

GUJARAT



ITINERARY:

15 days / 14 nights

This trip starts in Mumbai and ends in Ahmedabad



Day 1

AM Land in Mumbai. Stay at Taj Mahal Palace, the 'Grande Dame' of Indian hotels (**1 night**), in Tower Wing Luxury Sea-Facing Rooms.

PM City sightseeing. Mumbai is the largest and most vibrant city on the subcontinent and the capital of Maharashtra State. Dinner out at the famous Trishna fish restaurant.

India's economic capital for the past 150 years it now has a population of over 20 million.

Only 350 years ago this great metropolis was a collection of malarial islands and swampy mainland. The British acquired it as part of the dowry when the Portuguese Catherine of Braganza married Charles II in 1661.

In 1668 the East India Company leased the area from the crown and in 1672 shifted its headquarters to Mumbai. Despite its many social problems it has grown into a place of enormous drive, making it India's centre of business, film and fashion. It now sprawls across 7 islands joined into an artificial isthmus.

Day 2

Early afternoon flight to Diu. Check in Radhika Beach Resort (**2 nights**).

PM Afternoon visit to Diu Town and its Portuguese Fort (Largest in Asia), churches and Shore Temple for sunset.

The island of Diu has a fascinating history and a relaxed, unhurried atmosphere. On its north side the abandoned salt-pans have become a marsh habitat that attracts waders,



while on the south coast there are cliffs and pleasant sandy beaches. Its flavour is decidedly Iberian as it was under Portuguese dominion until 1961.

Day 3

AM Visit the fishing village of Vanakbara, with its boatyards and myriad of brightly painted fishing boats, and on to Diu's fish and vegetable markets, where the sellers are all women.

After lunch we have a free afternoon. Opportunity to swim in the Arabian Sea just across from our hotel.

Day 4

Depart Diu for Sasan Gir National Park (2 1/2h drive), the world's ONLY sanctuary for the Asiatic Lion. Stay **2 nights** at Taj Gateway Sasan Gir, the hotel is part of the Taj Group and is set in a quiet location overlooking the river.

PM In the afternoon we take our first jeep drive, exploring this extensive sanctuary (1,412 sq km) in the Saurashtra Peninsula, 258 sq km of which is the National Park. The area, once covered by jungle, is now a deciduous scrub jungle and savannah habitat. Rocky hills and deep valleys with numerous rivers and streams dissect this wildlife rich area.

Day 5

AM & PM 'Jungle activities'. We continue our search for the elusive Asiatic Lion, and for the many other wildlife species that inhabit this terrain. The Asiatic Lion once roamed widely, from North to West India, through Persia to Arabia and South Eastern Europe. It is now ONLY found in Gujarat; the last one to be seen outside India was shot in 1942 in Iran. Sasan Gir is also famed for its large leopard population.

Day 6

AM This morning we drive (1h) to Junagadh to visit Uppercot Fort on foot. This extensive and heavily fortified citadel, the historical capital of Gujarat, has stunning ramparts and step wells. We also visit the base of Ginar Hill's pilgrimage route, one of the Jain religion's 5 holiest

sites. Lunch at a traditional Gujarati 'Thali' restaurant in town.

PM Drive (1h) on to Gondal for **1 night** Orchard Retreat or Riverside Palace (Heritage Hotels). Royal Palace and vintage car collection visits.

Day 7

AM Drive to Dasada (4h) and the Little Rann of Kachchh Sanctuary (UNESCO World Heritage Biosphere). Stay at Rann Riders, Dasada (**2 nights**).

This is a safari camp specialising in the exploration of the Sanctuary. Our accommodation is in comfortable bungalows built in traditional style and materials, around a lush garden. Activities include jeep and walking safaris to wildlife areas and remote tribal villages.

PM local village walk.

Day 8

We spend the day visiting the unique salt-pan environment of the Rann of Kachchh. The Rann floods in the Monsoon, becoming a shallow saline lake, providing a rich habitat for countless bird species such as cranes, storks and flamingos. At other times it is semi-arid but still supports surprisingly large numbers of animals. The rare wild ass roams here, as do nomadic communities that cling to their ancient traditions.

AM & PM Morning and afternoon safaris, including village & market walks, and wildlife spotting.

Day 9

AM Drive (4h) to Balaram . On the way we visit the stunning C11th sun temple in Modhera, and Patan, the largest & most intricately carved step well in India (UNESCO WHS). We stay **2 nights** at Balaram Palace Resort (Heritage Hotel).

PM Late afternoon walk to a local village and through the nature reserve surrounding our accommodation.



Day 10

AM Drive (45 mins) to Jessore Bear Sanctuary, where we start our walk with a climb to a forest Shiva temple. We then retrace our footsteps to follow the road through and out of the sanctuary. We walk along the reservoir looking for wildlife and then through farming hamlets mostly belonging to the friendly Gujar (Herders) community. Return to Balaram for lunch.

PM Afternoon free to enjoy our accommodation's extensive grounds and lovely swimming pool.

Day 11

AM Drive (2h) and cross the state border to Mt Abu. This densely forested volcanic plug is, at 1,720m, Rajasthan's only 'hill resort'. Here princely courts sought respite from the summer heat in the days of the Raj.

We stay **2 Nights** at Wordsworth Lodge, a newly restored Heritage property belonging to the same family who own the lovely Khem Vilas on our Hidden Rajasthan trip.

PM Afternoon walk through forest to Sunset Point (2h).

Day 12

AM We walk (3h) through wildlife sanctuary, along forest paths with stunning views of the plains below. We then have an optional climb to ancient hilltop Shiva temple complex before returning to the hotel for lunch.

PM Visit the unrivalled Dilwara Jain Temples (Intricately carved marble and alabaster; superb!) another of Jainism's 5 holiest sites..

Day 13

AM Drive (3h) to Ahmedabad, Gujarat's bustling capital city, for **2 nights** at The House of MG Heritage Hotel.

PM Afternoon 'Heritage Walk' (2h) through the teeming bazaars of the old town to the C15th Juma Mashid, India's 2nd largest mosque.

Dinner at our hotel, at the famous rooftop restaurant, one of the best and most traditional in Gujarat

Day 14

AM Early morning Heritage Walk through the city's 'Pols', fascinating gated neighbourhoods (UNESCO WHS). Then drive across the bridge to the extensive Gandhi Ashram, where the Maha Hatma spent much of his later adult life.

PM After lunch stroll through the modern quarter of the city with its Le Corbusier-designed university and street bazaars.

Day 15

Transfer to Ahmedabad International Airport to fly home.