

10 Reasons to Visit Maharashtra, India

The cultural energy of Mumbai (Bombay). Originally a Portuguese colony in the 17th century, Mumbai (Bombay) has evolved into the commercial capital of India. This cosmopolitan metropolis is home to over 17 million people who speak over 12 languages and practice virtually every religion in the nation. Mumbai's busy and high-paced streets lead visitors to world-class cultural institutions, fabulous shopping, spectacular dining and an incredible nightlife, pulsing with energy.

The historic UNESCO sites. The State of Maharashtra is home to several **UNESCO World Heritage Sites**, including the majestic **Ellora** and **Ajanta Caves**. Composed of 34 monasteries and temples dating from A.D. 600, the Ellora Caves host sanctuaries devoted to Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism, which illustrate the spirit of tolerance that was characteristic of ancient India. The Ajanta Caves, 27 breathtaking rock-cut caves, are famous for their vivid frescoes that depict the life of the Lord Buddha and date back to the 2nd Century B.C.

The luxury. An excellent way to visit all of the major sites of Maharashtra is to board the elegant **Deccan Odyssey train** for a tour of the region. A joint venture between the Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation and Indian Railways, the Deccan Odyssey train is a private, 96-passenger first-class hotel, featuring private elegantly appointed suites and bathrooms, two restaurants offering exceptional cuisine, a gym, and a spa. The train's world-class staff ensures that every guest is treated like royalty, and make sure that the guided tours of Maharashtra's many towns are flawless.

The mouth-watering flavors. Maharashtra's cuisine is a product of the region's many ethnic influences. Delicious meals relatively unknown outside of India can be sampled throughout the state, including the ever-popular **bhelpuri**. Sold everywhere, this sweet, sour and crunchy snack is a combination of fried thin dough mixed with puffed rice, boiled potatoes, chopped onions, peanuts, besan sticks, green coriander and sweet tamarind and chili chatnis, all topped off with a squeeze of lime.

The centuries-old forts. Over 350 spectacular, centuries-old forts around Maharashtra, commissioned by many of the rulers of the region, can be visited by travelers today. One of the most popular forts is the **Jazira-Mehruba Fort** in the coastal town of Murud-Janjira. The fort, built in 1511 by the Siddis, continues to stand tall after numerous attacks by the Portuguese, the British and the Marathas.

The nature Maharashtra boasts. 31 life-sanctuaries, 5 national parks, 2 tiger reserves, breathtaking valleys and countless miles of white sandy beaches on the coast of the Arabian Sea for visitors looking for a peaceful and energizing escape with nature.

The eclectic shopping. Visitors can explore the cities and towns of Maharashtra for incredible shopping. Bargain hunters delight in Mumbai (Bombay) at designer boutiques run by world-renowned and local designers. Also, visitors can buy intricately-designed fabrics and silks, hand-made rugs, unique jewelry and religious artifacts like clay images of Lord Ganesha, the ever-popular elephant-headed God, at many local markets and abundant street fairs.

The vibrant colors. Colorful festivals are celebrated year-round in Maharashtra. Colossal in scale, the festivals reflect the vibrant cultural heritage of the region. Exotic music, dance, cuisine and rituals abound during these celebrations. One of great popularity is **the Festival of Janmashtami** celebrated in Mumbai (Bombay) in July/August. Celebrating the birth of Lord Krishna, the city streets of the Mumbai turn into a festive atmosphere where thousands of participants build human pyramids to attempt to reach pots of butter hung high up in the air, imitating the god's childhood pranks.

The movie stars of Bollywood. Mumbai (Bombay) is the cradle of the world's largest and fastest growing film industry, "Bollywood". Here, over 120 films are produced per year, showcasing glamorous film stars, elaborate sets, magical tunes and intricate choreography. Visitors can experience the magic of the cinema in person by visiting Film City, where many Bollywood blockbusters are filmed.

The mehendi ritual and the sweet scent of flowers. Upon arrival at many of Maharashtra's establishments, visitors receive a large garland of flowers made with white jasmine and orange marigolds. This affectionate, welcoming gesture is representative of the friendliness of the people of Maharashtra. It is also a custom for women to be asked to partake in the **mehendi ritual** during special occasions, during which intricately-designed **hennah** designs are imprinted on the hands and feet.

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