



Maharashtra

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Best Places to Eat

- » Malaka Spice (p108)
- » Biso (p102)
- » Khyber (p82)
- » The Grapevine (p112)
- » Prem's (p108)

Best Places to Stay

- » Verandah in the Forest (p101)
- » Hotel Sunderban (p107)
- » Lemon Tree (p85)
- » Beyond (see boxed text, p82)
- » Osho Meditation Resort Guesthouse (p107)

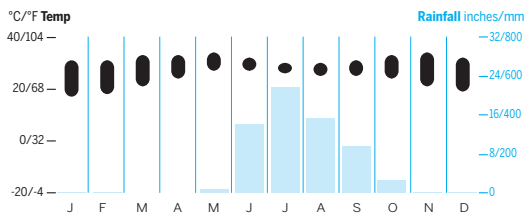
Why Go?

India's third-largest (and second-most populous) state, Maharashtra is smattered with lazy beaches, lofty mountains, virgin forests and historic hot spots, all complemented by the incredible sights, sounds, smells and tastes of India.

Starting up north around Nasik, the state yields a curious blend of spirituality, meditation and chardonnay. Next comes cosmopolitan Pune, a city as famous for its sex guru as its food-and-beverage circuit. Slip westward and you are rewarded with a rash of golden sands, crumbling forts and emerald forests along the lonely shores of the Arabian Sea. For an off-beat experience, head east to spy tigers prowling in dense tropical jungle, or saunter south for overwhelming temples, zany palaces and brawny action in wrestling pits. Sounds like your kind of melting pot? Dive right in.

When to Go

Nasik



Jan It's party time in Nasik's wineries, marked by grape harvesting and crushing galas.

Sep The frenzied and energetic Ganesh Chaturthi celebrations reach fever pitch.

Dec Winter's a lovely time for the secluded beaches of Murud, Ganpatipule and Tarkarli.

FORTS GALORE

In terms of medieval forts and citadels, Maharashtra comes second perhaps only to Rajasthan. The best of the lot is Daulatabad Fort (p88), a bastion that once played a cameo as India's capital. Equally intriguing is Janjira (p98), a 12th century island fortress that was once an outpost for the seafaring African traders. Best of all are the many forts closely associated with the life of Chhatrapati Shivaji, including the Raigad Fort (p112), and Shivneri Fort (p111), where the Maratha leader was born.

Fast Facts

- » Population: 112.4 million
- » Area: 307,690 sq km
- » Capital: Mumbai
- » Main languages: Marathi, Hindi, English
- » Sleeping prices: \$ below ₹1000, \$\$ ₹1000 to ₹4000, \$\$\$ above ₹4000

Money Matters

Maharashtra is among the most economically well-off states in India. Its per-capita income is 60% higher than the national average.

Resources

- » Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC; www.maharashtra.tourism.gov.in)
- » Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC; www.msrtc.gov.in)

Top Yoga & Meditation Centres

The **Vipassana International Academy** in Igatpuri (p83) has long been a destination for those wishing to put mind over matter through an austere form of Buddhist meditation. The boundaries of yoga, on the other hand, are constantly pushed at the **Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute** in Pune (p107) and the **Kaivalyadhama Yoga Hospital** in Lonavla (p102). For a more lavish and indulgent form of spiritual engagement, there's the super-luxurious **Osho International Meditation Resort** in Pune (p105), where one can meditate in style, while flexing a few muscles in the unique game of 'zennis' (Zen tennis).

DON'T MISS

The ancient caves of **Ellora** and **Ajanta** are among India's top architectural and artistic wonders. Rock art and cave paintings reach sublime levels of beauty and perfection at these World Heritage Sites.

Top Festivals

- » Naag Panchami (Aug, Pune, p103, Kolhapur, p113) A traditional snake-worshipping festival.
- » Ganesh Chaturthi (Sep, Pune, p103) Celebrated with fervour all across Maharashtra; Pune goes particularly hysteric in honour of the elephant-headed deity.
- » Dussehra (Sep & Oct, Nagpur, p96, Aurangabad, p84) A Hindu festival, but it also marks the Buddhist celebration of the anniversary of the famous humanist and Dalit leader BR Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism.
- » Ellora Ajanta Aurangabad Festival (Nov, Aurangabad, p84) A cultural festival bringing together the best classical and folk performers from across the region, while promoting a number of artistic traditions and handicrafts on the side.
- » Kalidas Festival (Nov, Nagpur, p96) Commemorates the literary genius of legendary poet Kalidas through spirited music, dance and theatre sessions.
- » Sawai Gandharva Sangeet Mahotsav (Dec, Pune, p103) An extravaganza where you can see unforgettable performances by some of the heftiest names in Indian classical music.