



# Gujarat

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## Best Places to Eat a Gujarati Thali

- » Agashiye (p678)
- » Shaam-e-Sarhad Village Resort (p713)
- » Geeta Lodge (p703)
- » Zorba the Buddha (p716)

## Best Places to Stay

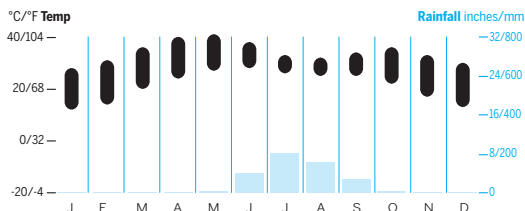
- » Camp Zainabad (p716)
- » House of MG (p677)
- » Vijay Vilas Adpur (p691)
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## Why Go?

Gujarat is a dynamic, relatively prosperous state that's barely glimpsed by many travellers scurrying between Mumbai (Bombay) and Rajasthan. But stop and explore and you'll find that this homeland of Mahatma Gandhi is quite a cocktail of surprises. It has its industries, but it also has artisans who weave and embroider some of India's finest textiles, and pristine parks harbouring unique wildlife such as the Asiatic lion. Its terrain is mostly flat, but it's scattered with dramatic, temple-topped, sacred mountains. Its cities range from the hectic to the frantic but they're also endowed with a wealth of beautiful old palace, mosque and temple architecture. The Gujarati people are renowned for their entrepreneurial nous and industriousness but with foreign tourists so scarce here, you're more likely to enjoy a friendly chat rather than a hard sell from locals. Gujarat is a dry state but this is one nonalcoholic cocktail that's worth savouring.

## When to Go

### Ahmedabad



### Sep/Oct

Navratri festival brings music and dancing to every town and village.

### Nov-Dec

Mango milkshake time in Junagadh.

### Nov-Mar

The best months to visit Gujarat's national parks and wildlife sanctuaries.

## MAIN POINT OF ENTRY

Ahmedabad (Amdavad) has direct flights from Singapore and several Persian Gulf cities, plus nine Indian cities. It's also the major hub for trains and buses connecting Gujarat with the rest of India.

## Fast Facts

- » Population: 60.4 million
- » Area: 196,024 sq km
- » Capital: Gandhinagar
- » Main language: Gujarati
- » Sleeping prices: \$ below ₹1000, \$\$ ₹1000 to ₹5000, \$\$\$ above ₹5000

## Top Tip

Gujarat's most exhilarating destinations are away from its crowded, noisy cities. To enjoy it most, head out to its national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, to the tops of its sacred mountains, to the island retreat of Diu or to the handicraft hotbed of Kachchh (Kutch).

## Resources

- » Gujarat Tourism ([www.gujarattourism.com](http://www.gujarattourism.com))
- » Gujarat Forest Department ([www.gujaratforest.gov.in](http://www.gujaratforest.gov.in))
- » Diu Tourism Department ([www.diotourism.co.in](http://www.diotourism.co.in))
- » Kala Raksha ([www.kala-raksha.org](http://www.kala-raksha.org))

## Food

Gujarat is strong on vegetarian food, partly thanks to the Jain influence here, and the quintessential Gujarati meal is the all-veg Gujarati thali. It's sweeter, lighter and less spicy and oily than Punjabi thali and locals have no doubts it's the best thali in the world. It begins with a large stainless-steel dish, onto which teams of waiters will serve most or all of the following: curries, chutneys, pickles, dhal, *kadhi* (a yoghurt and gram-flour preparation), raita, rotis, rice, *khichdi* (a blend of lightly spiced rice and lentils), *farsan* (savoury nibbles), salad and one or two sweet items – to be eaten concurrently with the rest. Buttermilk is the traditional accompanying drink. Normally the rice and/or *khichdi* don't come till you've finished with the rotis. In most thali restaurants the waiters will keep coming back until you can only say 'No more.' A good thali is an unbelievable combination of flavours – and a balanced, healthy, and usually good-value meal too.

## DON'T MISS

**Sasan Gir Wildlife Sanctuary** offers the chance to see the only wild Asiatic lions, the last of a species that once roamed from the Middle East to northern India. Lion numbers in this forest sanctuary have risen to around 400 and the chances of seeing some on a jeep safari are roughly fifty-fifty. Take two or three safaris and you'd be unlucky not to get a lion sighting.

The complicated jigsaw of tribal groups and sub-castes who inhabit the villages of **Kachchh** (Kutch) are some of India's finest artisans, practising a huge variety of crafts and especially textiles. Their embroidery, weaving, tie-dye and block printing are intensely colourful and infinitely varied, and visits to some of their workshops and sales outlets make a fascinating journey into a world of colour, pattern and endless hours of meticulous, amazingly skilled craftwork.

## Top State Festivals

- » Uttarayan (14–15 Jan, Ahmedabad, p677) Kite festival.
- » Modhera Dance Festival (around 20 Jan, Modhera, p683) Indian classical dance jamboree.
- » Bhavnath Mela (Jan/Feb, Junagadh, p701) Hindu festival at the foot of sacred Girnar Hill.
- » Mahakali Festival (Mar/Apr, Pavagadh, p688) Pilgrims pay tribute to Kali at Pavagadh hill.
- » Navratri (Sep/Oct, statewide, p684) Nine nights of dancing all around Gujarat.
- » Kartik Purnima (Nov/Dec, Somnath, p698, and Shatrunjaya, p690) Large fair at Somnath; Jain pilgrims flock to Shatrunjaya hill.