



## The Gujarat Special

(15 Days)

**Highlights:** Village stays, visits to local communities, 3 days of Jeep safaris (in search of lions and donkeys), 2 days at the beach, exposure to the best arts and crafts ever, and much more.

### Day 1: Mumbai – Bhavnagar

Arrive in Mumbai and transfer to the domestic airport for a flight to Bhavnagar, an industrial town known for its cotton, diamonds, plastics and ship parts. Afternoon is free to relax or walk around to get a first glimpse of a “bamboozling” (term used by Lonely Planet to describe the country) town.

### Day 2: Bhavnagar – Palitana

Travel to Palitana to visit Shatrunjaya, Jainism’s holiest pilgrimage site. A visit to the Temple complex involves a 500m climb up, over 3300 steps, and is an extraordinary experience once you make it up. Just the views in all directions are worth the climb. There are several temples at the top worth visiting for their detailed carvings.

### Day 3: Bhavnagar - Dui

Travel along the coast to Diu. Afternoon sightseeing tour of Diu (historical monuments, churches, fort and temples).

*Diu is a tiny ex-Portuguese island with white-washed churches and colourful Portuguese-influenced streets. Between 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries Diu was an important trading post and a navel base. The Ottomans controlled the northern shipping routes from here. In 1535 the Portuguese took control of the island until 1961, when India took the reins. The island’s main industries are alcohol, salt, fishing and tourism.*

### Day 4: Diu – Sasan Gir Wildlife Sanctuary

Drive to Sasan Gir National Park, home to the last remaining Asian lions and enjoy 2 Jeep safaris today.

*Sasan Gir Wildlife Sanctuary is the last refuge of the Asian lion, which centuries ago were supposed to have roamed from Syria to India but were hunted down mainly for fun. This large forested hilly sanctuary is bliss after the noise and chaos of Indian cities and roads. The sanctuary was set up in 1965 and 250 sq.km. of it became a national park in 1975. The number of lions has increased over the years and so have other animals (deer, sambar, antelope, gazelle, crocodiles, leopards) and over 300 species of birds in the park.*

### Day 5: Sasan Gir - Junagahd – Gondal

Wake up early today for a morning safari (best time to see animals), before departing for Junagahd (a fortified city with 2300 years of history) and Gondal. In Junagahd visit the Fort (believed to have been built in 319 BC) and a Buddhist cave (carved out of a rock about 2000 years ago). Continue on to Gondal and visit the Naulakha Museum housed in a 260-year old royal palace), an Ayurvedic Pharmacy and a handicraft shop if time permits. Overnight here in a royal palace.



#### Day 6: Gondol – Zainabad

Leave for Zainabad (a 4 hour journey) and after lunch get on a Jeep with a naturalist for an afternoon safari through the Little Rann of Kachchh. Overnight in the village.

*Little Rann of Kachchh is barren “white” land (nearly 5000 sq-km), home to the last remaining Indian wild ass (between 2000 to 3000), as well as other animals and birds such as, Jackals, Foxes, Wolves, Desert and Jungle Cats, Flamingos, Cranes, Ducks, Geese, Larks, Bustards, Sykes Nightjar, Sand Grouse and Harriers, Owls, etc. This area is also known for its salt farms (run by the poor eking out a living by pumping up groundwater and extracting the salt)*

#### Day 7: Zainabad – Modhera - Patan

Visit the Sun Temple in Modhera early morning and then the Jain Temple and step wells in Patan. Spend the evening with the villagers.

*Modhera: The beautiful Sun Temple in Modhera was built around 1026 is one of the greatest monuments of the Solanki dynasty whose rulers were believed to be descendents from the sun. The temple is built in such a way that at equinox, the dawn sun shines on the image of Lord Shiva. The place was ransacked by the Muslim rulers around 1300 but still remains impressive with intricately carved demons and deities on the outside. Its 52 sculpted pillars depict scenes from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. At the front of the temple is a step-well that contains over 100 shrines.*

*Patan was Gujarat’s capital city until Ahmedabad became one in 1411. It is now a dusty town with narrow streets lined with wooden houses – elaborately decorated – but has one of the oldest and finest step wells in Gujarat. The Rani-ki-Vav was built in 1063 by Queen Udayamati to commemorate her husband, Bhimdev. Steps lead down to several levels with lines of carved pillars and several hundred carved pillars.*

#### Day 8: Zainabad – Mandvi (5 - 6 hours drive)

Drive to Mandvi, which lies in the Gulf of Kachchh. Afternoon is free to be spent at the beach or visit a shipbuilding yard, on the banks of the Rukmavati River, where one can see how local craftsmen meticulously assemble ships out of wood for local or international clients.

*Kachchh is known as India’s Wild West. This flat land edged by the Gulf of Kachchh and the Ranns (Little and Great) changes seasonally: during dry periods the land is covered with hard, dried. Mud, and during rainy seasons first be seawater and then by fresh water. These changes plus the salt in the soil makes it impossible for any vegetation to grow here. This arid landscape is home to many tribes who produce some of India’s finest handicrafts (embroidery, weaving, tie-dye, block printing, wood-carving, and pottery). Many NGOs are working in this area to help people produce high quality goods which can be marketed and also help people preserve their heritage. This area was hit by a major earthquake in 2001 which killed over 30,000 people and wiped out many villages. Bhuj, the capital of Kachchh, has been largely restored.*

#### Day 9: Mandvi

Day free to sleep late, lie on the beach all day or walk around Mandvi town.

#### Day 10: Mandvi – Bhuj

Head to Bhuj and visit Darbargadh (the walled complex from which Kachchh was once ruled), Rani Mahal (17<sup>th</sup> century royal residence), Aina Mahel (built in 1750s with all things European), Prag Mahel, Kachchh Museum (Gujarat’s oldest) and Sharad Baug Palace (Italianate palace built in 1867). Many of these buildings were



destroyed in the earthquake and are not fully restored but nevertheless worth visiting. If time permits, visit the Bhuj market.

#### **Day 11: Bhuj - Bhujodi**

Drive to Bhujodi to begin the tour of the Kachchh arts and crafts. Nestled away in Bhujodi is a community of master artisans versed in traditional handloom weaving. One can see live demonstrations of weaving in village homes and spend your money on hand-woven products such as woollen and cotton stoles, shawls, blankets, carpets, bed and table linens, etc. directly from the weavers (which include some national award winners). Visit the Hiralaxmi Crafts Park, a non-profit venture which gives artisans across Kachchh an open platform to display their skills and sell their products. After lunch at artisan's home, visit Shrujan, another NGO, established in 1968 after a serious drought. It works to supplement the income of rural women through their embroidery skills and by marketing their products. In addition to a store, Shrujan also houses a design center, manufacturing unit and a fine collection of embroidery. Walk around the campus which is built with traditional and environmentally-conscious methods. Visit Ajrakhpur, a new village established by the traditional Muslim Khatri hand block printers after the earthquake in 2001. This is a craft village where artisans practice traditional hand block printing technique on cotton/silk fabrics using the age old Ajrakh prints as well as new design motifs.

#### **Day 12: Hodka**

Drive north to Hodka village, in northern Kutchch, where one has to first register with the police before proceeding to Shaam E Sarhad Village Resort ([www.hodka.in](http://www.hodka.in)) for the village stay. This successful endogenous tourism project is run by local people. After an early lunch, walk to the Hodka village to see the embroidery and leather crafts of the Meghwar community. In the evening stop over at the White Rann near Dhordo village to enjoy the sunset. A Kachchhi dinner will be served at the Resort followed by some traditional folk music of the region.

#### **Day 13: Hodka – Zura Village – Nirona Village - Dhordo Village**

Most of today will be spent visiting different villages and the unique arts and crafts of the region. First visit the Zura village to meet master craftsmen and learn about the skill-intensive process of tuning the famous copper bells of Jura and then head to Nirona village to see lacquer craft. Return to the Resort for a traditional lunch. Afternoon is free to relax or go see more arts and crafts.

#### **Day 14: Hodka Village – Khavda - Black Hills – Ludia Village**

Drive to the Ludia village which is divided into several hamlets. Gandhi nun Gam, inhabited by the Meghwar community, flaunts beautifully painted circular huts organized around the temple. Between the vibrant “kanjari” blouses of the women and the men hunched over in various corners carving wood, the village is an aesthetic delight. In wake of the 2001 earthquake, Ahmedabad-based non-profit, Namnav Sadhna, worked with the local community to rebuild their homes and lives using indigenous knowledge and community participation. In the effort to curb the aggressive selling techniques the community has adapted over time and to experiment with a collaborative marketplace, the hamlet has set up an “otlo” (a roofed platform) next to the temple, where each household brings its embroidered goods for selling. The remaining hamlets belong to the Samma community, who are primarily herdsmen and slightly more conservative towards tourists. Late afternoon, drive to the Black Hills (Kala Dungar) to enjoy a view of the Rann of Kachchh from the top of the hills and see the sun set in the horizon.

#### **Day 15: Hodka – Mumbai**

Drive to Bhuj airport for a flight to Mumbai International Airport for flights home. End of tour.