



# Madhya Pradesh & Chhattisgarh

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## Best Places to Eat

- » Raja's Café (p630)
- » Bapu Ki Kutia (p636)
- » Didi's Cafe (p622)
- » Girnar Thali Restaurant (p665)
- » Shivam Restaurant (p647)

## Best Places to Stay

- » Orchha Homestay (p622)
- » Evelyn's Own (p645)
- » Labboo's Cafe (p653)
- » Manu Guest House (p652)
- » Hotel Sheesh Mahal (p621)

## Why Go?

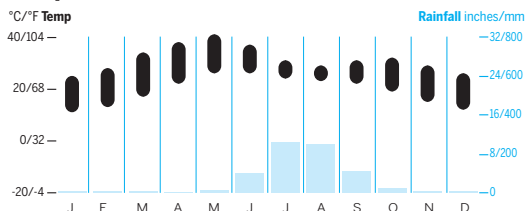
The vast but unassuming state of Madhya Pradesh (MP) doesn't roar for attention like its more celebrated neighbours. Instead it growls deeply from within, offering the promise of something big and beautiful for those prepared to prowling the plains.

Tiger parks are the star attraction, and your chances of spotting a wild tiger here are good, but lesser-known treasures abound: Khajuraho's temples display some of the finest temple art in the world and are the architectural highlight of a region scattered with ruined palaces, majestic hill-top forts, ancient Buddhist stupas and India's biggest and smallest mosques.

Laidback traveller havens like Orchha and Omkareshwar add some chill-out flavour to the region, but the more adventurous will love a foray into tribal Chhattisgarh, which split from Madhya Pradesh in 2000 and remains a world far removed from mainstream Indian culture.

## When to Go

### Bhopal



**Nov–Feb** Most pleasant time to visit central India, although hilltops will still be chilly.

**Apr–Jun** Best chance of spotting tigers; vegetation is thin and water sources are few.

**Jul–Sep** Monsoon time, but places like Chhattisgarh are at their most beautiful.

## Food & Drink

The combined region of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh is enormous so, naturally, food varies across the land. Bhopal produces some exquisite meat and fish dishes as well as some great biryanis and kebabs. In the dryer regions of the north and west, you'll find more wheat-based foods and less rice. There's wonderful fruit to be had, especially in the lush south and southeast regions – mangoes and custard apples are the highlights – and those brave enough to venture to the tribal markets of Chhattisgarh will see locals eating live ants. The favourite tippie, meanwhile, is a liquor made from the flowers of the *mahuwa* tree, which you'd be advised to drink with caution – it's potent.

### DON'T MISS

Madhya Pradesh is bursting at the seams with fabulous places to visit, but two things you really shouldn't leave without seeing (or at least attempting to see) are the exquisite temples of **Khajuraho** and India's most magnificent creature – the **tiger**.

## Top State Festivals

- » Festival of Dance (Feb/Mar, Khajuraho, p623) Week-long event with the cream of Indian classical dancers performing amid floodlit temples.
- » Shivaratri Mela (Feb/Mar, Pachmarhi, p643) Up to 100,000 Shaivite pilgrims, sadhus (spiritual men) and Adivasis (tribal people) attend celebrations at Mahadeo Temple. Participants bring symbolic tridents and hike up Chauragarh Hill to plant them by the Shiva shrine.
- » Magh Mela (Apr/May, Ujjain, p646) Huge annual religious fair held on the banks of the Shipra River at Ujjain; pilgrim numbers increase dramatically every 12th year for the massive Kumbh Mela (next held in Ujjain in 2016).
- » Ahilyabai Holkar's Birthday (Apr/May, Maheshwar, p653) The Holkar queen's birthday is celebrated with palanquin (enclosed seats carried on poles on four men's shoulders) processions through the town.
- » Navratri (Sep/Oct, Ujjain, p647) The Festival of Nine Nights, leading up to Dussehra, is celebrated with particular fervour in Ujjain. Lamps on the large pillars in Harsiddhi Mandir are lit.
- » Dussehra (Oct, Jagdalpur, p666) Dedicated to local goddess Danteshwari, this 75-day festival culminates in eight days of (immense) chariot-pulling around the streets.
- » Tansen Music Festival (Nov/Dec, Gwalior, p616) Four-day music festival attracting classical musicians and singers from all over India; free performances are usually staged at the tomb of Tansen, one of the most revered composer-musicians of Hindustani classical music.

## MAIN POINTS OF ENTRY

No international airports here, but the main cities – Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur and Raipur – plus big tourist spots such as Khajuraho are connected by rail and air to one or more of Delhi, Mumbai (Bombay) and Kolkata (Calcutta).

## Fast Facts

- » Population: 72.6 million (Madhya Pradesh), 25.5 million (Chhattisgarh)
- » Area: 308,000 sq km (Madhya Pradesh), 135,000 sq km (Chhattisgarh)
- » Capital: Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh), Raipur (Chhattisgarh)
- » Main languages: Hindi, regional tribal languages
- » Sleeping prices: \$ below ₹500, \$\$ ₹500 to ₹2500, \$\$\$ above ₹2500
- » Eating prices: \$ dishes below ₹50, \$\$ ₹50 to ₹100, \$\$\$ above ₹100

## Top Tip

If you're serious about seeing a tiger, plan and budget for at least three days of jeep safaris, with two safaris each day.

## Resources

- » Madhya Pradesh Tourist Board ([www.mptourism.com](http://www.mptourism.com))
- » Chhattisgarh Tourist Board ([www.chhattisgarh.tourism.net](http://www.chhattisgarh.tourism.net))
- » **Tiger protection** [www.saveourtigers.com](http://www.saveourtigers.com)