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It is my pleasure and privilege to be the guest editor of the first issue of this year for ‘Maharashtra Unlimited’. Over the course of my career, I consider myself lucky to have had the opportunity of travelling across the length and breadth of the state. Given that Maharashtra is spread over 3 lakh square kilometres and is home to more than 11 crore people, this is no easy task. Despite my many years of travelling across Maharashtra, I am still amazed to discover new heritage sites and natural wonders. We are lucky to be in a state that has it all - beaches, mountains, caves, shrines forests and exciting cities too.

This issue of Maharashtra Unlimited promises to introduce new heritage sites even to veteran travellers, as well as highlight Maharashtra’s innovations in the fields of heritage, agriculture and leisure. Thanks to the fertile Nashik valley, we are now the wine capital of India, setting a new trend for Indian agriculture as well as creating a beautiful destination for those in search of a relaxing getaway.

A journey on the Deccan Odyssey luxury train is the perfect blend between old world charm and tradition where our guests are treated in line with the Indian philosophy of “Atithi Deva Bhava” or “treat your guests akin to God” and provided with the best of modern technology. Each day of the train journey allows our travellers to awaken to a new wonder - from the incredibly energetic city of Mumbai one day to the marvels of the UNESCO World Heritage sites of Ajanta and Ellora the next day and the natural magnificence of the forests and tigers at Tadoba thereafter. It is no exaggeration to say that every day on the Deccan Odyssey creates new unforgettable experiences.

The beautifully carved temple at Hottal is another example of a site that deserves more public attention. Maharashtra has had a long and illustrious history, even before the reign of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj as is showcased by the caves at Pandavleni in Nashik dating back almost 2000 years. This issue also features the capital of the great king Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj himself with an article about Raigad. Through this issue, I would like to bring our beautiful but almost forgotten art of Chitrakathi or puppet making to the readers’ attention. No visit to Maharashtra is complete without experiencing the mouth-watering variety of cuisines available within the state, with Saoji cuisine enjoying the limelight in this issue.

Finally, I would like to invite travellers in search of the spectacular from all across India and beyond to kickstart their exploration of the ‘Great State’ through Maharashtra Unlimited’. For my fellow Maharashtrians, I encourage you to think beyond the ordinary and the routine, to go out there and experience the many splendours of Maharashtra that are waiting for you just beyond your doorstep. After all, even the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step!

Devendra Fadnavis,
Chief Minister, Maharashtra State
2015 – The year of tourism revolution for Maharashtra

This is the first issue of Maharashtra Unlimited in 2015. As we look back at the journey of the last year, it has been quite eventful and happening. We are embracing the New Year with warmth and energy. Maharashtra Tourism has come a long way and Maharashtra Unlimited has already become one of the best tourism magazines.

The overwhelming response from readers, intellects and tourism industry stakeholders has been very encouraging. They react with awe as they find the content so unique that they learn new things about Maharashtra with every issue.

We are committed to improving the quality and overall look and feel of the magazine from readers’ suggestions. In this digital age, it is a big achievement not only to run a print magazine but also earn popularity and fan following.

The year of 2015 begins with a lot of commitments from the team of Maharashtra Tourism. We strive to become the leading state in domestic tourism and we will continue with our innovative and aggressive approach. We are planning international promotions to introduce the best of infrastructure facilities in the state and offer “ease of business” in the process of approvals.

This year is going to be one of the most vibrant years for Maharashtra Tourism with the Kumbh-Mela in Nashik. It is a big challenge and at the same time, an opportunity to give impetus to tourism in Maharashtra.

We look forward to the continued support from all you readers and industry stakeholders to help us improve our Maharashtra Unlimited and become a part of the tourism revolution in Maharashtra.

Valsal Nair-Singh
Secretary, MTDC
Rustic to Riches - Maharashtra Unlimited

Maharashtra is one of the biggest states of India, geographically. But it is time to re-write that Maharashtra is also one of the biggest states in terms of the diversity and multiculturalism. For every shade of emotional inclination, there is something on offer for tourists in this State.

When the devotees of all religions flock to Maharashtra in search of Nirvana, the sport enthusiasts land here for an adrenaline rush, peace lovers love to wander in the wild or on beaches and intellects get immersed in the history and vigour of Maharashtra. A tourist with whatever amount of budget is guaranteed complete satisfaction.

The tourist can board our luxury train of Deccan Odyssey which has been reinvented and re-launched recently. This issue provides glimpses of the train for those who dream of it and also for those who want to indulge in its luxury. For shorter trips, one can rest in the lap of European style vineyards of Nashik, sipping exotic international quality domestic wine without burning their pockets on international travel.

Speaking about Nashik, this issue also takes you on a descriptive and pictorial tour of Pandavleni. The pre-summer bright mornings and ecstatic evenings await you at the beaches of Murud and Harnai, away from the urban hustle. Raigad is one the star attractions of Maharashtra and takes you back to the days of wars and valour of the Maratha era.

The hills of Toranmal and the temples of Hottal are the destinations which you can proudly claim of discovering amongst your tourist groups as they are yet quite unexplored. The travel circuit of Saswad and adventure of NEF reintroduces Maharashtra to tourists.

If you have ever heard that Maharashtrian cuisine is spicy, you will find the need to invent a spicier word to replace it if you have not yet tasted Saoji food. There are extensive and elaborative recipes covered in this issue which will arouse your taste-buds.

Wish you all, Happy Reading!

Paraag Jain Nainuttia,  
Managing Director, MTDC
MTDC wins ‘Tourism PSE of the Year’

The Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation has been awarded the first and only ‘Tourism PSE of the Year’ award at a quarterly review of India’s Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs). The MTDC was recognised as the best performing tourism PSE in India and its campaign “Maha Hai Maharashtra” was also feted for being the Best Tourism Brand Media Campaign, as a part of its larger ‘Maharashtra Unlimited’ tourism brand. Sunil Kungeri, manager, marketing, accepted the award on behalf of the MTDC.

Maharashtra is the top ranked state in India in receiving foreign tourists, receiving 41,56,343 foreign tourists and 8,27,00,556 domestic tourists in 2013. Valsa R. Nair Singh, Managing Director, MTDC, said, “Maharashtra has various attractions including ancient caves, globally-known forts of different eras, ancient shrines, beaches and hill stations, bird sanctuaries, leisure sports, adventure sports and museums. MTDC has Nilambari open double decker bus, which is similar to London’s Big Bus – primarily used by tourists for sightseeing and exploring the city.” It is no surprise then, that tourists are flocking to Maharashtra for their holidays.

Says Sanjay Dhekane, Senior Manager, Publicity & PR, MTDC, “This is a result of planned, focused, and aggressive marketing for two years. We are proud of being a trendsetter in the tourism industry through various innovative promotional campaigns and marketing strategies. The award is an appreciation of our hard work. We are in constant effort to facilitate tourists in all possible ways so they explore the beauty of Maharashtra and get enriched by the experience.”
The Forgotten History of Pandavleni

Nashik Caves

Text and Photographs © Manjiri Bhalerao

The author is Assistant Professor of Indology, Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth, Pune and can be reached at manjiri24@gmail.com
The Trirashmi Buddhist caves at Nashik are believed to be trendsetters in some respect in the history of rock-cut architecture of India and present a fascinating insight into the social, political and economic conditions in India during the period when the land was under the rule of various kings and there existed a strong influence of Buddhism, states Manjiri Bhalerao.
Nashik, located in the district of the same name, is an ancient town on the banks of river Godavari. Being a famous pilgrim place for Hindus, Jains and Buddhists, this city is visited by devotees throughout the year also due to its proximity to Trimbakeshwar, one of the 12 jyotirlingas. Incidentally, Trimbakeshwar is also where the river Godavari is believed to have originated from. At Nashik, the Buddhist caves make for one of the most important groups of monuments for the period circa 1st century BCE to circa 6th century CE and attest to the significant place Nashik has held from ancient times.

The location of the Buddhist caves in this region near the highway going to North India also indicates the importance of the site chosen for the caves, locally known as the ‘Pandavleni’. But the real name of the hill into which they were carved is ‘Trirashmi’, as can be seen from the inscriptions in the caves. The caves are located 8 kilometers to the west of Nashik, now a modern and bustling city. Not so conspicuous earlier, the caves are now easily discernible because of the memorial constructed in the memory of India’s pioneer in filmmaking, late Dadasaheb Phalke, a museum of the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Maharashtra State and a modern stupa nearby. As such, the caves now attract a larger number of tourists. The remains of the ancient rock-cut tanks are in the premise of a dargah near the base of the hill.

The Caves

The Pandavleni comprises of a group of 24 Buddhist caves preserving 27 inscriptions. The caves have been numbered by the Archaeological Survey of India from west to east and bear witness to the tussle between the Satavahana and the Western Kshatrapa rulers over the acquisition of this area during the 1st century CE. A detailed record of this power struggle has been found in the form of inscriptions in these caves, which are also a testimony to the patronage received from Nashik, located in the district of the same name, is an ancient town on the banks of river Godavari. Being a famous pilgrim place for Hindus, Jains and Buddhists, this city is visited by devotees throughout the year also due to its proximity to Trimbakeshwar, one of the 12 jyotirlingas. Incidentally, Trimbakeshwar is also where the river Godavari is believed to have originated from. At Nashik, the Buddhist caves make for one of the most important groups of monuments for the period circa 1st century BCE to circa 6th century CE and attest to the significant place Nashik has held from ancient times.

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the Satavahanas and the Western Kshatra-
apas along with wealthy Indian, Persian and
Greek traders. As such, the inscriptions have
helped researchers understand the political,
socio-economic and religious conditions that
existed in ancient India.

The caves can be accessed by climbing the
steps up the hill. It takes about 10 to 12 min-
utes to reach the entrance of the group of
caves where a ticket issuing window is locat-
ed in front of Cave No. 10. The earliest cave
(No. 19) at the site was created with dona-
tions from Krishna, a Satavahana ruler in the
1st century BCE. Then onwards there was an
almost continuous flow of donations for the
excavation of caves at this site.

The most impressive of the lot is No. 18, a
chaityagriha i.e. a prayer hall with a stupa,
the only one of its kind in this group. The pil-
lars inside the prayer hall are unique as they
have inscriptions written vertically on them
in the Brahmi script using the Prakrit lan-
guage. They record the names of the donor,
Bhatapalika, and her family members along
with the titles they held. This cave is also
unique for its stone frontage adorned with
beautifully carved decorative designs and an
image of the guardian Yaksha (a supernatu-
ral being) holding a lotus in his hands.

Over the years though, water seepage into
the caves has been a problem, especially dur-
ing the monsoon. This must have posed a
problem then too as is evident from the un-
finished caves in the Trirashmi group. In fact
some of such caves were therefore converted
into water reservoirs. Cave No. 1 is the best example of such practical resourcefulness. It has an impressive frontage with some decoration on the exterior although the interior presents a different picture altogether. Even though there is no water-logging now, marks on the wall suggest that water accumulated in this cave.

The next cave in the row is No. 2. Even though this was carved as a vihara (residential quarter) in 1st - 2nd century CE it was later converted into a shrine with images of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas in around 5th – 6th century CE. The most interesting of all the caves though is No. 3, the exterior of which was decorated in detail. There are six huge dwarves shown carrying beam ends, suggesting that they are bearing the load of the cave on their shoulders. The door frame of the hall is carved in such a way that one would remember the gateway of the stupa at Sanchi. In fact, the rear wall of the hall has a sculpture of the stupa. The other walls of the hall
have rooms which the monks must have used as their dwellings. Inscriptions state that this cave was labeled as the ‘Devi Lena’ (Queen’s Cave). The donors mentioned here include such royal personalities as Satavahana Queen Gautami Balashri, her son Gautami-putra Satakarni, and his son Vasishthiputra Pulumavi.

Among the rest of the caves, only those numbered 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 17, 20, 23 and 24 have similar inscriptions recording the names and occupations of the donors. Among these, the caves numbered 10 and 17 are worth a study for their fine carvings and the inscriptions on their veranda walls. All these point towards the establishment of the rule of the Western Kshatrapas who were from Scythia in Persia by origin. The Kshatrapas ruled over different parts of the country for a long time and Nahapana was the most powerful ruler of this family. Ushavadata, his son-in-law wrote long inscriptions in this cave along with his wife Dakshamitra. The pillars of the veranda are unique too for the images of sphinxes, indicating a foreign connection.

Cave No. 17, though unfinished, is significant for its unique plan with a combination of the prayer hall and the residential cells; the decoration of the pillars with griffin (a legendary creature); and a record of the donor who was a Yavana (from Ionian Island), a Greek called Indragnidatta. The donor of Cave No. 24 was also a Shaka and a writer by profession. Due to these foreigners, many of the caves at Nasik have non-Indian, especially European, motifs that are rarely found in other forms of Indian art, as for example sphinx, griffin, centaur, owl, etc.

The fact that many of the caves underwent changes is evident from Cave No. 20 which records multiple donations in its inscriptions. Scholars state that the once residential cave was later converted into a shrine and a vihara with a huge image of Gautam Buddha and the Bodhisattvas. The Bodhisattva images in this cave and in Cave No. 23 are very important to trace the development of the iconography of Buddhist deities. One of the caves also has an image of the Mahaparinirvana of the Buddha. The Buddhist goddess Tara is also carved in Cave No. 23. Some of the other caves, in particular 2, 15, 16, 20 and 23, are also important to enable historians and researchers understand the transitions in the images of the various Buddhist deities.

The Significance

The presence of these caves are a testimony to the prosperous rule of the Satavahanas and the Western Kshatrapas as also of the vibrant trading activities in this region in the early centuries of the Common Era. The wealthy gave munificent donations for the creation of these caves. The existence of different ethnic groups in the society of that period is also reflected in the creation of caves with unique plans and motifs. The inscriptions testify a change in the religious ideology of Buddhism leading to the next phase called as Mahayana. These inscriptions are also very important to
understand the political history of the Satavahanas and the Western Kshatrapas. In short, some of the most important caves in the entire group of the Western Indian caves were carved here and in fact many of the caves at this site have been proved as trendsetters in the history of rock-cut architecture of India.

The Caves at Present

Some caves like No. 10 and No. 11 underwent some changes in around 11th – 12th century CE. As the caves were deserted long before this period, images of the Tirthankaras and other Jaina deities were carved on the front wall and in the interior of these caves. Similarly, after some time when the Jaina devotees also left the site, carvings were made of Hanuman, Ganesha and Shivalinga. People thus forgot about the association of these caves with the Buddhists and started calling them as 'Pandavleni' under the mistaken impression that the human sculptures were those of the Pandavas. It is a belief that has been strongly adhered to for a long time.
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The Gateway of India illumination project was undertaken in collaboration with MTDC.
Wouldn’t you like to take a short break from your chaotic urban life and go to a serene place with breathtaking vistas of the sea and its coastline? Wouldn’t you love to dig into typical Konkani cuisine with its fish preparations made from fresh catches of the day? Wouldn’t you want to sink your feet into soft sand and stare at nothing but palm trees? All this turns into reality at the twin tourist destinations of Harnai and Murud.
There is nothing more pleasing to the eye than the sight of a wide expanse of the ocean, and nothing more soothing to the ears than the gentle lap of the waves arriving and receding from the shore. Add to this a landscape with swaying palm trees, forts in the far background and villages dotted with small houses and you get something akin to a beautiful painting. Now if you want this painting to come alive, head towards the twin villages of Harnai and Murud in the Dapoli taluka of Ratnagiri district. A favourite destination with tourists all year round, even though it can become hot and humid during the peak of summer, these places have not only been blessed with natural attractions but also occupy a significant place in the history of Maharashtra.
Historic Harnai

Located 225 kilometers from Mumbai with the nearest railway station at Khed on the Konkan line and the closest airport at Mumbai, Harnai is an ancient port on the west coast of India. Though the village is very small, a visit to the sea fort Suvarnadurg makes for an amazing experience. One can also travel from here to a village called Anjarle by crossing the Paaj Creek to visit the temple of Kadyavarcha Ganapati. The forts of Kanakdurg and Goa are situated on the shore of the Arabian Sea at Harnai.

Suvarnadurg is a shore fort and is surrounded by the sea on all sides. It was conquered and refurbished by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in 1660 and was then used as a base for the Maratha navy ship-building facility. It was also used by the chief of the Maratha Navy, Kanhojee Angrey, who spent his childhood in this fort. When Angrey was appointed the governor of the region by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, he set up a powerful fleet of warships to protect the western coast of Konkan from British, French, Dutch and Portuguese attacks. The fort of Suvarnadurg is therefore a landmark in Konkan.

The fort of Kanakdurg is a sub-fort of Suvarnadurg and was constructed by Shahu Maharaj in 1710. You can reach the top of the fort by climbing the steps and it is worth the effort for the wonderful view you get of the fishermen’s settlement situated on Fategad. On one of the highest points on the fort is an old lighthouse that provides a 360-degree view of the sea complete with the sight of tiny fishing boats bobbing on it. Earlier this lighthouse was used by fishermen and sailors as a navigation guide towards Harnai Port. The fort of Goa lies on the way to the harbour and is conspicuous by its huge black-stoned wall.
Mesmerising Murud

Murud, with Durga Devi as its local deity, is located just 14 kilometers from Dapoli, the taluka place. This village too has a historical background apart of course from being on the map of pilgrims for its beautifully designed temple dedicated to Durga Devi. The temple has intricately carved eight wooden pillars and decorative slabs. A six-layered ‘deepmaala’ stands tall in front of the temple. A smaller temple of Svayambhuva Devi is located in the courtyard of this main temple. A big bell hangs outside the main hall, this being a souvenir which Maratha warrior Chimaji Appa brought here to celebrate his victory over Vasai. Vasudev Joshi Murudkar was then the ‘subhedar’ of Vasai during the reign of Bajirao Peshwa I and is believed to have been instrumental in adorning the temple with this bell.

Murud is a tiny village with thick groves of trees on its coastline. A unique feature of this village is that it has offered two well-known personalities in the service of the nation – social reformer Annasaheb alias Dhondo Kesghav Karve and Sanskrit laureate Pandurang Vasudev Kane. They both were honoured with the supreme civil award Bharat Ratna. The official residence of Annasaheb Karve is no longer in existence but a bust in his memory has been erected in the square near the temple. The school in which both of these personalities finished their studies has completed its centenary and is a matter of pride for Murud.
Exciting Excursions
The pristine beach of Anjarle is a huge attraction for tourists. There is also a small but beautiful temple of Lord Ganesh on the beach, the deity being locally known as Kadyavarcha Ganapati. Anjarle can be reached from Harnai by crossing a bridge on the river Jog. It offers a magnificent view of the villages Harnai and Paaj and also the fort of Kanakdurg. Kelshi is yet another place worth a visit because of its captivating location, surrounded as it is with hills on three sides and the ocean on the fourth. It is believed that the village has the protection of none other than Goddess Mahalakshmi. A temple dedicated to the goddess is therefore the most important place in the village.
How to Reach

Distance from Mumbai: 225 kms

Both Harnai and Murud are easily accessible by road. State Transport (ST) buses as well as private shared jeeps and rickshaws run between Dapoli and Murud. You can hire an autorickshaw or drive down. Rented jeeps and cars are also available. From Dapoli take the road leading to Harnai and drive right up to the ST Stand. Then turn left to reach the harbour of Harnai. The places between Dapoli and Harnai include Gimhavane, Asud Pul, Saldure and Palande. There are several lodging and boarding facilities in Dapoli and even at Harnai and Murud.
As a traditional art form of the Konkan region, Chitrakathi is quite unique and unlike any other because it engages the audience with nothing but mythological fables narrated with the visual help of pictures drawn on paper. This form of art was a speciality of the Thakar community and practised with vigour and passion when it had royal patronage. Unfortunately, its decline into oblivion has been quick and would have been totally lost had it not been for the Gangavanes who continue to showcase it and have also built a museum to keep it alive.
The Sindhudurg district of Maharashtra’s Konkan region has been gifted with a number of natural wonders as well as age-old traditional folk arts and culture passed from one generation to another. A number of artists, technicians, journalists, actors, writers, sportspersons and politicians can trace their roots to this region even though they may have moved to other cities and achieved national and international fame. Almost every village in Sindhudurg can claim to have its own traditional artistic traditions and group of artists. For instance, the art of Dashavratar - the traditional dance and drama performances during important festivals originated in this area of Maharashtra. Similarly, the art of Chitrakathi originated in the village of Pinguli, and sadly is fast disappearing from public life.

What is Chitrakathi?

Chitrakathi is the art of storytelling with the help of pictures painted on cardboard pieces and cut to proper size. These tales are mostly based on the Puranás and popular epics such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata. The pictures are pasted on the top of a wooden strip and these are held by the artist and displayed in front while he narrates the story from behind. As the story progresses, different pictures come forth. Unfortunately, this wonderful folk art which once held both adults and children spellbound is no longer in vogue. The only family that has continued to practice this art are the Gangavanes of Pinguli village in Kudal taluka, located 520 kilometers from Mumbai.

Despite facing enormous difficulties, Parshuram Gangavane has nurtured this art with whatever resources he has been able to muster together and has in fact built a museum at Pinguli called Thakar Adivasi Kala Angan. Earlier the art had the patronage of the ruling dynasties. That is no longer the case. It is now up to Parshuram and his sons to keep it alive. The Gangavanes belong to the Thakar tribal community from Raigad district. This community resided in the lap of the Sahyadri mountain range in Thane and Raigad districts and it is said that their ancestors migrated from Raigad to the Sindhudurg region in search of food and employment.

At that time they received support from the rulers of the princely state of Sawantwadi. Over the years, they fine-tuned their skills in skinning goats and then painting pictures to make the best possible puppets. Their artistry was showcased across village festivals in Sindhudurg, and the community gradually came to occupy a niche position. Their shows were known as “Thakarancha Gondhal” in the local dialect. Taking into account the dedication of this community towards the art, Bapu Maharaj, then a prominent personality, provided them with paper to draw pictures, thus giving birth to the art of Chitrakathi.
**Coming into Prominence**

Earlier the pictures were drawn on the leaves of trees but then the artists started using handmade paper cut into shapes of 12x18 inches. Chitrakathi slowly but surely attracted many and those who could present it came to be known as the Bahulekars, also because they used puppetry alongside. The Kelabai Mandir in Kudal taluka was one place where the Bahulekars would perform regularly, sometimes from 10 pm to 6 am. The tanpura, a musical instrument, was always worshipped before the start of any programme and the artists would then perform for long hours, their meals taken care of by the villagers. Such was the prevailing symbiotic system that farmers would donate a part of their produce and every house in the village would give a kilogram of rice each to the artists.

In fact, so popular did Chitrakathi become that the artists would be booked six months in advance and some of the villages which came to be on the map of the touring groups included Sukalwad, Malewad, Talavane, Guladiye and Nerur. Among these, a performance at the Vetal Mandir of Salgaon village on the occasion of Tulasi Vivah (the wedding of Tulsi) was a must. The artists would travel from Kudal to Karwar carrying boxes made out of bamboo which held their puppets and pictures. On reaching a village, they would strike a temporary settlement outside it. Having done this, the chief of the group would go distribute fish to every house in the village and invite people with the phrase “Bahulekar ilo” meaning that the artists have arrived and implying that the villagers should attend their performance. The regular attire of the artists would comprise a jacket and turban.

**The Decline Begins**

After support from the royal families ended, the art form was orphaned in a sense, with
The Thakar Community
Ransing, Mhaske, Ganganvane, Singnath and Bahulekar are the most common family names in the Thakar community. Though they originally migrated from Thane and Raigad districts, the connection has long since been severed and the community is now spread mostly across Sindhudurg district. Of special importance to the Thakars are their marriages. These are solemnised in the presence of the ‘panch’ and not a Brahmin priest. Wine made out of ‘mahua’ flowers is distributed to all. The ‘potaraja’ blesses the new couple after a ceremony called ‘radhanrutya’. Such occasions may also have performances of Chitrakathi and puppetry along with the singing of traditional songs.

How to Reach
Distance from Mumbai: 520 kms
Contact:
Thakar Adivasi Kala Angan,
At Post Pinguli (Gudhipur), MKG Road, NH-17, Kudal Taluka, Sindhudurg 416 528.
Parshuram Gangavane:
Tel.: 362-222393, 09404919161, 09987653909.

no source of patronage. For the sake of survival the artists started performing as ‘nandi bail’ or ‘potaraja’ and were literally reduced to begging to be able to survive and carry on their art. A ‘potaraja’ would carry with him a broom made out of peacock feathers and was therefore often called ‘Hirvadev’, a green god. Though invited by many and respected, it was clear that the art was now teetering on the edge and there was no further scope for the artists to save it. It therefore indeed is surprising that Parshuram Gangavane stood strong in spite of all the odds and almost dedicated his whole life to preserving the skills of Chitrakathi.

The Pinguli Museum
Parshuram Gangavane’s museum is in that sense an example of how passion and perseverance can surmount many a challenge. The museum not only provides an insight into the art of Chitrakathi but also has on display other forms of tribal art and the various instruments that the tribal folk used at that time. Those who wish to know more about Chitrakathi or even learn it can attend a short workshop of two or three days. And for the Gangavanes there is nothing more special and heartwarming than to conduct such workshops for college students. The family also takes part in cultural programmes at Pune and Mumbai to once again get Chitrakathi into the limelight. Chitrakathi and puppet shows are also performed on request at private functions such as birthday parties.
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Zindagi ke saath bhi, Zindagi ke baad bhi.
There is no other fort that can compare with Raigad in Maharashtra, not only because of its impressive fortification and for being the capital of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj but also for the fact that the steep climb to reach it or even a ride on the ropeway is an experience that you will never forget in your lifetime, says P. K. Ghanekar.
Raigad
A fort fit for a King

P. K. Ghanekar | Photographs © Suhas Asnikar

The author is environmentalist, historian, writer, nature lover and an avid trekker.
Maharashtra is truly a region of forts, thanks in no small measure to the untiring efforts of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj – the brave and mighty ruler who was also known as a ‘fort architect’ - who had a penchant for building fortresses atop lofty hills. At that time, such was the geopolitical history of Maharashtra that to build and retain forts as a means to ward off attacks from enemies was a basic need of this rugged terrain. Over the centuries, as multiple factions struggled for control over this territory, they built, repaired and strengthened forts. The European powers such as the Portuguese, Dutch and British built some forts. The credit for constructing forts like Rajgad, Pratapgad, Kulaba, Padmadurg, Khanderi, Vijaydurg, Sindhudurg etc goes to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. Of these, the majestic mountain fort of Raigad is very special and even peculiar. It also occupies an important position in Maratha history because it was the capital of Chhatrapati Shivaji’s ‘Hindavi Swarajya’.

The Emergence of Raigad

Though the early history of Raigad is obscure, its enormous size, strength and strategic position must have made it an important stronghold from the very early times. The earliest references about Raigad are found from 14th century onwards. There is a mention of ‘Rairi’, which was ruled by the local Palegar rulers. After passing through several hands, the Maratha ruler Shivaji captured Rairi from Chandrarao More, a ruler of Javali in 1656. Though it was a superb military site, it was then without much fortification.

It was a visit to this impregnable fort by Shivaji that changed the scenario. He ordered the construction of several additional buildings and water reservoirs while strengthening the fortifications. The golden period in its history was from 1674 to 1680 when it became the headquarters of this foresighted ruler. The actual shifting of the capital from Rajgad to Raigad occurred from 1670-72. In 1674 Shivaji was crowned at Raigad amidst pomp and grandeur. In 1680, Shivaji died and with him was extinguished the glory of Raigad. For locals, Raigad has become a place of pilgrimage. It occupies tremendous importance in Maharashtra and is aptly called ‘Shivteerth Raigad’.
**Going to Raigad**

The best route to Raigad is from Mahad which is hardly 25 kilometers by road. Mahad is on the Mumbai –Goa highway and an all-weather road branches off towards Raigad from here. It leads to Konzar, from where the steep climb starts. This road continues to Pachad, the base village of Raigad. A small ‘gadhi’ or ground fort encloses the ruins of the palace of Jijabai, Shivaji’s mother, who was a major influence and inspiration in the ruler’s life. Jijabai breathed her last at Pachad after the coronation of Shivaji. Her ‘samadhi’ or memorial was erected at the place of cremation. A further climb takes us either to the base camp of Raigad ropeway or to the Pachad Pass from where begins a climb of more than 1,700 steps.

A picturesque place called ‘Waghbeel’ or ‘Nachan Tepachi Guha’ is hardly a five-minute climb on a footpath. This natural cave has three openings with two facing Pachad and the other towards Raigadwadi. It is a huge natural cave which is believed to have been occupied by people from the Stone Age. After visiting Waghbeel from Pachad Khind you will have two options. One is that you can start climbing the 1,700 steps. On the way up you will see Khubladha Burud (bastion), Mahadevacha Mal or Mashid Morcha and this will take you to the main entrance of the fort, the Mahadarwaja.

The second option is to take an unpaved road that will take you to the Nane Darwaja, which is the lower and smaller gate. You can then proceed further on a footpath which leads to Andhari, an ancient rock-cut cave. A steep climb from here on leads to the Mahadarwaja. Raigad is also approachable by a ropeway which takes a person to the top in just four minutes. Before this journey you can watch a documentary about the fort and also see some artefacts preserved in a museum, the charges for which are included in the ropeway ticket.

**Exploring the Fort**

Raigad Fort is a mesmerising place, alive with memories of grander times. Climbing the steps is absolutely very safe and the view that one gets of the picturesque forested valley, tiny streams in the distance, is something you will cherish forever. Raigad is a lonely hill, separated from the crest line of the Sahyadri range. This hill fort is historically of immense interest and politically of great importance. The Mahadarwaja is two-thirds of the total height from the base and is accommodated in the high curtain wall that snakes above the gorge, defending the fort’s northwest approach. The gate is flanked by two vast bastions, both over 20 meters in height. While one is concave the other is convex in structure.

Entering through the gate does not mean you have reached the top. There is still one-third of the climb that remains. The fort is practically inaccessible on three sides and therefore needed fortification only on one side. The hill itself is a huge wedge-shaped block cut from...
noticeable. Raigad also made it possible to supervise the other small forts in its vicinity.

The historical relics worth seeing at Raigad include Ganga Sagar, Hathi Talav, Bale Killa, the Minars, royal residential palace, storehouses, the huge Nagar Peth, Wadeshwar or Jagadishwar Mandir with two inscriptions, Shivaji’s samadhi, Bhavani Tok, Hirkani Tok and Takmak Tok. The Ganga Sagar reservoir is about 108 meters x 90 meters and rock-hewn on the south and east with dressed masonry on the west and north. The water is abundant and excellent. Hatli Talav is where the elephants used to splash and wallow. Another water tank – Hanuman Taki or Chambhar Taki - is the best source of potable water. Bale Killa is a citadel measuring 270 meters east and west and about 135 meters north and south. This huge area is enclosed by lofty walls with windows on both sides that provide excellent views from the top. This was the royal residence with enough arrangements for water and excellent provisions for waste disposal. Bale Killa also accommodates the royal court or ‘darbar’. It has a ‘Meghadambari’ of bronze, replicating a throne of old times. The entrance to the Darbar Dalan is called Nagarkhana. It is a solid square structure with a pointed archway about 9 meters in

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**How to Reach**

**Distance from Mumbai: 171 kms**

**How to reach:**

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

**By Rail:** Roha railway station is 62 km from Raigad. Pune station is closest major junction, 134 km away.

**By Road:** Raigad is a scenic 150 km drive away from Pune. From Mumbai, make your way to Pachad via National Highway 66 and State Highway 60. It is also possible to drive via Lonavala.

**Excursions:**

See the dramatic contrast between Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj’s sea forts and hill forts by making your way to Murud, 2 hours away from Raigad.

Unwind on a tranquil beach in Konkan at Diveagar for a more laidback weekend.

**What to Eat:**

One can enjoy the local Kolhapuri cuisine.
height, 9 meters wide and 6 meters in depth.

There is also an open space called Holicha Mal where the statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji was installed in 1974 at the time of the 300th anniversary of his coronation. A straight wide road passes through a double row of ruined buildings, which leads to the huge Wadeshwar Mandir, also known as Jagadishwar Mandir. A solid rock-carved Nandi reposes in front of the temple’s entrance. This temple is in a walled enclosure and around it are quarters for visitors and worshippers. To the east of the temple is an octagonal plinth on which stands a memorial or ‘chhatri’ which is termed the samadhi of the ruler. This shrine is an eight-sided canopy with a dome. The path further leads to Bhavani Tok where the plain land of Raigad Fort ends. Water tanks called Kolimb Talav, Kala Haud, Bara Taki, Baman Talav and Kushavart are worth visiting.

Quite a Challenge

The Raigad Fort poses quite a challenge to rock climbers. The ascent of Bhavani Kada, Hirkani Tok and Takmak Tok are certainly not for the weak-hearted since even expert rock climbers have found the terrain particularly imposing. The circumambulation or ‘pradakshina’ from the bottom is also very strenuous. In fact Sir Richard Temple, the governor of Bombay Presidency in 1883, once said, “Of all the ascents I have ever made in India - the Himalaya included - that of Raigad is the worst. It is not only that the side is very steep, but the heat is most trying.” For the adventure-inclined, there are many popular treks from Pune to Raigad. These involve negotiating the descent through old ghats or routes along the vertical cliff of the Sahyadri range.

Plan Your Visit

You can enjoy a stay at the MTDC resort or at the Raigad Zilla Parishad rest house. There is also a lodging facility at the upper junction of the ropeway station. Functional canteens are in existence at these places. Regular ST bus service is available from Mumbai, Pune Kolhapur and Mahad. The best time to visit the fort is when the flowers are in full bloom at the end of the monsoon, showcasing the region in a bright envelope of reds, pinks, whites and yellows. The day of Chhatrapati Shivaji’s coronation, known as Shiv Rajyabhishek Din, and the death anniversary or Shiv Punyatithi are observed on the fort every year. This is when hundreds of locals and tourists visit the place to pay their respects.
Though mostly known for the many temples that abound in this region, Saswad also offers a perfect getaway to relax in the lap of an idyllic rural landscape and take in the sights and experiences of unruffled lakes and rolling fields along with the quintessential socio-cultural milieu of Maharashtra.
Explore Saswad and Beyond

P. K. Ghanekar    |    Photographs © Suhas Asnikar, Ashutosh Bapat, Manjiri Bhalerao

The author is environmentalist, historian, writer, nature lover and an avid trekker.
It is indeed fortunate that the rural landscape of a region does not undergo changes at the same rapid pace as the cities and its suburbs. Else, there would not be any places with a wide variety of differences in their natural, social and cultural environments. Saswad, for example, is one such place that offers a refreshing break from the woes of the city, the closest to it being Pune. It’s a taluka at about 33 kilometers from the bustling city and apart from being known for the location of the Purandar Fort, there are many other places in and around it that make for a good tourist destination.

Mastani Talav
The way to Saswad is over the Dive Ghat and while traversing this road, a peep into a valley to the left will offer a glimpse of a circular water reservoir, so designed for irrigation purposes. This dam structure was built by Peshwa Bajirao I. With its catchment area spread across the entire Dive Ghat range, the water body covers about 5-6 hectares and its wall is strengthened by three bastions. Near the dam wall is a temple dedicated to Lord Ganesh. It is said that Bajirao I and Mastani used to visit this scenic place from time to time. If you want to visit Mastani Talav, you will have to catch a bus from the Mahatma Gandhi Bus Stand (also known as Pul Gate) in Pune. The bus will take you to Vadaki Nala, which is about 17-18 kilometers from Pune. You will then have to trek up to Mastani Talav, which is about 3 kilometers away.

Natural Bubble Cave
At the top of Dive Ghat just by the roadside to the right is a natural cave large enough to accommodate about 100 people. It is said that when the lava of a volcanic eruption flowed into this region, the cooling semi-liquid ash trapped within it a large gas bubble. This was cut vertically to widen the road, thereby exposing the interior. It’s an exceptional geological phenomenon well worth a visit.

Saswad
This rather isolated and quiet town is known for its local produce of guavas, figs and sweet peas. It is also a favourite place for pilgrims who congregate here to pay their respects at the Sopankaka Samadhi. Saswad is also home to two more memorials - a memorial for Baji Pasalkar, who was a warrior killed in the very first battle fought by Chhatrapati Shivaji in the Khalad-Belsarchi Ladhai against the ruler Adil Shah at Saswad. The second memorial is dedicated to Balaji Vishwanath who was the founder of the Peshwa dynasty. There are also two temples here, Sangameshwar and Vateshwar dating back 250 to 300 years on the banks of the river Karha.

Purandar Fort
Purandar Fort is about 40 kms south-east of Pune and some 10 kms south-west of Saswad. It is 1398 meters above sea level. It also has a twin fort called as Vajragad next to it. The fort is famous for the battle that was
fought between the Mughals and Chhatrapati Shivaji’s army led by Murar Baji. The fort is accessible by a motorable road. There are a few historical buildings on the fort including many temples and a church. The fort was used by the British during the World War II.

**Lavathaleshwar**

On the way from Saswad to Jejuri at a distance of just 1.5 to 2 kilometers before the town is a small temple of Lavathaleshwar which is of tremendous historical and social importance. It is said that the first meeting of Chhatrapati Shivaji and Moropant Pingle, who became the prime minister of the Marathas under Shivaji’s rule, took place in this temple. It was also visited by Sant Ramdas who conducted an ‘aarati’ to worship Lord Shiva.

**Ballaleshwar**

Jejuri is well-known for its Khandoba Mandir. It is about 80 kilometers from Pune and at a distance of about 3 kilometers from here is the lesser known temple of Ballaleshwar. This is a unique place with regards to its construction. For the benefit of pilgrims of Khandoba at Jejuri, Nanasaheb Peshwa, son of Peshwa Bajirao I, constructed a dam in the wall of which were built two staircases down which water gushes on to a Shiv-Pindi. This water is stored in a tank and then flows out through a ‘gomukh’ (cow’s mouth) and makes its way to a nullah which is then used to irrigate the land. The entire construction is of black basalt and continues to remain rock solid despite being almost 300 years old.

**Loni Bhapkar**

About 95 kilometers from Pune is the marvellous Mallikarjuna Mandir of Loni Bhapkar, located about 8 kilometers from the famous temple of Lord Ganesh at Morgaon. The Mallikarjuna Mandir is on the Datta Mandir Road, adjacent to an ancient Vishnu Mandir which has now been converted into a Shiva Mandir. It has a wonderful water tank on its premises, known as Pushkarni. The temple was constructed in 13th century during the rule of the Yadav kings of Devgiri. While the temple is made out of stone, its tower has
been constructed out of bricks. Within it are beautifully designed columns and carvings on its ceilings and pillars that depict tales from the Ramayana and Mahabharata.

A fascinating aspect about the Pushkarni are the steps leading to the base of the tank and the ‘devkoshthas’ or niches to keep idols as also the projected gallery or porch-like extension. The outer wall of this gallery has scenes from the Ramayana, the Dashavatkar or the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu, and a handful of ‘kamashilpas’ or erotic figures. Also worth studying here is the beautifully carved ‘yadnya varaha’, the third incarnation of Lord Vishnu with a ‘shankh’, ‘chakra’, ‘gada’ and ‘padma’. This is a very rare sculpture and has more than 140 images of Laxmi and Vishnu carved on its back.

There is another temple at Loni Bhapkar dedicated to Bhairav, in front of which are two very high ‘deepmalas’ (lamp pillars). In front of the temple hangs a huge bell that is 51.5 centimeters in diameter and 56 centimeters in height. On the exterior of the bell can be seen inscribed the letters ‘I H S’. This bell was brought here by victorious Maratha troops.
who won the Battle of Vasai under the leadership of Chimaji Appa Peshwa in 1739.

**Bhuleshwar**
A Yadava period Shiva temple is situated on a hill at Bhuleshwar which is approximately 34 kilometres from Saswad. One can see here intricate carvings in stone. The icons of ‘surasundaris’, different deities and a huge Nandi create the spiritual ambience of the place. A unique feature of this temple is that the Ganesha icon is in the form of a lady seen on the corridor wall of the temple. In the medieval period the temple was secured by fortification and was known as Daulatmangal Fort.

**Theur**
One of the ‘ashtavinayaka’ (8 Ganeshas) temples of Maharashtra, the Chintamani Mandir of Theur is located at about forty kilometres from Saswad and is one of the larger and more famous of the eight revered shrines of Ganesha.

**Travel Facilities**
Saswad and its adjoining areas are well-connected with a road network and you can either opt to travel in a private car or on an ST bus. There are many roadside restaurants and dhabas that offer good Maharashtrian meals and typical snacks like ‘vada pav’ and ‘misal pav’. Most of the larger towns have lodging facilities too.
Embark on a mesmerizing voyage of discovery through time and cultures through the Maratha heartland equipped with state of the art amenities offering you a lavish and pampering ride. There can be no greater luxury and old world charm on wheels than the splendor that is the Deccan Odyssey!
Deccan Delight!

Explore the Splendors of Maharashtra on the Deccan Odyssey

Text and Photographs © Ranadeep Bhattacharyya & Judhajit Bagchi

The authors are film makers and photographers with a deep interest in travel, heritage and culture and can be reached at judhajit26@gmail.com

www.maharashtratourism.gov.in
All of the sights of the hill and the plain
Fly as thick as driving rain;
And ever again, in the wink of an eye,
Painted stations whistle by...

The famous lines of R.L. Stevenson’s ‘From a railway carriage’ keep echoing as you see the ever-changing landscapes of the sea-kissed Konkan shores to the breathtaking Western Ghats whispering tales of the mighty Marathas whiz past the window. Sipping tea in bed in your private cabin, you can look out to the horizons merging under the luna rosa (red moon) against the crimson dawn sky as the train chugs away for an odyssey into the majestic heartland of Maharashtra.

Welcome aboard the Deccan Odyssey, India’s very own blue train - a world of luxury, elegance and opulence on wheels.

Ever since the introduction of the first luxury train, the ‘Pioneer’ by American industrialist George Mortimer Pullman in 1864, luxury train travel has come a long way. Today, these specially designed carriages, offer its patrons an elegant train ride, evoking a strong sense of nostalgia in history and heritage.

In India, the luxury train journeys have always been the subject of much fascination and mystery. In the days of yore, Indian Royalty and the British aristocracy would often set out on hunting expeditions or on celebrations, out in the wilderness or deserts or mountains, travelling in the luxury of their private palaces on wheels.

Inspired by the erstwhile royalty and the huge success of India’s first luxury train ‘Palace on Wheels’, the Maharashtra government, through the relentless efforts of Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) in collaboration with Indian Railways, made style, sophistication and stately exuberance on wheels a reality by launching the ‘Deccan Odyssey’ on January 16, 2004. A modern
day technological marvel with the eloquence and extravagance of the past, the Deccan Odyssey, currently operated by Cox & Kings is without doubt the best way to explore and discover the soul of Maharashtra and a pinch of Goa through its week long journey called ‘Maharashtra Splendor’.

Flagging off from the vibrant city of Mumbai, the journey takes one on a ride through the hinterland of Maharashtra, the majestic Western Ghats, into the Deccan and Konkan region. The itinerary includes visits to some of the most prominent destinations of west-central India, with a trip to the unrivaled Ajanta & Ellora caves; the Tadoba tiger reserve with its dense tiger population; the holy city of Nashik also known as India’s wine capital; the historical city of Kolhapur with its many experiences and lastly to India’s most popular holiday destination - Goa before returning to Mumbai. For those with limited time, this trip with Deccan Odyssey is the best way to experience the tapestry of rich culture and the melting pot of history and modernism that Maharashtra stands for in a relatively short duration.

If ‘variety’ is what defines the off-board itinerary of Deccan Odyssey’s Maharashtra Splendor journey, the on-board experience combines royal opulence in style and décor with modern convenience, fine cuisine and superb personal service. In fact, even before you have commenced the journey, the Guest Relations Officer from Deccan Odyssey normally calls you up to provide you with the departure details and also to assist you on how to reach the train.

Once you arrive at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus and hand over your luggage to the valet, you need not worry about anything else for the next 7 days. Every little requirement of yours is taken care of by the extremely efficient staff on board. After the grand red carpet welcome on the platform, there is a traditional Maharashtrian cultural dance performance for the guests that set the mood of the entire journey just like it was done for Indian Maharajas before they embarked upon an expedition.

The trumpet heralds the beginning of the journey on this beautiful blue train. Each coach of this luxury train is named after important places in Maharashtra with a story woven into the name, which you can read about and explore at your leisure during your stay. The coach ‘Gavilgad’ is named after the fort where legend has it that Bheema slew Keechaka who was making advances towards the wife of the Pandavas, Draupadi. The coach ‘Verul’ refers to the original name of the city now known as Ellora! Maharashtra has been home to royalty for centuries. From the Satavahanas, Rashtrakutas, Yadavas, Mughals, Marathas and Peshwas. Inspired by the imperial carriages used by royalty, the cabins of Deccan Odyssey capture this magnificence for you like never before where you can almost take a walk through centuries of history.

Once aboard, you have an entire royal cabin to yourself and it comes filled with lots of designer goodies to jot down your memories from the journey. Echoing the penchant for luxury of the erstwhile Maharajas, all the guest accommodation coaches are outfitted with cozy furniture and personalized guest amenities. Travelling in these elegant cabins through the trip you realize how the decor reflects several moods to suit the views of the landscape. In addition to the four resplendent Presidential Suites that stand for the pinnacle of style and sophistication, all the deluxe cabins are spacious enough for guests to move around freely and relax.

The decoration of each coach reflects a particular era of the Deccan milieu and is replete with facilities like a personal safe, attached bathroom, air-conditioning and a personal attendant on the round the clock service of the guests. One of the most thoughtful touches is the provision of a cell phone in each cabin with the valet on speed dial. This unique and important service shows the farsightedness...
of Maharashtra into the decor of the train, Warli motifs run across the entire packaging of the Deccan Odyssey starting from exterior panels depicting important landmarks and monuments of India in Warli style to conceptual Warli designs on the toiletry and stationery on board.

Heritage and hospitality are the two important parameters that attract travellers to India and both are in abundance on this train. A smile goes a long way and every staff on board knows it by heart. Dressed in traditional Maharashtrian attire from head to toe, every staff member makes it a point to take feedback from the guests on the food, off board experiences and any special queries that one may have. In addition to having a health spa, a beauty salon, a gymnasium, two multi-cuisine restaurants (Peshwa I and Peshwa II), a bar (Mumbai Hi) with the choicest spirits from across the globe, internet connection, cable and wifi access, and a foreign exchange facility, the handpicked staff and attendants at Deccan Odyssey are available round-the-clock to take care of any problem you might have in order to help make your journey completely relaxed and trouble free. In order to ensure that the cuisine keeps pace with the train’s journey, the chef whips up the local specialties of each region that the train makes its way through, so that you experience every location with all your senses - taste buds included. There is also a continental menu at each meal for travellers to choose from. So each time you step out to discover the treasures of this mesmerizing state, you come

Traveling through the coaches, you see finer touches incorporating traditional arts and heritage in the detailing of the Deccan Odyssey. Be it in integrating the traditional patterns of Himroo into the carpets or Paithani motifs of peacocks, floral patterns and birds in teak wood panels and the deliberate calibration of the entire train with uniform dimmer lamps to evoke a palatial mood. As a conscious effort to weave the art and handicrafts of Maharashtra into the decor of the train, Warli motifs run across the entire packaging of the Deccan Odyssey starting from exterior panels depicting important landmarks and monuments of India in Warli style to conceptual Warli designs on the toiletry and stationery on board.

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back to some well-deserved pampering.

With your safety, security and food preferences taken care of, all you need to do is relax and enjoy the trip. As the extremely well travelled, 19th time visitors to India from UK, Mr. and Mrs. Dryden put it, “Luxury train travel is the easiest and most hassle free way to see the culturally diverse India because this is luxury par excellence combined with total planning. As travellers, one need not worry which important places to see, which guide to take, when to wake up and what means of travel to take to reach every destination. Everything is taken care of by the efficient Deccan Odyssey staff. All we do is relax and have a good time. It’s like seeing the best places in the best way without the pangs of planning the travel or packing and unpacking every other day, something that you can’t avoid even in first or business class air travel. This makes it an ideal relaxed vacation through India. The best thing is that you sleep in comfort overnight and you wake up to a new destination every morning. That is something unique and fascinating about this odyssey.”

Merely being on the train is an experience in itself. It is ideal for people who want to take it slow and easy on a vacation; who want to experience the romance of the travel that is somehow getting lost in the current trend of lets get to the destination as fast as possible.

**Experiences on the Deccan Odyssey**

**Maharashtra Splendor Tour:**

*Destinations Covered: Mumbai - Aurangabad - Tadoba – Ajanta - Nashik - Kolhapur - Goa - Mumbai*
A grand welcome awaits you on the platform with salutations to the Hindu God of auspicious beginnings, Lord Ganesha, followed by a Lavani Dance performance. Lavani is a combination of Maharashtrian folk song and dance, which is particularly performed to the beats of the dholki by men wearing the traditional achkan, suvar, churidar and pyjama and women dressed in their nine-yard long saris. Hop on to the special air-conditioned coach and proceed for a scenic drive along the erstwhile Silk Route through the historic cities of Daulatabad (the capital of India during the rule of Mohammed Bin Tughlaq with the famous Daulatabad Fort), Khuldabad (famous for housing the graves of Sufi Saints and the last Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb) and Aurangabad (the erstwhile Mughal Capital of the Deccan) to Ellora; while the expert guide briefs you about the local history and culture of the place. Carved into the side of a basaltic hill 30 km from the city, the UNESCO World Heritage Ellora Caves, created between the 5th and 11th century CE, are the finest specimen of cave temple architecture in India. This is definitely a unique artistic creation of epic proportions in terms of the grand scale of sculptures carved out on this volcanic hill. These caves with diverse details and minute carvings devoted to Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism, illustrate the spirit of tolerance.
that was characteristic to ancient India. Other than the multi storied Buddhist Viharas (resting place for monks) the most famous of the Buddhist caves is the Vishvakarma Cave (Cave 16). Beyond its multistoried entry is a cathedral-like stupa hall of which the ceiling has been carved to give the impression of wooden beams. At the heart of this cave is a huge statue of Buddha seated in a preaching pose.

The carving in stone is an architectural marvel that leaves you awestruck until Ellora surprises you with its greatest and unrivaled centerpiece, Kailasa (Cave 16). Excavated for over 150 years, the temple is designed to recall Mount Kailasa, the abode of Lord Shiva. It is estimated that about 400,000 tons of rocks were scooped out to construct this multi-storied monolithic temple complex that covers an area double the size of the Parthenon in Athens. Filled with sculptures of Hindu gods and goddesses, there are also sculptures of composite animals like \textit{vyala} and tigers carved on the exterior of this huge monument. Whose hand was it that worked on the beautiful frieze in which Ravana rails against his captivity while Shiva merely flexes a toe to keep him in place? Remnants of paintings on the walls tease your imagination of how this entire temple complex would have looked many centuries ago. The miniature version of this grand spectacle known as the Chhota Kailasa a few kilometers away reflects a strict sense of asceticism that Digambara Jains achieved through their exceptionally detailed art works of the Jain Tirthankaras.

After being held spellbound by the architecture and superior craftsmanship of Ellora, return to the Deccan Odyssey for a savory lunch. You can spend the afternoon at leisure either by watching movies in the comfort of your cabin, or rejuvenate yourself at the Spa Plumera as the Deccan Odyssey heads towards the land of the mighty tigers- the Tadoba Tiger Reserve.

**Day 3**

**Tadoba**: Wake up before the sun this morning as the Deccan Odyssey rolls into Chandrapur Station and the special air-conditioned coach takes you through the dark alleys of the city to Tadoba, famous for its Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve. What makes this national park special besides sprawling wildlife is the fact that this is the oldest and largest...
national park of Maharashtra, covering an area of 625 km sq with the largest density of tigers in the whole of India. The excursions and hospitality in Tadoba forest is taken care of by Tiger Trails in association with Deccan Odyssey. At the Forest Office, jeeps await you to enjoy a morning safari in the Reserve as it’s considered to be the best time to spot the wild animals in their habitat. Accompanied by an expert trailer and guide, feel the morning chill of the forest as you discover the beauty of wilderness and be surprised by the diversity of the forest species like the striped hyena, small Indian Civet, sambar, sloth bear, Nilgai, Indian leopard, Chausingha and birds like the golden-backed woodpecker, the Indian Pitta and the paradise flycatcher other than tigers to look out for. The ride is surely a photographers’ delight! Chances are that you won’t be lucky enough to spot a tiger on a particular safari but do not let that spoil your experience of riding through the forest grasslands that is seeped with history of Gond Kings who ruled over Tadoba and spot remnants of their engineering marvels. After the morning safari, relish breakfast at the Tiger Trails wildlife lodge after which you can relax in the beautiful lodge, go for a walking safari wildlife viewing or sit through a presentation of the forest with the naturalist. You can even opt to swim in the swimming pool adjacent to the lodge, nestled beside the forest. Treat your taste buds to a special tribal lunch prepared by the local Gonds themselves with the sounds of birds chirping providing the background music. In the afternoon, proceed for another safari ride in the forest looking for tigers after which you drive back to Chandrapur Station to board the Deccan Odyssey for dinner and rest for the day.

Day 4

Ajanta: Enjoy breakfast on board as the Deccan Odyssey pulls into Jalgoan station, from where the air-conditioned coach takes you to the quaint MTDC Fardapur guesthouse, 10 km away from the Ajanta Caves. Having freshened up here, the shuttle bus takes you to Ajanta Caves, the pride of Maharashtra, which is a protected monument under the Archaeological Survey of India and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Ajanta has formed an epicenter of interest for those who appreciate and are eager to know more about Indian history and art. Excitement fills you up as you start your climb up the hill to reach to the caves. If you require a carriage for the climb, just inform the Guest Relations Officer and you will soon find yourself effortlessly carried on a sedan chair. Unlike the Ellora Caves, the Ajanta Caves were lost to human civilization until Captain John Smith of the East India Company and his troop on a hunting expedition discovered them in 1819. The 30 caves of Ajanta in a row, with steps leading down from each to the narrow Waghora River in the gorge below, were created over a span of some 600 years. The caves excavated for the use of the monks during their retreat in the

Panoramic view of the lake in the Tadoba reserve forest during the morning safari

Green Bee Eaters at Tadoba

Spotting wildlife on safari

Our eyes meet with the spotted deer

Presentation on wildlife at Tadoba by an expert naturalist at Tiger Trails Lodge

Swimming pool in the backdrop of the sylvan retreats of Tadoba

The tribal motif painted dining room at the Tiger Trails lodge

Tiger Trails Lodge
rainy season, provided a perfect seclusion to inspire the artist to give shape to his imagination through painted murals on the wall. Accompanying you from one cave to another, the guide also informs that Huen Tsang, the celebrated Chinese pilgrim, who visited India in the first half of the seventh century CE, has left a graphic description of the flourishing Buddhist establishment here at that time. The paintings are intensely religious in tone and theme and depict the lives and times of Buddha and the Bodhisattvas. The paintings inside the caves at Ajanta stay true to their promise of artistic exuberance. In their range of time and treatments they provide a panorama of life in ancient India through court scenes, street scenes, cameos of domestic life as well as animal and bird sanctuaries. A source of all kinds of information on prevalent hairstyles, ornaments, textiles, musical instruments, details of architecture, customs etc., these murals have stood the test of the highest standard of mural paintings. It was from this collection of classical Indian art that a particular style was formed that traveled with Buddhism to many parts of the world. The trip to Ajanta is an eye opener. You realize that the artists at that time were well informed about fashion (there are paintings of men in matching turban and socks) and painting techniques (the use of depth in two-dimensional space) and the idea of painting a collage to tell a story. The emotions change miraculously on some paintings during different times of the day based on how light falls on them. Hav-
Ghats & temples, industries and vineyards!

As you board on the air-conditioned coach, the local tour guide gives you a brief introduction to the city. Nashik is said to be the abode of Lord Rama (the hero of the Indian Epic Ramayan) during his 14 years in exile. It is located on the banks of the river Godavari, the Ganges of the South. It is one of the four places in India where the Kumbh Mela is held making it one of the holiest Hindu cities. You can already spot a lot of holy men and sadhus assembled here for the 2015 Kumbh Mela. The pulsating energy in the narrow bazaars of the old city seems to revolve around the Panchvati-Ramkund area located along the Godavari Ghats. The heart of this old city is a congested beehive of activity with narrow streets, traditional houses (Wadas) and ancient temples throbbing with energy, piety and sales. Understand the Hindu way of life by exploring the deeper meaning beneath various rituals that are being practiced right in front of your eyes by the holy river. Visit ancient temples like the Naroshankar Temple, Kalaram Mandir, Sita Gumpha, and Panchvati, as the guide explains the significance of each. The excursion along the old city also includes a peek into the colourful weekly local market selling items that range from cow...
dung cakes used as fuel to homegrown vegetables, from spices and fruits to saris and metal cast images of gods and goddesses. The trip is an absolute delight as it allows you to interact with the local folk on a one to one level. After the tryst with this ancient city, as you head towards the outskirts to the vineyards, you realize how Nashik with pride in its ancient heritage, has all the aspirations of a modern metropolis with high-rises, supermarkets and industries crowding its arteries. It is both the wine capital and Kumbh Mela destination of India! Need we say any more about its diversity? Arriving at the Grover Zampa Vineyards located in tranquil Sanjegaon of the sylvan Sahyadri valley, you are startled by the contrasting characters of Nashik. This unique tour accompanied by an in-house wine expert will allow you to discover the indigenous wine making process, learn about wine making traditions and finish the trip with a wine tasting session conducted by the resident wine connoisseurs. The highlight of this excursion is the Barrel Room with its lovely ambience of a mood lit long oak-wooded table waiting for you to unwind with your fellow travellers over a glass of champagne! A co-traveller from UK, Mrs. Muriel Dryden confessed that back in her homeland people would still be surprised at the possibility of wine tasting in India. Right after the wine tasting, a sumptuous lunch is served on the same premises following which you can choose to indulge in some wine shopping from the sales counter. Having already discovered so much in a day, you head back to the Deccan Odyssey as the train speeds into the night to the next destination.

**Day 6**

**Kolhapur:** It’s a relaxed morning onboard that prepares you for the range of hidden treasures to be discovered in Kolhapur in the later part of the day. After a delicious brunch, the sounds from the elephant trunk shaped Tutari welcome you as the Deccan Odyssey arrives in Kolhapur, a city with a multifaceted persona and a mythical past. While in Kolhapur, drench yourself in the local flavor of the town sporting the traditional saffron turban as soon as you disembark from the train! It’s time to explore the cultural tapestry of the town as the guide on the shut-
the city is the first things that your eyes meet as you proceed to your first destination, the New Palace Museum. This octagonal Palace built in 1881 in the Indo-Saracenic style has few rooms and a grand darbar hall (king’s court) on the ground floor converted into a museum while the royal family still resides upstairs. The museum houses rare paintings featuring original works by Raja Ravi Verma and Baburao Painter and artefacts used by the royal family. Royal weapons, games, costumes, jewellery, embroidery and paraphernalia such as silver elephant saddles and a tableau depicting court life of the last
tle gives you a background of the place. This city, situated on the banks of the sacred river Panchaganga, the confluence of five rivers is a unique blend of culture, history, nature & flourishing industry. A journey through the past reveals that Kolhapur has flourished under the regimes of various rulers from the mythical past to the modern age like the Chalukyas, Yadavas and the Marathas. Taking forward the legacy of Chhatrapati Shivaji, his daughter-in-law Tarabai fought the last Mughal Aurangzeb bravely and successfully founded the Kolhapur State, which eventually merged into the Indian Union in 1949. Tarabai's majestic statue at the threshold of...
century create an aristocratic ambience. One section exclusively featuring stuffed tigers, tiger heads, sloth bear, staring wild buffalo, lion, black panther, wild boar, black buck and innumerable deer would stand testimony to the great hunter that Chhatrapati Shahuji was in his times. The next stop for the day is to Bhawani Mandap, a sombre Neo-gothic structure built as the Town Hall in 1872-76 that houses antiques found during excavations at Brahmagiri on the banks of the river Panchaganga. The copper coins, brass models found in the excavation testify the valuable contact Kolhapur had with the West as being a part of the ancient Silk Route. Of special mention here is the idol of Poseidon, the Greek Sea God, one of the only two surviving sculptures in the world, which signify Kolhapur’s commercial links with the erstwhile Roman Empire! After your dose with the city’s history, proceed for some shopping time to the local Kolhapuri Chappal (slipper/shoe) unit. Witness the craftsmanship of the shoemakers and you can even carry a pair or two of the Kolhapuri Chappals (touted as the world’s thinnest and lightest footwear) back with you as souvenirs. It’s teatime and there is entertainment along with it too. Continuing to give the guests a crash course on Maharashtra culture, Deccan Odyssey presents to you Lavanya Sandhya - a beautiful evening with a full-fledged vibrant folk songs and dance performances by theatre artists taking you on a journey of the life of the traditional rural Maharashtra and its myriad celebrations. The reign of Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaja proved to be the dawn of the modern age in Kolhapur as he was a patron of music, art, literature and especially wrestling. To witness the same, walk into one of the oldest mud wrestling pits of the city to watch students still practice wrestling with mud smeared over their bodies after paying their salutations to Hanuman - the Indian Monkey God who symbolizes of strength and power. A trip to Kolhapur cannot be complete without visiting the ancient Mahalakshmi Temple that is the heartbeat of this historic Maratha town. With its ornate carvings of divine beauties on the exterior and the delicately carved ceil...
Day 6

The temple is breathtakingly beautiful, the sheer aesthetics of which evoke awe and wonder. The temple takes its name from Mahalakshmi, the consort of Lord Vishnu who killed the demon Kolhasura, after whom the city gets its name. Lastly, witness the splendor of traditional Indian martial arts through the ‘Mardaani Khel’ performance where you expect the unexpected every time the warriors swish their sword in air and engage in breathtaking sword fights. After an eventful day, as you head to the Deccan Odyssey in the evening, you are bound to appreciate the wide range of experiences that the Deccan Odyssey team has put together for its guests in this short span, which is almost impossible for any tourist travelling alone to organize.

After dinner as the train proceeds towards Goa, you already miss the warmth of Maharashtra and want to return to its enchanting splendor as soon as possible.

Day 7

Goa: Arrive in Goa, known for its beaches, churches, and temples. Walk through the old Latin Quarters known as Fontainhas and take a tour of Old Goa, visiting the St. Augustine Church & the Basilica of Bom Jesus. Visit a spice farm for a sumptuous Goan meal followed by an exploration of the farm and a glimpse of Portuguese architecture by visiting a 200 year old Solar (palatial house) at Ribandar before you head back to the train.

Day 8

Mumbai: After a week-long exploration of Maharashtra’s exotic past and spirited present, its time now to head back to the City of India’s future- Mumbai.

Even after the sensational trip is over, the journey never ends. If the railways in India were instrumental in bringing people across the country closer, then the Deccan Odyssey is a rendezvous with the world. With guests from all across the globe and different cultures spending time together for over a week, the trip is a great opportunity to make friends and connections. The guests start the journey solo but finish it as an extended family. With luxury built into every beam, affluence sown into every coach, every journey on the Deccan Odyssey is an unforgettable encounter. This blue train speeds on and on in your mind holding you captive through its splendid memories forever!
Excursions:

1. The Deccan Odyssey Maharashtra Splendor trip originates from and ends at Mumbai—the City of Dreams, the financial capital of India and home to Bollywood. You might take a day to take a tour of this cosmopolitan city exploring amazing beaches, like Aksa Beach, Chowpatty and Marine Drive. Not just beaches, Mumbai also has some one-stop shopping destinations like Fashion Street and Colaba Causeway. Adding on, the city has amazing architectural marvels of the Victorian Era in the Fort area. Glancing at Gateway of India, Taj Hotel and Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus will prove the point. It is dotted with holy shrines like Haji Ali, Mumba Devi, Mahalakshmi and Shree Siddhivinayaka Temple. Art enthusiasts can spend their day strolling around the Kala Ghoda in South Mumbai area dotted with several art galleries, Jehangir Art Gallery being the most popular among them. For theatre lovers, NCPA in South Mumbai and the legendary Prithvi Theatre in Juhu established in 1978 is a must visit. Mumbai is literally blessed with every little thing you might need.

2. Elephanta Caves, this UNESCO World Heritage Site located on a small island near Mumbai, can be easily accessed by ferry services from Gateway of India.

3. Borivali National Park in the north of Mumbai, offers an easy escape to nature and wildlife added with the thrills of trekking over to the historic Kanheri Caves that have breathtaking Buddhist architecture.

4. Differently abled guests need not worry about whether the train is suitable for them or not. The Deccan Odyssey team know in advance for them to arrange the same kind of special treatment on the train. If you need any special assistance (like organizing a wheelchair carriage or carriage on off board trips), then do let the Deccan Odyssey team know in advance for them to arrange the same kind of special treatment one gets on this royal trip.

5. Guests requiring storage of special medication (insulin, etc.) under refrigeration can be completely assured that the valet will take care of the same. In fact, there is a Doctor on board 24x7 on the Deccan Odyssey at your service. Valet will take care of the same. In fact, there is a Doctor on board 24x7 on the Deccan Odyssey at your service. Valet will take care of the same. In fact, there is a Doctor on board 24x7 on the Deccan Odyssey at your service. In fact, there is a Doctor on board 24x7 on the Deccan Odyssey at your service. The entire train has Wi-Fi connectivity. So after boarding the train, you need not worry about whether the train is suitable for you or not. The Deccan Odyssey team know in advance for them to arrange the same kind of special treatment on the train. If you need any special assistance (like organizing a wheelchair carriage or carriage on off board trips), then do let the Deccan Odyssey team know in advance for them to arrange the same kind of special treatment one gets on this royal trip.

6. If you need any special assistance (like organizing a wheelchair or carriage on off board trips), then do let the Deccan Odyssey team know in advance for them to arrange the same kind of special treatment one gets on this royal trip.

7. On reaching Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus for boarding the train, you will be handed a card with contact numbers of the Deccan Odyssey Guest Relations Officer and General Manager along with a special Deccan Odyssey badge. Do keep them safe and always with you throughout the entire trip. The badge helps you identify as a part of the group and almost acts as your gate pass to all tourist destination. If you by any chance get separated from the group during sightseeing or require any assistance anytime, the card comes in handy. The staff is just a phone call away to attend to your needs.

8. On the day of the journey it is always advisable to reach the departure station Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (CST) at least an hour before the train is scheduled to leave so that you can hand over your luggage to the staff and enjoy the grand opening along with the cultural program organized by the Deccan Odyssey team on the platform.

9. On days when you come back to the train in the afternoon after the day's trip, make sure you take your time to sit back and regale the most stunning view of the countryside in sunset glory from the Mumbai Hi Bar, while reading a book or listening to music over coffee and tea or drinks.

10. On reaching the destinations have a grand cultural welcome planned for you. So if you plan to miss out on this. You can simply request your valet to give you a wake up call along with some bed tea and snacks so that getting up from bed doesn't seem so bad!

11. Special Tip for Tadoba: The morning safaris are quite chilly. So it is advisable to carry warm clothes along with you for the day. Also if you are interested in photography and have a DSLR camera, then do carry your long lens kit (100-400mm lenses) to be able to capture the wildlife with clarity from a distance.

12. The last destination of the Maharashtra Splendor is in Goa after which the train heads back to Mumbai. So if you plan to spend an extended vacation in Goa, then you can plan your trip in such a way that you get off board in Goa after the day trip and request Deccan Odyssey to organize your travel to your hotel in Goa.

13. The dates for the Maharashtra Splendor trip on Deccan Odyssey are released almost six months in advance. So do plan in advance to book your trip, as it might be fully booked closer to the journey dates. There is mostly one trip every month.

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Confirmed Dates of Travel for Maharashtra Splendor in 2015

The Deccan Odyssey runs from September until the end of April each year. Departure dates for Maharashtra Splendor are limited to once per month unless there is demand for more trips. The confirmed departure dates in the coming season are:

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<th>Month</th>
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Other Itineraries of Deccan Odyssey in and around Maharashtra:

1. Soul Quest
Destinations Covered: Mumbai - Shirdi - Mumbai; Duration: 2 Nights / 3 Days
Drench in divinity at Shirdi. It is the heavenly abode of Sai Baba. Visit the Samadhi temple and walk out with Vibhuti; the sacred ash that cures all illness.

2. Spiritual Sahyadri
Destinations Covered: Mumbai - Nashik - Shirdi - Mumbai; Duration: 4 Nights / 5 Days
A tour through the enchanting Sahyadri mountain ranges. Have a blissful tour to the 12th Jyotirlinga shrine, Trimbakeshwar, Dwarkamai Mosque and Lord Shani shrine.

3. Maharashtra Wild Trail
Destinations Covered: Mumbai - Ajanta Caves - Nagzira - Tadoba - Aurangabad - Mumbai; Duration: 7 Nights / 8 Days
A full week tour to Maharashtra’s spectacular Nagzira Wildlife Sanctuary, Tadoba Tiger Reserve and other wildlife reserves. Experience the historic remains of Ajanta and Ellora Caves.

4. Indian Soiree
Destinations Covered: Mumbai - Ajanta Caves - Sanchi - Sawai Madhopur - Jaipur - Agra - New Delhi; Duration: 7 Nights / 8 Days
A tour touching the horizons of North, West and Central India's best destinations. From Ajanta caves to Sanchi, Ranthambore Tiger Reserve to Agra and Pink city of Jaipur.

5. Indian Sojourn
Destinations Covered: New Delhi - Sawai Madhopur - Jaipur - Agra - Sanchi - Aurangabad - Mumbai; Duration: 7 Nights / 8 Days
An exciting blend of North, Central and Western Indian destination covering the famous golden triangle circuit - New Delhi, Agra and Jaipur to ultimately visiting the great sites of Ajanta & Ellora, both of which are home to Hindu, Buddhist and Jain sculptures and mural paintings.

What you pay for this once in a lifetime experience
Deccan Odyssey is not a mere luxury train cruise! It’s a ‘classical odyssey’ of time beyond the realms of the present, a perfect way of experiencing Indian hospitality and heritage at its very best. As Andy Brabin, a co-passenger and the Product and Travel Experience Director for Rail Bookers, the international tailor made travel holidays company puts it, ‘the service and facilities on the Deccan Odyssey are at par with the Rovos Rail and Blue Train of South Africa that are ranked as the best luxury trains in the world’. Considering the range of services offered on this luxurious journey of 8 nights and 7 days, the tariff is most reasonable in comparison to 5 star accommodations and travel expenses across multiple cities in the vast expanse of Maharashtra.

You can either book yourself into a deluxe cabin with a tariff of Rs. 35500 per person, per night approximately, or a presidential suite costing around Rs. 56500 per person per night approximately, based on double occupancy. Room charges vary for domestic and international guests and on whether you take separate rooms for your children or not. Details of tariff for the lean season as well as peak season for different type of accommodation onboard the Deccan Odyssey can be easily accessed by contacting either MTDC or Cox & Kings and visiting the official website.
Contact Details

To book your trip on the Deccan Odyssey, you can either get in touch with MTDC or the operator Cox and Kings in the following addresses:

Official Website: http://www.deccan-odyssey-india.com
Talk to the Expert: +91 9818336340

MTDC Office:
Chief Project Officer-Deccan Odyssey
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Website: http://www.maharashtratourism.gov.in/mtdc/HTML/DO/index.html

Deccan Odyssey Luxury Train Administrative Office:
Project Manager (Deccan Odyssey)
Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation Ltd.
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Bangalore Branch Office:
G-23-24, Brigade Gardens, 19-Church Street, Bangalore – 560001
E-mail: trains@coxandkings.com
Hottal in Nanded district may not be on the regular tourism map but is well-known among those who like to study the architecture and designs of temples. As Dr. Maya J. Patil (Shahapurkar), Deputy Director, Archaeology and Museums, Maharashtra, finds out, the temples here are icons in the true sense of the word for the motifs and sculptures that adorn their walls.
Religion is undeniably the greatest influence on ancient Indian art and architecture. The designs of temples, their shikharas, and the beautiful sculptures that embellish them have lead Indian art, architecture and sculpture to reach commanding heights. The temple architecture of Maharashtra developed through a merging of the best of the Nagar and Dravidian styles of temple architecture, and is called the ‘Vesar style’. These temples are also recognised as ‘Bhumija’ temples.

Hottal is a small village located at a distance of 12 kilometers from Degloor in Nanded district. Its ancient Sanskrit name is ‘Potatal’ which means hill. Since Hottal is located on the table top of the hill and that is most likely how it derived its name. The temples existing here are from the later Chalukya i.e. Kalyani Chalukyan period as is evident from some of the inscriptions. Hottal prospered during this period and according to some historians, Hottal was the second capital of the Chalukyas. The village has a cluster of three ancient temples two of which have now been restored.

**Someshwar Temple**

This is a beautiful temple situated on the eastern side of the village Hottal. There are inscriptions on the front and they reveal details about this temple. According to the inscription, the temple is of ‘Tri-Purush-Dev’, which means the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh have their adhishtana in this temple. As per Hindu mythology, Brahma is the creator, Vishnu is the preserver and Mahesh is the destroyer. It also reveals that King Vikramaditiya VI of the later Chalukyan period extended patronage and financial assistance to this temple. It comprises of a mukhamandapa, sabhamandapa, antarala and tridal gabhara.

**Main Shrine:**

The main shrine of this temple admeasures 2.74 square meters. There is a shivlinga and the walls are plain. The roof has a floral design (rosettes) and kirtimukhas have been carved on all four sides. The doorjams have four beautifully carved branches i.e. the patrashakha, stambhashakha, pushpashakha and ratnashakha. There are carved chamardharinis (fly whisk bearers) seen along with dwarapalas (door keepers). The figure of Ganesh is carved above the door on the lalatpatta (lintel). The antarala has a flat ceiling with aesthetically carved rosettes. The sabhamandapa or hall is of the guhambadaga style i.e. an enclosed hall, with four intricately carved pillars supporting the ceiling.

**Ceiling:**

The ceiling of the guhambadaga is decorated with geometrical designs like squares and lozenges. At the corners we find kirtimukhas and rosettes. In the central part, there are rosette pendants. Four decorative pillars attract everyone’s attention. The height of these pillars is 2.8 meters. At the base, these pillars are square-shaped and then patterned as rectangular shafts and octagonal pieces divided into many parts. An attractive floral design is carved on a square-shaped part of the pillar. It is followed by a disc with triangular facets. On that is a big kani. There is a padma capped by an abacus on a round kani of the pillar and it has brackets at the top.

**Second Shrine:**

This shrine of the temple is probably dedicated to lord Vishnu because Gajalaxmi is carved at the lalatbimba. Here the God-
Laxmi has two arms and is flanked by elephants. She is seen holding a mace and conch. The dwarps are vaishnavas and they are shown holding mace and conch. This shrine faces the north.

**Third Shrine:**
According to the inscriptions, this shrine is dedicated to Tripurashak. This must be Lord Brahma, the god of creation. You can also see here Goddess Saraswati with a pash, ankush and fruit in her hand, carved at lalatbimba. No other icon is found here.

**Exterior:**
The exterior of this temple is beautifully decorated. Religious and non-religious sculptures add aesthetic value to the temple. The icons of gods and goddesses are carved in recesses and the projected portions have pilasters. There are three devkoshtas (niches), each at the back of the shrines. On the exterior wall a sculpture of Lord Surya (sun) who is dwibhuj (with two hands) and is standing in a samabhang, samapad position. He is seen holding a lotus in his hand. His seven horses, Sarathi, Arun and Usha Pratyusha, are also seen. Surya has kirita (headgear) on his head along with chakrakar kundalas in his ears, greevika (necklace), haryashti, keyur on arms, kankana (bangles), mekhala on waist, yadnopavita, and nupura (anklets).

These adornments add intricacy to the icon of Surya. In addition to this, there is one more artistic sculpture of Shiva. He is chaturbhuja and holds a sarpa (snake) in his upper right hand. The other three hands are broken. Nandi, the vahana (vehicle) of Shiva is seated near his right leg. This icon is ornamented by abhushanas. All these icons have makartorana behind their heads instead of prabhavala. On the upper side, in the centre, are the kirtimukhas. An icon of Harihara is also seen here. The hands and ayudhas (attributes) are broken. We can see some part of a mace in his upper left hand and can observe Nandi (bull), the vahana of Shiva, on the right side of the icon with Garuda, the vahana of Vishnu, towards the left. The right side of the muguta is the jata muguta of Shiva whereas on the left side is the kirita of Vishnu. The right side kundalas are chakrakar which belong to Shiva and on the left side are the makar kundala that belong to Vishnu. The icon is distinctly separated from head to feet for Shiva and Vishnu. The principle behind this is to show that there are no differences between Shaiva and Vaishnav sects and god is one. In addition to this, we can see icons of Narsinha and Nataraja. This temple is dilapidated or ruined and has been taken up by the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Maharashtra State, for conservation.
Siddheshwara or Mahadeo Temple

This temple is very attractive and well-decorated. According to historian Dr. G B De-glurkar, “The inscriptions reveal that the temple of Rabbesvara was constructed by Siddhugi, a subordinate of the ruler of Vahnikula and feudatories of the Chalukyas of Kalyani during the regime of Vikramaditya VI and can be dated to 1120 CE.”. It has been erected on a small plinth with a mukhamandapa, two ardhamandapas, sabhamandapa, antarala and a garbhagriha. It faces the east.

Mukhamandapa:
The mukhamandapa has dwarfish walls and kakshasana (benches) towards both sides. Decorated dwarf pillars support the vitana (ceiling). The exterior walls have moldings and are decorated by lozenges, pilasters and female figures. There are two more ardhamandapas facing towards the north and south.

Sabhamandapa:
The sabhamandapa is open and surrounded by dwarf walls and pillars. The rangashila is in the middle of the sabhamandapa and surrounded by four decorative pillars. Nandi is located here but it seems that it was a later addition. The pillars have square bases divided into three parts which have decorative triangles. The shaft is square and plain. Above that are a few octagonal moldings divided by discs under a thick square sculpted with floral designs. The circular mold compresses a few discs. Above this is a big disc or kani that is connected by a padma molding. The capital is of the four-faced brackets.

Antarala:
The entrance of the antechamber or the antarala is artistically carved. There are stone grills on both sides of the entrance. Two beautiful stambhapatalikas are seen eagerly awaiting visitors. They are seen standing in the tribhanga pose, wearing different vastra-abhushanas. The arch is in the form of makaratorana and Shiva in the form of Nataraja is carved on the central semicircular panel of this arch. The antarala is rectangular and has pilastered niches. The dwarashakha is very attractive and Gajalaxmi is carved on the lintel.

Two elephants can be seen with upraised trunks besides Goddess Laxmi. These are very common icons of the later Chalukya times. We can see vidyadharas flying on the entablature. Small sculptures of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh are also carved here. A combination of two animals, known as vyalas, is also seen here. The door of the garbhagriha is embedded with six dwarshakhas. It is the
the sculptures of Chaurni bearers - Shaiva and Vaishnava dwarpalas - Ganga and Yamuna and chamardharinis are sculpted. Mandaraka is flanked by kirtimukhas.

**Garbhagriha:**
The garbhagriha is square. The shivalinga is placed on the floor. The interior is simple and the vitana and mukhamandapa of the garbhagriha are the same.

**Exterior:**
The exterior is nakshrakruti (star-shaped). The temple is erected on an adhishthana (plinth) which has upana, kani, padma, kumuda, etc. The mandonara has horizontal moulding and above that begins the jangha. Beautiful carvings of sursundaris are carved on the jangha. The dancing forms of Ganesha and Nataraj are a special attraction.

**Nrityaganesh:**
A beautiful icon of Nrityaganesh (dancing Ganesha) is sculpted on the jangha of this temple. Like his father Shiva, Ganesha is also a good dancer. Samarth Swami Ramdas has described the dancing gestures of Nrityaganesh in his ‘Dasabodha’. Here Ganesha is seen standing on his left leg while the right leg is slightly bent upwards. His two hands are in a dancing pose and four other hands are holding ayudhas viz. danta, parashu, sarpa and his favourite sweet - the modak. He is seen wearing a variety of ornaments. His vahana i.e. the mouse is eating a modak near his master’s left leg. This sculpture is quite neatly and proportionately carved. The peculiar features of Ganesha like trunk, ears, and belly are carved with exceptional artistry.

**Sursundaris:**
There are sculptures of sursundaris on the madowara. They have sharp features and proportionate bodies. Some are seen playing musical instruments like the mridunga, damaru, ektari, etc. One of them is a darpana who is in a tribhanga position, holding a mirror in her left hand. She is watching her beauty in the mirror and wearing vstra abhushanas. Some are devotees of god. They hold akshamalas in the right hand and beejapuraka in the left. A sculpture of a woman i.e. Putravallabha is also there. Her deep love for her child is clearly seen on her face. The child is in her left arm and a toy in her right hand. There are two more temples viz. Parvati Temple and Parameshwar Temple. The conservation work of the Parvati Temple has been taken up by the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Maharashtra State.
Avatar Meher Baba is one of the well-known saints of Maharashtra whose ashram and final resting place at Meherabad attracts the faithful from across the world. What makes the place very unique is the silence that invariably draws you closer to Baba’s thoughts and teachings. Khursheed Dinshaw visits Meherabad to learn more
Meherabad
Experiencing Spiritual Silence
Khursheed Dinshaw | Photographs © Khursheed Dinshaw

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www.maharashtratourism.gov.in
Spiritual solace is best achieved near the shrines of saints. On that count, Meherabad in Ahmednagar district ranks high as a popular place of pilgrimage for followers of Meher Baba. In fact, up to 30,000 pilgrims converge at Amartithi, the commemoration of his death on January 31, each year – an eloquent testimony to the attraction this place has among the faithful. The most sacred place associated with Avatar Meher Baba is his tomb or ‘samadhi’. The inscription over its doorway reads, “Mastery in Servitude”, this being the motto of Meher Baba’s life and work. For a long period of time Meher Baba (February 25, 1894 - January 31, 1969) stayed and worked here. In 1927 he had a cabin built that had a pit in the floor which was 6 feet long, 4 feet wide and 6 feet deep. His close disciples, known as ‘mandali’, referred to this hut as his crypt cabin.

The dome of the samadhi was constructed in 1938. On each of its four corners are symbols representing the Zoroastrian flame, Hindu temple, Christian cross and Islamic mosque. The dark stones on the outer walls were taken from the original post office building which was dismantled in 1937. Helen Dahm, a Swiss artist who lived at Meherabad, painted the murals on the inner walls, ceiling and dome. Charlie Mortan created the beautiful lifelike painting of Baba inside the samadhi. On the marble are inscribed the words: “I have come not to teach but to awaken.” These were said by Meher Baba on July 9, 1925 before his 43½ years of silence, and contain the essence of his divine mission in the world.

Biographical Sketch

Merwan Sheriar Irani was born to Zoroastrian parents in Poona (now known as Pune) on February 25, 1894. Though his father had been a ‘dervish’ or seeker of God, Merwan led a normal childhood until, during his first year of college at the age of 19, he encountered Hazrat Babajan, a centenarian Muslim saint who was one of the five ‘sadgurus’ or ‘Perfect Masters’ of the age. With a kiss on the forehead, Babajan initiated Merwan into the state of ‘God-Realisation’. He was then
at their centre; adjoining or nearby structures and sites; and a garden extending to the north. The most important outlying properties are Seclusion Hill and the approach road.

In recent years Meherabad has acquired new lands and constructed new buildings and facilities, such as the Meher Free Dispensary and the associated staff quarters.

The graves next to the samadhi are of Meher Baba’s women mandali, Baba’s and Mehera’s (his dearest disciple) parents and animals close to Baba. His room is also located near the samadhi and it was here that he would do his work in seclusion. For the convenience of pilgrims, the Meher Pilgrim Retreat was built in 2006. It can accommodate 100 men and 100 women. Its facilities include a dining hall, reading rooms, library, music room, laundry, playground for children, and bus and car parking facilities. Baba chose Meherabad because in his words, “In the future, Meherabad will be like Jerusalem. For my spiritual work, it is the best possible place. It will always be the centre of my work.”

At lower Meherabad, the walking tour of the Meher Pilgrim Centre starts with the ‘original well’. In the 1920’s Baba’s clothes were washed on large, flat stones near this well. Once during the early days of Meherabad, when Baba’s spiritual mother Gulmai had washed his feet, Baba had the water poured into the well and commented, “The water from this well will always be my ‘prasad’.”

Next to the well is the tomb of Gilori Shah. Also known as Maula Baba (meaning guide or protector), Gilori Shah was a saint who had been a cook in Queen Victoria’s kitchen in England. He chose the spot where he wanted to be buried and when his devotees asked him the reason for picking such an isolated spot, he replied, “You are like children. You know nothing! In a short time, this place will turn into a garden of pilgrimage. A great one will come here, and this land will one day belong to the people of the world. Only then will you understand why I am buried here.”

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apet which was built around it at that time. In 1925, when it didn’t rain that year, in response to the villagers’ pleas to save them from a severe drought, Baba, on November 10, ordered a fire to be lit. Baba and his mandali sat round the fire and sang devotional songs. And as in a miracle, it began to rain. Since then a fire is lit on the 12th of every month at Meherabad. Baba’s table house has a small room where he would write his books and rest. There is also an interview cabin where Baba fasted in seclusion in January 1946. The main bungalow has a large meeting hall, living quarters, a kitchen and bathing rooms and was built for the mandali.

Visiting Meherabad
Located 300 kilometers from Mumbai and 130 kilometers from Pune, the nearest railway station is at Ahmednagar, a distance of 6 kilometers. At the ashram, ‘aarti’ is conducted daily at 7 am and 7 pm followed by the singing of devotional songs. Silence needs to be maintained at the samadhi to create an absolutely quiet atmosphere so that pilgrims can take ‘darshan’ and have their personal time with Baba without being disturbed. As Baba put it, “Things that are real are given and received in silence.” The Meher Pilgrim Retreat serves meals offering local dishes like 'bharli vangi', ‘poha’, Maharashtrian-style vegetables and ‘dal’. Foreigners are served non-spicy and non-oily dishes made of vegetables and porridge for breakfast. Accommodation is available in the form of clean rooms and the charge per day is Rs 490 that includes food. Online booking can be done by sending an e-mail to pimco@mail.ambppct.org.
Dawn at Yashwant Lake
While the hill stations of the Sahyadris are well known, if one wishes to enjoy genuine beauty of nature, cool comfort of the mountains, and virgin beauty of a glittering lake, one must visit Toranmal, which is situated in the Satpuda ranges. Unforgettably fascinating during the monsoons, the innumerable lotuses blooming in the Lotus Lake gives the tourists the impression that they have entered ‘a world apart’
Nagarjun Temple
Boating in Yashwant Lake
Botanical Garden (Medicinal plants)
Toranmal is a natural tourist spot situated in the 3rd and the 4th row of the Satpudas. Located 1150 metres (3770 feet) above sea-level, it is spread over about 41 sq. km. Set between two hills, the place resembles a huge saucer. In the summer, the temperature in Toranmal is around 37 degrees and in winter it dips down to 8 degrees celsius. In the monsoons the whole town is enveloped in a thick blanket of fog. There is an ancient temple of the goddess Torna after whom the place has been named ‘Toranmal’, they say.

One has to take the Dhulia – Dondaicha – Shahada – Dhadgaon route to reach Toranmal. We enter into the Satpuda ranges after travelling a little distance north from Shahada, and we start experiencing rather different surroundings around us. On reaching the Satpayari pass we get a glimpse of the Nagarjun temple to the left of the mountain, situated at the same level of Toranmal. The carvings on this temple are very beautiful and the idol is of the Yadav period. The temple has been rock-cut in a hill, and the stream of water which keeps trickling down from the rocks makes it unique. The Nagarjun temple, located on the hill-slope, is also a very beautifully sculpted edifice from an architectural perspective.
The chief attraction at Toranmal is the Yashwant Lake which is around 27 metres deep and is spread over 1.5 km. It is named after Yashwantrao Chavan, the first chief minister of Maharashtra. As per information from the forest department the depth of this lake is 9.20 meters and the storage capacity is 3500 PCM. Tourists are bound to simply forget themselves in the tranquil, transparent and enrapturing surroundings of the lake. The veritable chirping of birds add a sweet melody add to the experience. We can see here around 233 species of birds. Different types of forest birds are found here.

Another similar lake, the Lotus Lake is to be seen on the north of Yashwant Lake. As befits its name, the lake is full of blossoming lotuses that make the spectacle memorable.

A deep valley to the north-east of Toranmal is addressed as Sita Khai (Sita's Valley). It is around 1000 feet deep and its name has mythological references. A waterfall which comes rolling down from a cliff into a valley nearby completes the picture. The tumbling waterfall in the Sita Valley brings more blossoms to the beauty of Sita Valley. The Sita Valley has echo points too and we can hear echoes calling back over three times.

Khadki point is 3 k.m. away from Toranmal resort. Due to the tar road, it is easily accessible to tourists. A bird’s eye-view of the Satpudas is visible from here. Moreover, the huts in the foot of a hill populated by tribals are an attraction to tourists. The famous Narmada river is visible from this spot.

In addition to other holy temples, there is an ancient temple of Gorakshnath situated near Yashwant Lake where an annual fair is held on every Mahashivratri. Devotees from all over Maharashtra, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh gather over here on this occasion. This fair also familiarises tourists with the various aspects of the culture of the local tribal Jeensa people.

The Machhindranath cave, 2 km away from the Gorakshnath temple is also an attraction for tourists. Even today some sectarian people find penance here. The cave of Machhindranath is a popular tourist spot at this place.

Toranmal also offers a big treat for tourists who enjoy the pleasure of trekking. The 12 k.m. path of Ranipur-Nagzari-Kothbandhani-Kalapani and Aawaswadi is an uphill trek. The upward slope of 2 k.m. from Kalapani to Toranmal is an important point for trekkers.
We also see here a Cyphan Sprinkling System which has been developed by the local farmers for their daily use.

It is a lesser known fact that strawberries are also cultivated at Toranmal and are as sweet and juicy as those from Mahabaleshwar. Strawberry cultivation is highly dependent on conducive weather and Toranmal suits it perfectly. As a result, various processing industries have also come up here.

With hills, lakes, temples, forests and delicious strawberries to nibble on, perhaps tourists should put Toranmal on the map for their next weekend break!
Yashomala Wellness

Ananda in the Sahyadris at Roha

Yashomala Wellness is promoted by Shri. Aniruddha Deshpande who was associated with LAVASA and implementing India’s first smart city in making Amanora Park Town at Pune. Yashomala wellness combines Spa/ resort, bungalow, leopard sanctuary, horticulture, nature trail making it an iconic ecological tourist destination in this part of the world. Here wellness comes from the nature as well as modern facilities.

Yashomala Farming & Tourism Pvt. Ltd. initiated by Project Proponents having an experience of delivering prestigious projects over the years, has set out on the development of an ambitious and extremely unique Indian Wellness project located in the Sahyadri Hills of Kokan region of Maharashtra. This is a first time a development has been related to Indian Wellness and the project has been coined as an ‘Eco-Plus’ project in the sense that the company has added values to the nature and society by having planted more than 50,000 trees and converted previously barren land into a Green Zone with ample water resulting in a year round supply to 28 vadis downstream. This has also helped generate local employment from all seven villages surrounding the project area. Yashomala has impounded approximately 200 Crore litres of water on the hitherto dry land.

Yashomala have teamed up with ‘Ananda in the Himalaya’, the world’s best Wellness brand, which is located in the tranquil Himalayan foothills, close to the mythological cities of Haridwar and Rishikesh, Ananda Spa is well-known for traditional Indian wellness regimes of Ayurveda, Yoga and Vedanta combined with best of International Wellness Experiences. Project is taking shape now and is expected to complete in 5 years in phases and resort to be ready in next couple of years.

The destination for the new Wellness centre is the 1600 km north-south “girdle of the earth”; the Sahyadris or the Western Ghats which are older than the Himalayan range. The area’s high mountainous forest eco-system influences the Indian monsoon weather pattern. Moderating the tropical climate of the region, it presents one of the best examples of the monsoon system on the planet. The site also has an exceptionally high level of biological diversity and endemism. It is recognized as one of the world’s eight “hottest hotspots” of biological diversity. The forests of the site include some of the best representatives of non-equatorial tropical evergreen forests anywhere and are home to at least 325 globally threatened flora, fauna, bird, amphibian, reptile and fish species. What better a place to seek harmony and peace with nature and oneself!
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The NEF Mountain Triathlon

Location: Thangaon village near Panshet dam backwaters, approximately 70 kilometres from Pune, Maharashtra, India.

Time: 05.00 AM.
The hustle for India’s first ever Mountain Triathlon is on and the Marshals (volunteers) are on their toes. It’s a big day for all. The mid-December cold has everyone shivering and its intensity has doubled up here at the race location, near the Panshet dam waters. The Marshals, with their head-torches switched on, have started their work as the darkness lifts with the shimmer of LED lights and with the anticipation of dawn.

Tri-athletes from across India are ready for the ultimate triathlon. The NEF Mountain Triathlon organized by the National Education Foundation (NEF), Pune is a race that includes 800 meters open water swimming, 30 kilometres trail cycling and 10 kilometres trail running all clubbed together, to be completed in a time slab of 6 hours. The real challenge for these athletes is to transition themselves along the triathlon course that ask them to swim in a closed water pool, run and pedal on a smooth tar road, check their swimming skills in an open water lagoon, compel them to pedal out on the off-road, dirt patch and will certainly demand that they run on rough, uneven terrain. More than 100 participants from solo and relay (a team of 3 individuals, where each individual performs one discipline) categories stood tall for the mountain adventure.

The sun rose and the participants gathered to report for the race. With the cycling helmet strapped on and socks pulled up, the enthusiasm of participants was palpable. With the necessary formalities done and instructions reiterated several times, the swimmers were ready to dive into the lagoon. The race officials and Marshals of NEF were equally impassioned to flag off the first wave of these athletes. A hefty RedBull arch welcomed everybody at the entry point of the swimming arena. The 800 meter swimming lagoon was decked with an array of buoys and float-covered ropes thanks to the major sponsors of the race. And with the countdown finally over, the race was flagged off. The partici-
pants dived into the bone-chilling water with full gusto. Over a dozen Marshals kayaked around the swimmers to ward off any possibility of drowning and other swimming obstacles. The professionals swam their way briskly across the marked water boundary, some keeping pace steadily and the rest who needed to be monitored for sure. Some swam with their hearts pumping faster than their wrist-watches and others struggled to adapt to an open water swim course. Not surprisingly, a few participants who were unable finish the swim had to ask the kayaking Marshals to drag them back on the shore. The intense pressure and anxiety that gripped the swimmers, their teammates and the organizers at this phase of the Mountain Triathlon could easily make a plot for a thriller movie!

After the swimming section which lasted for 40 odd minutes in which, the fastest swimmer emerged after just 13 minutes setting the fastest record time for the race, the relay team swimmers quickly exchanged the time bands strapped on their left ankle with their cycling partners and within a few seconds the cyclists were on the saddle pedalling out on a dirt stretch of 30 kilometres. The trail tested the physical and mental endurance of the cyclists but also blessed them with the beauty of the panoramic Sahyadri ranges. At regular intervals of this 30 kilometre cycling terrain, the Marshals were equipped with the basic first aid kits, energy and recovery drinks and above all; water! The participants later described the cycling route as a route which tested their synergy, stress and adversity management skills and sheer guts.

With the cyclists back to the area where they started pedalling and after again a quick swapping of the time-band, the runners were striding away for a 10 kilometre barren surfaced run. The race Marshals were stationed at appropriate intervals and made sure that
the runners didn’t miss the route. One thing to note here is that even when in the countryside, an efficient mobile network is a greatest source of comfort. At the same time the possibilities of accidents are endless. Thus to take absolutely zero chance with mobile network coverage, HAM radio communication plays a vital part. The race Marshals are equipped with the HAM radio sets and follow a professional protocol to communicate, to get the updates of the on-going race and to take right measures in case of any mishaps.

The race ended. Participants and winners were awarded with medals, certificates and cash prizes worth rupees 3 lakhs. The second edition of this triathlon will be held in December, 2015. This particular form of triathlon; a mountain triathlon is undoubtedly the perfect combination of excitement, exhaustion and euphoria which not only tests the endurance, but compels racers to think strategically, tries to engage adventure junkies in nature, away from civilization and fuels the spirit of adventure aficionados. The Mountain Triathlon without doubt struck a chord with adventure heroes, future youth icons, tough leaders and compassionate friends. For all participants, just being a part of the Mountain Triathlon is a satisfying experience. For those who complete the challenge, the gusto is immeasurable and the victory definitely unmatchable!

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Nagzira is in the Eastern part of Maharashtra, which borders Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh. This area (part) of the country comprises some of the last remaining pristine forests of India – other than of course the Western Ghats, North East and widely distributed and unconnected patches. Recently, Nagzira’s protection status received a strong impetus when it became the part of Navegaon – Nagzira Tiger Reserve, complimenting the excellent habitat that has supported a strong wildlife population including the charismatic tiger.
When Bagheera met Baloo

Nagzira

Text and Photographs © Anirudh Chaoji

The author is Director, Pugmarks. He is a well-known wild life expert and has been involved in environment education and awareness for a number of years in Pune and can be reached at anirudh.chaoji@gmail.com

www.maharashtratourism.gov.in
It was late afternoon when we started our trail on that November day. As it was winter, dusk would engulf the forest soon, so we started off on our evening trail a little early. Pugmarks instructor Trishant Simlai, Prakash, our local guide and I, were leading the walking group of campers in the direction of the Tatezari village, a little tribal hamlet that was still inside the Nagzira Wildlife Sanctuary limits.

Our stay in Nagzira till now had been an enjoyable one. Participants learnt to read forest signs, observed a variety of butterflies, enjoyed good bird watching sessions and also sighted interesting mammals. By now the sun was sending down its last quota of days’ light seeping through the canopy. Our group was enjoying the experience of walking on the softly lit path, called the ‘chor-marg’.

We learnt that this was the route that folk from the neighbouring villages slyly took to venture inside the forest in search of minor forest produce like tubers, medicinal plants, honey and berries, apart from the regular firewood. Normally the forest guards never ventured on this route and preferred sticking to the regular safari roads.

We had been walking for almost forty-five minutes and enjoying the sight of the forest birds. After the good rains, most of the trees were in luxuriant foliage. Though, after January, as the soil dries up, this forest starts shedding its green dressing in order to preserve water through the oncoming dry season. It is a survival strategy that helps them overcome long stretches of 40 degrees centigrade plus temperatures. Scorching heat, dried nullas, and almost a leafless forest makes life in summers, difficult for all living forms. Only the central lake has water then. The forest department, on its part, ensures the wellbeing of birds and animals by maintaining water in large concrete waterholes spread all over the forest. Life in Nagzira without this water supplement is unimaginable, but then, it will soon be June, when dark clouds will start forming overhead and heralding monsoon showers that bring life back into Nagzira.

Fortunately for us, there was a pleasant chill in the breeze on this November evening. The jungle was alive with ioras, shamas, treepies and flocks of parakeets chattering in their bird lingo. We could actually put words into many bird calls, especially the iora’s whistle that almost sounded like someone complaining – Ee-kay-reee. However, the astounding melodies of the shama were impossible to be put in words and treepies were actually noisy. This is when an assortment of calls actually left us all enthralled. A racket tailed drongo, easily among the best mimics in the bird world, was calling out on behalf of a large number of other birds. Its metallic and nasal sounds as well as more complex notes and imitations of other birds left us speechless. It was almost like an orchestra performed by a solo artist.

Just as we were appreciating the jungle symphony, a very loud almost human-like ‘umh... umh...’ sound was repeated a few times. A sloth bear call! We were thrilled, but this was almost immediately followed by the crackling alarm calls of langurs from the top of a tree, around fifty meters left of us. Asking three volunteers to keep the group of young participants together, Trishant and I decided that the human-like grunt of a bear was not so important and rushed to explore...
if the *langur* was actually looking at a big cat. Langurs, sitting on vantage points are rarely wrong in alerting the forest of the presence of a predator on a prowl – mostly a leopard. We reached the tree from which the *langur* was calling out, but we could not spot anything curious that might have alerted them. Surprisingly the *langurs* suddenly stopped calling. The forest was again reverberating with the sound of the birds. We were depressed that we had missed a good opportunity to sight a predator, when suddenly we noticed Prakash calling us animatedly. He was pointing towards the hills on the right of the path that we were earlier walking on. Both of us immediately ran towards Prakash and we were thrilled to see a sloth bear hurriedly walking up the hillside. Soon all the young campers too joined us and were able to see the hairy mammal rapidly climb the hill. We imagined that, on seeing us approaching, the bear must have taken to its heels. Central India is full of bear stories where people venturing alone into the forests have had horrifying encounters with them. Bears, looking for fallen fruit, termites and insects as food on the forest floor, can easily miss an oncoming human. Their accidental encounters with humans are not very pleasant. The immediate human panic reaction of screaming with vigorous hand movements might probably be taken by the bears as a sign of aggression. The obvious reaction from the bears would be to try and defend themselves with their best weapons... claws and teeth. Many a human have lost their lives in the process and others have had skin on their faces and heads totally peeled off.

My encounters on the other hand have always been very memorable ones and I have developed tremendous love and respect for these huge fur balls. At the same time, I have also tried to maintain a very safe distance and I am just that extra attentive in a sloth bear and elephant country, fully aware of the limitations of human senses.

However today, the bear sounds, *langur* alarm calls and then the bear running up the hill seemed very surprising. There was something missing from the jigsaw puzzle. We decided to walk to the area where the sloth bear
It must have been about the same time that it came face to face with the sloth bear, which called out in alarm. However with humans in close proximity, both must have decided that it was not the best time to settle their 'jungle differences'. After exchanging the unpleas-antries, both seemed to have moved off. The leopard continued its fast paced walk on the forest path and passed beyond the direct view of the langurs, who then stopped alarm calling. The bear on its part started to climb the hillock.

Based on the pugmarks impression, we determined from the longish digits and impression size that the pugmarks were of a female spotted big cat in her prime. She had been walk-
The charm of Nagzira lies in the forest department’s simple accommodation located on the banks of the central lake. In the absence of electric supply, basic lighting is provided by solar energy. But this has meant that there is no loud music and only the interested and motivated tourists come here. So if you are thinking of a great wildlife holiday, you should really consider Nagzira.

Birding in Nagzira holds a special magic with a number of birds flocking to the lake side by the afternoon. A number of eagles descend on the waters for a drink, while orioles, drongos and ground thrushes can be seen bathing. The calls of the hungry chicks of the resident grey headed fish eagle need to be experienced once in your life time.

Amongst the mammals, a strong herbivore population of spotted deer, sambar deer and gaur have supported a healthy predator presence. Tigers and leopards can be frequently spotted – but the main appeal of this forest lies in understanding their presence. Pug-marks on the mud roads, droppings by the roadsides, territory marking on trees and bushes – similar to that the dogs do on the tires and poles, indicate the presence of big cats. Often the alarmed calling deer, langurs and peacocks tell us that a predator is on the prowl. They keep the jungle denizens posted of the lurking danger. This calling can also lead you to a lucky sighting of an elusive big cat.

Two other very charismatic animals of Nagzira are the wild-dogs and sloth bears. Both these animals are also frequently seen in these beautiful jungles. While wild-dogs can be seen in large groups – planning meticulously to make their next kill, sloth bears are generally seen roaming the forests solitarily or females can be seen in company of their cubs. Many tourists are also greeted by the wonderful sight of sloth bears cubs hitch-hiking on their mother’s back.

The forests of Nagzira boast of a diverse vegetation. While it is the northern limit of Teak, a number of these trees that were planted in the past can still be seen. However, other trees like the Mahua, Ain, Jamun and Bombax give colour to the green glory. Needless to mention, Bamboo is most predominantly seen here. The best time to see the beautiful forest would be immediately after the park reopens after monsoon, where the greens are luxuriantly growing and are supporting the diverse life forms of Nagzira. While the summers make a large portion of this forest bare – it is this that helps in better sighting of animals.
The Department of History and Ancient Indian Culture of the Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University in Aurangabad has set up a unique museum that offers a collection of miniature paintings, sculptures, texts, coins, weaponry, pottery, textiles, etc. which put together take you on a journey of India’s rich and diverse past.
A Glimpse of Indian History

History Museum, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Aurangabad

Dr. Neelambari Jagtap  I  Photographs © Dr. Neelambari Jagtap, Sudhir Balkhande

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History often finds its way to museums so that future generations may learn about the past. In that context, the History Museum of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University is quite a treasure trove that offers a fascinating glimpse into India's glorious heritage. Located in the vicinity of the world famous cave monuments of Ajanta and Ellora, the museum epitomizes the rich archaeological tradition of this region ranging from the Palaeolithic to Satavahana eras and from early medieval to Mughal and colonial periods. It provides a spectacular glimpse of cultural and artistic aspects of India’s diversity.

The Journey

The museum was born out of the efforts of Dr. R S Gupte in 1973 who was then a professor and head of the Department of History and Ancient Indian Culture with the Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University. A collaborative effort on part of the department’s faculty and staff helped the museum building take concrete shape in 1983. The rich collection present here was further enriched by the donations of Dr. S B Deshmukh, the ex-curator of the museum. Later additions from Sir Rao Bahadur Parasnis’s fabulous collection and Sardar Bavane’s collections of paintings boosted the artistic and antiquarian value of the museum’s wide range of artefacts.

The Collection

The museum building is located in the beautiful central garden of the university. It contains two main display gallery halls of miniature paintings and sculptures and a porch that exhibits coins, arms and armour, metal pottery, small-sized sculptures and ivory curios. The second floor of the museum consists of archives, manuscripts, library and a reading-cum-seminar hall.

Miniature Paintings: The gallery of paintings contains a display of Indian miniatures of the medieval age circa 1700 CE to 1900 CE. It showcases different schools and themes of paintings from the Maratha, Mughal, Rajput and Deccan schools of miniature art with themes drawn from the Ragamalas, the Barahamasa, and mythological texts. The illustrated manuscripts are indeed a precious possession, showcasing the artistic heritage of India. Interestingly, the museum has an illustrated and unique copy of the ‘Bhagavatpuran’ in Persian and also a copy of ‘Devi Mahatmya’ in the Takari script of the Kashmir School. The gallery offers a glimpse of Indian history through the miniatures since they cover such subjects as art, culture, war
techniques, customs, nature, environment, region, religious practices, etc.

**Sculptures:** The gallery of sculptures narrates the religious and artistic history of the Marathwada region. This collection dates back to Brahmanical, Jain and Buddhist traditions and presents an exemplary expression of socio-religious movements of the medieval period. The sculptures showcase splendid cultural, artistic, and aesthetic qualities.

**Coins:** The museum has a fascinating collection of coins ranging from the Mauryan dynasty to the colonial period. Most notable among these is the collection of gold, silver
and copper coins of the Guptas, Satavahanas, Sakas, Tughlaqs, Deccan Sultanate, Mughal and Maratha periods. The museum takes pride in being able to display gold coins belonging to the Guptas, Mauryas and Devgiri dynasties.

**Archaeological Artefacts:** The archaeology section of the museum has a collection from the Bhokhardhan Satvahana site of 300 BCE to 200 BCE. This excavation was undertaken by the Department in 1973. The most precious “catch” is a beautiful ivory statuette of a female similar to a statuette found at Pompeii in Italy along with other important and precious artefacts comprising terracotta pottery, glass beads and shells. This section is of special importance as some of these artefacts are used by the museum authorities during their visits to schools to be able to explain to the students chapters from the rich history of India and in particular that of the region.

**Arms and Armour:** The most attractive section here is the one that displays an impressive array of decorative styles, including engraved patterns of coats of arms from different regions in India. This collection belongs to circa 1700 CE to 1900 CE and also has swords used by the Maratha, Mughal, Deccani, British and Dutch warriors. The samurai and ‘patiyala’ types of swords are truly a class unto themselves.

**Metal Pottery:** There is also a small section of metal pottery belonging to the 18th and 19th centuries comprising pottery made out of copper and bronze as also silver-coated, not to forget the ones made of five different types of metals known as ‘panchdhatu’. All this together provides insights into the lives of those who lived during those periods. You can also learn the technique of making pottery, thereby understanding the craftsmanship of the artists.

**Textiles:** The textile and jewellery collection offers a peek into the richness and styles of royalty as it existed back then. It consists, for example, the traditional hand-woven Paithani silk sarees. It also has silk fans that display the medieval method of cooling oneself as well as an embroidered silk map of the religious town of Benaras. The unique pieces of conventional Rajasthani costumes are also worth a study.

**Decorative Art:** This section has small decorative ivory pieces, glass bowls and objects made out of Agate (a variety of silica) objects.
Archive and Library

The archival section of the museum has a collection of around 1,000 religious manuscripts, a few of which are illustrated. A section devoted to the Modi documents of the Maratha period (1700 to 1850 CE) also has a part of the Menavli Daftar of Nana Phadnavis, the finance officer of the Peshwas. The library holds some of the most precious documented and published treasures, including a collection of rare books on art and aesthetics. The books have been catalogued and computerised and some of them are in the process of being restored. The scanning and digitization of documents has helped scholars have easy access to a wide variety of reference works. For example, the library has a copy of the oldest gazetteer from 1884.

Additional Activities

To highlight the importance of this collection, the Department of History and Ancient Indian Culture has sketched out an ambitious scheme to bring out a series of illustrated catalogues, picture portfolios, and research publications. This is also with the objective of developing the museum as a resource center to cater to the needs of academicians and researchers. Further, with a view to develop professionalism and ethics, the Department in collaboration with the AIC has launched a Post Graduate Certificate Course in Museum Studies from the year 2009-10. It has also started PG certificate and diploma courses in Modi Studies from 2011-12. In fact, the museum will most likely take the form of a unique center of its kind offering valuable information related to Indian history, archaeology, museum studies and anthropology.
Two festivals, two vivid celebrations, but united in spirit: celebrating all that is good, bright and positive in life. Both Makar Sankranti and Ratha Saptami have their origin in the movement of the sun, and they embody the promise of new beginnings backed by fresh hope.

In these chaotic times, we sure could do with every reminder that life is innately empowered to reinvent—and renew itself.

**When black is far from bad...**

According to Pandit Vasantrao Gadgil, eminent Sanskrit scholar and head of the India International Multiversity: “Sankranta’ literally means the changing of the sun’s abode from one sign of the zodiac to another. Naturally, it falls every month. But Makar Sankranti, which marks the journey of the sun from Dhanu (Sagittarius) to Makar (Capricorn) is the most special of all.” The Hindu calendar divides the year into two parts or *ayanas*. Makar Sankranti marks the end of Dakshinayana (southward movement of the sun) and advent of Uttarayan (northward journey of the sun). In Maharashtra, it is celebrated on either of the two days January 10 or 14. While the former day is celebrated mainly in Ratnagiri and Pune districts, as per the Tilak almanac brought out by Lokmanya Tilak, the festival is largely celebrated on January 14. However, sometimes when the sun enters Makar rashii only in the evening hours, it is celebrated on January 15, when the sun will rise in Capricorn. At such times the period between sunrise and sunset on Saturday is the punyakal (or auspicious hour.)
Let us take a closer look at the tradition and thought governing the successive festivals of Makar Sankranti and Ratha Saptami. While the former heralds the harvest season, the latter venerates the Sun-God, inarguably the mainstay of all life. Some things may have changed with time, but the essence of these celebrations remains timeless.
Even as it coincides with the onset of the harvest season, Makar Sankranti is enthusiastically brought in with flying kites, taking a dip in a holy river, a bath with sesame oil, propitiating ancestors with a sesame oil lamp, exchange of til gul (sesame and jaggery twin symbols of prosperity), etc.

It is a widely held faith that whatever you give away on this day will be returned to you manifold by the Sun God, in this life as well as the next.

This is one day of the year when married women will favour black as the colour signifies the end of sadness and negativity and the onset of fresh optimism, explains Pandit Gadgil.

In cities, ladies celebrate the values of wedded life with haldi kunku, but rural parts of Maharashtra take this ceremony further with the elaborate exchange of sugad (earthen pots containing sticks of sugarcane, turmeric, cloth, rice and cotton.)

Makar Sankranti is celebrated by different age groups for an assortment of reasons. And the star of the occasion—without a doubt—is sesame. While the day begins with bathing in sesame-sprinkled water, sweets like til gul and gulaachi poli are enjoyed through the day. Not only is sesame the finest offering of the season, but its health benefits in the cool months are manifold.

The Suneche Tilavan or the first welcome to the daughter-in-law is much looked forward to by several families with new brides in their midst.

60-year-old Suchitra Kulkarni explains thus: “In the olden days, girls used to be married off at an early age. That’s how several festivities started to keep them engaged, and make them feel special. However, even today the tradition of dressing up one’s newly wedded daughter-in-law in a black saree and halwache dagine (ornaments made out of halwa or sugar-coated sesame) is great fun.”

New babies are fussed over too—with the fun filled “bornahan”. The customary ‘bath’ with all the goodies that children usually covet—including the ber fruit, pieces of sugarcane, puffed rice, candy and chocolates is symbolic of the baby’s first spring.

Even as women and children flock to the little one’s home, he or she is adorned in ornaments—and is anointed with toffees and sweets—more often than not with surprising results. Some children take the intrusion well, others burst into tears, while still others busy themselves with eating. Eitherways, the photo ops are unlimited and memorable!

He who rides the perfect chariot with seven horses

Ratha aka Bhaskar Saptami that falls in the Hindu month of Magha is an important day.
On this day, devotees rise early, having fasted on the previous day i.e. Sashti. This day marks the seventh day following the Sun’s northerly movement (Uttarayan) starting from the zodiac sign of Capricorn (Makara).

A prayer before sunrise is followed by seeking the blessings of elders. Rakta Chandan (or red sandalwood) is used to draw images of the Sun God Surya on his chariot, drawn by his seven splendid horses with Aruna the charioteer, towards the northern hemisphere, in a north-easterly direction. The symbolism of the seven horses are a tribute to the seven colours of the rainbow, an endless source of beauty and delight to everyone. The chariot has 12 wheels, which represents the 12 signs of the Zodiac (360 degrees) and constituting a full year.

Pandit Gadgil recounts the legend thus: “Long years ago, the kingdom of Kambhoj was ruled by the King Yashovarma, a good king, who had no heir to succeed him. He propitiated the gods, and was duly blessed with a son. But to everyone’s dismay the child was perpetually sick. A wise man advised the king that the son’s troubles were a result of his past life’s sins, wherein he harassed the poor and the weak. However, if the boy were to perform the Ratha Saptami pooja to rid himself of his past sins, all would be well. The son performed the pooja, and enjoyed good health thereon.”

Ratha Saptami also marks the gradual increase in temperature across India and heralds the arrival of spring. It is a huge celebration in the southern parts of the country as well, and sun temples come alive with the festivities. It is also traditional to take a headbath using Erukku leaves given its therapeutic properties.

Kheer is cooked on cow dung cakes, and offered to the sun god. Offerings include green bananas, uncooked rice, flowers, jaggery, turmeric and betel nuts. “The sun is the bedrock of all life on earth, and this day is a thanksgiving to Surya’s bounties,” says Pandit Gadgil.

For her part, Preethi Jagannathan explains that a simple pooja is held to thank the Sun god every year with customary fervour. “The beauty of this day is that not only is it steeped in our mythology, but also reiterates several scientific truths regarding the sun,” she says.
Special Sugar Jewellery for the Occasion

The Naik household is in a festive mood. For Sheetal, it is her first Makar Sankranti with her in-laws and husband Rahul. Understandably she is excited because not only will she celebrate the festival with her new family, she will also be wearing halva jewellery gifted by her mother-in-law exclusively for this occasion.

As per the Maharashtrian tradition, Makar Sankranti is the festival of reviving and cherishing warm relations with everyone. As a symbol of warmth and love, newlyweds and babies up to a year are bedecked with sugar jewellery. Some parents bedeck their kids till they are five years old. You know the festival is approaching when shops attractively display the garlands of halva jewellery.

In earlier days, when joint families were the norm, this occasion was a way of telling the family members to let go of their personal differences and live in harmony with one another. It is traditionally believed that eating til gul reduces personal fights and pettiness. Symbolically it is the sweetness of sugar and the holding capacity of til that can be incorporated in one’s life that helps to spread sweetness and love and bind people together.

Also since the weather is relatively cold, the til gul combination is said to be good for health as it provides energy and keeps the body warm. In earlier days on Makar Sankranti which is essentially a harvest festival, farm produce would be brought home and the new bride wore a black saree. While some say the reason while black was worn was to protect against nazar or the evil eye, others claim that since the festival came during the winter cold, wearing black helped the bride to stay warm as black not only absorbs but also retains heat. The white sugar jewellery stood out on her sari while she welcomed the produce home.

How to Make it

The technique for creating this sugar or halva jewellery involves making elaborate ornaments from intricately woven, tiny balls of sugar. This jewellery making is actually a tradition that is passed down from generation to generation, a custom that is carried forward in various households all over the state. In olden days it was as common as passing down one’s cooking recipes to one’s daughters. Today however younger generations prefer to buy the readily available jewellery rather than make it themselves as it is a time consuming process.

It takes 4-5 days to make a single set as it is entirely handmade. Before the advent of cooking gas, halva jewellery was made on a smoky kerosene stove. Glue was made using thick sugar syrup. Also formerly the ladies of the house would make sugar jewellery at home for their personal consumption and that jewellery was edible. With non edible sets available in the market, edible halva jewellery is done separately on dry fruits and til.

For making it, in a flat-bottomed pan, the dry fruit/coconut piece is lightly roasted on an extremely low flame and set aside. In another dish, sugar syrup is made and while it is hot, one-fourth teaspoon is poured in the flat-bottomed pan and the dry fruit/coconut piece is added. The dry fruit/coconut piece is rolled in the syrup by hand. The process continues by pouring one-fourth teaspoons at regular intervals, until the dry fruit/coconut piece becomes coated with the syrup. Once thorn-like projections appear it can
be eaten or used to make accessories.

Alternately, sugar balls available in the market can be bought and strung together with thread to make simple necklaces for those interested in trying their hand at this craft.

Society's perception has also changed over the years. A few decades ago halva jewellery was unheard of as a business venture. People would look down upon the few halva jewellery makers who ventured out commercially and assumed that they were doing it to tide over some sort of financial difficulty at home. Today, people see it as a creative pursuit and the makers are known as sugar jewellery specialists.

Basic jewellery sets comprise a necklace, bangles, bindi and earrings, while more elaborate ones come with 16 accessories right from anklets, bindis, waist bands, amulets, nose rings, toe rings, earrings, necklaces and bangles in two different designs each. Contemporary designs that are simpler, more modern, elegant and can be worn even to office or for formal occasions have been introduced in recent times. Around 60 jewellery designs for children, women and grooms/son-in-laws are available. For grooms' pagadis, bouquets, wrist-watches, garlands, rings, decorated coconuts, mobile phone and pen sets are available.

Boys often wear a set of jewellery representing Shri Krishna, consisting of a set of arm bands, a waist band, crown and garland along with a flute. For girls, the set consists of a waistband, armband, anklet, bangles, pendant and tiara all made from sugar. These are all essentially made from coloured paper and decorated with sugar balls along the edges. Stars, mirrors, sequins, coloured lace and gold thread are frequently added to make these creations all the more attractive.

To cater to the demand, machine made halva jewellery is also offered though the handmade one sells more in comparison to the machine made one. Another innovative option in halva jewellery has been the inclusion of beads coated with sugar. This helps to avoid wastage as the set can be used even after the sugar is removed.

Heavier jewellery is made with cashew nuts, almonds, coconut and peanuts. For making light jewellery sets, sesame is used. A number of ladies, who specialize in this jewellery making, take bulk orders from shops who stock it. They make the jewellery in the privacy of their homes. Those who do it on a full time basis work the entire year round (except the monsoons) where they prepare sections of the jewellery and as the festival approaches, assemble it all together to form these stunning sets.

Mostly worn on Makar Sankranti, halva jewellery can be worn again for special family occasions like weddings, anniversaries and poojas. The jewellery needs to be wrapped in butter paper and stored in an airtight plastic container. It should not be exposed or opened during the monsoon season as the sugar melts owing to the moisture and humidity in the air.
Saoji or Savji, write it anyway, this food from central India will make your eyes water, and your palate yearn for more. The food is what has made the Saoji Community famous, especially its hot and spicy non vegetarian delicacies.

A Touch of Spice

Saoji Cuisine

Text & Photographs © Prachi Bari

The author is a free lance journalist and can be reached at prachibari@gmail.com
“Saoji is a caste that is originally from Madhya Pradesh which migrated to Nagpur and Solapur,” explains Chef Vishnu Manohar who himself hails from Nagpur and has researched Saoji cuisine.

The community known as ‘Halba Koshti’ were weavers and the introduction of power looms almost killed their business. But this community survived because of their culinary expertise and in the present day, Nagpur boasts of at least 250 small home run bhojnalayas.

The Saoji emerged as a community with a distinct business and gastronomy. Their cuisine peppered with liberal doses of chilies and chilly powder, became very popular in the region. Over the centuries, “Saoji” food has not only retained its sting and popularity, but has found a resurgence and wide spread appeal. That there is no suburb in Nagpur city without a “Saoji” joint is the eloquent testimonial to this fact.

Nagpur used to be Madhya Pradesh’s capital and ‘Saoji’ was a word often used during the British Regime. ‘Saoji’ means Sahib, a greeting used to invite high rankers.

From times immemorial, farming has been the main occupation of the local population. The important crops grown are cotton, jowar, tur and rice. In the old days, only the male members of the family were supposed to work on farms. While the men drove bullock carts and plowed the land, the ladies of the house were tied to their household duties.

One of the most important of these household activities was cooking for the family. Mainly restricted to domestic chores, the women experimented with and created several unique dishes, which in turn were passed down from one generation to another. The womenfolk pottered around in their kitchens, talked about food, discussed and passed on various dishes to others and experimented with innumerable varieties.

Saoji masala has 16 types of spices, each of which is roasted separately, then boiled with water, drained and finally made into a fine paste using a mortar and pestle. The community believes that the masala retains its full flavour only when it is crushed. This masala is a key ingredient of Saoji cuisine and coriander and onion are used in large quantities.

The majority of Saoji dishes are made with mutton like paya khur, pherogdhadi or sundari. This style of cooking is important during ceremonies prior to a wedding and are often an inseparable part of the traditional rituals.

The Saoji masala is known by various names like for example in Solapur it is known as Ranjka and is in a powder form, in Marathwada it is known as Yesar and mixed with water and boiled to be served as Amti or even as Pithala or in vegetable.

A typical Saoji gravy is thin and almost black with a fair amount of oil. However, each spicy bite is bursting with flavour. They say that that curry passes the true test of taste - if you eat a Saoji curry, you will spend the next half an hour relishing the aroma of the curry on your fingers. And indeed, for most foodies in Maharashtra - there’s undeniably something special about a Saoji curry!
Saoji Rassa

**Ingredients**
- 2 bowls soaked chana dal
- 2 bowls onions, finely chopped
- 2 teaspoons poppy seeds, roasted and ground
- 4 teaspoons ginger-garlic paste
- 2 teaspoons cumin and coriander seeds
- 1 teaspoon Vidarbha style kala masala
- 1 teaspoon green chilly, pounded
- Chilli powder, turmeric and salt as per taste
- Mustard seeds and asafoetida (hing) for tempering

**Method**: Roast all the spices except the onion and garlic till they turn slightly dark. Soak them in hot water. Boil for 10 minutes and then grind to a paste in a mortar and pestle. Heat the pan, add the ground nut oil and the ginger-garlic liquid. Once it cooks, add the onion paste, ground masala and bay leaves.

Add more water and boil till the oil separates. Now add the turmeric, chilli powder and coconut oil. Mix the jowar flour in water and add it right at the end. Garnish with chopped coriander.

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Mutton Curry with Saoji Rassa

**Ingredients**
- 1 kg fresh mutton
- 4 bowls Saoji gravy
- 4 teaspoons of ginger, garlic, coriander and green chilly paste
- 2 bowls of sour yoghurt
- 1 teaspoon kala masala
- 1 teaspoon kasoori methi (fenugreek seeds)
- 1 teaspoon coriander seeds

**Method**: Clean the meat thoroughly and then marinate it in the ginger-garlic, coriander and green chilly paste and yoghurt for roughly 2 hours. Cook it without adding any extra water. Add the Saoji gravy and fenugreek seeds. Cook for another 5-7 minutes. Garnish with chopped coriander and serve it hot.

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Susan

**Method**: Make a hard dough of 1 kg refined wheat flour. Wash it under running water after 10 minutes. The starch will be washed away because of this. The remaining substance is called ‘gluten’. It will be approximately 200 to 250 gms. This does not dissolve in water. Boil some with little salt in it. Cook this substance in it for about 5-7 minutes. Drain out water & cut it into pieces, it is called “Susan” (it can be stored in the refrigerator for 5-6 days) Add 2 katories of Savaji gravy in 200 gm Susan. Heat it. You may fry ‘Susan’ before adding the gravy. Put chopped coriander leaves & serve it hot.

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Dal Kanda

This dish is a traditionally prepared on the night before a wedding in the Saoji community.

**Ingredients**
- 2 bowls soaked chana dal
- 2 bowls finely chopped onion
- 2 teaspoons poppy seeds (roasted and ground)
- 4 teaspoons ginger-garlic paste
- 2 teaspoons cumin seeds
- 1 teaspoon kala masala (Vidarbha style)
- 1 teaspoon green chillies (pounded)
- Chilli powder-turmeric-salt as per taste, Mustard seeds & asafoetida for tempering

**Method**: Soak the chana dal for 2-3 hours. Heat oil, temper it with mustard seeds, asafoetida, pounded green chilli, garlic. Add onion, sauté it well. Add soaked chana dal, salt & some water. Cook it till dal gets tender (misted when cooked). Gradually add cumin seeds, coriander seeds powder, poppy seeds powder, turmeric powder, chilli powder & ginger. Add a little water & sauté it. Lastly add kala masala,
chopped coriander, serve it with lambi roti or bhakri.
Note:-In this dish we have more oil & chilli powder than the other dishes.

Lambi Roti – this is very common in Vidarbha. Take dough of wheat flour, thump it again & again to have gluten formed in it, then shape it in chapati with hands, roast it on an earthen pot kept upside down.

Gavara Teekha (spicy cluster beans)
This is a different, but extra hot/spicy dish. Beans are not cut, but kept as it is. This is a dish you all will relish.

Ingredients
200 gms cluster beans 200 gms (remove the thread),
1 bowl finely chopped onion
2 teaspoons ginger-garlic paste
1 teaspoon cumin seeds
1 teaspoon coriander seeds powder
Turmeric-chilly powder and salt as per taste
1 teaspoon garam masala
2 teaspoons roasted & ground poppy seeds
2 teaspoons roasted & ground groundnut
1 teaspoon mustard seeds 1 t spoon
½ teaspoon asafoetida
½ bowl oil

Method: Heat some water in a pan, add turmeric powder, salt & boil cluster beans along with it. Heat the oil, temper it with mustard seeds, add garlic, onion sauté it thoroughly. Add turmeric powder, cumin seeds, coriander seeds powder, ginger, little water & salt as per the taste. Add the pods, garam masala, coriander to it. Serve it with hot bhakri.

Khaskhashichi Bhaji (Poppy seeds Bhaji)
Ingredients
2 bowls soaked poppy seeds
½ bowl grated onion
Turmeric-chilly powder and salt as per taste
½ teaspoon asafoetida
4 teaspoons oil
1 teaspoon coriander
2-3 cloves and bay leaves
1 teaspoon cumin seeds
1 teaspoon coriander powder
½ teaspoon kala masala (Vidarbh style)

Method: Heat oil in pan. Add the cloves and bay leaves to it. Then add garlic paste, grated onion, sauté it. Make a paste of the soaked poppy seeds. Add it to the onion, when it turns golden brown cook it, till the oil separates. Add the remaining spices, ginger, salt as per the taste and little water. Sauté it for a while. Serve it with chapati.

Kohlyachi (white pumpkin) gakhar Bhaji
Ingredients
½ kg ash gourd
½ bowl coriander
2 bowls varhadi gravy
1 teaspoon garam masala
1 teaspoon mustard seeds
¼ teaspoon asafoetida
Oil for tempering
Curry leaves and salt as per taste
5 teaspoons roasted piyal

Method: Chop the white pumpkin along with its skin. Heat the oil in a pan. Temper with mustard seeds, asafoetida, add pieces of white pumpkin, curry leaves & salt as per the taste. Add the varhadi gravy & piyal. Cook it on a low flame. Add garam masala. Allow it to cook with steam. Add chopped coriander. Serve it with hot chapatti.

Note: The vegetable used is basically a mild one so make this dish a little spicy.
Lavat

This dish is prepared in a unique way to go with it’s unique name. Usually it is prepared in winter season, as “Seeds” from fresh pods of Tur dal are used.

Ingredients:
- 1 bowl of fresh tur dal pods ground into paste
- 1 bowl finely chopped onion
- Turmeric-chilly powder and salt as per taste
- 4 teaspoons oil
- 1 teaspoon cumin seeds powder
- 1 teaspoon coriander seeds powder
- 2 teaspoons ginger-garlic paste
- 2 teaspoons roasted and ground poppy seeds
- 1 teaspoon mustard seeds
- 1 teaspoon finely chopped coriander
- ¼ teaspoon asafoetida

Method: Heat oil in pan, temper it with mustard seeds, add asafoetida, turmeric powder, chilly powder, salt & 1 bowl of water. Add besan (chana dal flour), keep stirring the mixture. Cook it well. As it thickens a little, add coriander to it. Pour it in a tray, spread layer of the grated coconut all over the tray. Cut into pieces, once it is cooled down. While serving it add little water & salt as per the taste in Varhadi rassa, now add ready Patodi to it, let it boil.

Masalyachi Wangi (Masala Brinjal)

Ingredients
- ½ kg brinjals
- Salt as per the taste
- ¼ teaspoon turmeric powder
- 1 teaspoon oil
- 2 bowls varhadi rassa

Method: Cut two brinjals in the centre & dip them in the water that has turmeric powder and salt mixed in it. Take Varhadi rassa in a pan, add the brinjals & salt as per the taste, let it cook. Serve it with hot phulkas.

Patodi Rassa

Patodi is known as ‘patwadi’. I first tasted this dish in the area of Yevatmal, later I realized that this rassa is prepared all over Vidarbha. This rassa is very easy to prepare, but if it is extra hot & spicy, it tastes great!

Ingredients
- 2 bowls varhadi gravy
- 1 bowl chana dal flour
- 2 teaspoons grated dry coconut
- ½ teaspoon turmeric powder
- Chilli & salt as per taste
- 2 teaspoons oil
- 1 teaspoon mustard seeds
- ¼ teaspoon asafoetida

Method: Heat some oil, temper it with mustard seeds, add asafoetida, turmeric powder, chilli powder, salt & 1 bowl of water. Add besan (chana dal flour), keep stirring the mixture. Cook it well. As it thickens a little, add coriander to it. Pour it in a tray, spread layer of the grated coconut all over the tray. Cut into pieces, once it is cooled down. While serving it add little water & salt as per the taste in Varhadi rassa, now add ready Patodi to it, let it boil.

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www.lavasa.com
Celluloid Stories: MTDC’s short film contest captures Maharashtra tourism on reel

With the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) the premier film school of the country, as well as the National Film Archive of India (NFAI) being a part of the city, Pune is a celluloid lover’s paradise. Both, a stone’s throw away from each other hold an important role in the cinematic journey of the country, one with its ability to churn out the industry’s most talented filmmakers, actors and technicians and the other a museum of sorts, housing rare and critical artefacts tracing the history and birth of cinema in India.

With all these factors in mind, the Pune International Film Festival (PIFF) was born in 2002. The aim was to attract the best in celluloid to the city, a task that it has achieved and how, over the last 12 years.

Today PIFF is an important date on the calendar for film buffs, filmmakers and all from the film fraternity not only across Pune or India, but the globe. This year, the PIFF, held from January 8th to the 15th, hosted a new competition for the very first time. The Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC), partnered with PIFF to sponsor a short film competition on tourism in Maharashtra. Entries were invited in 3 categories - Natural Heritage, Manmade Heritage and films depicting the culture of Maharashtra, i.e. Cultural Heritage. The prizes for each category were worth Rs 1,00,000, Rs 50,000 and Rs 25,000 for the winner, runner up and second runner up respectively. Each film was approximately 5-10 minutes in length.

Mrunmayi Vaishampayan and Aditi Pathwardhan won the first prize in the Cultural Heritage category for the film ‘Odyssey’ unfolding Maharashtra’s culture. ‘Nighoj’ directed by Dinkar Pandit won the top award in the Natural Heritage category and Sachin Patekar’s ‘Serendipity’ took first place in the Manmade Heritage category.

On the occasion, Srimati Valsa Nair-Singh, Tourism Secretary GoM, Managing Director, MTDC, said, “In our endeavours to take Maharashtra tourism on a global map, we have adopted this unique route. With this initiative, we are stringing the creative cord of young minds and encouraging them to unfold the rich heritage of Maharashtra by a powerful medium of cinema making. In this digital era, it’s a great opportunity to not only connect to; but also spread the message among millions of young and vibrant audience. Creative amateur film makers have captured the spectacular beauty of Maharashtra in their films. These films have created a strong bridge between Maharashtra and tourists world over.”
The list of winners in MTDC’s short film competition at PIFF 2015

**Cultural Heritage**

**First Prize** goes to ‘Odyssey - Unfolding Maharashtra’ directed by Mrunmayi Vaishampayan and Aditi Pathwardhan

**Second prize** goes to ‘Sangeet Govinda Gaurav’ directed by Dhananjay Mehendale

**Third prize** goes to ‘Inspiration of Kolhapur’ directed by Prasad Mahekar

**Natural Heritage**

**First prize** goes to ‘Nighoj’ directed by Dinkar Pandit

**Second prize** goes to ‘The Enigma of Lonar’ directed by Avadhoot Navale

**Third prize** goes to ‘The Silver-Golden beach’ directed by Kanchan Jadhav

**Man-made Heritage**

**First prize** goes to ‘Serendipity’ directed by Sachin Pathekar

**Second prize** goes to ‘Adorable Little Hamlet – Wai’ directed by Lakshmikant A

**Third prize** goes to ‘Kedareshwar Temple’ directed by Rahul Nagesh Narwane
‘Wari’ tableau steals the show at the Republic Day parade

After a gap of 20 years, Maharashtra has won the first prize for having the best tableau ‘Wari to Pandharpur’ on display at the annual Republic Day Parade held on the 26th of January in New Delhi. The second prize went to Jharkhand for its tableau on Maluti temples and the third place to Karnataka for its depiction of its famous Channapatna toys. A total of 25 tableaux were on display during the parade, 16 from states and 9 from various ministries and departments.

It was truly an honour for the Maharashtra tableau to be recognised, particularly in the presence of the guest of honour, the President of the United States of America, Barack Obama. The school children of Maharashtra (South Central Zone Cultural Centre) also did the state proud, winning the consolation prize for their portrayal of a ‘Lezim’ dance while the top prize went to the West Zone Cultural Centre for their ‘Daang’ dance from Gujarat.

The Wari to Pandharpur tableau was designed as per the specifications of the Union Defence Ministry, being 40 ft. in length by 14 ft in width and 16 ft in height. There were 250 warkaris depicted on it, and 31 dancers, mainly from the hinterland of Maharashtra. Art director Shekhar More, choreographer Santosh Bhangre and director of archaeology, Sanjay Patil worked together to create a winning spectacle set to the tunes of ‘Mauli Mauli’ sung by Ajay Gogavale, from the Marathi film ‘Lai Bhari’.
The fourth Virasat Pune Festival 2015 is here

Starting from the 6th to the 15th of February, 34 organisations with an exciting line up of events shall offer a unique opportunity to learn about Pune’s history, its cultural and natural heritage. The Virasat Pune Heritage Festival is organised every year by Janwani. This year the Pune Municipal Corporation and Forbes Marshal have supported the festival.

The attraction of this year’s festival is an eclectic mix of 48 events including exhibitions, film screenings, Heritage Walks, cultural programmes, campus tours, treasure hunts, workshops, cycle ride, bus tours, lecture series and more. There is a special activity organised for differently abled and many activities for children and families to participate!

Some of the highlights of Heritage Festival 2015 are:

- Participation of neighbourhood communities such as Deccan Gymkhana Parisar Samiti, Pimpri Chinchwad Citizen’s Forum to highlight the heritage in their neighbourhood. Deccan Area Heritage Quiz is being held for the first time! Tree Walks introducing Green Lane Volunteer Programme are being held. A Special Chinchwad Heritage Walk is planned.
- Bus tours to Karle and Bhaje Caves and a special ‘Pune Darshan’ tour.
- A one of a kind, high-tech, selfie-snapping heritage inspired Treasure Hunt in the Pune Cantonment!

Specifically designed events for the ‘Conservation of Natural Heritage’. Make your own artificial bird nests, map tree routes in your neighbourhood, understand the life of insects, and discover the ‘what, where and why’ on a Bat Spotting Walk. There is a lot for children too!

Series of lectures on topics ranging from Heritage sites in Bangladesh to Importance of Classical Sanskrit and Vedic literature! A special visit to Museum of Vedic Rituals and Utensils is also planned.

Campus Tours of Educational Institutions of Heritage value. This time the institutes have employed their student resources to design campus tours at their institutes. From exhibitions to film screening and museum visits all is included in this Tour!

Registrations are open! Most of these events in the Festival are absolutely free!

Complete details of the events and schedules are available at [www.virasatpune.com](http://www.virasatpune.com)
Pravasi Bharatiya Divas
A photo gallery
‘Mahaparyatan’: A grand tour of Maharashtra on TV

The Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (M.T.D.C) produced television serial consisting of 13 episodes of one hour each was telecast from 1st November 2014 to 24th January 2015 on D.D. Sahyadri. The main intention of this serial was to introduce the activities of the M.T.D.C. to the people. The episodes highlighted various activities like development of bed and breakfasts, homestays, Mahabhraman, production of souvenirs etc.

The episodes telecasted various themes discussed by various officers of the M.T.D.C., experts from tourism and associated fields, and other stake holders. Along with this, some clips of the tourist places were broadcast and along with further discussion on that place. The recently changed perspectives of tourism like Agro Tourism, Eco Tourism, Medical Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Historical Heritage Tourism, tourism related to Arts and Crafts, Social Tourism etc were explored in these episodes.

In the very first episode, Mrs. Kishori Gadre (G.M., M.T.D.C.), Dr. Mukesh Kulkarni and Mr. Sanjay Yadavrao participated in this discussion and the video clips of Times Square event, Govinda festival, Marabat festival, the Illumination of Gateway of India, Deccan Odyssey etc were shown. Subsequent episodes continued to showcase the wealth and variety of tourism related activities in Maharashtra along with expert opinions.
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Mumbai  230 kms
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Nearest Airport  Mumbai

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Dist. Sindhudurg
Mobile: 88792220, 880538900
Getting there
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Kolhapur  160 kms
Nearest railway station  Kudal
Nearest Airport  Mumbai

Auronda House Boat
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Kesarkar Bldg., Gandhi Chowk,
Sawantwadi-416 511.
2036 - 272416
272016

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02352 - 234731/2

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<table>
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<th>Moisture</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>18.5</td>
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<tr>
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<td>18.7</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>200</td>
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All values are per 100 gms of edible portion. ***Source: Nutrient value of Indian Foods National Institute of Nutrition

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