



## **5N/6D Package of Ahmedabad – Bhuj** **(Mandvi – White Desert – Narayan Sarovar – Koteswar)**

### **Day 1: Ahmedabad**

Arrival in Ahmedabad – a World Heritage City. Check into the hotel and after freshen up, visit:

#### **Gandhi Ashram:**

Mahatma Gandhi, after coming back from South Africa had his first religious retreat built in Ahmedabad's Kochrab area in the year 1915 on 25th May. The ashram was later on shifted to one of the banks of the Sabarmati River on an open tract of land. Gandhiji named the retreat as 'Sabarmati Ashram' as it was located on the bank of the Sabarmati River that passes through Ahmedabad. The date of the shifting is recorded as 17th June 1917. He made this transfer because he had taken a resolve to lead life like a poor, rustic Indian who earned his livelihood through farming and farm-related activities. The ashram served as the nerve-centre for the nation's freedom struggle. It was from this ashram that Mahatma Gandhi launched the Satyagraha movement on 12th March in 1930 and journeyed all the way to Dandi Beach by foot covering a distance of more than 300kms that took about 24 days. Gandhi's office was located in 'Hridaya Kunj' which was actually a cottage that was eventually turned into a museum. Sabarmati Ashram is one of the most important monument in Indian Independence History and today it is the first thing for a tourist visiting Gujarat to visit.

#### **Adalaj Stepwell:**

Adalaj Stepwell near Ahmedabad is one of the most beautiful Step-well in India with a perfect mixture of the Hindu and the Islamic architecture. Originally, it was being constructed by Rana Veer Singh but was completed by Sultan Mahmud Begada of Ahmedabad as he had killed the former to expand his kingdom. The stepwell was completed as the Queen of Veer Singh demanded its completion from Mahmud Begada who had proposed to marry her after his husband's demise. This resulted in the fusion of Indo-Islamic architecture in the stepwell. This 5 storey stepwell is constructed in such a way that sunlight cannot penetrate directly inside the stepwell which results in difference of 5 degrees Celsius in temperature from the normal temperature. The intricate carving on the columns and the windows of the stepwell is a treat to watch for any architectural lover.

#### **Swaminarayan Akshardham:**

One of the two Akshardham of the Bochasanwasi Aksharapurushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), Akshardham in Gandhinagar was the first to be constructed and completed in 1991. Built in Pink Sandstone, this magnificent structure is a sight to behold. Thousands of people visit it every day for its beauty and also the exhibition halls and the first Spiritual Light and Sound Show in the world 'Sat-chit-anand'. This famous temple was attacked by the terrorists in 2002 where around 30 people lost their lives. The main deity of the temple is Lord Swaminarayan who is considered as an incarnation of Lord Krishna and have a ardent following in the state of Gujarat.

Overnight at Ahmedabad.

### **Day 2: Ahmedabad – Bhuj**

Arrival in Ahmedabad – a World Heritage City. Proceed towards Bhuj (350 kms/7 hours). Visit LLDC Museum in Ajrakhpur on the way to feel the vibrancy of the colourful handicrafts of Kutch District.

LLDC stands for 'Living and Learning Design Centre'. The LLDC museum hosts glorious heritage of Kutch and it is a tribute to the brilliant artisans of Kutch. The museum has three galleries, studios and a library. Kutch is home to 12 tribes such as Ahir, Rabari, Maghwal, etc., that are indigenous communities of Kutch. The motive of the LLDC museum is to train, educate, support and promote the traditional crafts and communities of Kutch region. The biggest attraction of the museum is the textile and different embroidery styles of the locals, which is revered by the world. Tourists can see the different art and craft artefacts and also learn how they are created here. Also, a

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few more galleries are slated to be opened here featuring pottery, metal, wood and stone crafts. 'The Living Embroideries of Kutch' – the first show by the LLDC museum – had been seen by more than 30,000 people in just first couple of years. There are also craft shops where people can purchase the indigenous craft articles and there is also a café where the tourists can experience the local cuisine. The museum also hosts amazing sculptures and installations such as the metal installation created in the artificial pond.

Reach Bhuj – a city which rose from the ashes after the 2001 devastating Earthquake. Visit Swaminarayan Temple in Bhuj and overnight at Bhuj.

### **Day 3: Bhuj – White Desert – Black Hills – Bhuj**

Today morning, visit:

#### **White Desert:**

The Great Rann of Kutch is a salt marsh in the Thar Desert in the Kutch District of Gujarat, India. It is about 7500 km<sup>2</sup> (2900 sq miles) in area and is reputed to be one of the largest salt deserts in the world. The Great Rann of Kutch, along with the Little Rann of Kutch and the Banni grasslands on its southern edge, is situated in the district of Kutch and comprises some 30,000 square kilometres (10,000 sq mi) between the Gulf of Kutch and the mouth of the Indus River in southern Pakistan. The marsh can be accessed from the village of Kharaghoda in Surendranagar District. The Great Rann of Kutch together with the Little Rann of Kutch is called Rann of Kutch. In India's summer monsoon, the flat desert of salty clay and mudflats, which average 15 meters above sea level, fills with standing water. In very wet years, the wetland extends from the Gulf of Kutch on the west through to the Gulf of Cambay on the east. Every Year, in the vicinity of the White Desert, Gujarat Tourism celebrates the Rannutsav or the White Desert festival highlighting the white Desert and the colourful handicrafts of the district of Kutch which attracts thousands of people in the desert.

#### **Black Hills:**

Kalo Dungar or Black Hills stands as the highest point (462 m) in Kutch and is famous for its 400-year-old Dattatreya Temple. This is probably the only place from where you can enjoy the panoramic view of the white desert. The sunset from the Black hills is a treat to watch. Every day, at 12 in the noon, the jackals are served with food and then the holy Prasad is given to the people and this sight is recommended for the visitors to see.

Return back to Bhuj and overnight at Bhuj.

### **Day 4: Matano Mad – Narayan Sarovar – Bhuj**

Today morning, after breakfast, proceed to Narayan Sarovar (150 kms/3 Hours) and visit

#### **Matana Madh:**

The Ashapura Temple is a popular pilgrim location at Mata No Madh. The tiny village among the hills is visited by many religious followers to worship Ashapura Mata, who is considered as the main Goddess of the Kutch region. Mata Ashapura is also the principal Goddess of the ancient Jadeja rulers of Kutch. The temple is 58 feet long with a 32 feet width and 52 feet in height. The temple has been damaged in the recent years during the Gujarat earthquake of 2001. It has been renovated after that. The temple deity of Ashapura Mata is red colored in stone. It is 6 feet in height and 6 feet in width from the base. It gives striking resemblance to that of a human form.

#### **Narayan Sarovar and Koteswar:**

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The barren sandy land makes up for a picturesque background as the Narayan Sarovar is at the mouth of it. The lake has great religious values for its connection with Lord Vishnu from the Hindu sage. The Narayan Sarovar holds great pilgrimage values for the followers of Hinduism. The lake holds impedes for followers who are willing to take a dip. Bhajans and aartis take place which are key attractions for the travelers. The Narayan Sarovar is a well-known lake from the ancient Hindu theology as it is regarded as one of the five sacred lakes of the Hindus which are called the Panch Sarovar. It is said to have evolved from the mouth of the river Saraswati. The Narayan Sarovar Lake is famous for its religious history and people still visit it in thousands of numbers to make it an important pilgrimage sight in India. The Narayan Sarovar is at the closest vicinity of the famous Koteshwar Temple.

Return back to Bhuj and overnight at Bhuj.

### **Day 5: Bhuj – Mandvi - Bhuj**

Today morning, after breakfast, Visit:

#### **Prag Mahal:**

The gigantic Prag Mahal reflecting an unmistakable Gothic architecture at first sight doesn't seem to blend in with other structures in the surroundings. A commission or order for constructing a grand palace mirroring the Italian Gothic architectural style was given by King Pragmalji in 1865 and it was Colonel Henry Saint Wilkins who designed the layout for Prag Mahal. Artisans and craftsmen were indentured from Italy especially to help in the construction of this structure. Labourers received gold coins as remuneration for offering their services and it is alleged that more than 3.1 million rupees were invested for building this mansion. The palace has been constructed out of two materials-red sandstone and Italian marble. The sandstone was procured from Rajasthan. Upon entering the main or central hall, you'll see stuffed skins of different animals hung up on the walls, some of which have decayed considerably. You'll also stare in amazement at the grandiose chandeliers hanging from the ceilings and at the various statuettes placed in prominent corners around the palace. European flora and fauna done in 'Jali' style are going to impress you as well. Perhaps the feature or facet that'll appeal to you the most is the turret or bell tower plastered with a giant clock, going up to a height of 45 feet. Scaling to the top of the tower offers you breathtaking vistas of the entire city of Bhuj. A courtyard at the back of the Prag Mahal within which a tiny shrine having intricate stone engravings, can be seen.

#### **Aina Mahal:**

The Aina Mahal was built under the supervision of Maharao Lakhpatji in the year 1761. The palace was converted into a museum by the last ruler of the Jadeja dynasty Maharao Madan Sinhji. Although this 18th-century fortification is in an advanced state of decay, one can still see the magnificence of the structure by taking a detailed tour of its inner premises. You get to see the fortified wall constructed out of marble and ornamented with gold lacings and glass beads. There are large Venetian glass panels plastered on the walls layered with gilded ornaments. The palace suffered heavy damage owing to the earthquake that rocked Bhuj in 2001. The architecture of the Aina Mahal reflects a blend of Indo and European styles. The Swadeshi philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi also had a profound influence on the master craftsman whose effects are mirrored in the museum. The fountains, glasswork, and mirrors were specially designed by the architect. You should not miss exploring the quadrangle leading to the palace that looks marvelous because of the arched doorways, intricately carved balconies, and elaborate boxed-type windows.

Proceed to Mandvi – an ancient port city (60 kms/ 1 Hour) and visit:

#### **Vijay Vilas Palace:**

Situated on the outskirts of Mandvi, a municipality falling under Gujarat's Kutch district is the township's prime attraction-the Vijay Vilas Palace. This magnificent and grand palace that once used to be the summer sanctuary of

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the Cutch State's king is just about 2kms from the Mandvi Beach. The palace constructed fully out of red sandstone is still in pristine condition and looks breathtaking beautiful when viewed from close quarters. The architectural pattern of the Vijay Vilas Palace that was inspired by the layout of Datia and Orcha palaces mirrors the essential aspects of Rajput-style building architecture. The chief dome perched high atop the roof together with all the surrounding cupolas has a structure similar to domes seen in temples and shrines of Bengal. The windows along with the arches atop them have colored glasses, stone carvings with jali' work, broad verandas, and other elaborately engraved structural sections add to the magnificence of the palace. This stately fortress sits right in the center of meticulously manicured gardens that are in turn perfectly laid out highlighted with water fountains and channels. These fountains have been chiseled out of pure marble making them appear splendid. After scaling to the balcony of the palatial structure, one gets a breathtaking bird's eye-view of the surroundings. The beach area lying within the immediate neighbourhood is owned by the proprietors of the palace.

**Kranti Tirth (Shyamji Krishna Verma Memorial):**

Kranti Tirth is the memorial dedicated to the freedom fighter Shri Shyamji Krishna Varma. It is created in a way to resemble the 'India House' – a mansion located in Cronwell, London. This is the replica of the house from where Shri Shyamji Krishna Varma and the Indian Home Rule Society carried on the fight for freedom. The replica of India House here, located at Kranti Tirth, hosts a number of paintings, pictures, library and an audio-visual presentation. Also, there is Viranjali Walk-through Gallery which hosts the documentation of Viranjali Yatra. The Viranjali Yatra was organized in Gujarat state, when the ashes of Shri Shyamji Krishna Varma were brought back to India from Geneva. The ashes traversed across the state, covering more than 2000 km distance. The urns of ashes are kept in 'Smriti Kaksh' at the memorial along with the excerpts from Indian Sociologist journal that Shri Shyamji Krishna Varma published in London. Also, there is a Dayanand Saraswati Chowk at the memorial which pays tribute to one of the greatest social reformer of India Swami Dayanand Saraswati.

Relax at the serene beach in Mandvi and return back to Bhuj and Overnight at Bhuj.

**Day 6: Drop**

Today morning, check out and proceed to Ahmedabad (350 kms/7 Hours) and drop as per schedule.