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Standing Tall – and in Deep Waters

Fort Janjira

P K Ghanekar | Photographs © Ashutosh Bapat

The Janjira fort at Murud on the coastal belt of Maharashtra is unique not only for its architecture but for the fact that it was never conquered by all those who desired its ownership, writes

P K Ghanekar
Forts are the gateways to our history. And one such that can boast of an interesting past is the medieval fort of Janjira that stands on a rocky outcrop near the mouth of Rajpuri Creek. Never once conquered by the enemies of those who ruled here because of its unique location, it is spread over 22 acres and has 19 towers and a huge number of turrets. Each turret had a cannon installed on it, some of which have remained intact. This island fort is a marvel of architectural achievement, situated deep in the sea about 3 kms from the coastal town of Murud in Maharashtra. Though the Arabian Sea crashes relentlessly all around the fort, its impregnable walls continue to stand strong and tall at 40 feet high, even at full tide.

**History**

In ancient times, the rocky island in Rajpuri Creek was under the control of the rulers of Chaul. Later on, the fishing community of the Murud-Rajpuri area constructed a wooden fort (Koshtadurg). Ram Patil, the chief of these fishermen, lived in this Medhe Kot and the objective was to provide a fair amount of protection against the pirates who used to visit this area frequently.

**Distance from Mumbai: 150 Km**

**Reaching There**

**By Air:** The nearest airport is at Mumbai.

**By Rail:** Roha railway station on the Konkan line is the nearest one which is connected by rail to Mumbai.

**By Road:** Take the Mumbai-Goa highway NH 17 via Revdanda or a State Transport bus to Murud.

**By Water:** Ferries ply from the Gateway of India to Mandva. Take the hydrofoil and then a shuttle bus from Alibag.

**Excursions:**

Nandgaon is located about 9 kms away from Murud. The quiet, virgin beach here is relatively unknown to the normal tourist so if its solitude and peace you are looking for, this is the place.
Around 1490 CE, Ahmed Shah captured Rajpuri - the coastal settlement. Ahmed Shah was the founder of the Nizamshahi dynasty at Ahmednagar. He appointed a thanedar at Rajpuri to oversee the administration of the area. However, when the disputes between Ram Patil and the thanedar increased, the king sent Piram Khan with an army and naval contingent for subduing Patil. Some of the men scouting the area were captured by Piram Khan, who entertained them lavishly. This incident helped him know the details of the island fort. Accordingly, Piram Khan planned his next course of action.

On a late stormy evening, Piram Khan sent an urgent message to Ram Patil, requesting him to allow his ships to take refuge near the island. Patil was kind enough to cooperate. Piram Khan then offered exquisite liquor to Patil and his men and in a short while, when they were fully intoxicated and had lost control over themselves, Piram Khan attacked and arrested them. Ram Patil was sent to the Shah with an escort. At the court he was converted, his name was changed to Etbarrao, and he was allowed to return to the fort. Not one to take things lying down, Patil tried to overpower Piram Khan and was killed while doing so. This incident took place in 1522, and till 1538 Piram Khan ruled the area on behalf of Nizam Shah. After his death, Burhan Khan was appointed to oversee the fort’s management. He pulled down the wooden fortifications and started the construction of a strong masonry. In 1571, the fortification was completed.

In 1621, Siddi Ambar Sanak was appointed as the chief of this new impregnable fort. This started an independent dynasty of the Siddis who were originally from the east coast of Africa. They raised themselves to the title of nawab and ruled from 1621 to 1948. Except for a few violent and political skirmishes now and then, they enjoyed full freedom and ruled like independent kings at Murud & Janjira. To start with, they named the place Janjire Mehrub. Janjire is a corrupt form of Zizera from Arabic that means an island while Mehrub means the moon. However, now everybody refers to this fort as Janjira, meaning an ‘island fort’. In all, 20 nawabs ruled over Janjira. Initially, the most capable and strongest among the Siddis were installed as the nawab or the chief. But later i.e. from 1789 to 1947, it became an inherited seat that was passed from father to son.

With the rise of Shivaji in western Maharashtra and his expansion of Hindavi Swarajya towards Konkan, there began the tussle for supremacy. The Siddis of Murud Janjira were mainly a marine or coastal power. This compelled Shivaji Maharaj to establish the Maratha navy. Though he was a superpower on the mainland, he was unable to defeat the Siddis
with their stronghold at Janjira. He was once reported to have said, “Jaisa gharas undir, taisa rajyas Siddi ahe” (the Siddis are like rats in our homes), implying that though the Siddis at Janjira were not very powerful and there was no need to fear them, their nuisance value was quite high.

Despite their repeated attempts, the Portuguese, the British and the Marathas failed to subdue the power of the Siddis, who were themselves allied with the Mughal Empire. Major historical figures from Murud-Janjira include men such as Yahya Saleh and Sidi Yaqub. The fort has a tunnel which opens in Rajpuri. The fort was made by a mixture of lead, sand and gul. The Marathas, led by Shivaji Maharaj, attempted to scale the 12 meters’ high granite walls but failed in all their attempts. His son Sambhaji as well attempted to tunnel his way into the fort but was unsuccessful.

**Visiting Janjira**

To visit Janjira, one has to go to the village of Murud, a taluka of the Raigad district. It is about 50 kms south of Alibag and about 150 kms from Mumbai via Alibag. From Murud, one has to reach the small village of Rajpuri, located at a distance of about 2 kms. Except in the rainy season, regular ferry boats ply from Rajpuri to Janjira and back. Another route is from Diveghar-Srivardhan-Harihareshwar that leads to the Dighi port, which is the access point for the to and fro journey of the island fort. However, the frequency of the ferry is not as regular as compared to that from Rajpuri. After landing at the fort, only one hour is granted by the ferry boat owners’ association to explore it. This short period renders a visit to every nook and corner of the fort almost impossible and therefore it is best to take an overview of this fascinating place.

Right at the top of the main gate is Nagarkhana. The two bastions, flanking the entry point of the fort, have two interesting figures carved on the rocks. These sculptures include a tiger-like animal holding four elephants in four legs along with one elephant held tightly by its tail and the sixth elephant in its jaws. This symbolises, as stated on the right bastion, that one ruler of this fort is strong enough to fight and win against six strong enemies at a
time. On the left bastion a pair of a tiger and a tigress is depicted roaming leisurely because the elephants (symbolizing the local rulers) are fighting against each other. There is an Arabic inscription on a marble plaque which provides a clue to the time period i.e. Hijri year 1111 or 1694 CE.

As we enter through the gate, we can see Pir Panchayatan, a holy shrine. From here one can climb the steps that lead to the top of the fortification. There are three huge cannons - Kalal Bangdi, Chavari and Landa Kasam. There are other cannons too, spread over the nine bastions and it is estimated that there are about 80 in all in various stages of decay. From here one can see a five-storied building in a dilapidated condition. This was the palace of Nawab Siddi Surul Khan. If one continues towards the north fortification wall, there is a second entrance gate after the ninth bastion, locally called the ‘Chor Darwaza’.

In the centre of this island fort is a small hill of about 80 metres high. A flight of steps leads to the top from where one can see the ruins of the buildings in the fort. These ruins include two big water tanks and the entire fortification with 19 bastions and two mosques. The two water tanks are filled with *lemna* and *wolffia*- duckweeds which grow in...
Inscription on entrance inner side

Carvings at the entrance
fresh water and cover the surface. Towards the east one can get a picturesque view of the sea coast. Towards the north is another island fort – the Padmadurga or Pradurga, commonly called the Kansa fort, which was built by Chatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. Owing to ignorance, the fort now lies abandoned and covered with thorny bushes that do not permit easy access.

Around Murud

Murud is a calm and quiet village with a rich historic legacy. At Rajpuri, there is a big mosque while the tombs of Siddi rulers can be found at Khokari. On a hill is a Datta temple, where earlier stood a fort called Samrjagad constructed by the Maratha rulers, now lying in ruins. To the north of Murud is a suburb called Phulshaker. On a picturesque hillock facing the sea is the palace of the Siddis where the seal of the rulers can be seen inscribed on one of its doors. Many of the rulers’ wildlife trophies, swords, rifles and other weapons have been placed as exhibits inside the palace.

A few kilometers to the north are other coastal villages like Nandgaon with a Ganesh temple, Kashid with its white sand beach, a coastal sanctuary called Phansad with a dense forest and Salav with its Birla temple. The coastal fort of Korlai and the rock-cut caves of Kude-Mandad are some of the other attractions. Relaxing on the beach, taking a dip in the ocean, and going for long walks are some of the things to be enjoyed in Murud-Janjira. For the foodies, Murud offers delicious Konkan cuisine. Pick up some barfi and coconut chikki on the way home.
Travel Tips

Carry plenty of sun-protection, mosquito repellent, swimwear and light cotton clothes.
Do verify ferry timings and schedules before planning the Janjira trip.

Where to stay:
MTDC has simple cottages and rooms near the beach. You can also stay with the residents who give rooms and shacks on rent.

What to eat:
The beaches and village have a number of informal restaurants and shacks where you can sample Konkan cuisine and relish its flavour.

The author is an environmentalist, historian, writer, nature-lover and an avid trekker as well.
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Pen, with its name derived from the Marathi term ‘pene’ which means a place to rest, turns into a zone of frenetic activity as the Ganesh Festival inches near. This is because it is here that the best idols of Ganesha are made with craftsmanship that can be traced back to several generations.

Lord Ganesha’s ‘Idol’ Abode

Pen

Anuradha Apte | Photographs © Sachin Naik
Distance from Mumbai: 83 Km

Reaching There

By Air: The nearest airport is at Mumbai.

By Rail: Connected by the Dadar Ratnagiri Passenger train.

By Road: From Mumbai, via the Mumbai - Pune expressway, get to the city centre. State transport buses also go to Pen.

Excursions:

Make a trip to the Ganesh Idol Museum and Information Centre.

Arts & Crafts
Pen’s craftsmen are known for painting the Lord Ganesha’s eyes in such a way that the idol seems to come alive.

Moulding a Ganesha idol from clay

Moulding idols of Hartalka
When families set out to choose a Ganesha idol, few are aware that the idols are produced in Pen, the chief centre of idol-making in Maharashtra. Located on the Mumbai-Goa Highway, in Raigad district, 83 kms from Mumbai, Pen is the home of Lord Ganesha. It is here that the clay and Plaster of Paris (PoP) idols of Ganesha are created throughout the year. Here, making Ganesha idols is a passion, a tradition and a thriving industry. Idols marked ‘Made in Pen’ enjoy a special prestige and command higher prices than those crafted in other places. Most of the households here are engaged in some way or the other in the Ganesha industry. Over a quarter of the Pen idols wing their way abroad every year while the rest find their place in discerning homes and in pandals across Maharashtra during the ten-day Ganesha Chaturthi festival.

The Pen Ganesha is also in demand in Delhi, Calcutta, Chennai, and even in the US and the UK. An idol made here is much coveted be-
cause of its aesthetic appeal – serene expression, poise, grace, subtle shading of colours and a good finish. When one strolls through the lanes of Pen, one finds here a beehive of frenetic activity. The karigars (craftsmen) are busy - some kneading clay, some moulding images, others colouring them, and so on. Another encouraging thing is that among the workers, many are women.

It is also interesting to trace how Pen came to be the abode of the idols. History has it that the Kolhatkar family of Pen was related to the Peshwas of Pune. They were the worshippers of Ganapati and the festival of Ganesh Chaturthi was celebrated on a grand scale at Pune by the Peshwas. Since a majority of the families of Pen were Brahmins, the festival had a firm footing at Pen also. When Lokmanya Tilak took the Ganesha festival out of private worship into the domain of public festivity in the 1890s, some of Pen’s artisans shifted their skills to making idols for the Ganeshotsav.

In those days, making of idols was a pure art. The clay would come from Mumbai and the idol would be sculpted after months of work. It was sold locally under a barter system for a few kilos of rice, with no money exchanging hands. The art of creating the images out of simple clay has been acquired by the present generation of craftsmen from the knowledge handed down to them. The images of Ganapati were prepared about a century ago out of grey clay available in the nearby hills. The colours used then in painting the images were also procured out of black soot, lime, turmeric, flowers of the Pale trees, etc. For polishing the images, the leaves of trees such as Sag (teak wood) and Karate were used.

The clay available at the local hills was, however, not of a superior quality. Therefore, this began to be sourced from Mumbai where clay obtained from Gujarat would be sold by the merchants at throwaway prices. This clay was most suitable for the Ganapati idols. At that time, there were no roads linking Pen with Mumbai. Therefore, the clay was transported in boats from Mumbai to Antora Port which is only about 1.5 miles away from Pen. The commercialisation of the Ganesha industry began in the 1970s. The opening up of the Thane creek bridge was an important event. Suddenly access to Pen was no longer a problem. The ‘shadu’ or refined clay was now brought from far-off places like Bhavnagar and Surat and the idols become a marketable commodity.

The Ganesha idol industry in Pen has also witnessed pioneering turns over time due to enterprising craftsmen. One of such leading idol makers was Bhikaji Krishna Deodhar who turned to making the Ganesha idols after his traditional family business of making Maharashtrian pagdis (headgear) became slack. Meanwhile, the search for new material led N G Deodhar to use Plaster of Paris in place of clay which, however, was only used for those idols bought for decoration and not for wor-
ship during the Ganesha Festival. What is unfortunate though is that the diminishing number of skilled craftsmen has resulted in the increasing use of PoP instead of clay. Another factor contributing to this shift is that the clay idols cannot be of more than two feet in height while the demand is always for huge idols, especially by the Ganesha mandals.

According to Shrikant Deodhar, president of the Pen Murthikar Sanghatana (organisation of idol makers), there are 22 to 25 steps in the preparation of a single idol. Above all, Pen’s craftsmen are known for painting the Lord Ganesha’s eyes in such a way that the idol seems to come alive. There are presently over 25,000 craftsmen and about 550 workshops in Pen taluka that together produce up to 7 lakh Ganesha statues with an annual turnover of nearly Rs 6 crore. However, this cottage industry is now under threat. “Workshops are now coming up in other towns too. More disconcerting is the fact that idols made elsewhere are now being sold with the ‘Pen’ tag and since they do not match our craftsmanship, our reputation is being spoilt,” Deodhar says.

Therefore, to be able to give the Pen idols a brand value, the Pen Municipal Council has recently taken steps to provide wider exposure to the rich quality of craftsmanship which the sculptors possess. One such project has led to the setting up of a Ganesha Idol Museum & Information Centre to enable visitors and tourists to know and understand in detail the art and process involved in making the clay and PoP idols.

More than Idols

Pen is also famous for its papad, pohe (rice flakes) and white onions. The making of rice flakes has emerged as a profitable occupation because of the good quality of rice grown here while the poha and papad industry has provided entrepreneurship opportunities to the women of Pen. The white onion is actually a product of the Alibaug taluka but gets sold at Pen and Vadkhalnaka because they are the primary selling centres for onions.
If you have always been fond of visiting temples to not only seek blessings but also study ancient art and architecture, Solapur is the right place. But there’s also much more, says Dr Maya Patil-Shahapurkar.

Of Temples, Textiles and Traditions

District Solapur

Maya Patil-Shahapurkar | Photographs © Maya Patil-Shahapurkar, Sunil Piske, Ram Jeurkar, Shri Siddeshwar Devasthan Pancha Committee
Solapur, one of the four districts that form the region of Western Maharashtra and known for its textile industry, is located near Maharashtra’s borders with Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. A city with a rich cultural heritage and lots of ancient monuments, it is served by the rivers Bheema, Seena and Mann that are its lifelines. Above all, it is a place revered by Hindu pilgrims for it is believed to have been showered with blessings from Lord Vitthala of Pandharpur, who is worshipped by millions of warkaris (pilgrims). The city also has the sacred touch of Shri Siddharameshwar of Solapur and Lord Bhagwanta of Barshi while being the land of saints such as Damaji, Kanhopatra, Savta Maali, and others.

The city’s cultural influences are drawn from two states viz. Maharashtra and Karnataka and this is what it makes it unique. Therefore, in addition to Marathi, it has a substantial population speaking Telugu and Kannada in day-to-day life. Traditionally, Solapur has always been drought-prone but the construction of Ujani dam on the river Bheema has contributed to a great extent to the cultivation of cash crops like sugarcane and other horticultural produce like grapes, banana and pomegranates. Now, dry areas have been converted into orchards by enterprising farmers.

The ancient name of Solapur is Sonnalagiri, derived from the fact that it was a town made up of 16 villages. It was a part of Kuntala Desh and and has been ruled by Satavahanas, Vakatakas, Rashtrakutas, Chalukyas, Kalachuris, Shilahaaras and later the Yadavas. The district has tremendous tourism potential and can be explored from religious, medical, ecological, agricultural, historical and archaeological perspectives.

**Abode Of Gods And Saints**

As far as religious tourism is concerned, Pandharpur is the most important place. Here, millions of warkaris arrive to solicit the blessings of Lord Vitthala throughout the year. Aashadi, Kartiki, Chaitra and Maghi Ekadashis are the major events each year. Akalkot is another religious place, particularly for the disciples of Swami Samartha. Another holy place is Mangalvedha that was once the abode of Sant Damaji and Sant Kanhopatra.

**Travel Circuit**

**Shri Siddharameshwar Temple Complex**

**Distance from Mumbai: 395 Km**

**Reaching There:**

**By Rail:** Several southbound trains halt at Solapur.

**By Road:** Connected by three National Highways, NH-9, NH-13 and NH-211.

**Excursions:**

Children might enjoy the Mahatma Gandhi National Zoo.

Picnic by the scenic Hipparga Lake.

Head to Navi Peth to shop for Solapur textiles!
During the month of January (the festival of Makarsankranti), there is a grand pilgrimage for Shri Siddarameshwara. This festival is marked with a unique procession of people wielding ‘kathis’ (sticks).

The district has many ancient temples that include Kapilsidhha Mallikarjun at Solapur, Kashi Vishveshwara Mandir at Jeur, Harihareshwar and Sangameshwar temples at Hattarsang, Kudal, Someshwar temple at Malshiras, Mallikarjun temple at Nagansur, Mahadev temple at Natepute, Harinareshwar temple at Velapur, etc. Ancient and medieval style sculptures can be seen in the temples at Bibi Darfal, Nimbargi, Chapalgao, Narayan Chincholi, Shejbahbulgaon, Tarapur, Karkamb, Borale, Dahitane etc. There are beautiful sculptures of sursundaris (divine beauties) at Varkute and Koravali. All these temples belong to the period of Later Chalukya, Yadava and post-Yadava.

The temples in Solapur district have two types of ground plans viz. star-shaped and rectangular. This kind of architecture commonly includes the Mukhamandapa, Sabhamandapa, Antarala and Dwidalgabhara (with two sanctums). It is in a dilapidated condition but its beauty and archaeological importance cannot be underestimated. There is a unique sculpture which has Goddess Lakshmi on one side and Goddess Bhairavi on the other. A floral chandelier carved in stone hangs from the ceiling of Mukhamandapa. There are stone grills i.e. ‘jalvatayana’. In Sabhamandapa, there is a huge sculpture carved on a stone slab. The ceiling has a variety of sculptures, including one that shows a single head with five bodies and of Lord Krishna and his friends.

Of particular appeal is a depiction of ‘swarga’ (heaven) that has sursundaris and the kichakas lifting them. We can also see here a kinnara (composite...
figure of the body of a bird and the face of a man/woman) and *vidyadharas* (floating figures holding a garland in the air). The *surasundaris* are sculpted with a variety of gestures, drapery and ornaments. Their facial expressions and well-endowed figures make them seem almost real. The Sabha-mandapa includes a sculpture of Bhairava – the angry form of Lord Shiva. His bulging eyes, sharp canines and garland of human skulls make him look fearsome.

The most important feature of this temple is ‘*dwidala gabhara*’ (two sanctums) and one ‘*antarala*’ (space between Garbhagriha and Sabhamandapa). One of the sanctums is dedicated to Shiva (*shivalinga*) and the other to Muralidhara (Lord Krishna). An icon of Murlidhara can be seen in a *tribhanga* pose with a cow and a calf standing nearby. There also are remains of the *shikhara* dispersed around the temple. Among these lies an excellent but damaged sculpture of Kaliyamardan. This sculpture has an entwined ‘*kaliya*’ and Lord Krishna dancing over its head with a ball in his hand. There is also an excellent *shivalinga* with 359 small Shiva icons carved on it. The beauty of this *shivalinga* is that no match has been reported yet. This sculpture, with Shiva holding a *damru* and a *trishula*, has been now placed near the Sangameshwara temple.

As per Hindu mythology, there are two important sects – those of Shaiva and Vaishnava, both of which have a presence in this temple. The Shaivas follow Shiva i.e. ‘Hara’ and the Vaishnavas follow Vishnu i.e. ‘Hari’. There was a movement to bring together these sects, which is what led to the creation of the Harihara temples. This particular temple, traced back to the Kalyani Chalukya’s era, was excavated under the guidance of the Late Dr Gajanan Bhide.

The Sangameshwara temple is a part of the same premises and it has Mukhamandapa, Ardhamandapa, Antarala and a Garbhagriha. It is claimed that the first inscription in Marathi language was written on the ceiling of this temple. It has been dated back to 940 Shaka (1018 CE) and it is quite likely that this temple had a *tridal gabhara* (with three sanctums). Lord Ganesh has been depicted at the entrance and the *shivalinga* as well as the icons of Shiva, Parvati and Krishna are examples of splendid artistic creations.
Traditionally, Solapur has always been drought-prone but the construction of Ujani dam on the river Bheema has contributed to a great extent to the cultivation of cash crops like sugarcane and other horticultural produce like grapes, bananas and pomegranates.
Confluence of rivers Bheema and Seena
The medieval fort, built by the Bahamanis, is surrounded by a beautiful lake with a Siddheshwara temple and the yoga samadhi of Sant Sidharameshwara who established 68 shivalingas in the town. It is one of the largest lakes in the country surrounding an ancient temple.

Dr Maya Patil-Shahapurkar is Head, Department of Archaeology, School of Social Sciences, Solapur University.

You cannot visit Solapur and not go to Nannaj which is where you will find the Great Indian Bustard. This is the largest bird sanctuary of its kind in India and also provides shelter to other birds and animals like peacocks, spotted deer, wolves, rabbits, etc. One of the other green places in Solapur is Smrutivana which plays host to a large variety of trees and shrubs. During the last few years it has been systematically developed as an eco-education centre and it also has a public astronomical observatory. The city is also a hit with tourists because of its indigenous textile products, especially the bed-sheets and towels.

Some of the other items that make Solapur unique include the agarbattis, kadak bhakris, shenga (groundnut) chutney and shenga poli (roti stuffed with jaggery and groundnuts). In fact when it comes to eatables, it is the hurda (raw roasted jowar) that you must have in Solapur, provided of course that you go there during the right season. Hurda parties with a lavish spread of groundnut chutney, baingan bharta, green gram and butter milk are arranged during the months of December and January.

From an educational point of view, the city’s Sub-Regional Science Center is a fascinating interactive place of learning for both students.
and teachers whereas the Archaeology Museum of Solapur University provides a tour from the Stone Age to contemporary times. Akluj is another tourist destination which has a fort wherein important events from the life of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj have been sculpted. These are known as ‘shivasrushti’. The Sayaji Raje Water Park at Akluj is another attraction for those seeking fun. What’s more, Solapur, though a city, is far removed from the nightmarish urban chaos that you will find in the metros. Here you will find a laidback pace of life – the right cure for frayed nerves.

Travel Tips
Be careful while parking your car, the Solapur police are known for being particular about following rules!
Public transport mainly consists of Solapur municipal buses. In fact, it’s the only city outside Mumbai to have double-decker buses!

Where to stay:
Solapur has a wide variety of hotels to suit different budgets.

What to eat:
Sample a bit of ‘hurda’ (raw roasted jowar) a winter speciality.
‘Shenga poli’ i.e. roti filled with jaggery and ground-nuts is another must-eat in Solapur.
Located just 10 kilometres from Mumbai, the Elephanta Island not only offers an interesting insight into ancient periods through its archaeological remains but also makes for a perfect one-day excursion with the bonus of a boat ride on the Arabian Sea, says Suraj Pandit.

An Island With a Legacy

Elephanta

Suraj Pandit    | Photographs © Prachi Chaudhari, Manjiri Bhalerao, Snehal Page, Abhijit Rajadhyaksha (Photo courtesy: Archaeological Survey of India)
Distance from Mumbai: 10 Km

Reaching There:
Small motor boats from the Gateway of India are available to reach Elephanta. The journey takes 40-45 minutes.

Excursions:
Visit the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya or the Taraporewala Aquarium in Mumbai.
If, during a visit to Mumbai, you find its urban chaos rather stifling, the best way to escape it for a day would be to hop onto a boat and take off to the Elephanta Island. Here, you will be transported to virgin nature with palm, mango and tamarind trees dotting the landscape and the waves lapping quietly but firmly on the beach. Elephanta Island (also called Gharapuri Island or place of caves) is one of a number of islands in the Mumbai Harbour, east of Mumbai. This island is a popular tourist destination because of the island’s cave temples, the Elephanta Caves, which have been carved out of rock.

Elephanta has a population of about 1,200 involved in growing rice, fishing, and repairing boats. There are two British era cannons at the top. Quite recently, a small dam has been built so as to trap rain water but that part of the island is privately owned and not accessible to tourists. This island was once the capital of a powerful local kingdom. There are three small villages on the island viz. Morabandar, Shetbandar and Rajbandar occupied by the kolis (fishermen) and the farmers who have, through generations, carried on with their traditional way of living despite the proximity to India’s financial capital.

It is believed that the ancient name of the island was Puri which is referred to in an Aihole inscription of Pulakeshin II of the Chalukya (Badami) dynasty in 7th century CE as the capital of the Mauryas of Konkan. A Portuguese record of 1548 refers to this place as the Island of Pory. The island was named Elephanta after a more or less life-size sculpture of an elephant along with a sculpture of horse was unearthed from an area near Rajbandar. These are presently displayed at the entrance of the Bhau Daji Lad City Museum in Mumbai.
Andhakasuravadha, Cave No. 1
**Location**

Over the centuries, the geographical location of the island and the deep sea around it made this island an ideal place for international sea traders visiting India to dock their ships. This was an ideal port and even the present extension of the Mumbai Port (JNPT) is not far from the island. The Elephanta Island, in fact, plays a vital role in the defense of Mumbai. In terms of coordinates, it is located to the south of the Thane creek and east of the Old Mumbai dock and the fort (before it was demolished in 1865). This was an ideal location to control the south-western shore of Mumbai. In the ancient period, till the arrival of the Portuguese, access to Elephanta Island was from Trombay, which is also an archeologically rich area.

**Archaeological Remains**

Except Shetbandar, two other villages on the island are located on archaeological mounds and antiquities dated to the Satavahana period. To name a few, there are stupa remains of the Satavahana period, pieces of Roman amphorae, sculptures of the 6th-12th century CE, coins of Kalachuri and Rashtrakuta kings and structural remains of the Portuguese period (16th century CE). A few of these sculptures have been showcased in a museum near the entrance of Cave 1.

There are two hills known as Gun Hill and Stupa Hill on the island between which is an ancient reservoir that has been dated to 2nd-3rd century CE and is still under use by local people. In fact, this is the only fresh water source for the villagers. Many archaeological sites are located between the area Rajbandar and Morabandar along the seashore, at the foot of the Stupa Hill.

**Gun Hill**

This hill is so named because there are two canons of the British period placed on its top. These canons probably played a vital role in the defense of the Mumbai Fort. This is the main hill on the island where a total of five Shaiva caves were excavated in mid-6th century CE. Two out of the five are unfinished. The work seems to have started here somewhere around the middle of second quarter of 6th century CE.

**Main Cave**

The main cave i.e. Cave 1 is a masterpiece of art and architecture. This is the largest and most impressive cave and reflects an affiliation to the esoteric Pashupata sect of the Shaiva system, the revival of which was supposed to be done by Lakulisha, the great preacher. He is considered to be an incarnation of Lord Shiva by the Pashupatas. They believed in Shiva as the supreme god and in
the philosophy of ‘being one with him’ implying ‘end of the sorrows’ (dukkhaanta) as the ultimate goal of the life of any ascetic. There was a separate code of conduct for lay followers and the ascetics to achieve this ultimate goal. An ascetic who renounced the world in this system needed to acquire proper training from an ‘able teacher’ (guru) who ‘graced’ (anugraha) the merit and guided him on the path leading to Shiva.

For complete renunciation, one needs to understand ‘an illusionary existence of the world’ (maayaa). In his spiritual journey, the disciple realises the role of male (Shiva) and female (Parvati/Shakti) principles in the creation and also their oneness. The ultimate goal is to understand the supreme form of Shiva, i.e. Sadaashiva. As part of a ritual, the ascetic is supposed to live at different places, including a temple, a cave, the house of the teacher and the cremation ground. Shiva is to be understood in three different forms of manifest, un-manifest and manifest-unmanifest.

This philosophy and rituals are reflected in the art and architecture of the cave. The cave has two entrances. The entrance from north opens out in the passage leading to the Sadaashiva image on the back wall while the other entrance from the east leads to the central ‘sarvatobhadra’ (open from four sides) shrine of the linga which is a symbolic representation of Shiva. There are sculptural panels of Lakulisha (the great preacher), Natesha (Shiva as a teacher of all arts), Ravanaanugraha (gracing the Ravana), Andhakasuravadha which can also be identified as Andhakasura Anugraha (gracing the demon king Andhaka), Shiva-Shakti playing the game of dice, Kalyaanasundara (marriage of Shiva and Parvati), Ardhanaarishvara (half Shiva and half Parvati in one human body indicating their oneness), Gangaadharashiva (Shiva carrying the river goddess Ganga on his head) and Sadaashiva along the north-south access.

The panels of the ‘game of dice’ and the ‘marriage of Shiva-Parvati’ indicate the illusions created by god. All these panels indicate the five stages in the life of an ascetic i.e. the importance of a teacher, his grace, the illusionary existence of the world, the oneness of ‘shiva-shakti’ and the ultimate form of Shiva. Sadaashiva is usually shown with five faces indicating five forms of Shiva, viz. Sadyojaat (Creation-West), Vaamadeva (Preservation-North), Aghora (Dissolution/Rejuvenation-South), Tatpurusha (Concealing Grace-East) and Ishaana (Revealing Grace-Omnipresent), indicating the five principles of creation, i.e. earth, water, fire, air and ether respectively. In this image of Sadaashiva, his three phases are clearly visible (in manifest form), while the other two are just the indicative (unmanifest) from. All the sculptural panels are the manifest forms of Shiva and the linga in the
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To commemorate the living heritage of Indian dance, sculpture and art, Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation in association with Tata Consultancy Services organizes the Elephanta Festival every February. This Festival is a tribute to classical performers and an initiative to popularize Indian classical dance and heritage art forms. A renowned world heritage site, Elephanta forms a stunning backdrop for India’s leading artists as they enthral with their music and dance recitals. This endeavour by MTDC brings back the golden moments of our glorious past through an extraordinary extravaganza of enchanting ragas and dance performances.

The festival is held at the Elephanta island itself and tickets for the same include to & fro Launch journey between Gateway of India and Elephanta.

For more information contact:
MTDC Reservation Division,
Tel.: 2202 6713/2064 4489

Cave 1 at Elephanta Island is a complex of three caves referred to as the east and west wings of the main cave. The main cave is the temple, probably for lay followers. There are two rooms at both the ends of the verandah in front of the Sadaashiva image, most probably for meditation and to perform esoteric practices. The side wings were most probably the residential complexes and the private shrines for the ascetics. The east wing has a panel of seven mother goddesses, which is again a common feature of the Paashupata temples. Caves 2 to 5 on this hill are comparatively very plain and partially finished.

Stupa Hill
Not far from the Gun Hill is another hill which is popularly known as Stupa Hill because of the remains of a Buddhist stupa.
This *stupa* is completely covered with earth and is referred to as the archeological mound of a brick *stupa*. Nothing is visible of the *stupa* except a few bricks and stones. Not far from the *stupa* are the remains of a small reservoir and three rock-cut water tanks. The path leading to the *stupa* passes through the open courtyard of a cave which is supposed to be the earliest cave on this island, dated to the first quarter of 6th century CE. There is no concrete evidence which can help us to assign its affiliation to Buddhism or Shaivism. Not far from this cave are the remains of another unfinished cave. The flora and fauna of the hill also make for an interesting study.

In short, the island is a tourist’s paradise where nature in its pristine form blends well with the archaeological heritage. And for tourists who may want to shop for curios, there are shopping plazas too. The island does not offer any facility for overnight stay but does have small restaurants or shacks that provide refreshments. Untouched over centuries, Elephanta Island makes for a perfect one-day getaway from Mumbai.

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**Travel Tips**

- Beware of monkeys—hold on to your belongings.
- The ferry service is closed during the monsoon season from June to August.

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**Where to eat:**

- MTDC’s Chalukya Restaurant serves good food.
- The island does not offer any facility for overnight stay but does have small restaurants or shacks that provide refreshments.
Blessed by Lord Vithoba

Pandharpur

G B Deglurkar | Photographs © Sunil Piske, Ram Jeurkar, Painting: Ravi Deo

Every year, thousands of pilgrims undertake a long journey on foot from Alandi to Pandharpur to get a glimpse of the image of Lord Vithoba – a soul-stirring experience that takes one closer to salvation, says G B Deglurkar, who describes here the city and the deity.

While describing its sanctity, the holy city of Pandharpur is extolled by the saints of Maharashtra as ’Dakshina Kashi’. Pandharpur is situated on the right bank of the meandering Bheema, known as Chandrabhaga, curving gently along its banks crowded with shrines and temples. It lies at the junction of several important lines of communication. The roads coming from Ahmednagar, Pune, Kolhapur, Bijapur and Solapur converge at this place.

History

The oldest mention of Pandharpur is recorded in a copper plate grant of 516 CE of the Rashtrakuta king Avidheya. It is in Sanskrit and its script is Kannada. Jayadvithala, a Brahmin, was the recipient of a donation mentioned in the grant. Later, in 615 CE, the Chalukya king Pulakesin II conquered this part of Maharashtra and assumed lordship. It remained under the Chalukyas at least until 766 CE. Pandharpur was ruled successively by Rashtrakutas, Later Chalukyas and the Yadavas. It was also under the Hoyasalas for a short time which is evident from an inscription of 1237 CE, found in the temple of Shri Vitthala. The epigraph of 1249 CE records the name of Pandharpur as Pundarika Kshetra. The visit of Hemadri to Pandharpur is recorded in an inscription of 1273 CE. This is of importance due to the fact that the renovated temple of Vitthala was of Hemadpanti style, architecturally known as the Bhumija style.

Pandharpur had to face many vicissitudes, ups and downs during the medieval period, when the region was attacked by the iconoclast alien rulers. It was constantly under stress and strain from the beginning of the 14th century CE to the Peshwa period. During the period when Pandharpur and the regions surrounding it were under the Bahamanis, Nizamshahi and Baridshahi, continuous warfare took place among these rulers which disturbed the life of the people to a great extent. In fact with its unfortunate geographical situation and religious importance in the midst of these destructive activities, Pandharpur and the region around it was utterly ruined.
This resulted in the disappearance of Pandharpur in the cultural history of Maharashtra during this period.

The fate of Pandharpur region during the 16th and 17th centuries was the worst. Repeated plundering acts by the Muslim armies, including that of Aurangzeb who was stationed for a few years near Pandharpur, further deteriorated the situation. At last in 1719, Balaji Peshwa obtained the recognition of Maratha Swaraj by the court of Delhi and it was for the first time after 1325 that the town of Pandharpur again came under a Hindu ruler. The endless bickering between the Nizam and the Marathas still continued. However, in spite of these rivalries, due to political pressures and the dilution of the prejudices of religion and race, the condition of the people improved a lot.

In the second half of the 18th century, Maratha power was revived and Pandharpur rose from the ruins. The golden age dawned on the holy city. New temples were built and new buildings arose on the banks of the Chan-
drabhaga. The Shindes of Gwalior, Holkars of Indore, Pawars, Peshwas and the Sardars commenced the task of beautifying the town with shrines in their palatial buildings and from 1770 to 1800 CE seven such ghats were built. The important ones among these are the Mahadwara, Haridasa, Kumbhar as well as temples like that of Gopalkrishna, Vishnupada, Lakhubai, Padmavati, Belicha Mahadeo, Takpithya Vithoba, etc.

For a while Pandharpur belonged to the Patwardhans of Miraj state. It was given by the Peshwas because of the fame acquired and valour exhibited by them. The Patwardhans wisely made many improvements and additions to the holy city when they were the governors of the region. Unfortunately, Peshwa Bajirao II was defeated by the British army at Bassein (Vasai near Mumbai) and signed an ignominious treaty which practically put an end to Maratha Swaraj. Pandharpur had to admit the British troops in its precinct. Later on a treaty was signed at Pandharpur in 1812 CE as a result of which the British power assigned the city again to the Patwardhans of Miraj. It remained peaceful then onwards. During the last two centuries, the Pandharpur village of 516 CE grew first into a town and then as a city of today.

**A Holy Abode**

Pandharpur earned its importance as a sacred place due to the temple dedicated to Lord Vitthal. Epigraphic evidence of the presence of Vitthal right from 1237 CE onward, if not earlier, has been found. However, due to the formation of the warkari panth at the end of the 13th century and the arrival of Jnaaneshwar, along with a group of saints, Pandharpur emerged as a sacred town and a seat of the warkari sampradaya (cult or sect). This event brought about a cultural revolution in the history of Maharashtra in particular and in India in general. Its importance as a centre of pilgrimage increased. It became a centre of spiritual learning.

In the meanwhile, during successive periods, due to the onslaught of Muslim invaders, the glory of Pandharpur vanished. The warkaris lived in continual fear of persecution. But, the sampradaya remained alive. There arose a star on the horizon of the Bhakti movement - Sant Eknath of Paithan. He saved the cult from destruction of the glorious inheritance of the former saints and initiated a new fervour amongst the warkaris so that the glory of Vitthal continued to be celebrated. He was the rejuvenator of the sampradaya in more ways than one. For instance, he brought out an authenticated text of ‘Jnaaneshwari’ which was prepared by him in 1584 CE.

The contemporaries of Shri Jnaaneshwar like Sant Namdeo (tailor), Sena (barber), Gora (potter), Narhari (goldsmith) and others like Chokha, Mahar and Samvat formed the mandiyali (group of saints) who together embarked on the mission of disseminating the philosophy of the sampradaya. This mission was continued in the 16th century by Sant Eknath and Sant Tukaram. It is said, and rightly so, that Sant Jnaaneshwar laid...
Pandharpur earned its importance as a sacred place due to the temple dedicated to Lord Vitthal. Epigraphic evidence of the presence of Vitthal right from 1237 CE onward, if not earlier, has been found.
the foundation of the Bhakti cult and Sant Tukaram became the pinnacle of it.

**Vithobha’s Temple**

Pandharpur has grown around the great temple of Vithoba, which is its geographical centre as well as its raison d’etre. In fact the history of the town is the history of the temple itself. Vithoba is often called the ‘Lord of Pandhari’. The temple is located on top of a small hillock facing the east and the river Chandrabhaga. After ascending several steps, one enters the *mukhamandapa*. The lowest step of this temple is known as the ‘Namdevo Payari’ on which is installed a bronze bust of Namdeo. It is said that he took *samadhi* at that very place. In front of this step, at a distance of two meters, there is the *samadhi* of Chokhamela.

Beyond the big quadrangular wooden hall having *deepmalas* and a Maruti shrine is a narrow vestibule which is to be approached by a flight of steps. The vestibule has three openings leading to the *sola khambi* i.e. a square hall, the ceiling of which is shouldered by 16 pillars, beautifully carved with the designs and figures in relief. The sanctum and the ante-chamber are small structures, plain and simple. As we know from various epigraphs found in the temple and its vicinity, there was a *lahanaa maadu* (small shrine) at the beginning which later on was enlarged.

In the Yadava period, it was constructed in the Bhumaja style which was known as Hemadpanti. Exactly after 84 years, the present structure was built which is clear from the epigraph known as ‘Chauryanshicha Lekh’.

The temple complex has accommodated various small shrines, halls, cloisters, etc in the course of time. Thus, the ‘great temple’ as it stands today is a composite ensemble of various buildings erected during the 16th through 18th centuries CE. This was the period of Maratha renaissance. This process suggests the continued interest and devotion of the bhaktas (the faithful) which is everlasting.

Vithoba’s popularity can be attributed to the *warkari pantha*. The *warkaris*, in turn, owe their existence to the saint Jnaaneshwara, whose fame spread through literature and the annual pilgrimage undertaken by the devotees i.e. the *wari*. One cannot think of Vithoba without reference to this *pantha* and vice-versa. The veneration is deep and as Jnaanaba rightly says, “When my eyes rest on your image, my beloved, I become overwhelmed with happiness.” In the words of Tukaram, “This image is my happiness. I look at the beautiful face with love.”

**Vitthala’s Image**

The image of Vitthala is an installed one and therefore an *achala* or immovable icon (*dhruva bera*). He stands erect with rigid and straight legs, feet together in the *samacharana* pose, hands akimbo, holding a conch in the left and a lotus in the right hand.

Vithoba stands with no movements of hands or feet. Kalidasa describes such a position as ‘steady as an unflickering lamp’. Such an image is called a *Yogasthaanaka*. Lord Vithoba of Pandharpur has never been prayed to for the fulfillment of mundane purposes or worldly pleasures. The prayers to him, in fact, have been of a different sort, seeking liberation from the worldly bonds. Says a devotee, “Whether this corporal body exists or not, my devotion to Vitthala will remain steadfast. I vow never to leave his feet.”

The image also reflects yogic aspects. No wonder then that Jnaanadeva describes Vitthala as, “I like Shri Vitthala as Yogiraja very much”. Probably because of Vitthala being Yogiraja, Adishankara describes his seat at Pandharpur as Mahayogapeetha. Shri Vitthala is clad with a lower garment. He is shown wearing a *linga*-shaped *mukuta* (crown). The saints with their eyes of knowledge (*jnaana chakshu*) look at him as Hari-Hara (combination of Vishnu and Shiva). Being Yogiraja he is shown standing alone in the Garbhagriha. Later on another temple was constructed in about the 14th century CE enshrining Rukhminimata’s image. It is in the north-
west corner of the complex.

**The Pilgrimage**

Pandharpur owes its grandeur and glory to the temple of Shri Vithoba and to the annual pilgrimage from Alandi. The pilgrimage, undertaken in the month of Ashadha, is the most spectacular activity of the *warkaris*. In fact it is a *sine-qua-non* of the cult. Hundreds of *abhanga*s are composed by the leading *warkaris* of various sects describing the way, the nature and the importance of the pilgrimage. Literally hundreds of *palkhi*s (palanquins) from every nook and corner of Maharashtra can be seen on the road leading from Alandi to Pandharpur. The most important as well as the oldest of these is the *palkhi* of Shri Jnaaneshwara which starts from Alandi. This is at the centre of the pilgrimage. It leads the other *palkhis*, converging at a village called Wakhari near Pandharpur.

Earlier, when this tradition began, the annual pilgrimage was more like a rivulet because of the limited number of *warkaris*. It slowly became a large river, getting inundated every year due to the addition of an increasing number of *palkhis*. There is no other pilgrimage which consists of lakhs of devotees who travel such a long distance on foot – a journey that takes them 17 days. Singing of the *abhanga*s while in the *dindi*s is mandatory and dialogues, conversation, etc of any kind are strictly prohibited when the procession is on. The *warkaris* also follow a disciplined lifestyle – they are absolute vegetarians and do not drink alcohol or consume tobacco in any form. The pilgrimage takes the *warkaris* to Pandharapur from wherever they join the *dindi*. And finally, the *warkaris* face their Lord Vitthala, fulfilling an aspiration nursed through the year, until it's time to re-visit Pandharpur the next year.
First ‘Magician’ of the Movies

Dadasaheb Phalke

Paresh Mokashi  |  Photographs © National Film Archive of India, Pune

As India celebrates 100 years of cinema, it is time to turn the spotlight on Dadasaheb Phalke, the filmmaker from Maharashtra, who is known as the ‘father of Indian cinema’, writes Paresh Mokashi.
In India, there is only one thing that beats cricket. And that’s films! But while we take our films for granted today, there was a time when it was a major struggle to get one into the cans. That was 1913 when the motion picture first found its feet in the country. It’s been a long 100 years since then and quite an eventful journey. Interestingly, along the way the Indian film industry has had to lock horns with many an adversary, including ignorance, the strong presence of theatre and of course cricket. There was also the tough stand-off with television during the nineties when soothsayers predicted the death of the film industry. But like a good batsman who scores at a stable pace, it grew from strength to strength. A century is the result of that persistence and good sportsmanship.

And now as we get down to celebrate this event, the one person who must, on all accounts, be remembered is Dhundiraj Phalke aka Dadasaheb Phalke, also known as the ‘father of Indian cinema’, for it is he who opened up the mighty doors for the entry of this grand form of entertainment. Ironically, when his first film ‘Raja Harishchandra’ was screened at the Coronation Theatre in Mumbai on May 3, 1913, the response was lukewarm. Not many welcomed cinema with the kind of appreciation it deserved. Rather, it was thought of as some kind of evil that would do no good to society. On that day, Dadasaheb Phalke could not but muse over what had gone wrong even as his wife Saraswati stood by him and gave him the required moral support.

In fact, Saraswati was not just an onlooker but a partner in this adventurous venture. Equally excited by the notion of putting moving images on the screen, she had helped Dadasaheb Phalke all along, and that included mortgaging her jewellery to raise finance for the ‘experiment’, cooking daily for the team of 40-plus members who had undertaken the tasks of acting and managing the project and even perforating the film strips manually. So who was Dhundiraj Govind Phalke and what attracted him to take on the onerous task of making a film?

**Early Life**

Dhundiraj Phalke was born on April 30, 1870 at Trimbakeshwar, 30 kilometres from Nashik in Maharashtra. The son of an accomplished Sanskrit scholar, Phalke junior found himself attracted to art in his young days and he joined the Sir J J School of Art in Mumbai in 1885. After graduating in 1890, Phalke went to the Kala Bhavan in Baroda where he studied sculpture, engineering, drawing, painting and photography. It was now time to make a living and Phalke began his career as a photographer in Godhra in Gujarat. However, this shot at entrepreneurship was short-lived due to the tragic death of his first wife and child in an outbreak of the bubonic...
plague and also because of a rumour that the camera sucked the life out of anyone who posed in front of it.

Phalke’s luck changed when he met the German magician Carl Hertz, one of the 40 magicians employed by the Lumière Brothers, who are credited as the pioneers of cinema. Soon after, he had the opportunity to work with the Archaeological Survey of India as a draftsman. However, restless with his job and its constraints, he turned to the business of printing. He specialized in lithography and oleograph and worked for painter Raja Ravi Varma. Always the entrepreneur, Phalke soon started his own printing press and made his first trip abroad to Germany to learn about the latest technology and machinery.

Discovering Cinema
The printing press venture turned out to be short-lived too because of a dispute with his partners. But now there was something else brewing in his mind. Phalke had been very
impressed after watching the silent film ‘The Life Of Christ’ in a tent at Girgaon in Mumbai. In fact he even took his second wife Saraswati and his children to watch the film the next day, all of them mesmerised by the magic of the moving images. Phalke imagined how it would be to see the story of Indian gods and goddesses unfold on the screen. And that is what ultimately led to the making of ‘Raja Harishchandra’.

However, wanting to make a film and actually making it seemed to be at the extreme ends of a pole. The year was 1911 and nobody had a clue about filmmaking. Phalke, driven by his new-found obsession, began by reading books and catalogues to know more about the process. But theory wasn’t going to help much. It was time to get down to practicalities and to do so he sold several household items and even mortgaged his insurance policies to go to the United Kingdom. In the severe winter of London, Phalke’s biggest problem was to find vegetarian food. Fortunately, the problem was resolved by a fellow Maharashtrian who helped him out with the meals.

Next, he had to get someone to teach him filmmaking. Phalke gave it a thought and then barged into the office of a magazine called ‘Bioscope’ where he enlisted the support of its editor to introduce him to film director Cecil Hepworth. Picking up the craft of making films in the shortest time possible, Phalke then returned to India to mount his
Possibly one of the first outdoor shoots in Indian cinema history, Raja Harischandra.
ambitious project and tell the story of a king who gave away his kingdom to fulfill a promise made to a sage in his dreams.

When shooting began, Phalke began to encounter one problem after another, the biggest of which was to get a female actor to play the role of Queen Taramati. Unable to find anyone, he finally settled for a boy clad in a saree. Meanwhile, Phalke often found himself a victim of cynicism and skepticism with even his own friends threatening to get him admitted to a mental asylum. At one point
during the shooting, Phalke and his actors were dragged off to a police station because some constables on duty had been taken in by the costumes of the actors into assuming that they were thieves. Finally though, 'Raja Harishchandra' got made, and created history. Phalke proved successful in his new art and proceeded to make several silent films, shorts, documentary features, educational films, and so on.

**Moving On**

Phalke then formed a film company called Hindustan Films in partnership with five businessmen from Mumbai, in the hope that by having the financial aspect of his profession handled by experts in the field, he would be free to pursue the creative aspect. He set up a model studio and trained technicians and actors but, very soon, ran into insurmountable problems with his partners. In 1920, Phalke resigned from Hindustan Films, made his first announcement of retirement from cinema, and wrote 'Rangbhoomi', an acclaimed play. Lacking his extremely imaginative genius, Hindustan Films ran into deep financial loss and Phalke was finally persuaded to return. However, Phalke felt constrained by the business and after directing a few films for the company he withdrew once again.

Meanwhile, times and technology changed and Phalke fell victim to the emerging power of the 'sound' film. Unable to cope with the talkies, the man who had fathered the Indian film industry became obsolete. His last silent movie 'Setubandhan' was released in 1932 and later released with dubbing. During 1936-38, he produced his last film 'Gangavataram' (1937), before retiring to Nashik, where he died on February 16, 1944. Interestingly, such was Phalke’s genius that he was offered an opportunity to make films in London after ‘Raja Harishchandra’ was first screened there. Phalke turned down the offer. And Indian cinema became that much better for it.

We Recommend:

Watch the original Raja Harischandra and other Phalke classics to recreate the magic of early Indian cinema!

Catch Paresh Mokashi’s award-winning film ‘Harishchandrachi Factory’ depicting Phalke’s extraordinary life!

Reference

The National Film Archive, Pune regularly holds film festivals and screenings of classics of Indian cinema.

Keep an eye out for special events marking one hundred years of Indian cinema in 2013.
Raja Harishchandra/1913
The story of Raja Harishchandra held a parallel to the philosophy of Satyagraha; enduring suffering with faith in the ultimate victory of good over evil. India would certainly regain its lost glory from its oppressors by adhering to its ideals of truth. A spirit of self-sacrifice was needed to achieve freedom. The story was enacted and repeated down the generations, it was a shared experience of a people, hence the local audiences were thrilled to see a familiar story enacted by familiar Indian faces on the screen. The film ran for nearly a month. The Harishchandra tale was filmed repeatedly in every centre of filmmaking in India.

He wanted a woman to play the role of the Queen, but due to the social stigma attached to Cinema, he could not find any woman to play this role, and he settled on an effeminate cook named Salunke, whom he discovered in a café.

When D.G. Phalke showed this film in the provincial towns, it was not well-attended. He discovered that people were unwilling to pay three annas for 1 ½ hour show as people preferred to pay only two annas for a stageplay which was usually six hours long. Phalke advertised the film as “Raja Harishchandra: A Performance with 57,000 photographs and a picture two miles long. All for only three annas.” The audience felt that they received value for their money. It stirred buried sentiments of national pride as it evoked India’s legendary past. Phalke retold the stories from the epics which were handed down the generations by storytellers, minstrels and popular folk theatre.

Shree Krishna Janma/1918
Child Krishna fights the oppression and tyranny of King Kansa. The message of revolt was clearly portrayed in a subtle way.

The demon King Kansa’s hallucinations are very appealing, where he visualizes his severed head floating in the air. Phalke was adept at trick photography and delighted the audiences with his imagination.

Two reels are cut in half and stuck together to create the illusion of Krishna growing bigger. Some of the earliest special effects.
Kaliya Mardan/1919

In the underwater climax sequence, child Krishna vanquishes the venomous serpent Kaliya. The silent films were never really silent, they were usually accompanied by a live orchestra which provided background music and also songs which heightened the drama being flickered on the screen. In this particular sequence, there was a live chorus of the patriotic Vande Mataram. Kaliya symbolized the colonial oppressors, the evil in Hindu mythology.

A still from "Kaliya Mardan", Phalke's silent film.

Gangavataram/1937

His only Sound film, it was replete with trick scenes and was a mythological spectacle. With a big budget supported by Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur, the special effects were achieved by Babaraya Phalke, his son. Phalke had one whole hill painted white to create the Holy Kailas in Kolhapur.

A still from "Gangavataram", Phalke's only sound film.

Anecdotes
by Arti Karkhanis

Phalke’s own daughter Mandakini played the role of the child Krishna

Arti Karkhanis,
Research and Documentation Section,
National Film Archive of India, Pune
Haven’t we all grown up with fascinating fairy tales of what heaven is like? A land of immense beauty with waterfalls and towering peaks in the pristine lap of nature, Bhandardara comes close to experiencing heaven on earth, says Ashutosh Bapat.

A Slice of Paradise
Bhandardara
Ashutosh Bapat | Photographs © MTDC, Ashutosh Bapat, Hemant Pokharankar, Sanjay Katti
Distance from Mumbai: 185 Km

Reaching There

By Rail: The nearest rail head is Igatpuri.

By Road: Bhandardara is 185 kms from Mumbai and about the same from Pune too. While coming from Mumbai take a turn at Ghoti after Igatpuri and the road will lead you to Bhandardara via Bari, the village at the foothills of Mount Kalsubai. From Pune there is a diversion at Sangamner which will take you to Bhandardara via Akole.

Excursions:

Visit the Amruteshwar temple on the banks of the river Pravara.

Catch a glimpse of the majestic Randha water-falls, 12 km. from Wilson dam.

Also in the vicinity:

Alang, Madan, Kule, Harischandra Gad, Sanchan valley, Katrabai khind, Ghatghar kukan kada, Aad, Aundha, Patta, Bitina forts, Pabargad, Bhairavgad trek, Tringalwadi fort and Jain Caves.
Today, Mount Kalsubai is one of the most favourite destinations for trekkers. It held great strategic importance during the days of Maratha power as an observation post.
“There is pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is rapture in the lonely shore,
There is society where none intrudes,
By the deep sea and music in its roar.
I love not man less but nature more.”

To experience the very meaning of this poem by George Gordon Byron, just pack your sack and rush to Bhandardara. Monsoon is at our doorstep. Grab this opportunity for you won’t find a more amazing destination than this. Nestled among the Sahyadri Hills, Bhandardara has all the makings of a beautiful landscape surrounded by mountain ranges, roaring waterfalls and lush greenery everywhere. Fluorescent green paddy fields contrast with bright blue skies above and the brownish streams that flow everywhere are there to welcome you. When it rains, and clouds descend from the sky to cover the earth, the sight is truly breathtaking!

Bhandardara dam

On a full moon night you can get a beautiful reflection of the Kalsubai peak in the backwaters of the Wilson Dam – a spectacular vision indeed! Bhandardara is located to the north of Ahmednagar district in Akole tehsil. Apart from other things, it is a trekker’s paradise with a range of hills that include Mount Kalsubai, Pabargad, Ratangad and Ghanachakkar which start from Bhairvagad in the east to Mount Ajoba in the west. There is a magnificent 1,000 feet drop at village Ghatghar, called as Kokan Kada, Sandhan Valley. Such are the trekking options here that you can choose to indulge in this activity any time of the year. Meanwhile, here are some of the places you must necessarily fit into your schedule.

Wilson Dam

Almost a century ago, in 1910 to be precise, the British constructed a dam across the river Pravara to provide irrigation channels to the Ahmednagar region. As such, Wilson Dam holds the credit for being the oldest dam in India. Situated at a height of 150 meters above sea level, it is a powerful testimony to the engineering skills in practice during the British era. The cost of construction of this project with a catchment area of 122 sq km and water storage capacity of 11 TMC was Rs 84,14,188. The name comes from Sir Leslie Orme Wilson, who was then the governor of Bombay and was invited to inaugurate it on December 10, 1926. The site for this dam was discovered in 1903 by Arthur Hill, the chief engineer for irrigation and secretary to the government of Bombay Presidency. In recognition of the valuable services rendered by him, the lake was therefore named ‘Lake Arthur Hill’, which is now known as the Bhandardara Lake.

Umbrella Falls

When the water level of the dam rises above the acceptable limits, especially during the monsoon, one of the gates of the Wilson Dam is opened. And this rush of water cascading over the rocks creates an artificial waterfall which, being umbrella shaped, is so named.
Gorge at Sandhan valley
Randha Falls
Just 12 kms away from the Wilson Dam, the roaring river Pravara descends down from a height of 170 feet into a beautiful gorge. It is the third leading fall in India and its splendour is all the more enhanced during the rains. More than the sight, it is the thundering sound that mesmerises you. However, for those planning to visit during the monsoon season, here is a word of caution. A spot of raised land called Iceland from where the Randha Falls can be seen in its truly majestic form turns into an island when heavy rainfall submerges the low land around it, thus cutting out the exit route. There have been incidents in the past when tourists have been stranded here and rescue attempts have taken more than 10 hours at the least. While there, you can visit the temple of Ghorapadai Devi situated above the Randha Falls.

Agasti Rishi Ashram
There are the references to this place in the ‘Ramayana’ and according to the mythological legend, Agasti Rishi meditated here for a year, living only on water and air. It is believed that when Lord Rama and his brother
Laxman visited Agasti Rishi to seek his blessings, Lord Rama was gifted an arrow with which he ultimately killed Ravana. The ashram is situated on the bank of river Pravara.

**Mount Kalsubai**

Often referred to as the Mount Everest of Maharashtra, Mount Kalsubai towers 1,646 meters above sea level and is the highest peak in the state. The peak is said to have taken its name from a Koli girl called Kalsu who, according to a story, was fond of wandering in the forest. One day she came to a village at the foot of the hill and started serving in a Koli family with the condition that she should not be asked to do menial tasks such as cleaning pots or sweeping the floors. One day, one of the family members ordered Kalsu to clean some pots and clear away some garbage. Immediately after being forced to do this, she climbed the hill and stayed on its top till her death.

Today, Mount Kalsubai is one of the favourite destinations for trekkers. It held great strategic importance during the days of Maratha power as an observation post. There is a small temple at the top with an old well in its backyard. It is said that the water level in the well never drops below 3 feet. The panoramic view from the peak is a sight to behold, with the Ghatghar village and its majestic hillside known as Kokan Kada being the most striking feature.

There is a magnificent 1,000 feet drop at village Ghatghar, called as Kokan Kada, Sandhan Valley. Such are the trekking options here that you can choose to indulge in this activity any time of the year.
view from this place is really awesome and for amateur trekkers it is quite an achievement to reach its top, a climb that takes about three hours from village Bari at its base.

**Fort Ratangad**

On the Nashik–Ahmednagar border there is a range of lofty hills that attract the attention of trekkers. Ratangad is one of them on the top of which is an ancient fort that was captured by Shivaji Maharaj. It is said that this was his favourite fort and it is from a cave named Ratnubai located here that the river Pravara originates. Of curiosity value at Ratangad is a natural hole in a rock which has been named ‘Nedhe’. The fort, which offers a panoramic 360-degree view from its ramparts, was, in 1818, the headquarters of a district of five *mahals*. The forts of Alang and Kulang were subordinate to it. In 1820 Ratangad was occupied by Captain Goddard. To climb Ratangad you have to go to Ratanwadi, the village at the foot of this fort. The distance from Bhandardara to Ratanwadi is 20 kms.

**Amruteshwar Temple**

There is a reference in the Panhale copper plates that King Jhanjh of the Shilahar dynasty (rulers of Thane from 810 CE to 1260 CE, they were the disciples of Lord Shiva) constructed 12 Shiva temples in the dense forests of Sahyadri in the region within the reaches of rivers Bheema and Godavari. Amruteshwar is one of them, constructed at the snout of river Pravara-Amrutwahini. The temple is 23 meters long, 12 meters wide and 22 meters tall. The height of the *shikhara* (tower) is 5-6 meters. The *shikhara* is of the Bhumija style. Constructed in 1100 CE, this ancient temple houses an idol of Lord Shiva and has a very high dome over the shrine. In front of the shrine door is a handsome canopy. Artistically decorated walls and various types of images depicted on the temple show the mastery over the medium. To the southwest of the temple is a majestic water pond carved in stone that has been named ‘Pushkarni’. It measures 12 sq meters and the 10 niches within it host the idols of Ganesha, Vishnu, and others. Just besides this are memorial stones called Veergals and Satishilas.

The author is an avid trekker and history enthusiast.
Where to stay

There are now many hotels and resorts that offer comfortable accommodation at Bhandardara, but the ideal place to stay is the MTDC Holiday Resort which comprises 10 deluxe rooms, six lakeside cottages, eight standard rooms, nine special rooms and one dormitory for group accommodation. The resort offers a beautiful view of the Wilson Dam and Arthur Lake.

Treking Facilities

The Champamay Pratishthan has taken the initiative to train local youths with all the necessary skills of mountaineering and they now serve as guides for trekkers. The organisation also provides a wide range of trekking gear, including tents, ropes, carabiners, etc.

Travel Tips

Wear rain-proof clothing and enjoy the monsoons on a trek. Check with locals and experts before trekking in the monsoons. Some viewpoints can be cut off by heavy rains.
When the Body Transcends its Limits

Mallakhamb
Shriniwas Havaldar | Photographs © Sachin Naik

Combining dexterity and agility with strength and stamina, Mallakhamb is a tradition of gymnastics that requires a gymnast to perform acrobatics while balancing gracefully on a vertical pole says Shriniwas Havaldar

It would be worth beginning this account with an explanation of what the name ‘Mallakhamb’ means. It is a combination of ‘mall’ which is a gymnast or a man of strength and ‘kamb’, a pole. So, a combination of the two literally means a gymnast’s pole. This traditional Indian sport finds its origins in ancient India, with early mentions in Chalukya king Someshwar III’s ‘Manasollasa’, written in 1129 CE. After this period though, there is very little mention of the sport until it was revived by Shri Balambhatta Dada Deodhar, physical instructor to Bajirao Peshwa II. This is why he is known as the father of Mallakhamb.

During that time the Peshwa Durbar boasted of many other excellent wrestlers and so they hardly lost any matches to outsiders. In fact, accomplished wrestlers from all over the country visited the region to test their skills and strength. When Balambhatta was 16 he came with his parents to Pune where his father Shri Janardhan Bhatt assisted Peshwa Bajirao II with religious duties. There, young Balambhatta not only excelled in the Vedas but also in sports. He started training as a wrestler under the guidance of Guru Raghobha Vastad in his akhada (a place of wrestling). The young man’s capacity to learn and work hard quickly made him popular in his akhada and by the age of 20 he became well-known in the entire region of Pune.

In 1818, the British defeated Bajirao Peshwa II and transferred him with his followers to Brahmavarta, a holy city on the banks of the
river Ganga. Balambhattadada also followed along with his family and opened a new chapter of Mallakhamb there. When he was 44 years old he stayed for a while in Varanasi with Konbhattanana Godbole who decided to follow his techniques. Balambhattadada lived till the age of 72, spreading knowledge and awareness about wrestling and Mallakhamb all over India. Among his many disciples, Gopalrao Tattu (Bhan Talim, Miraj), Sardar Natu, Tatya Sathe, Balashashtri Sathe, Haripanth Bharve, Kasambhai (Sultan of Punjab), Gopalrao Soni and Takejmal are remembered with respect.

In 1852, unable to be independent any longer, Balambhattadada ended his life in the river Ganga. After his death, his follower, Konbhattanana Godbole, continued his work promoting Mallakhamb and wrestling while his eldest son, Ramchandra, refused to leave Brahmavarta, Dada’s wife and the two younger sons, Laxman Guru and Narayan Guru,
Once, two professional heavyweight wrestlers – Ali and Gulab – visited Pune after successful stints in akhadas all over the country. They challenged wrestlers in the region but no one responded because they were unsure of whether they would be able to face the two men who possessed such daunting physiques and flawless records. However, there was one exception – Balambhatta. He requested the permission of Bajirao Peshwa II to take on the two wrestlers, asking for a month to prepare himself.

Then, taking his mother’s blessing at Kothure village, he left for the serene hills of Saptashrungi, where he performed strict penance for 21 days. Finally, the goddess of Saptashrungi blessed him and informed him that Lord Hanuman, in the form of a monkey, would teach him some tricks. For three successive days a monkey is said to have appeared and demonstrated some techniques. Balambhatta practiced these techniques on a wooden pole until he mastered them. This is said to be the origin of modern Mallakhamb. He then went back to Kothure and made himself a Mallakhamb about five to six feet high and practiced on this pole till the day of the fight.

Balambhatta’s bout with Ali was hard-fought and in the end he managed to push his opponent down using a ‘Yamapash Dav’ (a wrestling trick) and gripped his neck between his thighs. This is one of the basic grips in Mallakhamb which Balambhatta had perfected. Ali, suffocating, had to admit defeat. Gulab, the other wrestler, threw in his towel before his bout and ran away. The Peshwa, very happy with Balambhatta, appointed him personal trainer in his Durbar, where he continued his training in wrestling along with Mallakhamb. After he was married at the age of 32, he was referred to as Shri Balambhattadada.
Mallakhamb’s Torch-Bearers

Damodar Guru Moghe, also a very talented student of Konbhthannana, went on to become the founder of ‘cane Mallakhamb’. He learnt Mallakhamb from Konbhthannana in 1843, at the age of eight, walking the entire distance of 500 kms from Gwalior to Varanasi. From 1872 to 1895, Damodar Guru travelled all over the country to promote Mallakhamb. His devotees called him Shri Achutanand Swami Maharaj. His student, Anantaram Guru Godbole, was a Malla Vidya Visharad from the Banaras Hindu University. In 1920, at the age of 55, Anantaram Guru Godbole came to Maharashtra along with Rajaram Atale, who opened two gymnasiums in Mumbai. Damodar Guru’s younger brother, Bhaskar Guru Moghe, also contributed to the field by promoting it in Sangli, Miraj and other interior places in Maharashtra.

Among the modern Mallakhamb legends is Prof Manikrao. Also known as Gajanan, he was a student of Jummadada. In 1886, at the age of 92, Jummadada taught Gajanan (who was eight at the time) all the techniques of Mallakhamb and wrestling. He was awarded a ‘Rajratna’ (a significant honour) by the ruler of Vadodara. Then there’s Pune’s legend D C Majumdar, founder of ‘Vyayamdnyanakosh’ and Tatya Sahstrabuddhe alias Hari Mahadeo who taught Mallakhamb to many students such as Ragopanta Pathare, Vasant Kaptan, and others. All of these well known names along with K B Mahabal, P L Kale, P V Bane and Shankar Rakshe devoted their entire lives to the development and promotion of Mallakhamb.
and continued to live in Varanasi with Konbhattana. He trained both of them perfectly in Mallakhamb and wrestling. Finally, he too married and started a new life. He had two sons, Anantaram and Narayan, both of whom achieved milestones in the field of Mallakhamb.

Today, there are many types of Mallakhamb – pole, rope, hanging, nirdhar (without support), Mallakhamb on bottles and cane Mallakhamb. However, at the competitive level only pole, rope and hanging Mallakhamb are performed. In the case of pole Mallakhamb, a vertical pole is fixed into the ground and the player performs gymnastics and yogasanas while balancing himself on the pole which is usually made of teakwood with castor oil rubbed over it whereas in hanging Mallakhamb the wooden pole is shorter in length than the standard pole and instead of being dug into the ground, it is suspended above it by hooks and chains. In rope Mallakhamb, no pole is used but instead, a rope is suspended from a support.

While girls are restricted to rope Mallakhamb, boys can perform all three. A Mallakhamb gymnast is a called a ‘patu’. The male patu wears a langot and jangya while the girls wear a costume or gym suit. Sometimes shorts and T-shirts are permitted for girls. Besides being a visually appealing sport for spectators, the patu himself benefits tremendously from it and can achieve a very high level of fitness. The stamina, speed, strength, flexibility and concentration required for other sports are highly developed in Mallakhamb. Those practicing Mallakhamb have successfully participated in several competitive sports like diving, horse-riding and athletics at the national level.

The regular practice of Mallakhamb also helps in the healthy development of the backbone. Not only acrobatics but also yogasanas like padmasana, natrasana, dhanurasana and paschimottanasana can be performed on a Mallakhamb. Besides asanas, many types of adhis, tedhas, mounts and dismounts, stretching and bending movements are also used by the Mallakhamb patus, providing excellent exercise to the entire body. The Mallakhamb Federation of India and other such organisations have been undertaking tremendous promotional efforts in the form of state and national level competitions whilst district associations conduct district level competitions. Every year, university, inter-college and inter-school level competitions are also conducted by respective organisers. Efforts are being made to promote Mallakhamb not only in cities but also in rural and remote areas as well as abroad.

What began in remote Saptashrungi spread across the country from master to disciple until Mallakhamb became synonymous with the perfection of physical prowess – stretching the body’s capacity to unbelievable limits, combining dexterity and agility with strength and stamina. This tradition persists today and celebrates the power and capacity of the human body, mind and spirit.
Dada’s favourite student, Takejmal, became the first player in the history of Mallakhamb to demonstrate the art in the presence of foreigners. He applied buttermilk (now substituted by castor oil) on the pole and exhibited some exceptional skills. Later, he went on to open a gymnasium under the rule of Shri Sayajirao Gaikwad, the ruler of Vadodara. His student, Jummadada, became a legend in the fields of wrestling and Mallakhamb.

The regular practice of Mallakhamb also helps in the healthy development of the backbone. Not only acrobatics but also yogasanas like padmasana, natrajasana, dhanurasana and paschimottamasana can be performed on a Mallakhamb.
Tucked in one of the by-lanes of Pune is a museum that is quite different from the others because of its unique collection of plain utility objects along with those that have a priceless historic value. Above all, it is a collection put together by one individual. A walk-through by Ulka Athale

Art Amidst

Everyday Objects

Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum

Ulka Athale | Photographs © Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum, Sachin Naik
Distance from Mumbai: 150 Km

Reaching There

By Air: Fly in to Pune’s Lohegaon Airport.

By Rail: The Deccan Queen and Pragati Express run daily between Mumbai and Pune.

By Road: From Mumbai, take the Mumbai - Pune expressway, get to the city centre.

Excursions:

Take a walk around Pune’s historic old centre, starting from the Shaniwarwada.

Stop in at the stately Vishrambaugwada and pick up gifts at Tulshibag.

For a monsoon picnic, enjoy the rains on top of Sinhagad fort!
A view of the Lamps Gallery

A bust of Dr. D.G. Kelkar, founder of the museum, Sculpture by Ram Parkhi
Nestled within the bustling streets of Pune’s old city centre is a quaint old ‘wada’. The old city centre is a maze of narrow roads, which I navigate with the help of a wizened old rickshaw driver. Tucked away in a by-lane, the Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum suddenly looms into view. The carved wooden arch at the entrance reassures me that I am in the right place. In fact, what I don’t know yet is that the ornamented doorway is the first of many that I will pass through in the museum.

The entrance corridor makes an arresting statement of the vision that pushed the museum’s founder Dr. D G Kelkar (1896 – 1990) to collect artefacts from all across India from the 1920s onwards until his demise in 1990. Dr. Kelkar believed firmly that the ordinary and the aesthetic mingle together in our daily lives. Utility and artistry were to be found within the same object. Walking in through the entrance corridor, I am awed by the amount of work gone into carving the wooden pillars and ornamented ceiling. I am transported back to a bygone era, where wood-paneled doors and ceilings delicately carved with flowers were the norm, and not the exception.

As one continues down the corridor, a majestic wooden sculpture of a galloping horse, dating from the 19th century, takes centre-stage. Rather eerily, as I move around the horse, I can sense its gaze following me around the room. Explains Sudhanva Ranade, the director of the museum, “The sculptor has placed the eyes with such precision that you get the impression that the horse is looking at you. It is a testament to the skill of the artist.”

Continuing on, the Gujarat Gallery opens up before me. The gallery contains a wooden façade typical to houses of Gujarat as well as other household artefacts from the region. A striking Meenakshi statue, dating back to the 18th century, holds court in one corner of the gallery, a large antique mirror reflecting all the detail on the back of the statue. Another impressive item is a gold and silver-plated shrine from Wai, also from the 18th century.

The Kelkar museum has eight galleries displaying kitchen utensils, textiles, musical instruments, lamps, arm and armour, ivory in addition to the Mastani Mahal and Gujarat Gallery. The kitchen utensil display catches my eye next. The antique copper vessels glow gently, infusing the room with a feel more akin to a noble home of the past. A more lingering look at the intricacy of the work and the artistry which a whole variety of things from spoons to carved spice boxes, antique noodle makers and a more quirky Ganesh made of vessels are a reminder that Dr. Kelkar was right to create a space for art found amongst everyday items.
A one of a kind five-headed Ganesh statue

A Sarinda belonging to playwright P.L. Deshpande

Daggers and knuckle-dusters
Wandering through the textile gallery, surrounded by beautifully embroidered vintage silk sarees, I spot a rather frayed quilt out of the corner of my eye. This simple patchwork quilt, possibly a bit out of place visually with the collection of textiles, however has a unique historical value. It was gifted to Dr. Anandibai Joshi, the first Indian woman to study medicine, by her American friends in 1886 and stands as a testament to the difficulties she faced and overcame, ultimately succumbing to tuberculosis soon after she graduated. The brightly coloured ornate shadow puppets are another must-see of the textile gallery. While only a few puppets are on display, the Kelkar collection itself has about 4,000 puppets.

The collection of musical instruments highlights the possibility of creativity in spite of the limits placed by the structure of an instrument. One can wander fascinated past sitars shaped like peacocks and a veena in the form of a crocodile. A veena made out of an ostrich egg is yet another delightful surprise in the gallery.

The lamps gallery is yet another reminder of how motifs can be created out of the mundane. At once an embodiment of the spiritual and the practical, lamps were essential to illuminate houses and equally important in religious rituals. Not surprisingly, many lamps are moulded around mythological themes. The Kadamba Vriksha Deep (Kadamba Tree Lamp) is a particularly fine example of this, depicting a mischievous Lord Krishna sitting high on the branches of the tree, having hidden the clothes of the gopis bathing in the river flowing below the tree. The gallery also displays myriad nut-cutters, some in the form of entwined lovers, others shaped like animals, delicately formed lime containers and other objects associated with the rituals of making tambool (areca nut with lime and leaves).

Other things to look out for in the museum are the delightful little ivory dice set. The rose and white ivory chess set is particularly enticing. The finely cut ivory playing cards evoke images of playfulness - a playfulness that recurs in various elements of the collection. The Kelkar museum reminds us of how art and craftsmanship toy with the boundaries of form and possibility, and how even the simplest of everyday objects can be masterpieces in their own right.

The Origin

The Raja Dinkar Kelkar museum houses one of the largest one-man collections in the world. The museum is the result of the sheer persistence and devotion of Dr. D G Kelkar, supported by his loving wife Kamalabai Kelkar. Born in 1896 at Karanjgaon near Kamshet, Dr. Kelkar was an optician by profession but a poet at heart. He was wed to Kamalabai in 1913, who supported his dream through all 67 years of their married life together until her death in 1980. Dr. Kelkar’s passion for writing historical poetry under the pseudonym ‘Adnyatwasi’ made his interest in history and antiques deeper. His son Raja died tragically at a young age. The death
of Raja spurred Dr. Kelkar to create a legacy in his memory in the form of the ‘Raja Sangrah’ as the museum was initially called. Dr. Kelkar spent most of his life travelling across India to collect antiques and curios for the museum. The jewel of his collection, though, is undoubtedly the Mastani Mahal.

A Peshwai Heritage

The love of Peshwa Bajirao I for Mastani has long been a part of folklore, to the extent that it is difficult to separate fact from fiction, history from romance. Conflicting reports exist about who Mastani was, and whether she was actually wedded to Bajirao I. The most widely accepted theory is that she was the daughter of King Chhatrasal of Bundela and his Muslim wife. Bajirao I met her on a campaign and soon fell in love with her. Upon bringing her back to Pune, however, she was viewed with hostility by Bajirao’s family, especially his mother and first wife Kashibai. Although she was initially housed in a wing of the Shaniwarwada, his official residence, in 1734, Bajirao I finally had a palace built for Mastani in Kothrud. This palace was known as the ‘Mastani Mahal’.

About 200 odd years later, the palace was in ruins, and the memory of the royal romance was contained in legends alone. A businessman had bought the lands on which the ruined Mastani Mahal stood and planned to construct a factory in its place. Realising that a few treasures still remained, he invited Dr. Kelkar to salvage what was left. Dr. Kelkar, with the help of his wife, daughter and a master carpenter, carefully took apart one room that had been preserved intact. Upon returning to the museum, the room was pains tak-
The author is a local of Pune, who is passionate about heritage conservation.
ingly reconstructed. Carpets and pillows belonging to the Peshwa-era were added to recreate to the sumptuous feel of a room fit enough for a queen.

More than Money
As the fame of the unique collection of the Kelkar museum spread, it was coveted by many. Nawab Salar Jung III, whose collection is housed in the Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad, offered to buy the entire Kelkar collection. Rumour has it that he even sent Dr. Kelkar a blank cheque. Dr. Kelkar’s collection meant far more to him than money. It was his legacy to his son and society. Thus, Dr. Kelkar respectfully declined the offer and returned the cheque. Later on, he was the first ever recipient of the Nawab Salar Jung Gold Medal.

An Appeal from Sudhanva Ranade
“The late Dr. D G Kelkar donated his personal collection to the Government of Maharashtra in 1975 in the firm belief that such a dream could only be fulfilled by the state’s proactive involvement and financial support. The existing state of affairs, however, leaves a lot to be desired. Spread over three floors and divided into 42 sections, the museum currently displays only about 2,500 plus exhibits, being approximately only 12.5 per cent of the total collection, owing to the paucity of space. The bulk of Dr. Kelkar’s collection, over 85 percent of the timeless treasure, still remains unseen – and therefore, unsung. To make matters worse, the museum is prey to the usual nemeses of city life: traffic congestion, pollution and the ravages of time on priceless treasures, among others. The diverse collection needs state-of-the-art adequate maintenance facilities. It has been accepted for long that the existing facilities need a total upgrade.

“Thus ‘Project Museum 2000’ has been conceived of, with a view to create an international standard museum complex to house the entire Kelkar collection, other exhibits, research and storage facilities and the Raja Dinkar Kelkar Institute of Museology and Fine Arts, an auditorium, student hostels, multimedia centre, etc. This priceless treasure needs to be nurtured if it is to remain an integral part of our national wealth. The encouraging response from both the private and the public sectors notwithstanding, a project of this gigantic scale calls for selfless personal contributions from all quarters. A 100 per cent exemption in income tax under Section 80 G II is aptly assured for all the contributions made in India towards this noble cause.”

Travel Tips
Photo-enthusiasts can pack their cameras - photography and videography are permitted at the museum (without flash of course)! Notebooks and sketchbooks are also permitted.

Visiting the museum
The Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum is located at 1377-78, Natu Baug, Off Bajirao Road, Shukrawar Peth, Pune - 411 002.
Timings: From 9.30 am to 5.30 pm.
The museum is open to visitors throughout the year.
For more information kindly log on to www.rajakelkarmuseum.com or call: +91 20 24482101/24481556/ +91 98220 37550 or drop a line at: sudhanvaranade@hotmail.com
Lullaby of the Ocean

Tarkarli

Ashishwang Godha   |   Photographs © MTDC

Whether you just want to let the waves wash over your stress or get an adrenalin-rush with some water-sports, Tarkarli is the perfect vacation option for you, says Ashishwang Godha
Distance from Mumbai: 493 Km

Reaching There

By Air: Goa is the nearest airport.


Excursions:
Take the ferry to Sindhu-durg fort. Visit the Laxmi Vishnu cashew factory.
Warm white sands, a pristine clear beach and waves that you can almost see through. This isn’t California or Kerala. This is Tarkarli, right in the heart of Maharashtra. And moreover Tarkarli’s enviable Malvan hospitality and serenity is what makes it a complete charmer. This undiscovered little alcove of sun, surf and sand is an idyllic getaway – perfect for every season. With the cool ocean breeze blowing through its lush-green palm fronds and water-sports season at its peak, Tarkarli makes a great getaway for summers and winters. But, while you can’t make a trip to the fort or indulge in any parasailing, the lingering sprays of gigantic waves and leisurely walks on the beach with the wet sand seeping into your toes makes this a rain-drenched, secluded seductive monsoon paradise.

Approximately 600 kms from Mumbai and accessible by rail, courtesy the Konkan Express, the beauty of the coastline strikes you even before you reach Tarkarli. The West-
ern Ghats in Maharashtra are a lush carpet of striking green. The very romantic railway chugs through tunnels, even as it leaps over little and big rivers and monsoon waterfalls, and makes its way through the Sindhudurg belt. The little engine hugs the mountain paths sparkling with mist and you know that your choice to opt for the road-less-travelled has already been worth it. By the time you reach the sleepy hamlet, its mid-day and one of the many eager rickshaw drivers you choose will tuk-tuk you for an hour through leafy by-lanes, coves, colourful villages homes with wall art and the wafting aromas of frying fish, spices and of course, the ocean.

Comfort Zone
Tarkarli has few hotels but offers several home-stays for those who would like to experience village life in India. But, the MTDC resort is your best bet for its location, food, cleanliness and access to water-sports. The MTDC’s Tarkarli property, reputed for being one of their most premium ones, will charm
you the moment you set foot on the sandy entrance lined with boats. This is beach itself and the ocean is, literally, a long jump away. Konkani sloping roofed-villas and twin-villas with all the amenities are spread over the sands – each one at a distance and an angle away from each other that ensures privacy. Each villa has a lovely porch where you can relax and enjoy your drink while watching the ocean come into the beach.

There are also two house-boats. But, these aren’t floating ones a la Kerala or Kashmir. These are anchored to the beach. During our visit, we were quite in love with our air-conditioned villas but children might enjoy the spiral staircases and the boat-home feel. Once there, throw your luggage down and let your feet up. Relax and let the sand tickle your toes. Feel the stress melt into the cool waters. As the sun sets in vibrant hues, take a

Konkani sloping roofed-villas and twin-villas with all the amenities are spread over the sands – each one at a distance and an angle away from each other that ensures privacy.
barefoot walk along the beach and watch the stars come up. The resort has a simple gazebo cafeteria that serves up a home-style Malvan menu. How about some Malvan crab for dinner?

**For The Adventurous**

Tarkarli isn’t just for those who wish to do nothing and simply rejuvenate. It pristine waters are also perfect for a variety of sports. While swimming is permitted, it would be advisable to stay within reach of the shore and ensure that children are not left unattended. As you go further in, the currents are strong and the waters can get dangerous. The water-sports season starts in November, post-monsoon and continues right up to May-June, when the sea starts getting rough. Here, the MTDC organises snorkelling, diving, water-scooters, and more. Feel the rush as the chilly water splashes and soaks you on a scooter. Or enjoy watching the sea creatures in their own habitat while snorkelling.
Dolphin Coast

Not too far out from Tarkarli’s coast is a dolphin reef. Except during the monsoon when the sea is completely out of bounds, you could take an early morning ride to the reef. The dolphins, known for being friendly and therapeutic, soar and preen above the waters. If you are trigger-happy, these loving creatures will be more than happy to pose as they sweep through the waves.

A Fortifying Experience

This aspect of Tarkarli is for the culture-vultures. The Sindhudurg fort is visible from your cottage. But it’s only accessible by sea. The MTDC organises ferry trips to the fort and back. Sindhudurg was a 17th century fort and even today it stands tall and gracious right in the middle of a churning ocean. Sindhudurg was built by the great Maratha warrior Shivaji in 1664. He selected the strategic rocky island location, then known as ‘Kurte’ for the fort to counter foreign forces and to keep the nearby Siddis of Murud-Janjira in check. One of the best preserved forts of the Marathas, Sindhudurg fort has zigzag rampart with 42 bastions. Apart from the huge stones, the building material involved 2,000 khandis (72,576 kg) of iron to erect the massive curtain wall and bastions. A notable feature is that the foundation stones were laid down firmly with five khandis (181.5 kgs) of molten lead.

Crabs, Curries and Cashews

Tarkarli is Malvan heartland. If you have so
far only been privy to watered-down, low-spiced versions of the cities, you have been deprived. Now is the time to feast. Make your way to the Malvan village for some local flavour for a lunch. Take a local bus for the six-kilometer distance and you will have hens clucking around in their baskets on the seat next to you. A flavour as local as it gets. Walk around the market streets abuzz with colour and the music of village commerce. Glass bangles glint coyly in the sunlight, fresh flowers act as aroma therapy and fish is sold at most corners. It’s such a mélange of sight and smell that your taste buds will soon demand attention.

Choose any of the little restaurants and settle down. It will mostly be a menu du jour. Cool off with a bright pink but spiced sol kadhi and choose a typical thali. It could be seafood, chicken or vegetarian. Of course, Malvan is renowned for its fish. So, try a prawn option or mussels and it will come with a section of dry / fried fish of your choice, masala gravy with the same fish, thick bhakris (Indian breads) made of jowar and steamed rice. A fresh, wholesome meal that’s finger-licking good. At the resort, dinner time will creep up soon enough – and surprisingly, so will hunger. Try a Malvan teekha, a unique thick and spicy (perhaps a little too much for palates not accustomed to Indian spice) preparation with chicken, seafood or just fresh vegetables.

Before you leave Tarkarli, take a short walk beyond the resort. The Lakshmi-Vishnu Kaju Factory is hardly a mechanised steel plant. This one still retains the charm of a village industry where you can see how you get to that salted cashew you love to munch on. For urban folks, a whole cashew is a surprise. It’s a green fruit, the size of a small pear. This has to be dry-roasted, punched by hand to open up, kernel taken out and roasted again. Buy the ones with their skin on for a smoky flavour or the sweeter ones without the flaky skin.

So, as the wind caresses the trees to sleep and the ocean sings a lullaby, Tarkarli will mesmerise you enough to come back – again and again.
Imagine this: the monsoon winds are gradually retreating after the heavy showers. The sun is playing hide-and-seek with the grey clouds. Lovely shades of green have covered the earth and flowers with their vibrant colours are busy attracting bees, butterflies and little sunbirds. The sea seems to be tired of the roaring activity of the last couple of months and is comparatively calm now. The atmosphere is fresh and filled with romantic aromas. There is everywhere the charm of creation and the promise of prosperity. Small wonder then that one should feel like celebrating these long-awaited moments.

Shravan, the fifth month in the Hindu calendar, opens up a number of avenues for such celebrations. But the ‘coconut festival’ is truly one of a kind. This festival marks the end of the monsoon season in Maharashtra. It is celebrated on the first full moon day of Shravan. And since coconut is known as ‘naral’ in Marathi, this particular festival is popularly known as ‘Narali Pournima’. It is also known
by other names such as ‘Shravani Pournima’, ‘Rakhi Pournima’ or ‘Raksha Bandhan’.

The ‘coconut festival’ also marks the beginning of a new fishing season. The fishing community known as Koli in Maharashtra celebrates this occasion in a jubilant manner. On the festive day, fishermen who depend on the sea for their living, appease the sea god before venturing out into the ocean in their boats painted in bright colours and festooned with streamers and decorations of different kinds. Coconuts are offered to the sea god during the worship and prayers are chanted to seek protection from natural calamities and help reap bountiful fish from the sea. Singing and dancing continues for a whole day and the entire fishing community arrives at the coast to mark the occasion. Sweet coconut rice is the special delicacy prepared for this festival.

The reason for offering coconut is because it is considered the purest. The water and the kernel inside the coconut are unadulterated and on a religious level it is believed that a coconut has three eyes, thus symbolising the presence of Lord Shiva. There is yet another legend associated with this festival. It suggests that the ritual is a sort of thanksgiving to Lord Varuna (god of rain or water) for holding aloft the bridge that enabled Lord Rama to go to Lanka as narrated in the epic ‘Ramayana’.

A Promise of Protection

Another feature of this festival is the tying of ‘rakhi’ or the holy thread by a sister on her brother’s wrist, from where the name ‘Raksha Bandhan’ originates. While ‘Raksha Bandhan’ is celebrated all over India, the festival is celebrated with greater zeal in the northern parts of India. A ‘rakhi’, in fact, is no longer a simple thread but comes in myriad forms, ranging from flower patterns in cloth to the intricately designed ones in gold or silver. The brother in return offers a gift to his sister and vows to look after her. Since north Indian kinship practices give cousins a status similar to siblings, girls and women often tie the ‘rakhi’ to their male cousins as well. ‘Raksha Bandhan’ has now begun to have a greater social outreach too with women tying ‘rakhis’ to soldiers and children in orphanages, not to forget prisoners.
Praying to the sea
Ancient Connections
There are many occurrences and mentions of ‘Rakhi Pournima’ in Indian mythology and history. Rakhi Pournima or Narali Pournima thus can boast of a long traditional lineage. Significantly, its importance remains undiluted because it underlines the values that Indian society in the 21st century still adheres to. Furthermore, the festival highlights the intrinsic and close relationship between man and nature. Though urban communities have become rather distanced from the special relationship that man enjoys with nature and depends on it for his well-being, festivals like these help to retain the bond to some extent.

The Legends of Draupadi
The most significant incident is from the epic ‘Mahabharata’. Draupadi, the wife of the Pandavas, is believed to have torn a strip of silk off her sari and tied it around Lord Krishna’s wrist to staunch the bleeding from a Yudhishthir battlefield wound. Krishna, touched by her action, is believed to have declared Draupadi to be his sister. He promised to repay the debt and then spent the next 25 years doing just that. Draupadi, in spite of being married to five great warriors and also the daughter of a powerful monarch, trusted and depended solely on Krishna. Krishna repaid the debt of her love and affection during the ‘vastraharan’ (literally meaning the removal of clothing) of Draupadi – an unfortunate incident that occurred in the assembly of Dhrutarashtra when the king lost her to the Kouravas in gambling. At that critical moment, Krishna indefinitely extended her sari through divine intervention so that it could not be removed and thus saved her honour. ‘Raksha Bandhan’ therefore implies that a brother will always protect his sister for life.

Bali
According to another legend, the demon king Bali was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu who had taken on the task of guarding the former’s kingdom by leaving Vaikunth, his own abode. Goddess Laxmi, Lord Vishnu’s wife, wanted her husband back in Vaikunth. So she went to Bali in the disguise of a woman seeking refuge until the return of her husband. On the day of ‘Shravani Pournima’, Laxmi tied a sacred thread to the king. Upon being asked who she was, Laxmi revealed her true identity and purpose of visit. King Bali was so touched by her goodwill for his family that he immediately requested Lord Vishnu to accompany her to Vaikunth. It is said that since then it has been a tradition to invite sisters on Rakhi Pournima for the thread tying ceremony.

Yama
One legend states that ‘Raksha Bandhan’ was a ritual followed by Yama, the lord of death, and his sister Yamuna, the river in North India. Yamuna tied a ‘rakhi’ to Yama and bestowed on him immortality. Yama was so moved by this emotional bonding that he declared that whoever gets a ‘rakhi’ from his sister and promises to protect her, would be gifted with immortality.

Alexander the Great
There is yet another legendary narrative to highlight the importance of ‘rakhi’. When Alexander the Great invaded India in 326 BCE, Roxana, his wife, sent a sacred thread to Porus, the Katoch king, asking him not to harm her husband in the battle. In accordance with

The author is a noted scholar of Indian culture.
Humayun arrived too late and Bahadur Shah managed to storm through the queen’s troops. Karnavati, along with a reported 13,000 other women in the fortress, carried out ‘jouhar’ (self-immolation) on March 8, 1535 - killing themselves to avoid dishonour while the men threw the gates open and rode out on a suicidal charge against Bahadur Shah’s troops. When he reached Chittor, Humayun evicted Bahadur Shah from the fort and restored the kingdom to Karnavati’s son, Vikramjit Singh.

Although contemporary commentators and memoirs do not mention the ‘rakhi’ episode and some historians have expressed skepticism about it, it is said to be mentioned in a mid-seventeenth century Rajasthani account.

**Rani Karnavati**

A popular historical narrative that is centered around the ‘rakhi’ is that of Rani Karnavati of Chittor and Mughal Emperor Humayun which dates back to 1536 CE. When Rani Karnavati, the widowed queen of the king of Chittor, realised that she could not defend her people against an invasion by Bahadur Shah, the Sultan of Gujarat, she sent a ‘rakhi’ to Emperor Humayun. Immensely touched by this show of affection and trust, the emperor immediately set off with his troops to defend Chittor.

The importance of Narali Pournima remains undiluted because it underlines the values that Indian society in the 21st century still adheres to. Furthermore, the festival highlights the intrinsic and close relationship between man and nature.
Distance from Mumbai: 235 Km

Reaching There

By Rail: Take a train to Karjat and then proceed by road to Rehekuri.

By Road: Pune to Bhigwan is 100 kms. Turn left towards Karjat. Drive 45 kms unto Karjat. Rehekuri is just outside Karjat.

Excursions:

Bhigwan lake for birds. One of the best locations for watching water birds — migratory and resident. Also visit this place for watching flamingos.

Great Indian Bustard Wildlife Sanctuary is spread over two districts of Ahmednagar and Solapur in Maharashtra. But the best place is Nanaj near Solapur.

Siddhivinayak Temple is one of the Ashtavinayak Temples, dedicated to Lord Ganesha. Located on the banks of river Bhima, situated in the remote village of Siddhatek, in the Karjat Taluka of Ahmednagar district.
There was a time when blackbucks were found in abundance on our vast grasslands, but now you have to head to the few sanctuaries that harbour the last remaining populations, to get a glimpse of them. This is exactly what Anirudh Chaoji did by visiting the blackbuck sanctuary at Rehekuri, just 200 kilometres from Pune.
A typical habitat

Graceful flight of female blackbucks
A few years ago, while driving to Nagpur, the sight of a dead animal on the road made me stop my car. I was astonished to see something resembling a black and white deer lying in a pool of blood. How did it get there if there was no wildlife sanctuary in the vicinity? The animal was almost the size of a calf and had long spiralling horns. Later, a little reading introduced me to the fact that it was not a deer but a handsome antelope called black buck (*Antilope cervicapra*), which is amongst the fastest of our land animals. Its worldwide distribution is restricted only to India, though large numbers can be seen in Texas, USA where they were introduced as an exotic breed. Attempts were also made to reintroduce them in Pakistan and Nepal, from where they were completely wiped out.

Once upon a time, these animals roamed throughout the open grassland plains of our country, except the North East and the coastal belts. Then the Indian cheetahs chased and hunted them down in spectacular pursuits. However, today the cheetahs are long gone and even this graceful animal is almost on the brink. It is, in fact, barely managing an existence, thanks to the Schedule 1 status provided by the Indian government and the ‘Near Threatened’ status provided by IUCN in 2003. Like cheetahs, most of these elegant open grassland specialists were easy targets for long-range rifles and thus ended up as trophies on the walls of many a hunter. The few remaining blackbucks are now distributed in pockets – conserved either by the efforts of the communities like the Bishnois or by the forest departments in small sanctuaries.

One such protected area is the tiny Rehekuri Wildlife Sanctuary, some 200 kms from Pune in the dry and scorching Karjat *taluka* of Ahmednagar district. To reach Rehekuri, we drove on the Pune-Solapur highway till Bhigwan and turned left towards Rashin and Karjat. Even as we drove, the countryside appeared too dry and desolate to support any life form. But the sight of a few blackbucks almost gliding in the air immediately removed all the gloom from our thoughts. Just a few kilometres beyond Karjat we saw a board displaying the entrance of the sanctuary. But, as we soon realised, this was hardly a sanctuary considering that it is spread only over 217.30 hectares – a little over 2 sq kms. Many of our better zoos are spread over larger areas!

This explains why these animals roam beyond the sanctuary’s limits in search of fodder and water and end up in someone’s private land or cultivation. It’s a grim reality since the semi-arid grasslands are being taken away for agriculture and pastoral use. And in the recent past the open lands have been covered by over-enthusiastic plantations of the exotic thorny shrubs of Australian acacia (*Prosopis juliflora*). Like in most other places, blackbucks at Rehekuri too venture into the neighbouring fields with irrigated green crops. This brings them into conflict with the local farming communities.

The dryland habitat supports an amazing diversity - all suited to the harsh climatic conditions here.
A shrike keeps a watch for small insect prey in the grassland.
In Marathwada as well as in areas around Pune, the few remaining blackbucks and their slightly better-off cousin, the Indian gazelle – also called chinkara - are frequently known to raid farms. Many chinkaras are killed by the farmers in the process. Locals also fancy the bush meat that is so easily available to them. But around Rehekuri, the forest department has been proactive. They have ensured that the blackbuck flocks remain in close proximity to the Rehekuri Wildlife Sanctuary and get sufficient drinking water in the artificial reservoirs that the department has created. The staff has also been rectifying the past mistake of having undertaken extensive plantations inside this sanctuary.

Realising that these antelopes need vast open areas for picking up their top speed of 80 kmph to escape their predators, the forest department is converting many old plantations into grassland areas. Thankfully, the blackbuck has benefited from these actions. From a measly 15 to 20 animals in 1980s they have steadily grown to a stable population of over 300 antelopes now. Incidentally, blackbuck is the only true antelope in India. Others like the blue bull (Boselaphus tragocamelus) and chousinga (Tetracerus quadricornis) are grouped in a different sub family as they lack the distinguishing spirally ringed horns – a characteristic of antelopes.

In Maharashtra the blackbuck is referred to as ‘Kalvit’. It is only the adult male which is black or dark brown. Even an individual adult male’s coat colour may vary with its breeding status from dark to light brown. The breeding male also shows off its long spiral horns to impress the females, who lack these decorative headgears. Females have a subdued light brown colour, similar to the immature males. These breeding males tend to defecate in specific places, thereby creating dung piles and then go on adding to these piles by repeated urination and defecation. These territory markers are sources of information for the passing females. Females will smell the dung piles and then give the fittest male their consent to continue their progeny.

Apart from the females, these dung piles also are a ‘go away’ message for the other males, who might want to try their luck with the females in the area. This, many a times, brings them into confrontation with the territory owner, ending up in an occasional fight. The fancy dark attire, however, is not always very useful though. The dark-coloured adult male actually stands out against the barren landscape of these areas. Added to this is the fact that their flamboyant walks also attract unwanted attention. On the other hand, the females and sub-adult males easily merge into the yellow brown-coloured grasslands. Little wonder that it is the dark adult males who make it to the trophy walls.

A Mythological Presence
In Hindu mythology, blackbuck was referred to as the ‘Krishnamriga’ and was considered as the vahana of the moon god Chandrama. In the Garuda Purana, Krishnamriga is supposed to bestow prosperity in the areas where they live. But ironically, today, this animal inhabits the driest and the poorest areas of the country. The state of Andhra Pradesh, that
has such dry lands in great abundance, has declared the blackbuck as its state animal.

The Bishnois of Rajasthan are well known for their ardent environment-friendly lifestyle. Even in today’s era, when few would actually go out of their ‘hectic’ schedules to protect wildlife, the Bishnoi community continues to do its part for the conservation of these blackbucks and chinkaras. Legend has it that a Bishnoi child was suckled by a mother blackbuck, which ensured his well-being. Till date, the Bishnois are repaying that maternal debt by ensuring that the blackbucks survive the human onslaught.

Dangers and Dilemmas
Man apart, the blackbuck has to face other predators too. In Rehekuri the ones who regularly prey on the blackbuck include the wolf (Canis lupus), Indian fox (Vulpes bengalensis) and stray dog packs. While the larger antelopes manage to get away, the smaller ones normally become the victims. Fawns are generally delivered after 50 days of gestation period and are hidden in shrubs or tall grass for almost a month. It is during this period that they are prone to becoming a prey to the snooping predators. Should they survive this testing period, they become fit enough to join the group.

At Rehekuri, the dry deciduous scrub forest provides sufficient grass cover along with shrubs of khair (Acacia catechu), ber (Ziziphus mauritiana), sisoo (Dalbergia latifolia), neem (Azadirachta indica) and babool (Acacia sp.). This has ensured that a number of these elegant animals have bred successfully and their population has steadily increased. However, being grazers who prefer open grassland habitats, we saw them in large numbers outside the sanctuary limits on grasslands and close to cultivations. Their preference for open areas and distinct dislike for thick forest cover is most likely a predator avoidance strategy as they primarily rely on early detection and scampering to avoid predation.

This fragmented blackbuck population is a relatively recent phenomenon in India. Till as late as 1900s, naturalist Richard Lydekker mentions of large herds that roamed the grassland plains of India. It was then that shikar used to be the favourite past-time of the British and the princely royals, who actually used specially trained pet cheetahs to hunt blackbucks and chinkaras. Today, if the blackbuck has to bring life to the desolate landscapes, they need to be protected – even outside the protected areas. Resolving the conflicts with farmers is important, as more and more agriculture will continue to encroach into the grasslands. But more importantly, we need to understand that grasslands are also habitats and not just wastelands. This will help protect all the large diversity of fauna that have made their home on this large but little understood Indian landscape.

Travel Tips
Facilities are basic. Book before hand. You need at least 2 days to explore this place.

Where to stay:
Acommodation: 2 suites at Rehekuri.
Booking at: Conservator of Forests, Forest Department, Wildlife wing, Wanowrie, Pune.
Ph: 020 - 26851143

Where to eat:
A few small places at Karjat. One small place about 500 meters from the gate. The staff also help in preparing basic meal. They have to be given at least 2 hours time.
When in Maharashtra, eat as the Maharashtrians do. And that’s not just a play on what you should be doing while in Rome but a fact of life that will have you coming back for more. If you have the dosas and idlis in the south and the rasogollas in the east and the tandooris in the north, what is it that Maharashtra has to offer?

For one thing, being an agrarian country most festivals and celebrations in India are deeply related to farming activities like sowing, reaping and harvesting, which in turn are based on a tri-seasonal cycle. For instance, the first spell and sweet smell of wet soil relieve the scorching summer and then the sultry monsoon is relieved by some bright sunshine, and so on. This sunshine brings with it a gamut of festivals which take off in the month of Shravan (fifth month in the Hindu calendar that usually comes around August) and continue till October-November. To add glamour to the start of the festive season, the sun and rain are still alternatively at play with nature blooming into an ornamental beauty in the form of landscapes of lush green grass, swaying trees and budding flowers. It’s that time of the year when the households gear up for family gatherings with some authentic tongue-tingling cuisine.

In Maharashtra, almost every auspicious occasion has a specific food preparation - mostly sweet - as a part of the meal. The predominant use of some ingredients like rice, wheat, coconut and jaggery in these preparations since ancient times is not only associated with various sacred beliefs but primarily based on the staple produce in this region and their high nutritional values. While rice and wheat are sources of carbohydrates, jaggery is rich in iron.

Coconut and Jaggery
The coconut tree – Cocos Nucifera - has been identified as a ‘kalpavruksha’ which means a complete tree in Sanskrit, the implication being that every part of the tree is put to use. Found mostly in tropical and sub-tropical areas, the fruit is much in demand for its fresh coconut, dry coconut, oil and milk. All other parts of the palm, including husk and leaves, are used in making a variety of furnishings like doormats, thatched roofs and decorative artifacts. The fruit also has cultural and religious significance and is a part of every Hindu ritual. Due to its purity and nutritional value, coconut water is ever-refreshing and soothing, recommended during the recovery of most ailments. A source of protein, the coconut fruit is also rich in various micro-nutrients and is considered an essential element in brain development by traditional Indian medicine.

Jaggery or ‘gul’ (in Marathi) is an unrefined form of sugar made from sugarcane, which also is a principal crop of Maharashtra. Popularly known as ‘panela’ in Mexico and South America, jaggery is a rich source of iron which helps in blood purification and for curing anemia. As compared to refined sugar, jaggery is a healthier sweetener which retains natural minerals and vitamins from sugarcane. Maharashtra, in fact, is one of the highest producers and consumers of jaggery and it is an essential part of every Maharashtrian kitchen, so much so that a typical rural Maharashtrian tradition demands offering a piece of jaggery and water to a visitor as a part of hospitality. Termed as a ‘source of complete nutrition’, the combination of jaggery and coconut therefore justifies its presence in most of Maharashtrian cuisine and sacred offerings.
Cuisine

Narali Bhat

Modak

Narali Bhat
Modak
A mouth-watering delicacy, it takes years of practice to make a perfectly-shaped sweet offering called ‘modak’. This is a sweet stuffed dumpling either steamed or fried that has its origins in west and south India. Called ‘modak’ in Marathi and Konkani, it is called ‘kudumul’ in Telgu and ‘kozhakkattai’ in Tamil. The outer covering (paari) is made of rice flour and the stuffing (saaran) with fresh coconut and jaggery. Considered as a favourite of Lord Ganesha in every Maharashtrian household, an offering of 21 modaks is made to him on the occasion of Ganesh Chaturthi (the first day of the ten-day long Ganesh Festival which falls in August or September) before relishing them with some pure desi ghee. The number of distinct folds on the modak will determine the efficiency with which a modak has been made.

Narali Bhaat
A form of coconut rice, ‘narali bhaat’ is a sweet preparation made in Maharashtra on the occasion of Narali Pournima or Shravan Pournima which falls on the full moon night in the month of Shravan (around August). Narali Pournima is also an auspicious day for the fishing community (kolis) from coastal Maharashtra who get back to the sea after the period of stormy rains. As the sea calms, they celebrate the night in full pomp and splendour and resume fishing activities after offering a coconut to the sea, their source of livelihood. Rice being a staple diet on the coastal belt and with coconut found in abundance, this festival is marked by the preparation of ‘narali bhaat’ as a sweet dish in most of western Maharashtra.

Prawn Curry
In Maharashtra, coconut is not only a part of sweet preparations or garnish, but also a principle ingredient in a lot of curries / gravies. Used in various forms like coconut paste or coconut milk, it is the base ingredient in the Maharashtrian prawn curry. Coconut itself being a source of oil, the use of oil in any coconut based gravies can be kept to minimum. Prawns, also known as shrimp or colloquially called kolumbi is a seafood found in abundance on the west coast of Maharashtra. It thus, seems obvious to combine it with the healthy coconut, forms nutritive servings like Kolumbi che kalvan or kolumbi rassa.
Recipe

Narali Bhat
(Sweet Coconut Rice)

Ingredients:
- Rice 2 cups
- Fresh coconut (medium size) ½
- Jaggery (grated) 3 cups
- Cloves 5-6 pods
- Cardamom 5-6
- Raisins ¼ cup
- Pure ghee ½ cup
- Hot water 4 cups

Method:
Wash and keep the rice for 1 hour. Heat 2 teaspoon ghee in a thick bottom vessel, add cloves and rice and sauté for a few minutes. Add 4 cups of hot water, cover and cook till rice is done. To avoid overcooking first cook on medium flame till the rice is ¾ cooked (water almost absorbed) and then cover and cook on a low flame till almost done. Spread the cooked rice in a platter or tray so that the grains remain separate. Cook the grated jaggery and coconut together in another thick bottom vessel till jaggery melts. Add the rice to the mixture and mix well. Add cardamom powder, raisins, remaining ghee and mix lightly. Cover and steam for 10-15 minutes on a low flame. Put a thick pan under the vessel to avoid the rice from sticking to the bottom. Serve hot.

Recipe

Prawn Curry
(Kolumbi Rassa)

Ingredients:
- Prawns ½ kg
- Onion (medium size) ½ finely chopped
- Tamarind pulp ¼ cup
- Turmeric
- Oil 1 tablespoon
- Chilli powder to taste
- Salt to taste
- Water

For paste:
- Fresh grated coconut 1½ cups
- Onion (medium sized) ½ no
- Garlic 6-7 pods
- Coriander seeds 1 tablespoon

Method
Shell, devein and wash the prawns. Apply salt and turmeric and keep aside. Grind all the ingredients to a paste. Heat oil in a vessel. Sauté finely chopped onion till brown. Add prawns and sauté till half cooked. Add the paste, chilli powder, tamarind pulp and salt (if required). Adjust the consistency with warm water to form a thin curry and let it simmer till the prawns are cooked. Serve hot with steamed rice.
Finding Saint and Serenity

The Gajanan Maharaj Sansthan, Shegaon

Tejas Modak | Photographs © Tejas Modak, The Gajanan Maharaj Sansthan, Shegaon

Shegaon, the home of Shree Sant Gajanan Maharaj’s resting place, is not just another place of worship. The immense efforts undertaken by the Gajanan Maharaj Sansthan in the form of developing a rich landscape called the Anandsagar now draws tourists too, says Tejas Modak.

Gajanan Maharaj

Heritage is defined as the history, traditions and qualities that a country or society has had for many years and which are considered an important part of its character. Architecture, art, music, etc are all expressive of these traditions and thus symbolic of the heritage of a particular place. We are proud of our diversity and undoubtedly India’s greatest lure is the rich legacy bequeathed to us by our forefathers. As much as it is our duty to ensure that this invaluable treasure is preserved...
and protected to be passed on to future generations, it is imperative that we add to this heritage. A culture flourishes not merely by preserving the old but by forging something new at every stage of its progression.

In north-eastern Maharashtra, 45 kms from the city of Akola lies Shegaon – an important centre of commerce in the district of Buldhana, but more prominently, the home of Shree Sant Gajanan Maharaj. Gajanan Maharaj was first spotted in Shegaon as a young man of extraordinary qualities on February 23, 1878. He attained ‘samadhi’ on September 8, 1910 leaving behind a rich legacy that attracts millions to Shegaon yearly. The Gajanan Maharaj Sansthan, besides being in charge of the temple and all the services in and around it, is the initiator of numerous welfare projects. The projects are not limited to the religious or spiritual domain but span the sectors of social welfare and upliftment, education and medical aid.

**Empowerment Initiatives**

One such project, the Sant Shree Gajanan Maharaj Engineering College, was established on May 31, 1983 and has come into focus for its exemplary journey. With an extensive library, cutting-edge equipment and an extremely dedicated and qualified staff, it is a much sought after institution for students aspiring towards an education in electronics, computers, electrical and mechanical engineering. It has been lauded and officially recognised nationally. The Sansthan has also established an English medium school for children from the town and surrounding villages to be able to communicate and compete on a global platform.

The Nivasi Matimanda Vidyalaya for mentally challenged children has become a beacon of hope for their families. Along with their education, the Sansthan works towards developing awareness and societal acceptance towards these children. The Warkari Shik-
shan Sanstha was created with the objective of preserving and enriching the ‘warkari’ culture of Maharashtra. With the traditional warkari knowledge of pravachan (discourse) and keertan (hymns), the Sansthan also initiates the students into various cottage industry trades to be able to build a sustainable source of income while contributing to a cultural and spiritual cause.

The Apanga Punarvasan Kendra or Rehabilitation Centre for the Handicapped has been felicitated by the government for its outstanding work. In special camps organised by the Sansthan, innumerable patients have been benefitted by wheelchairs, crutches and calipers donated to them. Several amputee patients have become self-reliant again thanks to the Jaipur Foot provided by the Sansthan. The ambulance and the mobile hospital facility reach out to more than 30,000 patients in a single year. Annually, underprivileged people from around 50 neighbouring villages are given free medical aid worth lakhs of rupees. The numbers are mind-boggling! The sheer logistics required for so many projects to run like clockwork would require superhuman discipline and foresight. Drawing inspiration from its patron saint, the Sansthan has ample reserves of both. Pre-empting the ever-growing droves of devotees homing in for blessings at the temple each year, the Sansthan built Bhakta Nivas – a massive lodging facility that makes clean lodging and dining available to temple visitors from all strata of society at very affordable rates. And it’s on a first-come-first-served basis. You could be a minister’s favourite nephew or a second-generation celebrity but you will be allotted space only after the people ahead in line have been allotted theirs. No reservations here!

Similar Bhakta Nivas complexes have been built by the Sansthan at other places of worship in Maharashtra viz. Pandharpur, Alandi, Trimbakeshwar and Omkareshwar.

Its other projects include supply of potable water and fodder for cattle to drought affected areas, prompt financial aid to areas affected by natural disasters, provision of funds to welfare organisations, hosting of immunisation camps as well as hosting of workshops for promoting the rich literature of the saints of Maharashtra through lectures and discourses on various subjects.

Natural Progression

The Sansthan’s recent, most popular and most ambitious project however is ‘Anandsagar’ – a landscaped garden spread over an area of 350 acres with lawns, temples, meditation halls, an amusement park and even a lake with an island. The park was made public in 2005 and work is still underway on several features, including the proposed replica of the famous Vivekananda Kendra at Kanyakumari. The park has an average daily footfall going into thousands but the brilliance of its layout and design ensures that the sanctity

Anandsagar, apart from being a place of beauty was conceived of as a place that would embody and imbibe values of secular harmony, national integration and spiritual upliftment.
of the place is well preserved in spite of the crowds it draws.

And to think it all started with a view to resolve the problem of water scarcity in the area! The harsh summers and dry climate of the Vidarbha region had brought about an acute shortage of water and there was much deliberation on what could be done about it.

On the outskirts of Shegaon was a lake which in British times served as the Boat Club of one Dr (Mrs) Lobo. It was suggested that this lake be filled up with water pumped from the river Mana which is 9 kms away. The replenished lake would ensure that Shegaon’s ground water level rose and met the requirement of the entire town. It would be a tedious and costly affair but it had to be done and accordingly the Sansthan, in 1997, was entrusted with the land for the project - 350 acres of land around the 55 acre water reservoir.

In two years the plan was readied and the land was cleared of its thorny vegetation and leveled. Labourers and volunteer workers toiled under the harsh Vidarbha sun and the Sansthan states that the first phase of the massive project which was estimated to take more than ten years was completed in three! Incredibly, the people working on the site did so with a feeling of gratitude towards Sant...
Landscaped gardens around the reservoir
Gajanan Maharaj and flatly refused the remuneration offered by the Sansthan. Sinewy hands tanned to a shiny umber started giving shape to a place that would surpass all expectations. The Sansthan’s managing committee too pulled off a balancing act par excellence and was able to repay the sanctioned bank loan - which went into several crores - within six months of the park’s unveiling.

This would have been understandable if the entrance fee had been, say, Rs 300 per head that experts had felt was justified for a park the size and splendour of Anandsagar. But it was quite incredible considering the entrance fee was finally fixed at a paltry Rs 25 per head instead. The simple reason behind charging so little was that a lofty figure would keep away the very visitor for whom the park was designed. Anandsagar, apart from being a place of beauty was conceived of as a place that would embody and imbibe values of secular harmony, national integration and spiritual upliftment. It was thus imperative that the park be accessible to as many people as possible. The fact that the Sansthan still manages to maintain and ably look after a park of this magnitude is no mean feat.

People familiar with the efficiency and discipline of the Sansthan are not surprised. This is but another addition to its feather-crowded cap. During important occasions and festivals, the temple is visited by incalculable thousands and yet the whole place is devoid of chaos.

An Experience to Cherish

For people reaching Shegaon at odd times or in the wee hours of the mornings, six buses ply between the temple, the bus terminus and the railway station. The Sansthan’s buses also ply between Bhakta Nivas and Anandsagar. The service – a 15 minutes’ drive - is made available free of cost. You alight in the parking area and the first impression that hits you is that of space. There’s lots and lots of it. The throng proceeds towards the ticket window. Clutching the entry ticket, you walk through the magnificent entrance archway and an alluring vista opens out before you. It’s a perfect blend of natural beauty and architectural splendour. You stare in astonishment because the sun beating down on your back keeps reminding you of how difficult the summers here are and it makes the view in Anandsagar seem even more mirage-like.

You walk down the steps towards the semicircular courtyard with a colonnade bordering it that has beautiful sculptures of saints from all over India. In the centre of the courtyard is the smiling paternal statue of Sant Gajanan Maharaj. If it is evening, water cascades down the centre of the stairway, with little lights illuminating its silvery dance and a fountain bathes the serene white sculpture of the saint. Anandsagar is a culmination of a lot of things. As laudable as the thought behind its design is, for me the most noteworthy aspect about the park is that its religious moorings are not overbearing. Which means that even a non-believer or a person not inclined towards religion can come here and experience the tranquility of the place without feel-
ing like an outsider. In a way it propagates spirituality without preaching about it. It is a place designed with ‘people’ in mind – as an indiscriminate whole – and not just followers of the saint.

And the indiscrimination is extended not just in terms of social strata but also in terms of age and health. To the young and able, Anandsagar is an ocean that they can traverse ceaselessly to their heart’s content. To the credit of the Sansthan, this also holds true for the old and infirm. Wheelchairs are promptly made available so that the feisty octogenarian accompanying you can enjoy the tranquil offerings of the place as surely and equally as you can! Babies too needn’t have to cling to their mommies all day long. Prams are at hand for the youngest members of the family. These are simple things that are nonetheless never thought about in a lot of places. Here, the idiom ‘God is in the details’ comes vividly to life.

Off the broad path leading to the sublimely beautiful Shiv temple is the refreshment area. Here too you experience the systematic and efficient work pattern that is the hallmark of the Sansthan. And here too you wonder how the Sansthan can offer such scrumptious refreshments at such subsidized rates. Another thing that strikes you is the cleanliness. It makes such a contrast to the littered surroundings of the food stalls or chowpatis we are used to, that you almost tend to forget you have stepped into the shade of the canopies for a bite. The Sansthan’s employees and volunteer workers are always at hand with a rag or a broom to wipe away or dispose of any stray crumbs, tissues and the like. But the visitors too are on their best behaviour - you notice everybody making sure that used paper plates, cups and tissues go only into the waste baskets. The same people in another setting probably wouldn’t think twice about flinging a plastic wrapper out of a bus or dropping an empty carton on the roadside. Perhaps there is a lesson to be learnt here and an example to be followed.

The mini-railway is one of the most popular rides. It’s a pretty little train that looks straight out of a fairy tale. Chugging out from the station, it meanders through Anandsagar giving its passengers kaleidoscopic glimpses of the park – the lotus pond, amphitheatre, beautiful Ganesh, Shiv and Navagraha temples - all of it ensconced in a refreshing lush green. As many as 1,00,000 trees were planted at the park’s inception and have been maintained immaculately. The fact that not a single sapling was allowed to perish is indicative of the effort put in by the team.

**Towards a better future**

Approximately 120 of the 350 acres have been developed and there is so much more to look forward to. Work on new features carries on continuously, undisturbed and in turn without obstructing the flock of visitors homing in everyday. Meanwhile, thousands of people avail of the temple prasad daily. The Sansthan celebrated the 100th year of Sant Shree Gajanan Maharaj’s samadhi in 2010 and the visitors to Shegaon were a human tsunami that washed over the temple to be cleansed and rejuvenated by the blessings of the saint. The Sansthan had made necessary provisions and hardly broke into a sweat.

Today Anandsagar is a magnet that draws thousands daily. What it also manages to do is set an example of what can be achieved with discipline and coordinated action. Often there is a tendency to look westward for instances of superior planning, skilled execution and efficient management. To be able to see a project function with such precision in our own country is a welcome shot in the arm and a mark of excellence to aspire towards. Anandsagar is a work of art that would hopefully spawn other places of beauty. Perhaps it could set off a chain reaction that would inspire an entire generation to ensure that ‘heritage’ isn’t something associated only with the past.

The Gajanan Maharaj Sansthan, besides being in charge of the temple and all the services in and around it, is the initiator of numerable welfare projects. The projects are not limited to the religious or spiritual domain but span the sectors of social welfare and upliftment, education and medical aid.

Shiv Mandir in Anandsagar
If you have always wondered about life forms in the deep oceans, here’s your chance to come close to a wide variety of aquatic creatures off the Tarkarli coast in Konkan where snorkeling allows you to experience a different world altogether, says Harish G. Thakkar

Dive into Bliss
Snorkeling
Harish G. Thakkar | Photographs © MTDC
Reaching There

By Air: Goa is the nearest airport.


Excursions:

Take a walk around the village of Tarkarli.

Sail out to the island-fortress, Sindhudurg.

Distance from Mumbai: 493 Km
There is a sense of serenity early in the morning as you walk towards the waiting boat. The soft sand feels soothing on bare feet. The first touch of cold water as you wade towards the boat in the knee-deep water is refreshing. As you head out to the open sea, you gaze at the distant horizon where the blue sky meets the Arabian Sea noticeable a few shades deeper. The ride is fast but smooth as the sea is relatively calm. The life vest makes you feel snug and protected. About a kilometer from the shore, the boat comes to a halt. It starts swaying gently to the rhythm of the waves. You are eager to take your maiden plunge to experience this amazing world under the water.

The snorkeling mask comes on, the tube is in place. With a thumbs-up from the instructor, you slowly slip into the inviting water. The

Tarkarli reminded me of a poem that I had read while in school:

Standing at the foot boys
Gazing at the sky
How can you get up boys
If you never try?
So what are you waiting for?
Come, slip into the water and feast on fish in a different way altogether.
first few minutes are truly mesmerizing. The sun has just risen in the eastern sky and its rays pierce the water at an oblique angle. As soon as the rays enter the water, it is as if they come alive and start dancing to the tune of the ripples. The light gets refracted and reflected in a thousand different ways creating delicate patterns which are ever changing. The sea bed, the corals, the shoals of darting fish - all wear this pattern proudly.

The multi-coloured fish, the corals, the slowly shifting seaweed, the rays of the morning sun all blend together to create their own little world, completely cut off from the rest of the world. You forget about the important business meeting awaiting you, about the movie you saw yesterday, or the book you were just reading. You forget about all worldly matters because to you, they just don’t exist any more. Friends, welcome to the world of snorkeling!

There is more good news. To experience snorkeling, you don’t have to travel abroad. It is available right here in Maharashtra at Tarkarli in Sindhudurg district in Konkan region. Tarkarli beach is located at the confluence of the river Karli and the Arabian Sea, just about 7 to 8 kilometers from Malvan. Yes, it is the same Malvan famous for its mouth-watering ‘Malwani’ cuisine. The drive from Mumbai is all along the scenic routes of Konkan. As you drive through the winding roads lined with red earth set amidst the lush green habitat, you are sure to enjoy the journey as much as the destination. You can also take the Konkan Railway. It is truly an enchanting experience to chug along through
The first few minutes are truly mesmerizing. The sun has just risen in the eastern sky and its rays pierce the water at an oblique angle. As soon as the rays enter the water, it is as if they come alive and start dancing to the tune of the ripples.

The author is a snorkeling enthusiast.
the virgin forests, valleys and rivers, crossing some of the longest and highest bridges spanning the enormous gorges en route.

You are greeted by the blue waters beneath and the blue sky above once you reach Tarkarli. Visibility can be up to 20 feet of depth in sea under ideal weather conditions. Not so crowded and away from urban hustle and bustle, Tarkarli is well-suited for snorkeling activity. One has to travel a small distance by motorboat to the snorkeling site which is located about a kilometer or so from the beach in the vicinity of Fort Sindhudurg. This sea fort was built by the great emperor Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj to keep an eye over the coastal region of Konkan.

Snorkeling requires very little training and the equipment known as snorkeling gear is quite simple. Swimmers will feel more comfortable and confident, but it is not essential to be able to swim as you are aided by the life vest. No oxygen cylinders, no buoyancy control devices, no air bends - just a simple rubber mask and a tube. The mask helps you breathe underwater with the help of the tube. Hold the tube between your teeth and make sure that the other end is sticking out of water at all times. And yes, most importantly, don’t forget to breathe through the mouth. The technique is quite simple and it takes only a few minutes to understand and practice it. Professionaly trained instructors are available at the snorkeling site who demonstrate the technique and also provide the snorkeling equipment, all at a reasonable price.

The ideal time for snorkeling is early morning after sunrise. The sea waters are calm. The sun rays entering the water enhance visibility. During morning hours the fish are quite active after a night’s rest. With the colourful fish and corals and rocks in sea water, it feels as though one has entered Alibaba’s cave. The colourful fish keep darting here and there without fear and while some move in groups, others prefer solitude. It’s wonderful to be at the centre of all this activity, watching it with astonishment and with your eyes wide open.

As you settle down, you get into the zone where you become a part of this wonder-filled underwater world. There is pin-drop silence and the only sound you can hear is the metronome of your breathing. As you float on your stomach, you effortlessly transcend into a meditative state as you take in and become one with God’s beautiful creation all around you. Other sea creatures like starfish, sea urchins, etc can be seen meditating on the sea bed. Be careful not to disturb these hermits. It is rare to come across octopus, jellyfish or sea snakes, but if you spot any, steer clear of them. As is with any adventure sport, safety is of paramount importance. One has to follow the rules and regulations as laid down by the instructors. The foremost priority is not to harm or upset the delicate eco-system.

Snorkeling is a very popular underwater activity and people travel thousands of miles to snorkel at places like Mauritius, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Thailand and many other island locations where there are coral reefs. The Great Barrier Reef in Australia is well-known and attracts people from all over the world. In India it can be done at Lakshadweep, Andaman and Tarkarli.
Crossword (Coastal Special) - Yazad Dotivala

Across
2 Town close to 4 across and 26 Across (11)
4 Fishing village and beach around 170 kms south of Mumbai (8)
7 Konkan city whose name means “The abode of Lord Parshurama” (7)
9 Popular beach along the Konkan coast (11)
14 Beach near 5 Down (4)
15 Raigad city home to the Nawab Palace (5)
16 Beach close to 15 Across (6)
19 ____ Jayanti is celebrated at 26 Across (10)
25 Coastline which extends from Raigad to Mangalore (6)
26 Major pilgrimage centre and tourist destination in the Raigad district (13)
28 Mumbai beach close to EsselWorld (5)
29 Spicy Konkani delicacy (4,5)
30 Village 170 kms from Ratnagiri known for its Mahashivratri fair (10)

Down
1 An important ingredient in Konkani cuisine (7)
3 Maharashtra beach renowned for its white sands (8,6)
5 Ratnagiri village where the Turtle Festival is held annually (5)
6 Temple town in Ratnagiri district which is also home to a clean beach (7)
8 Trees you are likely to see on a beach (4)
10 Island off 11 Down (8)
11 One of the best preserved forts in Maharashtra, on the Malvan shore (10)
12 ____ Ganesh: Temple at 9 Across (9)
13 River which flows to the Arabian sea from 26 Across (7)
17 Beach from where one can see 11 Down (8)
18 Fort at 15 Across (7)
20 Temple in the Malvan area (9)
21 Mumbai beach close to Malad (6)
22 Beach town close to Alibaug (6)
23 Fort in the Ratnagiri district (6)
24 Group of islands to the west of Salsette island off Mumbai (5)
27 Maharashtrian community which worships the Goddess Ekaveera (4)

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