



Mumbai (Bombay)

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Best Places to Stay

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Why Go?

Mumbai is a beautiful mess, full of dreamers and hard-labourers, actors and gangsters, stray dogs and exotic birds, artists and servants, fisherfolk and *crorepatis* (millionaires), and lots more. Its crumbling architecture in various states of technicolour dilapidation is a reminder that Mumbai once dreamt even bigger, leaving a bricks-and-mortar museum amid its chaotic streets.

Today Mumbai is home to a famously prolific film industry, one of Asia's biggest slums and the largest tropical forest in an urban zone. It's India's financial powerhouse, fashion epicentre and a pulse point of religious tension. Between the fine dining and frenetic streets, the urban grit and suburban glamour, the madness and the mayhem, there's a cinematic cityscape set to a playful and addictive raga – a complex soundtrack that dances to the beat of its own *desi* drum.

When to Go

Mumbai's most comfortable period is between November and March, when temperatures are manageable for outdoor sightseeing and balmy breezes blow in from the bay. By March, temperatures are rising, and by May, in anticipation of the monsoon, it's hot, hot, hot. From June onward, with the coming of the rains, accommodation prices drop, and in August to September, Mumbai experiences its biggest and most exciting festival, Ganesh Chaturthi; it's a great time to be in town, despite the downpours.

A Mouthful of Mumbai

Mumbai is a city shaped by flavours from all over India and the world. Throw yourself into the culinary kaleidoscope by sampling Parsi *dhansak* (meat with curried lentils and rice), Gujarati or Keralan thalis ('all you can eat' meals), Mughlai kebabs, Goan vindalho and Mangalorean seafood. And don't forget, if you see Bombay duck on a menu, it's actually *bombil* fish, dried in the sun and deep-fried.

Streetwise, don't miss Mumbai's famous beach *bhelpuri*, readily available at Girgaum Chowpatty, a flavour somersault of crisp-fried thin rounds of dough mixed with puffed rice, lentils, lemon juice, onions, herbs, chilli and tamarind chutney piled high on takeaway plates. Other street stalls offering rice plates, samosas, *pav bhaji* (spiced vegetables and bread) and *vada pav* (deep-fried spiced lentil-ball sandwich) do a brisk trade around the city.

DON'T MISS

For many, a visit to cosmopolitan Mumbai is all about dining, nightlife and shopping, but the city offers far more than nocturnal amusement and retail therapy. Nowhere is this more evident than in the spectacular maze of Gothic, Victorian, Indo-Saracenic and art deco architecture, remnants of the British colonial era and countless years of European influence. **Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (Victoria Terminus), High Court, University of Mumbai, Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai** and the **Gateway of India** are just the most prominent – little architectural jewels dot the urban quagmire throughout the metropolis and stumbling upon them is one of Mumbai's great joys.

Top Mumbai Festivals

- » Elephanta Festival (February, Elephanta Island, p16) Classical music and dance on Elephanta Island
- » Kala Ghoda Festival (February, citywide, p16) Two weeks of art performances and exhibitions
- » Nariyal Poornima (August, Colaba, p18) Commemorates the beginning of the fishing season
- » Ganesh Chaturthi (August/September, citywide, p18) Mumbai's biggest event celebrates all things Ganesh

MAIN POINTS OF ENTRY

Most travellers arrive at Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport, Mumbai Central train station (BCT) or Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (CST: Victoria Terminus).

Fast Facts

- » Population: 16.4 million
- » Area: 444 sq km
- » Area code: 022
- » Languages: Marathi, Hindi, Gujarati, English
- » Sleeping prices: \$ under ₹1000, \$\$ ₹1000 to ₹4000, \$\$\$ above ₹4000

Top Tips

Many international flights arrive after midnight. Save yourself some moonlit hassle by carrying detailed landmark directions for your hotel – many airport taxi drivers don't speak English and can dwindle precious sleep time hunting it down.

Eicher City Map Mumbai (₹250) is an excellent street atlas, worth picking up if you'll be spending some time here.

Resources

- » Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (www.maharashtratourism.gov.in) is the official tourism site.