

Gujarat



Gujarat is a dazzlingly diverse state that shakes up the know-it-all Indophile, and reveals treasures hidden from the tourist hordes. Gujaratis are renowned for their entrepreneurial nous, both home and abroad. Encounter an Indian anywhere, from Wall Street to Wellington, and there's a good chance they hail from this wealthy, resourceful state.

Dynamic Gujarat has a 1600km coastline and an easily traversable landscape. The highly visible Jain community – the devout of whom follow a disciplined path towards *moksha* (liberation) – are largely responsible for Gujarat's industrious reputation, stunning white marble temples, and exquisite, ever-so-slightly sweet vegetarian fare (and prohibition laws!).

In the northwest, the seasonal island of Kutch trickles into hardened salt plains come summer, and local artisans weave the finest textiles in India and battle the unforgiving elements of Little Rann – habitat of the wild ass and flocks of flamingos. Meanwhile, only 100km south is Saurashtra, a long, lush, remote coastal region dotted with slow-paced, one-bullock towns, and bejewelled farmers dressed head to toe in white.

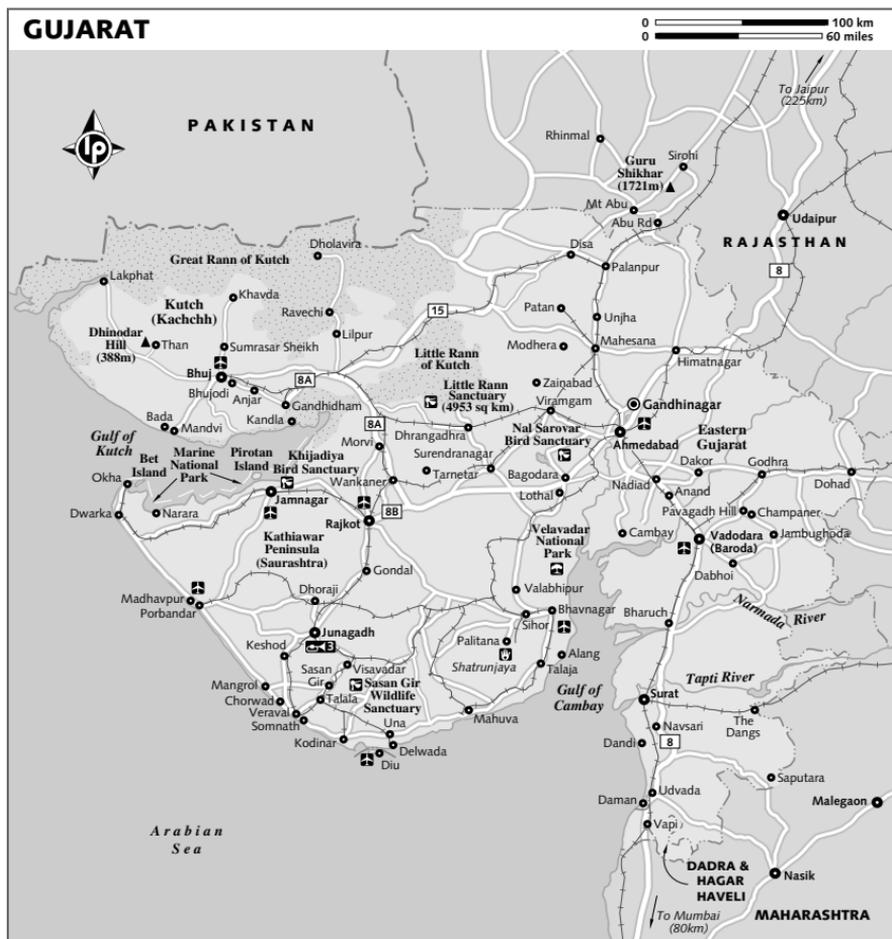
The sapphire of the salty isthmus is the ex-Portuguese island enclave of Diu, with its lazy, whitewashed vibe. At Shatrunjaya, climb to a mountain-top marvel of Jain architecture, or head off the map to Somnath and Dwarka, two powerful temples by the sea.

The main city of Ahmedabad is hard on the lungs and frantic but friendly. It's home to Mahatma Gandhi's ashram, and the world's finest textile museum. Rajkot and the university town of Vadodara house well-educated, young and upwardly mobile populations – suitable heirs to this proud and purposeful state.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Stop, drop and roll it out on the puzzling paradise of **Diu** (p739)
- Make a dawn pilgrimage to hill-top temples of **Shatrunjaya** (p738) in Palitana and **Ginar Hill** (p749) in Junagadh
- Tame that wild ass on the pancake-flat salt plains of **Little Rann** (p765), then leg it across the desert to Dholavira, the ancient Harappan site
- Visit the exotic tribal villages of **Kutch** (p759) and eye some of India's best textiles
- Dine, shop, pay homage to Mahatma Gandhi and visit the breathtaking **Calico Museum of Textiles** (p720) in Ahmedabad





History

It's said that Gujarat's Temple of Somnath witnessed the creation of the universe, and many significant sites in Krishna's life lie along the south coast.

On a firmer historic footing, Lothal and Dholavira (Kutch) were sites of a Harappan (Indus) civilisation more than 4000 years ago. Gujarat featured in the exploits of the mighty Buddhist emperor, Ashoka, and you can see his rock edict near Junagadh.

Later, Gujarat suffered Muslim incursions by Mahmud of Ghazni and subsequent Mughal rulers, and was a battlefield between the Mughals and the Marathas. It was also an early point of contact with the West; the first British commercial outpost was estab-

lished at Surat. Daman and Diu survived as Portuguese enclaves within Gujarat borders until 1961.

Saurashtra was never incorporated into British India. Instead it survived as more than 200 princely states until Independence.

FAST FACTS

- Population: 50.6 million
- Area: 196,024 sq km
- Capital: Gandhinagar
- Main language: Gujarati
- When to go: October to March

In 1956, all the states were amalgamated into the state of Mumbai. In 1960, Mumbai was split, on linguistic grounds, into the states of Maharashtra and Gujarat.

Congress was mainly in control of Gujarat after Independence, till 1991 when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power. In 2002, communal violence erupted after a Muslim mob was blamed for an arson attack on a train at Godhra that killed 59 Hindu activists. Hindu gangs then set upon Muslims in revenge. This violence coincided with the beginning of the election campaign, and BJP Chief Minister Najendra Modi followed a policy of fiercely Hindu rhetoric, which may have encouraged division in the state, but brought him a landslide victory. Since the 2002 riots, however, the state has been peaceful, and continues to enjoy its reputation as one of India's most prosperous states.

Information

PERMITS

Alcohol permits are now easy to get, obtainable at most large hotels with an alcohol shop: show your passport to receive a one-week permit (Indian/foreigner Rs 220/free).

EASTERN GUJARAT

AHMEDABAD (AMDADAV)

☎ 079 / pop 4.52 million

Ahmedabad (also called Amdavad) is Gujarat's major city, and a startling mini-metropolis. Straddling the Sabarmati River, it's one half old-world charm, and the other half new-world noise. Yet it's also remarkably cosmopolitan, with a rich Muslim history, a tangled, beautifully restored old city, stunning museums, fine restaurants and fabulous night markets. Many travellers stop off briefly on route to Rajasthan or Mumbai, sneaking in a visit to Sabarmati Ashram (Gandhi's former headquarters). However, those able to swallow the smog will discover a pulsating Indian city, with a media that preaches tolerance. Ahmedabad is a sky-scraping step-off point to the rest of Gujarat.

Each January, the city hosts Makar Sakranti, an international kite festival that's well worth the stiff neck.

History

Over the centuries Ahmedabad ('abad' means 'prosper') has boomed and declined. Founded

FESTIVALS IN GUJARAT

Makar Sakranti (Jan; Ahmedabad, above) This international kite festival is the time to see the sky filled with flickering, swooping colour.

Modhera Dance Festival (Jan; Modhera, p728) A three-day festival that aims to present classical dance in its original atmosphere.

Bhavnath Fair (Jan/Feb; Junagadh, p748) Held in the month of Magha. Folk music and dancing takes place and *nagas* (naked sadhus) throng Bhavnath Mahadev Temple, at the foot of Girnar Hill.

Dang Durbar (Feb/Mar; The Dangs, east of Surat, p732) This major tribal festival is held a week before Holi in the little-visited forested region called The Dangs, near the Maharashtra border.

Mahakali (Mar/Apr; Pavagadh, p731) In the month of Chaitra, pilgrims pay tribute to the goddess Mahakali at Pavagadh hill, near Vadodara.

Janmastami (Aug/Sep; Dwarka, p753) This important festival celebrates Krishna's birthday.

Tarnetar Fair (Aug/Sep; Tarnetar, northeast of Rajkot, p757) In the month of Bhadra, the Trinateshwar Temple at Tarnetar, 65km northeast of Rajkot, hosts this extraordinarily colourful fair, an opportunity for dressed-to-impress tribal men and women to find spouses. Men are seated under glorious embroidered *chhatris* (umbrellas) so that women can check them out to see who they fancy. Gujarat Tourism arranges accommodation for the fair, and special state buses go to/from Rajkot.

Navratri (Sep/Oct; statewide; www.navratrifestival.com) The Festival of Nine Nights is a fantastic time to be in Gujarat. The festival leads up to Dussehra and is devoted to the worship of Durga, the mother goddess. Junctions and market places are filled with nightly *garbas* – where people dress up in sparkling finery to perform entrancing dances till the early hours – it's a great festival for foreigners to join in.

Dussehra (Sep/Oct; statewide) Dussehra is the culmination of Navratri, and celebrates the victory of Durga and Rama over the demon king Ravana, with more all-night dancing and often fireworks.

Kartik Purnima (Nov/Dec; Somnath, p745) A large fair at the full moon of Kartik Purnima.

in 1411 by Ahmed Shah, at the spot where he saw a hare chasing a dog (he was impressed by its bravery), Ahmedabad was thought to be one of the finest cities in India in the 17th century, but by the 18th century its influence had waned. Its industrial strength once again raised the city to prominence, becoming a huge textile centre from the second half of the 19th century, which resulted in much immigration to man the mills. From 1915 it became famous as the site of Gandhi's ashram. In 1970 the last mills closed and the subsequent economic hardship may have been a contributing factor in the communal unrest that split the city in 2002.

Orientation

On the eastern bank of the Sabarmati River Mahatma Gandhi (MG) Rd and Relief Rd run east to the train station, about 3km away. The old city spreads north and south of Relief Rd. The busy road flanking the western bank of the Sabarmati is known as Ashram Rd and leads to Sabarmati Ashram. The airport is to the northeast. Most of the old city walls are now demolished, although some gates remain.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Crossword (Map p719; Shree Krishna Centre, Mithakali Six Rd; ☎ 10.30am-9pm) A bookworm bonanza. Also has CDs, maps and a 'Barista' coffee shop.

INTERNET ACCESS

Cyberworld (Map p719; Shree Krishna Centre, Mithakali Six Rd; per 30min Rs 16; ☎ 10am-10pm)

iWay (Map p721; per hr Rs 25; ☎ 8am-11.30pm) Convenient and fast; opposite the train station.

Reliance Webworld (Map p719; CG Rd; per 3hr Rs 100; ☎ 9.30am-10pm) Part of the broadband chain.

Relief Cyber Café (Map p721; Relief Rd; per hr Rs 20) Opposite Relief Cinema.

LEFT LUGGAGE

Train Station (Map p721; per 24hr Rs 10; ☎ 7.30am-3pm, 3.30-11pm & 11.30pm-7am)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Civil Hospital (Map p719; ☎ 27474359) Located 2.5km north of Ahmedabad train station.

MONEY

For changing travellers cheques and currency, try the following:

Bank of Baroda (Map p719; ☎ 27541093; Ashram Rd) Gives cash advances on Visa cards.

Green Channel Travel Services (Map p719; ☎ 26560489; 5/6 Sun Complex, CG Rd; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat) Amex representatives.

State Bank of India (Map p721; ☎ 25506800) Near Lal Darwaja (the local bus stand).

Wall Street Finances (Map p719; ☎ 26426682; CG Rd)

There are many ATMs, including:

HDFC (Map p719; Ashram Rd)

HSBC (Map p719; CG Rd)

Standard Chartered (Map p719; CG Rd)

POST

Main post office (Map p721; ☎ 23220977; Ramaniya Sheth Rd) Off Relief Rd.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The helpful state tourist office, **Gujarat Tourism** (Map p719; ☎ 26589172; www.gujarattourism.com; ☎ 10.30am-1.30pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat, closed 2nd & 4th Sat of month), is off Ashram Rd. Ask autorickshaw drivers for HK House. If you're there between 11am and 1pm Monday to Friday, ask for Hemant Pradhan, the senior tourist officer, a charismatic, exuberant mine of information (you can also call to make an appointment).

Staff can also arrange car hire or fast-paced five-day tours to Saurashtra and northern Gujarat/southern Rajasthan (around Rs 3000; worth considering if your time is short). Prices include all transport, accommodation and guide fees. Check out the excellent website for details.

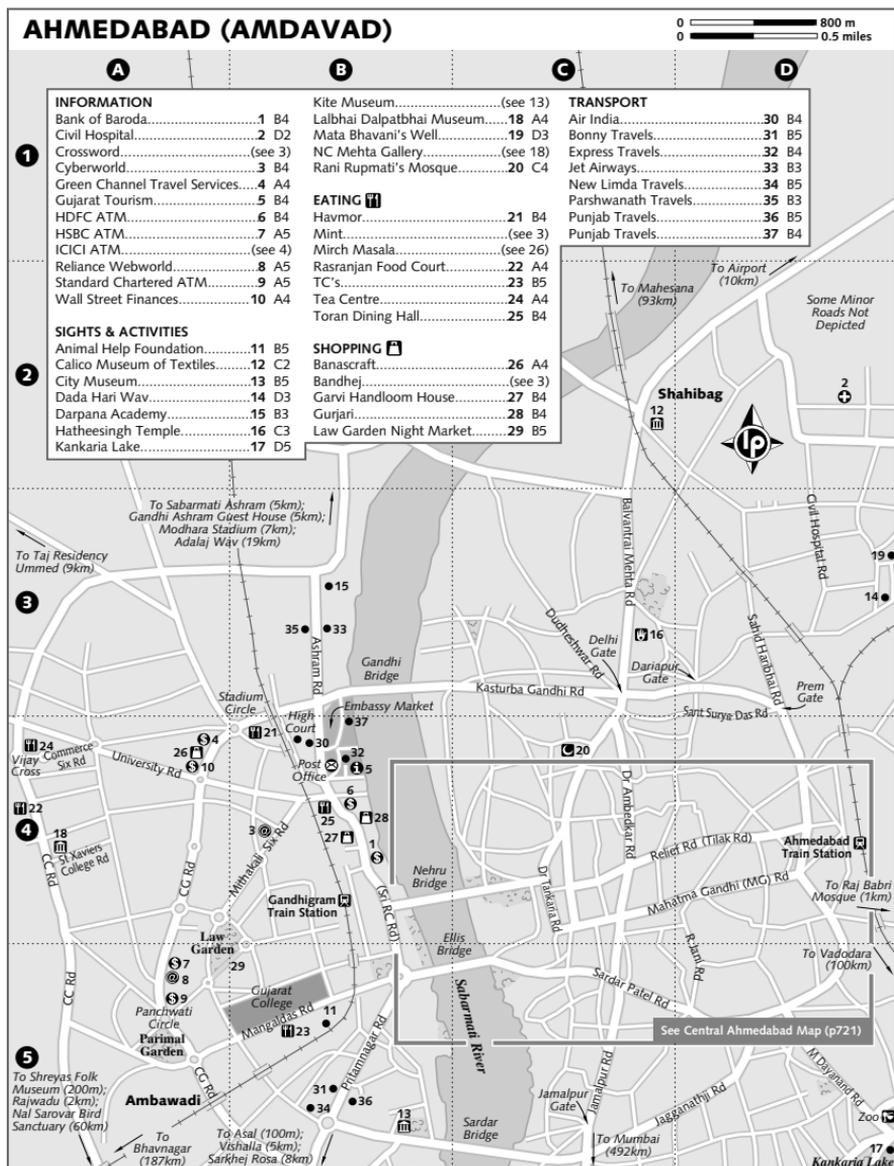
Sights

BHADRA FORT & TEEN DARWAJA

Bhadra Fort (Map p721; Lal Darwaja), built by the city's founder, Ahmed Shah, in 1411, now houses government offices. Ask for access to the roof, where you can check out the formidable structure, a perfunctory gallows and good views of the surrounding streets. Two of the fort bastions partly collapsed in the 2001 earthquake. To the east stands the **Teen Darwaja** (Triple Gateway), which was the gateway into the Royal Square, or Maidan Shahi, where royal processions and polo games took place. The gate too was damaged by the 2001 tremors, but has been repaired.

MOSQUES & MAUSOLEUMS

The **Jama Masjid** (Map p721), built by Ahmed Shah in 1423, is to the east of the Teen Dar-



waja. Demolished Hindu and Jain temples provided the building materials. The 260 columns support 15 domes at different elevations. There were once two 'shaking' minarets, but they lost half their height in the great earthquake of 1819 and collapsed after another tremor in 1957. The 2001 earthquake then took its toll, leaving cracks in the

masonry and destroying several jalis (carved marble lattice screens).

The **Tomb of Ahmed Shah** (Map p721), constructed after his death in 1442, stands outside the Jama Masjid's east gate, and includes the cenotaphs of his son and grandson. Women are not allowed to go into the central chamber. Across the street on a raised platform

is his queen's tomb, now a market and in poor shape.

Southwest of Bhadra Fort and dating from 1414, **Ahmed Shah's Mosque** (Map p721) was one of the city's earliest mosques. It has an elaborately carved ceiling with a circular symmetry reminiscent of Hindu and Jain temples, and beautiful pillars and jalis.

Sidi Saiyad's Mosque (Map p721; Dr Tankaria Rd), close to the river, was once part of the old citadel wall. Constructed in 1573 by Sidi Saiyad, a sometime slave of Ahmed Shah, it is one of Ahmedabad's most stunning buildings, with exquisite jalis – spider-web fine – depicting the intricate intertwining of the branches of a tree.

North of the centre, **Rani Rupmati's Mosque** (Map p719), built between 1430 and 1440, was named after the Hindu wife of the sultan. The minarets were damaged in the great earthquake of 1819. The dome is elevated to allow light in around its base. Like so many of Ahmedabad's early mosques, it combines elements of Hindu and Islamic design.

The small **Rani Sipri's Mosque** (Map p721), southeast of the centre, is also known as the Masjid-e-Nagira (Jewel of a Mosque) because of its graceful construction, with slender minarets – again a blend of styles. It's said to have been commissioned in 1514 by a wife of Sultan Mahmud Begara after he executed their son for some minor misdemeanour – she is also buried here.

South of Ahmedabad station, outside Sarangpur Gate, the **Sidi Bashir Mosque** (Map p719) is famed for its 21.3m-high shaking minarets (*jhulta minars*). Built to shake to protect against earthquake damage, this certainly worked in 2001.

The shaking minarets of the **Raj Babri Mosque**, southeast of Ahmedabad station in Gomtipur, were destroyed by their ingenuity, as one was partially dismantled by an inquisitive Englishman in an unsuccessful attempt to find out how it worked. It was never completely repaired, then in 2001 both minarets collapsed. Repairs continue.

TEMPLES

Outside Delhi Gate, north of the old city, the Jain **Hatheesingh Temple** (Map p719; Balvantrai Mehta Rd) is typically fine and made of delicately carved white marble. Built in 1848, it's dedicated to Dharamanath, the 15th Jain *tirthankar* (great teacher).

Dive into the old city's narrow streets to find the glorious, multicoloured, woodcarved **Swaminarayan Temple** (Map p721), a great, grand *haveli* (traditional, ornately decorated residence) dating from 1850, enclosed in a large courtyard.

KANKARIA LAKE

Built in 1451, this polygonal **lake** (Map p719), southeast of the city, is a breath of fresh air, and a popular place for a promenade. There is a grand colonial Dutch tomb nearby, one of Gujarat's oldest.

SARKHEJ ROSA

Located 8km southwest of the city, **Sarkhej Rosa** (☎ 26828675; admission free; ☞ 6am-10pm) is a fascinating collection of Islamic buildings. They cluster around a great tank, constructed by Sultan Mahmud Shah I (1458-1511).

By the entrance is the tomb of Sultan Mahmud Begada, with geometric jalis casting patterns of light on the floor.

Shaikh Ahmed Khattu (his name means 'bestower of wealth') lived at Sarkhej and built this mosque with a great open space in front of the prayer hall, surrounded by domes.

A return rickshaw here will cost around Rs 150.

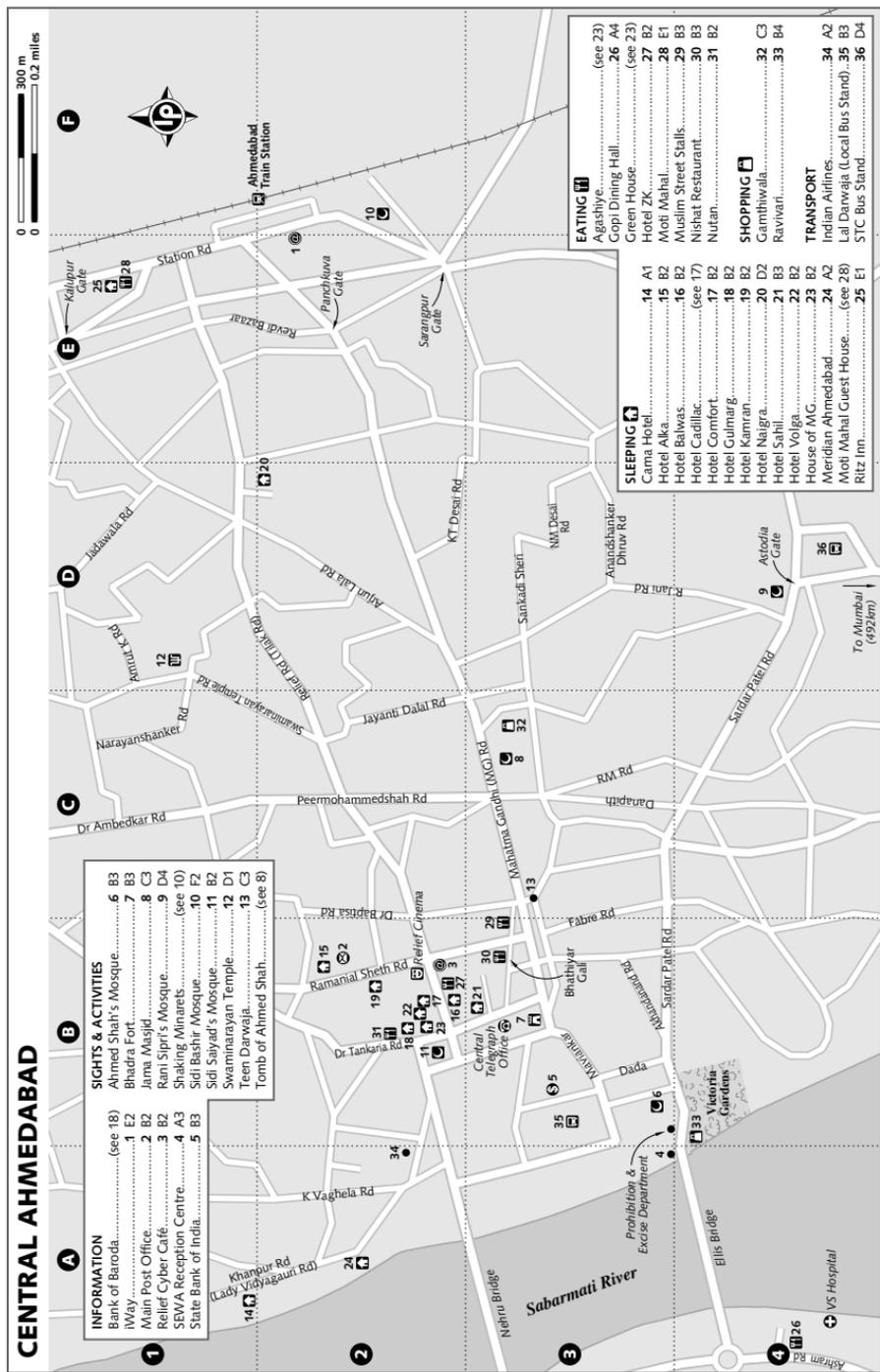
BAOLIS

Dada Hari Wav (Map p719; admission free; ☞ dawn-dusk), built in 1499 by a woman of Sultan Begara's harem, has steps to lower platforms, terminating at a small, octagonal well. The depths are cool, even on the hottest day. Neglected and often bone dry, it's a fascinating and eerie place. The best time to visit and photograph the well is between 10am and 11am (earlier in the summer; later in the winter); at other times the sun doesn't penetrate to the various levels. Bus 34 and 111 (Rs 5) to Asarwa stops nearby.

Mata Bhavani's Well (Map p719) is about 200m north of Dada Hari's. Thought to be several hundred years older, it's less ornate and used as a simple Hindu temple.

CALICO MUSEUM OF TEXTILES

This **museum** (☎ 27868172; Shahibag; admission free; ☞ 10.30am-12.30pm, no entry after 11am & 2.45-4.45pm, no entry after 3.15pm Thu-Tue) contains one of the world's finest collections of antique and modern Indian textiles – there are some astoundingly beautiful pieces here, displaying incredible virtuosity and extravagance.



There are two parts to the museum: first, the Calico Museum's main textile galleries, which can only be visited in the morning session, and second, Invisible Presence: Images and Abodes of Indian Deities, which explores depictions of Indian gods, with indoor and outdoor exhibits, also including textile galleries, which can only be visited in the afternoon. It's worth making time to visit both parts of the museum. Opposite the Underbridge, the museum is part of the Sarabhai Foundation, housed in a *haveli* constructed from old village houses, with wonderful woodcarving. It's 4.5km north of the city. Take bus 101, 102 or 105 (Rs 5) through Delhi Gate. An autorickshaw should cost Rs 40.

Photography is prohibited.

OTHER MUSEUMS

The excellent **City Museum** (Map p719; ☎ 26578369; Sanskar Kendra; admission free; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), housed in a striking Le Corbusier building reminiscent of a multistorey car park, covers Ahmedabad's history, with sections on the city's religious communities, Gandhi and the Independence struggle. On the ground floor is the **Kite Museum** (Map p719; admission free; 🕒 10am-8pm Tue-Sun) with a selection of patterned tissue-paper kites resembling trapped butterflies.

The **Lalbahai Dalpatbhai Museum** (Map p719; ☎ 26306883; admission free; 🕒 11.30am-5pm Tue-Sun), near Gujarat University, houses fine stone, marble and wood carvings from around India, as well as local bronzes, cloth paintings and coins. Among the sculptures is a sandstone carving from Madhya Pradesh dating from the 6th century AD, the oldest-known carved image of the god Rama.

Nearby is the **NC Mehta Gallery** (Map p719; ☎ 26302463, ext 31; admission free; 🕒 10.30am-5.30pm

Tue-Sun Jul-Apr, 8.30am-12.30pm Tue-Sun May-Jun) with an important collection of jewel-like illustrated manuscripts and miniatures. Best known is *Chaurapanchasika* (Fifty Love Lyrics of a Thief), written by Vilhana, an 11th-century Kashmiri poet sentenced to be hanged for loving the king's daughter. Just before his execution he composed the poems and so impressed the king that there was a lucky turnaround for Vilhana and the king gave his daughter to him in marriage.

The **Shreyas Folk Museum** (☎ 26601338; Indian/foreigner Rs 7/45; 🕒 10am-1.30pm & 2-5.30pm Fri-Tue), about 2.5km west of the river, in the suburb of Ambavadi, displays an impressive range of Gujarati folk arts and crafts, with elaborately decorated everyday items, including textiles, clothing and woodcarving. Take bus 34 or 200 (Rs 5), or an autorickshaw costs around Rs 30.

The **Utensil Museum** (☎ 26602422; Vishalla; admission Rs 8, camera/video Rs 50/100; 🕒 11am-3pm & 4.30-10pm), opposite Vasana Tol Naka, displays the graceful practicality of pots, with around 3500 utensils.

GUJARAT SCIENCE CITY

This educational **theme park** (☎ 65220111; www.scity.org; Hebatpur; 🕒 3-9pm daily), on the road to Gandhinagar, is well worth a visit. Features include an **IMAX theatre** (tickets Rs 100-125, hourly), the interactive **Hall of Science**, a 30-seater **Thrill Ride Simulator**, a spot-lit **Musical Fountain** (with shows at 7.30pm, 8.10pm and 8.45pm), and an **Energy Education Park**. **Planet Earth** is under construction.

SABARMATI ASHRAM

About 5km from the centre, peacefully set on the river's west bank, this **ashram** (☎ 27557277; admission free; 🕒 8.30am-6.30pm) was Gandhi's head-

WATERY WONDERS

The profound significance of water in the drought-prone districts of Gujarat and Rajasthan is set in stone in step wells – *baolis* (*baoris* in Rajasthan) – elaborate constructions unique to northwestern India. Ancient Hindu scriptures venerate those who build communal wells. With the natural Indian inclination to turn the functional into works of art, elaborate water-storage structures were developed, first by Hindus and then under the Mughals. Although the nobility considered it a religious obligation to construct these, the wells were evidently status symbols – the grandeur and artistry reflected the power and sensibility of their patrons. Often attached to temples so that devotees could bathe, the *baolis* were also meeting places, with verandas where people could take refuge from the fierce summer heat, and stopping places on the long caravan routes. Reliant on rainfall and ground water, and fulfilling so many differing watery needs, the wells are not the cleanest of containers, but certainly beautiful.

quarters during the long struggle for Indian independence. He founded the ashram in 1915 and it moved to its current site a few years later. It was from here on 12 March 1930 that Gandhi set out on his famous Salt March to the Gulf of Cambay in a symbolic protest. Handicrafts, handmade paper and spinning wheels are still produced on the site – there's a **paper factory** (☎ 11am–5pm Mon–Sat) over the road that's worth a look (ask at the ashram for permission). Gandhi's poignant, spartan living quarters are preserved and there's an excellent pictorial record of his life. The library contains the letter sent by Gandhi to Hitler on 23 July 1939 asking him to pull back from war. Gandhi was imprisoned at Sabarmati Jail, just down the road, in 1922.

There's usually a **sound-and-light show** – telephone for current times. Bus 81, 83/1 or 84/1 (Rs 5) run here. An autorickshaw costs about Rs 30.

Courses

The **Darpana Academy** (Map p719; ☎ 27550566; www.darpana.com; Ashram Rd, Usmanpura; ☎ Jul–Apr) was founded in 1949 and teaches Indian classical dance. Courses cost US\$50 per week (two hours per day).

Tours

The **Municipal Corporation** (☎ 9824032866; Indian/foreigner Rs 20/50) runs fascinating heritage walking tours through the old city. They start from the Swaminarayan Temple at 8am and finish near the Jama Masjid around 10.30am. It's advisable to book. The tours, through narrow, confusing streets and past dilapidated, carved wooden houses, are an excellent way to get a feel for the city and its *pols* (neighbourhoods). Commentaries are given in English and there's a brief slide show beforehand.

The Municipal Corporation has also collaborated with the House of MG (see p724) to develop an ingenious audio guide walk (Rs 100). Beginning at the famed hotel, this 80-minute MP3-guided walk takes an alternative route through the Old City, ending at the Bholantah Divetia Haveli. This finely carved house is now a museum-in-progress.

There's also a Gandhi-inspired walk that takes in the key monuments of the freedom struggle.

Staying

As a part of the Walled City Revitalisation project, several heritage homes have been

restored with modern facilities. A few have started accommodating guests, and it's a fascinating way to experience Ahmedabad. Contact the Municipal Corporation (☎ 9824032866).

Otherwise, many budget hotels are scattered around noisy, polluted Relief Rd. Some have 24-hour check-out, although most top-end hotels will turf you out at a stingy 9am. Day rates (ideal for those awaiting a night train) are about half-price.

BUDGET

The following have shared bathroom unless otherwise indicated.

Hotel Cadillac (Map p721; ☎ 5507558; Advance Cinema Rd, opposite Electricity House; dm Rs 60, r Rs 100–150) This is a good cheap option.

Hotel Gulmarg (Map p721; ☎ 25507202; Dr Tankaria Rd; s/d Rs 150/200) Near Sidi Sayad's Mosque, this 4th-floor place has a range of decrepit, dusty but spacious rooms, with clean bathrooms, and most have a TV and telephone. Stretch your calves if the lift isn't working.

Hotel Naigra (Map p721; ☎ 22172204; s/d with private bathroom Rs 200/350, with AC Rs 400/500; ☎) Just off Relief Rd, near Zakaria Masjid, this 'ultra-modern and luxurious guesthouse' is kidding itself, but remains friendly and quiet, with cramped, rather grubby rooms, some with balcony.

Hotel Sahil (Map p721; ☎ 25507351; Dr Tankaria Rd; s/d/tr with private bathroom from Rs 300/400/500) Opposite the Advance Cinema, this hotel has small, slipshod rooms, some immeasurably better than others.

MIDRANGE

All of these have private bathroom.

Hotel Comfort (Map p721; ☎ 5503014; Relief Rd; s/d Rs 350/450, deluxe with AC Rs 450/550; ☎) Hotel Comfort is a dependable midrange option, with chatty management, and clean, comfortable rooms. Ask to see a few because some lack a window. It's opposite Electricity House.

Hotel Alka (Map p721; ☎ 25500830; hotelalka@usa.net; Ramani Sheth Rd; s/d Rs 350/500, with AC Rs 550/675; ☎) This is a minor revelation set above a garage. It has smart, clean rooms, and friendly staff. The triple rooms (Rs 700 with AC) make you wish you had more friends.

Gandhi Ashram Guest House (☎ 27559342; s/d Rs 500/675, with AC Rs 900/1100; ☎) Opposite Sabarmati Ashram, 5km from the centre, is this relatively tranquil, state-run option, that recently underwent a successful facelift. Rooms

have balconies facing a leafiness that's unusual in this city. There's a stingy 9am checkout.

Moti Mahal Guest House (Map p721; ☎ 22121881; Kapasia Bazaar; s/d Rs 400/450, with AC Rs 500/600) Near the train station, this brand new guest house is jovially run by the same crowd as the famed restaurant downstairs (see right). It offers glossy, slightly cramped rooms, all with modern bathrooms.

Hotel Kamran (Map p721; ☎ 25509586; GPO Rd; s/d from Rs 400/500, with AC from Rs 550/650; 🏠) This unassuming option has comfortable rooms (cheaper ones are a bargain), and is located near the post office.

Hotel Balwas (Map p721; ☎ 25507135; Relief Rd; s/d with balcony Rs 425/550, with AC Rs 525/650; 🏠) Here, rooms at the front have balconies overlooking the Relief Rd mayhem. AC rooms are at the back and a bit larger and quieter, but all are good value.

Hotel Volga (Map p721; ☎ 25509497; volga@icenet.net; s/d Rs 450/600, with AC Rs 650-900; 🏠) This is the premier option in town, tucked in a quiet alley off Relief Rd, with smart, spic-and-span rooms, more dashingly decorated than most, and sharp, attentive service.

Ritz Inn (Map p721; ☎ 22123842; Station Rd; s/d with AC Rs 1350/1650; 🏠 🚗) Near the railway station, this smart hotel has unusual class, with comfortable rooms done out in Art Deco style. There's a good veggie restaurant. Check-out is 24 hour and it offers free airport transfer.

TOP END

All these places accept major credit cards.

House of MG (Map p721; ☎ 25506946; www.houseofmg.com; Dr Tankaria Rd; s/d from Rs 3000/4000, ste from Rs 5000; 🏠) This 1920s building (with two excellent restaurants; see right) was once the home of industrialist Sheth Mangaldas Girdhardas, converted into a beautiful heritage hotel with vast, veranda-edged suites beautifully and simply decorated, with great attention to detail and excellent service. It's an icon of the upper classes, and hugely popular with Indians and foreigners alike. The new indoor swimming pool and health club are ideal antidotes to a day on foot. Book in advance online to receive up to 30% discount. You can also purchase the furniture or accessories from your room.

Cama Hotel (Map p721; ☎ 25601234; www.cama-hotelsindia.com; Khanpur Rd; r Rs 3600-4600; 🏠 🚗) The Cama's unusually large rooms are carefully finished with light wood writing desks, and

comfy beds. Pay a little extra for a room with a view of the Sabarmati.

Meridian Ahmedabad (Map p721; ☎ 25505505; Khanpur Rd; s/d from Rs 6000/6500, ste Rs 12,000; 🏠 🚗) This is a better-than-average Meridian venture that towers over the fragile shacks along the river bank. All rooms are sumptuous and the suites are palatial. The price includes breakfast and free airport transfer. There's an indoor swimming pool (Rs 250 nonguests), spa and sauna.

Taj Residency Umed (☎ 66661234; residency.ahmedabad@tajhotels.com; International Airport Circle, Hansol; d US\$165-180, ste US\$350-500) Located close to the airport, this new addition to the Taj empire caters predominantly to the high-flying business crowd. Pool-facing doubles are good value, and the deluxe suites are superb.

Eating

As capital of this foodie state, Ahmedabad has some superb restaurants. It's a great place to sample the Gujarati thali – the traditional all-you-can-eat vegetarian meal, but with a greater variety of dishes, lighter and less oily than Punjabi food and with several sweet dishes.

RESTAURANTS

Nishat Restaurant (Map p721; Khas Bazaar; dishes Rs 18-62; 🕒 11am-4pm & 7-11.30pm; 🏠) This welcoming place gets packed in the evenings with Muslim men smashing hearty veg and, more often, nonveg tandooris dishes.

Moti Mahal (Map p721; Kapasia Bazaar; dishes Rs 20-70; 🕒 5-1am) Ahmedabad's oldest restaurant is still going strong, with a long Indian menu, and a regularly updated specials board. You can eat downstairs in an open-fronted simple restaurant, or upstairs in small elevated cubby holes and behind grills for more privacy.

Green House (Map p721; House of MG, Dr Tankaria Rd; dishes Rs 30-60; 🕒 7am-11pm; 🏠) Downstairs from Agashiye, this relaxed eatery has outdoor courtyard seating and a laid-back AC room. The food is delicate and delicious: try delicious *panki*, a thin pancake cooked between banana leaves; or divine *malpura*, a sweet, deep-fried pancake in saffron syrup, topped with rose petals. Don't leave without trying the hand-churned ice cream.

Nutan (Map p721; Opposite Dinbai Tower; dishes Rs 30-63) An immensely popular pure veg eatery that's packed with businessmen at lunchtime. They also do a side trade in hotel room service.

Hotel ZK (Map p721; Opposite Relief Cinema; dishes Rs 35-90) Slick new AC restaurant, with tinted windows and impeccable service. The Afghan curry is amazing and all the paneer dishes are great.

TC's (Map p719; ground fl, Aakash Ganga; dishes Rs 35-140; ☎ 11am-11pm) This trendy little café behind Gujarat College offers pita and hummus, Vietnamese noodles and Indian dishes tweaked for Western tastes, all in a bright diner setting, complete with rock music, big TV screens and Americanised waiters. Red bull cocktails (Rs 150) are about as wild as this party gets.

Gopi Dining Hall (Map p721; Ashram Rd; thalis Rs 45-65; ☎ 10am-3pm & 6-10.30pm) Just off the west end of Ellis Bridge, opposite the Town Hall, this small restaurant is a much-loved thali institution. The evening meal is spicier and heavier.

Mint (Map p719; G-36 Shree Krishna Centre, Mithakhali Circle; dishes Rs 40-105) This is a cool, small, mint-coloured place for the moneyed, with a calm atmosphere and good snacks, from Gujarati favourites such as *pav bhaji* (spiced vegetables with bread) to international comfort food such as cheese-topped mashed potatoes.

Toran Dining Hall (Map p721; Opposite Sales India; thali Rs 80; ☎ 11am-3pm & 7-10pm) Ahmedabad has a new champion in the thali stakes! Gung-ho staff knock up delicious, never-ending Gujarati specialities to a mostly middle-class crowd.

Mirch Masala (Map p719; CG Rd; dishes Rs 49-159; ☎ 12.30-3pm & 7-11pm) Lively and popular, with lots of bright pictures, puppets and film posters. Although à la carte is good for dinner, the lunch specials (Rs 89) are brilliant value.

Vishalla (☎ 26602422; lunch Rs 71, dinner Rs 179; ☎ 11am-3pm & 8-11pm) On the southern edge of town, opposite Vasana Tol Naka, Vishalla is a magical eating experience, evoking a traditional Gujarati village. You eat a veggie thali seated on the floor in rustic wooden huts, and the complex includes craft stalls and a fascinating Utensil Museum (p722). Dinner is accompanied by puppet or magic shows and traditional music. Bus 150 will take you nearby; an autorickshaw costs Rs 45 (about Rs 70 return).

Agashiye (Map p721; House of MG, Dr Tankaria Rd; lunch reg/deluxe Rs 195/295, dinner reg/deluxe Rs 255/375; ☎ noon-2.30pm & 7-11pm) This is Ahmedabad's best dining experience. On the rooftop of one of the city's finest mansions, the lovely terrace is an oasis of calm and space, candle-lit at night, a world away from the congested streets. The

menu, which changes daily, includes dainty little snacks, a multitude of ravishingly tasty vegetable dishes, sweets and ice cream.

QUICK EATS

Havmor (Map p719; Stadium Complex; ice cream Rs 15-70) Ahmedabad is famous for its ice cream and the Havmor ice-cream bar, behind Navrangpura bus stop, has tons of flavours.

Tea Centre (Map p719; Vijay Char Rasta; dishes Rs 10-80) A calm place to sip sophisticated chai, above a busy *chowk* (intersection). The iced teas are heavenly – try the *caiparinha*.

Rasranjan Food Court (Map p719; Vijay Cross Rd, Navrangpura Rasta, CG Rd; dishes Rs 15-78; ☎ 11am-11pm) A popular, bustling food emporium offering fast-food South Indian and Punjabi dishes, with sweets and *chaat* downstairs.

Excellent Muslim street food is available near Teen Darwaja on Bhathiyar Gali (Map p721), a small street parallel to MG Rd. You can get a good feed for about Rs 25 from the evening stalls, with halal meat, fish and vegetarian dishes. The Law Garden Night Market (Map p719) is also good for street food.

Shopping

Law Garden Night Market (Map p719; Law Garden) This evening market is packed with stalls selling glittering wares from craft-rich Kutch and Saurashtra, under the beguiling light of kerosene lamps. It's chock-a-block with *cholis* (backless mirrored blouses) and richly decorated *chaniyas* (long, wide traditional skirts), both traditionally worn at Navratri (see the boxed text, p717); intensely embroidered wall hangings; costume jewellery and more.

Gurjari (Map p719; Ashram Rd; ☎ 10am-2pm & 3-7pm) South of Gujarat Tourism is this state emporium on several floors, with some fantastic finds if you rummage around, including funky clothes and silk saris.

Garvi Handloom House (Map p719; Ashram Rd; ☎ 10.30am-8pm) Opposite Gurjari, this place sells a range of textiles.

Gamthiwala (Map p721; Manekchowk; ☎ 11am-1pm & 2-7pm Mon-Sat) In the old city, this sells excellent quality block-printed textiles and gorgeous, thick cotton.

Asal (5 Tejpal Society; ☎ 10am-8pm) An extraordinary dung-floored organic shop that is well worth seeking out – so eco-friendly that it's lit by candles rather than electricity in the evenings. It sells utensils, *khadi* fabric, Ayurvedic spices, herbal bath soaps, oils and essences.

Bandhej (Map p719; Shree Krishna Centre, Mithakali Six Rd; ☎ 10am-8pm) This boutique feels like it got lost en route to New York, and has some beautiful traditional clothes and furnishings at upmarket prices.

Banascraft (Map p719; 8-9 Chandan Complex, CG Rd; ☎ 10.30am-8pm Mon-Sat, to 6.30pm Sun) The retail outlet of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA; see the boxed text, below). It sells embroidered shawls, clothes and wall hangings.

Ravivari (Map p721; ☎ dawn-dusk Sun) This river-side flea market is a crazy mass of animals, music, crockery, clothing and gadgets that makes for fascinating rummaging.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Two recommended booking agents are **Parshwanath Travels** (Map p719; ☎ 27544142; parsh-trvl@wilnetonline.net; Ashram Rd; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Mon-Sat) and **Express Travels** (Map p719; ☎ 26588602; express@wilnetonline.net; ☎ 11am-6.30pm Mon-Sat), around the corner from Gujarat Tourism. Both places accept major credit cards.

Air India (Map p719; ☎ 26585382; Premchand House, Ashram Rd), near the High Court building, has flights to New York (US\$740) and Chicago (US\$850) via Mumbai and London (£278).

Indian Airlines (Map p721; ☎ 26585622, airport office 22867237; Relief Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm) is near the Nehru Bridge. It flies to Sharjah (Rs 14,100), Kuwait (Rs 19,225) and Muscat (Rs 14,095).

Singapore Airlines (☎ 30012840), off CG Rd, flies to/from Singapore.

Jet Airways (Map p719; ☎ 27543304; Ashram Rd; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat & Sun) flies regularly to Mumbai (US\$95 to US\$140; daily connections to Goa) and Delhi (US\$100 to US\$190).

BUS

Private buses from the north drop you at Naroda Rd, about 7km northwest of the city centre – an autorickshaw will complete the journey for around Rs 50.

Leaving from the bus stand near Rani Sipri's Mosque, **State Transport Corporation** (STC; Map p721; ☎ 25463360) buses go to Vadodara (Rs 60, two hours, every 10 minutes), as well as hourly to Jamnagar (Rs 115, seven hours), Junagadh (Rs 120, eight hours), Bhavnagar (Rs 90, four hours) and Rajkot (Rs 95, 4½ hours).

If you're travelling long distances, private buses are quicker; some offices are east of the STC bus stand. **Punjab Travels** (Map p719; ☎ 9am-9pm; Embassy Market (☎ 26589200; off Ashram Rd); Shefali Shopping Centre (☎ 26579999; Pritamnagar Rd) offers a number of intercity services, including to Ajmer (ordinary/sleeper Rs 200/320, 11 hours), Aurangabad (ordinary/sleeper Rs 320/420, 16½ hours), Jaipur (ordinary/sleeper Rs 250/360, 14½ hours), Jodhpur (Rs 210, 11 hours) and Udaipur (ordinary/sleeper Rs 130/220, seven hours).

SEWA

The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is Gujarat's largest union, comprising 700,000 members in India (535,000 in Gujarat). It's based on the simple notion that poor women need organisation, not aid.

Established in 1972, SEWA identifies three types of self-employed workers: hawkers and vendors; home-based workers such as weavers, potters and *bidi* (handmade cigarette) rollers; and manual labourers and service providers such as agricultural labourers, construction workers and domestic workers.

SEWA assists self-employed workers to organise into unions and cooperatives, so that they can control the fruits of their own labours. SEWA's approach focuses on health and childcare, literacy, appropriate housing and self-sufficiency, and the SEWA Academy conducts leadership training courses for its members. In Video SEWA, women make films on their issues and problems. SEWA is also active in the campaign for a needs-based minimum wage. Membership costs Rs 5 per annum.

SEWA also runs a bank, giving many poor women their first access to a savings or reputable lending body, and provides access to legal aid.

The **SEWA Reception Centre** (Map p721; ☎ 5506444; www.sewa.org; ☎ 10.30am-6pm Mon-Sat) is at the eastern end of Ellis Bridge. It has a range of literature and visitors are welcome. SEWA's fixed-price handicrafts are sold at Banascraft (above).

MAJOR TRAINS FROM AHMEDABAD

Destination	Train No & name	Departure	Duration (hr)	Fare (Rs)
Bhavnagar	9271 <i>Bhavnagar Exp</i>	6.20am	5¼	154/403* (SL/3AC)
Bhuj	9115 <i>Bandra-Bhuj Exp</i>	11.59pm	7¾	172/454*/709
Delhi	2957 <i>Rajdhani</i>	5.25pm (Tue-Sun)	14¼	1200/1785
	2915 <i>Ashram Exp</i>	5.45pm	18½	346/919*/1421
	9105 <i>Delhi Mail</i>	9.50am	19½	326/889*
Goa				
Jamnagar	9005 <i>Saurashtra Mail</i>	5.40am	6½	166/437* (SL/3AC)
Mumbai	2010 <i>Shatabdi</i>	2.30pm (Sat-Thu)	7¼	690/1315
	2902 <i>Gujarat Mail</i>	10.05pm	8¾	235/604*/925
Porbandar	9215 <i>Saurashtra Exp</i>	8.15pm	10¼	206/548*
Rajkot	1464 <i>Rajkot Exp</i>	8.15am (Thu, Sat-Tue)	5	139/360* (SL/3AC)
Udaipur	9944 <i>Sarai Rohilla Exp</i>	11.05pm	8½	154/621
Vadodara	2010 <i>Shatabdi</i>	2.30pm (Sat-Thu)	1½	270/520

Rajdhani fares are 3AC/2AC; *Shatabdi* fares are chair/executive; Express and Mail fares are 2nd class/chair car or sleeper for day trains, sleeper/AC sleeper for overnight trains (* = 3-tier). To calculate 1st-class and other fares see the table, p1180.

New Limda Travels (Map p719; ☎ 26579379; 5 Shroff Chambers) is a recommended company (the sign is in Gujarati), with buses travelling to Palitana (Rs 130, 4½ hours), Bhavnagar (Rs 120, four hours) and Mumbai (ordinary/sleeper/deluxe Rs 350/500/700, 24 hours). **Bonny Travels** (Map p719; ☎ 26579265; Pritamnagar Rd; ☎ 6am-11pm) serves Jamnagar (Rs 220, six hours) and Rajkot (Rs 160, four hours) several times daily.

TRAIN

There's a **computerised booking office** (Map p721; ☎ 135; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun) to the left as you exit Ahmedabad train station. Window 6 handles the foreign-tourist quota, and you could try booking with your credit card at Window 7.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

The airport is 10km north of town; an auto-rickshaw costs about Rs 100. A cheaper option is bus 105 from Lal Darwaja (Rs 6).

AUTORICKSHAW

Authorickshaw drivers here use the meter (it's the dial by their left knee) and are mostly honest, though the occasional rascal might try to fleece you. Travelling from Ahmedabad train station to Sidi Saiyad's Mosque should cost about Rs 30.

AROUND AHMEDABAD

Adalaj Wav

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

Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary

This 116-sq-km lake, located some 60km southwest of Ahmedabad, is a flood of ceaseless blue dissolving into the sky, surrounded by iron-flat plains. Between November and February, the **sanctuary** (Indian/foreigner Rs 10/250, car Rs 20, video Rs 2500) sees flocks of indigenous and migratory birds with as many as 250 species passing through the park. Ducks, geese, pelicans and flamingos are best seen early in the morning (aim for 5.30am) and in the evening.

The sanctuary is busiest at weekends and on holidays. To see the birds, it's best to hire a boat (Rs 100 per hour) for a few hours. Don't let your guide scare the birds.

Take supplies such as mineral water and food, as there's no café. Gujarat Tourism runs

a group of **pod-like huts** (☎ 079-26589172; d Rs 800) outside the sanctuary boundary.

Buses are infrequent (Rs 35, 2½ hours); your best bet may be a taxi from Ahmedabad (return around Rs 1000).

Lothal

About 85km southwest of Ahmedabad, this important archaeological site was discovered in 1954. The city that stood here 4500 years ago is clearly related to the Indus Valley cities of Mohenjodaro and Harappa, both in Pakistan. It has the same neat street pattern, carefully assembled, neat brickwork, and scientific drainage system.

Lothal means 'mound of the dead' in Gujarati, as does Mohenjodaro in Sindhi. Excavations have revealed a tidal dockyard (with a complex lock-gate system) – at its peak, this was probably one of the most important ports on the subcontinent. The Sabarmati River, which no longer runs past here, connected the dock to the Gulf of Cambay. Seals discovered at the site suggest that trade may have been conducted with the civilisations of Mesopotamia, Egypt and Persia.

The **archaeological museum** (admission Rs 3; ☎ 10am-5pm Sat-Thu) at the site displays fragments of this well-ordered civilisation, such as intricate seals, weights and measures, games and jewellery.

Palace Utelia (☎ /fax 079-26445770; r Rs 2000), 7km from the archaeological site, by the Bhugavo River, is an imposing palace – complete with aged retainers – that dwarfs the village it oversees. The shabby rooms are overpriced, but it's an unusual place with charm if not comfort.

Lothal is a long day trip from Ahmedabad. There are buses (Rs 68, three hours), or you can reach it via train to Bhurkhi (6km away), from where you can take a bus. There's a train from Ahmedabad at 7.50am (2nd class Rs 41, three hours).

Modhera

The beautiful **Sun Temple** (☎ 8am-6pm) was built by King Bhimdev I in 1026 and 1027 and resembles the better-known Konark temple in Orissa, which it predates by 200 years. It was similarly designed so that the dawn sun shone on the image of Surya, the sun god, during the equinoxes. The main hall and shrine are reached through a complex, pillared pavilion. The temple exterior is intricately and delicately carved, showing demons and evolving

gods. As at Somnath, this temple was ruined by Mahmud of Ghazni, but it remains impressive. Fifty two intricately carved pillars depict scenes from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The interior contains a hall with 12 niches representing Surya's different monthly manifestations. Erotic sculpture panels complete the sensual decoration.

It's fronted by the **Surya Kund**, an extraordinary rectangular *baoli* that contains over 100 shrines, resembling a sunken art gallery. Shrines to Ganesh, Vishnu and an incarnation of Shiva surround the tank on its other three sides.

In January Modhera is also the scene for a three-day **dance festival**.

Modhera is 102km northwest of Ahmedabad. There are direct buses (Rs 68, 3½ hours), or you can take the train to Mahesana and then catch a bus to Modhera (26km). Buses from Zainabad stop at Modhera (Rs 27, 1½ hours, three daily), and go on to Patan (Rs 56, one hour).

Patan

☎ 02766 / pop 112,038

Patan is a dusty, little-visited town, but its narrow streets are lined by elaborate, faded wooden houses, and are worth exploring. They hold more than 100 Jain temples, the largest of which is **Panchasara Parasvanath**.

About 130km northwest of Ahmedabad, Patan was an ancient Hindu capital before being sacked by Mahmud of Ghazni in 1024 – the only sign of its former glory is **Rani-ki-Vav** (admission Indian/foreigner Rs 5/100; ☎ 8am-6pm), an astoundingly beautiful *baoli*, incongruously grand in this unassuming town. Built in 1050, the *baoli* is the oldest and finest in Gujarat and is remarkably well preserved – it was protected by centuries of silt and restored in the 1980s.

Patan's also famous for its beautiful Patola silk saris produced in a torturously laborious process. Threads are painstakingly tie-dyed to create the pattern *before* the weaving process begins. To see them being made visit **VK Salvi** (www.patanpatola.com; Salviwado, Patolawala St).

Neerav Hotel (☎ 222127; s Rs 150, d Rs 200-400, r with AC Rs 900; ☎), near Kohinoor Cinema, is reasonable, while nearby **Anand Restaurant** (Kilachand Shopping Centre; dishes around Rs 30) has good thalis and à la carte dishes.

Patan is 25km northwest of Mahesana. Buses from Ahmedabad take 3½ hours and cost Rs 55. There are buses from Zainabad (Rs 60, 2½ hours, three daily), via Modhera.

GANDHINAGAR

pop 195,891

Gandhinagar forms a striking contrast to Ahmedabad, with big broad avenues and lots of greenery. This is where state politicians live, in large, well-fortified houses. Although Ahmedabad became the capital of Gujarat when the old state of Mumbai was split, this new capital was planned 32km northeast on the west bank of the Sabarmati River. Named Gandhinagar after Mahatma Gandhi, it's India's second planned city after Chandigarh. The secretariat was moved here in 1970.

The reason for visiting is spectacular **Akshardham Temple** (Ja Rd, Sector 20; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Tue-Sun), belonging to the wealthy Hindu Swaminarayan group. Built by nearly 1000 artisans, it is an elaborately carved building constructed out of 6000 tonnes of pink sandstone and surrounded by manicured lawns and perfect trees.

In September 2002, two suspected Islamist terrorists opened fire on visitors, murdering 31 people, before they themselves were killed, but there's little trace of this tragedy today, other than some bullet grazes on the ceiling.

Getting There & Away

From Ahmedabad, buses to Gandhinagar (Rs 16, 45 minutes, every 15 minutes) depart from the back northwest corner of Lal Darwaja and from the numerous stops along Ashram Rd.

VADODARA (BARODA)

☎ 0265 / pop 1.49 million

Vadodara (or Baroda as it's often known) is a cultured, harmonious university town 100km southeast of Ahmedabad, which explodes into life during festival season. The impressive museum, overwrought Indo-Saracenic palace and beautiful Tambekar Wada can be visited in a day or two, but the main reason for coming here is the nearby, wonderful Unesco World Heritage site Champaner, with its mosques lost in the landscape.

Prior to Independence, Vadodara was the capital of the princely Gaekwad state, and today prides itself as an educational centre, and home to the sprawling MS University.

Orientation & Information

The train station, bus stands and hotels are on the west side of the Vishwamurti River, which bisects the city. Tilak Rd connects the station with the main part of town.

There's an ICICI ATM at the train station and SBI and Standard Chartered ATMs on RC Dutt Rd.

Crossword (2/1 Arunoday Society, Alkapuri; ☎ 10.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, to 9pm Sat & Sun) A brilliant bookstore, with a good café.

Gujarat Tourism (☎ 2427489; ground fl, Narmada Bhavan, Jail Rd; ☎ 10.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, closed 2nd & 4th Sat of month)

HB's (104 Helix Sayjgunj; per hr Rs 10; ☎ 24hr) Part of a complex of several internet cafés.

Municipal tourist office (☎ 2794456; ☎ 24hr) Opposite the train station.

Thomas Cook (☎ 2355574; Shriram Chambers, RC Dutt Rd) Changes travellers cheques and currency.

Sights

SAYAJI BAGH

Within this shady, pleasant park is the **Baroda Museum** (admission Rs 10; ☎ 10.30am-5pm), which houses some good Asian statues and carvings, mangy zoology exhibits and an Egyptian room. The gallery has lovely Mughal miniatures and a motley crew of European masters.

TAMBEKAR WADA

This wooden multistoreyed **townhouse** (admission free; ☎ 8am-6pm) is a typical Maratha mansion, once the residence of Bhau Tambekar, Diwan of Baroda (1849-54). Inside are some beautiful 19th-century murals.

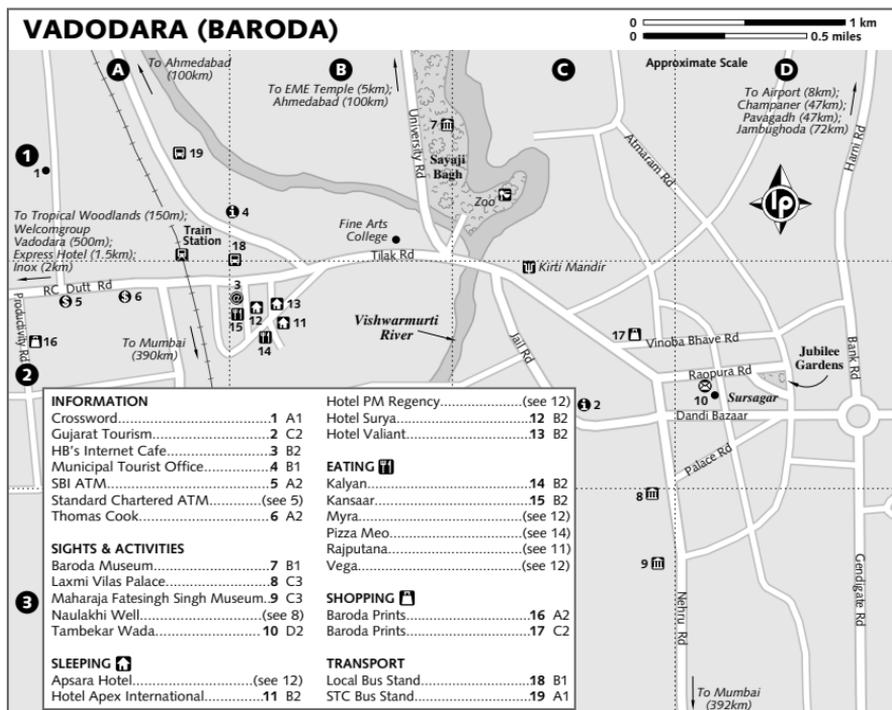
OTHER SIGHTS

Laxmi Vilas Palace (Nehru Rd; admission Rs 100; ☎ 10.30am-5.30pm Tue-Sun) was built in full-throttle 19th-century Indo-Saracenic style for Rs 6 million. You don't get much for your entrance fee – a few weapons and the Durbar Hall. Tickets are available from the neighbouring, underwhelming **Maharaja Fateh Singh Museum**. The **Naulakhi Well** (Nehru Rd), a fine *baoli*, is 50m north of the palace. About 5km north of town is the unusual Dakshinamoorthy Temple, more commonly known as the **EME (Electrical Mechanical Engineering) Temple**, built in the grounds of an Indian Army complex with an aluminium-domed roof.

In the centre of Sursagar, a lake in the east of town, is a huge statue of **Shiva**.

Sleeping

There are numerous hotels in and around Sayaji Gunj. The midrange options have 24-hour check-out and free airport transfer.



BUDGET

Apsara Hotel (☎ 5549600; Sayaji Gunj; s/d from Rs 150/250) In the street west of Hotel Surya is this friendly, welcoming place with a leafy yard. The rooms are small and a bit grubby, though those upstairs (without TV) are brighter. Showers shoot out at right angles.

Hotel Valiant (☎ 2363480; 7th fl, BBC Tower, Sayaji Gunj; s/d Rs 400/550, with AC from Rs 600/750) The bargain of the city, this popular hotel is hidden behind the main drag, and reached via a creaky lift. Rooms are clean and well-presented – all with TV and fridge.

Hotel PM Regency (☎ 2361616; Sayaji Gunj; s Rs 300-600, d Rs 600, with AC Rs 850/1050; ☎) This mainstay has reasonable rooms, with good value options overlooking the pleasant street. Condemning yourself to an 'economy' single is not for the claustrophobic.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Hotel Surya (☎ 2361361; www.hotelsurya.com; Sayaji Gunj; s/d with breakfast Rs 525/750, with AC from Rs 825/1000; ☎ ☎) Surya is incredibly popular, with a cordial atmosphere and professional staff. Rooms are spacious, and most overlook leafy

Sayaji Gunj. There are two restaurants (see opposite).

Hotel Apex International (☎ 2362551; www.hotelapex.com; Sayaji Gunj; s/d from Rs 800/1050) Opposite the statue of Sardar Patel, this has smart, well-designed rooms with balconies; some have views.

Express Hotel (☎ 2330960; www.expressworld.com; RC Dutt Rd; s/d/ste Rs 2600/3200/4000; ☎) The first government approved hotel in Gujarat (way back in 1973), this is a good choice, with business-minded though aesthetically pleasing rooms, and two very good restaurants. It's 1.5km west of the train station.

Welcomgroup Vadodra (☎ 2330033; www.welcomgroup.com; RC Dutt Rd; r with breakfast Rs 4500-8000; ☎ ☎) Perhaps the finest five-star hotel in Gujarat, this has well-appointed rooms, an inviting outdoor pool and a swish restaurant.

Eating

Vadodra has a burgeoning number of good restaurants, particularly in the popular Alka-puri area.

Kalyan (Sayaji Gunj; dishes Rs 15-80) Kalyan is a cool student hang-out, and is a perfect spot for

people-watching. The breezy restaurant serves healthy portions of Indian food (the sizzler plate is heavy duty), but unhealthy Western dishes.

Rajputana (☎ 5522799; Sayaji Gunj; mains Rs 45-85; ☎ 11am-3pm & 7-11pm) Specialising in North Indian (including Rajasthani) and Chinese dishes, this feels intimate, divided up by interior walls that feature gaps and hanging chains, and has a view over the busy small *chowk* with its food stalls.

Kansaar (101 Unique Trade Centre, Sayaji Gunj; thali Rs 80) A classy 12-year-old thali joint on the second floor, with impeccable service and delicious food; smokers can enjoy the fine street view.

Tropical Woodlands (139 Windsor Plaza, RC Dutt Rd; dishes Rs 18-100) This place provides popular, delicious South Indian food in pleasant surroundings, with big plate-glass windows for overlooking the busy road and a ceiling centred on dangling plastic plants.

Pizza Meo (Sayaji Gunj; pizza Rs 75-140, pasta Rs 90-105) This small Italian *ristorante* serves excellent pizza, and so-so pasta. Monday night buffet (Rs 150) is standing room only.

Mandap (Express Hotel, RC Dutt Rd; thali Rs 130; ☎ 11am-3pm & 7.30-10.30pm) has one the best thalis in town in a room with a mock-desert-tent interior.

Hotel Surya (☎ 2361361; www.hotelsurya.com; Sayaji Gunj) has two restaurants: **Vega** (dishes Rs 40-140; ☎ 7-10.30am, noon-3pm & 7.30-11pm), which has a comfortable atmosphere and good Chinese and Indian dishes, and **Myra** (thali Rs 85-115; ☎ 11am-3pm & 7-11pm), with good, filling thalis.

Entertainment

Inox (Ellora Park) This is a glossy mall about 2km west of the centre. It's a big local attraction, with fast-food places and a fashionable department store as well as an eight-screen multiplex showing all the latest releases.

Shopping

Baroda Prints Salatwada (Main Rd; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-8pm Sun); Aries Complex (GF-2,3 Productivity Rd; ☎ 9.30am-8.30pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-8.30pm Sun) A fantastic shop selling hand-printed textiles, including bright, beautiful bed sheets, dress material and so on. In the Salatwada store you can see the printers at work in the back room.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The airport is 8km northeast of town. **Indian Airlines** (☎ 2794747/8) has daily flights to Mum-

bai (US\$125) and Delhi (US\$215). **Jet Airways** (☎ 2343441) also has daily Mumbai flights.

BUS

The STC bus stand is 400m north of the train station, and there are buses to many destinations in Gujarat, western Madhya Pradesh and northern Maharashtra. Every 10 minutes there are buses to Ahmedabad (Rs 60, two hours). Regular buses also serve Bhavnagar (Rs 100, five hours), Palitana (Rs 110, eight hours, two daily), Diu (Rs 145, 13 hours, two daily) and Tararbul (for Lothal; Rs 55). Many private bus companies have offices nearby.

TRAIN

To Ahmedabad, the 9115 *Sayajinagari Express* leaves Vadodara at 9.51pm (2nd class Rs 51, 2¼ hours, 99km) and the 9011 *Gujarat Express* leaves at 12.13pm. The 2009/10 *Shatabdi* departs at 11.51am Saturday to Thursday (chair/executive Rs 315/590, two hours). From Ahmedabad it leaves at 2.30pm, arriving in Vadodara at 4.15pm and going on to Mumbai, arriving at 9.45pm (chair/executive Rs 695/1330). Also to Mumbai, the 9144 *Lokshakti Express* leaves at 11.10pm (sleepers/3AC Rs 212/565, 7¼ hours, 392km).

AROUND VADODARA Champaner & Pavagadh

Spectacular Champaner and Pavagadh are 47km northeast of Vadodara: Champaner is a Unesco World Heritage site, Gujarat's former capital, scattered on and around Pavagadh, an 800m volcanic hill looking like a chunk of the Himalaya dumped on the plain.

Pavagadh's oldest monument is the 10th- to 11th-century **Lakulisha Temple**, near the top of the hill. On the highest point is the temple of **Kalika Mata** – an important pilgrimage site, and home to a month-long **festival** in honour of the goddess Mahakali, which takes place in the month of Chaitra (March/April). You can walk to the temples at the top of Pavagadh hill, which will take two to three hours, or you can take the recently re-opened cable car (Rs 70 return). You'll need to take a bus to the base from Champaner (Rs 10).

Champaner (☎ 02676-245631; Indian/foreigner Rs 5/100; ☎ 10am-6pm) was established as the Chauhan Rajput capital in about the 8th century. On a strategic trade route, it was besieged by Sultan Mahmud Begara, who succeeded in taking it in 1484 (the Rajputs committed

jauhar – ritual mass suicide – in the face of defeat) and built many religious structures as well as the impressive fort wall on Pava-gadh. But the city began to decline from 1535 when the Mughals, led by Humayun himself, scaled the fort walls using iron spikes driven into the rocks and captured both the fort and its city.

The walls at the base of the hill were once 6km long; they surrounded military, civic and religious buildings and complex water-harvesting systems. The most stunning features are the mosques, with a blending of Islamic and Hindu decoration styles. The most spectacular monument is the Jama Masjid. Dating from 1513, it took 125 years to build, and has a wonderful carved entrance and imposing courtyard. Inside, the ruler's prayer hall is divided from the main space by jalis. Behind the building is an octagonal *kund* (lake), Hauz-i-Vazu, used for washing before prayer.

Other beautiful mosques include **Kewda Masjid**, where you can walk up the narrow stairs to the rooftop, with the globelike domes, as rounded as fruit, and even further up the minarets for great views. Nearby is **Iteri Masjid**, with brick-built minarets that resemble factory chimneys, and even further into the countryside is **Nagina Masjid**, with no minarets but exquisite geometric carving.

Hotel Champaner (☎ 02676-245641; Pavagadh Man-chi; dm/s/d Rs 75/200/300, s/d with AC Rs 500/750; 🏠) has state-run rooms that are plain and basic, but all have balconies with superb views.

There are six daily buses from Vadodara (Rs 42, two hours); a return taxi costs around Rs 550.

Jambughoda

Around 25km from Champaner is the charming ex-princely state of Jambughoda, turned sanctuary in 1992, encompassing 130 sq km of lush countryside. You can stay at **Jambughoda Palace** (☎ 241258; jambughodapalace@rediffmail.com; r Rs 1000-1200), a lovely rambling place, built in 1924, run by the erstwhile royal family who still live here. Rooms are simple and it's an enchantingly peaceful place, with resident geese and ducks.

BHARUCH

pop 148,391

Bharuch appeared in historical records nearly 2000 years ago. It's on the main rail line between Vadodara and Surat, about an hour from each.

The hilltop **fort** overlooks the wide Narmada River and has the **Jama Masjid** at its base. On the river bank, east of the city, is the **Temple of Bhri-gu Rishi**, from which the city took its name, Bhri-gukachba, later shortened to Bharuch.

The Narmada River is notorious because of the Sardar Sarovar, a hugely controversial dam, upstream of Bharuch near the village of Manibeli (see p89).

SURAT

☎ 026 / pop 2.4 million

On the Tapti River, Surat is a busy commercial centre for textiles and diamonds. It's long attracted outsiders: Parsis settled here in the 12th century, it later became a vital Mughal port and transit point for Mecca, and in 1613 was the first English settlement in India.

Once India's chief trading port, it declined when the East India Company shifted to Bombay. In 1994, there was an outbreak of the plague, and it was rated as India's filthiest city. Big cleanups have reportedly left it the second cleanest and healthiest (after Chandigarh). You might be inclined to rate it most exhausting and noisy, but travellers with an interest in colonial history might be tempted to stop.

Built in 1546, the riverside **castle** is alongside the Tapti Bridge and now full of offices, but there are good views from its bastions. **Colonial tombs** here date from the 15th to the 18th centuries. Most magnificent is the 17th-century memorial to Baron Adrian Van Reed, a local Dutch company director.

The city has huge textile outlets, including **Bombay Market** (Umarwada) – a big sari retail centre 1km south of the train station.

The nearby Dangs mountains near Maharastra host a spectacular, largely tourist-free **festival** in the week before Holi.

Getting There & Away

Surat is on the main Mumbai–Ahmedabad railway line. There are many trains to/from Ahmedabad, including the 9215 *Saurashtra Express* (sleeper Rs 132, five hours, 229km) and the 9301 *Kutch Express* from Mumbai (sleeper, Rs 143, four hours, 263km).

AROUND SURAT

Twenty-nine kilometres south of Surat (30 minutes by train), **Navsari** has been a headquarters for the Parsi community since 1142. Some 13km from Navsari is **Dandi**, the destination of Gandhi's epic Salt March in 1930. It's

reached along a pleasant rural road, and by the strikingly empty beach are several monuments to Gandhi, including a small museum. There's another museum at **Karodi**, 3km from Dandi, where he was arrested.

Udvada, 10km north of Vapi, the station for Daman, has India's oldest Parsi sacred fire; it's said to have been brought from Persia to Diu, on the opposite coast of the Gulf of Cambay, in AD 700. **Sanjan**, in the extreme south of the state, is the small port where the Parsis first landed. A pillar marks the spot.

DAMAN

☎ 02602 / pop 35,743

The ex-Portuguese enclave of Daman is like Diu's feral cousin – a wild-eyed resort town on a grey, soupy sea that ain't no tropical paradise. There is the piquancy of old Portugal here though, in the fine forts and churches (the evening services are spiritually charming), and a booze-soaked whimsy (to be sure, to be sure) that attracts exiles from Mumbai and fen-filled Gujarati thrill-seekers swaying harder than the palms on nearby Devka Beach.

Along with Diu and Goa, Daman was taken in 1961 from the Portuguese, who had seized in 1531. The Portuguese had been officially ceded the region by Bahadur Shah, the last major Gujarati sultan, in 1559. For a time Daman and Diu were governed from Goa but both now constitute the Union Territory of Daman and Diu, overseen by Delhi.

You are forbidden to take alcohol out of Daman unless you have a permit; there are police checks as you leave.

Information

Cyber Point (Dharmest Apt C; per hr Rs 25; ☎ 10am-9pm)

Dena Bank ATM (Kavi Khabardar Marg)

Main post office (☎ 2230453) South of the river.

Post office (☎ 2254353; Nani Daman; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Sat) More convenient than the main post office.

Speed Age Cyber Café (Kave Khabardar Marg; per hr Rs 20; ☎ 9.30am-9.30pm)

Tourist office (☎ 2255104; ☎ 9.30am-1.30pm & 2-6pm Mon-Fri) Near the bus stand; gives out a free map.

World Wide Travels & Tours (☎ 2255734; Devka Rd) In the arcade below Hotel Maharaja, it changes travellers cheques.

Sights & Activities

NANI DAMAN

You can walk around Nani Daman's **Fort of St Jerome** ramparts, with views over the colourful

fishing fleet – the nearby bridge often tumbles in monsoon season. The fort has a magnificent giant gateway facing the river to impress incoming traffic. The 1901 **Church of Our Lady of the Sea** inside the walls is worth a look.

To the north is a **Jain temple** with 18th-century murals depicting the life of Mahavira, who lived around 500 BC.

MOTI DAMAN

Moti Daman's **fort** dates from 1559. The walls, divided by 10 bastions, encircle 30 sq km of land. Inside are sleepy, leafy streets reminiscent of the Portuguese era, and there are relaxing views across the river to Nani Daman from the ramparts near the lighthouse. Moti Daman once housed the Portuguese gentry, and near the fort gate is the sometime home of 18th-century Portuguese poet Bocage.

Sé (Portuguese for 'cathedral'), or Church of Bom Jesus, built in 1603, is a piece of Iberia in India, with elaborate woodcarving.

The **Church of Our Lady of the Rosary**, across the overgrown square, has ancient Portuguese tombstones set into its cool, damp floor. Light filters through the dusty windows, illuminating the altar, a masterpiece of furiously detailed, gold-painted woodcarving. If it's closed, try the Sé for the key.

BEACHES

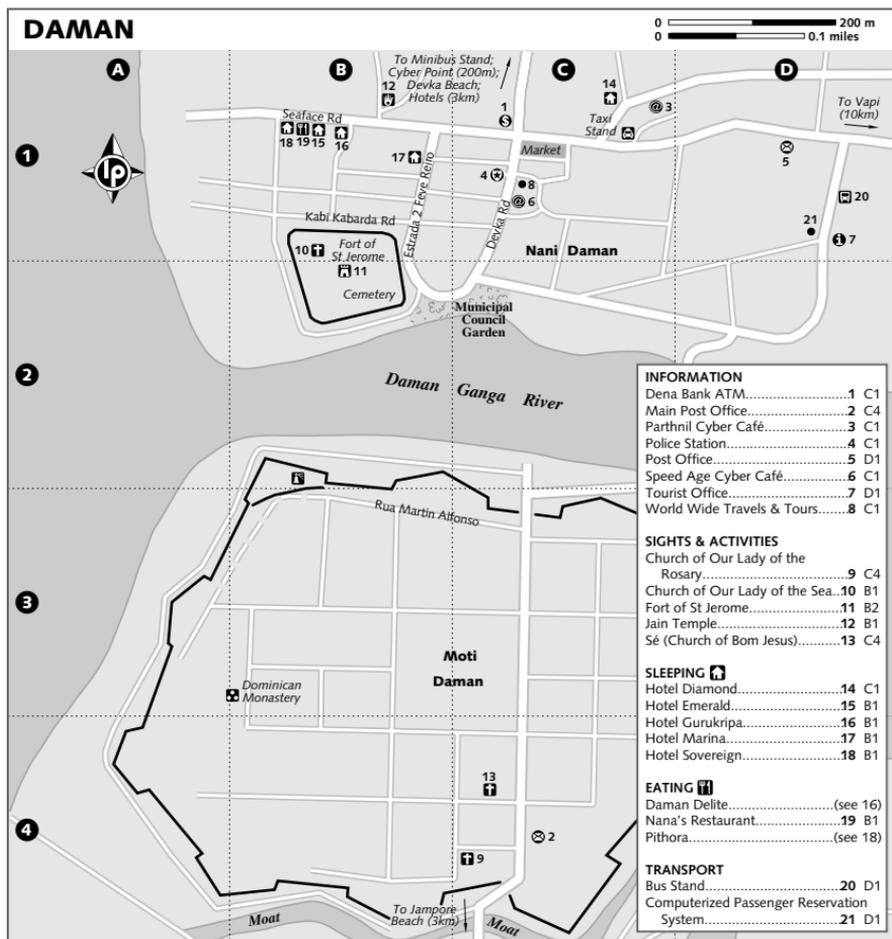
About 3km north of Nani Daman are the grubby, rocky shores of **Devka Beach** – not an appealing prospect. But the ambience of the place is easy-going; bars and hotels dot the quiet beachside road. The palm-shaded beach at **Jampore**, about 3km south of Moti Daman, is better, but still no good for swimming. An autorickshaw from town will cost Rs 30 to Devka and Rs 40 to Jampore.

Sleeping & Eating

Daman gets packed during holiday periods (particularly Diwali), when it's advisable to book ahead.

In February, Daman is noted for *papri*, boiled and salted sweet peas served wrapped in newspaper. Crab and lobster are in season in October. *Tari* palm wine is a popular drink sold in earthenware pots.

A Kingfisher beer costs only Rs 35 at local bars, but hotels charge Rs 45 or more. Or you may fancy a drop of mellow port (Rs 35 per glass).



TOWN AREA

Hotel Diamond (☎ 2255135; s/d Rs 250/400, with AC Rs 550/750; 🏠) This is a friendly choice, with musty but decent rooms, very near the taxi stand.

Hotel Marina (☎ 2254420; Estrada 2 Feve Reiro; s/d Rs 495/595, deluxe Rs 595/685) By far the pick of Damán, this converted Portuguese-style house has delightful upstairs rooms opening onto a thatched mezzanine. Rates are excellent value, and the restaurant does a few mean seafood dishes.

Hotel Sovereign (☎ 2250236; Seaface Rd; s/d Rs 725/875; 🏠) Near Hotel Gurukripa, this has reasonable, smartish rooms.

Hotel Gurukripa (☎ 2255046; www.hotelgurukripa.com; Seaface Rd; s/d Rs 825/950; 🏠) This option has

good rooms with satin-quilted bed covers lending a touch of the boudoir. They also run yoga classes.

Hotel Emerald (Seaface Rd; s/d Rs 900/1100; 🏠) A sparkling new, bright red premises better suited to manic Mumbai than lazy Damán. Rooms are ultra chic, and staff are amiable. The lounge bar is a class act. You could call ahead, but they don't have a phone.

Pithora (Hotel Sovereign, Seaface Rd; limited/unlimited thali Rs 60/90; 🍽️ 6am-3.30pm & 7-11pm; 🏠) Serves up tasty thalis in AC comfort or at an attractive rooftop restaurant with a sloping bamboo ceiling.

Nana's Restaurant (Seaface Rd; dishes Rs 45-120) A polished new nosh spot well on the tourist beat, with spicy meat dishes and powerful AC.

Daman Delite (Hotel Gurukripa, Seaface Rd; dishes Rs 40-200) Daman's best restaurant, a small place with stars on the ceiling and white tablecloths, popular with groups of men on their Daman break and the occasional family (however, even women alone will feel fine).

BEACH AREA

There are lots of decent midrange places at Devka Beach, stretching for 1.5km along the main road. All have a restaurant.

Sandy Resort (☎/fax 2254644; www.sandyresort.com; r Rs 650-950; 🍷 🍷) This is a friendly place with comfortable rooms ranging from rundown standard to bright and breezy deluxe options with balconies.

Hotel Shilton (☎ 2254558; r from Rs 600, with AC Rs 700-850; 🍷) Nearest to Daman, this offers a range of rundown rooms with small balconies; it'll drop prices like a shot.

Hotel Miramar (☎ 2250671; www.miramarmirasol.com; r with AC from Rs 1200, 6-person cottages Rs 2400; 🍷 🍷) This place is on the beach, 4km from Nani Daman. Rooms feel tired but the better ones have shady balconies.

Kalyan (Hotel Miramar; dishes Rs 40-400; 🍷 8am-midnight) This is a good open-air restaurant, in a fantastic setting jutting above the beach.

Getting There & Away

Vapi (3½ hours from Vadodara), on the main railway line, is about 10km from Daman. You can reserve tickets at the **Computerized Passenger Reservation System** (☎ 2254254; 🍷 8am-4pm), opposite the tourist office.

Plenty of share-taxis (Rs 15 per person, 20 minutes) wait outside the train station and leave frequently for Daman. It costs Rs 70 by autorickshaw, but most aren't permitted to enter Daman district. There are also some ramshackle buses (Rs 5).

SAURASHTRA

Saurashtra, also known as the Kathiawar peninsula, is the poster child for Gujarati diversity. Never part of British India, it consisted of 200 separate princely states until Independence during which time the laid-back landowners had amassed considerable feudal wealth. Head to toe in white, with turbans, pleated jackets and jodhpurs, and huge, golden stud earrings, these men are marvels of modern India, while the rural women are

as colourful as those of Rajasthan and wear embroidered backless cholis and heavy jewellery. City folk, meanwhile, continue to be hard-at-it and industrious.

Saurashtra has a reputation for being fond of its sleep, and siesta takes place from at least 1pm to 3pm. Traffic moves slower than the flowery fields grow, and the sea breeze is never far away.

The peninsula took its name from the Kathi tribespeople who used to roam the area at night stealing whatever was not locked into the many *kots* (forts). It consists of a central plateau – with some fabulously remote terrain – sloping down towards secluded coastal plains, with dense forests on its other side.

BHAVNAGAR

☎ 0278 / pop 510,958

Bhavnagar is a busy industrial centre that makes a useful base for journeys to nearby Shatrunjaya and Velavadar National Park. Founded in 1743, Bhavnagar has long been an important cotton trading post, but now supplements its survival on diamonds, plastics and ship parts – Bhavnagar lock gate keeps ships afloat in the port at low tide. The tangled bazaars and crumbling wooden houses of the old city feel remarkably untouched by the outside world, but otherwise there's little to see, and tourists are treated with a warm second glance.

Gandhi attended university here – a small museum displays photos of his life.

Orientation & Information

Bhavnagar is a sprawling city with distinctly separate old and new sections. The STC bus stand is in the new part of town and the train station is at the far end of the old city, around 2.5km away. There's an HDFC ATM near the museum.

Post office (🍷 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat)

State Bank of India (☎ 2439746; 🍷 10.30am-2.30pm & 3-7pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-4pm Sat) In the old city; changes cash and travellers cheques.

Yayoo Cyber Café (188 Madhav Darshan, Waghawadi Rd; per hr Rs 20; 🍷 9am-midnight)

Sights & Activities

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

Northeast, by the clock tower, the interesting, dusty **Barton/Gandhi Smriti Museum** (admission

Rs 3; 🚗 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, closed 2nd & 4th Sat of month), has religious carvings, betel-nut cutters, a skeleton in a cupboard and more Gandhi photographs than you could think existed.

Near the State Bank of India is the oldest part of the city, worth a wander, busy with small shops and cluttered with dilapidated elaborate wooden buildings.

Sleeping

The cheap hotel scene – mostly found in the old city – is fairly grim, but the midrange hotels are reasonable value.

BUDGET

Hotel Mini (☎ 2512915; Station Rd; s/d Rs 150/275) Close to the train station, this place is cleanish and quiet, with decent-sized rooms – doubles are much better than singles. Checkout is 24 hours. It's the best choice but only because the competition is so shoddy.

Vrindavan Hotel (☎ 2518928; Darbargadh; d/tr Rs 200/300; 🚗) This looks promising – a huge, old, rambling place around a courtyard, with rooms of various shapes and sizes but they are not that clean.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

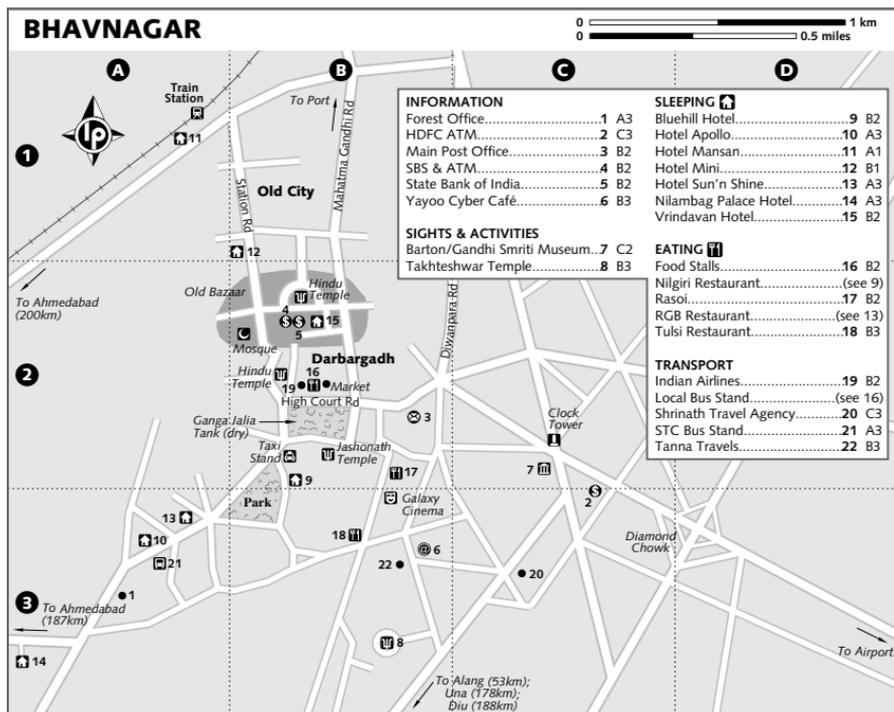
Hotel Apollo (☎ 2515655; s/d Rs 500/700, with AC Rs 700/900; 🚗) Apollo, opposite the STC bus stand, has drab but spacious cheaper rooms with balconies, and smart but musty AC ones. Bathrooms are notably clean. There are money-changing facilities (lowish rates).

Hotel Mausan (☎ 2512565; Station Rd; r Rs 700-1200; 🚗) Near the train station, this place is well turned-out, with comfy beds, modern facilities and helpful staff.

Bluehill Hotel (☎ 2426951; bluehillad1@sanchamet.in; s/d from Rs 1000/1100; 🚗 📺) Down a quiet park-side road, this is a good choice with airy, light, bright rooms overlooking storks nesting in tree-tops. There are two restaurants.

Hotel Sun'n Shine (☎ 2516131; s/d from Rs 1100/1400; 🚗 📺) This well-run hotel has a luxuriant lobby with fresh, clean rooms. The more you pay, the more windows you get. There are two restaurants.

Nilmbag Palace Hotel (☎ 2424241; s/d Rs 2000/3800; 🚗) On the Ahmedabad road is a former maharaja's palace, a stern place (built 1859), with stately rooms with dark, solid wooden furniture, but an impersonal feel. There's a circular



swimming pool (Rs 100 nonguests) and an appealing garden restaurant.

Eating

Food stalls line the northern side of Ganga Jalia Tank.

Tulsii Restaurant (Kalanala Chowk; veg dishes Rs 35-60; ☎ noon-3.30pm & 7-11pm) Low-lit with plants and understated décor, this is small, popular and has a short but good menu.

Rasoi (dishes Rs 35-150, unlimited thali Rs 80; ☎ 11am-3pm & 7-11pm) This recently overhauled bungalow restaurant is Bhavnagar's best. Inside you'll find great thalis, while the spot-lit lawn is reserved for Punjabi and Chinese fare – with a few twists. It's located off the main road.

Nilgiri Restaurant (Bluehill Hotel; dishes Rs 40-80; ☎ 11am-3pm & 7-11pm) Nice and bright, with big plate-glass windows, this has reliable Indian and Chinese vegetarian dishes.

RGB Restaurant (Hotel Sun'n Shine; veg dishes Rs 45-105; ☎ 7-11pm) This restaurant offers pure veg Jain, North Indian and Chinese dishes in smart plaid surroundings, with interesting daily specials.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The **Indian Airlines** office (☎ 2426503) is north of the Ganga Jalia Tank, off High Court Rd; there are regular Mumbai flights (US\$85).

An autorickshaw to/from the airport costs Rs 150. A bus (Rs 5) leaves from behind the Indian Airlines office.

BUS

State transport buses connect Bhavnagar with Ahmedabad and other regional centres. There are regular departures for Una (for Diu; Rs 95, six hours), Palitana (Rs 25, 1½ hours, hourly) and Ahmedabad (Rs 90, four hours, every two hours).

Private bus companies include **Tanna Travels** (☎ 2425218; Waghawadi Rd) and **Shrinath Travel Agency** (☎ 2427755), on the road to Palitana, with buses to Ahmedabad (with/without AC Rs 120/100, four hours) and Vadodara (Rs 110/130, five hours).

TRAIN

There are at least three trains to Ahmedabad daily, including the *Bhavnagar Express* departing at 8.15pm (sleeper/3AC Rs 174/433, 5½ hours, 268km).

AROUND BHAVNAGAR

Alang

On the coast between Bhavnagar and Talaja is Alang, India's largest ship-breaking site, where supertankers, container ships, warships and other vessels are dismantled – by hand – by 20,000 workers day and night. A huge ship takes around two to three months to pull apart.

It's an epic, Dickensian scene, but tricky to see as a tourist. In 2002 Greenpeace visited the yard posing as buyers, gathering material and photographs to support its protests against the dangerous conditions for workers at the yard and the toxic waste produced through ship breaking. Their actions have had some success; in February 2006, French President Jacques Chirac was forced to recall an asbestos-laden French ship to Europe. You can keep up to date with the controversy at www.greenpeace.org. These protests have made it more difficult for foreign tourists to visit the yard, but authorities can be lax. You may find you can wander unobtrusively onto the beach after asking a gatekeeper – it all depends on luck. A few kilometres along the road approaching the shipyard is a fascinatingly curious collection of junk shops selling things pulled off the ships – this is where to come if you want to buy a 1970s 20-seater sofa, a mirrored bar or a few hundred portholes.

For official permission, contact the **Gujarat Port Trust** (☎ 079-23238346) in Ahmedabad. You'll have to send a fax stating the date of the proposed visit, the reason and your passport number, and pay a fee.

Velavadar National Park

This beautiful, off-the-beaten-track, 34-sq-km **park** (Indian/foreigner Rs 10/250, car Rs 20/250, 4hr guide Rs 30/250, camera Rs 5/250, video Rs 200/2500; ☎ 7.30am-6pm 15 Oct-15 Jun), 65km north of Bhavnagar, encompasses large areas of pale, custard-coloured grassland stretching between two seasonal rivers.

It's famous for its blackbucks, beautiful, fast creatures, with around 3500 in and around the park, which sport elegant spiralling horns – as long as 65cm in mature males. It's also good for spotting birds such as wintering harriers, and the strange nilgai, which look half-horse, half-cow. You can explore by car or by walking. Local guides don't tend to speak English.

You can book accommodation at the **Tourist Lodge** (d Rs 300), which has four rooms at the

sanctuary, through the **Forest Office** (☎ 0278-2426425; 1st fl/10 Annexe Bldg, Bahamali Bhan; 🕒 11am-6pm Mon-Fri) near the STC bus stand in Bhavnagar.

A taxi from Bhavnagar costs about Rs 800 return. However, there are also buses (Rs 24) that run here.

PALITANA

☎ 02848 / pop 51,934

The hustling, bustling town of Palitana, 51km southwest of Bhavnagar, has grown up to serve the pilgrim trade around Shatrunjaya.

Sights

SHATRUNJAYA

One of Jainism's holiest pilgrimage sites, **Shatrunjaya** (Place of Victory; camera Rs 40; 🕒 temples 6.30am-7.45pm) is an incredible hilltop sea of 863 temples, built over 900 years on a plateau dedicated to the gods.

Jains believe that merit is derived from constructing temples – so this hill must have garnered a truckload. The hilltops are bounded by sturdy walls and the temples are grouped into nine *tunks* (enclosures) – each with a central temple and many minor ones. Some of the earliest were built in the 11th century, but were destroyed by Muslims in the 14th and 15th centuries; the current temples date from the 16th century onwards.

The 600m climb from the base of the hill to the summit is 2.5km, up 3200 steps, and will take about 1½ hours. It's best to start around dawn so you can climb before it gets too hot (or walk up for sunset). You can be carried up the hill in a *dholi* (portable chair with two bearers), which costs from Rs 200.

You should be properly dressed (no shorts etc). Leave behind leather items, including belts and bags, and don't take any eatables, drinks or mineral water inside the temple. Photo permits must be obtained from the main office before you commence the ascent.

As you near the top of the hill, the road forks. The main entrance, Ram Pol, is reached by taking the left-hand fork. To see the best views over the site first, take the right-hand fork.

There are superb views in all directions; on a clear day you can see the Gulf of Cambay. Approaching from the right, you reach one of the finest temples first, dedicated to Shri Adishwara, one of the most important Jain *tirthankars*. Note the frieze of dragons. Adjacent is the Muslim shrine of **Angar Pir**, where

women who want children make offerings of miniature cradles. The Muslim saint protected the temples from a Mughal attack.

Built in 1618 by a wealthy Jain merchant, the **Chaumukh** (Four-Faced Shrine) has images of Adinath facing out in the four cardinal directions. Other important temples are **Kumar Pal**, **Sampriti Raj** and **Vimal Shah**, named after their wealthy Jain patrons.

An autorickshaw from the bus station to the hill costs Rs 20, or you can walk in about 30 minutes. Water (not bottled) can be bought at intervals, and you can buy refreshing curd in pottery bowls outside the temple compound (Rs 5).

Sleeping & Eating

Palitana has scores of *dharamsalas* (pilgrim's guesthouses), but for Jains only.

Hotel Shrivak (☎ 252428; men-only dm Rs 60, s/d with shared bathroom Rs 100/200, d/tr/q with private bathroom Rs 300/400/500) Opposite the bus stand is this friendly place with basic rooms. Doubles are better than singles for cleanliness and are also spacious; however, décor is a depressing dark brown. Check-out is 24 hours (9.30am for the dorm).

Hotel Sumeru (☎ 252327; D/59 Dr Naleshwar Mahad; dm Rs 75, s/d Rs 200/300, with AC Rs 400/600; 🍴) Run by Gujarat Tourism, this charismatic, heavily-staffed place is 200m towards the station from the bus stand. Rooms are rundown and not that clean but those upstairs have balconies, and there's a certain dilapidated charm. Prices almost halve from mid-June to mid-September. Check-out is 9am.

Vijay Vilas Palitana (book through North West Safaris in Ahmedabad ☎ 079-26302019; ssibal@ad1.vsnl.net.in; s/d incl meals Rs 1800/3600) This lovely, small 1906 palace has six plain but nicely decorated rooms, with original furniture. It's family-run, with great attention to detail and delicious home-cooked food.

Jagruti Restaurant (limited thali Rs 25, snacks Rs 12; 🕒 10am-10pm) Across the alley from Hotel Shrivak, Jagruti is a wildly busy snack place offering *puris* (flat dough that puffs up when fried), *sabzi* (curried vegetables), *puri baji* (*puri* with vegetables), curd, roasted peppers and *ganthia* (varieties of fried dough).

Sohali Dining Hall (limited/unlimited thali Rs 30/40; 🕒 noon-4pm & 7-11pm) On the right after the bridge, Sohali is a grubby-looking back room, but recommended for tasty thalis. The sign is in Gujarati, so you'll have to ask locals to find it.

Getting There & Away

STC buses go to/from Bhavnagar (Rs 17, 1½ hours, hourly) and regularly to/from Ahmedabad (Rs 85, five hours).

Regular buses go to Talaja (Rs 15, one hour), where you can nab a bus to Una or Diu (six hours); it's a trip from hell, along bumpy roads in dilapidated old rattletaps. There's a daily bus at 5am to Una (Rs 65).

At the time of research, the train from Bhavnagar was undergoing conversion to broad gauge.

DIU

☎ 02875 / pop 21,576

What is Diu? For better or worse, this tiny Portuguese island is the reason most travellers come to Gujarat. And while it might not quite be the tropical paradise they imagined, it has a quirky charm that will tame you from asking too many questions.

Diu also has fine beaches, whitewashed churches, an imposing fort, colourful *Lisboa* streets, a gorgeous climate, lush seafood and giggly Gujarati weekenders who flock for the cheap booze and sunshine. Plus it's the safest place to ride a scooter in all of India, with minimum traffic and excellent roads.

Like Daman and Goa, Diu was a Portuguese colony until taken over by India in 1961. With Daman, it is still governed from Delhi as a Union Territory. It includes Diu island, about 11km by 3km, separated from the coast by a narrow channel, and two tiny mainland enclaves. One of these, housing the village of Ghoghla, is the entry point to Diu from Una.

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

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

History

Between the 14th and 16th centuries Diu was an important trading post and naval base from which the Ottomans controlled the northern Arabian Sea shipping routes.

Portugal made an unsuccessful attempt to capture the island in 1531, during which Bahadur Shah, Sultan of Gujarat, was assisted by the Turkish navy. The Portuguese finally secured control in 1535 by taking advantage of

a quarrel between the sultan and the Mughal emperor, Humayun.

Under pressure from the Portuguese and the Mughals, Bahadur signed a peace treaty with the Portuguese, giving them control over Diu Port. The treaty was soon ignored and, although both Bahadur Shah and his successor, Sultan Mahmud III, attempted to contest the issue, the peace treaty that was eventually signed in 1539 ceded the island of Diu and the mainland enclave of Ghoghla to Portugal.

Seven Rajput soldiers and a few civilians were killed in Operation Vijay, which ended Portuguese rule in 1961. After the Indian Air Force unnecessarily bombed the airstrip and terminal near Nagoa, it remained derelict until the late 1980s.

Orientation & Information

The unhelpful **tourist office** (Map p741; ☎ 252653; www.diuindia.com; Bunder Rd; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 2.30-6pm Mon-Sat) is on Diu Town's main road, parallel to the waterfront. It has simple maps (Rs 10).

You can change money at the **State Bank of Saurashtra** (Map p741; ☎ 252492; Main Bazaar; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat), near the town square, but at lower rates than on the mainland. Many shops around town also change money. There are SBS ATMs near Nagoa Beach and on Fort Rd.

The **post office** (Map p741; ☎ 252122) overlooks the town square. The best internet café is **A to Z** (Map p741; Vaniya St; per hr Rs 40; ☎ 9am-11pm), near Pancharti Rd. **Uma Cyber Café** (Map p741; Uma Shakti Hotel; per hr Rs 30; ☎ 9.15am-2pm & 4-11pm) and **Dee Pee Telecom** (Map p741; Gandhi Bhavan; per hr Rs 40; ☎ 8am-11pm) are also pretty good.

Dangers & Annoyances

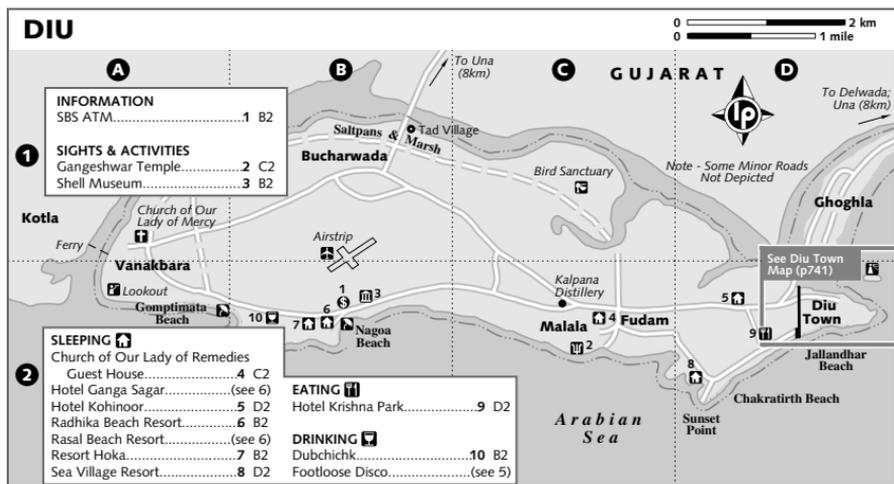
Much more an annoyance than a danger, drunk male tourists can be tiresome, particularly towards single or pairs of women, and particularly around Nagoa Beach.

Sights & Activities

DIU TOWN

Diu Town was the first landing point for the Parsis when they fled from Persia, although they stayed for only three years.

The town is sandwiched between the massive fort to the east and a huge city wall to the west. The main **Zampa Gateway** (Map p741) has carvings of lions, angels and a priest, while just inside the gate is a chapel with an icon dating from 1702.



Cavernous **St Paul's Church** (Map p741; ☞ 8am-6pm) is a wedding cake of a church, founded by Jesuits in 1600 and then rebuilt in 1807. Inside, it's a great barn, filled with heavy dark wood, with a small cloister next door, above which is a school. Daily mass is heard here. Nearby is white-walled **St Thomas' Church**, a lovely, simple building housing the **Diu Museum** (Map p741; admission by donation; ☞ 8am-9pm) downstairs. There's a spooky, evocative collection of worn Catholic statues. Once a year, on 1 November, this is used for a packed-out mass. There are also some remnants of a Jain temple. There's a guesthouse upstairs and you can ask George, the manager, to let you climb up onto the roof for amazing views. The **Church of St Francis of Assisi** (Map p741) has been converted into a hospital, but is also sometimes used for services. The Portuguese-descended population mostly live in this area, still called the 'foreigner's quarter'.

Unlike Daman, many Diu buildings show a lingering Portuguese influence. The town is a maze of narrow, winding streets and many houses are brightly painted, with the most impressive buildings on Panchwati, including decadent **Nagar Sheth Haveli** (Map p741), laden with curly stucco, fruit and animal carvings.

Built in 1535, with additions made in 1541, the massive, well-preserved **Portuguese fort** (Map p741; admission free; ☞ 8am-6pm) with its double moat (one tidal) must once have been impregnable, but sea erosion and neglect are leading to a slow collapse. Cannonballs litter the

place and the ramparts have a superb array of cannons, many in good condition. The lighthouse is Diu's highest point, with a beam that reaches 32km. There are several small chapels, one holding engraved tombstone fragments. Part of the fort also serves as the island's jail.

The former jail is **Fortim-do-Mar (Pani Kotha)**, the boat-shaped vacant white building that seems to float in the bay. You can take boat trips out around the harbour, which stop at Pani Kotha, when it's calm enough (which is seldom; Rs 25 return to Pani Kotha).

Outside the city wall are the **Naida Caves** (Map p741), an intriguing, overgrown network of square-hewn hollows and steps leading off into nowhere. This is where the Portuguese hacked out their building materials.

Diu-by-Night is an evening **ferry cruise** (Rs 110 incl drink; ☞ Oct-Mar) that departs from the jetty at 7.30pm nightly. It heads to Pani Kotha and Nagoa Beach, and returns around 9pm. Music and snacks are provided.

AROUND THE ISLAND

Nagoa Beach is a long, palm-fringed beach that's safe for swimming but busy, and often with drunk men: foreign women receive a lot of unwanted attention. **Gomptimata**, to the west, is a long, empty, sandy beach that gets big waves – you need to be a strong swimmer here. Beaches within easy reach of Diu Town include **Jallandhar**, **Chakratirth** and the stunning **Sunset Point**, the most popular with foreign tourists, a small, gentle curve that's good for swimming and pretty hassle free.

The **Shell Museum** (Map p740; admission Rs 10; ☎ 9am-6pm) is a labour of love – Captain Devjibhai Vira Fulbaria, a merchant navy captain, has collected shells for almost 50 years. The amazing shells range from silver abalone to folding shells.

Close to Diu Town, **Fudam** has a simple church, Our Lady of Remedies, that is now a guesthouse. A large, old carved wooden altar remains inside.

At the extreme west, **Vanakbara** is a fascinating little fishing village. It's great to wander around the port, packed with colourful fishing boats and bustling activity – best at 9am when the fishing fleet returns and sells off its catch. Tourists are something of an oddity here so the villagers are welcoming and intrigued.

Sleeping

Most hotels offer a discount of as much as 60% when things are quiet.

BUDGET

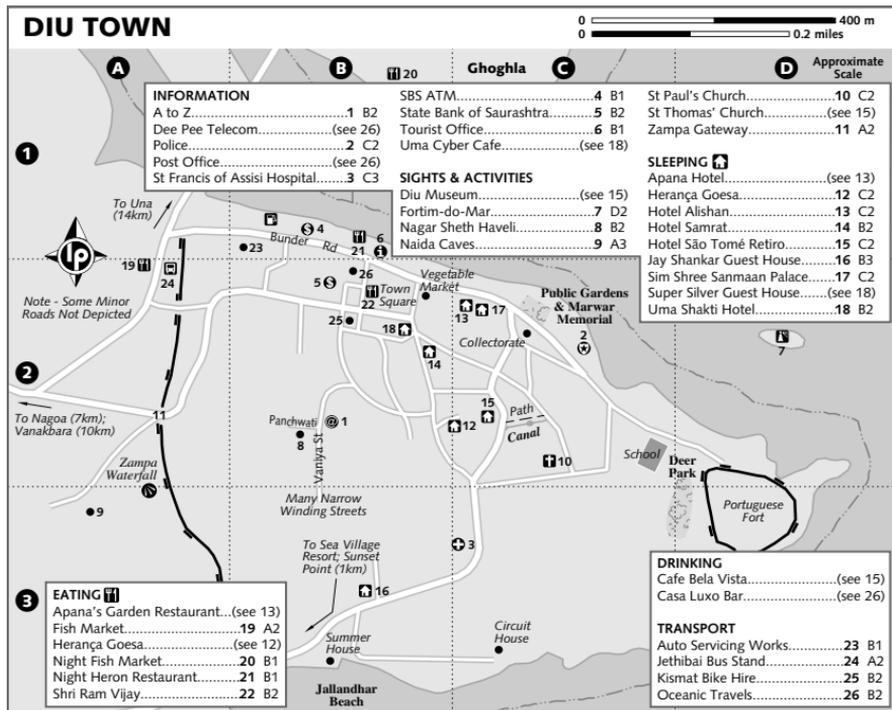
Diu Town

The following options are all located on the map below.

Hotel São Tomé Retiro (☎ 253137; georgesdesouza 84@hotmail.com; smaller r Rs 200-300, larger r Rs 400-500, rooftop Rs 100) A gorgeous guesthouse housed in lovely old St Thomas' Church, this is definitely the place to stay for the shoes-off, gone fishin' Diu experience. Your cruisy host, George D'Souza, will either bemuse or calm you, but either way he's a gentle soul, and his barbeque parties (see p742) are a treat. Rooms range from small structures on the roof to beautiful, breezy abodes – and they all come at a fairly cheap price. You can sleep on the roof when it's full (which is often), and negotiate longer stays. The 360° views from the church spire are unrivalled on the island.

Super Silver Guest House (☎ 255011; Super Silver Marketing Complex; s/d/tr from Rs 200/300/500) A block south of the vegetable market, Super Silver is just super, with spic-and-span rooms and helpful owners, but without the communal vibe the island seems to foster.

Herança Goesa (☎ 253851; 205/3 Behind Diu Museum; d Rs 350) This family house, off Hospital Rd, has just one nice double for rent. Plus they cook up a storm (see p742).



Around the Island

Jay Shankar Guest House (Map p741; ☎ 252424; near Jalandhar Beach; d Rs 100-250, with AC Rs 450; 🏠) Here, the cheapest rooms are not that clean, but pay Rs 250 and you'll get a simple, good-value double with balcony. Some have sea views. It has a good restaurant.

Sea Village Resort (Map p740; ☎ 254345; Chakratirth Beach; d Rs 250-350) This low-budget resort has the prime location at Sunset Point, with a steady stream of guests sipping beers in wicker chairs overlooking a pretty bay. Detached rooms are airless and grubby, though – and stinking hot in summer. Get past that and you'll love it.

Church of Our Lady of Remedies Guest House (Map p740; ☎ 255010; d with shared bathroom Rs 250, with private bathroom Rs 350) In quiet Fudam village, this average guesthouse hangs out upstairs in an empty church, but is handy for long-stayers (there's a self-catering kitchen) who have tired of their fellow man.

MIDRANGE

Diu Town

The following options are all located on Map p741.

Apana Hotel (☎ 253650; Fort Rd; r Rs 750-1500; 🏠) On the seafront, Apana is friendly and has white-tiled rooms with balconies and breezy sea views. There's a great garden restaurant (see opposite).

Hotel Alishan (☎ 252340; Fort Rd; d Rs 700-1500; 🏠 🍽️) Alishan has decent, bright rooms – with lots of bed-tilted mirrors – cheaper rooms are scrubby and at the back. Again, there's a good restaurant.

Hotel Samrat (☎ 252354; s/d Rs 800/1000, Rs 1500/2000; 🏠) A couple of blocks south of the town square, Hotel Samrat is the town's best upper-range choice, with pleasant, large, very comfortable doubles with street-facing balconies. Credit cards are accepted. There's an excellent restaurant and bar.

Uma Shakti Hotel (☎ 252150; d Rs 800; 🏠) Next door to Super Silver, and near the vegetable market, this has decent, small, overpriced doubles. Yep, you guessed it, there's a lovely rooftop restaurant.

Sim Shree Sanmaan Palace (☎ 253031; d Rs 1600; 🏠) This is an old Portuguese villa, between the town square and fort. New management has sacrificed the old charm, though the location is still superb. There's a pleasant rooftop restaurant – perfect for a beer.

Around the Island

The following options are all located on Map p740.

Hotel Ganga Sagar (☎ 252249; Nagoa Beach; d/t Rs 600/800) A once classic beachfront hotel, now more salty sea shack with a well-stocked bar and clammy clientele. The seafood is delicious though, and the shabby triple rooms are the best darn value from here to the mainland.

Rasal Beach Resort (☎ 255402; d Rs 1750) The latest addition to the Nagoa Beach scene has overpriced but fresh, stream-lined rooms – some unfortunately overlooking a landing strip. The restaurant is worth a visit.

Resort Hoka (☎ 253036; resorthoka@travelindia.com; Nagoa Beach; r Rs 1150; 🏠) Hoka is a great place to stay, with atmospheric rooms in a small, palm-shaded complex. Some have terraces over the palm trees. The food here is excellent.

Hotel Kohinoor (☎ 252209; r with AC Rs 1550-1850, ste Rs 2950; 🏠 🍽️) On the road to Fudam is this comfortable option. Its well-equipped rooms have balconies and are grouped in villas around a pool. There's a good restaurant and the Footloose disco.

Radhika Beach Resort (☎ 252553; www.radhikaresort.com; Nagoa Beach; s/d Rs 1750/2150; 🏠 🍽️) An immaculate, smart, modern place – Diu's most upmarket – set in grassy grounds; rooms are spacious with balconies. There's an appealing pool and good restaurant.

Eating

Beer and drinks are blissfully cheap – around Rs 35 for a large Kingfisher. Port (nice with ice) costs around Rs 120 per bottle. Fresh fish is good here, and best of all are the traditional Portuguese-style meals on offer at a couple of places.

RESTAURANTS

Hotel São Tomé Retiro (Map p741; ☎ 253137; all-you-can-eat BBQ Rs 100) From around September to April, hospitable George and family hold BBQ parties every other evening. The food offered is fantastic – fresh fish and delicious salads, beer's available and it's an atmospheric place to sit around a blazing campfire and meet other travellers.

Herança Goesa (Map p741; ☎ 253851; 205/3 Behind Diu Museum, off Hospital Rd; breakfast Rs 20-30, dinner Rs 20-100) Here you eat in the friendly Indo-Portuguese family's front room. For breakfast you can wander in till noon, and the cold coffee is good. For dinner you'll have to book, and it's

deservedly popular, with dishes such as delicious baked prawns with piripiri sauce.

Hotel Krishna Park (Map p740; Nagoa Beach Rd; dishes Rs 30-80; ☎ 7.30am-11pm) A two-level restaurant, this is scenically set next to a small, landscaped lake, in a peaceful setting. In season there are pedaloes on the lake (Rs 20 for 30 minutes).

Apana's Garden Restaurant (Map p741; Apana Hotel; dishes Rs 20-110; ☎ 7am-5pm & 7-11pm) This has a great outdoor, waterfront garden setting overlooking the sea. It does everything from breakfasts and South Indian to Punjabi, Chinese and fish dishes. The fruit salad is delicious.

Resort Hoka (Map p740; ☎ 253036; resorthoka@travelindia.com; Nagoa Beach; dishes Rs 15-225) This has notably good food, with inviting choices such as a fresh tuna sandwich or prawn-and-tomato curry. It's relaxed, pleasant and palm-shaded.

There are two fish markets (Map p741), one opposite Jethibai bus stand, and a night market, lit by flame torches, in Ghoghla. The fresh fish and seafood are delicious; most guesthouses and hotels will cook anything you buy.

QUICK EATS

Shri Ram Vijay (Map p741; ice creams Rs 10-20) A small, old-fashioned ice cream parlour, this has tables and benches, and delicious homemade ice cream – our top tips are fig and almond, and mango.

Night Heron Restaurant (Map p741; Jetty, Bunder Chowk; mains Rs 15-95) This friendly open-air café, a small wooden-slatted building with outside tables, right on the water's edge, is ideal for an ice cream or a beer.

Drinking

Apart from the restaurants (most of which double as bars), there are some good places for a tippie.

Casa Luxo Bar (Map p741; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-10pm Tue-Sun) Open since 1963, it looks like the décor hasn't changed since, with lots of dusty bottles. A Kingfisher costs only Rs 27.

Dubchichk (Map p740; Nagoa beach; dishes Rs 20-110; ☎ 11am-3.45pm & 6.30-10pm) This has a great vantage point for overlooking drunken antics on the beach from a safe distance.

Footloose Disco (Map p740; Hotel Kohinoor; ☎ Sat & Sun) This pint-sized disco can be fun, with booming cheesy pop and some eclectic movers on the floor.

Cafe Bela Vista (Map p741), near St Thomas' Church, is little more than a couple of tables, but is a scenic setting for a beer.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Jet Airways (☎ 252365; airport) flies to Mumbai (US\$117, 12.15pm Sunday to Friday). The agent is **Oceanic Travels** (Map p741; ☎ 252180; Gandhi Bhavan; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm), near the post office.

BUS

STC departures from Jethibai bus stand are usually inconvenient. There are buses to Veraval (Rs 35, three hours, four daily), Rajkot (Rs 90, five hours, four daily), Jamnagar (Rs 100, seven hours, two daily) and Bhavnagar (Rs 75, five hours). More civilised and frequent departure times exist from Una, about 10km away (Rs 10, 40 minutes, every 30 minutes from 5.30am to 10pm).

Buses depart from Una bus stand for Diu (from 6.30am to 8.15pm). Outside these hours, walk 1km to Tower Chowk in Una, from where shared autorickshaws go to Ghoghla or Diu for about the same fare. An autorickshaw costs Rs 100.

Private buses go from Diu to Mumbai at 10am (Rs 450 sleeper, 22 to 24 hours) and to Ahmedabad (Rs 170, Rs 220 sleeper, 10½ hours). Book in advance at **A to Z** (Map p741; Vaniya St; ☎ 9am-11pm).

TRAIN

Delwada, between Una and Ghoghla, and only about 8km from Diu, is the nearest railhead. A shared autorickshaw from there to Ghoghla costs about Rs 10. There's a direct train (313/314) at 8.10am from Delwada to Veraval (2nd class Rs 18, 3½ hours), which stops at Gir at 9.50am (Rs 12, 1¼ hours).

Getting Around

Travelling by autorickshaw anywhere in Diu Town should cost no more than Rs 20. To Nagoa beach pay Rs 40 and to Sunset Point, Rs 25. Shared autorickshaws to Ghoghla cost Rs 10 per person. Note that rickshaw-wallahs in Una are unable to proceed further than the bus station (Rs 75), so cannot take you all the way to Nagoa Beach (an additional Rs 50).

Mopeds are a perfect option for exploring the island – the roads are deserted and in good condition. The going rate per day is Rs 100 for a moped (plus fuel). Motorcycles

and scooters cost Rs 150 to 200. Most hotels arrange mopeds, although quality varies. Try **Kismat** (☎ 252971; 🕒 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 1pm Sun), which also rents bicycles (Rs 15 per day), or friendly **Auto Servicing Works** (☎ 252824; Raberi Rd; 🕒 9am-10pm), opposite the petrol pump. A Rs 200 to 1000 deposit is usually required.

Local buses from Diu Town to Nagoa and Vanakbara leave from the Jethibai bus stand at 7am, 11am and 4pm. From Nagoa, they depart for Diu Town from near the police post at 1pm, 5.30pm and 7pm (Rs 5).

VERAVAL

☎ 02876 / pop 141,207

Veraval is cluttered and chaotic, and smells strongly of fish – not surprising given that it's one of India's major fishing ports (nearly 4000 boats work from here) and its busy harbour is full of bustle and boat building. On the south coast of Saurashtra, Veraval was the major seaport for Mecca pilgrims before the rise of Surat. In the west of town is the eerie **Old Nawab's Palace** (closed to public). The main reason to come here is to visit the Temple of Somnath, 6km to the east.

JP Travels International (☎ 220110) changes travellers cheques and cash. The **State Bank of Saurashtra** (☎ 221266) will also change these on occasion. **Magnet Cyber Café** (Chandra-Mauli Complex; per hr Rs 25; 🕒 9.30am-midnight), in the same building as Hotel Ustav, allows you to slowly surf the internet. There's an HFDC ATM near the municipal gardens.

Sleeping

Hotel standards have fallen away here in recent years, probably due to the newly built hotels in Somnath.

Hotel Satkar (☎ 240006; dm Rs 100, s/d from Rs 150/250, better d/tr Rs 400/600; 🍷) Around the corner from Chetna Rest House, the cheapest rooms here are dingy but the best are nice, plain and freshly painted, with glass-covered balconies.

Toran Tourist Bungalow (☎ 246588; s/d Rs 300/400, with AC Rs 400/600; 🍷) Near the lighthouse, this is inconvenient, but quiet and well maintained. Deluxe rooms have balconies complete with swing chair, and sunset and ocean views. Check-out is 9am. The restaurant serves good Gujarati and Punjabi food (thalis Rs 45).

Hotel Utsav (☎ 222306; 3rd fl, Chandramauli Complex, ST Rd; d with private bathroom Rs 300, with AC Rs 600; 🍷) This hotel, opposite the local bus stand, has

quite clean doubles with views over the dusty town; staff are eager to please.

Hotel Kaveri (☎ 220842; 2 Akar Complex, ST Rd; r Rs 500-1000; 🍷) Popular with the business set, Kaveri is Veraval's best choice, with a range of well-kept rooms, some overlooking the main street.

Hotel Park (☎ 242703; Veraval-Junagadh Rd; r with private bathroom Rs 500-1500; 🍷 🍷) About 1.5km out of town, this has a nice big pool in the palm-shaded grounds, spacious though shabby rooms and a good restaurant.

Eating

Prakash Dining Hall (ST Rd; thali Rs 40) This is a simple, clean place serving up damn fine thalis.

Sagar (ST Rd; dishes Rs 15-90; 🕒 9am-3.30pm & 5-11pm) This subdued, friendly vegetarian restaurant, smothered in thick brown paint, serves good Punjabi and Chinese food.

Paradise Restaurant (dishes Rs 50; 🕒 10am-3pm & 7-10.30pm) Paradise might be overstating it, but it does surprisingly palatable Chinese food. There aren't many vegetarian dishes.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Departures are more frequent if you change at Una. See below for details of STC buses from Veraval.

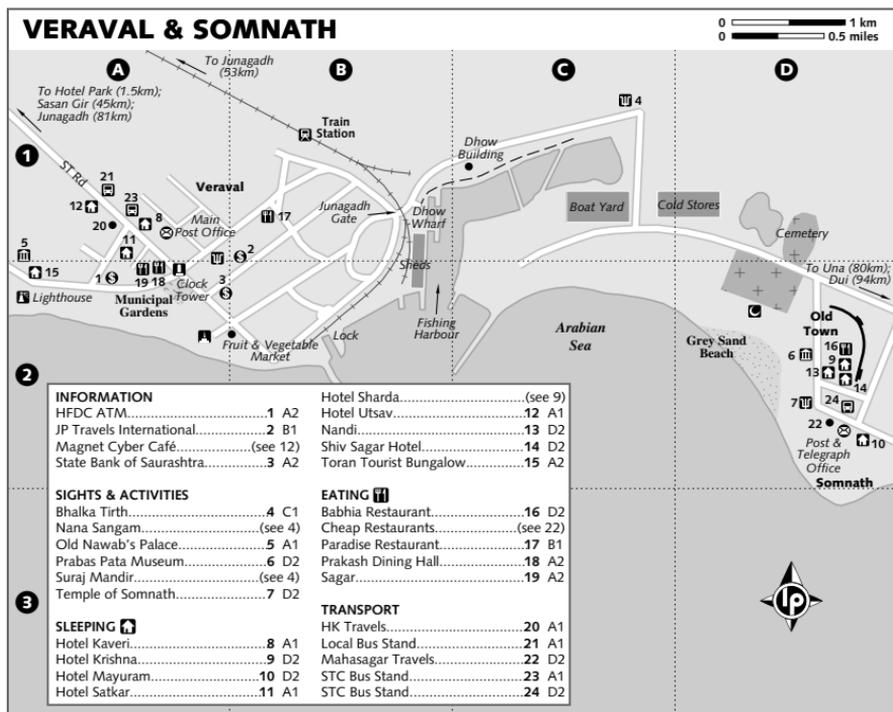
There are private bus agencies opposite the STC bus stand, including **HK Travels** (☎ 221934; ST Rd; 🕒 7am-11pm) which offer a nightly jaunt to Ahmedabad (ordinary/sleeper Rs 160/220) at 9pm.

TRAIN

The 1465/3 *Veraval-Jabalpur Express* to Ahmedabad goes at 10.15am (2nd class/2AC Rs 108/775, 8½ hours, 456km) via Rajkot (2nd class Rs 55, 3½ hours). Trains leave for Sasan at 9.40am, 2.20pm, 2.40pm and 3.05pm (2nd class Rs 10, 1½ to two hours).

BUSES FROM VERAVAL

Destination	Fare (Rs)	Duration (hr)	Frequency
Ahmedabad	125	10	4 daily
Diu	40	3	5 daily
Junagadh	41	2	every 30min
Porbandar	55	3	15 daily
Rajkot	70	5	hourly
Sasan	25	1½	5 daily



A passenger service (313) to Delwada (for Diu) leaves at 4.05pm (2nd class Rs 20, 3½ hours, 104km).

There's a **reservation office** (☎ 131; 🕒 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun) at the station.

Getting Around

An autorickshaw to Somnath, 6km away, should cost you about Rs 35; buses are Rs 8 and leave from the local bus stand, near the STC bus stand.

SOMNATH

☎ 02876

Somnath consists of a few streets leading away from its phoenix-like temple. The rugged sea below gives it a lonely, wistful charm. The pilgrim trade is constant, but merchants are surprisingly relaxed – perhaps in deference to the shadows cast by the awe-inspiring temple.

Sights

TEMPLE OF SOMNATH

This **temple** (🕒 6am-9.30pm), 80km from Junagadh, has been razed and rebuilt at least eight times. It's said Somraj, the moon god,

constructed a gold version, rebuilt by Ravana in silver, by Krishna in wood and by Bhimdev in stone. A description of the temple by Al-Biruni, an Arab traveller, was so glowing that it prompted a visit in 1024 by a most unwelcome tourist – Mahmud of Ghazni. At that time, the temple was so wealthy that it had 300 musicians, 500 dancing girls and even 300 barbers.

Mahmud of Ghazni, a legendary looter, descended on Somnath from his Afghan kingdom and, after a two-day battle, took the town and the temple. Having stripped its fabulous wealth, he destroyed it. So began a pattern of Muslim destruction and Hindu rebuilding that continued for centuries. The temple was again razed in 1297, 1394 and finally in 1706 by Aurangzeb, the notorious Mughal fundamentalist.

After the 1706 demolition, the temple wasn't rebuilt until 1950. Outside, opposite the entrance, is a statue of SV Patel (1875–1950), responsible for the reconstruction.

The current temple was built to traditional designs on the original coastal site, and is a serene, symmetrical, sinuous structure. Some

cracks appeared as a result of the 2001 earthquake, but they have since been repaired. It contains one of the 12 sacred Shiva shrines known as *jiyoti linga*. Photography is prohibited.

PRABAS PATA MUSEUM

Nearby, the **Prabas Pata Museum** (☎ 232455; Indian/foreigner Rs 2/50; 🕒 10.30am-5.30pm Thu-Tue, closed 2nd & 4th Sat of month) is strikingly laid out in courtyard-centred rooms and contains interesting remains of the previous temples, with lots of beautiful fragments, including an elaborate 11th-century ceiling.

OTHER SIGHTS

Halfway between Veraval and Somnath is **Bhalka Tirth**, where Krishna was mistaken for a deer (sleeping in a deerskin – a dangerous outfit) and wounded by an arrow. The legendary spot is at the confluence of three rivers. You get to it through the small *sangam* (confluence gate), known simply as the **Nana** (Small Gate). North of this sacred spot is **Suraj Mandir** (Sun Temple), which Mahmud of Ghazni also had a go at knocking down. This ancient temple, with a frieze of lions with elephant trunks, probably dates from the same time as the original Temple of Somnath.

Sleeping & Eating

Good-value hotels are popping up everywhere.

Shiv Sagar Hotel (☎ 233111; r without/with AC Rs 250/500) Opposite the temple with bright rooms, busy staff and a generous noon check-out.

Hotel Mayuram (☎ 231286; s/d with private bathroom Rs 250/350; 🍴) Just down the main road heading away from the temple, this quiet option has cleanish, bright, serviceable, plain doubles.

Nandi (☎ 231839; r with private bathroom without/with AC Rs 350/550; 🍴) The Somnath stalwart on a market-filled street leading from the temple, this has small, clean, bright rooms with an unusually cheery atmosphere and mostly with temple views.

Hotel Sharda (☎ 571798; near temple; d without/with AC Rs 450/700) Another excellent new temple-facing hotel. The rooms are straight from the box, especially 103.

Hotel Krishna (☎ 232245; behind temple; Rs d/tr with AC from 600/800; 🍴) Colourful hotel, with good value doubles, some with temple views. Bubbly young staff abound.

Babhia Restaurant (meals Rs 35-60) Tucked away near Shiv Sagar, this is the best restaurant on

the temple side of town. It has faux marble tables bolted onto grotty purple walls. The food is fresh and particularly good, especially the *veg handi*.

There are dozens of cheap restaurants between the temple and Hotel Mayuram.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Somnath has fewer departures than Veraval, but buses run to Jamnagar (Rs 90, seven hours, three daily), Porbandar (Rs 65, six hours, hourly), Dwarka (Rs 90, seven hours, five daily), Una (Rs 45, three hours, hourly) and Rajkot (Rs 80, five hours, hourly).

Mahasagar Travels (☎ 232189; 🕒 10am-10pm), opposite the STC bus stand, has buses to Ahmedabad (Rs 190, sleeper Rs 250, 10 hours).

SASAN GIR WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

☎ 0285

The last refuge of the Asiatic lion (*Panthera leo persica*) is 59km from Junagadh via Visavadar. The rugged, hilly, 1400-sq-km sanctuary feels beguilingly uncommercial, and encompasses some beautiful forested land. It was set up to protect lions and their habitat: since 1980 numbers have increased from fewer than 200 to an estimated 325 in May 2004 – a trend unheard of in modern India. However, while lions have been lucky, the distinctively dressed local *maaldharis* (herders), a devout, nomadic community, have lost valuable grazing land. In recent years the lions have been wandering outside the limits of the sanctuary in search of easy game – namely calves. One ended up on the beaches of Diu! The problem is compounded by the declining areas of forest outside the sanctuary, forcing villagers to forage for fuel within its precincts, reducing the lions' habitat.

Sasan Gir is not big enough for the number of lions, but moves by the Madhya Pradesh government to transfer 200 lions to the Pulpur Kuno sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh were unceremoniously canned by the Gujarat government, and there are no concrete plans to address the difficulties caused by the competition for scarce resources.

As well as lions, there are more than 30 species, including leopards, hyenas, foxes, wild boars, parrots, peacocks, crocodiles (there's also a crocodile-breeding centre), monkeys and deer – including the largest Indian

THE LAST WILD ASIATIC LIONS

In the 19th century the territory of the Asiatic lion stretched from its current refuge in Gujarat's Gir Forest as far east as Bihar. Widespread hunting decimated the population, with the last sightings recorded near Delhi in 1834, in Bihar in 1840 and in Rajasthan in 1870. The last lion to die in the Indian wild outside Gujarat's Kathiawar peninsula was recorded in 1884. Why did they survive in Gujarat? They almost didn't. Hunting pushed Gir lions to the brink of extinction, with as few as 12 remaining in the 1870s. It was not until one of their erstwhile pursuers, the enlightened nawab of Junagadh, decided to set up a protection zone at the beginning of the 20th century, that the lions began slowly to recover. This zone now survives as the Sasan Gir Wildlife Sanctuary.

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

antelope (nilgais), graceful chinkara gazelles, chow-singhas and barking deer.

The best time to visit is from December to April; it's closed from mid-June to mid-October and possibly even longer if there has been a heavy monsoon.

Information

The **Gir Orientation Centre** (☎ 9am-6pm), next to the Sinh Sadan Forest Lodge, offers displays and descriptions of the park's inhabitants and a replica *maaldhari* hut. A creaking film about the park is screened at 7pm.

Sights & Activities

SAFARIS

The lions are elusive, but you'd be unlucky not to see at least one on a safari. If you're determined to spot one, allow for a couple of trips. Understandably, the lions retreat into the undergrowth during Indian holiday periods when convoys of jeeps roar through the park.

Before you go on safari, you must get a permit. These are issued on the spot at the **Sinh Sadan Forest Lodge Office** (Indian/foreigner Rs 30/US\$5, 4hr vehicle entry Rs 100/US\$10, camera Rs 50/US\$5, video Rs 2500/US\$200; ☎ 6-10am & 3-5pm 16 Oct-Feb, 6-9.30am & 3.30-6pm Mar-15 Jun) and are valid for the whole day. The guide's fee is Rs 50/US\$10. Jeeps (maximum six) can be hired (US\$10) from the lodge office. Although prices are quoted in US dollars, payment is in rupees.

Try to take a jeep rather than a minibus. While the latter stick to the main tracks, the jeeps can take the small trails, where you're much more likely to come across lions.

GIR INTERPRETATION ZONE

Twelve kilometres from Sasan village at Devalia, within the sanctuary precincts, is the **Gir Interpretation Zone** (Indian/foreigner Rs 30/US\$5, jeep Rs 100/US\$10, guide Rs 50/US\$10; ☎ 8-11am & 3-5pm Thu-Tue). The 4.12-sq-km zone is home to a cross section of Gir wildlife. Chances of seeing lions here are good, but stage-managed and you're only likely to get 30 to 45 minutes looking for wildlife. Vehicles run here from Sasan Gir's main street for Rs 150.

CROCODILE BREEDING CENTRE

This **centre** (admission free; ☎ 8.30am-6pm), near Sinh Sadan, is a good place to see crocs, from baby to big – there are around 100, bred here to restock the sanctuary.

Sleeping & Eating

It's a good idea to make an advance booking. Sasan Gir has one main street and most accommodation is on it or nearby, with a couple of attractive options further away. These all have private bathroom unless stated otherwise.

Hotel Umang (☎ 285728; SBS Bank Rd; r Rs 450, with AC Rs 700; ☎) Signposted off the main road 100m west of Rajeshri Guest House, this is a quiet, gleaming, but overpriced option. Extensive renovations have returned it to life. Management works for the park, and can be overbearing.

Anil Farmhouse (☎ 285590; r Rs 550-650; ☎) Off the Junagadh road, 4km from Sasan (turn left along a difficult track from Bhalchhel village), this is deep in the forest, set by a mango orchard. It has seven simple rooms – some share balconies with wonderful views over the forest and flower-filled grounds. Call ahead.

Sinh Sadan Forest Lodge (☎ 285540; dm Indian/foreigner Rs 50/US\$5, r Rs 500/US\$30, with AC Rs 1000/US\$50; 🍴) This is pleasant but outrageously priced for foreigners (meal prices are similarly imbalanced) and service is lackadaisical.

Amidhara Resort (☎ 285950; www.amidhararesort.com; Talala; r from Rs 1000) On the road to Veraval, this brand-spanking hotel still has the plastic wrapping on parts. The nearly completed pool looks the goods though, and rooms are generously decked out.

Maneland Jungle Lodge (☎ 285690; Nov-Jan/Feb-Oct r full-board Feb-Oct Rs 2500, Nov-Jan Rs 3500, without meals Feb-Oct Rs 1500, Nov-Jan Rs 2500; 🍴 🚽) Also off the road to Junagadh, 3km from Sasan, this rural place has lovely rooms in cottages with alcoves, window seats and floors of polished terracotta. The pool may need cleaning.

Gir Lodge (☎ 285521; s/d from US\$50/70, with AC US\$60/80; 🍴) Down by the river, about 200m from Sinh Sadan Forest Lodge, is a pleasant, peaceful hotel operated by the Taj Group. Rooms have balconies with woodland views and the restaurant is serene.

Rajeshri Guest House (☎ 285505; r Rs 100-200), opposite the gate to Sinh Sadan, has basic, slightly grubby rooms. The young, smooth-talking staff are eager park guides. Thalís cost Rs 35. Local guide Nitin Ratangayra also opens his **family house** (☎ 285686; d with shared bathroom Rs 100-200) around the corner, with three smart rooms. He arranges excellent village tours, including to Jambut, 18km south of Sasan, which is famed for its strange African-flavoured music.

Sasan village is lined with food stalls and nothing-special thali restaurants, the best of which is **Hotel Gulmohal** (dishes Rs 30-35; 🕒 8am-4pm & 7-11pm), with reasonable South Indian and Punjabi food.

Getting There & Away

STC buses travel regularly between Junagadh and Veraval via Sasan. There are buses to Veraval (local/express Rs 12/20, 1½ hours, 45km, hourly) and to Junagadh (Rs 20/31, two hours, 59km).

Trains run to Veraval (Rs 10, 1½ hours) and Delwada (for Diu, Rs 20, three hours).

JUNAGADH

☎ 0285 / pop 168,686

Junagadh is a seductive little city, practically void of tourists, and ideal for aimless meanderings. It's an ancient, fortified city at the

base of spectacular Girnar Hill, which towers over town like a cloudy, holy spectre. The area around the Durbar Hall Museum is dotted with exotic old buildings, and crumbling Uperkot fort is properly spooky.

The city is named after the fort that enclosed the old city (*jirna* means old). Dating from 250 BC, the Ashokan Edicts nearby are testament to its earthly age.

At the time of Partition, the nawab of Junagadh opted to take his tiny state into Pakistan – a wildly unpopular option as the inhabitants were predominantly Hindu, so the nawab departed on his own.

Information

The centrally located **tourist office** buzzes with action, but offers little other than a visitors' map.

The **State Bank of India** (🕒 11am-2pm) near Diwan Chowk changes travellers cheques and cash. Travellers have reported efficient service from the Bank of Vadodara next to the local bus stand. **Swati Restaurant** (Jayshree Rd; 🕒 11am-3pm & 5.30-10.30pm) will change travellers cheques and currency for a little under the normal rate. **SBS** (Jayshree Rd) has an ATM.

Main post office (☎ 2627116) Inconveniently located south of the centre at Gandhigram.

Miracles Cyber Café (Shripal Complex, MG Rd; per hr Rs 10; 🕒 10am-midnight) Fast and filled with students.

Post office (🕒 10am-3pm) Off MG Rd, near the local bus stand.

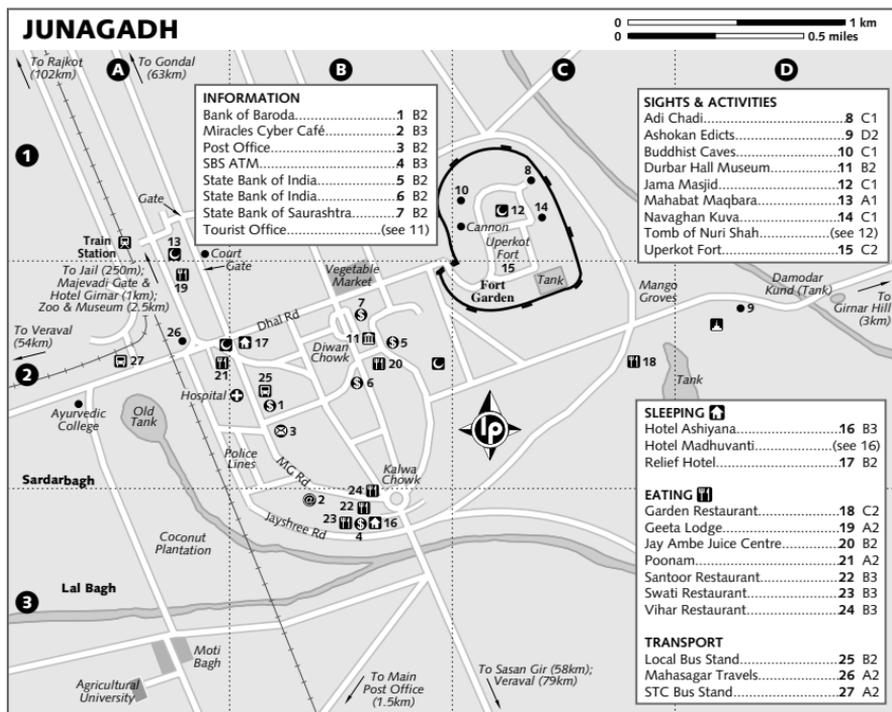
Sights

UPERKOT FORT

This ancient **fort** (admission Rs 2; 🕒 6.30am-6.30pm, dosed 2nd & 4th Sat of month), on Junagadh's eastern side, is believed to have been built in 319 BC by Chandragupta, though it has been extended many times. An ornate triple gateway forms the entrance, and in places the walls reach 20m high. It's been besieged 16 times, and legend has it that the fort once withstood a 12-year siege. It's also said that the fort was abandoned from the 7th to 10th centuries and, when rediscovered, was completely overgrown by jungle.

The **Jama Masjid**, the mosque inside the fort, was built from a demolished Hindu temple and has an interior filled with columns.

Close to the mosque are 2nd century AD **Buddhist caves** (Indian/foreigner Rs 5/100, video Rs 25; 🕒 8am-6pm), an eerie three-storey carved complex – the main hall contains pillars with weathered carvings.



Other points of interest include the **Tomb of Nuri Shah** and two fine *baolis*. One is **Adi Chadi** (named after two slave girls who used to fetch water from it), built into the narrow leaning walls of a cave, and the other, **Navaghan Kuva**, dramatically deep and reached by a magnificent staircase cut into the rock.

MAHABAT MAQBARA

This stunning **mausoleum** of a nawab of Junagadh seems to bubble up into the sky. One of Gujarat's most glorious examples of Indo-Islamic architecture, its lavish appeal is topped off by silver doors and minarets encircled by storybook, spiralling stairways. Completed in 1892, it's generally locked (the exterior's best anyway) – you can try to obtain the keys from the adjacent mosque.

DURBAR HALL MUSEUM

This **museum** (admission Rs 5; ☎ 9am–12.15pm & 2.45–6pm Thu–Tue, closed 2nd & 4th Sat of month) displays weapons, armour, palanquins, chandeliers, and howdahs from the days of the nawabs, as well as a huge carpet woven in Junagadh's jail. There's a royal portrait gallery, including

photos of the last nawab with his various beloved dogs (he had hundreds of them).

ASHOKAN EDICTS

On the way to the Girnar Hill temples, you pass a huge **boulder** (Indian/foreigner Rs 5/100; ☎ 8am–1pm & 2–6pm) on which Emperor Ashoka inscribed 14 edicts in Pali script in about 250 BC instructing people to be kind to women and animals and give to beggars, among other things. Sanskrit inscriptions were added around AD 150 by Emperor Rudradama and in about AD 450 by Skandagupta, the last emperor of the Mauryas, referring mainly to recurring floods destroying the embankments of a nearby lake, the Sudershan, which no longer exists.

The boulder, with its beautiful spidery inscriptions, is curiously enclosed in a small building.

GIRNAR HILL

The climb up 10,000 stone steps to the summit of **Girnar** is best begun at dawn. It's a magical experience in the early morning light, as pilgrims and porters trudge up the

well-maintained steps, built between 1889 and 1908, through scrubby teak forest and past chai stalls. The start is about 2km beyond Damodar Kund – the road takes you to around the 3000th step – which leaves you *only* 7000 to the top. As you gain height, the views begin to sweep across wooded hills.

The refreshment stalls on the 2½-hour ascent sell chalk, so you can graffiti your name onto the rocks. As you near the top, take a moment to marvel at how the stalls can rustle up a chilled drink. If you can't face the walk, *dholis* carried by porters can be hired; they are charged by weight so, before setting off, you suffer the indignity of being weighed on a huge beam scale.

Like Palitana, the temple-topped hill is of great significance to the Jains, but several important Hindu temples mean that Hindus make the pilgrimage, too.

The Jain temples, a cluster of mosaic-decorated domes interspersed with elaborate stupas, are about two-thirds of the way up. The largest and oldest is the 12th-century **Temple of Neminath** – dedicated to the 22nd *tirthankar* – go through the first left-hand doorway after the first gate. Many temples are locked from around 11am to 3pm, but this opens all day.

The nearby triple **Temple of Mallinath**, dedicated to the ninth *tirthankar*, was erected in 1177 by two brothers. During festivals this temple is a sadhu magnet.

Further up the steps are various Hindu temples. First, the **Temple of Gorakhnath** is perched on the highest peak at 600m. The next peak is topped by the **Temple of Amba Mata**, where newlyweds worship to ensure a happy marriage. On top of the final outcrop is **Dat Tatraya**, dedicated to three gods.

Bus 3 or 4 from the local bus stand will take you to Girnar Taleti at the hill's base. Buses run about once an hour from 6am (Rs 5) and pass by the Ashokan edicts. An autorickshaw from town costs about Rs 35.

JUNAGADH ZOO

If you don't make it to Sasan, Junagadh's **zoo** (admission Rs 10; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Thu-Tue) at Sakar Bagh, 3.5km from the centre, on the Rajkot road, has Gir lions. The nawab set up the zoo in 1863 to save lions from extinction, and though the concrete enclosures at the front rival much of Asia for sheer cruelty, it has a surprisingly good 'safari' park, with an abundance of lions, tigers and leopards in their natural habitat.

There is also a fine **museum** (☎ closed 2nd & 4th Sat of month) at the zoo with paintings, manuscripts, archaeological finds and other exhibits, including a natural-history section. Take bus 6 (Rs 5) or an autorickshaw (Rs 25) to get here.

Sleeping

Hotel Ashiyana (☎ 2624299; Jayshree Rd, Kahra Chowk; s/d from Rs 150/250) This place is on the 2nd floor of the same building that houses Hotel Madhuvanti, and has decent rooms.

Hotel Madhuvanti (☎ 2620087; 1st fl, Sabri Shopping Centre, Kahra Chowk; s/d Rs 150/300; ♿) This spacious, marble-floored hotel has large, clean, nondescript doubles around a courtyard. There's a pool hall on the same floor.

Relief Hotel (☎ 2620280; Dhal Rd; s/d Rs 150/200, r with AC Rs 500; dishes Rs 15-100; ♿) Mr Sorathia presides over the pick of the town, which has plain, freshly painted, good-value rooms and the best setup for travellers. Their fabulous new restaurant is fast and friendly, and secure parking is available.

Hotel Girnar (☎ 2621201; Majewadi Darwaja; s/d Rs 200/300, with AC Rs 400/650; ♿) About 2km out of town, this is state-run but good, with spacious rooms; try to get one with a balcony. There are big discounts mid-June to mid-September. Good thalis cost Rs 45.

Eating

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

Garden Restaurant (dishes Rs 25-90; ☎ 6.30-10.30pm Thu-Tue) Something different: this restaurant has a lovely garden setting near Jyoti Nursery and beneath Girnar hill, spaced-out tables and reasonable Jain, Punjabi and South Indian food – it's popular with Indian families and is worth the short rickshaw ride.

Santoor Restaurant (MG Rd; dishes Rs 21-55) Popular Santoor has quick service, good, fresh vegetarian Punjabi and South Indian, delectable mango shakes, 1970s booth seating and dim, dim lighting from mini-chandeliers.

Swati Restaurant (Jayshree Rd; dishes Rs 17-70; ☎ 11am-3pm & 5.30-10.30pm) This is welcoming and of a similar standard to Santoor, with tasty food (go for Indian rather than Chinese) and, in keeping with the Gujarati restaurant craze, has brown-booth seating and dim lighting.

Vihar Restaurant (Kalwa Chowk; thali Rs 30) Stunning Gujarati food in a packed streetside restaurant. Hard to miss, and harder to beat.

Geeta Lodge (thali Rs 45; ☎ 10am-3.30pm & 6-11pm) Close to the station, with all-you-can-eat thalis (sweet costs extra) and an army of waiters.

Poonam (thali Rs 35) Down a small side street off Dhal Rd is another vegetarian option. It's above an STD phone place (its sign is in Gujarati).

Jay Ambe Juice Centre (snacks & drinks Rs 15-40; ☎ 7-1am) Great for a fresh juice, milkshake or ice cream; this is a perfect retreat.

Getting There & Away

BUS

Buses leave regularly for Rajkot (Rs 50, two hours), Sasan (Rs 22, two hours), Porbandar (Rs 53, three hours), Veraval (Rs 45, three hours), Una (for Diu; Rs 65, five hours), Jamnagar (Rs 65, four hours) and Ahmedabad (Rs 115, eight hours).

Various private bus offices are on Dhal Rd, near the rail tracks. **Mahasagar Travels** (☎ 2629199) serves Mumbai (non-AC/AC Rs 350/700), Vadodra (non-AC/AC/sleeper Rs 180/200/220), Ahmedabad (non-AC/AC/sleeper Rs 140/150/190, eight hours) and Udaipur (Rs 275, sleeper Rs 330, 15 hours).

TRAIN

There's a **reservation office** (☎ 131; ☎ 8am-1pm & 3-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun) at the station.

Trains serve Rajkot (sleeper/2AC Rs 121/298, 2¼ hours, 103km) and Veraval (2nd class/2AC Rs 121/291, 1¾ hours, 83km). The 1465/3 *Veraval-Jabalpur Exp* leaves at 11.50am and arrives in Ahmedabad at 6.25pm (2nd class/2AC Rs 93/666, 373km). They rarely stop at the station for longer than a couple of minutes.

GONDAL

Gondal is a small, leafy town, 38km south of Rajkot, that sports a string of palaces on a gentle river. Once capital of a 1000-sq-km princely state, it was run by the Jadeja Rajputs, later overtaken by the Mughals, then recovered in the 1650s. Maharaja Bhagwat Singhji ruled in the 19th century and was a progressive social reformer who, among other things, introduced compulsory education for both sexes.

Sights & Activities

Naulakha Museum (Naulakha Palace; admission Rs 100) is housed in the beautiful riverside palace and

built in a mixture of styles, with striking gargoyles. The museum shows royal artefacts, including scales used to weigh the maharaja in 1934 (his weight in silver was distributed to the poor) and dinky toys.

The **Car Museum** (Orchard Palace; admission Rs 100; ☎ 8.30-11.30am & 2.30-5.30pm) contains the royal fleet of around 50 impressive vehicles, including a car from 1907, so early that its make is given as: 'New Engine Company Acton'.

The **Shri Bhuvaneshwari Aushadhashram Ayurvedic Pharmacy** (☎ 222445; www.bhuraneshwaripith.com; Ghanshyam Bhuvan Mahader Wadi) was founded in 1910 by the Royal Physician. The pharmacy manufactures medicines and it's possible to see all the weird machinery involved, as well as buy the result (for treating hair loss, vertigo, insomnia etc). The founding physician here first coined the title 'Mahatma' (Great Soul) for Gandhi.

Swanarayan Temple (☎ 7.30am-1pm & 3.30-8.30pm), owned by the wealthy Swanarayan sect, is a white, 19th-century building built on land donated by the maharaja, with an attached farm.

About 3km off the road to Rajkot is **Veri Lake**, a large reservoir that's good for bird-watching (return rickshaw Rs 40 to 50).

Udhyog Bharti Khadi Gramodyog (Udhyog Bharti Chowk; ☎ 8am-1pm & 3-5pm) is a large *khadi* shop where around 800 women work spinning cotton upstairs, while downstairs embroidered salwar suits and saris are on sale at reasonable fixed prices.

Sleeping & Eating

These places have private bathroom.

Bhuvaneshari Guest House (☎ 222481; r Rs 200, with AC Rs 400; ☎) A few streets from Orchard Palace, and part of the Bhuvaneshari complex, this is a pilgrims' guesthouse that has reasonable rooms (AC ones are cleaner) with balconies.

Orchard Palace (☎ 221950; Palace Rd; r full-board Rs 2200, without meals Rs 1200, with AC 1400; ☎) This small palace, once the royal guesthouse, has six well-kept, high-ceilinged rooms of different sizes, filled with original 1930s and '40s furniture. It's a charming, peaceful place to stay and guests get free admission to all of Gondal's attractions.

Dreamland (2nd fl, Kailash Complex; dishes Rs 20-68, thali Rs 45; ☎ 11am-3pm & 7-11pm) Near the bus stand, this has Gondal's best thalis, in a bright, clean, busy restaurant, with good Punjabi dishes, too.

Getting There & Away

Buses run to/from Rajkot (Rs 25, one hour, every 30 minutes), Junagadh (Rs 30, two hours, hourly), Bhavnagar (Rs 85, 3½ hours, every two hours) and Porbandar (Rs 85, three hours, every two hours).

Trains from Rajkot (Rs 12, one hour, three daily) to Junagadh (Rs 18, 1½ hours) stop at Gondal (they go on to Veraval).

PORBANDAR

☎ 0286 / pop 133,083

The port town of Porbandar, located between Veraval and Dwarka, is famed as the birthplace of Mahatma Gandhi. This friendly beachside town on the southeast coast is Gujarat now builds its reputation on cement and soda ash, and is well off the tourist map. You can't swim here due to rough, repugnant seas; in fact, you can't do much except stroll the tree-lined streets enjoying the invigorating sea breeze, visit the former house of the loinclothed fakir, or pay respects at a neighbouring shrine. Back towards Jynbeeli bridge you'll find some lovely mangroves replete with birdlife.

In ancient times, the city was called Sudamapuri after Sudama, a compatriot of Krishna, and there was once a flourishing trade from here to Africa and the Gulf. The Africa connection is apparent in the number of African-Indians, known as Siddis, who form a separate caste of Dalits.

Information

There's no tourist office, but you could check out www.porbandaronline.com.

iWay (per hr Rs 20; ☎) Still leads the way for internet access.

Skyline Cyber Café (25 Indraprasth Complex, ST Cross Rd; per hr Rs 30; ☎ 9.30-12.30am) Quick access.

Thanks Tours & Travels (☎ 2244344; Jeevan Jyot, MG Rd; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1.30pm Sun) Changes travellers cheques and currency.

Sights

KIRTI MANDIR

This **memorial** (admission free; ☎ 7.30am-7pm) to Gandhi was built in 1950. Reflecting Gandhi's age when he died, it's 79ft high and has 79 candle holders; symbols from all the world's major religions are incorporated. There's a small bookshop and photographic exhibition (take the stairs by the entrance). Next door is **Gandhi's birthplace** – a three-storey, 220-year-old house. He was born here on 2 October 1869 (the very spot is marked on the floor by

a swastika), and it was his home till the ripe old age of six. The house is an interesting warren of 22 rooms.

Sleeping

Nilesh Guest House (☎ 2250247; MG Rd; r Rs 150) A welcoming, dollar-friendly guesthouse, with passable doubles.

Hotel Moon Palace (☎ 2241172; moonpalace@porbandaronline.com; MG Rd; s/d from Rs 150/250, deluxe ste Rs 600/700; thali Rs 35) This is a clean, comfortable, friendly, well-run option, with some good-value rooms (the single is a bargain). Pricier rooms are bigger, better and brighter. There's a popular restaurant.

Hotel Silver Palace (☎ 2252591; www.silverpalcehotel.com; silver complex, ST Rd; s/d from Rs 200/300, with AC 550-850) A well-run hotel, with colour-coded rooms – blue room (Rs 850) stands out. Prices include tax, and the noon check out is rare.

Hotel Indraprasth (☎ 2242681; ST Cross Rd; s Rs 300-1500, d Rs 450-2000; ☎) An unprepossessing mall block leads to an attractive and unusually decorated hotel, with painted dancing girls along the corridor and rococo paintings in the rooms.

Hotel Sheetal (☎ 2247596; s/d from Rs 500/700, with AC Rs 800/1000, Rajwari Ste d Rs 1950; ☎) Opposite the main post office, family-run, eager-to-please Hotel Sheetal has a big range of smart rooms, from very small to cheerful larger ones to the Rajwari Suite, which has two heart-shaped beds and a rain shower. Prices include breakfast.

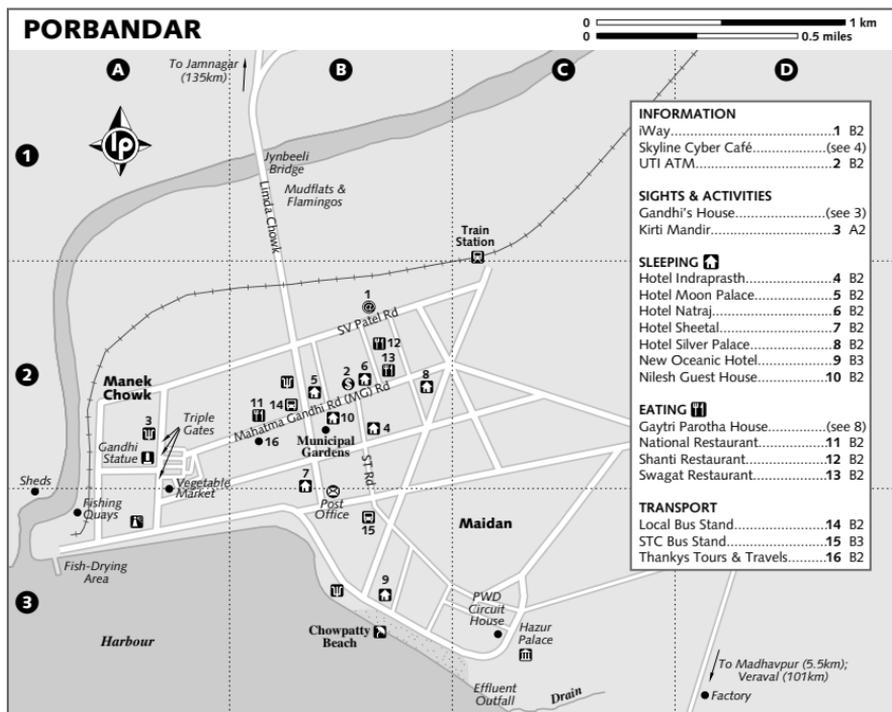
Hotel Natraj (☎ 2215658; www.hotelnatraj.com; near UTI bank, MG Rd; s/d from Rs 500/800 with AC) Forgive the clashing colours, this brand spanker is the pick of the town. Rooms are generously sized and comfortable, with tasteful bathrooms.

New Oceanic Hotel (☎ 2242917; Sea Face Chowpatti; s Rs 500-800, d Rs 600-1200) In a great position on the waterfront, the rooms are better than you might expect from its dilapidated exterior – costlier ones are clean and roomy. The best have sea views.

Eating

Swagat Restaurant (MG Rd; dishes Rs 16-75; ☎ 8.30am-3pm & 6-10pm; ☎) Porbandar's finest, this 1st-floor restaurant is a calm retreat from the street, with brown-booth seating and cool chrome chairs, selling tasty Punjabi and Chinese food.

National Restaurant (MG Rd; Rs 25-150; ☎ 11.30am-3pm & 7-11.30pm) This is a simple, traditional



place, thronged on Sunday, serving veg and nonveg Punjabi and Chinese dishes.

Shanti Restaurant (Ramtekri Rd, opp Khojakhana; dishes Rs 20-110; ☎ 10am-3.15pm & 6pm-11.15pm) A new enterprise run by the Thanki brothers, with delicious Punjabi, South Indian and Chinese food, and a big city décor.

Gaytri Parotha House (below Hotel Silver Palace; thali Rs 44) This red-seated gem does a stupendous thali (Rs 44) that attracts repeat customers, with countless *puris*, and lappings of sour milk. The sign is in Gujarati.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Jet Airways offers daily flights to Mumbai (Rs 5452). Bookings can be made with **Thankys Tours & Travels** (☎ 2244344; Jeevan Jyot, MG Rd; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1.30pm Sun).

An autorickshaw to/from the airport costs usually around Rs 30.

BUS

There are regular services along a bumpy road to Dwarka (Rs 53, three hours), Jamnagar (Rs 56, four hours), Veraval (Rs 59, three hours)

and Junagadh (Rs 54, three hours). Private bus companies have offices on MG Rd.

TRAIN

The 9216 *Saurashtra Express* leaves Porbandar at 8pm for Mumbai (sleeper/3AC Rs 332/907, 23½ hours, 959km) via Rajkot (sleeper/3AC Rs 128/330, 4½ hours, 215km) and Ahmedabad (sleeper/3AC Rs 206/548, 10 hours, 461km).

DWARKA

☎ 02892 / pop 33,614

Dwarka literally feels like the end of the earth. This remote pilgrimage town at the extreme western tip of the Kathiawar peninsula is one of the four most holy Hindu sites in India – Krishna is said to have set up his capital here after fleeing from Mathura. It's a well-organised town, busy with pilgrims and farmers. Men wear white clothes and red turbans, and both men and women are weighed down with gold nugget-like jewellery. It gets packed with pilgrims at festival times. Archaeological excavations have revealed five earlier cities lying just off the coast – submerged as the sea encroached.

The town swells to breaking point for **Janmasti** in August/September in celebration of Krishna's birthday.

Sights & Activities

Dwarkanath Temple (☎ 7-8am, 9am-12.30pm & 5-9.30pm) is dedicated to Krishna and has a magnificent, five-storey spire that is supported by 60 columns. Non-Hindus must make a declaration of respect for the religion to enter.

Also worth a look are the carvings of **Rukmini Temple**, about 1km to the east, and the many-pillared **Sabha Mandapa**, reputed to be over 2500 years old, as well as the **Nageshwar Mandir**, with its underground chamber, about 16km away.

Dwarka's **lighthouse** (admission Rs 6; ☎ 5-6.30pm) affords a beautiful panoramic view. Photography strangely not allowed.

About 30km north of Dwarka is a ferry service (Rs 5, 25 minutes, sunrise to sunset) crossing the 3km from Okha to the island of **Bet**, where Vishnu is said to have slain a demon. There are modern Krishna temples on the island, and a deserted beach on the northern coast. An STC bus goes to Okha (Rs 15, every 30 minutes) from Dwarka.

The sights around Dwarka can be visited on a five-hour **tour** (Rs 40 not incl ferry ticket; ☎ 8am & 2pm), which whips around Nageshwar, Gopi Taleo (a river), Bet and Rukmini Temple. It's run by Dwarka Darshan, which has an office in the vegetable market. You could also see the sights by taxi (Rs 400 to 500).

Sleeping & Eating

Most places offer significant discounts, except during festivals.

Meera Hotel (☎ 234031; High Way Rd; s/d/tr Rs 120/180/240, with AC Rs 500/750/1000, thalis Rs 40; ☎) This hotel is on the main approach road, and rather on the outskirts, but has a good range of rooms – those on the top floor are cheap and cheerful, while the deluxe rooms are comfortable. There's a popular dining hall, which does good thalis.

Kokila Dhiraj Dham (☎ 236746; Hospital Rd; r Rs 300) This Reliance hotel is seriously good value (though no AC). A lift takes guests to long corridors, and numerous well-apportioned rooms. The communal TV room can get rowdy at night.

Hotel Rajdhani (☎ 234070; Hospital Rd; d/tr Rs 300/400, with AC 500/600; ☎) A good, quiet, cen-

tral hotel, with marble floors and smart, clean rooms in all categories.

Hotel Gurupreena (☎ 234512; opposite Bhadrakali Temple; without/with AC Rs 500/700) Lush on the outside, bland in the middle, Gurupreena is still good value, and has one of the best restaurants in town.

Hotel Darshan (☎ 235034; near old bus stand; d Rs 600; ☎) Lovely new place, with polished white floors and a large seated area filled with black vinyl.

If you don't fancy feeding from street stalls, try **Sharanam Restaurant** (Hotel Gurupreena; dishes Rs 15-75; ☎ 8am-3pm & 6-11pm) for Punjabi and South Indian food.

Getting There & Away

There are trains to Jamnagar (2nd class Rs 25, 2½ hours, 139km), and Mumbai (sleeper/3AC/2AC Rs 295/828/1324, 20 hours, 961km) via Rajkot (2nd class Rs 63, 4¼ hours, 223km) and Ahmedabad (sleeper/2AC Rs 176/789, 10½ hours, 469km). The station is 3km from town and has a **reservation office** (☎ 8am-2pm & 2.15-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun).

STC buses serve Jamnagar (Rs 60, four hours, hourly), Junagadh (Rs 75, six hours, every two hours) and Somnath (Rs 110, 6½ hours).

JAMNAGAR

☎ 0288 / pop 447,734

Jamnagar is another Gujarat delight, a fabulous, little-visited city, overflowing with ornate, decaying buildings and colourful bazaars displaying the town's famous, brilliant-coloured *bandhani* – produced through a laborious 5000-year-old process involving thousands of tiny knots in a piece of folded fabric. It's an ideal base for exploring the surrounding coastline that stretches to Dwarka, where rare birds flock to ankle-deep islands, and fine beaches are empty all year-round.

Jamnagar is best known for having India's only Ayurvedic university, where you can learn the techniques of ancient medicine and yoga, and a temple that's hosted nonstop chanting since 1964 (it's in the *Guinness Book of Records*; see opposite).

Prior to Independence, the town was ruled by the Jadeja Rajputs. It's built around appealing Ranmal Lake, which has a small palace at its centre, and huge weekend crowds around its edge.

Orientation & Information

The centre of the newer town, with most places to stay, is Teen Batti Chowk. The old town, known as Chandi Bazaar, is to the southeast, with Darbar Gadh, a semicircular gathering place where the maharajas of Nawanager once held public audiences, at its centre. The bus stand and train station are a long way west and northwest respectively.

The **Forest Office** (☎ 2552077; 🕒 10.15am-6.15pm Mon-Fri, closed 2nd & 4th Sat of month) provides information on exploring the Gulf of Kutch, with its marine park, as well as the nearby Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary, though not much English is spoken. You can also contact Hotel President (p756) for assistance in visiting these parks.

Precious Money Exchange (☎ 2679701; Teen Batti Chowk) changes money. The Hotel President will change US dollars, pounds sterling and euros, but accepts cash only. There are plenty of ATMs.

Surf the internet at **iWay** (per hr Rs 25; 🕒 8am-11pm).

Sights & Activities

LAKHOTA PALACE & RANMAL LAKE

This mid-19th-century diminutive palace on Ranmal Lake once belonged to the maharaja of Nawanager. Today it houses a **museum** (Indian/foreigner Rs 2/50; 🕒 10.30am-5.30pm Thu-Tue, closed 2nd & 4th Sat of month), a striking building with some fine woodcarving and grotesque gargoyles that contains sculpture and inscriptions from the surrounding region. The lake itself is a scenic breath of fresh air.

BALA HANUMAN TEMPLE

At this **temple** on the southeastern side of Ranmal Lake, there's been continuous, 24-hour chanting of the prayer *Shri Ram, Jai Ram, Jai Jai Ram* since 1 August 1964. This devotion has earned the temple a place in the Indian favourite, the *Guinness Book of Records*. Early evening is a good time to visit as the temple gets busy, as does the whole lakeside.

JAIN TEMPLES & OLD CITY

In the thick of Chandi Bazaar are four beautiful Jain temples. The larger two, **Shantinath Mandir** and **Adinath Mandir**, dedicated to the 16th and first *tirthankars*, in front of the post office near Darbar Gadh, explode with fine murals, mirrored domes and elaborate chandeliers. The Shantinath Mandir is particularly beautiful,

with coloured columns and a gilt-edged dome of concentric circles. Opening hours vary, but you can usually find someone to let you in.

Around the temples spreads the old city with its lovely buildings of wood and stone, peeling, pastel-coloured shutters and crumbling wooden balconies. **Subhas market** – the vegetable market – has lots of local colour.

KHIJADIYA BIRD SANCTUARY

This small **sanctuary** (Indian/foreigner Rs 10/250; 🕒 dawn-dusk) is unique in that it encompasses salt and freshwater marshlands – from September to March there are lots of cranes here. It's best to visit around sunrise. Permits are available from the Forest Office (left). A return taxi costs around Rs 400, or you can take a bus (Rs 8) to nearby Khijadiya, then walk the last 3km.

MARINE NATIONAL PARK

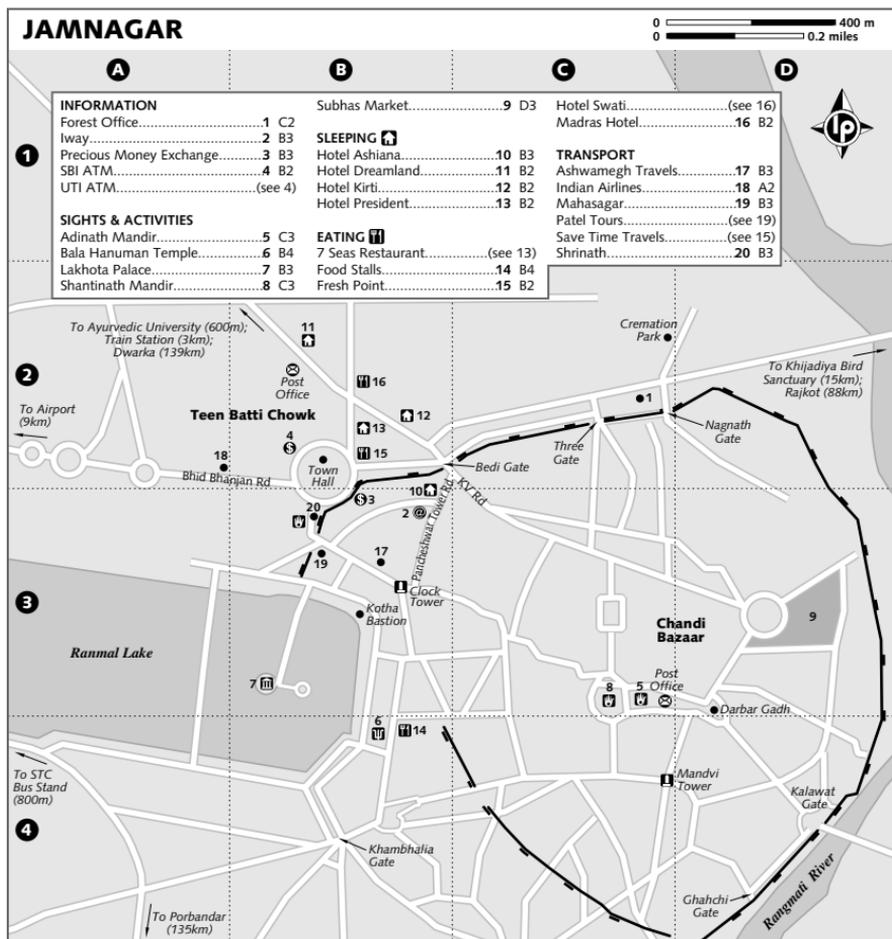
This gorgeous, isolated **park** (Indian/foreigner Rs 30/250, Narara car permit Rs 35/200, camera Rs 50/250, video Rs 2500/US\$200; 🕒 Oct-Jun) stretches 170km along the coast and encompasses 42 islands, 33 of which are ringed by coral reefs. It's rich in marine and bird life. The best time to visit is from December to March. The Forest Office (left) administers the park, or you can arrange a visit (or a sailing trip to Mandvi) through Hotel President (p756). It takes two hours to reach **Pirotan island** (timings are restricted because of tides – you must spend 12 hours on the island to wait for the tide to turn), which is the only offshore route set up for visitors. Nearby **Okamadhi Beach** as one of many sheltered havens.

You can also visit beaches along the coast, such as **Narara**, 110km from Jamnagar off the Dwarka road, where it's possible at low tide to walk among the corals.

Industry along the coast has affected this fragile ecosystem. In January 2005 Essar Oil, responsible for a new refinery in the region, paid for a whole coral reef to be shifted 1km from its original location. It's hoped the transplant will prevent damage to the marine ecology, which is threatened by an undersea petrol pipeline and rising sedimentation.

AYURVEDIC UNIVERSITY

India's only **Ayurvedic university** (☎ 2770103; www.ayurveduniversity.com; 🕒 6am-noon & 3-7pm Mon-Sat) runs many courses in Ayurvedic medicine, including a full-time, 12-week introductory course



(registration Rs 200, fee Rs 15,000) teaching basic theory and medicine preparation, as well as diploma and degree courses. These courses are set up for foreign nationals with medical qualifications; see the website for more. You can also study hatha yoga here – either a Certificate in Yoga Education (US\$625; six hours per day for 1½ months) or Practical Training in Yoga (US\$100; one hour per day for three months). You can also join for a couple of weeks (US\$8 per week). Massage, steam baths and mud therapy are also available (around Rs 150/US\$7 Indian/foreigner per treatment).

Sleeping

Hotel Ashiana (☎ 2559110; s Rs 200–400, d Rs 300–450, s/d with AC from Rs 500/600; 🏠) A vast, rambling

top-floor hotel in the heart of the old city, with rooms ranging from simple and cleanish to huge and comfortable, all with 1970s furnishings. Renovations are very 21st century.

Hotel Kirti (☎ 2558602; Teen Batti; r Rs 300–500, with AC Rs 550–850; 🏠) Off Teen Batti Chowk is this great-value option, with good, clean, bright rooms that have a bit of a view.

Hotel Dreamland (☎ 2542569; hoteldreamland@yahoo.co.uk; Teen Batti; s/d from Rs 200/350, with AC Rs 600/750; 🏠) North of Teen Batti Chowk, this hotel is set back from the street, with reasonable rooms backing a courtyard. Upstairs rooms are better, though all are good value and unintentionally kitsch.

Hotel President (☎ 2557491; www.hotelpresident.in; president@wilnetonline.net; Teen Batti Chowk; s/d Rs 550/650,

with AC Rs 800/950; 🚗 🚗) This efficient, pleasant hotel has very helpful management. Many of the well-appointed rooms have a balcony. There's also an excellent restaurant (see below).

Eating

For cheap snack food in the evening try the stalls set up near Bala Hanuman Temple.

7 Seas Restaurant (Hotel President, Teen Batti Chowk; dishes Rs 40) This offers tasty food, with excellent choice. Vegetable biryani is good, and tandoori *bhindi* (okra) is a triumph.

Hotel Swati (1st fl, Teen Batti Chowk; dishes Rs 17-80; 🚗 10am-3pm & 5-11pm) This vegetarian place has a good atmosphere, decked out with droopy chandeliers. It offers a big range of delicious South Indian and Punjabi dishes.

Madras Hotel (dishes Rs 18-60; 🚗 8am-11pm Wed-Mon) This place, near Hotel Swati, is simple and popular and specialises in veggie South Indian and Punjabi cuisine, as well as the odd pizza.

Fresh Point (Town Hall Rd; dishes Rs 28-65; 🚗 10.30am-3pm & 6-11pm) Good food in a simple, informal restaurant with red, wiped-clean surroundings.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Indian Airlines (☎ 2550211; Bhid Bhanjan Rd; 🚗 10am-5pm) has daily flights to Mumbai (US\$180). Bookings can be made with **Save Time Travels** (☎ 2553137; Town Hall Rd; 🚗 9.30am-8.30pm).

BUS

There are STC buses to Rajkot (Rs 37, hourly, two hours) and Junagadh (Rs 63, every 30 minutes, four hours); other buses head for Dwarka (Rs 69, four hours), Porbandar (Rs 58, four hours) and Ahmedabad (seven hours).

There are also various private companies, many based west of the clock tower. **Ashwamegh Travels** (☎ 26920405) offers buses to Ahmedabad (ordinary/AC Rs 170/190, 6½ hours, six daily) via Rajkot (two hours). **Patel Travels** (☎ 2552419; Pancheswar Tower Rd) serves Bhuj (Rs 130, three daily), Mandvi (Rs 150), Rajkot (Rs 80) and Ahmedabad (Rs 2100). **Mahasagar** (☎ 2554747) has buses to Bhavnagar (Rs 160, six daily).

Shrinath (☎ 2553333; Town Hall Circle) goes to Ahmedabad (Rs 195, six hours, eight daily), Mt Abu (Rs 250, 12 hours) and Udaipur (Rs 350, sleeper Rs 400, 14 hours).

TRAIN

Trains going to/from Ahmedabad include the 9006 *Saurashtra Mail*, at 3.40pm (sleeper

Rs 166, 6½ hours, 330km), continuing on to Mumbai (sleeper/3AC/2AC Rs 305/831/1182, 16½ hours, 822km). Trains also run to Dwarka at 12:35pm (sleeper Rs 121, 2¼ hours, 139km) and Rajkot (Rs 32, two hours, 84km).

Getting Around

There's no bus to the airport – it's 10km west and autorickshaw drivers demand at least Rs 120. An autorickshaw from the bus stand to Bedi Gate costs Rs 20. From Teen Batti Chowk to the train station, about 4km north of the centre, it costs around Rs 40.

AROUND JAMNAGAR

Bardar Sanctuary

Sixteen kilometres south of Jamnagar, Bardar Sanctuary is a gentle mountain range filled with crumbling temples and ancient town settlements. It makes for a fabulously isolated, out-of-the-way road trip: follow signs to the barren pinnacle at Kileshwar.

RAJKOT

☎ 0281 / pop 1.137 million

This former capital of the princely state of Saurashtra has matured into the second city of Gujarati affairs. Once a base for the Western States British government office, Rajkot rapidly expanded into a prosperous, lively business centre, with an evocative old city. It's also a testament to modern Gujarat, where farmers sell ghee on street corners, and mall-dressed young professionals race to lunch through lanes selling fresh produce.

Mahatma Gandhi lived here; you can visit his family home.

The prestigious Rajkumar College dates back to the 19th century and is regarded as one of India's best private schools. It was set up by the British for the sons of nobility (*rajkumar* means prince).

Information

State Bank of India, north of Jubilee Gardens, changes money.

Buzz Cyber Café (Alaukik Building, Kasturba Rd; per hr Rs 10) Tucked away opposite Lord's Banquet.

ICICI ATM (Jawahar Rd)

Interlink Cyber Café (off Lakhajiraj Rd, per hr Rs 30;

🚗 10am-midnight) Opposite Bapuna Bawala.

Tourist Office (☎ 2234507; Jawahar Rd; 🚗 10.30am-1.30pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat, closed 2nd & 4th Sat of month) Behind the State Bank of Saurashtra building, opposite the Galaxy Hotel.

and helpful staff. There's 24-hour room service, and food provided from local restaurant Spices, and you can eat dinner on the pleasant rooftop terrace.

Hotel Rajdoot (☎ 2468991; Dr Yagnik Rd; s/d Rs 550/850, with AC Rs 850/1050; 🏠) In an area with numerous restaurants and shops, this has appealing rooms, where the décor gets progressively more camp (red carpet, mirrored headboards) the more expensive they are.

Hotel Harmony (☎ 2240950; www.hotelharmonyrajkot.com; Limda Chowk; s/d from Rs 1095/1695) A modern establishment with a business-like feel. Rooms are comfortable, if overpriced, and come in various shades of brown.

Silver Palace (☎ 2480008; www.silverpalace.com; s/d with AC from Rs 1320/1895; dishes Rs 47-105; 🏠) This is one of Rajkot's swishest, and the haunt of visiting cricket and other stars, with neutrally decorated rooms and smart bathrooms. The buzzing restaurant, Flavours, is excellent.

Imperial Palace (☎ 2480000; www.theimperialpalace.biz; Dr. Yagnik Rd; s/d from Rs 1600/2100) The new high roller in town, with a masterful lobby and lavish rooms spiralling upwards to penthouse bliss. The glass elevator is worth the ride, and the hung artwork is decidedly decadent.

Eating

Adingo (☎ 2227073; Toran, Limda Chowk; thali Rs 65) This sophisticated two-storey place does tremendous thalis for the professional set. Downstairs is dark and leather clad; upstairs is red-tiled and raging.

Bukhara Woodland Restaurant (Hotel Kavery, Kanak Rd; dishes Rs 35-80; ☎ 11.30am-3pm & 7-11pm) Bukhara is smart, despite the Formica, cool and calm with good service and quality food, including inviting snacks and one of the biggest *paneer* menus ever.

Aroma (dishes around Rs 30; ☎ 9am-midnight) A café-style, snappy little place, run by the Spices crowd, this has snappy meals such as *puri* and *chaat*, stuffed *parathas* and South Indian dishes, as well as pretty good pizzas. There's an adjoining pool hall.

Rainbow Restaurant (Lakhajiraj Rd; dishes Rs 14-45; ☎ 11am-3.30pm & 7-11pm; 🏠) Rainbow is popular and serves tasty and cheap South Indian cuisine in the open-fronted downstairs, and Punjabi and Chinese dishes upstairs in AC comfort. There's a tantalising ice-cream selection.

Lord's Banquet (Kasturba Rd; dishes Rs 49-125; ☎ 12.30-3.30pm & 7.30-11.30pm) is a long-established place, popular for pure-veg Punjabi, Continental

and Chinese cuisine. The same management runs snappy **Temptations** (dishes Rs 35-90; ☎ 11am-12.30am) a few doors down, serving Mexican, pizzas, sandwiches and *paratha* in a brightly decorated, clean café.

Getting There & Away

AIR

There are daily flights to Mumbai (US\$95) with **Indian Airlines** (☎ 2222295).

BUS

Regular STC buses connect Rajkot with Jamnagar (Rs 42, 2½ hours, every 30 minutes), Junagadh (Rs 45, two hours), Porbandar (Rs 70, five hours), Veraval (Rs 70, five hours), Ahmedabad (Rs 80, 3½ hours) and Bhuj (Rs 90, seven hours, every 30 minutes) – the road to Bhuj is now excellent.

More comfortable private buses operate to Ahmedabad, Bhavnagar, Una (for Diu), Mt Abu, Udaipur and Mumbai. Several offices are on Kanak Rd, by the bus stand. Head to **Jay Somnath Travels** (☎ 2433315; Umesh Complex; ☎ 5.30am-midnight) for buses to Bhuj (Rs 110, six hours, four daily).

TRAIN

There are at least four trains daily to/from Ahmedabad (2nd class Rs 86, five hours, 246km). Trains also go to/from Jamnagar (Rs 51, two hours, 84km) and Porbandar (Rs 77, five hours, 216km). The 9006 *Saurashtra Mail* leaves at 5.40pm and arrives in Mumbai at 8.10am (sleeper/3AC/2AC Rs 286/777/1104, 738km). There's also the 9119 to Veraval (2nd class Rs 75, four hours, 186km) which leaves at 1.10pm.

Getting Around

An autorickshaw to the airport from the centre costs Rs 60; to the train station, expect to pay Rs 30.

KUTCH (KACHCHH)

Kutch, India's wild west, is a geographic phenomenon, full of rugged, fiery beauty. What appears an endless desert plain running dead straight for the horizon, is in fact a seasonal island. The tortoise-shaped land (*kachbo* means tortoise in Gujarati) is flat and dry, but the villages dotted throughout the dramatic, inhospitable landscape feel like pre-partition

Pakistan, and the tribal villagers produce some of India's finest folk textiles, glittering with exquisite embroidery and mirrorwork.

It's edged by the Gulf of Kutch – a dangerous, swirling sea – and Great and Little Ranns. During the dry season, the Ranns are vast expanses of hard, dried mud. Then, with the start of the monsoon, they're flooded first by seawater, then by fresh river water. The salt in the soil makes the low-lying marsh area almost completely barren. Only on scattered 'islands' above the salt level is there vegetation – coarse grass – which provides fodder for the region's rich wildlife. These grasslands are under threat from the *gando bavai* (crazy thorn tree), which is spreading across the Rann at an alarming rate, threatening to destroy fragile ecosystems.

The Indus River once flowed through Kutch – and along the route once inhabited by the 5000-year-old Indus Civilisation – until a massive earthquake in 1819 altered its course, leaving behind this salt desert. A mammoth earthquake in January 2001 again altered the landscape, taking some 30,000 lives, and destroying many villages completely. Although the effects of the tragedy will resonate for generations, the residents have determinedly rebuilt their lives and are amazingly welcoming to visitors.

BHUJ

☎ 02832

The capital of Kutch is an interesting outback city resurrected from the 2001 earthquake that killed 10% of the city's 150,000 people, and devastated its rich cultural heritage. But the city's physical and psychological scars are healing, and much of interest still remains. The beguiling bazaars sell amazing Kutch handicrafts, and some historic buildings, such as the Aina Mahal and Prag Mahal, have an eerie beauty that makes Bhuj more than just a springboard for visits to the surrounding tribal villages.

The reconstruction of Bhuj has been an expectedly slow process – settlements of itinerant workers still line the roads in and out of the city – and to encourage economic growth, the government has opened up the surrounding salt plains on a cheap lease, with 10-year tax-free incentives. The industries that came forward though were largely salt or chemical plants – many from outside the region – so it remains to be seen what impact this will have on local flora and fauna.

Orientation & Information

The town surrounds the dry Hamirsar Kund, with the palaces just to the northeast. East of the palaces is Shroff Bazaar, the main shopping street. The STC bus stand is to the south, and the train station is about 2.5km north.

PJ Jethi, the helpful, knowledgeable curator of the Aina Mahal (see below) knows all there is to know about the city and surrounding villages, and runs a very helpful **Tourist Information Office** (☎ 10.30am–6pm Mon–Sat, closed 2nd & 4th Sat) at the Aina Mahal. He's also written a very useful Kutch guidebook (Rs 50), published in both English and French.

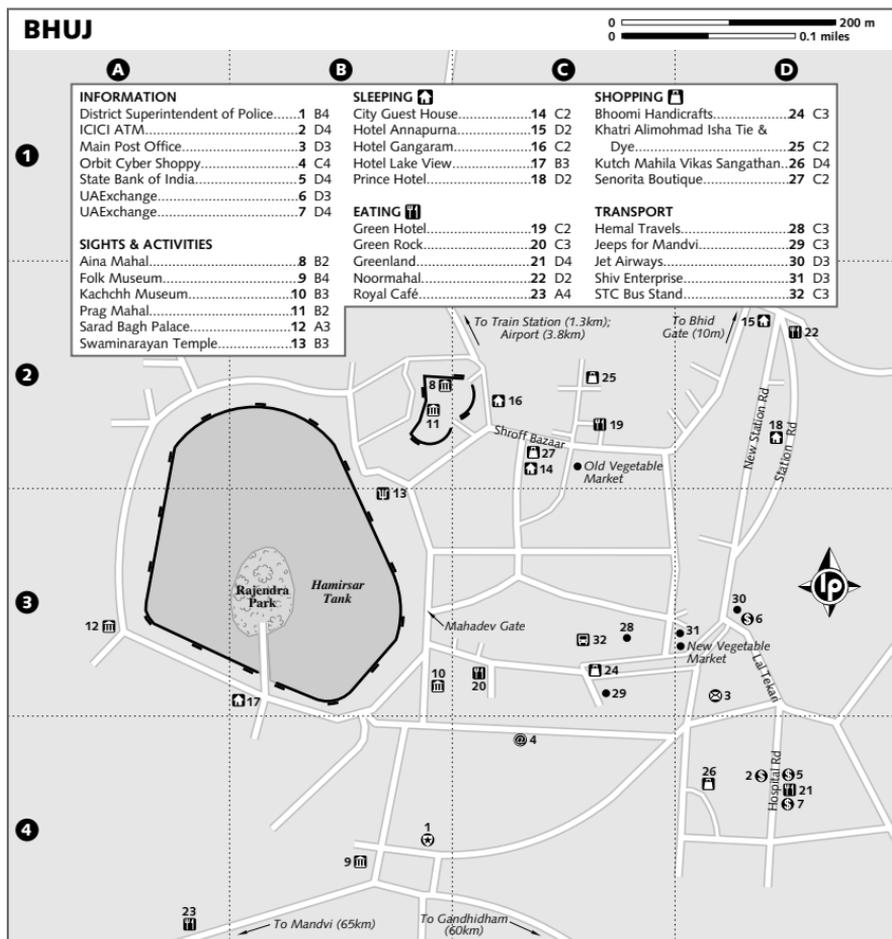
You can change travellers cheques or currency at **UExchange** (☎ 227580; Hospital Rd) or at the **State Bank of India** (☎ 256100; NRI Branch, Hospital Rd; ☎ 11am–5pm Mon–Fri, to 2pm Sat), with an ATM, opposite which is an ICICI ATM. Surf the internet at **Orbit Cyber Shoppy** (Ganshyam Nagar; per hr Rs 20; ☎ 9.30am–11pm).

Sights & Activities

Prag Mahal (New Palace; admission Rs 10, camera/video Rs 30/100; ☎ 9am–noon & 3–6pm) is in a forlorn state, damaged by the earthquake and dusty, but is worth visiting for its ghostly, exuberant Durbar Hall, with broken chandeliers and gold-skirted classical statues that wouldn't look out of place on podiums in a gay nightclub. Several scenes from *Lagaan*, the much-acclaimed Bollywood cricket blockbuster, were filmed here.

Next door is the beautiful **Aina Mahal** (Old Palace; ☎ 260094; admission Rs 10, camera/video Rs 30/100; ☎ 10.30am–6pm Mon–Sat, closed 2nd & 4th Sat of month), built in 1752 at a cost of Rs 2 million. It lost its top storey in the earthquake, but the lower floor is open, with a fantastic 15.2m scroll showing a Kutch state procession. The 18th-century elaborately mirrored interior is a demonstration of the fascination with all things European – an inverted mirror of European Orientalism – with blue-and-white Delphi-style tiling and the Hogarth lithograph series *The Rake's Progress*. The beautiful inlaid ivory door cost Rs 20,000 in labour alone. In the bedroom is a bed with solid gold legs (the king apparently auctioned his bed annually).

Much of the oldest palace, the **Durbar Gadh**, collapsed, but many of its latticed windows and elaborate carvings remain. It's estimated that the Aina Mahal will cost Rs 2.5 million



to repair. Donations are gratefully received – contact PJ Jethi at the museum for details (a fund has been set up through the V&A Museum in London).

Nearby is **Swaminarayan Temple**. This has brilliant paintings covering its carved wooden exterior; however, it's no longer being used – a new temple has been constructed to the south of town.

Kachchh Museum (College Rd; admission free) Gujarat's oldest museum, housing many ancient artefacts – has just been re-opened since the earthquake. The passionate curator, Umesh Jadia (☎ 220541; jadia_umesh@yahoo.co.in) has also overseen the reconstruction of a **whale skeleton** – the largest in Asia – now hanging at the Hill Garden on Mandvi Rd. If you're

interested in traditional music, Mr Jadia has a wealth of resources and knowledge.

Folk Museum (Bhartiya Sanscruti Darshan Kachchh; admission Rs 10, camera Rs 50; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-6pm Mon-Sat) displays embroidery, children's toys, beautiful paintings and traditional Kutch mud huts.

Sarad Bagh Palace (admission Rs 10, camera/video Rs 20/100; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-6pm) is a graceful Italianate palace, built in 1867, in the midst of beautiful, restful and shady gardens. It lost most of the 3rd floor in the earthquake, but retains the lower floors.

Outside Bhuj is its 18th-century **fort**, an impressive edifice built at the same time as the town walls, but it's occupied by the military and off limits to visitors.

KUTCH CREATIVITY

The crafts of Kutch are beautiful and intricate, with a diversity that reflects the differing traditions of different tribes. Numerous local cooperatives invest in social projects and preserve the area's artistic heritage by ensuring work is not merely market driven.

Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (☎ 256281; 11 Noolan Colony, Bhuj) is a grass-roots organisation, comprising 8000 rural women (2000 artisans), that pays members a dividend of the profits and invests money to meet social needs. The embroidery and appliqué are exquisite, employing the distinctive styles of eight different communities. Visit the head office in Bhuj, the 'Qasab' outlet at the Prince Hotel in Bhuj, or Khavda, a village north of Bhuj.

Kala Raksha Trust (☎ 253697; www.kala-raksha.org; 🕒 10am-2pm & 3-6pm), based at Sumrasar Sheikh, 25km north of Bhuj, also aims to preserve and promote Kutch arts, and specialises in Suf, Rabari and Garasia Jat embroidery. The trust has a small museum, works with nearly 600 artisans from seven different communities and can arrange visits to villages to meet artisans and see them at work. There are some beautiful items on sale; 30% goes to the artisans, who also help price the goods.

Shrujan (☎ 240272; Hasta Shilp Kendra; 🕒 9am-5.30pm), in Bhujodi, 12km from Bhuj, works with a network of 80 villages, benefiting nearly 3000 women and artisans. The chi-chi store has some beautiful, upmarket pieces of the finest quality.

Parmath (☎ 273453; Ramkrushn Nagar, New Dhaneti; 🕒 8.30-9pm), run by a delightful family, specialises in Ahir embroidery and wallpieces. It's in New Dhaneti, 15km north of Bhuj.

Chamunda Leather Embroidery (☎ 277718; 🕒 9am-6pm) in tiny Nakhatrana village, 50km northwest of Bhuj, is a leading manufacturer in camel leatherwork, including items such as mirrors and belts.

The prestigious **Dr Ismail Mohammad Khatri** in Ajrakhpur, near Bhujodi, heads a blockprinting business of real quality. You can stay with the family to learn the craft, or pick up unique naturally dyed pieces on a passing visit.

In Bhuj, textile dealers line the Shroff Bazaar, and it's packed with fine work. Be prepared to bargain, though. A good shop is **Señorita Boutique** (☎ 226773; Main Bazaar; 🕒 8.30am-9pm), which sells Harijan, Islamic and Jatt embroidery and tie-dyeing. **Bhoomi Handicrafts** (☎ 225808; 🕒 9am-9pm), opposite the bus station, is popular with locals.

If you're interested in antique embroidery, get in touch with **Mr AA Wazir** (☎ 224187). He has a stunning collection of more than 3000 pieces. Prices range from Rs 200 to 20,000.

Other recommended shops:

Kutch Rabari Art (☎ 240005; 🕒 9am-9pm) In Bhujodi, this Rabari family sell fine old Rabari pieces from their home.

Vankar Vishram (☎ 240723; 🕒 8am-8pm) Also Bhujodi-based; sells excellent woven products, with some beautiful woollen shawls.

Sleeping

Hotel Annapurna (☎ 220831; hotelannapurna@yahoo.com; Bhid Gate; s/d with shared bathroom Rs 70/100, with private bathroom Rs 150/200, dishes Rs 6-45) Annapurna has a nice atmosphere, and friendly staff, but is situated on a frenetically busy junction. Rooms are clean and some have balconies so you can overlook the mayhem. The dining hall serves tasty thalis.

City Guest House (☎ 221067; Langa St; s/d with shared bathroom Rs 70/150, r with private bathroom Rs 180) Just off the main bazaar, this is unusually bright, clean and cheery for a budget guesthouse, with neat basic rooms set along walkways.

Hotel Gangaram (☎ 224231; Darbargarh Chowk; r Rs 300) In the old city, near Aina Mahal, this

is a great place, where nothing is too much trouble, run by kindly Mr Jethi. Spic-and-span rooms centre on an internal courtyard, and there's a communal balcony overlooking the ruined palaces. The meals here are delicious.

Hotel Lake View (☎ 253422; opposite Rajendra Park, Sanskar Nagar Rd; r Rs 500, with AC 1050/1150) This haphazard hotel has the premium lakeside location, and generous, though run down rooms.

Prince Hotel (Station Rd; s/d Rs 600/800, with AC from Rs 1400/1800; 🗳️) Acknowledged as Bhuj's best, Prince Hotel has slick service and smart rooms – a haven though situated on a busy, dusty road. It offers free airport transfers. You can get an alcohol permit at its alcohol shop.

Eating

Noormahal (dishes Rs 20-50; ☎ noon-3pm & 7-10.30pm) This popular nonveg place gets packed out with mostly men eating chicken.

Royal Café (Mandvi Rd; dishes Rs 40; ☎ 10am-3pm & 6-10.30pm) An excellent choice, this garden restaurant has a lovely setting and good food served in small huts.

Jesal (Prince Hotel, Station Rd; dishes Rs 25-100; ☎ 7am-3pm & 7-11pm) This smart, nicely decorated little multicuisine restaurant offers good breakfast options.

Opposite the STC bus stand is **Green Rock Hotel** (Bus Stand Rd; thalis Rs 35; ☎ 11am-3pm & 7-10.30pm), a popular, 1st-floor place with lunch-time thalis; it's a sister restaurant to **Greenland** (Hospital Rd; dishes Rs 23-65; ☎ 11am-3pm & 7-10.30pm), a buzzing family restaurant with a groovy water-wall feature, and the also-good **Green Hotel** (Shroff Bazaar; dishes Rs 15-55; ☎ 9am-10.30pm), a small, cheery restaurant.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Jet Airways (☎ 253671; Station Rd; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun) has regular flights to Mumbai (US\$126).

BUS

STC buses run to/from Mandvi (Rs 22, 1½ hours, every 30 minutes), Ahmedabad (Rs 112, eight hours, five daily), Rajkot (Rs 97, six hours, five daily) and Jamnagar (Rs 120, 7½ hours, three daily). Book private buses at **Hemal Travels** (☎ 252 491; STC bus stand; ☎ 8am-9pm), which has buses to Ahmedabad (ordinary/sleeper Rs 160/225, nine hours), Rajkot (Rs 100) and Jamnagar (Rs 110).

TRAIN

Bhuj station is 2.5km north of the centre and has a **reservations office** (☎ 8am-2pm & 2.15-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun). The 9032 *Kutch Express* (sleeper/3AC/2AC Rs 172/454/703) leaves at 6.30pm, arriving in Ahmedabad at 2.15am. The 9116 *Bhuj-Bandra Express* leaves at 8.30pm and hits Ahmedabad at 4.05am. Going the other way, the most convenient is the 9115 *Bandra-Bhuj Exp* at 11.59pm from Ahmedabad.

Getting Around

It's 5km to the airport – a taxi will cost Rs 150, an autorickshaw Rs 50. Autorickshaws to the train station costs Rs 30. You can hire mopeds and motorbikes at **Shiv Enterprise** (☎ 251329;

Waniyawad; per day Rs 100-300; ☎ 9.30am-9pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun).

AROUND BHUJ

Kutch is one of India's richest areas for handicrafts, particularly famed for its beautiful embroidery work, but also with many villages specialising in pottery or block printing. The local Jat, Ahir, Harijan and nomadic Rabari communities have distinct, colourful traditions that make their villages fascinating to visit.

The village of **Hodka** – 50km north of Bhuj – is home to a fascinating project in 'endogenous tourism'. In partnership with hospitality professionals from around India, and various NGOs, **Shaam-e-Sarhad Rural Resort** (☎ 574124; www.hodka.in; Hodka; tents s/d Rs 1600/1800, bhunga s/d Rs 2600/2800) is a successful exponent of this burgeoning self-help tourism trend, and a welcome addition to the Kutch countryside. Set in the beautiful Banni grasslands, 'Sunset at the Border' as it's known, consists of three traditional mud huts (*bhungas*) with sloping roofs and neat interiors, and six luxurious tents, all with private bathroom. Owned and operated by the Halepotra people, it's a fascinating opportunity to witness the daily life of an indigenous community, and to witness first-hand the positive impact of thoughtful tourism.

Other interesting villages north of Bhuj include the Jat **Sumrasar Sheikh** (see the boxed text opposite), **Khavda** for pottery, the Ahiri **Danati** and **Ludiya** (mudwork). You can head towards the edge of the Great Rann, with its snow-glare of salt.

Little-visited **Lakphat**, an ancient port city with some interesting monuments, including a Muslim tomb and Sikh shrine, is about 140km from Bhuj.

Northeast of Bhuj is the Harappan site (pre-2500 BC) of **Dholavira**, which is both fascinating and remote. Excavations are ongoing but demonstrate a complex town. You'll need your own transport as there's no nearby accommodation and the journey's at least seven hours.

You need a permit to visit some villages north of Bhuj, but this is easy to obtain. You have to take a copy of your passport and visa (and the originals) to the **District Superintendent's Office** (☎ 11am-2pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat), 200m south of Hamirsar Tank, and complete a form listing the villages you want to visit – you

should get the permit (free of charge; maximum 10 days) straightaway.

About 60km northwest of Bhuj is **Than**, an eerie monastery set in the hills. The holy man Dhoramnath, as a penance for a curse he had made, stood on his head for 12 years. The gods pleaded with him to stop, and he agreed, provided the first place he looked at became barren – hence Little Rann. He then established the Kanphata's (Slit Ears) monastic order at Than. There's one bus daily to Than from Bhuj (Rs 28, two hours). This is a laid-back place to explore the hills around, and the architecture ranges from crumbling mud brick to Portuguese style stucco, blue whitewash and bell towers, with a hint of basil and marigold in the air.

Towns to the east of Bhuj were hardest hit by the earthquake, but many, including **Anjar** and **Rahpar**, have been rebuilt and are handy bases for trips to see artisans at work. To the south, Bada village is the base for the **Kutch Vipassana Centre** (☎ 02832-221437, 02834-73303), which runs free 10-day meditation courses.

Bhujodi is a large village about 12km south of Bhuj that specialises in weaving, with many outlets specialising in shawls and blankets. Take a bus towards Ahmedabad and ask the driver to drop you at the turn-off for Bhujodi (Rs 4). It's a 2km walk or autorickshaw ride from the highway. A return rickshaw costs Rs 150.

Getting Around

Riding around the barren landscape in an old Ambassador taxi is a classic India experience. PJ Jethi (see p760) arranges tours for Rs 1100 per day (historical tours with a guide are available on Saturday), or you could explore using local buses: for example, there are hourly buses to Sumrasar Sheikh (Rs 10, one hour). Otherwise you can pick up jeeps from Bhuj, which cost the same as buses and can be quicker – leave in time to get back to town though, as they thin out after 4pm.

MANDVI

Mandvi is a minor miracle. Forty-five minutes down the road from dustbowl Bhuj lies this dash of cheerful tropical cheek. It's a busy little place too, with an amazing shipbuilding yard where hundreds of men construct, by hand, wooden beauties for faraway Arab merchants. There are also some respectably fine and sweeping beaches (though water quality

can vary). The best are the empty, long, clean private beach (Rs 30) near Vijay Vilas Palace and another, just east of town, by the Toran Beach Resort.

Sights

Vijay Vilas Palace (admission Rs 15, camera/video Rs 50/250; ☎ 9am-6pm), a grand 19th-century palace, is 5km west of town in the centre of a palm plantation and set by a magnificent private beach. The palace was used as a setting for smash-hit *Lagaan* and many other Bollywood hits.

Sleeping & Eating

Rukmavati Guest House (☎ 223557; rukmavati@rediffmail.com; dm Rs 100, s/d Rs 175/300, with AC Rs 200/350; ☎) The best Indian hospital to spend the night in, this eccentric but pleasant former medical centre doesn't feel too institutional. It's light and bright, with solar-water heaters and self-catering facilities. Check-out is 24 hours. Owner Vinod is a gentleman.

Jitendra Guest House (☎ 222841; behind Taluka Panchayat, ST Rd; r Rs 350; with AC Rs 650) An excellent new choice run by a pair of cruisy brothers. Rooms are tidy and spacious, and room service is available.

Hotel Sea View (☎ 224481; ST Rd; r Rs 400-600, with AC Rs 800-1200; thalis Rs 50; ☎) A new, small hotel on the waterfront, this has rooms with big windows that make the most of the views over the wooden shipbuilding along the water's edge. Room 3 has windows on two sides. There's an excellent handicrafts showroom downstairs.

Vijay Vilas Beach Resort (☎ 9873013118, in Ahmedabad 079-28218551; www.palacesofindia.com; d B&B US\$125, dishes Rs 40-200) A tented resort on the private beach stretching down from Vijay Vilas Palace, this is overpriced but has a fantastic location. The large, luxurious tents have big wooden beds, white-tiled bathrooms and small verandas. The Dolphin restaurant is open to nonguests and is a pavilion with a wonderful beachside setting.

Zorba the Buddha (meals Rs 40; ☎ 11am-3pm & 7-10pm) In the heart of the city, Zorba's is a massively popular place for cheap veggie thalis.

Getting There & Away

Regular buses to/from Bhuj (Rs 25) take two hours. Or you can take faster jeeps for the same price, which leave from the road opposite Bhuj bus station and drop off at Mandvi port.

LITTLE RANN SANCTUARY

This is not a region for the faint-hearted. The barren, blindingly white land of Little Rann is nature at its most harsh and compelling, and home to India's last remaining population of khur (Asiatic wild ass). There's also a huge bird population, and the area is one of the few places in India where flamingos are known to breed naturally. Khurs and flamingos are protected in the 4953-sq-km **Little Rann Sanctuary** (admission Indian/foreigner Rs 5/US\$5, camera Rs 20/US\$5, video Rs 2500/US\$200; ☎ dawn-dusk). The area is punctuated by desolate salt farms, where people eke out a living by pumping up ground water and extracting the salt. Heat mirages disturb the vast horizon – bushes and trees seem to hover above the surface.

The approximately 3000 Khurs in the sanctuary survive off the flat, grass-covered expanses or islands, known as *bets*, which rise up to around 3m. These remarkable creatures are capable of running at an average speed of 50km/h for long distances.

Rain turns the desert into a sea of mud, and even during the dry season the solid-looking crust is often deceptive, so it's essential you take a local guide when exploring the area, or when running the gauntlet to distant Dholavira – a white-knuckled, white-hot jeep ride.

The small town of **Zainabad**, 105km north-west of Ahmedabad, is very close to the Little Rann. **Desert Coursers** (☎ 02757-241333) is a family-run tour company that organises interesting safaris and village tours in the Little Rann. It runs **Camp Zainabad** (full-board incl unlimited safaris d Rs 3800; ☎ Sep-Apr), offering comfortable and attractive *kooba* (traditional thatch-roofed huts) in a peaceful, remote setting. Advance booking is advised.

To get to Zainabad by road from Ahmedabad, you can take a bus to Dasada, 12km away (Rs 50, 2½ hours). From here Desert Coursers does free pick-ups, or there are local buses. There are direct buses to Zainabad from Patan (Rs 48, 2½ hours, three daily) via Modhera (Rs 22, 1½ hours). Desert Coursers can arrange taxis around the area for Rs 4.5 per kilometre.

Rann Riders (www.rannriders.com), near Dasada, 10km from the sanctuary, is also family-run and offers luxurious cottage accommodation and jeep safaris. Book through **North West Safaris** (☎ 079-26302019) in Ahmedabad.

You may also approach from **Dhrangadhra**. The town itself is worth visiting, if only to break up the Bhuj–Ahmedabad hike. The streets and alleys wind around each other, and almost every turn is a mosaic of white-washed and coloured buildings of all periods, description and type. Temple bells ring out, and the locals aren't used to tourists, making for some refreshing dialogue, and even a flute concert if you're lucky.

The personable Devji Bhai Dhamecha (☎ 9825548090) is a wildlife photographer who makes a wonderful guide. He is passionate about the sanctuary and welcomes travellers with a special interest in wildlife. You can stay at his appealing **house** (per person incl meals Rs 450), and visit the sanctuary in his jeep (maximum five) for Rs 750/1500 per half/full day. He is planning two camp sites within the sanctuary as well, for those who want to get even closer to nature, with similar accommodation prices. If you can't get Devji, try his son Ajai (☎ 985548104).

Permission from the **Deputy Conservator of Forests** (☎ 02754-260716) in Dhrangadhra is required to enter the sanctuary; the guides mentioned will arrange this.

An hour south of Dhrangadhra is **Sayla**, a peaceful, pastoral town that swells during the Tarnetar Fair. The surrounding countryside is lush, tourist-free yet rich with princely states and skilled artisans (Sayla itself is noted for *ikkat* silk weaving). The nomadic Bharwad shepherds are known for their intricate beadwork, Somasar village for silk and cotton weaving, and Sejathpur is a Kathi village famed for its beadwork. A little further away at Wadhwan you'll find exquisite *bandhani* tie-and-dye and brassware.

Old Bell Guest House (☎ 280017; www.ahmedabadcity.com/sayla; Sayla Circle, Rajkot Highway; d from Rs 1800), presided over by the erstwhile ruling family of Sayla, is a wonderful retreat set in flowery gardens. All rooms have spacious ensembles; the upstairs corner rooms have two balconies.

Sayla is conveniently located on the Ahmedabad–Rajkot highway, while Dhrangadhra is on the New Bhuj–Ahmedabad rail route 230km (5¼ hours) from New Bhuj (2nd class Rs 64) and 130km (three hours) from Ahmedabad (2nd class Rs 42). It's well served by buses, for example to and from Ahmedabad (Rs 43, 3½ hours) and Bhuj (Rs 78, six hours).

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