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Gujarat

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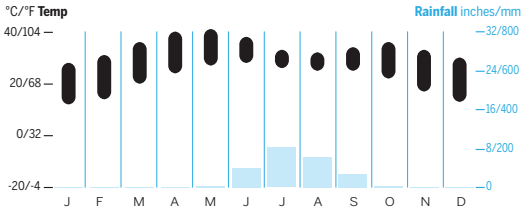
Why Go?

Gujarat is a dynamic, relatively prosperous state that's barely glimpsed by many travellers scurrying between Mumbai (Bombay) and Rajasthan. But stop and explore and you'll find that this homeland of Mahatma Gandhi is quite a cocktail of surprises. It has its industries, but it also has artisans who weave and embroider some of India's finest textiles, and pristine parks harbouring unique wildlife such as the Asiatic lion. Its terrain is mostly flat, but it's scattered with dramatic, temple-topped, sacred mountains. Its cities range from the hectic to the frantic but they're also endowed with a wealth of beautiful old palace, mosque and temple architecture. The Gujarati people are renowned for their entrepreneurial nous and industriousness but with foreign tourists so scarce here, you're more likely to enjoy a friendly chat rather than a hard sell from locals. Gujarat is a dry state but this is one nonalcoholic cocktail that's worth savouring.

When to Go

Ahmedabad



Sep/Oct
Navratri festival brings music and dancing to every town and village.

Nov–Dec
Mango milkshake time in Junagadh.

Nov–Mar
The best months to visit Gujarat's national parks and wildlife sanctuaries.

MAIN POINT OF ENTRY

Ahmedabad (Amdavad) has direct flights from Singapore and several Persian Gulf cities, plus nine Indian cities. It's also the major hub for trains and buses connecting Gujarat with the rest of India.

Fast Facts

» Population: 60.4 million

» Area: 196,024 sq km

» Capital: Gandhinagar

» Main language: Gujarati

» Sleeping prices: **$** below ₹1000, **$$** ₹1000 to ₹5000, **$$$** above ₹5000

Top Tip

Gujarat's most exhilarating destinations are away from its crowded, noisy cities. To enjoy it most, head out to its national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, to the tops of its sacred mountains, to the island retreat of Diu or to the handicraft hotbed of Kachchh (Kutch).

Resources

» Gujarat Tourism (www.gujarattourism.com)

» Gujarat Forest Department (www.gujaratforest.gov.in)

» Diu Tourism Department (www.diutourism.co.in)

» Kala Raksha (www.kala-raksha.org)

Food

Gujarat is strong on vegetarian food, partly thanks to the Jain influence here, and the quintessential Gujarati meal is the all-veg Gujarati thali. It's sweeter, lighter and less spicy and oily than Punjabi thali and locals have no doubts it's the best thali in the world. It begins with a large stainless-steel dish, onto which teams of waiters will serve most or all of the following: curries, chutneys, pickles, dhal, *kadhi* (a yoghurt and gram-flour preparation), raita, rotis, rice, *khichdi* (a blend of lightly spiced rice and lentils), *farsan* (savoury nibbles), salad and one or two sweet items – to be eaten concurrently with the rest. Buttermilk is the traditional accompanying drink. Normally the rice and/or *khichdi* don't come till you've finished with the rotis. In most thali restaurants the waiters will keep coming back until you can only say 'No more'. A good thali is an unbelievable combination of flavours – and a balanced, healthy, and usually good-value meal too.

DON'T MISS

Sasan Gir Wildlife Sanctuary offers the chance to see the only wild Asiatic lions, the last of a species that once roamed from the Middle East to northern India. Lion numbers in this forest sanctuary have risen to around 400 and the chances of seeing some on a jeep safari are roughly fifty-fifty. Take two or three safaris and you'd be unlucky not to get a lion sighting.

The complicated jigsaw of tribal groups and subcastes who inhabit the villages of **Kachchh** (Kutch) are some of India's finest artisans, practising a huge variety of crafts and especially textiles. Their embroidery, weaving, tie-dye and block printing are intensely colourful and infinitely varied, and visits to some of their workshops and sales outlets make a fascinating journey into a world of colour, pattern and endless hours of meticulous, amazingly skilled craftwork.

Top State Festivals

» Uttarayan (14–15 Jan, Ahmedabad, p677) Kite festival.

» Modhera Dance Festival (around 20 Jan, Modhera, p683) Indian classical dance jamboree.

» Bhavnath Mela (Jan/Feb, Junagadh, p701) Hindu festival at the foot of sacred Girnar Hill.

» Mahakali Festival (Mar/Apr, Pavagadh, p688) Pilgrims pay tribute to Kali at Pavagadh hill.

» Navratri (Sep/Oct, statewide, p684) Nine nights of dancing all around Gujarat.

» Kartik Purnima (Nov/Dec, Somnath, p698, and Shatrunjaya, p690) Large fair at Somnath; Jain pilgrims flock to Shatrunjaya hill.

Gujarat Highlights

1 Take a forest safari in search of Asia's only wild lions at **Sasan Gir Wildlife Sanctuary** (p699)

2 Change down a gear and head for a sleepy island sojourn at the former Portuguese enclave of **Diu** (p692)

3 Explore the villages of **Kachchh** (Kutch; p714) to understand, admire and acquire some of India's best textiles

4 Explore an abandoned capital city and follow pilgrims up a mountain at the World Heritage Site of **Champaner and Pavagadh** (p687)

5 Undertake a challenging dawn pilgrimage to the hill-top temples of **Shatrunjaya** (p690) near Palitana or **Girnar Hill** (p701) near Junagadh

6 Tackle a thali, explore the old-city mosques, and pay homage to Mahatma Gandhi in bustling **Ahmedabad** (Amdavad; p672)

7 Go looking for Indian wild ass on the flat salt plains of the **Little Rann of Kachchh** (p716)

History

It's said that Gujarat's Temple of Somnath witnessed the creation of the universe, and many significant sites in Krishna's life lie along the state's coast. On a firmer historical footing, Lothal and Dholavira (Kachchh) were important sites of the Indus Valley civilisation more than 4000 years ago. Gujarat featured in the exploits of the mighty Buddhist emperor Ashoka, and you can see his rock edicts near Junagadh. Jainism, an important element of Gujarati life today, first took root under a grandson of Ashoka who governed Saurashtra.

The rule of the Hindu Solanki dynasty from the 10th to 13th centuries, with its capital at Patan, is considered Gujarat's cultural golden age. Solanki rule was ended when Ala-ud-din Khilji brought Gujarat into the Delhi sultanate after several campaigns around 1300. A century later the Muslim Gujarat sultanate broke free of Delhi rule and established a new capital at Ahmedabad. The Mughal empire conquered Gujarat in the 1570s and held it until the Hindu Marathas from central India occupied eastern and central Gujarat in the 18th century. The British set up their first Indian trading base at Surat on Gujarat's coast in about 1614, and replaced Maratha power in the early 19th century. Most of Gujarat's 400 or so princely states – many of them ruled by assorted Rajput clans – retained a degree of local autonomy under the British. Daman and Diu survived as Portuguese enclaves on Gujarat's coast until 1961.

After Independence, eastern Gujarat became part of Bombay state. Saurashtra and Kachchh, initially separate states, were incorporated into Bombay state in 1956. In 1960 Bombay state was divided on linguistic lines into Gujarati-speaking Gujarat and Marathi-speaking Maharashtra.

The Congress Party of India largely controlled Gujarat until 1991 when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power. In 2002, communal violence erupted after a Muslim mob was blamed for an arson attack on a train at Godhra that killed 59 Hindu activists. Hindu gangs set upon Muslims in revenge. This violence coincided with the beginning of the state election campaign, and BJP chief minister Narendra Modi followed a policy of fiercely Hindu rhetoric, but it brought him a landslide victory. In 2011 a court in Gujarat sentenced 11 Muslims to death, and 20 to life imprisonment, for setting fire to the train, while Modi was criticised by a Supreme Court panel for a 'partisan stance' over the subsequent violence. Since the 2002 riots, however, Gujarat has been peaceful, and continues to enjoy its reputation as one of India's most prosperous and businesslike states. It has, among other things, some exceptionally good roads (as well as some awful ones), and its buses mostly run on time. In 2008 the large and lucrative Tata Motors' Nano car project was secured for the town of Sanand, west of Ahmedabad.

EASTERN GUJARAT

Ahmedabad (Amdavad)

☎079 / POP 4.52 MILLION

Ahmedabad (also called Amdavad, Ahmadabad or Ahemdavad) is Gujarat's major city and a startling metropolis with a long history, many remarkable buildings, a fascinating maze of an old quarter, excellent museums, fine restaurants and fabulous night markets. Yet the old-world charm is all but swamped by 21st-century traffic, crowding, pollution and the usual extremes of wealth and poverty. Many travellers stop off briefly en route to Rajasthan or Mumbai, sneaking in a visit to Sabarmati Ashram (Gandhi's former headquarters). You need a little stamina to get to know the city better, as it's quite spread out and moving around can be a bit of a task.

The old city lies on the east side of the Sabarmati River and used to be surrounded by a 10km-long wall, of which little now remains except 15 formidable gates standing

ALCOHOL PERMITS

Gujarat is a dry state but alcohol permits for foreign visitors are easy to get at most large hotels with a 'wine shop'; show your passport plus a certificate or letter from your hotel (your Gujarat 'residence form') to receive a one-month permit. Permits are only available within one month of your arrival in India. Although they are officially free, local authorities often demand ₹100 or so from the shops and the shops pass this cost on to the customer. The permit allows you two units over the month and that equates to 20 bottles of standard beer, which you must drink in private. Cheers.

as forlorn islands amid swirling, cacophonous traffic. The new city on the west side of the river, nearly all built in the last 50 years, has wider streets with freer-flowing traffic and many middle-class neighbourhoods.

History

Ahmedabad was founded in 1411 by Gujarati sultan Ahmed Shah at the spot where, legend tells, he saw a hare chasing a dog (he was impressed by its bravery). The city spread quickly beyond his citadel on the east bank of the Sabarmati and by the 17th century it was considered one of the finest cities in India, a prospering trade nexus with an array of fine Islamic architecture. Its influence waned but from the second half of the 19th century Ahmedabad rose again as a huge textile centre (the 'Manchester of the East'). By the late 20th century many of the mills had closed and the subsequent economic hardship may have been a contributing factor in the communal violence that split the city in 2002, when over 1200 people, mostly Muslims, were killed. Today Ahmedabad is booming again as a centre for IT, education and chemicals production on top of its traditional textiles and commerce, and has recently been dubbed a 'megacity'.

Sights

FREE Sabarmati Ashram HISTORIC SITE
(www.sabarmati.org; Ashram Rd; 8.30am-6.30pm) About 5km north of the centre, in peaceful, shady grounds on the river's west bank, this ashram was Gandhi's headquarters from 1917 to 1930 during the long struggle for Indian independence. It's said Gandhi chose this site because it lay between a jail and a cemetery and any *satyagrahi* (nonviolent resister) was bound to end up in one or the other. From here on 12 March 1930 Gandhi and 78 companions set out on the famous Salt March to Dandi on the Gulf of Cambay in a symbolic protest, with Gandhi vowing not to return to the ashram until India had gained independence. The ashram was disbanded in 1933, later becoming a centre for Dalit welfare activities and cottage industries. Gandhi's poignant, spartan living quarters are preserved, and there's a museum that presents an informative record of his life and teachings. After Gandhi's death some of his ashes were immersed in the river in front of the ashram.

Buses 13/1 and 83 (₹5) run here from Lal Darwaja bus stand. An autorickshaw from the city centre is about ₹40.

FREE Calico Museum of Textiles MUSEUM
(22868172; www.calicomuseum.com; Sarabhai Foundation; tours 10.30am & 3pm Thu-Tue) This museum contains one of the world's finest collections of antique and modern Indian textiles, all handmade and up to 500 years old. There are some astoundingly beautiful pieces, displaying incredible virtuosity and extravagance. You'll see Kashmiri shawls that took three years to make, and double-*ikat* cloths whose 100,000 threads were each individually dyed before weaving.

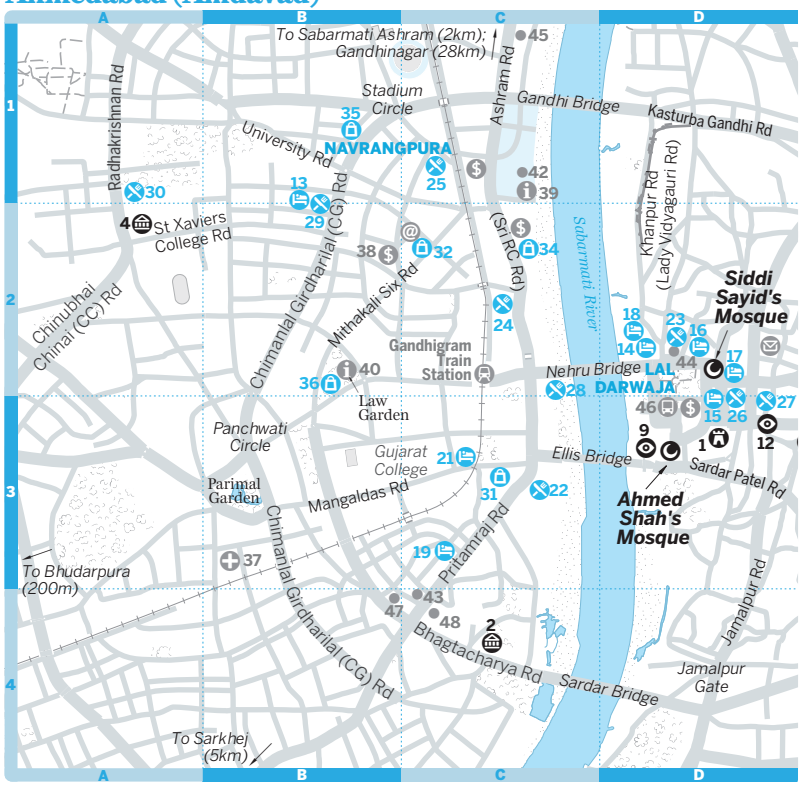
The main textile galleries can only be visited in the morning session: the tours last two hours with a maximum 25 people – 15 by group booking and 10 on a first-come-first-served basis. Be there by 10am to maximise chances of getting in. The afternoon tour (maximum 15 people, all first-come-first-served) is devoted to the Sarabhai Foundation's collection of religious art, which explores depictions of Indian gods, including textile galleries.

No photography is allowed. The museum is in the Shahibag area, 3.5km north of the old centre, opposite the Shahibag Underbridge. You can get there by bus 101, 102 or 105 (₹5) from Lal Darwaja local bus stand and through Delhi Gate. An autorickshaw should cost ₹40.

Mosques & Mausoleums MOSQUES
Under the Gujarat sultanate in the 15th and 16th centuries, and especially under Ahmed Shah I (1411–42) and Mahmud Begada (1459–1511), Ahmedabad was endowed with a remarkable collection of stone mosques in a unique style incorporating elements of Hindu and Jain design.

The **Mausoleum of Ahmed Shah** (Badshah-na-Hazira), outside the Jama Masjid's east gate, may have been constructed by Ahmed Shah himself before his death in 1442. His cenotaph is the central one under the main dome. An 11pm drumming session in the mausoleum's eastern gateway used to signal the closing of the city gates and still happens nightly. Through an arch a little further east is Ahmed Shah's queen's tomb, the **Rani-na-Hazira**, on a raised platform now engulfed by market stalls, and in poor shape, though the *jali* (carved lattice) screens are nice.

Siddi Sayid's Mosque (Lal Darwaja) was built in the year the Mughals conquered Gujarat (1573), by an Abyssinian in the Gujarati army. One of Ahmedabad's most stunning buildings, it is famed for its exquisite



jali windows, spiderweb fine, depicting the intricate intertwining branches of the 'tree of life'.

Southwest of Bhadra Fort, **Ahmed Shah's Mosque** was built in 1414 for the sultan and nobles within Ahmedabad's original citadel. The prayer hall is a forest of beautifully carved stone pillars and *jali* screens, and its elaborately carved ceiling has a circular symmetry reminiscent of Hindu and Jain temples.

The small **Rani Sipri's Mosque**, near the ST bus stand, is also known as the Masjid-e-Nagira (Jewel of a Mosque) because of its graceful construction, with delicate carved minarets and Rani Sipri's domed tomb with fine *jali* screens. Rani Sipri is said to have been a Hindu widow of Mahmud Begada; the buildings date from 1514.

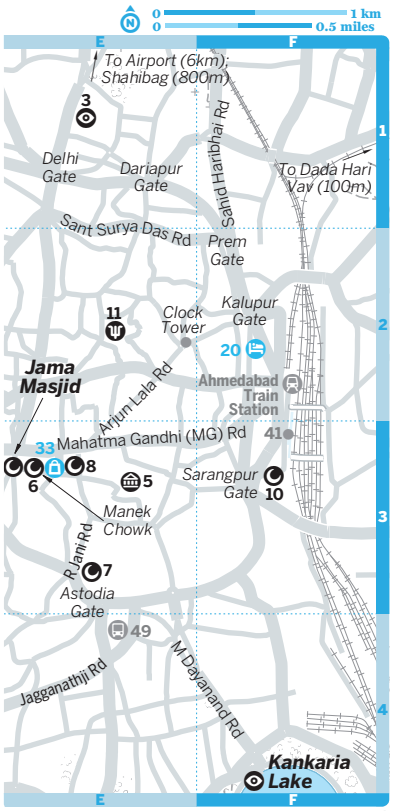
Between Ahmedabad train station and Sarangpur Gate, the **Sidi Bashir Mosque**, built in 1452, is famed for its 21.3m-high shaking minarets *(jhulta minara)*, built to shake to protect against earthquake damage. This certainly worked in 2001.

Kankaria Lake LAKE

(admission ₹10; ⏲9am-11pm) Built in 1451 and recently dandified as a recreation space for the city, this large lake is a nice respite from the hectic streets. Attractions include a tethered **hot-air balloon** (10min ride ₹100; ⏲10am-10pm), a **mini-train** and a **zoo**. One Tree Hill Garden on the west side (entered from outside) contains some quite grand colonial **Dutch tombs**.

FREE Bhadra Fort & Teen Darwaja FORT

(Lal Darwaja; ⏲dawn-dusk) Built immediately after the founding of Ahmedabad in 1411, Bhadra Fort now houses government offices and a Kali temple. Its gate formed the eastern entrance of the Ahmedabad citadel, which stretched west to the river. From the roof you can check out the formidable structure and views of the surrounding streets.



Between the fort and the **Teen Darwaja** (Triple Gateway) to its east was the Maidan Shahi (Royal Square), where royal processions and polo games took place. Today it's a seething market area.

Temples JAIN & HINDU TEMPLES

Outside Delhi Gate, north of the old city, the Jain **Hutheesingh Temple** (Balvantrai Mehta Rd) is constructed of delicately carved white marble. Built in 1848, it's dedicated to Dharamanath, the 15th Jain *tirthankar* (great teacher).

The glorious, multicoloured, woodcarved **Swaminarayan Temple** (Kalupur; ⏲6am-7pm), in the old city, was built in 1822 as the first temple of the Swaminarayan Hindu sect. Followers believe the sect's founder, Swaminarayan (1781–1830), was the supreme being. The start of the daily Heritage Walk (p677) here at 8am usually coincides with worship at the temple, with believers' passion on full display.

Shreyas Folk Museum MUSEUM

(Indian/foreigner ₹10/90; ⏲10am-1.30pm & 2-5.30pm Tue-Sun) This museum, 3km west of the river in Bhudarpura, displays an impressive range of Gujarati folk arts, including woodcarvings, metalwork and some wonderful embroidered textiles and amazing tie-dyed quilts. Included in the ticket is the **Kalpana Mangaldas Museum**, with festival masks from around India and, just to round things off, an elephant skeleton. It's all set in the peaceful, peacock-dotted grounds of the Shreyas Foundation. Photos are not allowed. An autorickshaw from the centre costs around ₹35.

FREE **Sarkhej Roza** HISTORIC BUILDINGS

(⏲9am-dusk) In the Sarkhej area 8km southwest of the old centre, Sarkhej Roza is a mosque, tomb and palace complex dedicated to the memory of Ahmed Shah I's spiritual advisor, Ahmed Khattu Ganj Baksh. The elegant though dilapidated buildings cluster around a great (now often dry) tank, constructed by Sultan Mahmud Begada in the mid-15th century. It's an atmospheric place that was used as a retreat by several of Ahmedabad's rulers. The mausoleums of Mahmud Begada (by the entrance, with geometric *jalis* casting patterns of light on the floor) and Ganj Baksh (the largest in Gujarat) are both here.

A return autorickshaw from the city centre will cost around ₹120 and Sarkhej Roza

DON'T MISS

JAMA (JUMMA) MASJID

Built by Ahmed Shah in 1423, the Jama Masjid (Friday Mosque) on Mahatma Gandhi (MG) Rd ranks as one of India's most beautiful mosques, enhanced by an enormous, peaceful courtyard. Demolished Hindu and Jain temples provided the building materials and the mosque displays some architectural fusion with these religions, notably in the lotus-like carving of some domes, similar to that of many Jain temples. The prayer hall's 260 columns support 15 principal domes at different elevations. There were once two 'shaking' minarets, but they lost half their height in the great earthquake of 1819, though their lower portions still flank the prayer hall's central portico.

Ahmedabad (Amdavad)

Top Sights
Ahmed Shah's Mosque D3
Jama Masjid E3
Kankaria Lake F4
Siddi Sayid's Mosque D2

Sights
1 Bhadra Fort D3
2 City Museum C4
3 Hutheesingh Temple E1
Kite Museum ..... (see 2)
4 Lalbhai Dalpatbhai Museum A2
5 Mangaldas ni Haveli E3
6 Mausoleum of Ahmed Shah E3
NC Mehta Gallery ..... (see 4)
7 Rani Sipri's Mosque E3
8 Rani-na-Hazira E3
9 SEWA Reception Centre D3
10 Sidi Bashir Mosque F3
11 Swaminarayan Temple E2
12 Teen Darwaja D3

Sleeping
13 Comfort Inn President B1
14 Hotel Ambassador D2
15 Hotel Cadillac D3
Hotel Good Night ..... (see 17)
16 Hotel Royal Highness D2
Hotel Volga ..... (see 17)
17 House of MG D2
18 Le Meridien Ahmedabad D2
19 Neelkanth Sahara C3
20 Ritz Inn F2
21 Royal Orchid Central C3

Eating
Agashiye ..... (see 17)
Dadi Dining Hall ..... (see 19)
Food Inn ..... (see 17)
22 Gopi Dining Hall C3
Green House ..... (see 17)
Havmor ..... (see 15)
23 Havmor D2
24 Havmor C2
25 Havmor Restaurant C1
26 Hotel ZK D3
27 Muslim Street Stalls D3
28 Neelkanth Patang C2
29 Sankalp B2
TGB Cafe 'n Bakery ..... (see 28)
30 Zen Cafe A1

Shopping
31 Art Book Center C3
32 Crossword C2
33 Gamthiwala E3
34 Garvi Gurjari C2
35 Hansiba B1
36 Law Garden Night Market B2

Information
37 Apollo City Center B3
Cyberpoint ..... (see 32)
38 Cyberworld C2
39 Gujarat Tourism C1
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40 Tourism Desk B2

Transport
41 Computerised Train Booking Office F3
42 Express Travels C1
43 Gujarat Travels C4
44 Indian Airlines/Air India D2
45 Jet Airways C1
Kingfisher Airlines ..... (see 29)
46 Lal Darwaja Local Bus Stand D3
47 Patel Tours & Travels B4
Raj Express ..... (see 47)
48 Shree Swaminarayan C4
49 ST Bus Stand E4

could be combined with a visit to Vishalla restaurant and its utensil museum (p679), about 1km back towards the city.

FREE Lalbhai Dalpatbhai Museum MUSEUM
(LD Museum; www.ldindology.org; Radhakrishnan Rd; ⏲10.30am-5pm Tue-Sun) Part of the LD Institute of Indology, this museum houses a fine collection of ancient and medieval Indian art treasures, including stone, marble, bronze and wood carvings and 75,000 Jain manuscripts. A 6th-century-AD sandstone carving from Madhya Pradesh is the oldest-known carved image of the god Rama.

FREE NC Mehta Gallery MUSEUM
(Radhakrishnan Rd; ⏲10.30am-5.30pm Tue-Sun Jul-Apr, 8.30am-12.30pm Tue-Sun May-Jun) In the same building as the LD Museum, this gallery has an important collection of jewel-like illustrated manuscripts and miniature paintings. Best known is *Chaurapanchasi-*

ka (Fifty Love Lyrics of a Thief), written by Vilhana, an 11th-century Kashmiri poet sentenced to be hanged for loving the king's daughter. Before his execution he was granted one final wish: he chose to recite these 50 poems, which so impressed the king that he gave Vilhana his daughter in marriage.

FREE City Museum MUSEUM
(Sanskar Kendra, Bhagtacharya Rd; 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) In a 1956 red-brick-and-concrete building by renowned Swiss architect Le Corbusier, the City Museum covers Ahmedabad's history with rather old-fashioned displays, but explanatory material is in English and Gujarati – interesting enough if you're a history buff. It includes sections on the city's religious communities, Gandhi and the Independence struggle. On the ground floor you will find the **Kite Museum** (admission free; 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), with a selection of patterned tissue-paper kites resembling trapped butterflies.

FREE Dada Hari Vav NOTABLE BUILDING
(dawn-dusk) This step-well, built in 1499 by the supervisor of Sultan Begada's harem, has steps down through five levels of carved stone columns to two small wells, now often bone dry. The depths are cool, even on the hottest day, and it's a fascinating and eerie place. Overflow channels at the top are a reminder of times when water tables were much higher than today. Behind the step-well, the 16th-century **Dai Halima Mosque** contains the mausoleum of a royal midwife named Halima, with nice *jali* screens.

Vechaar Utensil Museum MUSEUM
(www.vishalla.com; Bye-Pass Rd; Indian/foreigner ₹10/50; 3-10.30pm Tue-Sun) At Vishalla restaurant, opposite Vasna Tol Naka, this museum displays the graceful practicality of pots and utensils, with more than 4500 items from all over India, some 1000 years old.

Festivals & Events

Uttarayan KITE FESTIVAL
Each 14–15 January, Ahmedabad hosts Uttarayan (Makar Sakranti), a traditional kite festival that attracts international participants and is well worth the stiff neck.

Tours

The Municipal Corporation runs a fascinating daily **Heritage Walk** (9824032866; Indian/foreigner ₹30/50) through the old city. It starts at 8am at the Swaminarayan Temple in Kalupur and finishes at the Jama Masjid around 10.30am. It's advisable to book. The tours, through narrow, confusing streets and past dilapidated, carved wooden houses, are an excellent way to get a feel for old Ahmedabad with its 600 *pols* – neighbourhoods of narrow streets with common courtyards, wells and *chabutaras* (bird-feeding towers). The tours are in English and there's a brief slide show beforehand. Wear slip-on footwear as you'll be visiting plenty of temples.

The House of MG offers an ingenious **audio guide walk** (₹100). Beginning at the famed hotel (where you deposit your passport), the 80-minute walk takes an alternative route through the old city, ending at the **Mangaldas ni Haveli**, a finely carved old mansion that houses a crafts shop.

The Municipal Corporation runs twice-daily four-hour **city tours** (₹100) by bus, with short stops at major sights. Buses depart from Bhadra Fort at 9am and 1.30pm.

Sleeping

Budget hotels are mostly clustered in the noisy, traffic-infested Lal Darwaja area, close to the old city, while the majority of midrange and top-end places are found on Khanpur Rd (paralleling the east bank of the Sabarmati) or west of the river, which is a more congenial environment but further from most of the interesting sights. Ahmedabad has most of the top-end hotels in Gujarat.

House of MG HERITAGE HOTEL $$$
(25506946; www.houseofmg.com; Lal Darwaja; s/d from ₹4990/5990, ste from ₹8990/10,900, all incl breakfast;) This 1920s building (with two excellent restaurants) opposite Siddi Sayid's Mosque was once the home of textile magnate Sheth Mangaldas Girdhardas – it was converted into a beautiful heritage hotel in the 1990s by his great-grandson. All the rooms are vast, verandah-edged and tastefully decorated, with great attention to detail. It's an icon of the upper classes, and hugely popular with locals and foreigners alike. Service is first-rate, and the indoor swimming pool and gym are divine. If you know your dates, book a couple of months in advance online to receive up to 30% discount.

Le Meridien Ahmedabad HOTEL $$$
(25505505; http://lemeridien.com/ahmedabad; Khanpur Rd; s/d from ₹6500/7500, ste ₹20,000, all incl breakfast;) This luxurious option towers over the fragile shacks scattered along the river bank. All rooms are super comfort-

able and the suites are palatial. Breakfast is excellent and as huge as you like, and there is a neat indoor swimming pool, spa and sauna. Ask for the best available rate, which can be little more than half the rack rate.

Royal Orchid Central HOTEL $$$
(☎30912345; www.royalorchidhotels.com; Ellis Bridge; s ₹7000-8000, d ₹8000-9000, ste ₹12,000, all incl breakfast; ❄@📶🏊) Opposite Gujarat College, a new high-end business hotel where the rooms are tasteful and comfortable rather than exciting but have state-of-the-art gadgets like universal electrical sockets and iPod docks. There's an excellent 24-hour restaurant-cum-coffee-shop. Free airport transfers too.

Hotel Ambassador HOTEL $$
(☎25502490; www.ambassadorahmedabad.com; Khanpur Rd; s/d from ₹2100/2500; ❄@📶) Newly renovated inside and out, with a bright white exterior, the Ambassador greets you with a chilled lobby and friendly desk and follows up with rooms that are quite stylish in browns and creams. With discounts often available, it's not bad value.

Ritz Inn HOTEL $$
(☎22123842; www.hotelritzinn.com; Station Rd; s ₹2400-2600, d ₹3000-4500; ❄@📶) Near the railway station, this smart hotel has unusual class and is excellent value for money. The art-deco lobby, comfortable rooms with superb beds, and unusually slick and amiable service make it an outstanding option. There's a good veg restaurant, checkout is a civilised 24 hours, discounts are often available and it offers free airport and station transfers.

Comfort Inn President HOTEL $$
(☎26467575; www.comfortinnpresident.com; off CG Rd, Navrangpura; s/d incl breakfast from ₹3125/4000; ❄📶) This is a calm, well-run hotel on a quiet street close to the Chimanlal Girdharilal (CG) Rd shops in middle-class Navrangpura. Rooms aren't huge but are solidly comfortable and well equipped, and there's an in-house wine shop as well as a multicuisine restaurant. Good discounts are often available; airport transfers are free.

Hotel Royal Highness HOTEL $$
(☎25507450; www.hotelroyalhighness.com; Lal Darwaja; s/d incl breakfast from ₹2750/3300; ❄@📶) This grand edifice is in a convenient location and the lobby is impressive. The rooms have all been renovated and are spacious and clean. Deluxe rooms feature zebra-print furnishings and sparkling bathrooms with big glassed-in showers. There is a 24-hour restaurant, and a free airport shuttle service.

Hotel Volga HOTEL $
(☎25509497; www.hotelvolga.com; Hanuman Lane, off Relief Rd, Lal Darwaja; s/d ₹600/750, s with AC ₹800-1000, d with AC ₹950-1150; ❄) This surprisingly good option tucked down a narrow street behind the House of MG is worth searching out. Rooms are smart and respectably clean, with a hint of 1970s design in the curved beige walls – some are more dashingly decorated. The front desk is friendly and efficient, checkout is 24 hours, and you can order decent multicuisine food (mains ₹95 to ₹175) to your room.

Hotel Good Night HOTEL $
(☎25507181; hotelforyou2002@yahoo.com; Lal Darwaja; s/d from ₹450/550, s with AC ₹800-1300, d with AC ₹/950-1500; ❄) This tidy hotel next door to the House of MG has budget rooms better than the average in these parts. There are seven categories of room, all clean and well kept, so it shouldn't be too hard to find one that suits your budget and comfort needs, though the ground-floor 'Ordinary' ones are dingy and can be odorous.

Neelkanth Sahara HOTEL $$
(☎66615145; sahara@neelkanthhotels.com; 2nd fl, Iscon Sq, Pritamraj Rd, Paldi; s/d ₹750/850, with AC from ₹900/1100; ❄) With helpful staff, bright, tasteful decor, and decent-sized rooms, this is quite good value and close to many private bus offices. There's a fruit-and-vegetable market on the ground floor of the building, and a good thali restaurant, **Dadi Dining Hall** (thali ₹140; ⏲lunch & dinner), on the 1st floor.

Hotel Cadillac HOTEL $
(☎25507558; Advance Cinema Rd, Lal Darwaja; s/d ₹250/300, without bathroom ₹150/300) This cheerful and cheap option, sporting a wooden balustrade, is a classic from 1934. Management vouch for the comfort of the lumpy cotton mattresses, but we remain dubious. While the street noise and squat-toilet bathrooms are not selling features, the people-watching balcony is.

Eating

Ahmedabad has the best range of eating options in Gujarat and is a great place to sample the Gujarati thali.

Agashiye GUJARATI $$
(☎25506946; House of MG, Lal Darwaja; lunch or dinner regular/deluxe ₹395/495; ⏲noon-3.30pm &

STEP-WELLS: DEEP & MEANINGFUL

The profound significance of water in the drought-prone districts of Gujarat and Rajasthan is set in stone in the step-well – *vav, wav, kuva* or *baoli* (*baori* in Rajasthan). These elaborate constructions are unique to northwestern India. Ancient Hindu scriptures venerate those who build communal wells. With the Indian inclination to turn the functional into works of art, sophisticated water-storage structures were developed, first by Hindus and then under the Mughals. Although the nobility considered it a religious obligation to construct these, the wells were evidently status symbols – the grandeur and artistry reflected the power and sensibility of their patrons. Often attached to temples, the wells were also meeting places, with verandahs where people could take refuge from the summer heat, and stopping places on caravan routes. Reliant on rainfall and (dropping) levels of ground water, many of the wells are now often dry, sadly neglected and full of rubbish.

7-10.45pm) This is Ahmedabad's best dining experience. On the rooftop of one of the city's finest mansions, the lovely tiled terrace is an oasis of calm and space, candle-lit at night and a world away from the congested streets. The all-veg menu, which changes daily, begins with a welcoming drink and is a cultural journey around the traditional thali – a multitude of ravishingly tasty vegetable dishes – and finishes with hand-churned ice cream. You even get a handy leaflet on the etiquette of eating a thali. For dinner, it is advisable to book ahead.

Green House GUJARATI $$
(House of MG, Lal Darwaja; mains ₹100-175) The Green House is the casual front restaurant at the House of MG. Choose the fan-blasted outdoor courtyard or the AC room with a 15% surcharge. The selection of vegie Gujarati dishes is superb. Do try the house special *sharbat* (sherbet); and the delicate and delicious *panaki,* a thin crêpe cooked between banana leaves; or the divine *malpuva,* a sweet, deep-fried pancake in saffron syrup, topped with rose petals. And don't leave without trying the hand-churned ice cream. The breakfasts (₹175 to ₹250) are pretty good too.

Vishalla INDIAN $$
(☎26602422; www.vishalla.com; Bye-Pass Rd; lunch ₹197, dinner ₹449; ⏲lunch & dinner) On the southwest outskirts of town, just off the road to Sarkhej (opposite Vasna Tol Naka), Vishalla is a magical eating experience in an open-air setting that recreates a traditional Gujarati village. You eat a copious vegetarian meal seated on the floor in rustic wooden huts, and dinner is a whole evening's feast (7.30pm to 11pm) including entertainment of folk music and dance and puppet shows. The complex includes a fascinating utensil museum (p677). An autorickshaw from the city centre costs about ₹100 return.

Neelkanth Patang MULTICUISINE $$
(☎26586200; Chinubhai Center, west end Nehru Bridge; lunch Mon-Sat ₹329, brunch Sun ₹449, dinner Mon-Fri ₹399, dinner Sat & Sun ₹449; ⏲11am-2.30pm & 7-11.30pm) For a meal with a view the Neelkanth Patang has no rivals as it's 50m above the ground and revolves. The multicuisine buffet meals are terrific and bountiful. It's worth calling ahead to book.

Food Inn INDIAN $$
(Lal Darwaja; mains ₹85-175; ⏲lunch & dinner) A clean, bright and bustling curry house in the Hotel Good Night building (opposite Siddi Sayid's Mosque) where carnivores can tuck into numerous chicken, mutton and fish dishes, including spicy Punjabi curries, lip-smackin' tandoori, biryani and sizzlers.

Sankalp SOUTH INDIAN $
(Samir Bldg, CG Rd; mains ₹50-120) A quality chain restaurant serving up excellent vegetarian South Indian food, Sankalp sits on a rooftop about five storeys high. Unusual fillings like pineapple or spinach-cheese-garlic are available for its renowned *dosas* (paper-thin lentil-flour pancakes) and *uttapams* (thick, savoury rice pancakes) that come accompanied by seven different sauces. Order *masala papad* (thin, crisp wafer with a spicy topping) for a tasty starter.

Gopi Dining Hall GUJARATI $
(off Pritamraj Rd; thali ₹85-115; ⏲lunch & dinner) Just off the west end of Ellis Bridge, this little restaurant is a much-loved thali institution, with a small garden and an AC dining room. You can choose from 'fix', 'full' and 'with one sweet' options depending how hungry you are.

Zen Cafe CAFE $
(www.zencafe.info; Radhakrishnan Rd; drinks ₹25-40, snacks ₹50-100; ⏲4-9pm Tue-Sun) This peaceful spot in a tree-fringed garden is popular with students from Gujarat University and other colleges nearby. It's right next to the weird Amdavad ni Gufa (Amdavad Cave), an underground art gallery which looks like a heap of octopuses with sawn-off tentacles. Offerings include panini, chocolate walnut brownies, organic coffee and capriosch mocktails – perfect icy coolers of mint, lime and soda.

Havmor ICE CREAM $
(scoops ₹15-40; ⏲11am-11pm) Ahmedabad is famous for ice cream and locals aver that the Havmor brand, found only in Gujarat, is best. Havmor has branches all over the city including at Lal Darwaja, Khanpur Rd, Navrangpura and the Cinemasala building, Ashram Rd.

Hotel ZK INDIAN, CHINESE $$
(Relief Rd, Lal Darwaja; mains ₹75-150; ⏲9am-11pm) This AC, non-veg restaurant has tinted windows, low lighting and impeccable service. The chicken Afghani curry is recommended but apparently the most popular dish with the locals is the interesting-sounding chicken pesto Chinese.

Havmor Restaurant MULTICUISINE $$
(Stadium Complex, Navrangpura; mains ₹50-250; ⏲noon-10.45pm) Havmor ice-cream company operates this AC place where Ahmedabad's middle class congregate for a huge choice of well-prepared snacks and meals, from wraps and nachos to Italian and Indian.

TGB Cafe 'n Bakery CAFE $
(Chinubhai Center; cakes ₹30-130; ⏲11.30am-11pm) Time you treated yourself to a Dutch truffle cake or sizzling chocolate brownie with ice cream? Head to this lounge-style cafe underneath the Neelkanth Patang, at the west end of Nehru Bridge, and indulge. Real coffee too.

The **Law Garden Night Market** and **Manek Chowk** are good for street food after about 8pm. Muslim street food is available on **Bhathiyar Gali**, a small street parallel to MG Rd: you can get a good meaty feed for about ₹30 from the evening stalls.

Shopping

Law Garden Night Market HANDICRAFTS, CLOTHING
(Law Garden; ⏲dusk-11pm) An evening market packed with stalls selling glittering wares from Kachchh and Saurashtra. It's chock-a-block with fantastically decorated cholis (sari blouses) and *chaniyas* (long, wide traditional skirts), as well as embroidered wall hangings, costume jewellery and more.

Manek Chowk HANDICRAFTS, FOOD
(Old City) This busy space and surrounding narrow streets are the commercial heart of the old city. Weave your way through the crowds to soak up the atmosphere and browse the vegetable and sweet stalls and silver and textile shops. **Gamthiwala** (⏲11am-1pm & 2-7pm Mon-Sat), by the entrance to the Mausoleum of Ahmed Shah, sells quality block-printed textiles.

Garvi Gurjari HANDICRAFTS, CLOTHING
(Ashram Rd; ⏲10am-7.30pm Mon-Sat) This state-government-run outlet has three floors of Gujarat crafts including silk and handloomed-cotton saris, painted metal

SEWA

The Ahmedabad-based Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is one of India's largest trade unions and a rarity for two reasons: its members are women and they work in the informal sector (that large majority of Indian workers who do not receive the benefits of formal employment, such as hawkers, vendors and many home-based workers, labourers and domestic workers). Established in 1972 by women working on the fringes of the Ahmedabad textile industry, SEWA now has some 1.2 million members. It's based on the notion that poor women need organisation, not aid.

SEWA assists self-employed workers to organise into unions and cooperatives, so that they can control the fruits of their labours. Its approach focuses on health and childcare, literacy, appropriate housing and self-sufficiency, and the SEWA Academy conducts leadership courses for its members. SEWA also runs a bank, provides access to legal aid and is active in the campaign for a needs-based minimum wage.

The **SEWA Reception Centre** (☎25506444; www.sewa.org; ⏲10am-6pm Mon-Sat) is at the eastern end of Ellis Bridge. It has a range of literature and visitors are welcome. SEWA's fixed-price handicrafts are sold at Hansiba.

jewellery boxes and clothing in folksy designs. There are some good finds if you rummage around.

Hansiba HANDICRAFTS
(8 Chandan Complex, CG Rd; ⏲11am-9pm Mon-Sat, 11.30am-7.30pm Sun) The retail outlet of SEWA, Hansiba sells colourfully woven and embroidered shawls, saris, other clothes and wall hangings.

Art Book Center BOOKSTORE
(www.artbookcenter.net; off Mangaldas Rd; ⏲10am-6pm) This specialist treasure trove is upstairs in a brightly painted building near Ellis Bridge. Indian architecture, miniature painting and textile design are the main topics stocked.

Crossword BOOKSTORE
(Shree Krishna Centre, Mithakali Six Rd; ⏲10.30am-9pm) A large, bustling book, music and DVD shop also boasting a Café Coffee Day.

Information

Internet Access

Cyberpoint (Shree Krishna Centre, Mithakali Six Rd; per hr ₹20; ⏲10am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat & Sun) Behind Crossword bookstore.

Relief Cyber Café (Relief Rd; per hr ₹20; ⏲9.30am-12.30am) It's air-conditioned, what a relief!

Medical Services

Apollo City Center (☎66305800; www.apolloahd.com; 1 Tulsibaug Society) Small but recommended private hospital opposite Doctor House, near Parimal Garden.

Money

For changing travellers cheques and currency, there's **State Bank of India** (Lal Darwaja; ⏲11am-4pm Mon-Fri, 11am-1pm Sat) opposite the local bus stand, and **ICICI Bank** (2/1 Popular House, Ashram Rd; ⏲9am-6pm Mon-Fri). There are numerous ATMs:

HDFC (Relief Rd, Lal Darwaja) Also off Mithakali Six Rd, Navrangpura.

State Bank (Ramanial Sheth Rd) Also at Ahmedabad train station.

Post

Main post office (Ramanial Sheth Rd; ⏲10am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun)

Tourist Information

Gujarat Tourism (☎1800 2337951; www.gujarattourism.com) Ahmedabad train station (⏲6am-6pm Mon-Sat); Ashram Rd (☎26578044/5/6; HK House, opposite Bata showroom, off Ashram Rd; ⏲8am-8pm) The very helpful HK House office has all sorts of information at its fingertips and you can also hire cars with drivers here.

Tourism Desk (☎32520878; Law Garden; ⏲10.30am-8.30pm) Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation's office has a few publications and can answer some questions.

Getting There & Away

Air

Ahmedabad's busy airport has direct flights to nine Indian cities and, overseas, Doha (Qatar), Dubai (United Arab Emirates), Kuwait City (Kuwait), Muscat (Oman), Sharjah (United Arab Emirates) and Singapore. Domestic airlines serving Ahmedabad:

Go Air (☎9223222111; www.goair.in)

Indian Airlines/Air India (☎25505198; www.airindia.in; Lal Darwaja)

IndiGo (☎9910383838; www.goindigo.in)

Jet Airways (☎022-39893333; www.jetairways.com; Ratnanabh Complex, Ashram Rd)

Kingfisher Airlines (☎1800 2093030; www.flykingfisher.com; Shop No 3, Shoppers Plaza, CG Rd, Navrangpura)

SpiceJet (☎1800 1803333; www.spicejet.com)

Many agencies sell air tickets, including **Express Travels** (☎26588602; expresstravel@eth.net; Jivabhai chambers, off Ashram Rd).

Bus

Private buses from the north may drop you on Naroda Rd, about 7km northeast of the city centre – an autorickshaw will complete the journey for ₹50 to ₹60.

From the **ST bus stand** (Sabarmati Terminal), frequent **Gujarat State Road Transport Corporation** (GSRTC, ST) buses go to Vadodara (Baroda; express/luxury ₹78/115, two hours), Bhavnagar (₹110/130, five hours), Junagadh (₹160/180, eight hours), Jamnagar (₹166/186, seven hours), Rajkot (express/AC ₹115/232, 4½ hours) and Bhuj (seat/sleeper ₹160/210, nine hours). Six or seven daily buses go to Udaipur (express/luxury ₹150/185, 5½ hours). A Volvo AC bus departs at 7pm for Udaipur (₹395), Jaipur (₹985) and Delhi (₹1585, 20 hours).

For long distances, private buses are mostly quicker; most offices are close to Paldi Char Rasta.

Patel Tours & Travels (www.pateltoursandtravels.com; 8 Shroff Chambers) Runs Volvo AC buses to Rajkot (₹300, four hours, 18 daily), Jamnagar (₹400, six hours, nine daily) and Mumbai (seat/sleeper ₹600/800, 11 hours, 7.30pm), plus non-AC buses to Mumbai (seat/sleeper ₹400/500, 6pm and 10pm) and

six daily buses to Bhuj (seat/sleeper non-AC ₹220/320, AC ₹270/370, eight hours).

Raj Express (8 Kanth Complex) Runs Volvo AC buses to Udaipur (₹350, five hours, 6.45am and 2pm) and non-AC buses to Jaipur (seat/sleeper ₹300/400, 12 hours, four daily).

Gujarat Travels (www.gujarattravels.co.in; 1 Medicine Market) Has buses to Mt Abu (seat/sleeper ₹220/300, seven hours, three daily).

Shree Swaminarayan (22 Anilkunj Complex) Heads to Diu (seat/sleeper ₹200/280, 10 hours, 10.30pm and 2.30am).

Train

There's a **computerised booking office** (⏲8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun) just outside Ahmedabad train station. Window 6 handles the foreign-tourist quota. Computerised booking is also available at the *relatively* quiet Gandhigram station, although there is no window dedicated to foreigners.

Getting Around

To/From the Airport

The airport is 8km north of the centre; a prepaid taxi should cost around ₹300 depending on your destination. An autorickshaw costs about ₹150 to the old city. A cheaper option is bus 105 to/from Lal Darwaja (₹10).

Autorickshaw

Autorickshaw drivers are supposed to turn their meter to zero at the start of a trip then calculate the fare using a conversion chart at the end. They should cost ₹7 per kilometre.

Around Ahmedabad

Trips to destinations to the northwest and southwest of the city can be extended with a visit to the Wild Ass Sanctuary (p716).

ADALAJ VAV

Adalaj Vav, 19km north of Ahmedabad, is among the finest of the Gujarati step-wells. Built by Queen Rudabai in 1499, it has three entrances leading to a huge platform that rests on 16 pillars, with corners marked by shrines. The octagonal well is five storeys deep and is decorated with exquisite stone carvings; subjects range from eroticism to buttermilk. The Gandhinagar bus will get you within walking distance (ask the conductor where to get off). An autorickshaw costs ₹300 return.

GANDHINAGAR

With broad avenues and greenery, Gandhinagar forms a striking contrast to Ahmed-

MAJOR TRAINS FROM AHMEDABAD

DESTINATION	TRAIN NO & NAME	DEPARTURE	DURATION (HR)	FARE (₹)
Bhavnagar	12971 *Bandra-Bhavnagar Exp*	5.45am	6	182/442/584 (A)
Bhuj	19115 *Bandra-Bhuj Exp*	11.59pm	7¾	180/462/624 (A)
Delhi	12957 *Rajdhani*	5.25pm	14	1230/1615/2680 (B)
	12915 *Ashram Exp*	5.45pm	16½	353/924/1253/2106 (C)
Jamnagar	19005 *Saurashtra Mail*	5.15am	7	174/445/601/1005 (C)
Junagadh	19221 *Somnath Exp*	10pm	6½	177/454/613 (A)
Mumbai (Bombay)	12010 *Shatabdi*	2.30pm (Mon-Sat)	7	715/1350 (D)
	12902 *Gujarat Mail*	10pm	8¾	242/609/817/1375 (C)
Udaipur	19944 *Ahmedabad-Udaipur Exp*	11pm	9	162/554 (E)
Vadodara (Baroda)	12010 *Shatabdi*	2.30pm (Mon-Sat)	1¾	305/570 (D)

Fares: (A) sleeper/3AC/2AC, (B) 3AC/2AC/1AC, (C) sleeper/3AC/2AC/1AC, (D) AC chair/1AC, (E) sleeper/2AC

abad. This is where state politicians live in large, fortified houses. Although Ahmedabad became Gujarat's capital when the old state of Bombay was split, this new capital was planned 28km north on the west bank of the Sabarmati River. Named Gandhinagar after Mahatma Gandhi, it's India's second planned city after Chandigarh. The secretariat was moved here in 1970.

The best reason for visiting is the spectacular **Akshardham** (www.akshardham.com; J Rd, Sector 20; ⏲9.30am-7.30pm Tue-Sun), belonging to the wealthy Hindu Swaminarayan group. The elaborately carved main temple, built by nearly 1000 artisans and opened in 1992, is constructed of 6000 tonnes of pink sandstone and surrounded by manicured gardens. Three underground **exhibition areas** (admission ₹50; ⏲10am-5.30pm Tue-Sun) have hi-tech multimedia presentations on the Swaminarayan movement, the Hindu epics and other religions. At sunset (every day except Monday) a 45-minute **Water Show** (adult/child ₹75/50) presents the story of the Upanishads through fountains, music, fire and lasers and promises to reveal the secret of life after death.

Buses to Gandhinagar (₹18, 45 minutes, every 15 minutes) depart from the back northwest corner of Lal Darwaja and from the numerous stops along Ashram Rd.

NALSAROVAR BIRD SANCTUARY

This 121-sq-km **sanctuary** (Indian/foreigner ₹30/250, car ₹20, camera/video ₹50/2500), around 60km southwest of Ahmedabad, comprises Nalsarovar Lake, a flood of island-dotted blue dissolving into the sky and iron-flat plains, and its surrounding wetlands. Between November and February, the sanctuary sees flocks of indigenous and migratory birds with as many as 250 species passing through. Ducks, geese, eagles, spoonbills, cranes, pelicans and flamingos are best seen early in the morning (aim for 5.30am) and the evening.

The sanctuary is busiest at weekends and on holidays. To see the birds it's best to hire a boat (around ₹1000, negotiable, for a full day). Gujarat Tourism runs a group of pod-like **cottages** (☎02715-245083; s/d ₹300/400, with AC ₹450/650; ❄) 1.5km from the lake.

Buses (₹30, two hours) run from Ahmedabad's ST bus stand at 7am, 12.15pm and 5pm. A taxi (around ₹1500 for a day trip from Ahmedabad) is an easier option, and gives you the option of combining Nalsarovar with Lothal (40km south).

LOTHAL

About 80km southwest of Ahmedabad, this important **archaeological site** (admission free; ⏲dawn-dusk) was discovered in 1954. The city that stood here 4500 years ago was one of the most important of the Indus Valley civilisation, with similarities to Moenjodaro and Harappa in Pakistan. The site has no dramatic buildings but rather a set of scattered, low structures, so it's really one for archaeology buffs. Excavations have revealed, among other things, a tidal dockyard (the world's oldest known artificial dock) that was connected to an old course of the Sabarmati River and thus to the Gulf of Cambay. Seals discovered at the site suggest that trade may have been conducted with the civilisations of Mesopotamia, Egypt and Persia.

The site **museum** (Indian/foreigner ₹2/50; ⏲9am-5pm Sat-Thu) displays fragments of this well-ordered civilisation, such as intricate seals, weights and measures, games and jewellery, plus an artist's impression of how Lothal looked at its peak.

Palace Utelia (☎02714-262222; r from ₹3000), 7km from the site, by the Bhugavo River, is an imposing palace – complete with aged retainers – that dwarfs the village it oversees. The shabby rooms are overpriced, but it's an unusual place with some charm if not comfort.

Lothal is a long day trip from Ahmedabad, and a taxi (around ₹1500 return) is the easiest bet. Buses heading for Sayla or Rajkot can drop you at Bagodra (₹35, 1½ hours), where you should be able to find an autorickshaw, taxi or jeep to the site, 18km south. Trains from Ahmedabad's Gandhigram station at 7.15am and 9am run to Lothal-Bhurkhi station (2nd-class ₹45, two hours), 6km from the site, from where you can catch a bus. Take water and food with you.

MODHERA

The beautiful **Sun Temple** (Indian/foreigner ₹5/100; ⏲9am-5pm) was built in 1026 and 1027 by King Bhimdev I and is one of the greatest monuments of the Solanki dynasty, whose rulers were believed to be descended from the sun. Like the better-known Sun Temple at Konark in Odisha (Orissa), which it predates by 200 years, the Modhera temple was designed so that the dawn sun shone on the image of Surya, the sun god, during the equinox. Though it was sacked by invading Delhi sultan Ala-ud-Din Khilji around 1300, losing its main spire, it remains impressive. The main hall and shrine

are reached through a pillared pavilion. The temple exterior is intricately carved with demons and deities. Within, 52 sculpted pillars depict scenes from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, and a hall with 12 niches represents Surya's different monthly manifestations. Erotic sculpture panels complete the sensual decoration.

The temple is fronted by the **Surya Kund**, an extraordinary rectangular step-well that contains over 100 shrines, resembling a sunken art gallery.

Around 20 January, the temple is the scene for a three-day **classical dance festival** with dancers from all over India.

Modhera is 100km northwest of Ahmedabad. You can take a bus (₹59, two hours, half-hourly) from Ahmedabad's ST bus stand to Mahesana (Mehsana), and then another bus 26km west to Modhera (₹30, one hour). There are also trains from Ahmedabad to Mahesana. Buses run from Modhera to Patan (₹35, 1¼ hours) every 30 minutes till around 4pm. There are also two daily buses to/from Zainabad (₹45, 1½ hours). A taxi from Ahmedabad will cost about ₹1500 round-trip.

PATAN

☎02766 / POP 112,038

About 130km northwest of Ahmedabad, Patan was Gujarat's capital for six centuries before Ahmedabad was founded in 1411. It was ruined by the armies of Ala-ud-Din Khilji around 1300, and today is a dusty, little-visited town with narrow streets lined by elaborate wooden houses. The only real sign of its former glory is the **Rani-ki-Vav** (Indian/foreigner ₹5/100; ⏲9am-5pm), an astoundingly beautiful step-well, incongruously grand in this unassuming town. Built in 1063 by Rani Udayamati to commemorate her husband, Bhimdev I, the step-well is the oldest and finest in Gujarat and is remarkably well preserved – it was protected by centuries of silt before being excavated and restored between the 1960s and 1980s. Steps lead down through multiple levels with lines of carved pillars and over 800 sculptures, mostly on Vishnu-avatar themes.

Patan also has more than 100 Jain temples, the largest of which is **Panchasara Parshvanath**, and is famed for its beautiful Patola silk textiles produced by the torturously laborious double-*ikat* method. Both the warp (lengthways) and weft (transverse) threads are painstakingly tie-dyed to create the pattern *before* the weaving process begins. It takes about six months to make one sari, which might cost ₹100,000. To see double-*ikat* being made visit the Salvi family at **Patan Patola Heritage** (☎232274; www.patanpatola.com; Salvivado, Patolawala St).

The new, clean and friendly **Surya Palace Hotel** (☎329872; Yash Plaza, University Rd; s/d ₹400/500, AC from ₹700/800; ❄), near the train station, is the best bet for rooms. **Anand Restaurant** (Kilachand Shopping Centre; mains ₹40-70) has good thalis and à la carte dishes.

Patan is 40km northwest of Mahesana. Buses leave Ahmedabad's ST bus stand about every hour (₹78, 3½ hours). There are also buses to/from Zainabad (₹65, 2½ hours, two daily), via Modhera.

Vadodara (Baroda)

☎0265 / POP 1.49 MILLION

Vadodara (or Baroda as it's often known) lies 106km southeast of Ahmedabad, little over an hour's drive along National Expressway 1. Vadodara has some interesting city sights, but the main reason for coming here is the stunning nearby Unesco World Heritage Site of Champaner and Pavagadh.

After the Marathas expelled the Mughals from Gujarat in the 18th century, their local lieutenants, the Gaekwad clan, made Vadodara their capital. Vadodara retained a high degree of autonomy even under the British,

NAVRATRI & DUSSEHRA

Navratri (Festival of Nine Nights) is celebrated in September or October India-wide, but Gujarat has made it its own. The festival celebrates feminine divinity in the forms of the goddesses Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati. Celebrations centre on special shrines at junctions, marketplaces and, increasingly today, large venues that can accommodate thousands. People dress up in sparkling finery to whirl the night away in entrancing *garba* or *dandiya* circle dances till the early hours. Navratri is celebrated in every town and village in Gujarat and it's a festival where you may well find yourself joining in.

The night after Navratri is Dussehra, which celebrates the victory of Durga and Rama over the demon king Ravana, with more nocturnal dancing and fireworks.

right up to Independence in 1947. Maharaja Sayajirao III (1875–1939) was a great moderniser and laid the foundations of Vadodara's modern reputation as Gujarat's cultural capital.

Sights

Sayaji Bagh PARK, MUSEUM

Within this shady park is the **Baroda Museum & Picture Gallery** (Indian/foreigner ₹10/200; ⏲10.30am-5pm), which houses a diverse collection, much of it gathered by Sayajirao III, including statues and carvings from several Asian regions, an Egyptian room and some rather mangy zoology exhibits. The gallery has lovely Mughal miniatures and a motley crew of European masters.

FREE Tambekar Wada HISTORIC BUILDING

(Pratap Rd, Raopura; ⏲8am-6pm) This wooden multi-storeyed townhouse is a typical Maratha mansion, once the residence of Bhau Tambekar, diwan of Baroda (1849–54). Inside are beautiful 19th-century murals featuring scenes from the Mahabharata, Krishna's life and the 19th-century Anglo-Maratha War. It was due to reopen in 2011 after restoration.

Laxmi Vilas Palace PALACE

(Nehru Rd; audio tour ₹125; ⏲9am-5pm Tue-Sun) Still the residence of Vadodara's royal family, Laxmi Vilas was built in full-throttle 19th-century Indo-Saracenic flourish by Major Charles 'Mad' Mant for Sayajirao III at a cost of ₹6 million. It's set in expansive parklike grounds. The audio tour lets you have a leisurely sticky-beak at the palace's elaborate interiors with their mosaics, chandeliers, artworks and *jarokhas* (projecting balcony-windows).

Sleeping

The main cluster of hotels is in the conveniently central Sayajigunj area.

Sapphire Regency HOTEL $$

(☎2361130; www.sapphireregency.com; Sayajigunj; s/d incl breakfast from ₹1400/1800; ❄📶) New in 2009, the Sapphire Regency has the best rooms in Vadodara for its price range. Looking and smelling fresh, it has a contemporary minimalist style with white walls and tiles and brown furniture and doors. Room size increases as you move up the price categories.

Hotel Ambassador HOTEL $$

(☎2362727; www.hotelambassadorindia.com; Sayajigunj; s/d incl breakfast from ₹1100/1400; ❄📶) Newly renovated and jazzed up, the Ambassador offers very good value. The cheapest ('deluxe') rooms have a vaguely Japanese air, while the 'executive' quarters have a slick contemporary feel, all pinks, oranges, squares and rectangles. There's civilised 24-hour checkout too.

Hotel Surya HOTEL $$

(☎2361361; www.hotelsurya.com; Sayajigunj; s/d incl breakfast from ₹1700/1900; ❄@📶) Surya is a popular choice, with a cordial atmosphere and professional staff. Rooms are clean, though not particularly big or modern, and the mattresses are on the firmer side of hard. Two excellent restaurants, Vega and Myra, flank the reception.

Hotel Valiant HOTEL $$

(☎2363480; www.hotelvaliant.com; 7th fl, BBC Tower, Sayajigunj; s/d ₹600/775, with AC from ₹850/1025; ❄@) The Valiant has surprisingly fresh rooms on the upper floors of a high-rise building. Take the lift up from the street entrance to find reception in a spacious lobby on the 7th floor. The rooms are clean, well presented and good value, and checkout is 24 hours.

Hotel Express Towers HOTEL $$

(☎3055000; www.expressworld.com; RC Dutt Rd; s economy ₹1990, s/d incl breakfast from ₹3200/4000; ❄@📶) A good choice about 1km west of the train station, with business-minded rooms, a wine shop and two very good restaurants.

WelcomHotel Vadodara HOTEL $$$

(☎2330033; www.itcwelcomgroup.in; RC Dutt Rd; s/d from ₹8000/9000; ❄@📶🏊) A swish five-star complex with predictable, well-appointed rooms, an unusual outdoor pool, plenty of cool lounge areas, an expensive 24-hour multicuisine restaurant and a wine shop.

Apsara Hotel HOTEL $

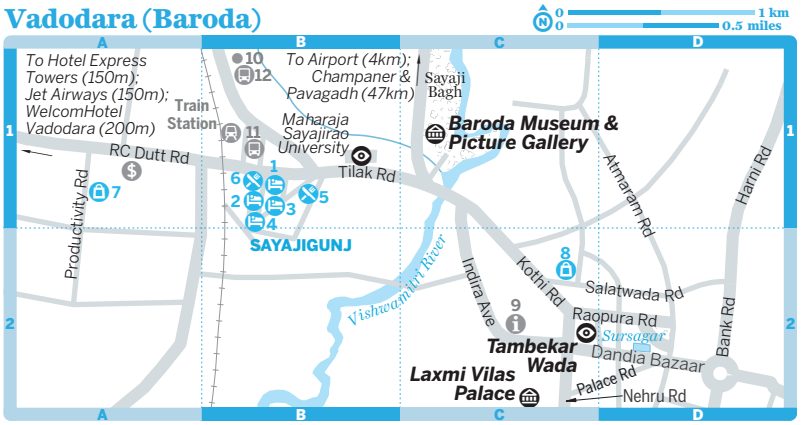
(☎2225399; Sayajigunj; s/d ₹250/450) This budget place with a leafy little front yard is friendly and welcoming, although the rooms are small and a bit grubby (those upstairs are marginally brighter).

Eating

Kansaar GUJARATI $

(101 Unique Trade Centre, Sayajigunj; thali ₹130; ⏲11am-3pm & 7-10.15pm) A classy veg thali joint on the 1st floor (behind the 'Kadahi Punjabi' sign), with impeccable service and delicious food; the thali is bottomless and you can eat inside or out on the terrace for the street view.

Vadodara (Baroda)



Pizza Meo
ITALIAN $$

(Sayajigunj; pizza & pasta ₹120-190; ⏲11am-11pm) This small Italian *ristorante e pizzeria* serves excellent veg pizza, and so-so veg pasta. With a Sistine Chapel ceiling and red-green-and-white aproned waiters, it is an almost-convincing slice of the Continent on the subcontinent.

Mandap
GUJARATI $$

(Hotel Express Towers, RC Dutt Rd; thali ₹200; ⏲12.30-2.45pm & 7.30-10.45pm) One the best thalis in town, served in a splendidly decorated room with a desert-tent interior.

Vega
MULTICUISINE $$

(Hotel Surya, Sayajigunj; mains ₹100-170) Comfortable Vega serves decent Chinese, Indian, Thai and Italian fare.

Kalyan
SOUTH INDIAN, FAST FOOD $

(Sayajigunj; dishes ₹40-100) Kalyan is a breezy student hang-out serving healthy portions of South Indian food and less healthy attempts at Western fast food (though all dishes are vegetarian).

Shopping

Baroda Prints
HANDICRAFTS

(⏲10am-8pm) Aries Complex (3 Aries Complex, Productivity Rd); Salatwada (Main Rd, Salatwada) A shop selling hand-printed dress materials in original, colourful and attractive designs. In the Salatwada store you can see the printers at work in the back room.

Information

There are State Bank and Bank of India ATMs at the train station, an SBI ATM on RC Dutt Rd, and Bank of Baroda and ICICI ATMs in Sayajigunj.

Gujarat Tourism (☎2427489; Block C, Narmada Bhavan, Indira Ave; ⏲10.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, closed 2nd & 4th Sat of month) On the ground floor of a red and yellowy-white nine-storey building and not well signed. Unless you want to organise a tour or get brochures, this office is rather disappointing.

ICICI Bank (Sayajigunj) As well as the ATM, it changes travellers cheques and cash.

Speedy Cyber Cafe (Sayajigunj; per hr ₹20; ⏲8am-10pm)

Getting There & Away

Air

The airport is 4km northeast of the centre. **Jet Airways** (☎022-39893333; www.jetairways.com; 11 Panorama Bldg, RC Dutt RD) and **IndiGo** (www.goindogo.com) fly to Mumbai and Delhi (Jet has several flights daily); **Indian Airlines** (☎2794747; www.indian-airlines.nic.in; AG Chambers, Fatehganj) has an evening flight to Delhi.

Bus

The **ST bus stand** is about 300m north of the train station, with buses to many destinations in Gujarat and neighbourng states including Ahmedabad (ordinary/deluxe ₹65/100, two hours, at least hourly), Bhavnagar (express ₹150, five hours, about hourly from 6am), Diu (deluxe ₹179, 12 hours, 6pm, 9pm and 10pm), Mumbai (deluxe ₹275, nine hours, 6pm, 7pm and 7.30pm) and Udaipur (₹195, eight hours, four daily). Many private bus companies have offices nearby, including **BGTS Travel House**, with Volvo AC buses to Mumbai (seat/sleeper ₹900/1000, eight hours, 8.30pm, 8.45pm, 9.30pm and 11.30pm), and three buses to Udaipur (seat/sleeper ₹300/400) all leaving at 8.30pm.

Vadodara (Baroda)

Top Sights
Baroda Museum & Picture Gallery C1
Laxmi Vilas Palace C2
Tambekar Wada C2

Sleeping
1 Apsara Hotel B1
2 Hotel Ambassador B1
Hotel Surya ..... (see 1)
3 Hotel Valiant B1
4 Sapphire Regency B1

Eating
5 Kalyan B1
6 Kansaar B1
Pizza Meo ..... (see 5)
Vega ..... (see 1)

Shopping
7 Baroda Prints A1
8 Baroda Prints C2

Information
Bank of Baroda ATM ..... (see 4)
9 Gujarat Tourism C2
ICICI ..... (see 4)
Speedy Cyber Cafe ..... (see 6)

Transport
10 BGTS Travel House B1
11 Local Bus Stand B1
12 ST Bus Stand B1

Train

About 30 trains a day run to Ahmedabad, including the 12009 *Shatabdi* at 11.20am Monday to Saturday (AC chair/1AC ₹335/610, two hours). The 13 daily trains to Mumbai include the 12010 *Shatabdi* at 4.17pm Monday to Saturday (AC chair/1AC ₹625/1170, 5¼ hours).

Around Vadodara

CHAMPANER & PAVAGADH

This spectacular Unesco World Heritage Site, 47km northeast of Vadodara, combines a sacred, 762m volcanic hill (Pavagadh), looking like a chunk of the Himalaya dumped on the plain, and a ruined Gujarati capital with beautiful mosque architecture (Champaner).

Pavagadh may have been fortified as early as the 8th century; it became the capital of the Chauhan Rajputs around 1300 and was taken by the Gujarat sultan Mahmud Begada, after a 20-month siege, in 1484 (the Rajputs committed *jauhar* – ritual mass suicide – in the face of defeat). Mahmud Begada turned Champaner, at the base of the hill, into a splendid new capital. But its glory was brief: when it was captured by Mughal emperor Humayun in 1535, the Gujarati capital reverted to Ahmedabad, and Champaner fell into ruin. Hindu and Jain pilgrims, however, continue to this day to climb to the temples atop Pavagadh.

The heart of **Champaner** (Indian/foreigner ₹10/250; ⏲8am-6pm) is the Citadel, a rectangular area nearly 1km long, surrounded by high stone walls and now partly occupied by a village. A 6km-long outer wall enclosed the rest of the city. Champaner's most stunning features are its monumental mosques (no longer used for worship), with their beautiful blending of Islamic and Hindu decoration styles – above all the huge **Jami Masjid**, just outside the Citadel's east gate. Here a wonderful carved entrance porch leads into a lovely courtyard surrounded by a pillared corridor. The prayer hall has two tall central minarets, further superb stone carving, multiple domes, and seven mihrabs (prayer niches) along the back wall.

Other beautiful mosques include the **Saher ki Masjid**, behind the ticket office inside the Citadel, which was probably the private royal mosque, and the **Kevda Masjid**, 300m north of the Citadel and about 600m west of the Jami Masjid. Here you can climb narrow stairs to the roof, and higher up the minarets, to spot other mosques even further out into the countryside – **Nagina Masjid**, 500m north, with no minarets but exquisite geometric carving, and **Lila Gumbaj ki Masjid**, 800m east, on a high platform and with a fluted central dome. The twin minarets resembling factory chimneys, about 1km west, adorn the **Brick Minar ki Masjid**, a rare brick tomb.

To ascend **Pavagadh**, you can either walk up the pilgrim trail, which will take two to three hours, or you can take a shuttle bus (₹10) from opposite the Citadel's south gate. The bus deposits you about halfway up the hill, where you can either join the walking path (here lined by souvenir and drink stalls), or hop on the **Ropeway** (cable car; return ₹98; ⏲7am-11pm) which glides you up

to within a 700m walk of the **Kalikamata Temple** on the hill's summit. The first version of this temple to Kali, an evil-destroying incarnation of the mother goddess, was built in the 10th or 11th century. The temple attracts a steady stream of pilgrims, especially during the nine days of Navratri (September/October) and the month-long **Mahakali Festival** (March/April). Near the top of the hill are also Pavagadh's oldest surviving monument, the 10th- to 11th-century Hindu **Lakulisha Temple**, and several Jain temples. The views are fantastic and so, if you're lucky, are the cooling breezes.

Hotel Champaner (☎02676-293041; s/d ₹350/500, with AC ₹700/1000; ❄), near the foot of the Ropeway, has typically state-run rooms that are plain and basic, but all have balconies with superb views.

Buses to Champaner run about every half-hour from Vadodara (₹45, two hours); a return taxi costs around ₹700.

South of Vadodara

Gujarat stretches some 240km south from Vadodara to the border of Maharashtra, 150km short of Mumbai. **Surat**, 140km south of Vadodara, is where the British established their first Indian settlement in 1614. It's now Gujarat's hectic second-biggest city (population 5 million), a busy commercial centre for textiles and diamonds. Around 40km south of Surat is **Dandi**, the destination of Gandhi's epic Salt March in 1930, with several Gandhi monuments by its strikingly empty beach. Just before the Maharashtra border is the ex-Portuguese enclave of **Daman**, an alcohol-infused resort town on a grey sea. Though it still retains a little of the piquancy of old Portugal, Daman is far less attractive than its counterpart Diu in Saurashtra. In the southeast, the hilly **Dangs** district is the northern extremity of the Western Ghats, with a large tribal population and little tourist infrastructure. The main town is the minor hill resort of Saputara. The **Dangs Darbar** (February/March), in the week before Holi, is a spectacular, largely tourist-free tribal festival.

SAURASHTRA

Before Independence, Saurashtra, also known as the Kathiawar Peninsula, was a jumble of over 200 princely states. Today it has a number of hectic industrial cities, but most of them retain a core of narrow old streets crowded with small-scale commerce. Outside the cities it's still villages, fields, forests and a timeless, almost feudal feel, with farmers dressed head to toe in white and rural women as colourful as their sisters in Rajasthan.

Saurashtra is mainly flat and its rare hills are often sacred – including the spectacular, temple-topped Shatrunjaya and Girnar. The peninsula is liberally endowed with wildlife sanctuaries, notably Sasan Gir, where Asia's last wild lions roam. On the south coast lies the very quaint, laid-back ex-Portuguese island enclave of Diu. Saurashtra is also where Mahatma Gandhi was born and raised: you can visit several sites associated with the great man.

Saurashtra has a reputation for being fond of its sleep, and siesta takes place from *at least* 1pm to 3pm.

Bhavnagar

☎0278 / POP 510,958

Bhavnagar is a hectic, sprawling industrial centre with a colourful old core, that makes a base for journeys to nearby Shatrunjaya and Blackbuck National Park. Founded in 1743 and always a cotton-trading town, Bhavnagar supplements its income today through diamonds, plastics – and ship parts: Alang, 70km south, is the world's biggest shipbreaking site, with thousands of workers dismantling dozens of vessels, from supertankers down, by hand. Alang attracts controversy over its working conditions, health risks and pollution: the only way in is by invitation from a company operating there.

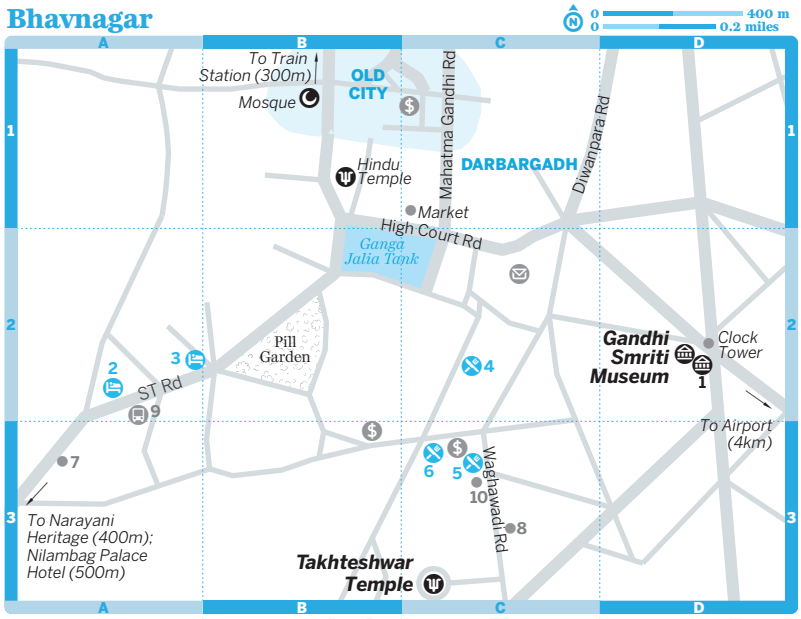
Sights & Activities

Mahatma Gandhi attended university in Bhavnagar, and the dusty **Gandhi Smriti Museum** (admission free; ⏲9am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat, closed 2nd & 4th Sat of month), by the clock tower, has a multitude of Gandhi photographs and documents. Explanatory material is in Hindi only. Downstairs, the equally dusty **Barton Museum** (Indian/foreigner ₹2/50; ⏲same), has religious carvings, betel-nut cutters, and a skeleton in a cupboard.

The **old city**, north of Ganga Jalia Tank, is worth a wander, especially in the evening – it's busy with small shops and cluttered with dilapidated elaborate wooden buildings leaning over the colourful crowded bazaars.

Takhteshwar Temple sits on a small hillock high enough to provide splendid views over the city and out onto the Gulf of Cambay.

Bhavnagar



Sleeping

The budget hotels, mostly in the old city and near the train station, are fairly grim, but midrange hotels are reasonable.

Hotel Sun 'n' Shine HOTEL $$
(☎2516131; Panwadi Chowk, ST Rd; s/d incl breakfast from ₹1600/1800; ❄@📶) This well-run, three-star hotel is excellent value. It has a Mediterranean-inspired and vertigo-inducing atrium, a very welcoming front desk, and the recommended RGB restaurant. The rooms are fresh and clean with comfortable beds: the more you pay, the more windows you get. The breakfast is substantial, and free airport transfers are offered.

Narayani Heritage HERITAGE HOTEL $$
(☎2513535; narayaniheritage@gmail.com; Dairy Rd; s/d ₹1200/1600; ❄🏊) This hotel occupies a former administrative building in the royal compound of Nilambag Palace Hotel and styles itself a 'budget heritage hotel'. The bright, spacious rooms are tastefully decorated and good value. Though they don't have the atmosphere of the palace they do share its dining room, pool, gym and tennis court.

Nilambag Palace Hotel HERITAGE HOTEL $$
(☎2424241; www.nilambagpalace.com; s/d cottage room ₹1500/2100, palace room ₹2500/4000; ❄@🏊) In large gardens beside the Ahmedabad road, about 600m southwest of the bus station, this former maharaja's palace was built in 1859. It looks rather stern from

Bhavnagar

Top Sights
- Gandhi Smriti Museum D2
- Takhteshwar Temple C3

Sights
- 1 Barton Museum D2

Sleeping
- 2 Hotel Apollo A2
- 3 Hotel Sun 'n' Shine A2

Eating
- 4 Rasoi C2
- RGB Restaurant ..... (see 3)
- 5 Sankalp C3
- 6 Tulsi Restaurant C3

Information
- 7 Forest Office A3

Transport
- 8 Jet Airways C3
- 9 ST Bus Stand A2
- 10 Tanna Travels C3

outside, but has a more personal feel inside. The 'cottage' rooms are good-sized but rather bare; the palace rooms are much nicer and bigger, in a stately early-20th-century style. Guests have use of a circular **swimming pool** (nonguests ₹100; ⏲7am-noon & 3-8pm Tue-Sun) in the Vijay Mahal in the extensive grounds, plus a gym and tennis facilities.

Hotel Apollo HOTEL $$
(☎2425251; www.thehotelapollo.com; ST Rd; s/d ₹500/800, with AC from ₹1100/1250; ❄) Bare but quite spacious rooms.

Eating

Tulsi Restaurant INDIAN, CHINESE $
(Kalanala Chowk; mains ₹60-80; ⏲lunch & dinner) Low-lit with plants and understated decor, this cosy and clean place with well-prepared Punjabi and Chinese veg dishes is rightly popular. Service is friendly and efficient, and it's excellent value.

Rasoi INDIAN, CHINESE $
(mains ₹50-70, thali ₹120; ⏲11.30am-3.15pm & 6-11pm) This secluded bungalow and (in the evening) garden restaurant serves up great unlimited Gujarati thalis, as well as Punjabi and Chinese veg fare. It's behind the police post between two petrol stations just north of the Galaxy Cinema.

RGB Restaurant MULTICUISINE $$
(Hotel Sun 'n' Shine, Panwadi Chowk, ST Rd; mains ₹100-130) Cool, cosy, vegetarian, hotel restaurant offering generous serves of Jain, North Indian and Chinese.

Sankalp SOUTH INDIAN $
(Waghawadi Rd; mains ₹50-120; ⏲11am-11pm) First-class South Indian vegetarian dishes in clean, contemporary surroundings.

Information

State Bank of India (Darbargadh; ⏲10.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Changes cash and travellers cheques and has a 24-hour ATM and a lovely, ornately carved, old-city portico. Other ATMs include State Bank and HDFC near Tulsi Restaurant.

Getting There & Around

AIR **Jet Airways** (☎2433371; www.jetairways.com; Surat House, Waghawadi Rd) and **Kingfisher** (☎1800 2093030; www.flykingfisher.com) have daily flights to and from Mumbai. A taxi to or from the airport costs around ₹100.

BUS From the ST bus stand there are buses for Diu (₹115 to ₹122, seven hours, four daily), Rajkot (₹93 to ₹100, four hours, 12 daily) and Ahmedabad (₹100 to ₹108, five hours, 13 daily). Private bus companies include **Tanna Travels** (Waghawadi Rd), with AC buses to Ahmedabad (₹150, four hours, 15 daily), Vadodara (₹170, four hours, seven daily) and Mumbai (₹700, 13 hours, 4pm).

TRAIN The 12972 *Bhavnagar-Bandra Express* departs at 8.30pm and arrives at Ahmedabad (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹182/442/584) at 1.55am.

Around Bhavnagar

BLACKBUCK NATIONAL PARK

This beautiful, 34-sq-km **park** (Indian/foreigner car ₹200/1000, 4hr guide ₹50/500; ⏲dawn-dusk 16 Oct-15 Jun), north of Bhavnagar, encompasses large areas of pale, custard-coloured grassland stretching between two seasonal rivers. Formerly called Velavadar National Park, it's famous for its blackbucks, beautiful, fast antelopes which sport elegant spiralling horns – as long as 65cm in mature males. Some 1600 inhabit the park, which is also good for spotting birds such as wintering harriers from Siberia (about 2000 of them most years). The park has a good road network and is best explored by car. Pay your fees and pick up a guide (who is unlikely to speak English) at the reception centre about 65km from Bhavnagar, north of Valabhipur.

You can book accommodation in the four-room **Forest Department Guest House** (Indian/foreigner d ₹500/2500, with AC ₹1500/3750), by the reception centre, through the **Forest Office** (☎0278-2426425; F-10, Annexe, MS Bldg; ⏲11am-5pm Mon-Fri) in Bhavnagar. The very comfortable stone-built villas of **Blackbuck Lodge** (☎9824019877, 079-40020901; www.theblackbucklodge.com; s/d incl all meals ₹3000/5300) are just outside the park's western entrance.

A taxi day trip from Bhavnagar costs about ₹2000.

Palitana

☎02848 / POP 51,934

The hustling, dusty town of Palitana, 51km southwest of Bhavnagar, has grown rapidly to serve the pilgrim trade around Shatrunjaya. Your best bet for general information is the helpful manager at Hotel Shravak.

Sights & Activities

Shatrunjaya SACRED SITE
(Place of Victory; ⏲temples 6.30am-6pm) One of Jainism's holiest pilgrimage sites, Shatrun-

jaya is an incredible hilltop sea of temples, built over 900 years on a plateau dedicated to the gods. The temples are grouped into *tunks* (enclosures), each with a central temple and many minor ones. Some of the earliest were built in the 11th century, but were destroyed by Muslim attackers in the 14th and 15th centuries; the current temples date from the 16th century onwards.

The 500m climb up 3300 steps to the temples adds to the extraordinary experience and takes most people about 1½ hours. The steps start on the southwest edge of Palitana about 3.5km from the bus stand (₹20 by autorickshaw). Pilgrims make the climb in their hundreds most days, and in thousands around Kartik Purnima, in November or December.

As you near the top of the hill, the track forks. The main entrance, Ram Pole, is reached by taking the left-hand fork. To see the best views over the site first, take the right-hand fork. There are superb views in all directions; on a clear day you can see the Gulf of Cambay. Inside the Nav Tonk Gate, one path leads left to the Muslim shrine of **Angar Pir**, where women who want children make offerings of miniature cradles. The Muslim saint protected the temples from a Mughal attack. To the right, the second *tunk* you reach is the Chaumukhji Tunk, containing the **Chaumukh** (Four-Faced Shrine), built in 1618 by a wealthy Jain merchant. Images of Adinath, the first Jain *tirthankar* (believed to have attained enlightenment here), face the four cardinal directions.

You can easily spend a couple of hours wandering among the hundreds of temples up here. The biggest and one of the most splendid and important, with a fantastic wealth of detailed carving, is the **Adinath Temple**, on the highest point on the far (south) side.

Shri Vishal Jain Museum (admission ₹10; ⏲8am-8.30pm), 500m down the street from the foot of the Shatrunjaya steps, exhibits assorted Jain artwork and artefacts up to 500 years old. In the basement is a surprising circular temple with mirror walls and centuries-old images of four *tirthankars*.

Sleeping & Eating

Vijay Vilas Adpur HERITAGE HOTEL $$
(☎282371, 9427182809; vishwa_adpur@yahoo.co.in; Adpur village; s/d incl breakfast ₹2000/3000; ❄) Vijay Vilas sits in deep, beautiful countryside beneath the western end of Shatrunjaya, 11km west of Palitana. It's a small 1906 palace with six large, plain but nicely decorated rooms, with original furniture. Three have terraces/balconies looking towards Shatrunjaya – which can be climbed from here by a slightly shorter, steeper path (2700 steps) than the one from Palitana. Vijay Vilas is family-run, with delicious home-cooked food (a mix of Gujarati and Rajasthani, veg and non-veg). You can also just pop in for lunch (₹300) – it's best to call first.

Hotel Shravak HOTEL $
(☎252428; s/d/tr/q ₹100/300/400/500) The ultrabasic rooms at the friendly Shravak, opposite the bus stand, are the best bet in Palitana itself. They're shabby but clean; doubles are better than singles for space. Showers are unheated: buckets of hot water are available from 5am to 10am.

Hotel Sumeru HOTEL $
(☎252327; Station Rd; men-only dm ₹75, s/d ₹300/400, with AC ₹683/945; ❄) This dowdy Gujarat Tourism establishment is 200m towards the station from the bus stand. Rooms are rundown, but the upstairs ones have balconies, and there's a restaurant.

Jagruti Restaurant INDIAN $
(thali ₹30, mains ₹30-50; ⏲10am-10pm) Across the laneway from Hotel Shravak, Jagruti is a wildly busy thali house.

Getting There & Away

Plenty of ST buses run to/from Bhavnagar (₹25, 1½ hours, every half-hour) and Ahmedabad (₹120, five hours, hourly). For Diu, take a bus to

SHATRUNJAYA PRACTICALITIES

It's best to start the ascent around dawn so you can climb before it gets too hot. You should be properly dressed (no shorts etc). Leave behind leather items, including belts and bags, and don't take any food or drinks inside the temples. Water (not bottled) can be bought at intervals on the ascent. If you wish, you can be carried up and down the hill in a *dholi* (portable chair with two bearers), for about ₹1000 round-trip.

Photo permits (₹100) must be obtained before you start the climb, from an office on the left just before the foot of the steps.

Talaja (₹20, one hour, hourly), where you can catch buses to Diu (₹90, 5½ hours, around six daily.).

Three passenger trains run daily to/from Bhavnagar (2nd class ₹9).

Diu

02875 / POP 21,576

What is Diu? For better or worse, this tiny ex-Portuguese island is one of the main reasons travellers come to Gujarat. And while it may not be the tropical paradise they imagined, it has a quirky charm and serenity.

Diu is clean and uncrowded and boasts some reasonable beaches, whitewashed churches, an imposing fort, interestingly colourful Portuguese-influenced streets (most of them deliciously quiet) and fresh seafood, as well as groups of giggly Gujarati weekenders who flock here for the cheap booze. Plus it's the safest place to ride a scooter in all of India, with minimum traffic and excellent roads.

Like Daman and Goa, Diu was a Portuguese colony until taken over by India in 1961. With Daman, it is still governed from Delhi as part of the Union Territory of Daman & Diu and is not part of Gujarat. It includes Diu Island, about 11km by 3km, separated from the mainland by a narrow channel, and two tiny mainland enclaves. One of these, housing the village of Ghoghla, is the entry point to Diu from Una.

Diu town sits at the east end of the island. The northern side of the island, facing Gujarat, is tidal marsh and salt pans, while the southern coast alternates between limestone cliffs, rocky coves and sandy beaches.

The island's main industries are fishing, tourism, alcohol and salt. Kalpana Distillery at Malala produces rum from sugar cane.

One legacy of the Portuguese that is very much respected by many local businesses is that of the siesta.

History

Diu was the first landing point for the Parsis when they fled from Persia in the 7th century AD. By all accounts they moved on to Sanjan, in southeast Gujarat, after a few years, although Diu did have some sort of Parsi community later in its history. Between the 14th and 16th centuries Diu was an important trading post and naval base from which the Ottomans controlled the northern Arabian Sea shipping routes.

Portugal unsuccessfully attempted to capture the island in 1531, during which the Turkish navy helped Bahadur Shah, Sultan of Gujarat. The Portuguese finally secured control in 1535 by taking advantage of a quarrel between the sultan and the Mughal emperor, Humayun. Bahadur signed a treaty with the Portuguese, giving them control over Diu port. Though both Bahadur and his successor, Mahmud III, then attempted to contest the issue, another treaty eventually signed in 1539 ceded the island of Diu and the mainland enclave of Ghoghla to Portugal.

Seven Rajput soldiers and a few civilians were killed in Operation Vijay, which ended Portuguese rule in 1961. After the Indian Air Force unnecessarily bombed the airstrip and terminal near Nagoa, it remained derelict until the late 1980s. Diu, Daman and Goa were administered as one union territory of India until 1987, when Goa became a state.

Dangers & Annoyances

Much more an annoyance than a danger, drunk male tourists can be tiresome, particularly towards single or pairs of women, and particularly around Nagoa Beach.

Sights & Activities

DIU TOWN

The town is sandwiched between the massive fort at its east end and a huge city wall on the west. The main **Zampa Gateway**, painted bright red, has carvings of lions, angels and a priest, while just inside it is a chapel with an image of the Virgin and Child dating from 1702.

Cavernous **St Paul's Church** (8am-6pm) is a wedding cake of a church, founded by Jesuits in 1600 and then rebuilt in 1807. Its neoclassical facade is the most elaborate of any Portuguese church in India. Inside, it's a great barn, with a small cloister next door, above which is a school. Daily mass is heard here. Nearby is white-walled **St Thomas' Church**, a lovely, simple building that is now the **Diu Museum** (admission free; 9am-9pm), with a spooky, evocative collection of wooden Catholic saints going back to the 16th century. Once a year, on 1 November, this is used for a packed-out mass. The Portuguese-descended population mostly live in this area, still called Farangiwada (Foreigners' Quarter). The **Church of St Francis of Assisi**, founded in 1593, has been converted into a hospital, but is also sometimes used for services.

Many other Diu buildings show a lingering Portuguese influence. The western part of town is a maze of narrow, winding streets

and many houses are brightly painted, with the most impressive being in the Panchwati area, notably **Nagar Sheth Haveli**, an old merchant's house laden with stucco scrolls and fulsome fruit.

AROUND THE ISLAND

Beaches BEACHES

Nagoa Beach, on the south coast of the island 7km west of Diu town, is long, palm-fringed and safe for swimming – but busy, and often with drunk men: foreign women receive a lot of unwanted attention. Two kilometres further west begins the sandy, 2.5km sweep of **Gomptimata Beach**. This is often empty, except on busy weekends, but it gets big waves – you need to be a strong swimmer here. Beaches within walking distance of Diu town are the rocky **Jallandhar**, on the town's southern shore; the longer, sandier **Chakratirth**, west of Jallandhar; and pretty **Sunset Point Beach**, a small, gentle curve beyond Chakratirth that's popular for swimming and relatively hassle-free. **Sunset Point** itself is a small headland at the south end of the beach, topped by the **INS Khukhri Memorial**, commemorating an Indian Navy frigate sunk off Diu during the 1971 India-Pakistan War. Unfortunately the region around Sunset Point is also the town's dumping ground. Waste is sometimes dumped directly into the sea, and any early-morning excursion will reveal that the tidal zone here is a popular toilet venue.

Gangeswar Temple HINDU TEMPLE

Gangeswar Temple, on the south coast 3km west of town, just past Fudam village, is a small coastal cave where five Shiva linga (phallic symbols) are washed by the waves.

Parsi Bungali HISTORIC SITE

A stone-paved path leads 200m inland from Gangeswar Temple to two Parsi 'towers of silence', squat, round stone towers where the Parsis laid their dead out to be consumed by vultures.

Sea Shell Museum MUSEUM

(adult/child ₹10/5; ⏲9am-6pm) This museum, 6km from town on the Nagoa road, is a labour of love. Captain Devjibhai Vira Fulbaria, a merchant navy captain, collected shells from literally all over the world in 50 years of sailing, and has displayed and labelled them in English with great care.

Vanakbara FISHING VILLAGE

At the extreme west of the island, Vanakbara is a fascinating little fishing village. It's great to wander around the port, packed with colourful fishing boats and bustling activity – best around 7am to 8am when the fishing fleet returns and sells off its catch.

DON'T MISS

DIU FORT

Built in 1535, with modifications made in the 1540s, Diu's massive, well-preserved **Portuguese fort** (admission free; ⏲8am-6pm) with its double moat (one tidal) on the land side, must once have been impregnable. Cannonballs litter the place and the ramparts have a superb array of cannons. The lighthouse in the fort is Diu's highest point, with a beam that reaches 32km. There are several small chapels, one of them dedicated to Santiago, whose horse-mounted, sword-wielding image is quite a surprise to encounter so far from its Iberian Peninsula homeland! Part of the fort also now serves as the island's jail. The former jail is **Fortim-do-Mar (Pani Kotha)**, the boat-shaped building that seems to float in the bay north of the fort.

Tours

You can take 20-minute **boat trips** (per person ₹25, minimum charge ₹150; ⏲9.30am-1.30pm & 3-6.30pm) around the harbour, with a close-up look at Fortim-do-Mar, when it's calm enough. Get tickets at the kiosk in front of the tourist office. Other options include a one-hour **evening cruise** (per person ₹120, minimum charge ₹960) at 7.30pm, weather permitting.

Sleeping

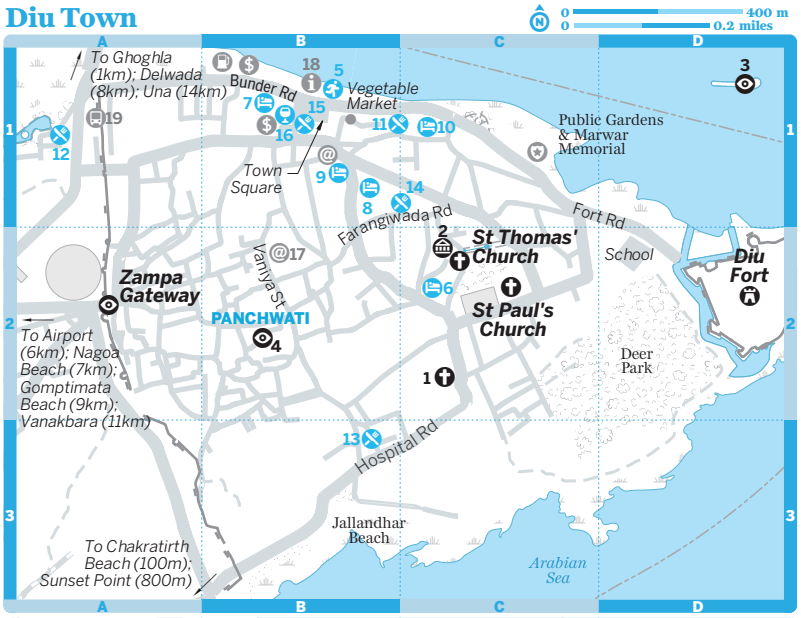
Rates at most hotels are extremely flexible, with discounts of up to 60% available at the more expensive places when things are quiet. Some only charge the full rates at peak holiday times like Diwali and Christmas/New Year.

DIU TOWN

Herança Goesa GUESTHOUSE $

(☎253851; heranca_goesa@yahoo.com; Farangiwada; r ₹350-500) Behind Diu Museum, this friendly home of a Portuguese-descended family has eight absolutely spotless rooms that represent incredible value. Take one of the upstairs rooms that captures the sea

Diu Town



breeze and just relax. Good breakfasts are served and delicious fish/seafood dinners (around ₹200) are available if you reserve in the morning.

Hotel São Tomé Retiro
GUESTHOUSE $

(☎253137; r ₹500-800, without bathroom ₹250) This atmospheric guesthouse, occupying rooms up on the side of old St Thomas' Church, is definitely the place to stay for the shoes-off, gone fishin' Diu experience. Your host, George D'Souza, is a gentle soul, and his barbecue parties are a treat. Rooms range from small, hot and basic structures on the roof to charming, breezy thick-walled abodes. The 360-degree views from the church roof are unrivalled on the island.

Hotel Samrat
HOTEL $$

(☎252354; www.cidadedediu.com/samrat; Old Collectorate Rd; r ₹1450, regular/deluxe with AC ₹1850/2250; ❄) Hotel Samrat is the town's best midrange choice, with comfortable doubles, some with street-facing balconies. Credit cards are accepted and there's a decent Indian/Chinese restaurant (mains ₹65 to ₹145) with plenty of grog available.

Hotel Super Silver
HOTEL $

(☎252020; hotel_supersilverdiu@yahoo.com; Super Silver Complex; s/d ₹250/300, r with AC ₹700; ❄) Super Silver has a nice central location and is very good value, with simple, clean, freshly painted rooms, some with views, and helpful management. Non-AC rooms are smallish. The hotel has a handy cybercafe and scooter and motorcycle rental.

Sanmaan Palace
HOTEL $$

(☎253031; Fort Rd; s/d cottage ₹850/1200, deluxe ₹1250/1600, ste ₹1650/2000; ❄) This is a nearly 200-year-old Portuguese villa in a superb, breezy waterfront location between the town square and fort. The 'cottages' are stuffy converted shipping containers in the garden and best avoided. The six original villa rooms, including the two larger corner 'suites', are plain and simple, but their high ceilings lend a little charm. There's a pleasant rooftop restaurant – perfect for a beer.

Hotel Apaar
HOTEL $$

(☎255321; hotelapaardiu@gmail.com; Bunder Rd; r ₹1800-2600; ❄) Set back off the main waterfront road in town, the Apaar opened in 2009 and still has that recently-opened shine – for now at least. The sizeable 'superior' rooms (₹2300) have full-wall windows, faux-wood surfaces and balconies, some of them sea-facing.

Hotel Relax Inn
HOTEL $$

(☎9638741888; Bunder Rd; r ₹2000; ❄) Next to the Apaar and equally new, with colourful

Diu Town

Top Sights
- Diu Fort ... D2
- St Paul's Church ... C2
- St Thomas' Church ... C2
- Zampa Gateway ... A2

Sights
- 1 Church of St Francis of Assisi (Hospital) ... C2
- 2 Diu Museum ... C2
- 3 Fortim-do-Mar ... D1
- 4 Nagar Sheth Haveli ... B2

Activities, Courses & Tours
- 5 Boat Tour Kiosk ... B1

Sleeping
- 6 Herança Goesa ... C2
- 7 Hotel Apaar ... B1
- Hotel Relax Inn ... (see 7)
- 8 Hotel Samrat ... B1
- Hotel São Tomé Retiro ... (see 2)
- 9 Hotel Super Silver ... B1
- 10 Sanmaan Palace ... C1

Eating
- 11 Apana Foodland ... B1
- 12 Fish Market ... A1
- Hotel São Tomé Retiro ... (see 2)
- 13 La Dolce Vita ... B3
- 14 O'Coqueiro ... C1
- 15 Ram Vijay ... B1

Drinking
- 16 Casaluxo Bar ... B1

Information
- 17 A to Z ... B2
- ICICI ATM ... (see 16)
- Post Office ... (see 16)
- 18 Tourist Office ... B1

Transport
- A to Z ... (see 17)
- 19 Jethibai Bus Stand ... A1

exterior paintwork, Relax Inn offers similarly bright rooms, in blues and whites, all with balconies. If the weather's not too hot, you can score a good discount by having the AC turned off.

NAGOA BEACH

Resort Hoka HOTEL $$

(☎253036; www.resorthoka.com; r ₹1750-1950; ❄📶) Hoka is a great place to stay, with colourful, clean and cool rooms in a small, palm-shaded complex with a small swimming pool. Some rooms have terraces over the palm trees. The management here is very helpful, you can hire mopeds, and the food is excellent. Fork right when you arrive at Nagoa Beach, and it's on the left about 300m along.

Radhika Beach Resort HOTEL $$

(☎252553; www.radhikaresort.com; d ₹2550-4050; ❄@📶) An immaculate, smart, modern place and Diu's best-located upmarket option, with comfortable, tasteful villas in grassy grounds. Rooms are spacious, clean and worth the money, and there's a very good multicuisine restaurant. The 'classic' and VIP rooms are set around a large pool.

Hotel Gangasagar HOTEL $$

(☎252249; d ₹900, with AC or beach-facing balcony ₹1200; ❄) A classic beachfront hotel, with salty sea-shack ambience and a well-stocked beachfront bar, which might or might not be an advantage. The beach-facing balcony rooms are the best, though all rooms are clean and simple. A downside can be the weekend clientele.

Eating

Fresh fish is excellent here, and drinks are blissfully cheap – around ₹50 for a Kingfisher or ₹150 for a bottle of port.

TOP CHOICE O'Coqueiro MULTICUISINE $$

(Farangiwada Rd; mains ₹65-240) Here, a dedicated owner has developed a soul-infused garden restaurant celebrating freshness and quality. The menu offers uncomplicated but very tasty pasta, chicken and seafood, plus a handful of Portuguese dishes learnt from a local Diu matriarch. There's also good coffee, cold beer, mellow music and friendly service.

La Dolce Vita MULTICUISINE $$

(☎9824203925; Hospital Rd; mains ₹60-130) This is a pretty garden restaurant on the beach side of town with excellent-value breakfasts (options include homemade muesli, fruit salad, pancakes and lassi) and very good Moka coffee. Lunch and dinner comprise veg and non-veg curries, pasta and seafood.

Bon Apetit MULTICUISINE $$
(Nagoa Beach; mains ₹110-140) This rustic place, 500m west from the Nagoa fork, serves up very tasty pasta, pizza, and prawn and chicken masala and curries, at low tables in a nice, shady garden setting. If you pre-order you can get a BBQ dinner for anywhere between ₹185 and ₹400 depending on what you fancy and what's available at the market.

Resort Hoka MULTICUISINE $$
(Nagoa Beach; mains ₹100-275; ⏲8.30-10.30am, 1-2.30pm & 7.30-9.30pm) The open-air restaurant at this small hotel has notably excellent food, with inviting breakfasts and delicious choices such as penne with tuna and tomato, fish and chips, and prawn coconut curry. It's relaxed, pleasant and tree-shaded.

Apana Foodland MULTICUISINE $$
(Apana Hotel, Fort Rd; mains ₹60-160) This outdoor restaurant facing the town waterfront does everything: breakfasts, South Indian, Gujarati, Punjabi and Chinese. The fish dishes, including shark tikka, or kingfish/prawns with rice, chips and salad, can be pre-ordered so you don't miss out. The Gujarati fruit salad is delicious.

Hotel São Tomé Retiro SEAFOOD $
(☎253137; all-you-can-eat BBQ ₹150) From around September to April, hospitable George and family hold BBQ parties every other evening. The fresh fish and delicious salads are fantastic, beer's available and it's an atmospheric place to sit around a blazing campfire and meet other travellers.

Ram Vijay ICE CREAM $
(scoops ₹20-25; ⏲8.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-9.30pm) For a rare treat head to this small, squeaky-clean, old-fashioned ice-cream parlour near the town square, for delicious handmade ice cream and milkshakes. Going since 1933, this family enterprise started with soft drinks, and still makes its own brands (Dew and Leo) in Fudam village – try a mint or ginger lemon soda and then all the ice creams!

There are two **fish markets**, one opposite Jethibai bus stand, and an evening market, lit by flame torches, across the bridge in Ghoghla. The fresh fish and seafood are delicious; most guesthouses and hotels will cook anything you buy.

Drinking

Apart from the restaurants (most of which double as bars), there are a number of bars around town. Some are on the seedy side, but the almost publike **Casaluxo Bar** (⏲9am-1pm Mon-Sat, 4-9pm Tue-Sat), facing the town square, has a more salubrious air. It opened in 1963, and doesn't seem to have updated its decor since, with lots of dusty bottles.

Information

Note that many shops around town change money.

A to Z (Vaniya St, Panchwati; internet per hr ₹30; ⏲9am-11pm)

ICICI ATM Facing the town square.

Post office (⏲9am-5pm Mon-Sat) Upstairs, facing the town square.

SBI ATM (Goldmoon Complex, Bunder Rd)

State Bank of India (Main Bazaar; ⏲10am-4pm Mon-Fri) Changes cash and travellers cheques.

Tourist office (☎252653; www.diutourism.co.in; Bunder Rd; ⏲9am-6pm Mon-Sat) This quite helpful office has maps, bus schedules and hotel prices.

Uma Cyber Café (internet per hr ₹30; ⏲9.30am-11pm) Next to Uma Shakti Hotel.

Getting There & Away

Air

Jet Airways (☎255030; www.jetairways.com) flies to/from Mumbai daily except Saturday. There are several ticketing agents in town. The airport is 6km west of town, just before Nagoa Beach.

Bus & Car

Apart from the final 14km from Una, the roads approaching Diu are abysmal. Hwy 8E is one long pothole from 30km west of Una to 30km east of it. Visitors arriving in Diu by road may be charged a border tax of ₹50 per person, though the practice seems to be erratic.

From Jethibai bus stand there are buses to Veraval (₹70, three hours, 10 daily), Junagadh (₹110, five hours, seven daily), Rajkot (₹140, six hours, six daily), Bhavnagar (₹107, seven hours, 10 daily) and Ahmedabad (₹200, 12 hours, 7am and 9pm). More frequent departures go from Una, 14km north of Diu. Buses run between Una bus stand and Diu (₹14, 40 minutes) every half-hour between 6.30am to 8pm. Outside these hours, shared autorickshaws go to Ghoghla or Diu from Tower Chowk in Una (1km from the bus stand), for about the same fare. An autorickshaw costs ₹150 to ₹200. Una rickshaw-wallahs are unable to proceed further than the bus station in Diu, so cannot take you all the way to Nagoa Beach (an additional ₹60).

A to Z (Vaniya St; ⏲9am-11pm) sells tickets for private buses from Diu to Mumbai at 11am (seat/sleeper ₹450/500, 22 hours) and to Ahmedabad at 7.30pm (₹200/250, 11 hours).

Train

Delwada, 8km from Diu on the Una road, is the nearest railhead. Train 315 at 2.25pm runs to Sasan Gir (2nd class ₹15, 3½ hours) and Junagadh (₹23, 6¼ hours). Train 314 at 8.05am heads to Veraval (₹17, 3¼ hours). Half-hourly Diu–Una buses stop at Delwada (₹14, 20 minutes).

Getting Around

Travelling by autorickshaw anywhere in Diu town should cost no more than ₹20. To Nagoa Beach pay ₹60 and to Sunset Point ₹40.

Scooters are a perfect option for exploring the island – the roads are deserted and in good condition. The going rate for 24-hour rental is ₹150 to ₹200 (not including fuel), and motorcycles can be had for ₹250. Most hotels can arrange rentals, although quality varies. You will normally have to show your driving licence and leave a deposit of ₹500 to ₹1000. At Hotel Super Silver, rentals include a helmet and the deposit is ₹500.

Local buses from Diu town to Nagoa and Vanakbara (both ₹10) leave Jethibai bus stand at 7am, 11am and 4pm. From Nagoa, they depart for Diu town from near the police post at 1pm, 5.30pm and 7pm.

Veraval

☎02876 / POP 141,207

Veraval is cluttered, chaotic, and smells strongly of fish – not surprising given that it's one of India's major fishing ports – and its busy harbour is full of bustle and boat building. Veraval was the major seaport for Mecca pilgrims before the rise of Surat. The main reason to come here now is to visit the Temple of Somnath, 6km southeast.

Sights

One kilometre from Veraval towards Somnath, **Bhalka Tirth** is where Krishna was mistaken for a deer (he was sleeping in a deerskin) and fatally wounded by an arrow. The temple here is an architecturally mundane affair, but it contains an image of Krishna reclining, a tulsi tree planted in his memory growing out through the roof, a relief of his footprint and two Shiva linga. A sign outside tells us that this was where Krishna departed on his journey to Neejdham (final rest) at 2.27 and 30 seconds am on 18 February, 3102 BC.

The **fishing harbour** about 800m south of Bhalka Tirth towards Somnath is a striking sight with hundreds of wooden dhows flying colourful flags.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Kaveri HOTEL $

(☎220842; 2 Akar Complex, ST Rd; s/d ₹250/400, AC s ₹550-650, d ₹650-850, ste ₹1100-1800; ❄) Kaveri is the pick of the town's uninspiring accommodation, and the most convenient choice, with a range of well-kept rooms and switched-on management.

Toran Tourist Bungalow HOTEL $

(☎246588; College Rd; s/d ₹350/500, with AC ₹600/800; ❄) This state-government-run hotel, 1km west of the clock tower, is not very conveniently situated. But it has sizeable, clean rooms with white-tile walls and floors, and terraces from which you can see the sea.

Sagar INDIAN $

(ST Rd; mains ₹60-100; ⏲9am-3.30pm & 5-11pm) This subdued, friendly vegetarian restaurant serves reasonable Punjabi and South Indian food.

Veraval

Sleeping
1 Hotel Kaveri A1

Eating
2 Sagar A1

Transport
3 Krishna Travels A1
4 ST Bus Stand A1

Information

There are HDFC and Axis Bank ATMs near the municipal gardens.

JP Travels International (Satta Bazaar; ⏲10am-8.30pm Mon-Sat) Changes travellers cheques and cash.

Magnet Cyber Café (2nd fl, Chandramauli Complex, ST Rd; internet per hr ₹20; ⏲9.30am-10pm) Opposite the bus station.

Getting There & Away

BUS ST buses go to Ahmedabad (₹175, nine hours, five daily), Diu (₹70, three hours, 10 daily), Sasan Gir (₹25 to ₹45, 1½ hours, hourly), Junagadh (₹40, 2½ hours, every 30 minutes) and Rajkot (₹80, four hours, hourly). **Krishna Travels**, opposite the ST bus stand, offers a nightly jaunt to Ahmedabad (seat/sleeper ₹180/280) at 9.30pm.

TRAIN The *Jabalpur Express* (train 11463 or 11465) leaves at 10am for Junagadh (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹130/225/294, 1¾ hours), Rajkot (₹130/307/409, four hours) and Ahmedabad (₹204/529/717, nine hours). Second-class-only trains with unreserved seating head to Sasan Gir (₹7, 1¼ to two hours) at 9.45am and 1.55pm, and to Delwada (for Diu) at 4.20pm (₹17, 3¼ hours). There's a **computerised reservation office** (⏲8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun) at the station.

Getting Around

An autorickshaw to Somnath should cost about ₹40; buses are ₹9 and leave from the ST bus stand.

Somnath

☎02876

Somnath's famous, phoenix-like temple stands in neat gardens above the beach, 6km southeast of Veraval. The sea below gives it a wistful charm. The small town of Somnath is an agglomeration of narrow streets now shielded by a high wall from the gaze of the relentless stream of pilgrims at the temple. There's a State Bank ATM on your right as you approach the temple. Somnath celebrates **Kartik Purnima** (November or December), marking Shiva's killing of the demon Tripurasura, with a large colourful fair.

Sights

Temple of Somnath HINDU TEMPLE

(⏲6am-9pm) This temple has been razed and rebuilt at least seven times. It's said that Somraj, the moon god, constructed a gold version, rebuilt by Ravana in silver, by Krishna in wood and by Bhimdev in stone. A description of the temple by Al-Biruni, an Arab traveller, was so glowing that it prompted a visit in 1024 by a most unwelcome tourist – the legendary looter Mahmud of Ghazni from Afghanistan. At that time, the temple was so wealthy that it had 300 musicians, 500 dancing girls and even 300 barbers. Mahmud of Ghazni took the town and temple after a two-day battle in which it's said 70,000 Hindu defenders died. Having stripped the temple of its fabulous wealth, Mahmud destroyed it. So began a pattern of Muslim destruction and Hindu rebuilding that continued for centuries. The temple was again razed in 1297, 1394 and finally in 1706 by Aurangzeb, the notorious Mughal fundamentalist.

After the 1706 demolition, the temple wasn't rebuilt until 1950. The current serene, symmetrical structure was built to traditional designs on the original coastal site: it's painted a creamy colour and boasts a little fine sculpture. The large, black Shiva lingam at its heart is one of the 12 most sacred Shiva shrines known as *jyoti linga*. Colourful dioramas of the Shiva story line the north side of the temple garden. A one-hour **sound-and-light show** (admission ₹20) highlights the temple nightly at 8pm.

Prabhas Patan Museum MUSEUM

(Indian/foreigner ₹2/50; ⏲10.30am-5.30pm Thu-Tue, closed 2nd & 4th Sat of month) This museum, 300m north of the Somnath temple, is laid out in courtyard-centred rooms and contains remains of the previous temples, with lots of beautiful fragments, including an elaborate 11th-century ceiling.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Sukhsagar HOTEL $$

(☎232311; www.hotelsukhsagar.in; Somnath Bye Pass Corner; r ₹1400-2800; ❄) The prime choice lies 2km northeast of Somnath temple where the Veraval–Somnath bypass meets Hwy 8E. It's a new hotel with spick-and-span, reasonably spacious rooms with sparkling tiled floors, plus a veg restaurant with garden and AC sections.

Hotel Mayuram HOTEL $

(☎231286; Triveni Rd; r without/with AC ₹400/700; ❄) Just down the coast road heading away from the temple, quiet Mayuram has clean, plain doubles shining with tiles.

New Bhabha Restaurant INDIAN, CHINESE $
(mains ₹50-80) The pick of a poor bunch of eateries, vegetarian New Bhabha sits 250m north of the ST bus stand. You can eat in a small AC room or outside open to the street. The sweet Kashmiri pulao is reasonably tasty despite its alarming dyed-green colour.

Getting There & Away

Somnath has fewer departures than Veraval, but buses run to Diu (₹65, three hours, daily at 9.40am), Junagadh (₹45, two hours, eight daily) and Rajkot (₹85, four hours, two daily). **Mahasagar Travels**, just north of the ST bus stand, has buses to Ahmedabad (seat/sleeper ₹200/300, nine hours) at 9pm and 10pm.

Sasan Gir Wildlife Sanctuary

☎02877

The last refuge of the Asiatic lion *(Panthera leo persica)* is this forested, hilly, 1412-sq-km sanctuary about halfway between Veraval and Junagadh. It feels beguilingly uncommercial, and simply driving through the thick, undisturbed forests would be a joy even if there wasn't the excitement of lions and other wildlife to spot. The sanctuary was set up in 1965, and a 259-sq-km core area was declared a national park in 1975. Since the late 1960s, lion numbers have increased from under 200 to over 400. The sanctuary's 37 other mammal species, most of which have also increased in numbers, include the dainty chital (spotted deer), the sambar (a large deer), the nilgai or bluebull (a large antelope), the chousingha (four-horned antelope), the chinkara (a gazelle), crocodiles and rarely seen leopards. Sasan Gir is a great destination for birders too, with over 300 species, most of them resident. While the wildlife has been lucky, more than half the sanctuary's human community of distinctively dressed *maaldhari* (herders) have been resettled elsewhere as their herds of cattle and buffalo were competing for food resources with the antelopes, deer and gazelles, while also being preyed upon by the lions and leopards (*maaldhari* livestock still provides a quarter of the lions' diet).

Sasan Gir is no longer big enough for the number of lions, and today groups of lions are found as far away as the Junagadh hills to the north and even occasionally on the beaches of Diu!

The sanctuary access point is Sasan Gir village, on a minor road and railway between Veraval and Junagadh (about 40km from each). The best time to visit is from December to April; the sanctuary is closed from 16 June to 15 October and possibly longer if there has been a heavy monsoon.

Sights & Activities

TOP CHOICE Safaris WILDLIFE-WATCHING

As a general rule of thumb about one in every two safaris has a lion sighting. So if you're determined to see lions, allow for a couple of trips. You'll certainly see a variety of other wildlife, and the guides are adept spotters.

Visits to the sanctuary are in jeeps which follow varied circuits of about three hours. The best time for seeing wildlife is early morning. Most hotels and guesthouses in and around Sasan Gir have jeeps and drivers or will arrange them for you, charging ₹900 or more per safari for up to six passengers. Alternatively, you can hire a jeep and driver for around ₹800 outside the sanctuary **reception centre** (☎285541), next to Sinh Sadan Guest House in Sasan

THE LAST WILD ASIATIC LIONS

The Asiatic lion *(Panthera leo persica)* once roared as far west as Syria and as far east as India's Bihar. Widespread hunting decimated the population, with the last sightings recorded near Delhi in 1834, in Bihar in 1840 and in Rajasthan in 1870. In Gujarat too they were almost hunted to extinction, with as few as 12 remaining in the 1870s. It was not until one of their erstwhile pursuers, the enlightened Nawab of Junagadh, decided to set up a protection zone at the beginning of the 20th century that the lions began slowly to recover. This zone now survives as the Sasan Gir Wildlife Sanctuary.

Separated from their African counterpart *(Panthera leo leo)* for centuries, Asiatic lions have developed unique characteristics. Their mane is less luxuriant and doesn't cover the top of the head or ears, while a prominent fold of skin runs the length of the abdomen. They are also purely predatory, unlike African lions which sometimes feed off carrion.

Gir village. Once you have a vehicle sorted, you must queue up at the reception centre to obtain a **permit** (vehicle with up to 6 passengers Indians/foreigners ₹400/US$40 Mon-Fri, ₹500/US$50 Sat & Sun, ₹600/US$60 around Navratri, Diwali & Christmas/New Year) and a **guide** (4hr ₹50), and pay **photography fees** (camera up to 7 megapixel free, over 7 megapixel Indian/foreigner ₹100/US$10). Your driver will usually help with this; be at the reception centre with your passport when it opens to ensure getting a permit and an early start. Permit-issuing times are posted at the reception centre: at research time they were 5am to 6am, 8am to 9am and 2pm to 3pm. Up to 90 permits can be issued each day and half of those can be booked in advance. Although permit prices are quoted in US dollars, payment is in rupees and the exchange rate is at the official's discretion – usually fair.

Gir Interpretation Zone WILDLIFE-WATCHING
(Indian/foreigner ₹75/US$20; ⏲8.30am-noon & 3.30pm-dusk Thu-Tue) Twelve kilometres west of Sasan Gir village at Devalia, within the sanctuary precincts, is the Gir Interpretation Zone, better known as simply 'Devalia'. The 4.12-sq-km fenced-off compound is home to a cross-section of Gir wildlife. Chances of seeing lions here are good but stage-managed, and you're only likely to get 30 to 45 minutes looking for wildlife and only from a bus. An autorickshaw/taxi round-trip to Devalia from Sasan Gir village costs around ₹70/100.

Gir Orientation Centre EXHIBITION
(admission free; ⏲8am-6pm) Next to the reception centre, this has an informative exhibition on the sanctuary and a small shop. A creaking film about the park is screened behind the building at 7pm.

Sleeping & Eating

It's a good idea to make an advance booking. Sasan Gir has one main street and most accommodation is on it or nearby, with a few upmarket options further away.

Amidhara Resort HOTEL $$
(☎285950; www.amidhararesorts.com; r incl 3 meals ₹3900-7500, with AC ₹4900-8000; ❄🏊) Two kilometres south of the village on the Veraval road, this is easily the most comfortable choice. The rooms and cottages are generously decked out and there's an inviting pool and other sports and games facilities. The included meals are vegetarian; it's also possible to get a room without meals for about one-third off the rates given here, and take veg or non-veg meals as you choose.

Hotel Umang HOTEL $
(☎285728; www.hotelumang.com; Rameshwar Society, SBS Rd; r without/with AC ₹750/1250; ❄) This is a quiet option with serviceable rooms, helpful management and decent meals. Discounts are available when business is slow, and it offers a two-night package with all meals for ₹3150. Head 150m west from Sinh Sadan then 200m south off the main road.

Maneland Jungle Lodge HOTEL $$
(☎285690; www.maneland.com; r incl meals ₹2500, with AC ₹3500; ❄) Off the road to Junagadh, 3km from Sasan Gir village, this friendly and relaxed place is in a nice, natural setting backing on to the sanctuary, and has good, clean rooms in stone-built cottages. The included meals are vegetarian and good.

Gir Birding Lodge HOTEL $$
(☎9899810456; www.girbirdinglodge.com; cottage incl meals s/d standard ₹3000/3500, deluxe ₹4500/5000; ❄) Has 12 bungalow rooms in a fruit orchard 2.5km from the village off the Junagadh road. Bird and river walks available; naturalist guides cost ₹2000 per day.

Hotel Annapurna HOTEL $
(☎285569; r without/with AC ₹400/1000; ❄) On the main street, with small, clean rooms freshly painted in pinks and yellows. Get one with an exterior window.

Gir Rajwadi Hotel INDIAN $
(mains ₹60-70; ⏲lunch & dinner) This vegetarian joint is the best of several simple restaurants along the village's main street. Gujarati thali is ₹80.

Getting There & Away

Buses run from Sasan Gir village to both Veraval (local/express ₹25/45, 1½ hours) and Junagadh (₹30/50, two hours) about 10 times daily.

Second-class unreserved-seating trains run to Junagadh (₹12, 2¾ hours) at 5.57pm, to Delwada (for Diu, ₹15, 3½ hours) at 9.57am, and to Veraval (₹7, 1½ hours) at 12.07pm and 4.27pm.

Junagadh

☎0285 / POP 168,686

Junagadh is an interesting small city reached by few tourists. It's an ancient, fortified city with 2300 years of history (its name means

'old fort'), at the base of holy Girnar Hill. At the time of Partition, the Nawab of Junagadh opted to take his tiny state into Pakistan – a wildly unpopular decision as the inhabitants were predominantly Hindu, so the nawab departed on his own. Junagadh makes a good jumping-off point for chasing lions at Sasan Gir.

Sights & Activities

While parts of the centre are as traffic-infested, crowded and hot as any other city, the area up towards Uparkot Fort and around Circle and Diwan Chowks is highly atmospheric, dotted with markets and half-abandoned palaces in Euro-Mughal style with grass growing out of their upper storeys.

Uparkot Fort FORT

(admission ₹2; ⏲dawn-dusk) This ancient fort is believed to have been built in 319 BC by the Mauryan emperor Chandragupta, though it has been extended many times. In places the walls reach 20m high. It's been besieged 16 times, and legend has it that the fort once withstood a 12-year siege. It's also said that the fort was abandoned from the 7th to 10th centuries and, when rediscovered, was completely overgrown by jungle.

The views over the city and east to Girnar Hill are superb. The **Jumma Masjid**, the mosque inside the fort, was converted from a palace in the 15th century by Gujarat sultan Mahmud Begada and has a rare roofed courtyard with three octagonal openings which may once have been covered by domes.

Close to the mosque is a set of **Buddhist caves** (Indian/foreigner ₹5/100; ⏲dawn-dusk), not actually caves but monastic quarters carved out of the rock about 2000 years ago. The three-storey complex is quite eerie and the main hall contains pillars with weathered carvings.

The fort has two fine step-wells both cut from solid rock. **Adi Kadi Vav** (named after two slave girls who used to fetch water from it) is 41m deep and was cut in the 15th century. **Navghan Kuvo**, 52m deep and designed to help withstand sieges, is almost 1000 years old and its magnificent staircase spirals around the well shaft.

Girnar Hill SACRED SITE

The long climb up 10,000 stone steps to the summit of Girnar is best begun at dawn. Be prepared to spend a full day going up and down if you want to reach the furthest temples at the top. Starting out in the early morning light is a magical experience, as pilgrims and porters begin to trudge up the well-maintained steps. The start is 4km east of the city at Girnar Taleti. A road goes as far as about the 3000th step, which leaves you *only* 7000 to the top – it was closed for repairs at research time but expected to reopen in 2011.

The refreshment stalls on the ascent sell chalk, so you can graffiti your name on the rocks. As you near the top, take a moment to marvel at how the stallholders can rustle up a chilled drink. If you can't face the walk, *dholis* carried by porters cost ₹3850 (round-trip) if you weigh between 50kg and 70kg, and ₹4250 for heavier passengers. If your weight range isn't obvious, you suffer the indignity of being weighed on a huge beam scale before setting off.

Girnar is of great significance to the Jains, but several important Hindu temples mean that Hindus make the pilgrimage, too.

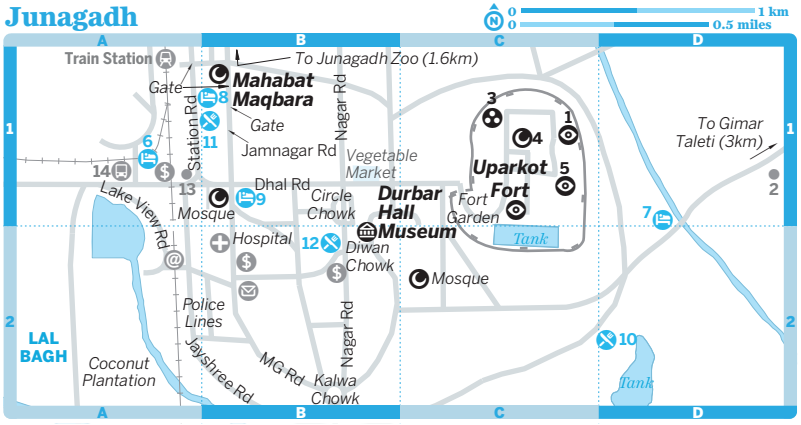
The Jain temples, a cluster of mosaic-decorated domes interspersed with elaborate stupas, are about two-thirds of the way up. The largest and oldest is the 12th-century **Temple of Neminath**, dedicated to the 22nd *tirthankar:* go through the first left-hand doorway after the first gate. Many temples are locked from around 11am to 3pm, but this is open all day. The nearby triple **Temple of Mallinath**, dedicated to the ninth *tirthankar,* was erected in 1177 by two brothers. During festivals this temple is a sadhu magnet.

Further up are various Hindu temples. The first peak is topped by the **Temple of Amba Mata**, where newlyweds worship to ensure a happy marriage. Beyond here there is quite a lot of down as well as up to reach the other four peaks and further temples. The **Temple of Gorakhnath** is perched on Gujarat's highest peak at 1117m. The steep peak **Dattatraya** is topped by a shrine to a three-faced incarnation of Vishnu. Atop the final outcrop, **Kalika**, is a shrine to the goddess Kali.

The **Bhavnath Mela** (Bhavnath Fair), over five days in the month of Magha (January/February) brings folk music and dancing and throngs of *nagas* (naked sadhus or spiritual men) to Bhavnath Mahadev Temple at Girnar Taleti. It marks the time when Shiva is believed to have danced his cosmic dance of destruction.

An autorickshaw from town to Girnar Taleti costs about ₹50.

Junagadh



Mahabat Maqbara HISTORIC BUILDING

This stunning **mausoleum** of Nawab Mahabat Khan II of Junagadh (1851–82) seems to bubble up into the sky. One of Gujarat's most glorious examples of Euro-Indo-Islamic architecture, with French windows and Gothic columns, its lavish appeal is topped off by its silver inner doors. Boasting even more flourish is the neighbouring **Vazir's Mausoleum**, sporting four storybook minarets encircled by spiralling stairways.

Junagadh Zoo ZOO, MUSEUM

(admission ₹20, camera/video ₹20/100; ⏲9am-6pm Thu-Tue) If you don't make it to Sasan Gir, Junagadh's zoo at Sakkarbaug, 2km north of the centre, has Asiatic lions and a broad selection of other Indian wildlife. Though the concrete enclosures in the front part are cruelly small, there is a surprisingly good **'safari' park** (20min bus tour ₹25; ⏲9am-1pm & 2.30-5.45pm) at the back, with an abundance of lions, tigers and leopards. Safari visits start from the zoo's north gate whenever 10 punters accumulate there. The zoo also houses the **Junagadh Museum** (Indian/foreigner ₹2/50; ⏲9am-12.15pm & 2.45-6pm Thu-Tue, closed 2nd & 4th Sat of month), with paintings, manuscripts, archaeological finds and more. An autorickshaw from the centre costs around ₹25.

Durbar Hall Museum MUSEUM

(Diwan Chowk; Indian/foreigner ₹2/50; ⏲9am-12.15pm & 2.45-6pm Thu-Tue, closed 2nd & 4th Sat of month) This museum displays weapons, armour, palanquins, chandeliers, and howdahs from the days of the nawabs, as well as a huge carpet woven in Junagadh's jail. There's a royal portrait gallery, including photos of the last nawab with his numerous beloved dogs.

Ashokan Edicts HISTORIC SITE

(Indian/foreigner ₹5/100; ⏲dawn-dusk) Just outside town on the road to Girnar Hill, a white building on the right encloses a large boulder on which the Buddhist emperor Ashoka had 14 edicts inscribed in Brahmi script in the Pali language about 250 BC. The spidery lettering instructs people to be kind to women and animals and give to beggars, among other things, and is one of several inscriptions that Ashoka placed all around his realm expounding his moral philosophy and achievements. Translations into Hindi, English and Gujarati are placed beside the boulder.

Sleeping

There are several cheap hotels around Kalwa Chowk which, because of the clientele they attract, are best avoided by females – even when travelling with a male partner.

Lotus Hotel HOTEL $$

(☎2658500; www.thelotushotel.com; Station Rd; s/d from ₹1000/1250; ❄📶) This luxurious and comfortable option occupies the totally renovated top floor of a former *dharamsala* (pilgrim's rest house). Pilgrims never had it so good, with split-system AC and LCD TVs. Rooms are beautifully bright, spacious and pristine, the beds are great, and everything works – incredible value for such quality. There isn't a restaurant, but there is room service and Geeta Lodge is in the same building.

Junagadh

Top Sights
Durbar Hall Museum B2
Mahabat Maqbara B1
Uparkot Fort C1

Sights
1 Adi Kadi Vav C1
2 Ashokan Edicts D1
3 Buddhist Caves C1
4 Jumma Masjid C1
5 Navghan Kuvo C1

Sleeping
6 Hotel Vishala A1
7 Leo Resorts D1
8 Lotus Hotel B1
9 Relief Hotel B1

Eating
10 Garden Cafe D2
11 Geeta Lodge B1
12 Jay Ambe Juice Centre B2
Relief Restaurant ..... (see 9)

Transport
13 Mahasagar Travels A1
14 ST Bus Stand A1

Relief Hotel HOTEL $
(☎2620280; www.reliefhotel.com; Chitta Khana Chowk; s/d ₹300/400, r with AC ₹700; ❄@) Mr Sorathia (Junagadh's unofficial tourist information officer) presides over the pick of the town's budget accommodation, which has simple, clean, colourfully painted rooms and the best set-up for travellers. There's also a fabulous restaurant and secure parking is available.

Hotel Vishala HOTEL $$
(☎2631599; www.hotelvishala.com; 3rd fl, Dhara Complex; r from ₹800, with AC ₹1500; ❄) Almost opposite the bus station and recognisable by the little awnings over its windows, this has good-sized, recently renovated rooms with a touch of contemporary minimalism in the AC quarters. There's a rooftop veg restaurant too.

Leo Resorts HOTEL $$
(☎2652844; www.leoresorts.com; Taleti Rd; s ₹1800-2700, d ₹2000-3000; ❄📶🏊) Leo boasts a very inviting pool, a large playground and lawned gardens. The cheaper ('delux') rooms are spacious and quite liveable, without being attractive; the 'super delux' have a touch of style and plenty of comfort. It's situated on the way out towards Girnar Hill. Staff seemed oddly out of sorts when we visited.

Eating & Drinking

Junagadh is famous for its fruit, especially for *kesar* (mangoes) and *chiku* (sapodilla), which are popular in milkshakes in November and December.

Geeta Lodge GUJARATI $
(Station Rd; thali ₹65; ⏲10am-3.30pm & 6-10.30pm) Geeta's army of waiters are constantly on the move serving up top-class, all-you-can-eat veg Gujarati thalis at a bargain price. Finish off with sweets, such as fruit salad or pureed mango, for ₹15.

Relief Restaurant INDIAN $
(Relief Hotel, Chitta Khana Chowk; mains ₹60-100; ⏲11.30am-3.30pm & 6.30-11.30pm) This spotless, relaxed, AC restaurant serves up delicious Punjabi, tandoori and Chinese dishes. Meat-eaters can choose from chicken, mutton, fish or prawns, and there's a good choice of veg and paneer dishes.

Garden Cafe INDIAN $
(mains ₹60-110; ⏲6.30-10.30pm Thu-Tue) Something different: this restaurant has a lovely garden setting next to Jyoti Nursery on the east side of town, and reasonable Jain, Punjabi and South Indian food. It's popular with families and worth the short rickshaw ride.

Jay Ambe Juice Centre JUICE BAR $
(Diwan Chowk; snacks & drinks ₹25-40; ⏲10am-11pm) Perfect retreat for a fresh juice, milkshake or ice cream – try a custard-apple shake.

Information

The very helpful management at Hotel Relief serves as an unofficial tourist information provider.

Bank of Baroda ATM (cnr MG Rd & Post Office Rd)

State Bank ATM (Prism Complex) Near the bus station.

State Bank of India (Nagar Rd; ⏲11am-2pm Mon-Fri) Changes travellers cheques and cash; has an ATM.

X'S Internet Cafe (1st fl, Lake View Complex, Talav Gate; internet per hr ₹20; ⏲9am-11pm)

Getting There & Away

Bus

Buses leave the ST bus stand for Rajkot (₹50, two hours, hourly), Sasan Gir (₹55, two hours, hourly), Veraval (₹40, 2½ hours, eight daily), Diu (₹98, five

hours, 2.30pm and 3.15pm), Una (for Diu, ₹80, 4½ hours, eight daily), Jamnagar (₹80, four hours, nine daily), Ahmedabad (₹160, eight hours, 6am and 7am) and Bhuj (₹100, seven hours, five daily).

Various private bus offices including **Mahasagar Travels** are on Dhal Rd, near the rail tracks. Services go to Mumbai (seat/sleeper ₹350/450, 19 hours), Ahmedabad (with/without AC ₹300/250, eight hours), Rajkot (₹60, two hours), Jamnagar (₹100, four hours) and Udaipur (seat/sleeper ₹300/400, 14 hours).

Train

There's a **computerised reservation office** (⏲8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun) at the station.

The *Jabalpur Express* (train 11463 or 11465) departs at 11.38am for Rajkot (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹130/244/301, 2½ hours) and Ahmedabad (₹177/454/613, seven hours).

Second-class train 316 at 7.15am heads to Sasan Gir (₹12, 2¾ hours) and Delwada (for Diu, ₹23, six hours).

Gondal

☎02825 / POP 96,000

Gondal is a small, leafy town, 38km south of Rajkot, that sports a string of palaces and a gentle river. It was once capital of a 1000-sq-km princely state ruled by Jadeja Rajputs.

Sights & Activities

Naulakha Museum MUSEUM

(Naulakha Palace; admission ₹20; ⏲9am-noon & 3-6pm) This interesting museum in the old part of town is housed in a beautiful, 260-year-old riverside royal palace that was built in a mixture of styles, with striking gargoyles. It shows royal artefacts, including scales used to weigh Maharaja Bhagwat Sinhji in 1934 (his weight in silver was distributed to the poor), a nine-volume Gujarati dictionary compiled by the same revered maharaja, and the royal horse-carriage and Dinky Toy collections.

Vintage & Classic Car Collection MUSEUM

(Orchard Palace; Indian/foreigner ₹60/210; ⏲9am-noon & 3-6pm) This is the royal collection of cars – 32 impressive vehicles, from a 1907 car made by the 'New Engine Company Acton' to racing cars raced by the present maharaja. All are still in working condition.

Bhuvaneshwari Ayurvedic Pharmacy AYURVEDA

(www.bhuvaneshwaripith.com; Ghanshyam Bhuvan; ⏲9am-noon & 3-5pm Tue-Sat) Founded in 1910 by Gondal's royal physician, this pharmacy manufactures ayurvedic medicines and it's possible to see all the weird machinery involved, as well as buy medicines for treating hair loss, vertigo, insomnia etc. The founding physician, Brahmaleen Acharyashree, is said to have coined the title 'Mahatma' (Great Soul) for Gandhi. Also here is a temple to the goddess Bhuvaneshwari.

Udhyog Bharti Khadi Gramodyog HANDICRAFTS WORKSHOP

(Udhyog Bharti Chowk; ⏲9am-noon & 3-5pm Mon-Sat) A large *khadi* (homespun cloth) workshop where hundreds of women work spinning cotton upstairs, while downstairs embroidered *salwar kameez* (traditional dresslike tunic and trouser combination for women) and saris are on sale.

Sleeping & Eating

Orchard Palace HERITAGE HOTEL $$

(✉220002; www.gondalpalaces.com; Palace Rd; s/d incl breakfast ₹2225/4450, incl all meals ₹3025/6050; ❄) This small palace, once the royal guesthouse, has seven well-kept, though hardly luxurious, high-ceilinged rooms of different sizes, filled with 1930s and '40s furniture. It's rather overpriced, though a peaceful place to stay where guests get free admission to all of Gondal's attractions. Vegetables are from the on-site organic garden. Reservations recommended.

Riverside Palace HERITAGE HOTEL $$

(✉220002; www.gondalpalaces.com; Ashapura Rd; s/d incl breakfast ₹2225/4450, incl all meals ₹3025/6050; ❄) This is the erstwhile ruling family's other palace-hotel, built in the 1880s and formerly the crown prince's abode. It has a slightly less welcoming feel than the Orchard Palace, but is still fine. It's adorned with hunting trophies and four-poster beds and has river views. Reservations recommended.

Getting There & Away

Buses run frequently to/from Rajkot (₹20, one hour) and Junagadh (₹30, two hours). Slow passenger trains between Rajkot (₹15, one hour) and Junagadh (₹18, 1½ hours) also stop at Gondal.

Rajkot

☎0281 / POP 1.137 MILLION

Rajkot is a large, hectic commercial and industrial city that isn't easy to love with its heavy traffic, impatient drivers and lack of open spaces. But the old city, east of the

newer centre, still has plenty of character, with narrow streets, markets, and farmers still selling ghee on street corners.

Rajkot was founded in 1612 by Jadeja Rajputs, and in colonial times it became the headquarters of the Western India States Agency, Britain's administrative centre for some 400 princely states in Saurashtra, Kachchh and northern Gujarat. After Independence Rajkot was capital of the short-lived state of Saurashtra.

Sights & Activities

Watson Museum MUSEUM
(Jubilee Gardens; Indian/foreigner ₹2/50; 9am-12.45pm & 3-6pm Thu-Tue, closed 2nd & 4th Sat of month) The Watson Museum is named after Colonel John Watson, a political agent (administrator) in the 1880s who gathered many historical artefacts and documents from around Saurashtra. It's a jumbled attic of a collection, featuring 3rd-century inscriptions, arrays of arms and delicate ivory work overseen by an unamused marble statue of Queen Victoria.

FREE **Kaba Gandhi No Delo** HISTORIC BUILDING
(Ghee Kanta Rd; 9am-noon & 4-6pm Mon-Sat) This is the house where Gandhi lived from the age of six (while his father was diwan of Rajkot), and it contains lots of interesting information on his life. The Mahatma's passion for the hand loom is preserved in the form of a small weaving school.

Patola Sari Weaving HANDICRAFTS WORKSHOPS
The Patola-weaving skill comes from Patan, and is a torturous process that involves dyeing each thread before it is woven. Whereas in Patan both the warp and weft threads are dyed (double *ikat*), in Rajkot only the weft is dyed (single *ikat*), so the product is more affordable. You can visit workshops in people's houses in the Sarvoday Society area about 1km southwest of Shastri Maidan, including **Mayur Patola Art** (2464519; Street No 4; 10am-6pm), behind Virani High School. You can call for directions.

Sleeping

There are plenty of cheapies on Dhebar and Kanak Rds, either side of the ST bus stand.

Imperial Palace HOTEL $$
(2480000; www.theimperialpalace.biz; Dr Yagnik Rd; s ₹3900-5900, d ₹4400-6400, ste from ₹8500;) The numero uno in town, with a masterful lobby and lavish, well-appointed rooms and real mattresses on the beds. There's a busy little wine shop, and two excellent veg eateries. Breakfast is complimentary.

Hotel Kavery HOTEL $$
(2239331; www.hotelkavery.com; Kanak Rd; s ₹1250-2100, d ₹1850-2650, incl breakfast;) A popular midrange business hotel; the rooms here fill up quickly. Rooms are comfortable without being inspiring, and desk staff are helpful. Part of the popularity is undoubtedly due to the excellent in-house Bukhara Restaurant.

Galaxy Hotel HOTEL $$
(222905; www.thegalaxyhotelrajkot.com; 3rd fl, Galaxy Commercial Centre, Jawahar Rd; s ₹1090-1890, d ₹1390-2290, ste ₹2790, incl breakfast;) An oddly classy hotel on the 3rd floor of a very ordinary building, with spacious, gleaming rooms. No restaurant, but there is 24-hour room service.

Hotel Bhakti HOTEL $
(2227744; Kanak Rd; s/d ₹500/650, s with AC ₹750-850, d with AC ₹1100-1250;) This reasonable semi-cheapie out the back of the bus station has neat and comfortable rooms, but check your bathroom for proper functioning.

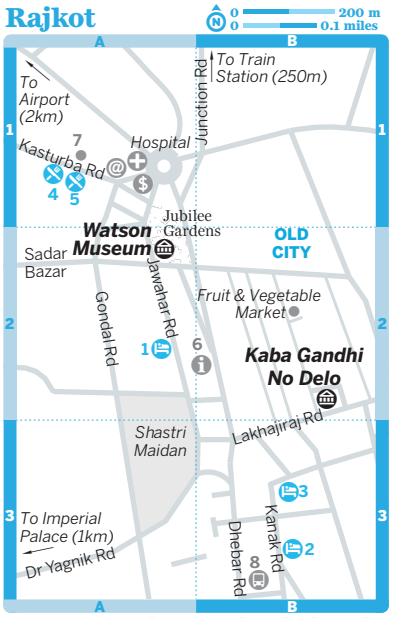
Eating

Temptations MULTICUISINE $$
(Kasturba Rd; mains ₹100-170; 11am-midnight) A few doors down from Lord's Banquet (same management), popular Temptations has Mexican, Italian, falafel, baked potatoes, *parathas* (thick flat bread with stuffings such as vegetables or paneer) and South Indian in a cool, clean, brightly decorated cafe.

Senso MULTICUISINE $$
(Imperial Palace, Dr Yagnik Rd; mains ₹80-210; 24hr) The Imperial Palace's very good round-the-clock coffee shop does everything from Lebanese to lasagne and sizzlers to South Indian – all without meat.

Lord's Banquet MULTICUISINE $$
(Kasturba Rd; mains ₹120-170; 12.30-3.30pm & 7.30-11.30pm) Slightly more formal than its sister Temptations, Lord's is very popular for pure-veg Punjabi, continental and Chinese cuisine in cool, clean surroundings.

Bukhara Restaurant MULTICUISINE $
(Hotel Kavery, Kanak Rd; mains ₹40-130, thali ₹120; 11am-11pm) Bukhara is smart, cool and calm with good service and quality



Rajkot

Top Sights

Kaba Gandhi No Delo B2
Watson Museum A2

Sleeping

1 Galaxy Hotel A2
2 Hotel Bhakti B3
3 Hotel Kavery B3

Eating

Bukhara Restaurant ..... (see 3)
4 Lord's Banquet A1
5 Temptations A1

Information

SBI ATM ..... (see 6)
6 Tourist Office B2

Transport

7 Jay Somnath Travels A1
8 ST Bus Stand B3

food, including Gujarati thali for lunch, and South Indian, among others, for dinner.

Information

There are ATMs all over town, including SBI on Jawahar Rd.

Aaryans (Dr Yagnik Rd; internet per hr ₹15; 7.30am-11pm) Go 100m south from the Imperial Palace hotel.

Buzz Cyber Café (Alaukik Bldg, Kasturba Rd; internet per hr ₹15; 8.30am-9.30pm) Tucked away opposite Temptations restaurant.

State Bank of India (Kasturba Rd; 10am-4pm) Changes cash and travellers cheques.

Tourist office (2234507; Bhavnagar House, Jawahar Rd; 10.30am-6pm Mon-Sat) Behind a State Bank of India building. Willing staff but no city map.

Getting There & Around

AIR There are daily flights to Mumbai with **Air India** (2234122; www.airindia.in) and **Jet Airways** (2450200; www.jetairways.com).

BUS Regular ST buses connect Rajkot with Jamnagar (₹53, two hours, every half-hour), Junagadh (₹50, two hours, hourly), Ahmedabad (₹109, 4½ hours, every half-hour) and Bhuj (₹125, seven hours, about hourly). Private buses operate to Ahmedabad, Bhavnagar, Una (for Diu), Mt Abu, Udaipur and Mumbai. Several offices are on Limda Chowk. Head to **Jay Somnath Travels** (Umesh Complex, Kasturba Rd) for buses to Bhuj (₹160, seven hours, six daily).

TRAIN The 19006 *Saurashtra Mail* leaves at 5.45pm and arrives in Ahmedabad (sleeper/3AC/2AC/1AC ₹147/369/497/824) at 10.25pm and Mumbai (₹292/779/1062/1779) at 7.40am. The 19005 departs at 10.45am and arrives at Jamnagar (₹130/225/294/477) at 12.25pm. An autorickshaw to the station from the centre costs about ₹30.

Jamnagar

0288 / POP 447,734

Jamnagar is another little-touristed but interesting city, brimming with ornate, decaying buildings and colourful bazaars displaying the town's famous, brilliant-coloured *bandhani* (tie-dye) – produced through a laborious 500-year-old process involving thousands of tiny knots in a piece of folded fabric.

Before Independence, Jamnagar was capital of the Nawanagar princely state. Maharaja Jam Ranjitsinhji (r 1907–33) laid out a European-style street plan for the city and was also the first great Indian cricketer, although he played for England as India had no team then. Today Jamnagar is quite a boom town, with the world's biggest oil refinery, belonging to Reliance Petroleum, not far west of the city. The whole central

area is one big commercial zone, with more brightly lit shops and stalls at night than you'll find in many a larger city.

Sights

Ranmal Lake & Lakhota Palace
LAKE, MUSEUM

The promenades around Ranmal Lake make for a nice stroll when temperatures are moderate. The diminutive mid-19th-century Lakhota Palace, a fort on an island in the lake, is reached by a causeway from the north shore. It houses a small **museum** (Indian/foreigner ₹2/50; 10am-1.15pm & 2.45-6pm Thu-Tue, closed 2nd & 4th Sat of month) which preserves the fort's guardroom, frescos of battles fought by the Jadeja Rajputs and assorted historical and archaeological artefacts.

Bala Hanuman Temple
HINDU TEMPLE

This temple on the southeastern side of Ranmal Lake has been the scene of continuous chanting of the prayer *Shri Ram, Jai Ram, Jai Jai Ram* since 1 August 1964. This devotion has earned the temple a place in an Indian favourite, the *Guinness Book of Records*. Early evening is a good time to visit as the temple and lakeside area get busy.

Old City
AREA

The heart of the old city is known as Chandi Bazaar (Silver Market – which it is, among other things) and it contains, besides a heaving commercial scene, three beautiful Jain temples. The larger two, **Shantinath Mandir** and **Adinath Mandir**, dedicated to the 16th and first *tirthankars,* explode with fine murals, mirrored domes and elaborate chandeliers. The Shantinath Mandir is particularly beautiful, with coloured columns and a gilt-edged dome of concentric circles.

Around the temples spreads the old city with its lovely buildings of wood and stone, peeling, pastel-coloured shutters and crumbling wooden balconies. **Willingdon Crescent**, a European-style arcaded crescent, was built by Jam Ranjitsinhji to replace Jamnagar's worst slum. It now houses an assortment of shops, and is commonly known as Darbargadh after the now-empty royal residence across the street. **Subhas market**, the vegetable market, has lots of local colour.

Courses

Gujarat Ayurved University
AYURVEDA

(2677324; www.ayurveduniversity.edu.in; Chanakya Bhavan, Hospital Rd) The world's first ayurvedic university, founded in 1967, is 1.5km northwest of the centre. It has played a big part in the revival of ayurvedic medicine since Independence and also has a public hospital treating 800 to 1000 inpatients and outpatients daily, mostly free of charge. Its **International Center for Ayurvedic Studies** (2664866; icasjam@gmail.com; office 10.30am-1pm & 3-6.30pm Mon-Sat) runs a full-time, three-month introductory course (registration US$20, tuition per month US$375) teaching basic theory, treatment and medicine preparation, as well as longer certificate and degree courses in ayurveda, yoga and naturopathy. These courses are set up for foreign nationals with medical background; see the website for more information.

Sleeping

Hotel President
HOTEL $$

(2557491; www.hotelpresident.in; Teen Batti; r ₹750, with AC ₹1450-2000;) This hotel has helpful management and a range of reasonable rooms. The AC rooms have street views and are bigger and generally better than the non-AC, which are in the rear. Many rooms of both types have balconies. The recommended 7 Seas Restaurant is also here.

Hotel Ashiana
HOTEL $

(2559110; www.ashianahotel.com; New Super Market; s ₹325-1300, d ₹375-1500; @) Rambling, welcoming Ashiana has helpful management and a variety of well-kept rooms, from simple and plain to large and comfortable. There's a large, pot-plant-decked roof terrace to enjoy in the evenings, and free airport, station and bus station transfers. Enter by lift or stairs from inside the New Super Market shopping centre.

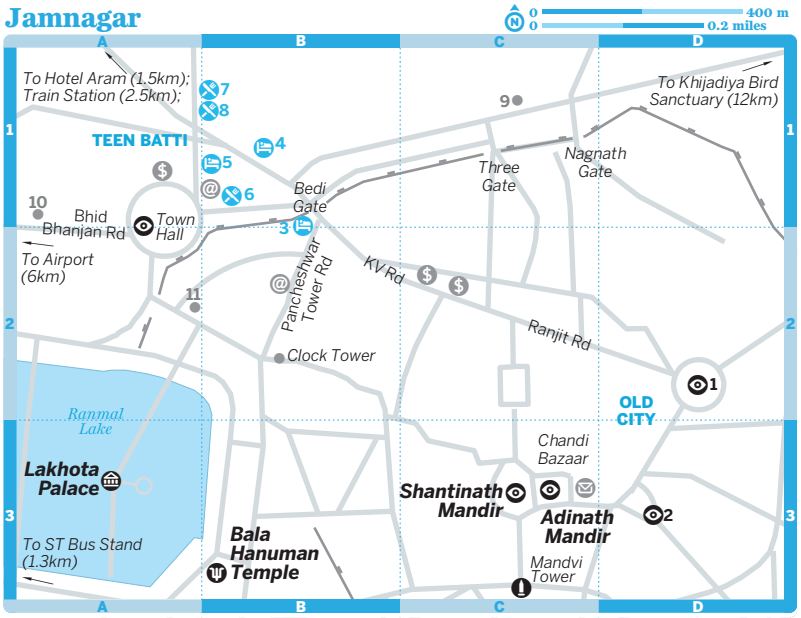
Hotel Aram
HERITAGE HOTEL $$

(2551701; www.hotelaram.com; Pandit Nehru Marg; r ₹1300-2500, ste ₹3000-5000; @) This former royal property has more potential magnificence than actual opulence. For the money the rooms are a little past their prime, though it is not without charm, and the rooms are spacious. There's a good multicuisine veg restaurant (mains ₹50 to ₹125) with garden seating.

Hotel Kirti
HOTEL $

(2558602; Teen Batti; r ₹400-550, with AC ₹800-1500;) The Kirti is a good-value option, with well appointed and clean, if drab, rooms that have a bit of a view.

Jamnagar



Eating

7 Seas Restaurant MULTICUISINE $$
(Hotel President, Teen Batti; mains ₹90-190) This cool, clean, efficient hotel restaurant has a nautical theme and a touch of class, offering a good range of veg and non-veg dishes, including seafood and tandoori options. The tandoori *bhindi* (okra) is a triumph.

Hotel Swati MULTICUISINE $
(Teen Batti; mains ₹40-110; ⏲lunch & dinner) This upstairs, AC vegetarian restaurant has a faded ambience, but is well run and offers a big range of tasty South Indian, Chinese and Punjabi dishes, plus the odd pizza.

Fresh Point INDIAN, CHINESE $
(Town Hall Rd; mains ₹30-70; ⏲lunch & dinner) A simple, friendly, bustling restaurant with generous serves of Punjabi, South Indian and Chinese in clean surroundings.

Madras Hotel INDIAN $
(Teen Batti; mains ₹35-85; ⏲lunch & dinner) This buzzing eatery is basic and popular and pumps out vegetarian South Indian, Jain, Punjabi, as well as the odd pizza. It has AC and non-AC rooms.

Information

The website **www.jamnagar.org** is full of useful information for visitors.

SBI by the Town Hall roundabout, and Bank of Baroda and Bank of India on Ranjit Rd, change travellers cheques and cash between 10am and 4pm Monday to Friday. Hotel President will also change foreign currency.

Surf the internet at **IWorld** (1st fl, Indraprasth Shopping Centre, Pancheshwar Tower Rd; per 75min ₹30; ⏲24hr) or **Cyber City** (bottom fl, City Point Shopping Centre; per hr ₹20; ⏲9am-10pm).

Getting There & Away

AIR **Indian Airlines** (☎2554768; www.indian-airlines.nic.in; Bhid Bhanjan Rd) has daily flights to Mumbai.

BUS ST buses run to Rajkot (₹53, two hours, half-hourly), Junagadh (₹80, four hours, about hourly) and Ahmedabad (₹166 to ₹186, seven hours, about hourly).

There are also numerous private companies, many based west of the clock tower, including **Patel Tours** with nine daily Volvo AC buses to Ahmedabad (₹380, seven hours) and three non-AC buses to Bhuj (seat/sleeper ₹210/280, six hours).

TRAIN The 19006 *Saurashtra Mail* departs at 3.35pm for Rajkot (sleeper/3AC/2AC/1AC ₹130/235/294/477, 1¾ hours), Ahmedabad (₹174/445/601/1005, seven hours) and Mumbai (₹310/832/1136/1906, 16 hours).

Jamnagar

Top Sights

Adinath Mandir C3
Bala Hanuman Temple B3
Lakhota Palace A3
Shantinath Mandir C3

Sights

1 Subhas Market D2
2 Willingdon Crescent D3

Sleeping

3 Hotel Ashiana B1
4 Hotel Kirti B1
5 Hotel President B1

Eating

7 Seas Restaurant ..... (see 5)
6 Fresh Point B1
7 Hotel Swati B1
8 Madras Hotel B1

Information

9 Forest Office C1

Transport

10 Indian Airlines A1
11 Patel Tours A2

Getting Around

An autorickshaw from the airport, 6km west, should be around ₹50, and a taxi ₹150. An autorickshaw from the bus stand to Bedi Gate costs ₹20.

Around Jamnagar

Permits for these protected areas are available from the **Forest Office** (☎2679355; Nagnath Gate, Van Sankul, Ganjiwada, Jamnagar; ⏲10.30am-12.30pm & 4-5.30pm Mon-Sat).

Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary BIRDWATCHING
(6 Indians or 1 foreigner ₹250) This small (6 sq km) sanctuary, about 12km northeast of Jamnagar, encompasses both salt- and freshwater marshlands and hosts over 200 bird species including rarities like the Dalmatian pelican and black-necked stork. The best months are October to March and the best times of day around sunrise or sunset. The evening arrival of cranes for roosting can be spectacular. A return taxi costs around ₹1200, or you can take a bus (₹10) to nearby Khijadiya, then walk 3km.

Marine National Park NATURE RESERVE
(6 Indians or 1 foreigner ₹250) This national park and the adjoining Marine Sanctuary encompass the intertidal zone and 42 small islands along some 120km of coast east and west of Jamnagar – an area rich in marine and bird life which faces growing challenges from industrialisation. Corals, octopus, anemones, puffer fish, sea horses, lobsters and crabs are among the marine life you may see in shallow water at low tide. The best time to visit is from December to March, when wintering birds are plentiful.

Access and obtaining permits can be a little complicated, so it's advisable to enlist local help such as that of Mustak Mepani (☎98242277886; www.jamnagar.org), manager at Hotel President. Mr Mepani can arrange a guided day-trip for up to six people to Pirotan Island, a two-hour boat ride through creeks and channels north of Jamnagar, for around ₹12,000; or a car trip to Narara island, 60km west of Jamnagar, for ₹2000 including guide.

Western Saurashtra

Mahatma Gandhi was born in 1869 in the chaotic port town of **Porbandar**, 130km southwest of Jamnagar. You can visit **Gandhi's birthplace** – a 22-room, 220-year-old house – and a memorial next door, Kirti Mandir. **Dwarka**, 106km from Jamnagar at the western tip of the Kathiawar Peninsula, is one of the four holiest Hindu pilgrimage sites in India – Krishna is said to have set up his capital here after fleeing from Mathura. Its **Dwarkadhish Temple** is believed to have been founded over 2500 years ago, and has a fantastically carved, 78m-high spire. The town swells to breaking point for **Janmastami** in August/September in celebration of Krishna's birthday.

There are some good beaches on the ocean coast, including the beautiful, long, clean **Okhamadhi**, 22km south of Dwarka – waves can be strong here – and the calmer **Shivrajpur**, a long lagoon beach 12km north of Dwarka. En route to Porbandar, the **Barda Wildlife Sanctuary** is a hilly, forested area with stone-built villages, old temples and good hiking. A good contact for more information on visiting these and other off-the-beaten-track places in western Saurashtra is **Mustak Mepani** (☎98242277886; www.jamnagar.org) at Jamnagar's Hotel President.

KACHCHH (KUTCH)

Kachchh, India's wild west, is a geographic phenomenon. The flat, tortoise-shaped land (*kachbo* means tortoise in Gujarati), edged by the Gulf of Kachchh and Great and Little Ranns, is a seasonal island. During the dry season, the Ranns are vast expanses of hard, dried mud. Come the monsoon, they're flooded first by seawater, then by fresh river water. The salt in the soil makes the low-lying marsh area almost completely barren. Only on scattered 'islands' above the salt level is there coarse grass which provides fodder for the region's wildlife.

The villages dotted across Kachchh's arid landscape are home to a jigsaw of tribal groups and sub-castes who produce some of India's finest handicrafts, above all their textiles which glitter with exquisite embroidery and mirrorwork.

A branch of the Indus River once entered the Great Rann until a massive earthquake in 1819 altered its course. Another mammoth earthquake in January 2001 again altered the landscape, killing nearly 30,000 people and destroying many villages completely. Although the effects of the tragedy will resonate for generations, the residents have determinedly rebuilt their lives and are welcoming to visitors. Tax breaks to encourage economic recovery have brought in new industrial plants, but by and large Kachchh still remains a refreshingly pristine, rural environment.

Bhuj

02832 / POP 136,500

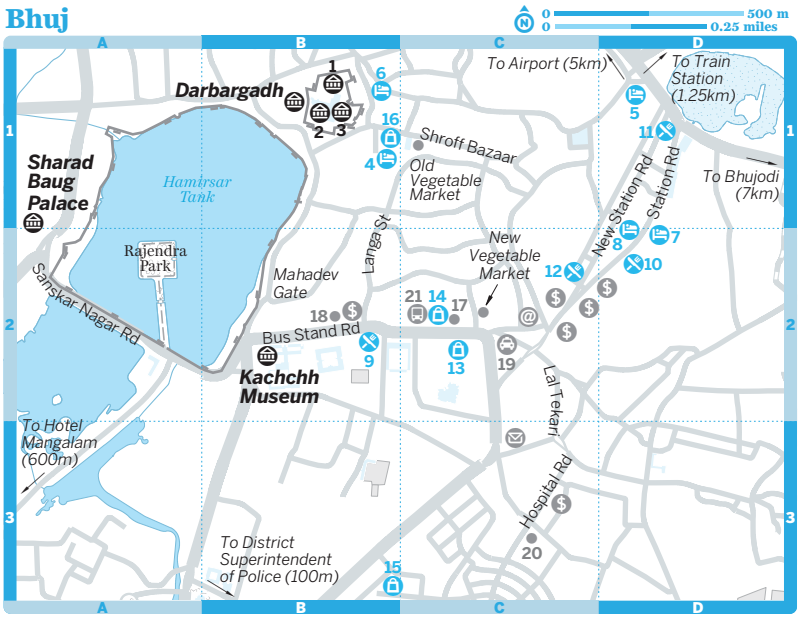
The capital of Kachchh is an interesting city resurrected from the 2001 earthquake. Its beguiling bazaars sell amazing Kachchh handicrafts, and historic buildings such as the Aina Mahal and Prag Mahal possess an eerie beauty. Bhuj is an ideal springboard for visits to the surrounding villages, and textile tourism is attracting visitors from around the world.

The Jadeja Rajputs who took control of Kachchh in 1510 made Bhuj their capital 29 years later, and it has remained Kachchh's most important town ever since.

Sights

TOP CHOICE Darbargadh PALACES

This walled complex from which Kachchh was once ruled is still in need of much repair after the 2001 earthquake. The 17th-century **Rani Mahal**, the former main royal residence, is completely closed up, though you can still admire the latticed windows of its zenana (women's quarters). Largest of the



three palaces here is the 19th-century **Prag Mahal** (New Palace; Indian/foreigner ₹20/100, camera/video ₹100/200; ⏲9am-noon & 3-6pm Feb-Nov, 9.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-5.30pm Dec & Jan). It's in a sad state and most sections are closed, but it's worth visiting for its ghostly Durbar Hall, a wonderful piece of decayed magnificence with broken chandeliers, rotting hunting trophies covered in bird droppings, and gold-skirted classical statues that wouldn't look out of place decorating a nightclub.

The beautiful **Aina Mahal** (Old Palace; admission ₹10, camera ₹30; ⏲9am-noon & 3-6pm Sun-Fri), built in the 1750s, was badly damaged in the earthquake, but the 1st and 2nd floors are open again and contain a fascinating museum with excellent explanatory information in English. The palace was built for Maharao Lakhpatji by Ramsingh Malam, a sailor from Dwarka who had learned European arts and crafts on his travels. The elaborately mirrored interior is a demonstration of the maharao's fascination with all things European – an inverted mirror of European Orientalism – with blue-and-white Delft-style tiling, a candelabra with Venetian-glass shades and the Hogarth lithograph series *The Rake's Progress*. In the bedroom is a bed with solid gold legs (the king apparently auctioned his bed annually). In the Fuvara Mahal room, fountains played around the ruler while he sat watching dancers or composing poems. It's estimated that the Aina Mahal will cost ₹2.5 million to repair fully. Donations are gratefully received – contact Pramod Jethi, the curator, at the museum for details (receipts are given).

Kachchh Museum — MUSEUM

(College Rd; Indian/foreigner ₹2/50; ⏲10am-1pm & 2.30-5.30pm Thu-Tue, closed 2nd & 4th Sat of month) Opposite Hamirsar Tank, Gujarat's oldest museum has eclectic and worthwhile displays spanning textiles, weapons, silverware, sculpture, wildlife, geography and dioramas of Kachchh tribal costumes and artefacts, with labelling in English and Gujarati.

Folk Art Museum — MUSEUM

(Bharatiya Sanskriti Darshan; admission ₹10, camera ₹50; ⏲9am-noon & 3-6pm Mon-Sat) This museum has excellent displays on traditional Kachchh culture, including reconstructed Rabari *bhungas* (mud-and-mirrorwork huts), musical instruments, many wood and stone carvings and much more. It's a further 700m south of the Kachchh Museum, off Mandvi Rd.

Sharad Baug Palace — PALACE

(admission ₹10, camera/video ₹20/100; ⏲9am-noon & 3-6pm Sat-Thu) This graceful 1867 Italianate palace, on the west side of Hamirsar Tank in the midst of shady trees full of crows and bats, was the abode of the last Maharao of Kachchh, Madansingh, until his death in

Bhuj

Top Sights
- Darbargadh B1
- Kachchh Museum B2
- Sharad Baug Palace A1

Sights
- 1 Aina Mahal B1
- 2 Prag Mahal B1
- 3 Rani Mahal B1

Sleeping
- 4 City Guest House B1
- 5 Hotel Annapurna D1
- 6 Hotel Gangaram B1
- 7 Hotel Ilark D2
- 8 Hotel Prince D2

Eating
- 9 Green Rock B2
- 10 Hotel Nilam D2
- 11 Noorani Mahal D1
- 12 Sankalp C2

Shopping
- 13 Bhoomi Handicrafts C2
- 14 Crossword C2
- 15 Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan B3
- 16 Señorita Boutique B1

Information
- Tourist Information Office ..... (see 1)

Transport
- 17 Hemal Travels C2
- 18 Jay Somnath Travels B2
- 19 Jeeps for Mandvi C2
- 20 Kingfisher Airlines C3
- 21 ST Bus Stand C2

1991. It lost most of its 3rd floor in the 2001 earthquake, and the remaining lower floors are closed. However, the adjacent former dining hall now houses the palace's eclectic museum collection. Standout exhibits are two huge stuffed tigers that the erstwhile maharao shot, and his coffin.

Sleeping

Hotel Prince HOTEL $$
(☎220370; www.hotelprinceonline.com; Station Rd; s/d ₹900/1100, s with AC ₹2000-4000, d with AC ₹2500-4800; ❄@📶) The Prince has slick service, smart rooms, good restaurants, and free airport transfers. You can get an alcohol permit from reception (free), though you will need to find a fridge to chill the warm beer from its wine shop.

Hotel Gangaram HOTEL $
(☎224231; Darbargadh Chowk; s/d ₹300/600, with AC ₹800/1000; ❄) In the old city, near the Darbargadh, this is a great place – run by kindly Mr Jethi (not to be confused with the Aina Mahal curator) – where nothing is too much trouble. The rooms vary greatly so it might be worth inspecting a few. The meals here are delicious.

Hotel Mangalam HOTEL $$
(☎220303; www.mangalamhotels.com; Mangalam Cross Roads; s/d ₹900/1200, s with AC ₹1550-2700, d with AC ₹1850-3600; ❄📶) Towards the south edge of town, the new Mangalam has big, bright, modern rooms with comfy furnishings and mostly good views. It's professionally run and on a nice human scale with just 17 rooms. The excellent Yellow Chilli restaurant is here, and free airport transfers are offered.

City Guest House GUESTHOUSE $
(☎221067; Langa St; d ₹300, s/d without bathroom from ₹120/240) Just off Shroff Bazaar, this is unusually bright and cheery for a budget guesthouse, and has neat, ultraclean, basic rooms. Bathrooms have either squat toilets or the hybrid variety. Breakfast is available, there are two airy roof terraces, and you can rent motorbikes for ₹400 per day.

Hotel Ilark HOTEL $$
(☎258999; www.hotelilark.com; Station Rd; s ₹1800-3200, d ₹2200-3800, ste from ₹4000; ❄@) This glitzy-looking modern hotel has quite stylish wood-panelled, wood-furnished rooms that more or less live up to the promise of the angular glass-and-red-paint exterior. Service is professional.

Hotel Annapurna HOTEL $
(☎220831; hotelannapurna@yahoo.com; Bhid Gate; dm ₹70, s/d ₹225/300, without bathroom ₹150/200, with AC ₹700/800; ❄) Annapurna has a nice atmosphere, and friendly staff, but stands on a frenetically busy junction. Rooms are clean and some have balconies so you can overlook the mayhem.

Eating

TOP CHOICE **Yellow Chilli** MUGHLAI $$
(Hotel Mangalam, Mangalam Cross Roads; mains around ₹150, buffet lunch ₹175-200; ⏲lunch & dinner) A branch of a franchise run by celebrity chef Sanjeev Kapoor, the Yellow Chilli serves up innovative, delicious, pure-veg Mughlai-based dishes. Well worth a quick rickshaw ride from the city centre.

Hotel Nilam INDIAN, CHINESE $
(Station Rd; mains ₹60-90) Good service by bow-tied, waistcoated waiters complements tasty vegetarian North and South Indian and Chinese dishes at this long, white, AC and highly popular restaurant. There's Gujarati thali (₹110) at lunchtime.

Sankalp SOUTH INDIAN $
(Hotel Oasis, New Station Rd; mains ₹50-120; ⏲11am-11pm) A quality chain restaurant with booth seating serving up excellent South Indian food.

Green Rock MULTICUISINE $$
(Bus Stand Rd; mains ₹90-140, thali ₹120-150; ⏲11am-3pm & 7-10.30pm) This 1st-floor, AC place serves up tasty lunchtime thalis as well as an extensive all-veg menu.

Noorani Mahal INDIAN $
(Station Rd; mains ₹55-110; ⏲11.30am-3pm & 7-11pm) This popular non-veg place gets packed out with mostly men eating chicken, but there's also mutton and veg cooked in the tandoor or in a spicy North Indian curry.

Shopping

Crossword BOOKSTORE
(Bus Stand Rd; ⏲8am-2pm & 4-9pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun) A tiny branch of this franchise with some English-language books on Kachchh. Books are also sold at the Aina Mahal and Hotel Prince.

Information

You'll find Bank of Baroda and SBI ATMs on Station Rd, and an HDFC ATM on Bus Stand Rd.

Ashapura Money Changer (Station Rd; ⏲9.30am-7pm Mon-Sat) Changes currency and travellers cheques, as will most midrange hotels.

State Bank of India (Hospital Rd; ⏲10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) Changes travellers cheques or currency.

Tourist information office (☎291702, 9374235379; Aina Mahal, Darbargadh; ⏲9am-noon & 3-6pm Sun-Fri) Pramod Jethi, the knowledgeable curator of the Aina Mahal, knows all there is to know about Bhuj and surrounding villages. He's also written a very useful guide to Kachchh (₹100), published in both English and French.

Universal Cyber Cafe (1st fl, Tara Empire; per hr ₹20; ⏲9am-10pm) You can surf the internet in small cubicles here.

Getting There & Away

Air

Jet Airways (www.jetairways.com) and **Kingfisher Airlines** (☎1800 2093030; www.flykingfisher.com; Hospital Rd) have daily flights to Mumbai.

Bus

Numerous ST buses run to Ahmedabad (₹150 to ₹158, nine hours), Rajkot (₹125, seven hours) and Jamnagar (₹165, seven hours). Book private buses at **Hemal Travels** (Bus Stand Rd; ⏲8am-9pm), just outside the bus station, for Ahmedabad (seat/sleeper ₹220/320, AC ₹300/400, nine hours, five daily) and Jamnagar (₹200/300, six hours, one bus at 9.30pm), or at **Jay Somnath Travels** (Bus Stand Rd; ⏲8am-9pm) for Rajkot (₹160, seven hours, five daily).

Train

Bhuj station is 1.5km north of the centre and has a **reservations office** (⏲8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun). The 14312 *Ala Hazrat Express* leaves at 11.05am (Monday, Thursday, Saturday, Sunday) and arrives at Ahmedabad (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹180/462/624) at 6.50pm, continuing to Abu Road, Jaipur and Delhi. The 19116 *Bhuj-Bandra Sayaji Express* leaves at 10.15pm daily and hits Ahmedabad (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹180/462/624) at 5.05am.

Getting Around

The airport is 5km north of town – a taxi will cost around ₹200, an autorickshaw ₹100. Autorickshaws to the train station cost ₹30.

Around Bhuj

The local Jat, Ahir, Harijan, nomadic Rabari and other communities have distinct, colourful craft traditions that make their villages fascinating to visit. See p714 for some recommended artisans and organisations.

Bhujodi, about 7km southeast of Bhuj, is a village of weavers, mostly using pit looms, operated by both feet and hands. You can look into many workshops, which weave attractive shawls, blankets and other products. The village is 1km off Hwy 42. You can take a bus towards Ahmedabad and ask the driver to drop you at the turn-off for Bhujodi (₹7). A return rickshaw from Bhuj costs ₹250.

In the hills about 60km northwest of Bhuj is the eerie monastery at **Than**. The holy man Dhoramnath, as penance for a curse he had made, stood on his head on top of Dhinodhar hill for 12 years. The gods pleaded with him to stop, and he agreed, provided the first place he looked at became barren – hence the Great Rann. He then established the Kanphata (Slit Ears) monastic order, whose monastery (dating back to at least the 12th century) stands at the foot of the hill. This is a laid-back place to explore the surrounding hills, and the architecture ranges from crumbling mud brick to Portuguese-style stucco, blue and whitewash bell towers, with a hint of basil and marigold in the air. There's one bus daily to Than from Bhuj (₹40, two hours) at 5pm, returning early next morning. The monastery and the temple atop Dhinodhar have very basic **guest rooms** with mattresses on the floor (pay by donation) but no drinking water.

You need a permit to visit some villages in the northern and western parts of Kachchh, but this is easy to obtain. Take a copy of your passport and visa (and the originals) to the office of the **District Superintendent of Police** (⏲11am-2pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat), 800m south of Kachchh Museum in Bhuj, and complete a form listing the villages you want to visit – you should get the permit (free of charge; maximum 10 days) straight away. Drivers will need permits for themselves and their vehicles too.

TOP CHOICE **Shaam-e-Sarhad Village Resort** (☎02803-296222; www.hodka.in; tent s/d ₹1900/2200, bhunga s/d ₹3000/3500, incl 3 meals; ⏲Oct-Mar), just outside **Hodka**, in the beautiful Banni grasslands 70km north of Bhuj, is a fascinating and successful project in 'endogenous tourism'. Owned and operated by the Halepotra people, its accommodation consists of three *bhungas* with sloping roofs and neat interiors, and nine luxurious earth-floored tents, all with private bathroom. Local guides cost ₹200 per day for birdwatching or visits to villages in the area like Hodka, **Khavda** (known for

KACHCHH CREATIVITY

Kachchh (Kutch) is one of India's richest areas for handicrafts, particularly famed for its beautiful, colourful embroidery work (of which there are at least 14 distinct styles), but it also has many artisans specialising in weaving, tie-dye, block printing, wood-carving, pottery and other crafts. The diversity of Kachchh crafts reflects the differing traditions of its many communities. Numerous local cooperatives invest in social projects and help artisans produce work that is marketable yet still preserves their artistic heritage.

Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (☎02832-256281; 11 Nutan Colony, Bhuj) is a grassroots organisation, comprising 12,000 rural women (1200 artisans), that pays members a dividend of the profits and invests money to meet social needs. The embroidery and patchwork are exquisite, employing the distinctive styles of several communities. Products go under the brand name Qasab and range from bags and bedspreads to cushion covers and wall hangings. Visit the head office in Bhuj, the Qasab outlet at Hotel Prince, or Khavda, a village about 80km north of Bhuj.

Kala Raksha (☎02808-277237; www.kala-raksha.org; ⏲10am-2pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat), based at Sumrasar Sheikh, 25km north of Bhuj, is a nonprofit trust working to preserve and promote Kachchh arts. It works with about 1000 embroiderers and patchwork and appliqué artisans from six communities in some 25 villages. The trust has a small museum and shop, and can help arrange visits to villages to meet artisans. Up to 80% of sale price goes to the artisans, who also help design and price the goods.

Vankar Vishram Valji (☎02832-240723; Bhujodi; ⏲8am-8pm) is a family operation and one of the leading weavers in Bhujodi; it sells beautiful blankets, shawls, stoles and rugs.

Shrujan (☎02832-240272; www.shrujan.org; Bhujodi; ⏲10am-7.30pm), just past the Bhujodi turn-off, behind the GEB Substation, is a nonprofit trust working with over 3000 women embroiderers of nine communities in 114 villages. Their showroom sells top-class shawls, saris, cushion covers and more.

Dr Ismail Mohammad Khatri (☎02832-299786, 9427719313; dr.ismail2005@gmail.com; ⏲9am-5pm) in Ajrakhpur, 6km east of Bhujodi along the Bhachau road, heads a 10-generation-old block-printing business of real quality, using all-natural dyes in bold geometric designs. Go in the morning if you want to see a demonstration of the fascinating, highly skilled process. You can buy tablecloths, shawls, skirts, saris and other attractive products.

Parmarth (☎02832-273453; 106 Ramkrushn Nagar, New Dhaneti; ⏲8.30am-9pm), run by a delightful family whose work has won national awards, specialises in Ahir embroidery. New Dhaneti is 17km east of Bhujodi on the Bhachau road.

Khamir (☎02832-271272; www.khamir.org; Lakhond Crossroad, Kukma Rd, Kukma; ⏲9am-5.30pm) is an umbrella organisation dedicated to preserving and encouraging Kachchh crafts in all their diversity. At the Kukma centre you can see demonstrations and buy some of the artisans' products. It's about 4km beyond Bhujodi in the Anjar direction.

In Bhuj, textile dealers line Shroff Bazaar just east of the Darbargadh. However, plenty of so-called block-printed fabric is in fact screen-printed. A good shop is **Señorita Boutique** (☎02832-226773; Shroff Bazaar; ⏲8.30am-9pm), which sells various regional types of embroidery and tie-dyeing. **Bhoomi Handicrafts** (☎02832-225808; Bus Stand Rd; ⏲9am-9pm) is popular with locals.

If you're interested in antique embroidery, contact **Mr AA Wazir** (☎02832-224187; Plot 107B, Lotus Colony, Bhuj; awazir1@rediffmail.com), opposite the General Hospital. He has a stunning collection of more than 3000 pieces, about half of which are for sale.

its pottery and textiles) or **Ludia** (known for its mudwork), or **Kalo Dungar** (Black Hill, Kachchh's highest point at 462m above sea level), or the Great Rann itself, with its snow-glare of salt (you may need to provide your own transport). You can also just call in for a superb thali lunch (₹125).

Centre for Desert & Ocean (CEDO; ☎02835-221284, 9825248135; www.cedobirding

.com; Moti Virani; per person incl all meals ₹1500), 53km northwest of Bhuj, is a wildlife conservation organisation run by passionate environmentalist Jugal Tiwari. It does birding and wildlife trips focusing on the wildlife-rich Banni grasslands (between Sumrasar Sheikh and Khavda). Accommodation is in plain but well-kept rooms with 24-hour solar-heated hot water; meals are Gujarati vegetarian. They can pick you up from Bhuj for ₹1200, or you can get a bus to Nakhtrana, followed by an autorickshaw 3km to Moti Virani. A day safari starting from Bhuj is ₹2500 (with AC ₹3000). An expert naturalist/birder guide costs ₹1500 per day.

A long drive northeast from Bhuj is the fascinating and remote Harappan site of **Dholavira**, on a seasonal island in the Great Rann. Excavations have revealed a complex town of stone buildings 1 sq km in area, inhabited from around 2900 to 1500 BC. It's best to organise your own transport: the only bus to Dholavira leaves Bhuj at 2pm (₹80, seven hours) and starts back at 5am. The state-government-run **Toran Tourist Complex** (☎02837-277395; s/d ₹200/300, with AC ₹650/700; ❄) at Dholavira offers basic accommodation and meals.

Mandvi

☎02834 / POP 45,000

Mandvi is an hour down the road from Bhuj and is a busy little place with an amazing shipbuilding yard. Hundreds of men construct, by hand, these wooden beauties for faraway Arab merchants. The massive timbers apparently come from Malaysian rainforests. There are also some sweeping beaches, including the glorious, long, clean private beach (₹100) near Vijay Vilas Palace, and Kashivishvanath Beach, 2km from the centre just east of the Rukmavati River.

Sights & Activities

Vijay Vilas Palace PALACE

(admission Mon-Sat ₹25, Sun ₹35, vehicle ₹20, camera/video ₹50/200; ⏲8.30am-6.30pm) Vijay Vilas Palace is a nicely proportioned 1920s palace reminiscent of an English country house, 7km west of town amid extensive orchards, and set by a magnificent private beach. Originally a summer abode for the Kachchh rulers, its 1st floor (out of bounds to visitors) is now the erstwhile royal family's main residence. The view from the roof is worth the climb, and the gardens make a nice stroll. Autorickshaws charge about ₹80/125 one-way/return from town. You can walk back to town along the beach if you like.

Kutch Vipassana Centre MEDITATION

(☎02834-273303; www.sindhu.dhamma.org) At Bada village, 22km west of Mandvi, this centre runs 10-day *vipassana* meditation retreats for beginners. Courses, accommodation and food are free but donations are accepted.

Sleeping & Eating

The Beach at Mandvi Palace HOTEL $$$

(☎277597, 9879013118; www.mandvibeach.com; 2-night package s/d ₹11,000/12,000) A small tent resort in a fantastic location on the private 2.5km beach stretching down from Vijay Vilas Palace. The luxurious air-cooled tents have big beds, white-tiled bathrooms and solid wood furniture. The resort's **Dolphin restaurant** (meal veg/non-veg ₹400/450; ⏲1-3pm & 7-9pm) is a wonderful beach pavilion that is open to nonguests if not full with guests. The beach is open to nonguest couples, families and foreigners for ₹100 per person unless you are having a meal at the Dolphin.

Rukmavati Guest House GUESTHOUSE $

(☎223558, 9429040484; www.rukmavatihotel.webs.com; Bridge Gate; dm ₹175, s/d from ₹300/400, r with AC ₹900; ❄) The best Indian hospital to spend the night in, this pleasant former medical centre, just by the bridge as you enter town, doesn't feel institutional. It's light, bright, clean and welcoming to travellers, with solar-water heaters and

EXPLORING KACHCHH

It is possible to get out to Kachchh's villages by public transport – for example, there are hourly buses to Sumrasar Sheikh (₹15, one hour) and three a day to Khavda (₹50, two hours). You can also use autorickshaws to villages not too far from the city. But you'll have many more options and more flexibility if you rent a car and driver – most Bhuj hotels can organise this for you.

An excellent option is the customised **autorickshaw tours** (per half/whole day ₹500/1000) to villages outside Bhuj organised by **Pramod Jethi** (☎9374235379; pkumar_94@yahoo.com), curator at the Aina Mahal.

self-catering facilities. Some rooms have river-view balconies, and there's a nice terrace. Owner Vinod is a gentleman, and the town's unofficial tourist officer, with maps and heaps of helpful info.

Hotel Sea View HOTEL $
(☎224481; www.hotelseaviewmandvi.com; cnr ST & Jain Dharamsala Rds; r ₹500, with AC ₹1100-2000; ❄) A small hotel facing the river, this has brightly decorated rooms with big windows that make the most of the views of the shipbuilding.

Zorba the Buddha GUJARATI $
(1st fl, Osho Hotel, Bhid Gate; thali ₹70; ⏲11am-3pm & 7-10pm) In the heart of the town, Zorba's is a massively popular place for wonderfully flavourful, endless and cheap Kachchh-style thalis. It's also known as Rajneesh Hotel, and the sign outside says 'Osho'.

Gabha's Roti STREET FOOD $
(roti ₹5; ⏲11am-1.30pm daily, 6-8.30pm Mon-Sat) Don't leave Mandvi without tracking down these famed bread rolls with their very spicy potato, garlic, chutney and masala filling. Mr Gabha frequently sells 1000 in an hour. At lunchtime his stall can be found at the vegetable market (Mochi Bazar); in the evenings it's on Swaminarayan Rd.

Getting There & Away

Regular buses to/from Bhuj (₹22 to ₹32) take 1½ to two hours. Or you can take faster shared jeep-taxis (₹30 or ₹35) which run between the street south of Bhuj's vegetable market and Mandvi. For least discomfort, sit at the front and buy an extra seat for your luggage. Several agencies including **Patel Tours & Travels**, by the Sea View Hotel, sell tickets for private buses to Ahmedabad (seat/sleeper non-AC ₹250/350, with AC ₹350/450, 11 hours), mostly leaving between 7pm and 8.30pm.

Wild Ass Sanctuary

The barren, blindingly white land of the Little Rann is nature at its harshest and most compelling, and home to the last remaining population of the chestnut-coloured Indian wild ass (also called khur), as well as blue-bulls, blackbuck and chinkara. There's also a huge bird population from October to March (this is one of the few areas in India where flamingos breed in the wild). The 4953-sq-km **Wild Ass Sanctuary** (jeep with up to 6 passengers Indians/foreigners ₹200/US$20 Mon-Fri, ₹250/US$25 Sat & Sun; guide per 4hr ₹50) covers a large part of the Little Rann. The area is accessible from Ahmedabad and can be combined with interesting destinations such as Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary, Modhera and Patan.

The Little Rann is punctuated by desolate salt farms, where people eke out a living by pumping up groundwater and extracting the salt. Heat mirages disturb the vast horizon – bushes and trees seem to hover above the surface. Rain turns the desert into a sea of mud, and even during the dry season the solid-looking crust is often deceptive, so it's essential you take a local guide when exploring the area.

There are somewhere between 2000 and 3000 khurs in the sanctuary, surviving off the flat, grass-covered expanses or islands, known as *bets,* which rise up to around 3m. These remarkable, notoriously untamable creatures are capable of running at an average speed of 50km/h for long distances.

Desert Coursers (☎9998305501, 9427066070; www.desertcoursers.net), run by infectiously enthusiastic naturalist Dhanraj Malik, organises excellent Little Rann safaris and village tours from its **Camp Zainabad** (full board per person ₹2500; ⏲Aug-Apr; ❄), very close to the east edge of the Little Rann and just outside the small town of **Zainabad**, 105km northwest of Ahmedabad. The lodge has comfortable and attractive *koobas* (traditional thatch-roofed huts) and excellent meals, in a peaceful, remote setting. The price includes unlimited jeep safaris. Advance booking is advised.

To get to Zainabad from Ahmedabad, you can take a bus from Ahmedabad's ST bus stand to Dasada, 10km away (₹70, 2½ hours, about hourly), where Desert Coursers does free pick-ups. There are direct buses between Zainabad and Patan (₹65, 2½ hours, two daily) via Modhera (₹45, 1½ hours). Desert Coursers can arrange taxis around the area for ₹4.5 per kilometre.

Rann Riders (☎9925236014; www.rannriders.com; s/d incl all meals & 2 safaris ₹4500/5800; ❄🏊), near Dasada, is also family-run and offers luxurious cottage accommodation in pretty gardens, plus jeep and camel safaris and its own stable of indigenous horses for riding.

You may also approach from **Dhrangadhra**. The town itself is worth visiting, if only to break up the Bhuj–Ahmedabad hike. The streets and alleys wind around each other, and almost every turn is a mosaic of

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whitewashed and coloured buildings of all periods, description and type. Temple bells ring out, and the locals aren't used to tourists, making for some refreshing dialogue. The personable **Devjibhai Dhamecha** (☎9825548090, 02754-280560; www.littlerann.com) is a wildlife photographer who makes a wonderful guide. You can stay at his appealing **house** (Dev Krupa, Jinplot, Dhrangadhra; per person incl meals ₹500) or his recently opened **Eco Tour Camp** (Jogad village; tents per person ₹750, hut s/d ₹1500/2000, all incl meals) which has colourful *koobas* near the edge of the sanctuary, 40km northwest of Dhrangadhra. Six-/eight-hour safaris to the sanctuary from either place cost ₹2000/3000 per jeep. If you can't get Devjibhai, try his son **Ajaybhai** (☎9825548104).

Dhrangadhra is on the Bhuj–Ahmedabad rail route, 215km from Bhuj (3AC ₹350, five hours) and 120km from Ahmedabad (3AC ₹258, three hours). It's well served by buses, for example to and from Ahmedabad (₹50, three hours) and Bhuj (₹100, five hours).

The guides mentioned will arrange your permits for the reserve; the cost of these is normally additional to safari prices.

An hour south of Dhrangadhra on the Ahmedabad–Rajkot highway is **Sayla**, a peaceful, pastoral town that swells during the **Tarnetar Fair** in August/September. **Bell Guest House** (☎9724678145; spjhala@yahoo.co.in; r incl breakfast ₹3000; ❄), presided over by the erstwhile ruling family of Sayla, is a wonderful homestay retreat down a lane off the Sayla roundabout on Hwy 8A. Rooms have spacious ensuite bathrooms. You can look for bluebulls and peacocks in the surrounding countryside or take trips further afield to see wild asses, blackbuck, the birds of Nalsarovar or a variety of artisans in area villages.

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