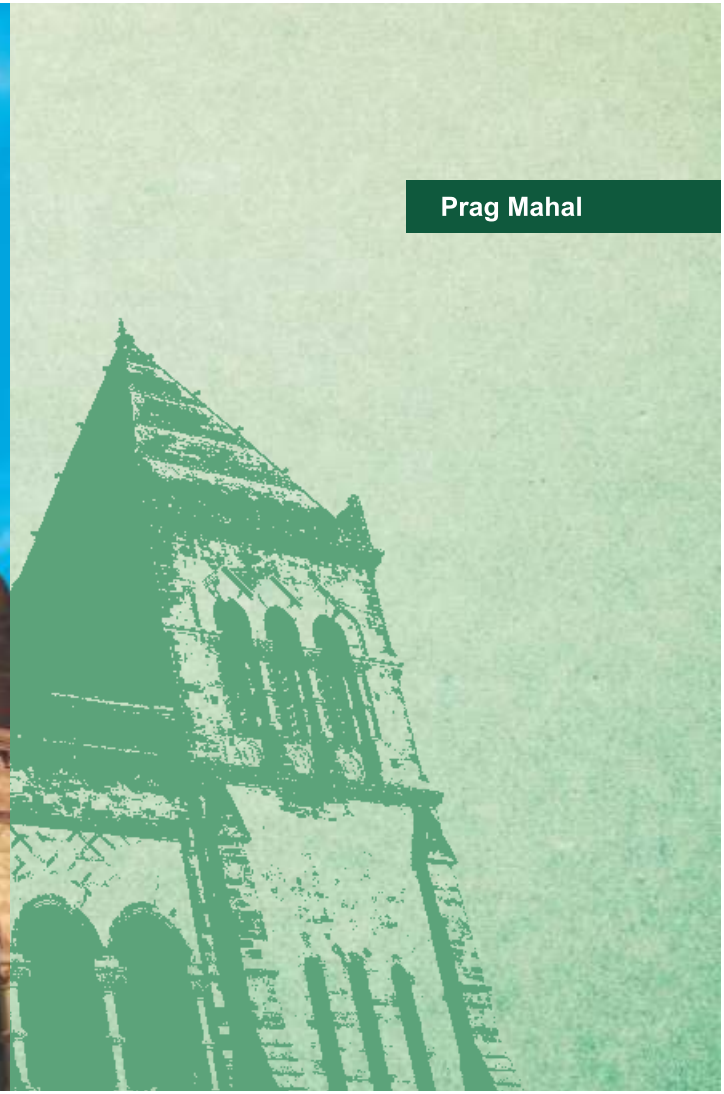
The district is also famous for the ecologically important Banni grasslands with their seasonal marshy wetlands which form the outer belt of the Rann of Kutch. Along the northern edge of the Rann of Kutch lies the border with Pakistan.

The coast and the marshlands attract many migratory and domestic birds including giant flocks of flamingoes.





Prag Mahal



Tourist attractions

Bhuj: Headquarters of the district and the most important place in the area is the walled town of Bhuj, picturesquely placed between two streams. Bhuj was built by Rao Khengar I (1548-85). The city wall, 10.5mtrs high and forming a polygon, has 5 major gates and one small gate known as Chathi bari. Not much remains of the fort wall.

Bhuj, set against the dramatic backdrop of Bhujjo hill is an interesting city to explore. The tombs, palaces, museums and other buildings from the rule of Naga chiefs, the Jadeja Rajputs, the Gujarat Sultans and the British also form a part of Bhuj's history.

Aina Mahal: Known as the Palace of Mirrors, the Aina Mahal was built in 1761, under Maharao Lakhpatji, a great patron of art and culture. He deputed his protégé Ramsung Malam, a sailor turned master craftsman, to Holland to master the skills and commissioned him to construct the Aina Mahal, among many other splendid works.

Decorated with resplendent chandeliers, fountains and doors inlaid with ivory and gold. The palace cost 8 million koris to build. Entry fee is ₹20.

Location: Darbargadh, Bhuj.

Visiting hours: 09.00 am to 12.00 noon and 03.00 pm to 06.00 pm. Closed on Thursday and Public Holidays.

For more details: +91 2832 291702.

Prag Mahal: Located within the precincts of the Aina Mahal, the impressive Prag Mahal was commissioned by Maharao Pragmalji II in 1865. On the 1st floor of this Italian Gothic masterpiece is the large Darbar hall ornate with carved columns and statues. The palace's 45 metres tower stands tall over the Bhuj skyline and is an architectural marvel. Entry fee is ₹20.

Location: Situated next to the Aina Mahal, Bhuj.

Visiting hours: 09.00 am to 12.15 pm and 03.00 pm to 06.00 pm.

Closed on Public Holidays.

For more details: +91 9429821524.

Ramkund: Located behind the Ram Dhun temple, Ramkund is a square tank. The walls of the tank have intricately carved miniature idols depicting the ten incarnations of Vishnu, along with other deities of the Hindu pantheon.

Location: Near the Kutch Museum, behind Ram Dhun Temple.

Visiting hours: Across the day, every day.

Hamirsar Lake: The majestic Hamirsar Lake rests in the centre of Bhuj. In the morning, locals come here to feed the birds and the fish. The surrounding copse of trees provides refuge from the midday heat and in the evenings it is thronged by locals of all ages. This is also a venue for performances of the local traditional folk artists.

Location: On Kodhki Road, Bhuj.

Visiting hours: Across the day, every day.

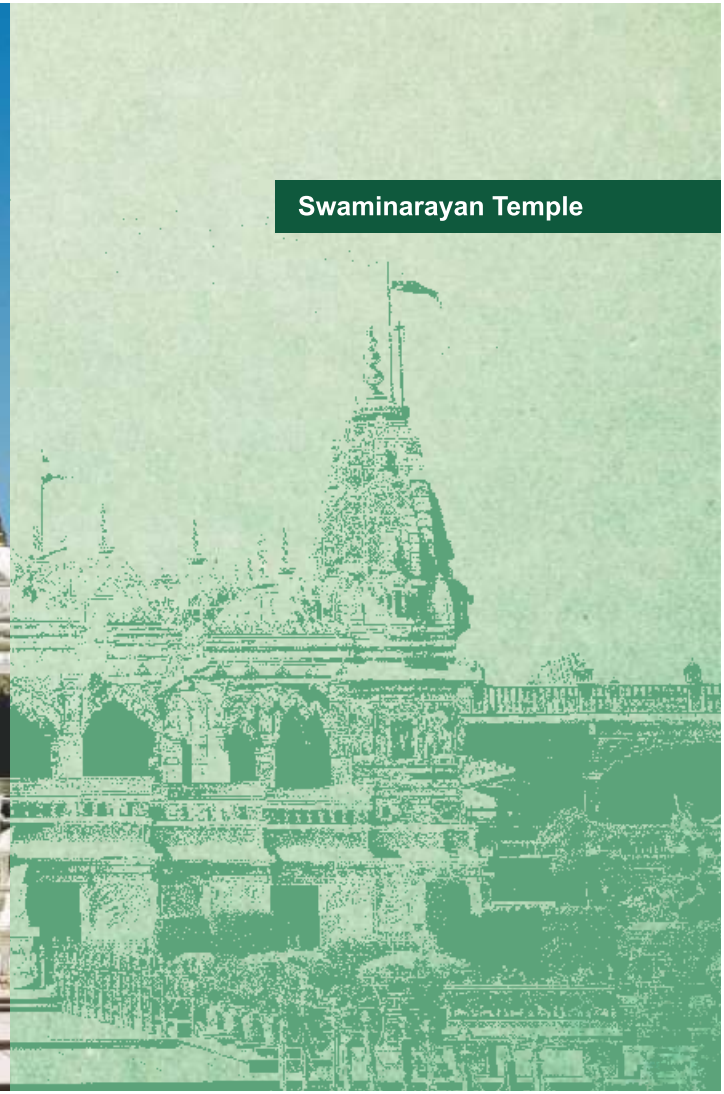
Rao Lakhpats Chhatardi: To the south of Hamirsar lake are the Chhatardis or cenotaphs of the Royal family. A memorial stone commemorates the spot where the body is cremated with a pavilion built around it.

The Chhatardis of Lakpatji, Rayadhanji and Desarji are partially intact. The quiet and cool location of these monuments attracts a lot of people and is an excellent spot to enjoy sunrise and sunset.





Swaminarayan Temple



Swaminarayan Temple: The temple is one of the 6 temples built during the time of Swami Sahajanand, the founder of the Swaminarayan sect. Intricate wooden carvings coated with vibrant colours characterise this temple.

Location: Opposite City Police Station, Tirth Dham.

For more details: +91 2832 251331.

Kutch Museum: The oldest museum of Gujarat founded by Maharao Khengarji II, it has the largest existing collection of Kshatrapa inscriptions dating back to the 1st century AD as well as examples of extinct Kutchi script, and a collection of coins (koris - Kutchi currency). The museum exhibits also comprise of traditional textiles, metal artifacts, pottery, woodwork, sculptures, archaeological objects and a variety of other embroideries, paintings, etc.

Entry fees: ₹5/- for Indians, ₹50/- for Foreign nationals.

Location: On Kutch Museum Road, Ghanshyam Nagar, 1.5 km from Bhuj station.

Visiting hours: 10.00 am to 01.00 pm, 02.30 pm to 05.30 pm.
Closed on Wednesdays, 2nd & 4th Saturdays and Public Holidays.

For more details: +91 2832 220541.

Bharatiya Sanskriti Darshan Museum: A passionate Forest Officer, Ramsinhji Rathod during his official sojourns to the remotest regions of Kutch collected Kutchi folk art & handicrafts and an array of artifacts. The collection has grown into an institution and is dedicated to promotion and preservation of local crafts and culture. Entry fee for Indians is ₹10 and ₹50 for foreigners.

Location: South along the College Road at Old Umed Nagar.

Visiting hours: 10.00 am to 01.00 pm and 02.00 pm to 06.00 pm. Closed on Sunday, 2nd and 4th Saturday and Public Holidays.

For more details: +91 2832 226580.

Bhujodi: Bhujodi is the artisans cooperative settlement comprising approx. 1200 inhabitants versed in traditional weaving. You can see live demonstrations and buy hand woven products such as woollen and cotton stoles, shawls, blankets, bed and table linen directly from the weavers.

A number of self help groups, NGOs and Crafts Park have come up to facilitate the craftsmen to market their products nationally and internationally and fetch them good prices.

Location: 8 km Southeast of Bhuj.

For more details: +91 2832 240723.

Sharad Baug Palace: Sharad Baug palace remained the King's residence until Madansingh, the last ruler of Kutch died in 1991. Upon his demise the palace became a museum. Surrounded by gardens of flowering and medicinal plants, it gives a glimpse into the past grandeur of Kutch. Entry fee is ₹ 10.

Location: Opposite Khengarji Park, Bhuj.

Visiting hours: 09.00 am to 12.00 noon and 03.00 pm to 06.00 pm. Closed on Friday and Public Holidays.

For more details: +91 2832 291701.

Kera: This place houses the Shiva Temple that dates to the era of the Solanki rulers. The inner sanctum as well as the main spire is the major attraction. It has some classic sculptures and simple but elegant stone grills. Also, the Fort of Kapilkot is next to the temple.

Location: 22 km south of Bhuj, on the road to Mandra.

Visiting hours: Across the day, every day.





Dholavira

Places to see around:

Dholavira: Dholavira is an ancient site locally known as 'Kotda Timba'. The site contains ruins of an ancient Indus Valley Civilisation/Harappan city. Situated in the northwest corner of Khadir is a large island surrounded on all sides by the Great Rann of Kutch. Dholavira is one of the two largest known Indus settlements in India.

The site of Dholavira was discovered as recently as 1967. In its fully developed state the settlements had 3 pronounced parts: the Citadel, Middle town and Lower town. All three were interlinked with an elaborate system of fortifications. The site is spread over 250 acres. As a result of extensive excavations, Dholavira has emerged as a major Harappan city remarkable for its exquisite town planning, aesthetic architecture, amazing water management and storage system, and monumental structures. Large number of antiquities such as seals, beads, gold, silver and terracotta ornaments, pottery and bronze vessels have been found. The site has a unique distinction of yielding an inscription often large-sized signs of Harappan script, indeed the oldest signboard of the world.

The site also has a Dholavira Museum where you can peruse pictures and artifacts found from the excavations.

Location: 250 km from Bhuj.

Dholavira Museum Timings: 08.00 am to 06.00 pm, every day.

Harappan Site Timings: 08.00 am to 07.00 pm in summers and 08.00 am to 06.00 pm in winters.

Lakhpat: Lakhpat literally means a place which earns revenue in lakhs. At one time, a very fertile land and a major port, it was totally destroyed during the earthquake of 1819, when the river Indus-Sindhu changed its course, but left a mineral wealth by way of Panandro mines.

The fort walls form an irregular polygon. Of interest here is an octagonal black stone tomb of Ghouse Muhammad, half Hindu and half Muslim in his customs, who was believed to have supernatural powers. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, is believed to have camped in Lakhpat on his way to Mecca.

Location: 140 km from Bhuj.

Mata no madh: This shrine is of Ashapura Mata, the family diety - Kuldevi of Yaduvansh. She is also the family diety of the former Kutch rulers. The temple is steeped in antiquity as far as its origin is concerned. This temple was built by one Devchand Shah who was ordered in his dream to construct a temple and keep the temple doors closed for 6 months. At the end of 5 months, Devchand Shah heard some music from within the closed temple and in his curiosity opened the doors of the temple. The image of the deity was not complete, the legs were missing, however the Goddess was pleased with the devotion and blessed him.

Koteshwar: Koteshwar is the ancient Shiva temple located at the western most tip of India, on the shores of the Arabian Sea and a tributary of the Sindhu river. This is one of the rare temples facing the west. It is said that you can hear a crow crowing in Karachi and at night see the lights in Karachi.

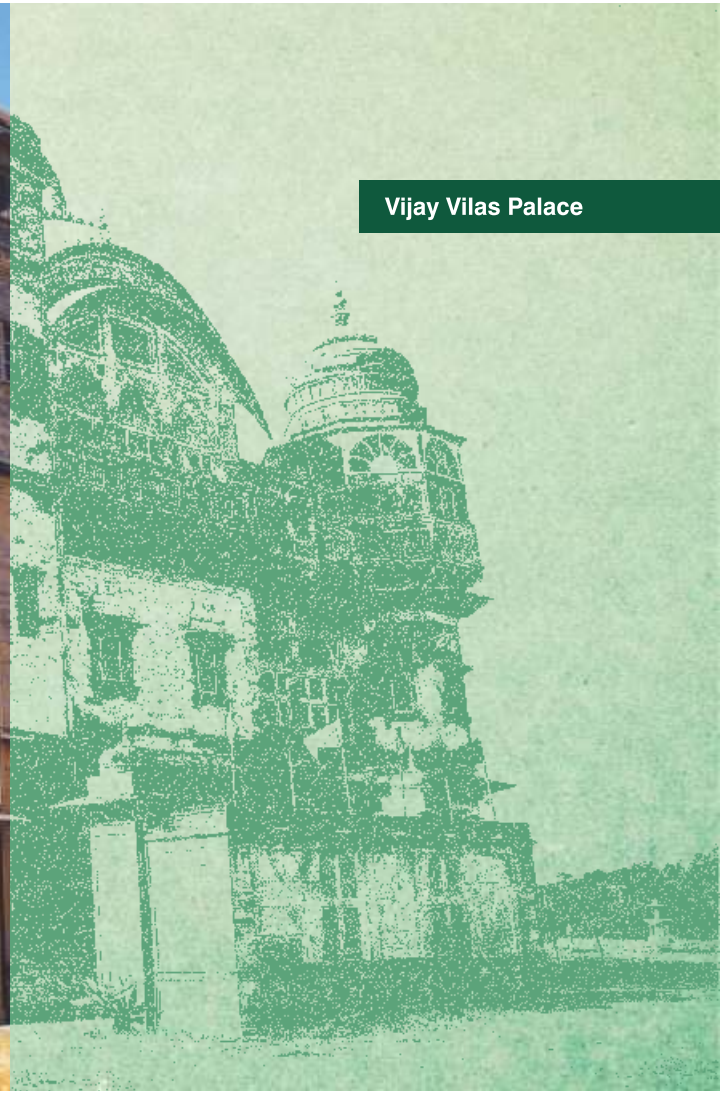
Mention of Koteshwar is found in the Puranas and also in the Ramayana. Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese traveller has mentioned this temple. There was a port and a settlement of 5000 Buddhist monks as per his travelogues.

Location: 145 km from Bhuj.





Vijay Vilas Palace



Mandvi: Mandvi was once a major port town of the region and a seafarer's destination from ancient times. Mandvi attracted ships from as far as East Africa and Southeast Asia for trading precious stones and fine textiles.

The city has a 400-year old ship building industry that still builds small ships. The town on the right bank of Rukmavati river and overlooking the Arabian sea, is being developed as a seaside resort.

The Vijay Vilas Palace on the Mandvi beach was the Summer retreat of Vijayrajji.

Location: 60 km from Bhuj.

Visiting hours: Across the day, every day.

Chari Dhand: The Chari Dhand wetland located on the edge of arid Banni grasslands and the marshy salt flats of the Rann of Kutch, is legally protected or Reserve Forest. Chari means salt affected and Dhand means shallow wetland. It is spread over an area of 80 sq. km, southwest of the city of Bhuj. It is home to nearly two lakh birds with migratory and endangered species of birds flocking into the area in thousands during the monsoon and in winter. Besides Flamingoes who descend here in thousands, common cranes, painted storks and spoonbills are among others that can be spotted here.

Location: Around 80 km Northwest of Bhuj.

Visiting hours: 07.00 am to 06.30 pm, everyday.

Narayan Sarovar: A sacred place for Hindus, this is one of the five holy lakes of India viz., Mansarovar, Pushkar Sarovar, Bindu Sarovar and Pampa Sarovar. According to Hindu mythology, these lakes were formed due to the falling of droplets from the pot containing nectar (amrit) during the samudra manthan i.e. churning of the sea.

Location: 145 km from Bhuj and 50 km from Lakhpat.

Khavda-Kalo Dungar: Khavda town is the handicrafts hub of Kutch where one can see excellent pottery, leather crafts, Ajrakh block printing, embroidered handmade dolls and other amazing textile products. It has a mixed population of Meghwals (Hindus) and Muslims from Sindh. Khavda is also the departure point to visit the largest flamingo colony.

Kalo Dungar or black hill is the highest point in Kutch at 462 metres and is 25 km from Khavda, the nearest town. Kalo Dungar is famous for the 400 year old Lord Dattatreya temple. A unique phenomenon at this temple is that prasad is offered to the jackals who emerge from the rocky terrain in the afternoon and evening during aarti at the temple.

This is probably the only place in Kutch from where the panoramic view of the Great Rann of Kutch is possible. On a clear day, one can also see the India Bridge which is on the Indo-Pak border.

Location: Khavda, 70 km from Bhuj, Kalo Dungar, 97 km from Bhuj.

Among other numerous places the handicrafts pockets of Banni region, like Hodko, Dhordo, Ludiya, Dhamadka, Sumrasar, etc. are worth exploring. Many NGOs like Shrujan and Kalaraksha have set up their base in these villages. Bhirandiyara on the way to Khavda is a town famous for the fresh mavoo or sweetened milk reduced to fudge like consistency and eaten fresh.

Kutch has faced many natural disasters, the most destructive being the earthquake of 2001, which devastated lives and properties which were enveloped by the earth. While the impact of this tragedy was heart wrecking the Kutchi spirit remains indomitable.



Besides the places listed above, the following places would be of interest: Gandhidham, Anjar, Mundra, Kera Shiva temple, Bhadreswar Jain Tirth, Fossil Park, Kandla Port which is the biggest free trade zone, Pingleswar beach, the Wild Ass sanctuary in the little Rann of Kutch, etc.

The Rann Utsav from December to February is a great draw and has put Kutch on the world tourist map. It is rightly said, ***Kutch nahin dekha toh kuch nahin dekha.***

Cimate and clothing: Gujarat experiences a moderate to extreme summer with temperature rising to almost 45°C during summer and winter temperature dropping to 8 to 9°C. So cotton clothes are preferable during summer with loads of moisturizers and lotions and during the winters warm clothes are suitable.

How to Reach:

By Rail: Bhuj and Gandhidham are the rail heads in Kutch and are well connected with major destinations with trains originating and terminating at either of these stations.

By Bus: the Gujarat State Road Transport Corporation connects Bhuj to other major towns and cities of Gujarat, Private companies also operate overnight buses.

By Air: Bhuj is connected to Mumbai by air.

For local transport one can hire taxis or jeeps and to move around in the city auto rickshaws are most convenient.

Nearest Tourism Office:

Tourist Information Bureau, Office of Dist. Information centre,
1st floor, opp. Bahumali Bhavan, Bhuj. Tel.: +91 2832 224910.



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