



# Bihar & Jharkhand

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## Best Places to Eat

- » Bellpepper Restaurant (p512)
- » Chanakya BNR Hotel (p523)
- » Tandoor Hut (p512)
- » Mohammed Restaurant (p520)
- » Takshila (p512)

## Best Places to Stay

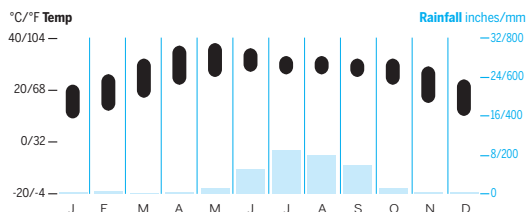
- » Indo Hokke Hotel (p522)
- » Chanakya BNR Hotel (p523)
- » Taj Darbar (p518)
- » Hotel Windsor (p511)

## Why Go?

Though long harnessed as pilgrim country for the devout, Bihar and Jharkhand remain pioneer travel territory for the average tourist and are perhaps more representative of traditional India than any other northern states as a result. Outside the big cities most signage is in Hindi and men are more likely to be wearing the kurta and dhoti rather than Western-style shirt and trousers. But the region's spirituality is the big draw. As the birthplace of Buddhism, Bihar holds great significance in India's cultural and religious heritage. Siddhartha Gautama – Buddha – spent much of his life here and attained enlightenment underneath a bodhi tree in Bodhgaya, making it the most important pilgrimage site in the world for Buddhists. Jharkhand's highest point, Parasnath Hill, is notable as the most significant Jain pilgrimage site in north-central India. Together, the states cater to a procession of pilgrims throughout the year.

## When to Go

### Patna



**Feb & Mar** Beat the heat: temperatures hover between a pleasant 19°C and 25°C.

**Oct & Nov** With monsoons in retreat, the region is pleasant and dry as winter sets in.

**Nov & Dec** Bihar's Sonepur Mela extravaganza puts Pushkar's Camel Fair to shame.

## The Flavour Frontier

You're in hearty frontier country. Leading the charge north towards the Himalayas is a vibrant gastronomic medley influenced by Mughals, Afghans, Bengal Nawabs, Persians, Europeans and Buddhist vegetarianism. Look out for *chokha*, spicy mashed potatoes prepared with *panch foron*, a five-seed mix of mustard, anise, fenugreek, carom and onion; and roasted chickpea flour fried in hot sand, known as *sattu*, which boasts a high-carb, energetic kick. *Litti*, balls of spiced *sattu* covered in dough and baked on coals, is ubiquitous on the streets. Bihari kebabs, usually made with mutton splashed with red chillies, cumin, coriander, raw papaya, cinnamon, garlic and ginger, are a delight if you can find them, and are sometimes wrapped inside *paratha* and served as rolls. Sweet teeth in Bihar and Jharkhand are satiated with dry sweets, like the strange but satisfying *tilkut*, pounded sesame seed cookies made with jaggery batter or melted sugar.

### DON'T MISS

Buddhist pilgrims from all over the world flock to Bihar's **Mahabodhi Temple** in Bodhgaya and rightfully so: it is here that Prince Siddhartha Gautama attained enlightenment beneath a bodhi tree and became Buddha. The temple complex was declared a Unesco World Heritage Site in 2002. Other treats in the region include the Jain Holy Ground at **Parasnath Hill**, the elephant-rich **Betla National Park** and the ancient ruins in and around **Rajgir**.

## Top Bihar & Jharkhand Festivals

- » Pataliputra Mahotsava (Mar, Patna, p511) Patna celebrates its historic past with parades, sports, dancing and music.
- » Rajgir Mahotsava (Oct, Rajgir, p521) A classical performing arts festival with folk dances, devotional songs and instrumental music.
- » Chhath Festival (Oct/Nov, Bihar and Jharkhand) People line the banks of rivers and water bodies to honour Surya, the Sun God. At sunset on the sixth day after Diwali, married women, having fasted for 36 hours, immerse themselves in the water and offer fruits and flowers to the deity.
- » Sonapur Mela (Nov/Dec, Sonapur, p514) With 700,000 attendees and countless thousands of animals taking part, this three-week festival is four times the size of Pushkar's Camel Fair.

## MAIN POINTS OF ENTRY

Most travellers arrive at Patna's Jaiprakash Narayan International Airport, Ranchi's Birsa Munda Airport or by train into Patna (PNBE) or Ranchi junctions (RNC).

## Fast Facts

- » Population: 103.8 million (Bihar), 33 million (Jharkhand)
- » Area: 99,200 sq km (Bihar), 74,677 sq km (Jharkhand)
- » Capital: Patna (Bihar), Ranchi (Jharkhand)
- » Language: Hindi
- » Sleeping prices: \$ below ₹800, \$\$ ₹800 to ₹1500, \$\$\$ above ₹1500

## Top Tip

Steer clear of this region during monsoon season (June to September) – Bihar is India's most flood-prone state.

## Resources

- » Tourism Bihar ([www.tourismbihar.org](http://www.tourismbihar.org)) is the official department of tourism site of Bihar.
- » Jharkhand Tourism ([www.jharkhandtourism.in](http://www.jharkhandtourism.in)) is the official department of tourism site of Jharkhand.