

Madhya Pradesh & Chhattisgarh



Madhya Pradesh (MP) was India's largest state until tribal Chhattisgarh broke away in 2000. It's still a significant chunk of most train rides from Delhi to central India, yet many travellers see little more than its train tracks; a shame for more reasons than having to train it for two days.

Khajuraho, Mandu and Sanchi have some of India's finest Hindu, Islamic and Buddhist monuments. A more lively form of religion is at the ghats (steps or landings) on the Narmada River, one of the seven sacred rivers. There's also Ujjain, one of the seven holy cities, and the holy island, Omkareshwar. Historical sites include the millennia-old Bhimbetka rock paintings and Gwalior's lavish Jai Vilas Palace. Among the temple towns, Khajuraho is famous for the erotic carvings writhing across its 10th-century temples. Another historical hotspot near the Agra–Varanasi route is secluded Orchha, where riverside cenotaphs and palaces exude a 'lost world' atmosphere matched only by Mandu's plateau-top tombs.

For outdoor enthusiasts there are 1000m-plus peaks, forests and waterfalls at hill station Pachmarhi, and tiger-filled national parks. View the cats from an elephant at Kanha, Bandhavgarh, Panna (site of Kipling's *Jungle Book*) and Pench. The distinctive craftwork and colourful markets in Chhattisgarh's Bastar region show tribal communities keeping tradition alive.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Eye with the king of the Indian jungle in the national parks, **Panna** (p681), **Pench** (p708), **Kanha** (p709) and **Bandhavgarh** (p711)
- Blush at **Khajuraho's** (p673) erotic 10th-century temple carvings, before cooling off among the *chhatris* (small domed Mughal kiosks) and palaces rising from the undergrowth in **Orchha** (p670), the 'hidden place'
- Climb above the plains at historic hill station **Pachmarhi** (p693) and **Mandu** (p702) to the finest relics left in India by the Afghans
- Join the sadhus (spiritual men) and *yatris* (pilgrims) offering *puja* (prayer) at the ghats in the holy cities **Ujjain** (p695), one of the sites of Kumbh Mela, and **Maheshwar** (p701)
- Gaze across the sacred Narmada River at **Omkareshwar** (p700) and ponder the locals' claim that the holy island looks like the Om symbol if seen from above
- See **Bhopal's** (p682) mosques, lakes and museums from the Lake Princess cruise boat or the Bhopal-On-Wheels tour bus
- Watch a huge, garlanded chariot being dragged through the streets of **Jagdalpur** (p713), capital of Chhattisgarh's tribal Bastar region, during the animist celebration of **Dussehra** (p663)



History

Virtually all phases of Indian history made their mark on the region historically known as Malwa, starting with the rock paintings at Bhimbetka (p688) and Pachmarhi (p693), which date back more than 10,000 years. They tell of a cultural succession through the late Stone Age to the start of recorded history in the 3rd century BC, when the Buddhist emperor Ashoka (see the boxed text, p41) controlled the Mauryan empire from Malwa and built Sanchi's Great Stupa (p689).

The Mauryas were followed by the Sungas and the Guptas (p41) – Chandragupta II ruled from Ujjain (p695) and had the caves cut at Udaigiri (p692) – before the Huns rampaged across the state. Around 1000 years ago the Parmaras reigned in southwest Madhya Pradesh – notably Raja Bhoj, who ruled over Indore (p698), Mandu (p702) and Bhopal (p682). The state capital's name derives from its original moniker, Bhojpal, which refers to the *pal* (dam) Bhoj built to create the city's two lakes.

From AD 950 to 1050 the Chandelas' nimble-fingered sculptors enlivened the façades of some 85 temples in Khajuraho (p673) with erotic scenes. Between the 12th and 16th centuries, the region experienced continuing struggles between Hindu and Muslim rulers (p43), and Mandu was the scene of some decisive clashes. The Mughals were eventually superseded by the Marathas (p46), who enjoyed most power in Malwa before they fell to the British, for who the Scindia maharajas (see the boxed text, p667) of Gwalior (p662) were powerful allies.

With the States Reorganisation Act of 1956, several former states were combined to form Madhya Pradesh. In 2000 Chhattisgarh (p712) became an independent state.

Information

Madhya Pradesh Tourism (MT Tourism; 📞 Bhopal 0755-2774340, Delhi 011-23341187; www.mptourism.com) has offices of varying usefulness in all towns and cities, and counters at most major train stations and airports; in the cities it will book cars for you. The website is useful for information on tours and locations, and for booking MP Tourism hotels.

ACCOMMODATION

Backpacker-style accommodation outside Khajuraho and Orchha is limited but there

FAST FACTS

Madhya Pradesh

- Population: 39.6 million
- Area: 308,000 sq km
- Capital: Bhopal
- Main language: Hindi
- When to go: September to March

Chhattisgarh

- Population: 20.8 million
- Area: 135,000 sq km
- Capital: Raipur
- Main language: Hindi
- When to go: September to March

are plenty of budget hotels, and midrange hotels often have some budget rooms. The air-conditioning is often the only difference between AC and non-AC rooms.

MP Tourism places, often in choice locations, are good, if a little pricey. Rooms can be booked centrally through the website or the head office, and prices normally include breakfast.

Many hotels in Eastern Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh ask guests to leave a deposit.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Domestic flights serve Gwalior (p668), Khajuraho (p681), Bhopal (p687), Indore (p700), Jabalpur (p707) and Raipur (p712).

TRAIN

Train is generally a better way to navigate Madhya Pradesh than road. Travelling from north to south on the state's most significant line, it comes from northwest India via Delhi and Agra, and passes through Jhansi (see the boxed text, p670) and Bhopal (see the boxed text, p687), before forking at Itarsi, from where it heads to Mumbai (Bombay) and to Hyderabad and Chennai (Madras).

Travelling northeast from Mumbai, the state's other useful line passes through Itarsi, Jabalpur (see the boxed text, p707), Katni and Satna en route to Allahabad, Varanasi and Howrah. From Katni, lines run into Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Jharkhand.



Two lines run from Indore to Jaipur, one via Ujjain (see the boxed text, p698), but there is only one direct train a day; the other option is to go via Agra.

Unless otherwise mentioned, fares in this chapter are sleeper/3AC/2AC for long journeys and 2nd class/chair car for short journeys.

Getting Around

Madhya Pradesh's pothole-ridden roads are appalling and Chhattisgarh's are worse. Work on a basis of 20km/h and, particularly in the more mountainous areas, avoid travelling after dark unless near-death experiences are your bag. The roads in remote areas such as around Khajuraho, Kanha National Park, Pench Tiger Reserve and Mandu are notably abysmal.

NORTHERN MADHYA PRADESH

GWALIOR

☎ 0751 / pop 826,919

Gwalior is famous for its medieval hilltop fort, described by the Mughal emperor Babur as 'the pearl amongst fortresses in India'. For travellers making a detour from the Golden Triangle, the slow-paced town sprawling around the hill is a good introduction to an un-touristy part of central India. Jai Vilas Palace, home of the Scindia Museum, is the historic seat of the Scindias, one of the country's most revered families.

FESTIVALS IN MADHYA PRADESH & CHHATTISGARH

Jhansi Festival (28 Feb; Jhansi, p669) Music, arts and dance.

Festival of Dance (Feb/Mar; Khajuraho, p673) Week-long event with the cream of Indian classical dancers performing amid floodlit temples in the western enclosure.

Shivaratri Mela (Feb/Mar; Pachmarhi, p693) 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.

Ahilyabai Holkar's birthday (Apr/May; Maheshwar, p701) Her birthday (b 1725) is celebrated with palanquin (enclosed seats carried on four men's shoulders) processions through the town and cultural activities including music and dance.

Navratri (Dussehra; Sep/Oct; Ujjain, p695) Celebrated with particular fervour. Lamps on the large pillars in Harsiddhi Mandir are lit.

Dussehra (Oct; Jagdalpur, p713) Nothing to do with Ramayana, but this 75-day festival is dedicated to local goddess Danteshwari. It culminates with eight days of (immense) chariot-pulling around the streets.

Feast of St Jude (28 Oct; Jhansi, p669) Christian pilgrims converge on St Jude's Church to plead their case to the patron saint of lost causes.

Chethiyagiri Vihara Festival (Nov; Sanchi, p689) Buddhist monks and pilgrims flock to see relics of two of Buddha's early disciples, Sari Puttha and Maha Moggallana (discovered in Stupa 3 in 1853).

Tansen Music Festival (Nov/Dec; Gwalior, opposite) Four-day music festival attracting classical musicians and singers from all over India; free performances are usually staged at the great musician's tomb.

History

Gwalior's legendary beginning stems from the hermit Gwalipa curing the Rajput chieftain, Suraj Sen, of leprosy using water from Suraj Kund tank (which still remains in Gwalior fort). Renaming him Suhan Pal, he foretold that Suhan's descendants would remain in power as long they retained the name Pal. His next 83 descendants did just that, but number 84 changed his name to Tej Karan and, naturally, lost his kingdom.

In 1398 the Tomar dynasty came to power. Gwalior Fort became the focus of continual clashes with neighbouring powers and reached its ascendancy under Raja Man Singh (1486–1516), remembered for his love of music and architecture. After his death the fort fell to Ibrahim Lodi; two centuries of Mughal possession followed, ending with its capture by the Marathas in 1754.

Over the next 50 years the fort changed hands several times, including twice to the British. Finally it passed to the Scindias, one of only five noble clans to be honoured with a 21-gun salute by the British (see the boxed text, p667).

During the Indian Uprising in 1857, Maharaja Jayajirao remained loyal to the British but his troops rebelled, and in mid-1858 the fort was the scene of some final dramatic events of the whole uprising. Near here the British finally defeated rebel leader, Tantia Topi, and

it was in the final assault on the fort that the Rani of Jhansi was killed (p669).

Orientation

Gwalior sprawls beneath its fort, which crowns the massive ridge to the west. The old town clings to the northeast base of the fort. To the south is the new town, Lashkar, with its market area, Jayaji Chowk.

The train station is on the east side of town. Taxi touts will meet you with their choice of commission-paying hotel so walk to the main road and hail an autorickshaw.

Information

Fun Stop Cyber Zone (MLB Rd; per hr Rs 30;

☎ 8.30am–10.30pm) Internet access.

MP Tourism Tansen Residency (☎ 23403370; 6A Gandhi

Rd; ☎ 10am–5pm; train station (☎ 4070777; ☎ 9am–7.30pm) Books MP Tourism hotels and cars.

Post office (☎ 4010555; ☎ 10am–4pm Mon–Sat) Near the train station.

State Bank of India (☎ 2336291; Bada Chowk;

☎ 10.30am–4pm Mon–Fri, 10.30am–1.30pm Sat) Cashes travellers cheques. It has an ATM in the train station foyer which accepts MasterCard and Visa.

Sights

GWALIOR FORT

Exploding out of the rocks 100m above town, the 3km-long hilltop **fort** (☎ dawn–dusk) is an imposing site, its circular towers ringed with

Gwalior



A

B

C

D

INFORMATION

Fun Stop Cyber Zone.....	1	C5
MP Tourism.....	2	D5
Post Office.....	3	D5
State Bank of India.....	4	A6
State Bank of India ATM.....	5	D4
UTI Bank ATM.....	6	C5

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Chatarbhui Mandir.....	7	C3
Gujari Mahal.....	(see 19)	
Hindu Temple.....	8	C3
Jai Vilas Palace.....	9	C5
Jauhar Kund.....	(see 10)	
Jehangir Mahal.....	10	C3
Karan Palace.....	11	C3
Man Singh Palace.....	12	C3
Mohammed Gaus & Tansen Tombs.....	13	C3

Museum.....	14	C3
Rock Sculptures.....	15	B4
Sasbahu Temples.....	16	C4
Scindia Museum.....	(see 9)	
Scindia School.....	17	B4
Shah Jahan Mahal.....	(see 10)	
Sikh Gurdwara.....	18	C4
Sound-and-Light Show.....	(see 12)	
State Archaeological Museum.....	19	C3
Teli ka Mandir.....	20	B4
Ticket Counter.....	21	C3
Vikram Mandir.....	(see 11)	

SLEEPING

Central Park.....	22	D5
Hotel DM.....	23	D5
Hotel Gwalior Regency.....	24	D5
Hotel Mayur.....	25	D5

Hotel Safari.....	26	D4
Usha Kiran Palace.....	(see 9)	

EATING

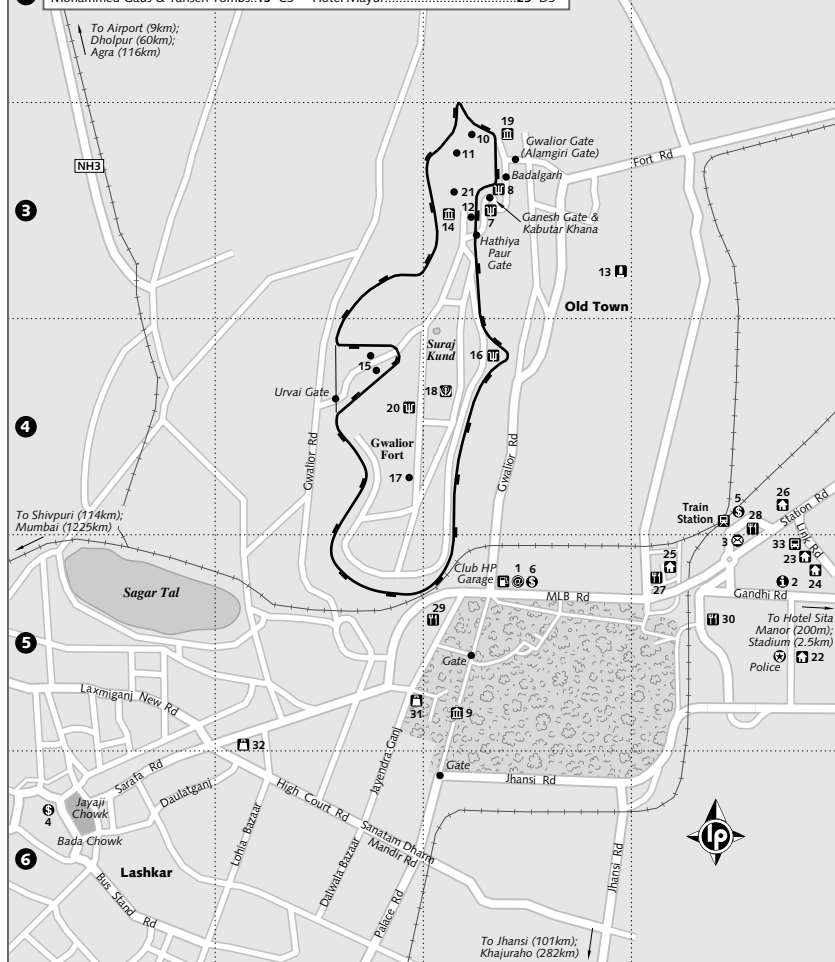
Blue Fox.....	27	D5
Indian Coffee House.....	28	D4
Kwality Restaurant.....	29	C5
Silver Saloon.....	(see 9)	
Swad Restaurant.....	30	D5

SHOPPING

Arihant Emporium.....	31	B5
Mignayani Emporium.....	32	B5

TRANSPORT

Air Deccan.....	(see 22)	
Bus Stand.....	33	D5



To Jhansi (101km);
Khajuraho (282km)

tiles as turquoise as the skies above. Once up there, it's great for a wander at any time of day, among the butterflies and dragonflies flitting through the ruins and shady spots offering views across the white and blue walls of the old town far below.

There are two approaches to the fort. From the west a steep road passes through Urvai Gate, where you will likely be approached by a guide and a driver. Only taxis are allowed past the gate.

From Gwalior Gate on the east side it's a steep 1km slog uphill to the fort compound. The best option is to be driven up to Urvai Gate and then walk down to Gwalior Gate.

A **ticket counter** (☎ 2480011; Indian/foreigner Rs 5/100, video Rs 25; 🕒 dawn-dusk) near Man Singh Palace sells tickets for the monuments, and another ticket for the small museum (right).

An atmospheric **sound-and-light show** (Indian/foreigner Rs 40/100; 🕒 Hindi 7.30pm, English 8.30pm Oct-Jun) is held nightly in the open-air amphitheatre.

There are several historical sites in the fort, much of which is now occupied by the prestigious private Scindia School, established by Maharaja Madhavrao Scindia in 1897 for the education of Indian nobility.

Rock Sculptures

While there are sculptures carved into the rock on the way up from Gwalior Gate, the most impressive are those on the long ascent up from Urvai Gate. Mostly cut into the cliff face in the mid-15th century, they represent nude figures of *tirthankars* (the 24 great Jain teachers), defaced and castrated by Babur's Muslim army in 1527 but more recently repaired.

The images are numbered in white lettering at the base. Image No 20 is a 17m-high standing sculpture of the first *tirthankar*, **Adinath**, while image No 22 is a 10m-high seated figure of **Nemnath**, the 22nd *tirthankar*.

Teli ka Mandir

Used as a soda factory and coffee shop by the British after the Indian Uprising of 1857, this 30m-high, 8th-century temple is the oldest monument in the compound. Its hybrid design incorporates a Dravidian square roof and Indo-Aryan decorations. Dedicated to Vishnu, the Pratihara temple is covered with sculptures and a Garuda tops its 5m-high doorway.

The modern gold-topped gurdwara (Sikh worship) nearby is dedicated to Sikh hero Guru

Har Gobind, who Nur Jahan imprisoned in Man Singh Palace.

Sasbahu Temples

The Mayan-like Sasbahu, or **Mother-in-Law** and **Daughter-in-Law** temples, rise close to the eastern wall. They are similar in style and date from the 9th to 11th centuries. Mother-in-Law is dedicated to Vishnu, with an ornately carved base and figures of the deity over the entrances; four gigantic pillars support the heavy roof, layered with carvings. The smaller Daughter-in-Law, dedicated to Shiva, is also stacked with sculptures. Once damaged by Aurangzeb's roaming band of image defacers, vandalism is fortunately restricted to the lower levels.

Man Singh Palace

Whimsical is the only way to describe it: an imperial palace decorated with a frieze of yellow ducks! These – and mosaic tiling of elephants, tigers and crocodiles in blue, yellow and green – give it its alternative identity of Chit Mandir (Painted Palace).

Built by Tomar ruler Man Singh between 1486 and 1516, this fine example of early Hindu architecture consists of two open courts surrounded by apartments on two levels. Below ground lie another two storeys constructed for hot weather, connected by 'speaking tubes' built into the walls and used by the Mughals as prison cells.

Here Aurangzeb imprisoned his brother, Murad, and slowly poisoned him with opium, which drove him mad before finishing him off. The dungeon with the cage in the floor looks like the scene of the grisly deed, but it was actually a bathing chamber.

Bring a torch to help you navigate the subterranean gloom. The attendants have torches but they are often lost somewhere inside the building with other tourists.

Museum

The small **museum** (☎ 2480011; admission Rs 2; 🕒 10am-5pm Sat-Thu) by Man Singh Palace houses sculptures and carvings from around the fort. Of equal attraction to overhot visitors are the oversize fans.

Other Palaces

A set of gates north of the palace leads to more ruins. There is bound to be an unofficial guide who'll reveal all for Rs 50.

The 16th-century Hindu temple Vikram Mandir, with its open hall, was destroyed in World War I. Narrow galleries connect it to the narrow, elongated two-storey **Karan Palace**, next to an old jailhouse.

The tank **Jauhar Kund** marks the spot where Rajput women of the harem committed *jauhar* (ritual mass suicide by immolation) to avoid rape by the forces of Iltutmish, the slave king of Delhi, when he defeated the Raja in 1232.

At the northern end of the enclosure, with another tank at their bases, are the **Jehangir Mahal** and **Shah Jahan Mahal**, chiefly interesting for the dizzying views of the Gujari Mahal and across Gwalior to the moundlike hills.

Northeast Entrance

A series of gates punctuates the worn steps of the path down to Gwalior Gate. The top, sixth gate, **Hawa Gate**, no longer exists; the fifth gate, **Hathiya Paur** (Elephant Gate) is now the entrance to the palace.

Descending to the north, you pass a 9th-century Vishnu shrine known as **Chatarbhuij Mandir** (Temple of the Four-Armed). The interesting **Ganesh Gate** was built in the 15th century. Nearby is a small pigeon house, or **Kabutar Khana**, and a small four-pillared **Hindu temple** to the hermit Gwalipa, after whom fort and town were named.

The third gate is **Badalgarh**, named after Badal Singh, Man Singh's uncle, while the second gate, **Bansur** (Archer's Gate), has disappeared. The bottom and first gate is **Gwalior Gate** (Alamgiri Gate) dating from 1660.

State Archaeological Museum

The **museum** (☎ 2350743; Indian/foreigner Rs 5/30, camera/video Rs 20/50; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) is within Gujari Mahal, uphill west of Gwalior Gate. Built in the 15th century by Man Singh for his favourite rani (wife), the palace is now rather deteriorated. There's a large collection of Hindu and Jain sculptures, including the famed *Salabhanjika* (an exceptionally carved female figure) plus copies of Bagh Caves frescoes.

JAI VILAS PALACE & SCINDIA MUSEUM

This **museum** (Indian/foreigner Rs 30/200, camera/video Rs 30/80; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Thu-Tue) occupies some 35 rooms of the Scindias' opulent Jai Vilas Palace (see the boxed text, opposite), built by Maharaja Jayajirao in 1874 using prisoners from the fort. The convicts were rewarded

with the 12-year job of weaving the hall carpet, the largest in Asia.

The gold paint around the durbar (royal court) hall weighs half a tonne. Eight elephants were suspended from its ceiling to check it could cope with two 12.5m-high, 250-lightbulb, 3.5-tonne chandeliers, said to be the largest pair in the world.

Bizarre items fill the rooms: Belgian cut-glass furniture and stuffed tigers. There's a ladies-only swimming pool with diving boards, a boat and a wine cabinet. The cavernous dining room displays the *pièce de résistance*, a model railway with silver train that carried after-dinner brandy and cigars around the table.

It's well worth collaring Ramashankar (Rs 50), a guide at the museum since it opened in 1964.

OLD TOWN

Old Gwalior lies eastwards below Man Singh Palace. Nearby is the resplendent **tomb of Mohammed Gaus**, a Muslim saint who played a key role in Babur's acquisition of the fort.

In the same compound is the smaller, simpler **tomb of Tansen**, a singer much admired by Akbar and held to be a father of Indian classical music. Chewing the leaves of the tamarind tree at Tansen's grave supposedly enriches your voice and during the Tansen festival in October/November it takes on an unseasonably autumnal look when stripped by visiting singers.

Sleeping BUDGET

Hotel DM (☎ 2342083; Link Rd; r Rs 120-250) The 17 pint-sized rooms leading to a small lawn at the back of the building range from those with basic, shared bathrooms to those with TVs and private bathrooms with all mod cons. It's quieter than its closeness to the bus stand suggests, and guests can jog on the roof for free.

Hotel Safari (☎ 2340638; Station Rd; s Rs 180-550, d Rs 240-600; 🚿) Near the train station, this aged hotel's 1st-floor reception is gloomy and its bar-restaurant is rough, but the rooms are clean enough, with reasonable furniture and enough space to swing a langur.

Hotel Mayor (☎ 2325559; Padav; dm Rs 81, s Rs 180-850, d Rs 300-920; 🚿) A solid choice down a quiet alley near the bridge on Station Rd. The wide range of accommodation starts with men-only dorms and proceeds up the scale to AC rooms

BLESSED MAHARAJAS

The Scindia Museum, which occupies a quarter of the neoclassical Jai Vilas Palace, gives a glimpse of the lives of India's Prince Williams and Princess Beatrices.

Mahadji (1761–94) founded the Scindia dynasty at the time of the Mughal emperor Babaur, after his three brothers were killed in the third battle of Panipat. He devised the family crest – a sun flanked by two black cobras – as a tribute to the cobra that, when he was a child, spread its hood to protect him from the sun.

The Scindia salute, inscribed in the music room, reads: 'God bless the Maharaja, long to reign over us, happy and glorious, god bless the Maharaja'. Looking no further than the neighbouring rooms, with their ivory figurines, Sanskrit manuscripts, miniature paintings, Chippendale furniture and one of only three Napoleon tables in existence, these Maharajas do indeed seem blessed.

But the Scindias have borne tragedies. Madhavrao (1945–2001) died in a plane crash, aborting a political career that would have likely seen the Congress member crown the family's many political achievements by running for prime minister. Photos of his meetings with political notables such as Saddam Hussein and Fidel Castro can be seen upstairs. He was fond of recalling the time he was stopped late at night by a London policeman, who gave a nonplussed reply to the maharaja's revelation of his identity: 'Well if you're the Maharaja of Gwalior, I'm the Pasha of Iran.'

In classic blue-blooded fashion, the Scindias have intermarried with other high-caste clans. Maharaja Jyotiraditya (b 1971), who followed his father into parliament, is married to the daughter of the Maharaja of Baroda, Gujarat. His sister is married to the crown prince of Kashmir and the family also has ties with the Nepali aristocracy.

Also true to form, the Scindias allied themselves with the British during the colonial era, as the sepia-tinted photos of walrus-moustached hunting parties suggest. Visitors to the palace were often taken to the family estate at Shivpuri (p668). A photo shows eight tigers killed in a day during Lord Harding's visit in 1916; five tigers bagged in a day by Madhavrao are on display.

with adjoining Western-style bathrooms. The rooftop cheapies have fort views.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Hotel Sita Manor (☎ 4010485; Gandhi Rd; s Rs 1000-2100, d Rs 1150-2100) Low-key hotel at the intersection of Gandhi and Link Rds. Rooms have marble-floored bathrooms, comfy chairs, TVs, brown bedspreads and matching lamp shades.

Hotel Gwalior Regency (☎ 2340670; Link Rd; s/d with breakfast Rs 1800/2400; ♿) The beige rooms are not as pleasant as the lobby suggests in this red-carpeted establishment, but they do offer comforts including fridges, TVs, kettles, bath tubs and hot water. There are daily specials in the grand bar-restaurant (meals Rs 65 to 225) and a travel desk.

Central Park (☎ 2232440; www.thecentralpark.net; s with breakfast Rs 1800-2000, d Rs 2200-2400, ste Rs 3000-3900; ♿) Gwalior's topnotch business hotel has wi-fi access, currency exchange, a doctor on call, a health club, a gateaux-heavy café, and a chic, low-lit bar. The polish continues in the rooms, with crisp sheets and fruit baskets.

our pick Usha Kiran Palace (☎ 2444000; www.tajhotels.com; Jayendraganj, Lashkar; r/ste/villa from Rs 7000/9500/20,000; ♿) Live like a Scindia

(see the boxed text, above) in their auxiliary palace. Unflinchingly contemporary touches, such as the poolside aromatherapy spa and the granite swimming pools adjoining the two villas, mingle in the air-conditioned kingdom with reminders of its heritage. Meals are Rs 650.

Eating

Gwalior's limited eating-out scene revolves around the hotel restaurants.

Indian Coffee House (Station Rd; dishes Rs 15-65) The perennial favourite for a snack and real coffee served by fellows in white jackets and fan-tailed headgear. Dose up with a *masala dosa* (curried vegetables inside a crisp pancake), or give the *uttapam* (pancake of rice and dhal) a bite.

Kwality Restaurant (MLB Rd; meals Rs 75-130; ☎ 10.30am-11pm) This popular restaurant serves up subtle curries, from a plethora of *paneer* (unfermented cheese) dishes to chicken and lamb curries. Many dishes take up to 30 minutes to prepare – the textured chicken *bhurta* (curry with roasted eggplant) is among the quicker options.

Blue Fox (☎ 2326209; Hotel Shelter, Tansen Rd; meals Rs 100-150) With its cool blue décor, this res-

MAJOR TRAINS FROM GWALIOR

Destination	Train No & name	Fare (Rs)	Duration (hr)	Departure
Chennai	2616 <i>Grand Trunk Exp</i>	651/1654/2224	31	11.30pm
Delhi	2001 <i>Shatabdi</i>	650/960(a)	4	7.07pm
Howrah	2176/2178 <i>Chambal Exp</i>	563/1406/1867	24	6.50am(1)
Indore	2920 <i>Malwa Exp</i>	436/1049/1351	13	12.47am
Mumbai	2138 <i>Punjab Mail Exp</i>	551/1373/1818	21	10.40am

a – chair/1AC; 1 – Wed, Fri, Sun, Tue

restaurant's big-city ambience is only let down by the circumspect staff. There's an extensive breakfast menu and a basement bar serving cocktails such as the 'Indian-American' Royal Stag whiskey sour.

Swad Restaurant (☎ 5011271; 47 Manik Vilas Colony; meals Rs 200) Hotel Landmark's relaxing restaurant offers a dizzying range of Indian, Chinese and Continental dishes in contemporary surroundings. Save some space for the lip-smacking *gulab jamun* (deep-fried balls of dough soaked in rose-flavoured syrup).

Silver Saloon (☎ 2444000; Usha Kiran Palace, Jayendranj, Lashkar; meals Rs 550) It's worth having a bite of the Nepali cuisine in the tangerine-and-magenta restaurant or the palm-shaded courtyard to take a peek at the 120-year-old palace.

Shopping

Arihant Emporium (Moti Mahal Rd; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Sat) Near Jai Vilas Palace, specialises in a Gwalior favourite, silver boxes decorated with images from the tilework on Man Singh Palace (around Rs 1200).

Mrignayani Emporium (High Court Rd; ☎ 11am-8pm Mon-Sat) The state-owned chain sells the state's handicrafts and fabrics, including Chanderi and Maheshwar saris.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Air Deccan (☎ 2479851; Central Park hotel; ☎ 10am-6pm) has daily budget flights to Indore and Delhi at 3.10pm and 7pm respectively.

BUS

From the **bus stand** (Link Rd) there are half-hourly services to Agra (Rs 65, three hours), Jhansi (Rs 55, three hours) and Shivpuri (Rs 65, 2½ hours). Ten buses serve Indore (Rs 252, 12 hours), and there's a night bus to Bhopal (Rs 250, 10 hours, 8pm).

Getting Around

Cycle rickshaws (Rs 5 to 10) and autos (Rs 10 to 30) are plentiful. Brutish-looking tempos (Rs 2 to 6) run on fixed routes.

SHIVPURI

☎ 07492 / pop 146,860

Shivpuri is the old Scindia summer capital and the site of the family's *chhatris* (small, domed Mughal kiosks), appropriately grand memorials to the maharajas and maharans (see the boxed text, p667).

There is a State Bank of India ATM in town.

Set in formal gardens east of the bus stand, the **chhatris** (☎ 221412; admission Rs 2; camera/video Rs 10/30; ☎ 8am-noon & 3-8pm) are walk-in marble structures with Mughal pavilions and *sikharas* (Hindu spires), facing each other across a pool with a network of walkways. The *chhatris* to Madhorao Scindia, built between 1926 and 1932, is exquisitely inlaid with intricate *pietra dura* (marble inlay work).

Madhav National Park (☎ 222350; Indian/foreigner Rs 15/150, camera/video Rs 40/300, vehicle Rs 75, guide Rs 40; ☎ 6-11am & 3pm-dusk) is scattered with relics from the Scindias' hunting days – a shooting box, hunting lodge and sailing club, the latter now closed due to all the marsh crocodiles and pythons in the artificial lake. The 355-sq-km park hosts leopards, waterfowl, panthers, antelope and deer, wild boar, and a caged tigress. The 20km circuit of the park, entered at the visitors centre 6km east of the bus stand, takes about two hours. The best visiting time is October to March.

Tarun Residency (☎ 508257; tarunresidencyvp@yahoo.co.in; ITBP Gate No 2, AB Rd; r non-AC/AC from Rs 500/600, ste Rs 750; ☎) is a basic hotel next to MM Hospital, 4km out of town towards the park. Rooms are overpriced but cleaner than the dishevelled reception suggests. **Tourist Village** (☎ 223760; tvshivpuri@sancharnet.in; r non-AC/AC Rs 790/1190; ☎) in-

cludes breakfast in its prices. This breezy MP Tourism complex with big-windowed cottages and bungalows is set among the palms and frangipani trees, overlooking the nearby lake and park; staff can arrange trips to the national park.

Buses leave regularly for Jhansi (Rs 52, three hours), Gwalior (Rs 58, three hours) and, once a day, for Bhopal (Rs 124, eight hours).

A daily passenger train between Shivpuri and Gwalior (2nd/sleeper Rs 42/230, four hours) leaves Shivpuri at 7.52am and Gwalior at 8.15pm.

To get about and explore the park, hire a jeep for the day (Rs 400), but beware of hotels taking commission.

JHANSI

☎ 0517 / pop 420,665

Looking at the map, Jhansi lies at the narrow mouth of a globular Uttar Pradesh incursion into Madhya Pradesh. It's in the west of the mountainous Bundelkhand region that has long been a hiding place for dacoits (outlaws) such as Phoolan Devi, the 'Bandit Queen'. Jhansi fort bears testament to the town's turbulent history, but Jhansi today is mostly used by travellers as a transit point for Orchha and Khajuraho.

History

When a raja died in 1853, his widow and successor Rani Lakshmbai was forcibly retired by the British (a controversial law allowed them to take over any princely state under their patronage if the ruler died without a male heir). During the Indian Uprising four years later, Rani Lakshmbai was at the forefront of Jhansi's rebellion. The British contingent here was massacred, but the following year they retook Jhansi while the rebel forces quarrelled among themselves. The rani fled to Gwalior. In a fatal last stand she rode out against the British disguised as a man and subsequently became a heroine of Indian Independence.

Orientation

The Shivpuri-Khajuraho road is the spine of the town. The fort is 1km to the north of the centre, the train station 2km southwest and the bus station 3km east.

Information

Madhya Pradesh Tourism (☎ 2442622; ☎ 10am-6pm) At the train station, books taxis and MP Tourism hotels, and has information about Orchha and Khajuraho.

Sify Cyber Café (Shivpuri Rd; per hr Rs 20; ☎ 10am-10pm) Below National Bakery.

State Bank of India (☎ 2330319; Elite Rd; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) Cashes major currencies, and Amex travellers cheques up to Rs 10,000 per day. The ATM (opposite the train station) accepts Visa and MasterCard.

Uttar Pradesh Tourism Hotel Veerangana (☎ 2441267; Shivpuri Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, closed every 2nd Sat; train station (☎ 2442622; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, closed every 2nd Sat) Has information about Agra and Uttar Pradesh.

Sights

JHANSI FORT

Built in 1613 by Maharaja Bir Singh Deo of Orchha, **Jhansi Fort** (☎ 2442325; Indian/foreigner Rs 5/100; ☎ dawn-dusk) still bears signs of the blood-letting that took place within its double walls and moat, which was inhabited by crocodiles. Guides (Rs 100) can tell some colourful tales.

Near the flag turret is a parapet, over which the fleeing Rani Lakshmbai with her adopted son mounted behind her, rode her horse. The horse is said to have died, but the story still seems incredible looking at the steep rocky slope 15m below.

Elsewhere, there's the second cannon made in India, constructed in 1787 using eight metals, and a German machine gun used by the British. Having had boiling water poured on them from the battlements, the victorious British later rebuilt a wall with slits for machine guns.

The British incarcerated the captured freedom fighters in a dingy jail and buried three deceased fighters, two Muslims and a Hindu, in the compound. They built themselves a blue-spired church and left standing the temple dedicated to Shiva.

STATE MUSEUM

This **museum** (☎ 0510-2330035; admission Rs 2, camera Rs 10; ☎ 10.30am-4.30pm Tue-Sun, closed every 2nd Sun) below the fort is a ragbag of central Indian miniature paintings, illustrated manuscripts, terracotta sculptures, and portraits of Rani Lakshmbai, cricketers and politicians.

Festivals & Events

Jhansi Festival, a locally organised programme of music, arts and dance, commences on 28 February. Jhansi is also known for the **Feast of St Jude** (28 October), when thousands of

MAJOR TRAINS FROM JHANSI

Destination	Train No & name	Fare (Rs)	Duration (hr)	Departure
Chennai	2616 <i>Grand Trunk Exp</i>	635/1609/2159	29	1.04am
Delhi	2001 <i>Shatabdi</i>	735(a)	5	5.56pm
Howrah	2176/2178 <i>Chambal Exp</i>	547/1361/1802	22(1)	8.35am
Mumbai	2138 <i>Punjab Mail Exp</i>	535/1328/1753	19	12.30pm

a – chair; 1 – Tue, Wed, Fri, Sun

desperate Christian pilgrims converge on St Jude's Church to plead their case to the patron saint of lost causes.

Sleeping & Eating

There is a strip of reasonable hotels on Shivpuri Rd.

Hotel Samrat (☎ 0510-2444943; Shivpuri Rd; s non-AC/AC from Rs 275/625, d Rs 325/675; 🍷) The offer of an illicit beer is never far away in this clean, busy hotel with the feel of a boarding house. At the top of a leg-stretching series of staircases, the budget rooms have squat loos and TVs.

National Bakery (Shivpuri Rd; meals Rs 60) A fast-food joint offering pizzas, sundaes, *namkin* (savoury, often spicy, nibbles) and Chinese dishes, all set to a soundtrack of Hindi pop videos.

Vidhata (Elite Crossing; meals Rs 60) A tasty *paneer tikka masala* (marinated cheese dish) is on the vegetarian menu at this popular family restaurant at a busy crossroads.

Getting There & Away**BUS**

Express buses for Khajuraho leave from the train station (Rs 96, five hours, 5.30am and 11am). The second connects with the Shatabdi train from Delhi; **MP Tourism** (☎ 2442622) sells tickets for it. Local buses also leave the **bus stand** (☎ 2445745; Khajuraho Rd) for Khajuraho (Rs 85, six hours, 11.45am, 1.30pm, 3.45pm and 7.30pm).

An alternative is a bus to Bamitha (Rs 80, 4½ hours, frequent), then an 11km-jeep ride (Rs 15) to Khajuraho. Frequent services go to Shivpuri (Rs 52, three hours) and Gwalior (Rs 55, three hours), which also stops at Datia (Rs 20, one hour).

TAXI

Train station taxi charge Rs 1500 for a trip to Khajuraho.

Getting Around

An autorickshaw from the train station to the bus stand costs Rs 40 and to Orchha it is Rs 150. Taxis to Orchha charge Rs 300/350 for non-AC/AC. Tempos from the bus stand cost Rs 10 for the 40-minute journey, and the bus costs the same.

ORCHHA

☎ 07680 / pop 8500

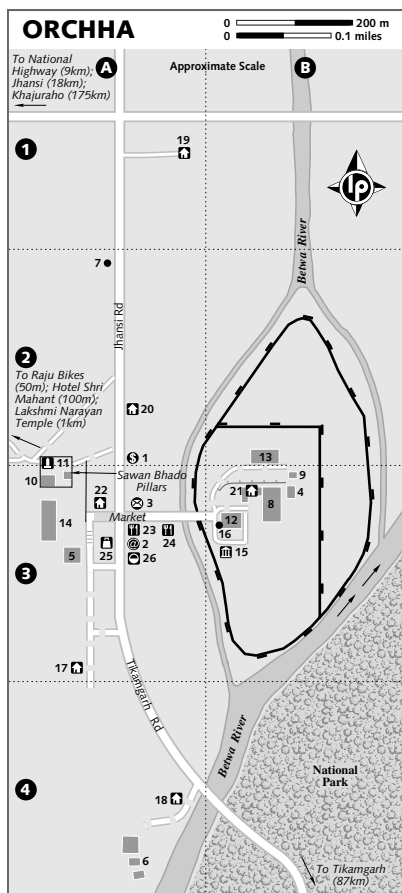
Entered by a gate crowned with a red Ganesh, Orchha's name (Hidden Place) is singularly appropriate. Temples, palaces and *chhatris* fight their way out of the encroaching jungle, their spires and domes overshadowing a few ramshackle streets. At sunset, vultures peer down from the temple tops at the Hindu faithful drifting in to chant incantations to Lord Rama, who they believe lives and breathes in Ram Raja Temple.

History

Orchha was the capital of the Bundela rajas from the 16th century to 1783, when they decamped to nearby Tikamgarh. Bir Singh Deo ruled from Orchha from 1605 to 1627 and built Jhansi Fort. A favourite of Mughal Prince Salim, he feuded with Akbar, who all but ruined his kingdom. In 1605 Prince Salim became Emperor Jehangir, making Bir Singh a powerful figure, and the Jehangir Mahal was built for his visit the following year. When Shah Jahan became emperor in 1627 Bir Singh was once again out of favour; his revolt was crushed by 13-year-old Aurangzeb.

Orientation

The limpid-green Betwa River, with its boulder-strewn riverbed, forms an eastern boundary. A channel, mostly dry outside monsoon time, loops around an elevated area creating a fortifiable island on which the palaces were built.



Information

Canara Bank (☎ 252689; Jhansi Rd; ☏ 10.30am-2.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-12.30pm Sat) Changes travellers cheques and cash (up to Rs 10,000 daily).

Cyber Café (Tikamgarh Rd; per hr Rs 40; ☏ 7am-9.30pm)

MP Tourism (☎ 252624; Hotel Sheesh Mahal; ☏ 7am-10pm) Information on Orchha and transport.

Post office (☎ 252631; Jhansi Rd; ☏ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat)

Sights & Activities

A day ticket for Orchha's **sites** (Indian/foreigner Rs 5/30, camera Rs 20), covering seven monuments and the museum, is only available from the **ticket office** (☏ 7.30am-6pm).

INFORMATION

Canara Bank.....	1	A2
Cyber Café.....	2	A3
MP Tourism.....	(see 21)	
Post Office.....	3	A3
State Bank of India ATM.....	(see 2)	

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Camel Stables.....	4	B3
Chaturbhuj Temple.....	5	A3
Chhatris.....	6	A4
Forestry Office.....	7	A2
Jehangir Mahal & Museum.....	8	B3
Khana Hammam.....	9	B3
Palki Mahal.....	10	A3
Phool Bagh & Hardol Memorial.....	11	A2
Raj Mahal.....	12	B3
Raj Praveen Mahal.....	13	B2
Ram Raja Temple.....	14	A3
River Rafting.....	(see 21)	
Saaket Museum.....	15	B3
Ticket Office.....	16	B3

SLEEPING

Amar Mahal.....	17	A3
Betwa Retreat.....	18	A4
Bundelkhand Riverside.....	19	A1
Fort View Guesthouse.....	20	A2
Hotel Sheesh Mahal.....	21	B3
Shri Mahant Guest House.....	22	A3

EATING

Bhola Restaurant.....	23	A3
Hotel Sheesh Mahal.....	(see 21)	
Ram Raja.....	24	A3

DRINKING

Betwa Tarang.....	(see 24)	
-------------------	----------	--

SHOPPING

Rajasthan Emporium & Indian Art Gallery.....	25	A3
--	----	----

TRANSPORT

AR Tours & Travels.....	(see 2)	
Tempo & Bus Stand.....	26	A3

PALACES

Crossing the granite bridge over the seasonal offshoot of the Betwa brings you to three 17th-century palaces. **Jehangir Mahal**, an assault course of steep staircases, precipitous walkways, bamboo scaffolding and rubble-filled rooms, may put off visitors who aren't into outward-bound travel, but it nonetheless represents a zenith of medieval Islamic architecture.

There's a small **archaeological museum** on the ground floor and behind the palace are sturdy **camel stables**, overlooking a green landscape dotted with monuments. In the nearby **Raj Mahal**, the caretaker will open the painted rooms where Rama, Krishna and Orchha royalty wrestle, hunt, fight and dance across the walls and ceilings.

Downhill from the palace compound are the smaller **Raj Praveen Mahal**, a pavilion and formal Mughal garden, and **Khana Hammam** (Turkish Bath), with some fine vaulted ceilings.

On the other side of the village, **Palki Mahal** was the palace of Dinman Hardol, the son of Bir Singh Deo who committed suicide to 'prove his innocence' over an affair with his brother's wife. His memorial, two cloth-covered stone beds in a pavilion, is in the adjacent **Phool Bagh**, a traditional *charbagh* (formal Persian garden). Prince Hardol is venerated as a hero in Bundelkhand culture. Women sing songs about him, tie threads onto the jali (carved marble lattice screen) of his memorial and walk around it five times, clockwise, to make wishes they hope he'll grant.

MUSEUM

Amid a scattering of minor monuments with crumbling lotus arches, the **Saaket Museum** (admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) has masks and oil-on-cloth paintings narrating the adventures of Hanuman.

TEMPLES

Orchha's impressive 16th-century temples still receive thousands of Hindu pilgrims. At the centre of a lively square is the pink-and-gold-domed **Ram Raja Temple** (☎ 8am-noon & 8-10pm), the only temple where Rama is worshipped as a king. Built as a palace for Madhukar Shah's wife, it became a temple when an image of Rama, temporarily installed by the rani, proved impossible to move. The best times to visit are during the peaceful morning and evening prayer sessions.

Neighbouring **Chaturbhuj Temple** is an immensely solid building on a cruciform plan. Buy a cheap torch from the bazaar and climb the internal stairs to the roof where, from among the mossy spires and domes, you get the best view in town.

Lakshmi Narayan Temple is worth the 1km trek from Ram Raja for the rooftop views and the well-preserved murals on the ceilings of its domed towers.

CENOTAPHS

Cenotaphs to Orchha's rulers including Bir Singh Deo; the **chhatris** rise from the rubble and undergrowth 500m south of the village. They're best seen at dusk, when the birds reel above the children splashing in the adjacent Betwa River ghats.

RAFTING & TREKKING

River rafting (per 1½/3 hr Rs 1200/2000) can be booked through MP Tourism (p671).

A 12km track loops through the 45-sq-km **national park** (admission Rs 200; ☎ 1 Oct-1 Jul), which isn't exactly purring with tigers. It's entered on the far side of the bridge southeast of town, maps are available from the **forestry office** (☎ 9425337932; ☎ 9am-5pm), off Jhansi Rd, and jeeps can be hired from the bus stand (per half-day Rs 300).

Sleeping

Hotel Shri Mahant (☎ 252341; Lakshmi Narayan Temple Rd; r with AC Rs 700, without AC Rs 200-400; ☎) Has a chilled-out location with some of Orchha's best views.

Shri Mahant Guest House (☎ 252715; r with air-cooler Rs 150-350; ☎) Overlooking the market, this is an excellent budget choice with clean rooms and friendly management.

Fort View Guest House (☎ 252701; s with squat toilet Rs 100, r Rs 200-400; ☎) Pokey rooms opening onto a riverside garden with a view of the palaces. There's a big discrepancy between the rooms and the more expensive choices are better value. The AC room has a large window with a superb view and a blue-and-yellow tiled bathroom with hot water.

Betwa Retreat (☎ 252618; bcorchha@rediffmail.com; s/d Rs 690/790, with AC Rs 890/990; ☎) MP Tourism place on a rise above the river on the outskirts of town. Wander between the 14 cottages and 10 tents in the well-tended garden and you could imagine yourself many miles away from the usual MP Tourism menu in the restaurant.

Bundelkhand Riverside (☎ 252612; s Rs 1750-2500, d Rs 2600-4100; ☎) The Maharaja of Orchha's hotel abounds with latticework, gold paint and functional fireplaces. The 29 rooms overlook either the river or the flowery garden with a 200-year-old Hanuman shrine. Excursions to local villages are on offer.

Amar Mahal (☎ 252102; Bypass Rd; s Rs 1750-2500, s Rd 2950-3750, ste Rs 4500; ☎) Amar Mahal's name means 'immortal fort' and the place is lent a distinguished air by architectural details modelled on the Jehangir Mahal. Rooms have four-poster beds, dressers, wardrobes and baths. The only disappointment is the restaurant.

our pick **Hotel Sheesh Mahal** (☎ 252624; hsmorcha@sancharnet.in; Jehangir Mahal Rd; s/d Rs 1190/1490, ste Maharani/Maharaja Rs 3990/4990; ☎) The air-cooler

is the only sound you'll hear at night in the rooms of this literally palatial MP Tourism hotel in a wing of Jehangir Mahal. Every room is unique and the two suites have regal touches such as throne-like toilets.

Eating & Drinking

Orchha does a good line in fudge.

Bhola Restaurant (cnr Jehangir Mahal & Tikamgarh Rds; meals Rs 40) This streetside restaurant's hotch-potch of global dishes, from tandoori (marinated meat dishes) to Korean, has Oriental commentary scrawled on the menus. It's a good spot for an energising breakfast of pancakes or *paratha* (bread).

Ram Raja (Jehangir Mahal Rd; meals Rs 45) This small restaurant under a tree offers reasonable vegetarian fare, and it's worth trying the *kheer* (rice pudding) for dessert.

Hotel Sheesh Mahal (☎ 252624; Jehangir Mahal Rd; meals Rs 70-110) It's the same old MP Tourism menu but it's worth it for the historic surroundings and the classical and folk music and dancing.

Betwa Tarang (Jehangir Mahal Rd; beer Rs 100) Serves beer on its terrace overlooking Jehangir Mahal, but the food is best avoided.

Shopping

Rajasthan Emporium & Indian Art Gallery (Shops 12 & 13, Tikamgarh Rd; ☎ 7am-9.30pm) Embroidery, paintings on silk and marble, and silver and copper handicrafts sold in a low-pressure environment.

Getting There & Around

Tempos (Rs 10) ply the 18km journey to the Jhansi bus stand; autorickshaws charge Rs 150 for the same journey. Coming from Khajuraho, you can ask the bus driver to drop you off at the Orchha turn-off on the National Hwy 9km east of Jhansi, though the autorickshaw drivers here demand high prices.

Taxis to Khajuraho cost Rs 1500, to Gwalior Rs 1200 and to Agra Rs 2700. For Khajuraho, catch a tempo or autorickshaw into Jhansi and pick up a bus (p670). If you're willing to risk the bus being full, wait for it 9km away on the National Hwy.

AR Tours & Travels (☎ 9993263100; Tikamgarh Rd), based at Cyber Café, can organise transport.

Orchha is easily crossed on foot or by bike. **Raju Bikes** (Lakshmi Narayan Temple Rd) hires out rickety cycles (per hour/day Rs 10/50).

KHAJURAHO

☎ 07686 / pop 19,290

The Kamasutra carvings that swathe Khajuraho's three groups of temples are among the finest temple art in the world. While many travellers take a quick peek at the sensuous sculptures as a stop-off between Agra and Varanasi, those who linger discover a spiritual but modern spot where everything from yoga to folk dancing can be experienced.

History

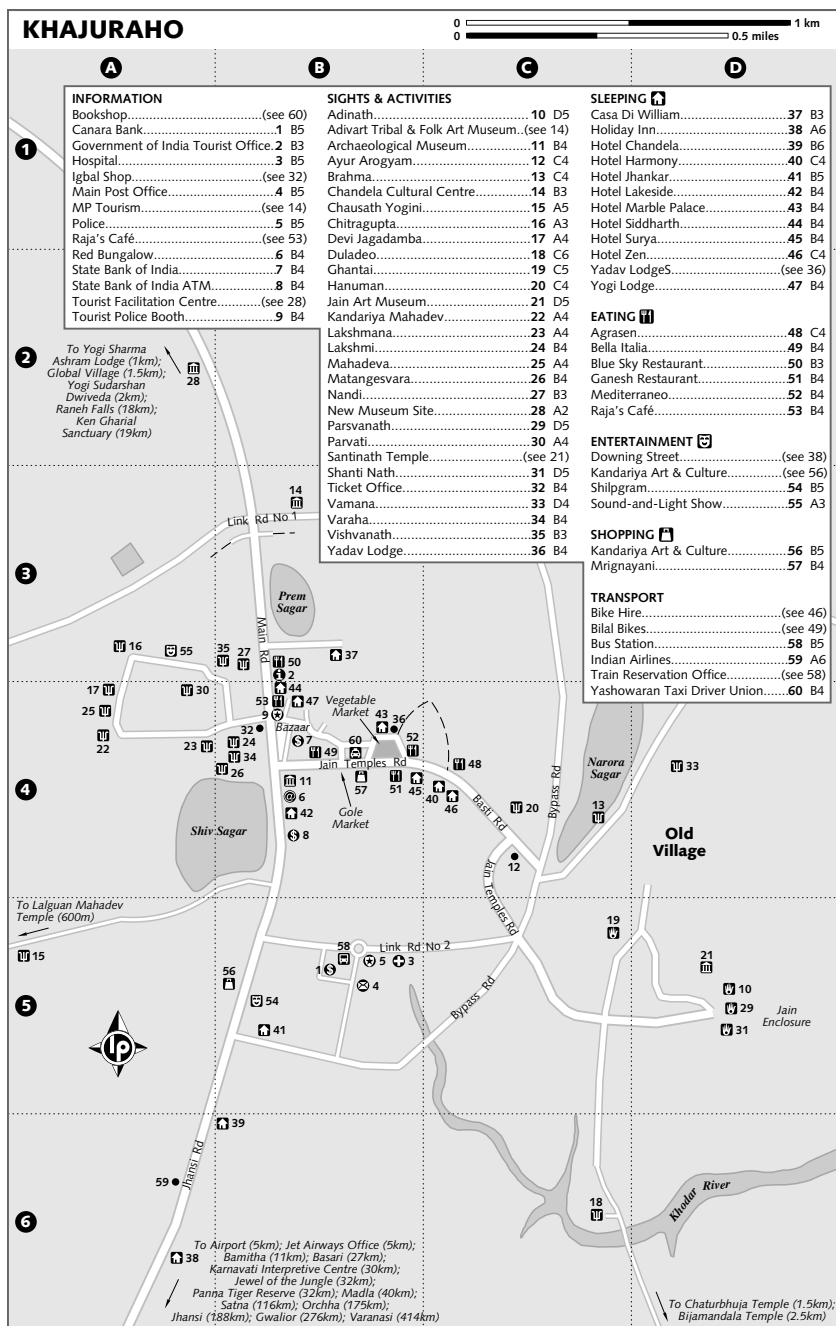
Legend has it that Khajuraho was founded by Chardravarma, the son of the moon god Chandra, who descended on a beautiful maiden as she bathed in a stream. The Chandela dynasty built the temples, many of which originally rose from a lake, and survived for five centuries before falling to the Mughal onslaught. Most of the 85 temples – of which some 25 remain – were built during a century-long burst of creative genius from AD 950 to 1050. Almost as intriguing as the temples' size and beauty is the question of why they were built here. There's nothing of great interest or beauty to recommend Khajuraho as a building site and no great population centre nearby.

How did the Chandelas manage to turn their exhilarating dreams into stone? Building so many temples of such monumental size in just 100 years would have required a huge amount of labour. Whatever the answers, Khajuraho's isolation helped preserve it from the desecration Muslim invaders inflicted on 'idolatrous' temples elsewhere.

Under threat from Afghan invaders from the north, the Chandelas forsook Khajuraho for their forts. People no longer prayed at the temples, which fell into ruin and the jungle took over. The wider world remained ignorant until British officer, TS Burt, was guided to the ruins by his palanquin (enclosed seats carried on four men's shoulders) bearers in 1838. There this stalwart Victorian soldier was surprised at the architectural treasure house but shocked by what he saw, first describing the erotica as 'a little warmer than there was any absolute necessity for'.

Orientation

A cluster of hotels, restaurants and shops lies near the western group of temples. About 1km northeast of the bus stand is the old village and the eastern temples, with another set to the south.



Information

BOOKSHOPS

Bookshop (Jain Temples Rd; per hr Rs 40; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm; ☑) All-purpose bookshop with internet, handicrafts and films. CD burning Rs 100.

EMERGENCY

Police (☎ 272032; Link Rd No 2)

INTERNET ACCESS

Most internet places burn digital images to CD for Rs 100.

Raja's Café (Main Rd; per hr Rs 40; ☎ 8am-11pm)

Red Bungalow (Main Rd; per hr Rs 15; ☎ 7am-10.30pm)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Hospital (☎ 272498; Link Rd No 2)

MONEY

Canara Bank (☎ 274070; ☎ 10am-2pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon Sat) At the bus stand, allows MasterCard and Visa advances up to Rs 25,000.

State Bank of India (☎ 272373; Main Rd; ☎ 10.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-1.30pm Sat) Changes cash and travellers cheques; MasterCard and Visa ATM.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Igbal Shop (Main Rd; ☎ 6am-10.30pm) Film and memory cards.

POST

Main post office (☎ 274022; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

The new Tourist Facilitation Centre, under construction north of the western temples, will contain tourist offices, banks, a train reservation office, an internet café, a post office, tourist police and shops.

Government of India tourist office (☎ 272348; Main Rd; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat) Very helpful with Khajuraho and India information.

Guides (per half-/full day 1-5 people Rs 350/500, multilingual guides extra Rs 180) Licensed guides can be booked at tourist offices or Raja's Cafe (above).

MP Tourism airport (☎ 274051; ☎ incoming flights); Chandela Cultural Centre (☎ 274051; fax 272330; Link Rd No 1; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, closed 2nd Sat of month) Information on car hire and MP attractions. Also books MP Tourism hotels.

Dangers & Annoyances

Be aware that something as seemingly innocuous as accepting a lift on the back of a boy's

bicycle can lead to a commission changing hands in Khajuraho.

The most notorious scam is when children invite you to visit their classroom, normally in the old village, concluding with demands for rupees, which the child splits with their teacher. They may use the Urdu word for school, *madarsa*, to make the proposition more intriguing. If you are keen to visit a school, establish a price before you go, and take no extra cash.

Even the government-approved guides should be approached with scepticism. Discuss the itinerary of your tour – they may plan to conclude it at a commission-paying shop or school. Equally, the yogis and masseurs who pop up in every hotel may not be professionally qualified. At the temples, do not feel pressured to leave a financial offering – you can be sure it won't be given to Shiva.

If you need assistance, the **Government of India tourist office** (☎ 272348; Main Rd; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat) and **tourist police booth** (Main Rd) are good ports of call.

Sights

TEMPLES

The temples are superb examples of Indo-Aryan architecture, but it's their liberally embellished carvings that have made Khajuraho famous. Around the temples are bands of exceedingly artistic stonework showing a storyboard of life a millennium ago – gods, goddesses, warriors, musicians, real and mythological animals.

Two elements appear repeatedly – women and sex. While the *mithuna* (carved figures running through a whole Kamasutra of positions and possibilities) are certainly eye-catching, the erotic content should not distract from the great skill underlying the sculptures. Sensuous, posturing *surasundaris* (heavenly nymphs), *apsaras* (dancing *surasundaris*) and *nayikas* (mortal women) have been carved with a half-twist and slight sideways lean that make the playful figures dance and swirl out from the flat stone. A classic example is the washerwoman with a wet sari clinging to her body – an image imbued with as much eroticism as any of the couples, threesomes or foursomes.

Walk round the temples with your right shoulder facing the building – the right side is considered divine.

BIRDS DO IT, CHANDELAS DO IT

Why all the sex? Scholars are uncertain. The audioguide at the western group of temples stuffily posits that the ritualised positions and calm expressions suggest that sex was a way of practising restraint. Another theory has it that the erotic posturing was a kind of Kamasutra in stone, a how-to manual for adolescent Brahmin boys growing up in all-male temple schools. Another claims that the figures were thought to prevent the temples being struck by lightning, by appeasing the rain god Indra. This old lecher is supposedly a keen voyeur who wouldn't want the source of his pleasure damaged.

Rather more convincing is the explanation that these are Tantric images, especially as they're not limited to Khajuraho. According to this cult, gratification of the baser instincts is one way to transcend the evils of the world and achieve enlightenment. *Bhoga* (physical enjoyment) and *yoga* (spiritual exercise) are seen as equally valid in this quest for nirvana.

The Khajuraho sculptors may have been simply representing life as it was in their society, with unhampered sexual expression alongside many other day-to-day scenes. The carvings should be seen as a joyous celebration of all aspects of life.

Western Group

The main temples are in the **western group** (Indian/foreigner Rs 20/250, video Rs 25; ☀ dawn-dusk), the most interesting group although the others are free. An Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) guidebook to Khajuraho (Rs 60) and a two-hour **audio guide** (Rs 50) are available at the ticket office.

The temples are described here in a clockwise direction.

Varaha, dedicated to Vishnu's boar incarnation, and the closed-up **Lakshmi** are two small shrines facing the large Lakshmana Temple. Inside Varaha is a 1.5m-high sandstone boar, dating to 900–25 and meticulously carved with a pantheon of gods.

The large **Lakshmana Temple** took 20 years to build, completed in about 954 during the reign of Dhanga according to an inscribed slab in the *mandapa* (pillared pavilion in front of a temple; see the boxed text, opposite). One of the temple's many anonymous sculptors has added himself to a subsidiary shrine at the southwest corner. There are also battalions of soldiers – the Chandelas were generally at war when they weren't inventing new sexual positions. On the south side is a highly gymnastic orgy, including one gentleman proving that a horse can be a man's best friend, while a shocked figure peeks out from behind her hands. More sensuous figures intertwine between the elephants in the frieze ringing the basement.

One of the earliest and best-preserved monuments in this group, Lakshmana is dedicated to Vishnu, although in design it is similar to the Shiva temples Vishvanath and Kandariya-Mahadev.

The 30.5m-long **Kandariya-Mahadev**, built between 1025 and 1050, is the largest temple in town and represents the highpoint of Chandelan architecture. It also has the most representations of female beauty and sexual aerobics, all crammed into three central bands. There are 872 acrobatic statues (226 inside and 646 outside), most of them nearly 1m high – taller and more slender than on the other temples.

The 31m-high *sikhara* is, like *linga*, a phallic Shiva symbol, worshipped by Hindus hoping to seek deliverance from the cycle of reincarnation. It's decorated with 84 subsidiary spires – replicas of itself.

Mahadeva, a small, ruined temple on the same platform as Kandariya-Mahadev and Devi Jagadamba, is dedicated to Shiva, who is carved on the lintel of its doorway. Although small and insignificant compared with its mighty neighbours, this temple houses one of Khajuraho's finest sculptures – a *sardula* (mythical beast, part lion, part some other animal or even human) caressing a 1m-high lion.

Devi Jagadamba was originally dedicated to Vishnu, but later to Parvati and then Kali. Some believe it's still a Parvati temple and that the Kali image is actually Parvati, painted black. The carvings include *sardulas* accompanied by Vishnu, *sarasundaris*, and *mithunas* frolicking in the third uppermost band. Its three-part design is simpler than Kandariya-Mahadev and Chitragupta (1000–25). It has more in common with Chitragupta, but is less embellished with carvings so is likely a little older.

North of Devi Jagadamba, **Chitragupta** is unique in Khajuraho – and rare among North Indian temples – in being dedicated to the sun god Surya. While not in as good condition as the other temples, it has some fine carvings of *apsaras* and *sarasundaris*, elephant fights and hunting scenes, *mithuna* and a procession of stone-carriers. In the inner sanctum, Surya drives his seven-horse chariot, while on the central niche in the south façade is an 11-headed statue of Vishnu, representing the god and 10 of his 22 incarnations.

Continuing around the enclosure, the closed-up **Parvati Temple** is on your right. The name's probably incorrect, since this small temple was originally dedicated to Vishnu and now has an image of Gauri riding a *godha* (iguana).

Believed to have been built in 1002, the **Vishvanath Temple** and **Nandi Shrine** are reached

by steps flanked by lions on the northern side and elephants on the south. Vishvanath anticipates Kandariya-Mahadev, with which it shares *saptamatrukas* (seven mothers) flanked by Ganesh and Virabhadra, and is another superlative example of Chandela architecture. Its sculptures include sensuous *surasundari* writing letters, cuddling babies, and playing music while languishing more provocatively than at other temples.

At the other end of the platform, a 2.2m-long statue of Nandi, Shiva's bull vehicle, faces the temple. The basement of the 12-pillared shrine is decorated with an elephant frieze that recalls similar work on Lakshmana's façade.

Matangesvara, outside the fenced enclosure, is the only temple in Khajuraho still in everyday use. It may be the plainest temple here

TEMPLE TERMINOLOGY

Khajuraho temples follow a fairly consistent and unique design pattern of a three- or five-part layout.

The *ardhamandapa* (entrance porch) leads to a *mandapa* (initial hall) and then into the *mahamandapa* (main hall), which is supported with pillars and has a corridor around it. An *antarala* (vestibule) then leads into the *garbhagriha* (inner sanctum) where the resident deity is displayed. A *pradakshina* (enclosed corridor) runs around this sanctum. Simpler three-part temples lack the *mandapa* and *pradakshina*.

Externally the temples consist of successive waves of higher and higher *urusingas* (towers), culminating in the soaring *sikhara* (spire) topping the sanctum. While the lower towers, over the *mandapa* or *mahamandapa*, may be pyramid-shaped, the *sikhara* is taller and curvilinear. The ornate design of these vertical elements is balanced by the equally ornate horizontal bands of sculptures that run around the temples.

The whole temple sits upon a *adisthana* (high terrace) and the finely carved entrance gate to the temple is a *torana*.

The temples are almost all aligned east to west, with the entrance facing east. Some of the earliest temples were made of granite, or granite and sandstone, but all those from the classic period are made completely of sandstone.

The sculptures and statues play such an important part that many have their own terminology:

- *apsara* – heavenly nymph, beautiful dancing woman
- *mithuna* – Khajuraho's most famous image; sensuously carved, erotic figures that have shocked a variety of people, from Victorian archaeologists to busloads of blue-rinse tourists
- *nayika* – the only difference between a *surasundari* and a *nayika* is that the *surasundari* is supposed to be a heavenly creature while a *nayika* is human
- *salabhanjika* – female figure with tree, they act as supporting brackets within the temple; *apsaras* also perform this bracket function
- *sardula* – a mythical beast, part lion, part some other animal or even human; *sardulas* usually carry armed men on their backs
- *surasundari* – when a *surasundari* is dancing she is an *apsara*; otherwise she attends the gods and goddesses by carrying flowers, ornaments, mirrors or other offerings; she also engages in everyday activities, such as playing with pets, babies, musical instruments or herself

(suggesting an early construction) but inside it sports a polished 2.5m-high lingam (phallic image of Shiva).

The ruins of **Chausath Yogini**, beyond Shiv Sagar, date to the late 9th century and are probably the oldest at Khajuraho. Constructed entirely of granite and the only temple not aligned east to west, the temple's name means 64 – it once had 64 cells for the *yoginis* (female attendants) of Kali, while the 65th sheltered the goddess herself. It is possibly India's oldest *yogini* temple.

A further 600m west is the sandstone-and-granite **Lalguan Mahadev Temple** (c 900), a small, ruined shrine to Shiva.

Eastern Group

The eastern group consists of four temples scattered around the old village and three Jain temples in a walled enclosure.

The **Hanuman Temple** on Basti Rd contains an almost 2.5m-tall statue of the monkey god. The interest is in the pedestal inscription dating to AD 922, the oldest dateable inscription in Khajuraho.

Its sandstone *sikhara* overlooking Narora Sagar, the granite **Brahma Temple** is one of the oldest in Khajuraho. The four-faced lingam in the sanctum led to it being incorrectly named but the image of Vishnu above the sanctum doorway reveals its original dedication to Vishnu. Similarities with Lalguan Mahadeva link it to the same period, about AD 900.

Resembling Chaturbhuj Temple in the southern group, **Javari Temple** (1075–1100) stands outside the chaotic old village. It's dedicated to Vishnu and is a good example of small-scale Khajuraho architecture for its crocodile-covered entrance and slender *sikhara*.

Vamana Temple (1050–75), 200m further north, is dedicated to the dwarf incarnation of Vishnu. It has quirky touches such as elephants protruding from the walls, but its *sikhara* is devoid of subsidiary spires and there are few erotic scenes. Its roofed *mahamandapa* (main hall) is an anomaly in Khajuraho but typical among medieval west Indian temples.

Located between the old village and the Jain group, the small **Ghantai Temple** is named after the *ghanta* (chain and bell) decorations on its pillars. It's similar to nearby Parsvanath Temple, but is a little more evolved so likely dates from the late 10th century. Unfortu-

nately, only its pillared shell remains and it's normally locked.

While not competing in size and erotica with the western-enclosure temples, **Parsvanath**, the largest of the Jain temples in the walled enclosure, is notable for the exceptional skill and precision of its construction, and for its sculptural beauty. Some of Khajuraho's best-known figures can be seen here, including the woman removing a thorn from her foot (some say, painting her foot for a temple dance) and another applying eye make-up. Although the temple was originally dedicated to Adinath, a jet-black image of Parsvanath was substituted about a century ago. Both an inscription on the *mahamandapa* doorway and its similarities with the slightly simpler Lakshmana Temple date it to 950–70.

The adjacent smaller **Adinath** has been partially restored over the centuries. With fine carvings on its three bands of sculptures it's similar to Khajuraho's Hindu temples, particularly Vamana. Only the striking black image in the inner sanctum triggers a Jain reminder.

Shanti Nath, built about a century ago, houses components from older temples, including a 4.5m-high Adinath statue with a plastered-over inscription on the pedestal dating to about 1027.

Outside the enclosure is the circular **Jain Art Museum** (admission Rs 5; ☎ 7am–6pm). Its artworks salvaged from the temples are not worth a special visit if you're touring the temples themselves. More interesting are the photographs relating to Jainism in the modern **Santinath Temple**.

Southern Group

A dirt track runs to the isolated **Duladeo Temple**, about 1km south of the Jain enclosure. This is the youngest temple, dating to 1100–50. Its relatively wooden, repetitious sculptures, such as those of Shiva, suggest that Khajuraho's temple builders had passed their artistic peak by this point, although they had certainly lost none of their zeal for the Kamasutra.

Anticipating Duladeo and its flaws, the ruined **Chaturbhuj Temple** (c 1100) has a fine 2.7m-high, four-armed statue of Vishnu in the sanctum. It is Khajuraho's only developed temple without erotic sculptures.

Just before Chaturbhuj there's a signed track leading to **Bijamandala Temple**. This is the excavated mound of an 11th-century temple, dedicated to Shiva judging by the white

marble lingam at the apex of the mound. Although there are some exquisitely carved figures, unfinished carvings were also excavated, suggesting that what would have been Khajuraho's largest temple was abandoned as resources flagged. Scattered around the base are various misplaced stones from the upper parts while nearby are three smaller mounds containing unearthed buildings.

MUSEUMS

The **Archaeological Museum** (☎ 272320; Main Rd; admission Rs 5; 🕒 10am-5pm Sat-Thu) is announced by a statue of Ganesh dancing rather sensuously for an elephant-headed deity. This collection of statues and sculptures from around Khajuraho is moving to a larger site north of the western temples.

Adivart Tribal & Folk Art Museum (☎ 272721; Chandela Cultural Centre, Link Rd No 1; Indian/foreigner Rs 10/50; 🕒 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) makes a colourful change from the temples. It gives a taste of Madhya Pradesh's vibrant tribal culture through pointillist Bhili paintings, terracotta Jhoomar sculptures, masks, statues and bamboo flutes.

Activities

The four-handed Ayurvedic treatments at the Keralan-run, India Tourism-approved **Yadav Lodge** (☎ 272572; treatment US\$25-50; 🕒 24hr) win rave reviews and are the perfect way to rejuvenate after a day of temples and touts. The lodge is set to reopen on Basti Rd under the name Ayur Arogyam.

Apart from the hotels offering yoga, the inspiring **Yogi Sudarshan Dwiveda** (☎ 9893912141; Vidhya Colony; 🕒 5.30am & 6pm) runs sessions at his home, with attendant children and cows.

Volunteers can help at workshops run by NGO **Global Village** (☎ 74237; globalvillage@indiatimes.com; Main Rd), which targets environmental problems such as the plastic bags littering Khajuraho.

Sleeping

Khajuraho's popularity means a plentiful supply of hotels, and hefty discounts (20% to 50%) available out of season (April to September).

To avoid adding a tout's commission to your bill, get a ride to a place near your chosen hotel, pay your driver and walk in alone.

The **Government of India tourist office** (☎ 272348; Main Rd; 🕒 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat) can organise homestays in Basari, a tribal village 27km east of Khajuraho.

BUDGET

Some budget hotels move into midrange with their better rooms.

Yogi Lodge (☎ 274158; r from Rs 120-150) These small, spartan rooms with sit-down toilet, bucket shower, air-cooler and TV are among the best budget choices. There's a rooftop restaurant and, as at Yogi Sharma's other hotel, Ashram Lodge, yoga classes (7.30am to 8.30am).

Yadav Lodge (☎ 272572; r Rs 150) If a treatment here isn't enough (see left), there are seven basic but charming rooms with bucket showers, and Ayurvedic meals.

Yogi Sharma Ashram Lodge (☎ 272273; Main Rd; r Rs 100-300) Monastery-like place 1.5km north of town in a garden thick with mango and lemon trees, which guests can plunder for their cooking. Yogi Sharma runs yoga classes (7.30am to 8.30am), which nonguests can attend for a small donation, and free room and board is offered to guests who get involved with his mission at 10 local Adivasi schools.

our pick Hotel Surya (☎ 274145; www.hotelsurya.khajuraho.com; Jain Temples Rd; r Rs 200-600, with AC Rs 750; 🕒 📺) Well-appointed rooms set among whitewashed corridors, marble staircases and a walled garden. If you're opting for non-AC, it's well worth spending Rs 600 for a room with balcony, bath and TV. The atmosphere is refreshingly laid-back, and yoga (7am to 8am) and massage are on offer.

Hotel Zen (☎ 274228; oshozen62@hotmail.com; Jain Temples Rd; r Rs 200-700, with AC Rs 500-1200; 🕒 📺) A popular backpacker hang-out. Rooms have TVs with BBC Worldwide and overlook a series of courtyards with lotus ponds, candles flickering at night and an overpriced restaurant. The attentive staff is more than happy to organise tours and travel.

MIDRANGE

Casa Di William (☎ 274244; anupamgupta74@hotmail.com; s/d Rs 300/400, with air-cooler Rs 350/450, with AC Rs 550/650; 🕒 📺) Fifteen simple, colourful rooms set around a leafy courtyard with a rooftop restaurant and, of course, yoga and massage centre. Room 651 is across the road from the western temples.

Hotel Harmony (☎ 244135; Jain Temples Rd; s/d from Rs 350/400; 🕒 📺) This upbeat hotel has 25 comfortable rooms with TV and a decent courtyard restaurant (meals Rs 75 to 100) serving pizza, pasta, Mexican, and bread and tiramisu made daily. One-hour yoga sessions are at 7am and 6pm.

Hotel Lakeside (☎ 274120; avinashkhr@rediff.com; Main Rd; s/d Rs 300/350, with AC Rs 775/975; 🏠 📺) There are views across Shiv Sagar from the 22 breezy rooms with hot water and the restaurant on the roof, which is also the venue for yoga and meditation sessions (9am).

Hotel Marble Palace (☎ 274353; palacemarle@hotmail.com; s/d Rs 350/450, with AC Rs 550/650; 🏠 📺) This quiet hotel does indeed have marble floors plus a large winding staircase. The 10 rooms have attractive black, white and brown minimalist décor.

Hotel Siddharth (☎ 274627; hotelsiddharth@rediffmail.com; Main Rd; r with air-cooler/AC Rs 390/790; 🏠 📺) One of the best midrange hotels, with cool, spacious rooms, hot-water bath tubs for a post-temple soak, and a popular terrace restaurant (meals Rs 60 to 80) with some of Khajuraho's best temple views. Pot plants sit in the windows of the more expensive rooms upstairs.

Hotel Jhankar (☎ 274063; mptkhaj@sancharnet.in; r non-AC/AC Rs 690/1190; 🏠 📺) Dated but clean and comfy MP Tourism hotel with tiled floors, 24-hour hot water and an AC restaurant, set among the trees in a secluded location south of the modern village.

TOP END

These deluxe hotels are south of the modern village.

Holiday Inn (☎ 272301; www.holidayinnkhajuraho.com; Jhansi Rd; s/d/ste from US\$65/75/110; 🏠 📺) Not as stylish as Hotel Chandela but the 82 AC rooms with minibars and safes leave little to be desired. Its facilities match the other top-end hotel. Meals are Rs 200 to 250.

Hotel Chandela (☎ 272355; www.tajhotels.com; Jhansi Rd; s/d/ste from Rs 4000/4300/6000; 🏠 📺) Five-star hotel with a fountain in the AC foyer and a swimming pool (Rs 300 nonguests) that's perfect for cleansing temple-tired legs. Other amusements include minigolf, badminton, flute recitals (8pm to 9pm), two restaurants (meals Rs 400 to 500), boutiques and a bookshop. The 90 rooms feature a tasteful mix of old and new furnishings.

Eating

Khajuraho has a restaurant to suit every palate, many with temple views.

Raja's Café (rajacafe@hotmail.com; Main Rd; dishes Rs 50-80) The Swiss-owned restaurant at Khajuraho's kilometre zero serves scrumptious Indian and Chinese favourites, as well as less orthodox dishes such as macaroni, goulash and chicken Szechwan, in a shady courtyard and terrace.

Agrasen (Jain Temples Rd; meals Rs 60) Up and coming terrace restaurant offering a good range of grub including pizza, thali (traditional south Indian and Gujarati 'all-you-can-eat' meal), nonvegetarian curries, soups and Chinese.

Ganesh Restaurant (Jain Temples Rd; meals Rs 50-110) Quality food – Indian and Chinese, vegetarian and nonvegetarian, and curd-and-banana-based breakfasts – although the cold coffee leaves a bit to be desired. You can sit on the roof at night.

Blue Sky Restaurant (☎ 274120; Main Rd; meals Rs 150-200; 🕒 7am-midnight) Scores for its balcony seating as well as its fine selection of Italian, Japanese and more traditional dishes. Up in the tree-house dining area, with its bird's-eye view of the temples, you ring a bell for service. Don't believe the staff – you can't see the sound-and-light show (below) from here.

Mediterraneo (☎ 272246; Jain Temples Rd; meals Rs 150-200) Overdosing on thali? Get down to this rooftop Italian restaurant for mouth-watering wood-fired pizzas, homemade pasta, crepes, and bread and cakes baked freshly every day.

If your budget won't stretch as far as Mediterraneo, try **Bella Italia** (☎ 274582; Jain Temples Rd; meals Rs 80-190).

Entertainment

Sound-and-light show (Indian/foreigner Rs 50/300; 🕒 in English 6.30pm/7.40pm, in Hindi 7.30pm/8.40pm Nov-Feb/March-Oct) Technicolour floodlights sweep across the temples of the western group as Indian classical music soundtracks a potted history of Khajuraho narrated by the 'master sculptor'.

Folk dancing can be seen at the government-operated **Shilpgram** (☎ 9425143528; 🕒 7am-9.30pm Oct-Mar), designed to promote Indian culture. Folk dances are also performed in the comfortable indoor theatre at **Kandariya Art & Culture** (☎ 274031; Jhansi Rd; admission Rs 300; 🕒 7-8pm & 8.30-9.30pm). **Downing Street** (☎ 272301; Holiday Inn, Jhansi Rd; 🕒 8pm-midnight) is the only disco in town.

Shopping

Mrignayani (Gole Market; 🕒 10am-8pm Wed-Mon) MP government shop with fixed prices and dispassionate but helpful staff selling state-produced handicrafts. Also has a booth at the western group of temples.

Kandariya Art & Culture (☎ 274031; Jhansi Rd; 🕒 9.15am-8pm) Two showrooms containing large antiques and India-wide goods.

Getting There & Away

Visitors to Khajuraho may feel uncomfortably like its intrepid Victorian discoverer by the end of a long, shaky bus journey from one of the nearest railheads. Flying is a good alternative, and a railway line is being built to link Khajuraho with Jhansi and Varanasi.

AIR

Reserve in advance, as seats can be booked solid for days by tour groups.

Indian Airlines (☎ 274035; Jhansi Rd; ✈ 10am-5.35pm Mon-Sat) flies daily to Delhi (US\$170, 4.10pm) and Varanasi (US\$120, 1.30pm).

Jet Airways (☎ 274407; ✈ 9.30am-5.30pm), at the airport, flies daily to Delhi (US\$175, 1.30pm) via Varanasi (US\$120).

BUS

The bus station has a **ticket office** (☎ 8am-noon & 1.30-7pm) off Link Rd No 2.

There are regular buses to Jhansi (Rs 90, five hours) including deluxe services (Rs 170, 9am and 11.15am); the second connects with the Jhansi-Delhi Shatabdi train. There's a bus to Agra (Rs 240, 10 hours, 8am) and, on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday, a night bus to Varanasi (Rs 190, 14 hours, 3pm).

Three buses run to Satna (Rs 80, 3½ hours, 7.30am, 2pm and 3pm) and there are regular services to Mahoba (Rs 40, four hours) and to Madla for Panna National Park (Rs 25, one hour).

More buses can be caught at Bamitha, 11km away on Hwy 75 where buses between Gwalior, Jhansi and Satna shuttle through all day. Catch a shared jeep (Rs 10, 7am to 7pm) to Bamitha from the bus station.

TAXI

Yashwanar Taxi Driver Union (☎ 9425143774), opposite Gole Market, drives to Satna (with/without AC Rs 1500/1200), Varanasi (with/without AC Rs 5000/4500), Agra (with/without AC Rs 6000/5500) and Orchha or Jhansi (with/without AC Rs 2500/2200).

To Bamitha costs Rs 300; a jeep, necessary for Panna National Park, costs Rs 1500.

Prices are fixed but off-season bargaining is a possibility. Costs can be cut by sharing a ride.

TRAIN

Train tickets can be bought from the **train reservation office** (☎ 274416; ✈ 8am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Sat) at the bus station. When it's closed,

the amiable chai (tea) shop owner outside has a current timetable.

Jhansi is the nearest station on the Delhi-Mumbai train line; Satna on the Mumbai-Allahabad line is better for Varanasi. An alternative is to get the bus to Mahoba and take train 1107 *Bundelkhand Express* overnight to Varanasi (Rs 334/788/991, 10 hours, 12.34am).

Getting Around

Bicycle is the favourite way to get around flat and pleasantly traffic-free Khajuraho; bikes cost from Rs 20 per day to hire from several places along Jain Temples Rd, including **Bilal Bikes** (☎ 274176; ✈ 8am-7pm).

Cycle-rickshaws should cost about Rs 10 to 15 per kilometre and for a half-day/whole day Rs 100/200. Make sure the cost includes the southern temples plus waiting time. Quicker for the southern temples is an autorickshaw at about Rs 20 a kilometre or for a half-day/whole day Rs 200/300.

Taxis to and from the airport charge Rs 150, while autorickshaws ask Rs 50.

AROUND KHAJURAO

Raneh Falls

These **waterfalls** (☎ 07686-272622; Indian/foreigner Rs 10/200, compulsory guide Rs 40, video Rs 200, autorickshaw/car entry Rs 15/30; ✈ 6am-6pm) are 18km from Khajuraho – a Rs 300 autorickshaw or Rs 400 taxi return journey. While the falls are only 30m high they are wide and tumble as a churning mass over black and red rocks. There are boats for hire (Indian/foreigner Rs 50/100) and it's possible to view gharial or mugger river crocodiles 1km away at **Ken Gharial Sanctuary** (☎ 1 Oct-30 Jun).

Panna National Park

The Satna road passes the Madla Gate of this 543-sq-km **tiger reserve** (☎ 07732-252135; 1/2/3 drive Indian Rs 25/40/60, foreigner Rs 500/750/1000, video Rs 200, compulsory guide Rs 75, jeep entry/hire Rs 30/800, elephant ride Indian/foreigner Rs 100/600; ✈ 6.30-10.30am & 2.30-4pm 1 Oct-15 Feb, 6-10am & 3-5pm 16 Feb-30 Jun) along the Ken River, 32km from Khajuraho. It has a variety of wildlife, including 37 tigers, leopards, nilgais (antelope), chittals (spotted deer), langur monkeys and sambars.

About 2km west of the park entrance is an **Interpretative Centre** (☎ 07732-275231; Indian/foreigner Rs 5/50; ✈ 6am-6pm) with a useful introduction to the history and ecology of the area.

Pandav Falls (Indian/foreigner Rs 10/100, camera/video Rs 40/300, autorickshaw/jeep entry Rs 15/30; ☎ 6am-5pm), a short drive east of Madla, are mentioned in the Mahabharata as one of the places where the five Pandava brothers stayed during their exile – commemorated by five small sculptures of houses.

Jewel of the Jungle (☎ 07732-275241; www.thejewelofthejungle.com; Madla Gate, Panna National Park; tw per person US\$50-75, American Plan US\$100-110, Jungle Plan US\$130-150; 📶 📺 📶) has cottages with animal-themed decoration and the atrium of the main building, which has facilities such as a wood-panelled library-cum-bar, is open to give breezes and butterflies free passage. The Jungle Plan includes goodies such as a herbal massage.

Transport in the park is in petrol-driven jeeps only; they can be hired at Madla Gate or in Khajuraho (see p681).

SATNA

☎ 07672 / pop 225,470

Pass straight through Satna (known as 'cement city') if you can – on the bus to Khajuraho or the train to Varanasi. The bus and train stations are 3km apart (Rs 20 in an autorickshaw). There is a State Bank of India ATM opposite the bus stand and **MP Tourism** (☎ 225471) has an often-closed counter at the train station.

If you do wash up here overnight, **Chandra View** (☎ 226906; Rewa Rd; s/d from Rs 300/475; 📶), 300m from the bus stand, is a little unclean but infinitely preferable to the Pepsi-branded station hotel.

Four buses go to Khajuraho (Rs 65, five hours, 6.30am, 7am, 9.10am and 2.30pm). At other times go via Panna (Rs 40, four hours).

The best train to Varanasi is No 5159 *Sarnath Express* (Rs 310/720/892, nine hours, 8am).

CENTRAL MADHYA PRADESH

BHOPAL

☎ 0755 / pop 1.46 million

South of the two lakes, the state capital lives up to its role in life – shopping complexes and bright lights compete for space in New Market; hotels, museums and restaurants nestle in the Arera and Shamla Hills. On Upper Lake, nicknamed 'the Bhopal beauty', the wealthy race around in speedboats or fill the night with ringtone on the Lake Princess cruise boat.

North of the lakes is the old city, where Hamidia Rd is a streak of modernity alongside an area of bazaars and mosques. Bhopal's population is 40% Muslim – one of India's highest concentration of Muslims – and the women in black *niqabs* (veils) are reminders of the female Islamic rulers who built up Bhopal in the 19th century. North of the old city is a reminder of a more recent, more tragic history – the Union Carbide plant, site of the world's worst industrial disaster (see the boxed text, p684).

Orientation

The train and bus stations are just off Hamidia Rd, within easy walking distance of the main hotel area. The 6-sq-km Upper Lake (Map p683) is separated from the smaller Lower Lake (Map p683) by a causeway, which links the old city's Muslim-dominated, maze-like streets with the broad, leafy avenues of the new city. Autorickshaw drivers tend to use the 'back road' to the east of Lower Lake – to use the causeway, ask to go via Sadar Manzil (Hall of Public Audience). Most of the city's shops, banks and facilities are in New Market.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Variety Book House (Map p683; 14-15 GTB Complex; ☎ 10am-9.45pm) Stationery, maps and a great selection of books in English, including the wonderful *Vintage Madhya Pradesh* and *Lonely Planet* titles.

INTERNET ACCESS

Hub (Map p683; Rang Mahal Rd; per hr Rs 20;

☎ 11.30am-10pm)

Sunny Internet (Map p686; per hr Rs 15; ☎ 8.30am-11pm) Off Hamidia Rd.

LEFT LUGGAGE

Train station (Map p683; per piece/day Rs 10; ☎ 24hr)

LIBRARIES

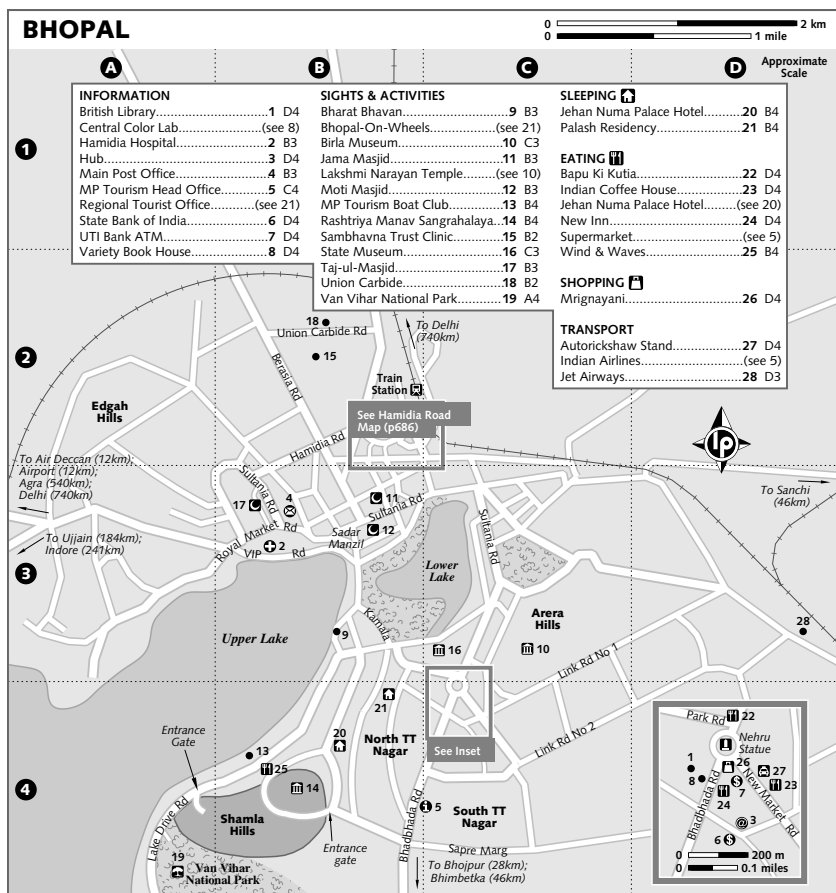
British Library (Map p683; ☎ 2553767; bl.bhopal@britishcouncil.org; GTB Complex, Roshanpura Naka;

☎ 11am-7pm Tue-Sat) Has a reading room.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Hamidia Hospital (Map p683; ☎ 2540222; Royal Market Rd)

Raj Medical Store (Map p686; ☎ 2744728; Hamidia Rd; ☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Sat, 9am-8pm Sun) Near the central bus stand.



MONEY

ATMs are marked on the maps.

State Bank of India (Map p683; ☎ 5288634; Rang Mahal Rd; 🕒 10.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-1.30pm Sat) Cashes travellers cheques and foreign currency. There's also an ATM at the train station.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Central Color Lab (Map p683; ☎ 4234000; GTB Complex, Bhadbhada Rd; 🕒 10.30am-9pm) Digital and film services.

POST

Main post office (Map p683; ☎ 2531266; Sultania Rd; 🕒 10am-6pm) There is also a counter at the train station.

TOURIST INFORMATION

MP Tourism airport (🚗 including flights); head office (Map p683; ☎ 2774340, MP Tourism hotel reservation 8383, transport 5572, ticketing 2764397; Paryatan Bhavan, Bhadbhada Rd; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 11am-1pm 2nd & 3rd Sat); regional office (Map p683; ☎ 3295040; Palash Residency, TT Nagar; 🕒 7am-7pm); train station (p683; 🕒 8am-8pm) MP Tourism books hotels throughout the state and can organise language guides. The head office even has a library, and its ticketing office sells Indian Airlines and Jet Airways tickets.

Dangers & Annoyances

Beware of pickpockets working around the train station, the bus stand and along Hamidia Rd.

THE BHOPAL DISASTER – A CONTINUING TRAGEDY

On 3 December, 1984, 40 tonnes of deadly methyl isocyanate (MIC) gas leaked out over Bhopal from the US-owned Union Carbide chemical plant (Map p683). Blown by the wind, rivers of the heavy gas coursed through the city. In the ensuing panic, people were trampled trying to escape while others were so disorientated that they ran into the gas.

The leak at the plant resulted from a saga of untested technology, negligent maintenance and cost-cutting measures that, according to some estimates, saved a mere US\$70 a day. There were 3828 initial fatalities according to official figures, although truckloads of bodies were secreted away to mass graves. The continuing death toll stands at over 20,000, while more than 500,000 people suffer from a catalogue of illnesses from hypertension and diabetes to premature menopause and skin disorders. Their children experience growth disorders, such as shrunken rib cages.

Of US\$3 billion demanded in damages, Union Carbide paid the Indian government US\$470 million in 1989. However, winning compensation for the many victims (there were about a million compensation claims) has been a tortuous process, slowed by the Indian government's wrangling over who was a victim and Dow Chemical's acquisition of Union Carbide in 2001. Both buyer and seller deny ongoing liability.

The Indian government is also reluctant to discourage foreign investors. It took a 19-day hunger strike in 2003 to force the government to request that its American counterpart extradite former Union Carbide chairman Warren Anderson, who absconded from court hearings in 1992. Anderson continues to enjoy his retirement on Long Island, New York State.

Union Carbide financed the building of a multimillion dollar hospital, while charity **Sambhavna Trust** (Map p683; ☎ 2730914; Bafna Colony, Berasia Rd) runs a clinic, treating more than 200 people a day using yoga, allopathic and Panchakarmic (an Ayurvedic procedure for detoxification through medicated oil massage, steam bath and medicinal enema) treatments, and Ayurvedic remedies prepared using herbs from its medicinal garden. Sambhavna volunteers also work in areas such as advertising, medical research and internet communications.

Some 25,000 people are estimated to have been poisoned by chemicals washed into the ground from the plant, where substances including mercury and tar lie baking in the sun. The water in most of Bhopal is the same as in the rest of India, but in the bastis (slums) near the plant, wells have been marked as dangerous. Safe water is brought in, but not enough, and the residents of these areas continue to use the wells. 'This is not just something that happened in 1984,' an American Sambhavna volunteer told us. 'People get poisoned every day by the water – high on our list of priorities is stopping fresh victims.'

For more information, visit www.bhopal.org or www.bhopal.com, or read *Five Past Midnight in Bhopal*, the royalties of which go to disaster victims.

Sights & Activities

MOSQUES

One of the largest mosques in India, **Taj-ul-Masjid** (Map p683; ☎ closed to non-Muslims Fri) was built by Bhopal's third female ruler, Shah Jahan Begum (1868–1901). The building was incomplete at her death, as funds were diverted to her other projects including the city's waterworks, railways and postal system, and construction did not resume until 1971. Fortresslike terracotta walls surround three gleaming white onion domes and a pair of towering pink minarets with white domes. If you can make the dawn azan (call to prayer), you won't regret it.

The gold spikes crowning the squat minarets of the **Jama Masjid** (Map p683), built in

1837 by Qudsia Begum, glint serenely above the skull caps and veils swirling through the bazaar below.

The **Moti Masjid** (Map p683) near Sadar Manzil was built by Qudsia Begum's daughter, Sikander Jahan Begum, in 1860. Similar in style to the Jama Masjid in Delhi, it's a smaller marble-faced mosque with two dark-red minarets and gold-spiked cupolas.

RASHTRIYA MANAV SANGRAHALAYA

The **Museum of Man** (Map p683; ☎ 2661319; admission Rs 10, vehicle Rs 10; ☎ 10am–5.30pm Tue–Sun Sep–Feb, 11am–6.30pm Tue–Sun Mar–Aug) is the best way to learn about the life, culture and beliefs of India's 450-plus tribes without visiting an Adivasi village. It would be easy to lose track of a day in the

sprawling complex, overlooking the forested hills of the Van Vihar National Park (right).

The hilltop **museum** focuses on individual tribes as well as giving an overview of Adivasi life from Tamil Nadu to Himachal Pradesh, through art, photographs, dress, cooking implements and entire tribal dwellings.

Tribal Habitat is an open-air exhibition of some 30 buildings in village settings, best toured at the beginning or end of the day – unless you take the Bhopal-On-Wheels bus (see right). Built and maintained by Adivasis using traditional tools and materials, its authentic feel is accentuated by its hillside location.

As well as dwellings from across India – from the Himalayan foothills to the Rajasthan desert and the Orissan forest – there is a **mythological trail** exploring the tribal people's extraordinary myths and legends through their crafts.

STATE MUSEUM

This **archaeological museum** (Map p683; ☎ 2661856; Shamlia Hills; Indian/foreigner Rs 5/30, camera/video Rs 20/50; ☎ 2-9pm Tue-Sun Mar-Sep, 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Oct-Feb) boasts 16 AC rooms stacked with sculptures, cave paintings, photographs and artefacts tracing local and national history; from 87 Jain bronzes unearthed by a surprised farmer in western MP to a letter in which Queen Elizabeth II takes over the administration of India.

BHARAT BHAVAN

Architect Charles Correa designed cultural centre **Bharat Bhavan** (Map p683; ☎ 2660239; admission Rs 10; ☎ 2-8pm Tue-Sun Feb-Oct, 1-7pm Tue-Sun Nov-Jan) to blend into the landscape – though this doesn't preclude multicoloured domes. Offering some of Bhopal's best lake views, the complex is a serene place to take in modern Indian art, tribal carvings and paintings, a library, and private contemporary art galleries. There is a café, and regular evening performances of poetry, music and theatre.

LAKSHMI NARAYAN TEMPLE & BIRLA MUSEUM

Lakshmi Narayan Temple (Map p683; Birla Mandir; Arera Hill) has a series of marble panels illustrating the central tenets of the Bhagavad Gita and views across the lakes to the minaret-dotted old city. An adjacent **museum** (Map p683; ☎ 2551388; admission Rs 5/51; ☎ 9.30am-8pm Tue-Sun) contains a small collection of local sculptures

dating back to the 6th century. For those who don't make it to Bhimbetka (p688), there's a reconstruction of one of the rock shelters.

VAN VIHAR NATIONAL PARK

The best time to visit this 445-hectare **safari park** (Map p683; ☎ 2674278; dirvnp@sancharnet.in; Indian/foreigner Rs 15/200, camera/video Rs 40/300, autorickshaw/car Rs 20/40; ☎ 6.30am-5.30pm Sat-Thu Mar-Sep, from 8am Oct-Feb) is at 4.30pm, when animals including two white tigers, an albino sloth bear and a lion pace the edges of their cages waiting to be fed. You may want to hire a rickshaw – it's 5km from the entrance to the basic interpretation centre at the end.

UPPER LAKE

The **MP Tourism Boat Club** (Map p683; ☎ 32095; Lake Drive Rd; ☎ 5.30am-7pm) offers **motorboat rides** (per 5min Rs 35, minimum 3 people) and two-to-four-person **pedalboats** (per 30 min Rs 30), as well as boats suitable for 10 people and upwards (Rs 25 to 50 per person).

Tours

Bhopal-On-Wheels (adult/child 3hr tour Rs 60/30; ☎ 11am) is a guided tour in a dinky open minibus, departing from **Palash Residency** (Map p683; ☎ 2553066; II Nagar) and winding through the hills and the old city. Stops include Lakshmi Narayan Temple, MP Tourism Boat Club and Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya.

Lake Princess (upper deck/AC lower deck Rs 75/100; ☎ 6.30pm) cruises Upper Lake for 45 minutes, leaving from MP Tourism Boat Club (above). It's not exactly a serene sunset cruise, with young guys doing their best to rave to Hindi pop on the minute top-deck dance floor.

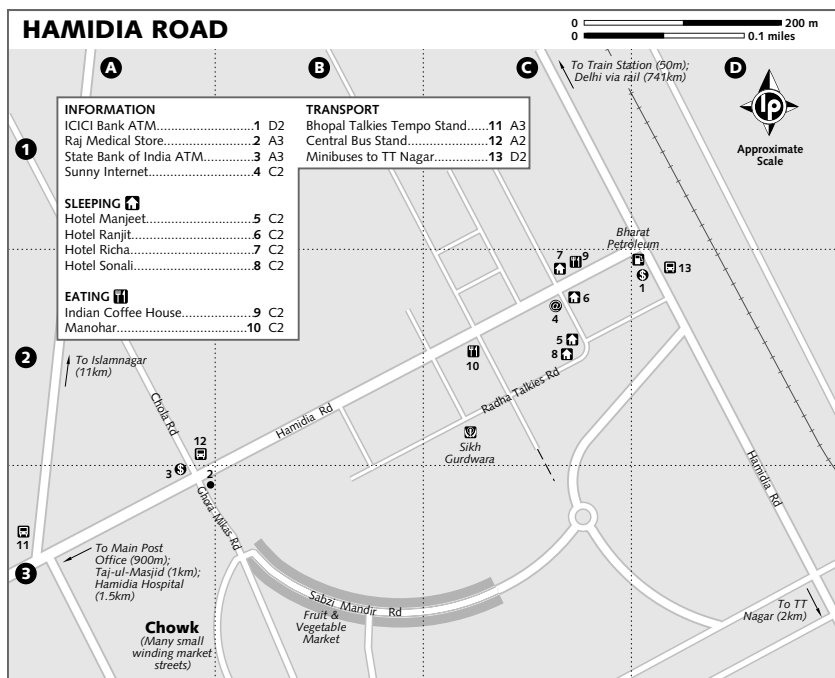
Sleeping

HAMIDIA ROAD

Hotels here generally offer both budget and midrange rooms, as well as 24-hour check-out. Those on Hamidia Rd are noisy – ask for a room away from the road. Budget hotels are often full, so book ahead.

Hotel Ranjit (Map p686; ☎ 2740500; ranjeethotels@sancharnet.in; 3 Hamidia Rd; s Rs 250-450, d Rs 350-550, with AC s Rs 450-600, d Rs 550-700; ☎) The comfortable rooms have hot-water showers and TVs, and the bar-restaurant (meals Rs 80) is deservedly popular, but the hotel trails behind its near neighbours.

Hotel Sonali (Map p686; ☎ 2740880; sonalinn@sancharnet.in; 3 Radha Talkies Rd; s/d from Rs 275/350, AC with



breakfast from Rs 600/675; 🚽 🚿) The wide range of rooms includes some of the area's smartest budget accommodation. The more expensive rooms seem a little worn for the money, but 24-hour service and facilities such as a travel desk are compensation.

Hotel Richa (Map p686; ☎ 4231980; 1 Hamidia Rd; s Rs 320-370, d Rs 400-450, with AC s/d Rs 570/700, ste Rs 900; 🚽) Beyond the gloomy reception, the rooms are good value – particularly in executive class – with Hollywood films on the TV and a newspaper under the door in the morning.

Hotel Manjeet (Map p686; ☎ 2740949; hmanjeet@sancharnet.in; r Rs 250-725, ste Rs 825-875; 🚽) Don't be put off by the alleyway outside – Manjeet is competing with Sonali for the 'best midrange hotel' rosette. The clean and tidy rooms, quiet retreats off Hamidia Rd, have sparkling tile floors and all mod cons.

NEW CITY

Palash Residency (Map p683; ☎ 2553066; palashotel@sancharnet.in; TT Nagar; s/d from Rs 1790/2090; 🚽) White-washed walkways lead past a lawn to 33 spacious, shipshape AC rooms let down only by

cramped bathrooms. One of MP Tourism's smartest properties.

Jehan Numa Palace Hotel (Map p683; ☎ 2661100; www.hoteljehanumapalace.com; 157 Shamlia Hill; incl breakfast, cottage s/d Rs 2299/2799, s Rs 2999-4699, d Rs 3699-5399, ste Rs 5999-6999; 🚽 🚿 🚿) A former late-19th-century palace that's lost none of its character through conversion into a fine hotel. Book ahead to bag a cottage – the best value, with cosy rooms around an enclosed garden. Some more expensive rooms have direct access from their balconies to the palm-lined swimming pool.

Eating & Drinking

Eating places in Bhopal divide into the cheap on Hamidia Rd and midrange restaurants in TT Nagar.

Manohar (Map p686; 6 Hamidia Rd; meals Rs 40) A busy team of uniformed waiters serves Chinese, pizza, snacks, South Indian favourites, juices, shakes and even fresh fruit to Bhopal's well-to-do. For a memorable feast, try the elongated special *masala dosa* followed by the bright-yellow, sweet-noodle *faluda* (chickpea flour noodles).

Indian Coffee House (Map p686; Hamidia Rd; meals Rs 50) Not as salubrious as the TT Nagar branch (Map p683), on New Market Rd, but nonetheless a top spot for a breakfast of filter coffee and scrambled eggs.

ourpick Babu Ki Kutia (Map p683; Sultania Rd; meals Rs 50; ☎ 11am-11pm) Located between the Nehru statue and Café Coffee Day, this quality *dhaba* (snack bar) is so popular you'll probably have to share a table. Its name means 'Papa's Shack'.

Popular Inn (Map p683; Bhadbhada Rd; meals Rs 80) A popular TT Nagar haunt where waiters bustle between marble walls and painted windows. Mains, including a range of kebabs, are pricey, but there is also a good selection of soups, noodles and chop suey.

Wind & Waves (Map p683; meals Rs 100; ☎ 10.30am-10.30pm) It's the usual MP Tourism menu, but it's worth facing those 'mood lifters' and staples 'from the soup tureen' for the view across the Upper Lake. Perfect for a pre-Tribal Habitat power-up or a sunset beer, it's off Lake Drive Rd.

Jehan Numa Palace Hotel (Map p683; ☎ 2661100; 157 Shamla Hill) Head up the hill to indulge yourself at the lavish hotel's two bars (beer from Rs 70) and four eateries: Caféchino café, La Kuchina Trattoria, the fountain-side Under the Mango Tree, and the grand Shahnama (meals Rs 300), where fish in piquant sauces is a speciality.

The **supermarket** (Map p683; ☎ 10am-10pm) off Bhadbhada Rd has a good range of items for DIY eating.

Shopping

Bhopal's two main shopping areas are New Market and the *chowk* (marketplace) off Hamidia Rd. While similar items can be found in both markets, prices are more reasonable in the atmospheric *chowk*. The labyrinthine al-

leys, weaving towards the Jama Masjid (p704), stock delicate gold and silver jewellery, fancifully woven saris, hand-embroidered appliqué skirts and *jari* (glittering embroidery, often including shards of mirror or glass) shoulder bags, a speciality of Bhopal.

Many shops carry MP handicrafts – mainly silk and cotton textiles, and clay, brass, wood and silver sculptures (prices Rs 50 to 2000).

Mrignayani (Map p683; 23 New Market Shopping Centre; ☎ 11am-2.30pm & 3.30-8pm Tue-Sun) This state-owned place offers stress-free shopping, though the fixed prices are higher than elsewhere.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Flights can also be booked at the MP Tourism head office (p683).

Indian Airlines (Map p683; ☎ 778434; Airlines House, Bhadbhada Rd; ☎ 10.30am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat) flies daily to Mumbai (US\$165, 7.15pm) via Indore (US\$80) and to Delhi (US\$155, 6.40pm).

Jet Airways (Map p683; ☎ 2760372, airport 2645676; 8 Ranjit Towers; ☎ 9.30am-7pm) also flies daily to Mumbai (US\$180, 8pm) and Delhi (US\$115, 11am), with an additional Delhi service via Indore (US\$90, 6.45pm) every day but Tuesday.

Air Deccan (☎ 2645676), at the airport, has daily budget flights to Delhi (9.05am or 10.40am and 7pm), going via Jabalpur (9.05am and 5pm) on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday.

BUS

From the **central bus stand** (Map p686; ☎ 4257602; Hamidia Rd) there are numerous daily buses to Raisen (Rs 21, one hour), Bhimbetka (Rs 31, one hour), Sanchi (Rs 22, 1½ hours), Vidisha (Rs 27, two hours), Indore (ordinary/deluxe Rs 97/135, five/four hours), Ujjain (Rs 103, five hours), Pachmarhi (Rs 90, seven hours, 6.15am,

MAJOR TRAINS FROM BHOPAL

Destination	Train No & name	Fare (Rs)	Duration (hr)	Departure
Delhi	2001 <i>Shatabdi</i>	980(a)	8¼	2.40pm (1)
Delhi	2723 <i>Andhra Pradesh Exp</i>	449/1085/1403	10½	10.40pm(1)
Indore	2920 <i>Malwa Exp</i>	313/703/854	6	7.50am
Jabalpur	8233 <i>Narmada Exp</i>	316/737/917	7	11.35pm
Mumbai	2138 <i>Punjab Mail Exp</i>	480/1172/1529	14½	5pm
Pipariya	2854 <i>Amkantak Exp</i>	291/601/707	3	3.45pm
Ujjain	2920 <i>Malwa Exp</i>	291/626/743	4	7.50am

a – chair car; 1 – via Jhansi, Gwalior & Agra

8.15am, 10.15am, 11.45am and 3.30pm) and Jabalpur (Rs 160, 10 hours).

MP Tourism's 18-seater runs from **Palash Residency** (Map p683; ☎ 2553066; TT Nagar) to Pachmarhi (Rs 103, six hours, 6.45am) and Indore (Rs 135, four hours, 7am, from the bus stand 7.30am; 1.30pm, from the bus stand 2.30pm); book ahead (Rs 15).

Getting Around

Minibuses for TT Nagar constantly depart from the corner of Hamidia Rd, while an autorickshaw costs about Rs 40. Autorickshaws often have unused meters; negotiating a fare should work out no more expensively. The airport is 16km from central Bhopal; expect to pay Rs 100/200 for an autorickshaw/taxi. MP Tourism (p683) can organise a car and driver from Rs 750 per day.

AROUND BHOPAL

Islamnagar

This fortified city 11km north of Bhopal was the first capital of Bhopal state, founded as Jagdishpur by the Rajputs before Dost Mohammed Khan occupied and renamed it in the early 18th century. The still-standing walls enclose two villages and remains including two palaces, **Chaman Mahal** and **Rani Mahal** (Indian/foreigner Rs 5/100, camera/video Rs 20/50; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat).

The 18th-century Chaman Mahal is a synthesis of traditional Indian and Islamic architecture with Bengali-influenced drooping eaves. The main attraction is the Mughal water garden with sporadically functional channels and fountains. There are also an interpretation centre, giving a fragmented view of local history, and a *hammam* (Turkish bath) with changing rooms and water troughs in the dark, cool interior.

Adjacent is the dusty 19th-century Rani Mahal with a sturdily colonnaded Diwan-i-Am. Outside stand eight massive iron treasure chests, presumably delivered by outsized porters from the nearby *hathi khana* (elephant stables).

Catch a tempo (Rs 6) up Beresia Rd (Map p686), though you will probably have to change, or take an autorickshaw (Rs 100).

Bhojpur

Raja Bhoj (1010-53), founder of Bhopal, constructed an estimated 400-sq-km lake in Bhojpur, 28km southeast of Bhopal. The lake was unfortunately destroyed by Hoshang

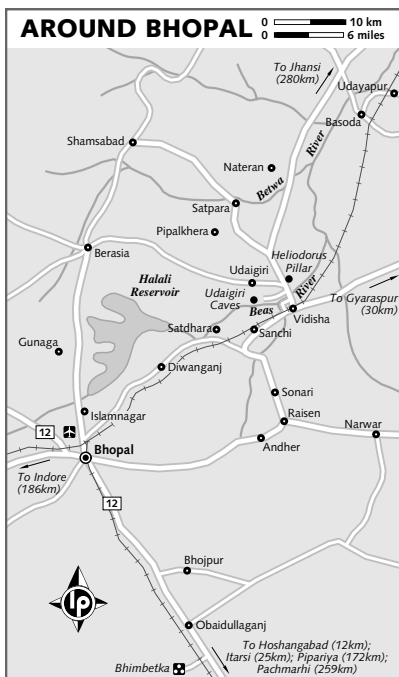
Shah, ruler of Mandu, in a pique in the early 15th century.

What did survive is the **Bhojeshwar Temple**, squatting on a small hill. For some reason the building was never finished and behind the temple are the remains of a ramp used to haul masonry. Sometimes called the Somnath of the north (see p745), the Shiva temple is unusual – an unrefined rectangle that houses an enormous 2.5m lingam. While there are some carvings, and presumably more were meant to follow, this temple lacks the finer details of its contemporaries. Fenced-off areas on nearby rocky slopes look to have been used as tracing boards, and lines still etched into the rock show grand future plans.

Take the Bhimbetka bus to the turn-off for Bhojpur (Rs 10), where tempos (Rs 7) ply the road to the temple.

Bhimbetka

Secreted in a forest of teak and sal in craggy cliffs, 46km south of Bhopal, are more than 600 **rock shelters** (Indian/foreigner Rs 2/10, vehicle Rs 10; ☎ dawn-dusk); almost half contain prehistoric paintings.



Thanks to their natural red and white pigments, the colours are remarkably well-preserved and, in certain caves, paintings of different eras adorn the same rock surface. A gamut of figures and scenes spill across the rocks: wild buffaloes (gaurs), rhinoceroses, bears and tigers, hunting scenes, initiation ceremonies, childbirth, communal dancing and drinking sessions, religious rites and burials.

The oldest paintings (Upper Palaeolithic) in white, often of huge animals, are probably up to 12,000 years old. Successive periods depict hunting tools, trade with the agricultural communities on the Malwa plains, and, still later, religious scenes involving tree gods. The latest are crude, geometric figures probably dating from the medieval period, when much of the artistry was lost.

The rock shelters are easy to find; 15 are accessible, signposted with a number (S1 to S15) and linked by a concrete path. A knowledgeable guide (agree on a fee beforehand) will point out the more obscure paintings and explain their significance. **Zoo Rock Shelter** (S4), famous for its variety of animal paintings, is one of the first you come to; **S15** features a huge red bison attacking a helpless stick figure. There are no facilities here, so bring water.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Ask your bus driver to drop you at the turning for Bhimbetka, about 6.5km southeast of Obaidullaganj. Follow the large blue sign in Hindi with a red arrow pointing '3.2' right, crossing the railway line for a 3km walk into hills. Alternatively, take an autorickshaw from Obaidullaganj.

On the return journey, flag down a bus on the main road, or pay your autorickshaw to wait. If you want to visit both Bhimbetka and Bhojpur, it's worth hiring a car (about Rs 850) from MP Tourism in Bhopal (see p683).

SANCHI

☎ 07482 / pop 6790

Rising from the plains, 46km northeast of Bhopal, is a rounded hill topped with some of India's oldest Buddhist structures.

In 262 BC, repentant of the horrors he had inflicted on Kalinga in present-day Orissa, the Mauryan emperor Ashoka (see the boxed text, p41) embraced Buddhism. As a penance he built the Great Stupa at Sanchi, near the birthplace of his wife. A domed edifice used to house religious relics, it was the first Bud-

dhist monument in the region and many other religious structures followed.

As Hinduism gradually reabsorbed Buddhism, the site decayed and was forgotten. In 1818 a British army officer rediscovered its treasures, leading to immense damage at the hands of amateur archaeologists and treasure hunters before a proper restoration took place between 1881 and 1919.

Although Sanchi can be visited from Bhopal, the crossroads village is a relaxing spot to spend the night. The stupas are best visited at dawn and at dusk, when the stone still glows with the heat of the day as the sun sinks behind the surrounding hills.

Orientation & Information

The Bhopal-Vidisha road intersects Monuments Rd, which leads from the train station to the hill with the stupas.

Canara Bank (☎ 266732; Monuments Rd; ☎ 10.30am-2.30pm Mon-Tue & Thu-Fri, 10.30am-12.30pm Sat) Changes travellers cheques and currency up to Rs 15,000.

Health centre (☎ 266724; Monuments Rd; consultation Rs 100; ☎ 8am-1pm & 5-6pm Mon-Sat)

Post office (Monuments Rd; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat)

Sanjeev Internet (per hr Rs 30; ☎ 8.30am-10.30pm) At the market.

Sights

The hilltop **stupas** (Indian/foreigner Rs 10/250, car Rs 10, museum Rs 5; ☎ dawn-dusk) are reached via a path and stone steps at the end of Monuments Rd. The **publication sale counter** (☎ 10am-5pm) sells guidebooks and postcards.

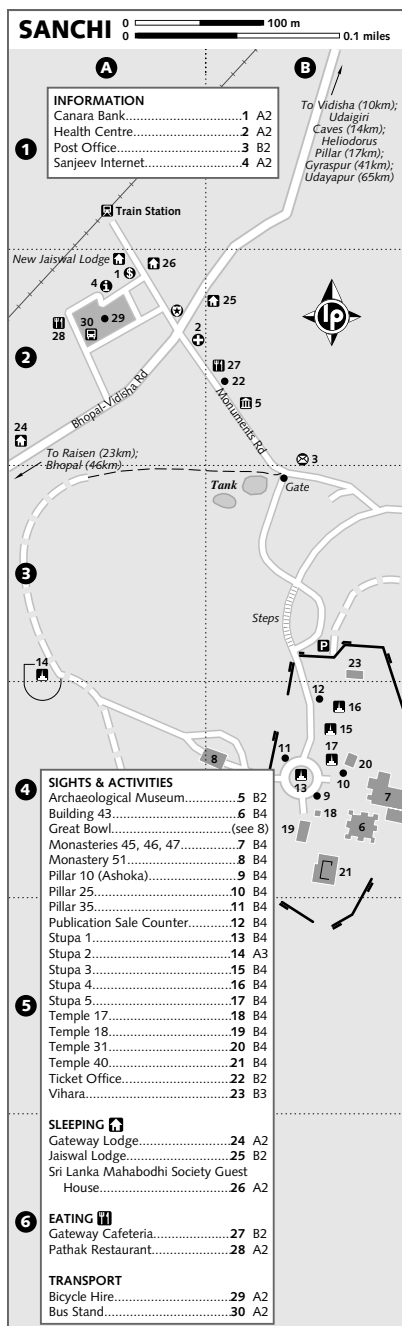
If you're going up to the stupas for sunrise, buy a ticket the day before. Remember that you should walk clockwise around all Buddhist monuments.

STUPA 1

Beautifully proportioned, the Great Stupa is the main structure on the hill. Originally constructed by Ashoka, it was later enlarged and the original brick stupa enclosed within a stone one. Presently it stands 16m high and 37m in diameter. A wall encircles the stupa. There are four entrances through magnificently carved *toranas* (gateways) that are the finest Buddhist works of art at Sanchi and possibly in India.

TORANAS

Four gateways were erected around 35 BC and had all completely fallen down at the



time of the stupa's restoration. Scenes carved onto the pillars and their triple architraves are mainly tales from the Jatakas, episodes from Buddha's various lives. At this stage in Buddhist art he was never represented directly – his presence was alluded to through symbols. The lotus stands for his birth, the bodhi tree his enlightenment, the wheel his teachings, and the footprint and throne his presence. The stupa itself also symbolises Buddha.

Northern Gateway

Topped by a broken wheel of law, this is the best preserved of the *toranas*. Scenes include a monkey offering a bowl of honey to Buddha, represented by a bodhi tree. Another panel depicts the Miracle of Sravasti – one of several miracles represented here – in which Buddha, again in the form of a bodhi tree, ascends a road into the air. Elephants support the architraves above the columns, while horses with riders and more elephants squeeze in between. Delicately carved *yakshis* (maidens) hang nonchalantly on each side.

Eastern Gateway

The breathtakingly carved figure of a *yakshi*, hanging from an architrave, is one of Sanchi's best-known images. One of the pillars, supported by elephants, features scenes from Buddha's entry to nirvana. Another shows Buddha's mother Maya's dream of an elephant standing on the moon, which she had when he was conceived. Across the front of the middle architrave is the Great Departure, when Buddha (a riderless horse) renounced the sensual life and set out to find enlightenment.

Southern Gateway

The back-to-back lions supporting the oldest gateway form the state emblem of India and can be seen on every banknote; they're an excellent example of the Greco-Buddhist art of that era. The gateway narrates Ashoka's life as a Buddha, with scenes of Buddha's birth and another representation of the Great Departure. Also featured is the Chhaddanta Jataka, in which Buddha took the form of a six-tusked elephant. One of his two wives became jealous and had the elephant hunted and killed. The sight of his tusks, sawn off by the hunter, was sufficient for the queen to die of remorse.

Western Gateway

Potbellied dwarfs support the architraves of this gateway, which has some of the site's most interesting scenes. The top architrave shows Buddha in seven different incarnations, manifested three times as a stupa and four times as a tree. The rear of one pillar shows Buddha resisting the Temptation of Mara, while demons flee and angels cheer. The Chhaddanta Jataka features again.

OTHER STUPAS

Lesser stupas cover the hill, some of them tiny votive ones less than 1m high. Ashoka built eight, but only three remain, including the Great Stupa. **Stupa 2** is halfway down the hill to the west. If you come from the town by the main route you can walk back down via Stupa 2. Instead of gateways, 'medallions' decorate the surrounding wall – naïve in design, but full of energy and imagination. Flowers, animals and people – some mythological – ring the stupa.

Stupa 3 is northeast of the main stupa and similar in design, though smaller. With a single, rather fine gateway, it may just postdate the completion of Stupa 1. It once contained relics of two important disciples of Buddha (see the boxed text, p663). They were moved to London in 1853 but returned in 1953 and are now kept in the modern *vihara* (resting place).

Now almost totally destroyed, the plain 2nd-century-BC **Stupa 4** stands behind Stupa 3. Between Stupas 1 and 3 is the small **Stupa 5**, unusual in that it once had an image of Buddha, now displayed in the museum.

PILLARS

Of the scattered remains of pillars, the most important is **Pillar 10**, erected by Ashoka and later broken by a local landowner. Two upper sections of this beautifully proportioned and executed shaft lie side by side under a shelter 20m away; the capital (pillar's top, usually sculpted) is in the museum (right). **Pillar 25**, dating from the Sunga period (2nd century BC) and the 5th-century-AD **Pillar 35** are not as fine as the earlier pillar.

TEMPLES

Temple 18 is a *chaitya* (prayer room or assembly hall) remarkably similar in style to classical Greek-columned buildings. It dates from around the 7th century AD, but traces of earlier wooden buildings have been discov-

ered beneath it. Nearby is the small **Temple 17**, also Greek-like. The large **Temple 40**, slightly southeast, in part dates back to the Ashokan period.

The rectangular **Temple 31** was built in the 6th or 7th century but reconstructed during the 10th or 11th century. It contains a well-executed image of Buddha, which may come from another temple as it doesn't exactly fit its pedestal.

MONASTERIES

The earliest monasteries were made of wood and are long gone. The usual plan is of a central courtyard surrounded by monastic cells. **Monasteries 45** and **47**, standing on the eastern ridge, date from the transition from Buddhism to Hinduism, with strong Hindu elements in their design. The former has two exceptional sitting Buddhas.

Behind **Monastery 51**, partway down the hill towards Stupa 2, is the **Great Bowl**, carved from a huge boulder, into which food and offerings were placed for distribution to the monks. The **vihara** (☎ 9am-5pm) was built to house the returned relics from Stupa 3. They can be viewed on the last Sunday of the month.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM

This **museum** (☎ 10am-5pm Sat-Thu) has a small collection of sculptures from the site. The most interesting pieces are the lion capital from the Ashoka pillar, a *yakshi* hanging from a mango tree, and beautifully serene Buddha figures in red sandstone – some of the earliest found anywhere.

Sleeping & Eating

Jaiswal Lodge (☎ 266610; Bhopal-Vidisha Rd; s/d Rs 100/200) Set to be renamed Krishna Lodge, the better of the two Jaiswal hotels (New Jaiswal Lodge is up near the train station) has simple rooftop rooms with sit-down toilets and bucket showers, and a basic restaurant. It's above the pharmacy.

Sri Lanka Mahabodhi Society Guest House (☎ 266699; Monuments Rd; r Rs 100-250, with AC & bath-room Rs 450; ☎) Visiting Buddhists stay here in cloistered rooms around a garden quadrangle – there's even a prayer room. The monks are friendly and it's a good choice if you don't mind basic rooms.

Gateway Lodge (☎ 266723; tl_san@sancharnet.in; Bhopal-Vidisha Rd; r with breakfast & air-cooler/AC Rs 890/1290; ☎) Southwest of town, this has the

edge on the competition in quality and '70s architecture. Rooms have bright bedspreads, patterned bathroom tiles and, in the bungalows, verandas overlooking the garden.

Pathak Restaurant (meals Rs 20; ☎ 10am-10pm) Among the small restaurants at the bus stand producing cheap, hearty vegetarian meals.

MP Tourism also runs **Gateway Cafeteria** (☎ 266743; Monuments Rd; meals Rs 70), which has two air-cooled bedrooms (singles/doubles Rs 490/590).

Getting There & Around

Frequent local buses connect Sanchi with Bhopal (Rs 22, 1½ hours) and Vidisha (Rs 5, 20 minutes). See also p687.

Train 8235 *Bhopal-Bilaspur Express* (sleeper Rs 271, 45 minutes) departs Bhopal at 8.10am, with the return service leaving Sanchi at 4.30pm. There are many passenger trains to Sanchi, and trains at 10am and 5.30pm in the opposite direction.

You can rent bicycles at the market for about Rs 5 per hour.

AROUND SANCHI

Within cycling distance of Sanchi are more Buddhist sites, although none match those at Sanchi. **Sonari**, 16km southeast of Sanchi, has eight stupas, one of them important because many of its carvings are still intact. At **Satdhara**, west of Sanchi on the banks of the Beas River, are another two stupas, one 30m in diameter. At **Andher**, 20km southeast of Satdhara, there are three small but well-preserved stupas, unearthed in 1851 following the discovery of Sanchi.

Further afield, **Gyraspur**, 41km northeast of Sanchi, is noted for two delicately carved temples dating from the 9th and 10th centuries. About 65km northeast of Sanchi, **Udayapur** has the large, red-sandstone **Neelkantheswara Temple**, thought to have been built in 1059. **Raisen**, 23km south of Sanchi, has a large, colourful hilltop **fort** built around 1200.

Vidisha

☎ 07592 / pop 125,460

Vidisha, 10km northeast of Sanchi in a fork of the Betwa and Bes Rivers, was a major commercial centre in the 5th and 6th centuries BC. Later, it was known as Besnagar during the Buddhist emperor Ashoka's reign, then passed through the hands of everyone from the Mughals to the Scindias.

The ruins of a 2nd-century BC **Brahmanical shrine** here show traces of lime mortar, possibly the earliest use of cement in India. There is also a sun-worshipping temple, **Bija Mandal**. Finds from local sites are displayed in the dusty **District Museum** (☎ 250592; Sagar-Vidisha Rd; Indian/foreigner Rs 2/20, camera Rs 20; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun). Muscling over you as you pay for your ticket is a 3m-high, 2nd-century BC stone statue of Kuber Yaksha, treasurer of the gods. Other ancient residents include an 11th-century serpent couple, a 13th-century Hanuman, and Kamdev, the sex god – the one with the busty maidens and the wine.

There are frequent buses and shared jeeps from Sanchi (both Rs 5, 20 minutes) or take an autorickshaw (Rs 60).

Udaigiri Caves

Cut into a sandstone hill, about 5km northwest of Vidisha, are some 20 **Gupta cave shrines** (☎ dawn-dusk) dating from the reign of Chandragupta II (382-401) according to an inscription. Most are Hindu but two are Jain (Caves 1 and 20) – unfortunately both are closed due to unsafe roofs. There may be an ASI caretaker on hand to show you around.

In Cave 4 is a lingam bearing Shiva's face complete with a third eye. Cave 5 has a superb image of Vishnu in his boar incarnation topped with a frieze of gods, who also flank the entrance to Cave 6. Lotus-ceilinged Cave 7 was cut out for the personal use of Chandragupta II. On the top of the hill are ruins of a 6th-century Gupta temple dedicated to the sun god.

To get there, take an autorickshaw from Vidisha (Rs 50) or straight from Sanchi (Rs 200 return). To reach the caves by bicycle from Sanchi, cycle towards Vidisha and turn left 1km after the river at an obvious intersection and stone traffic island/sign. After 2km turn right at a T-junction to another junction about 500m further along, and turn left. Take this road over the river and take the first left to the caves, another 3km.

Heliodorus Pillar

Instead of turning left for the Udaigiri Caves (see above) continue straight on for 3km to **Heliodorus Pillar** (Khamb Baba), erected in about 140 BC and dedicated to Vasudeva. An inscription says it was erected by a Greek ambassador, Heliodorus, from Taxila (now in Pakistan).

The pillar is worshipped by local fishermen. On full moon nights one is chained to the pillar, becomes possessed and is able to drive evil spirits from other locals. When someone has been exorcised, they drive a nail into the tamarind tree nearby, fixing to it a lime, a piece of coconut, a red thread, and supposedly the spirit. The large tree is bristling with old nails.

PIPARIYA

☎ 07576 / pop 4490

This small town is the road and rail junction for Pachmarhi, 54km up in the hills. The railway footbridge exits into the bus stand.

MP Tourism's two rooms near the bus stand at **Tourism Motel** (☎ 222299; tourpip@sancharnet.in; ₹ 390) have fans, TVs and bucket showers.

Jeeps go to Pachmarhi (back seat ₹ 40, front seat ₹ 150, two hours) at all hours. Ask your driver to break the journey at Denwa View lookout.

Alternately there are buses (₹ 35, two hours, 10am, 11am, 2.30pm and 7.30pm) and MP Tourism's 18-seater (₹ 43, two hours, 11.30am).

Train 2853 *Amarkantak Express* goes to Bhopal (₹ 291/601/707, 3½ hours, 7am) daily and No 1464 *Jabalpur–Veraval Express* (₹ 271/571/677, 4½ hours, 2.25pm) on Tuesday to Friday and Sunday. Train 1093 *Mahanagari Express* goes to Varanasi (₹ 431/1062/1383, 15 hours, 1.40pm) daily.

PACHMARHI

☎ 07578 / pop 11,370 / elev 1067m

Madhya Pradesh's hill station feels a long way from steamy central India. The mountain town is surrounded by waterfalls, cave temples, the forested ranges of the Satpura National Park and rock paintings dating back 10,000 years. Visitors flock here to attend mass religious meetings held by big-name gurus and to scale Chauragarh, or simply to go trekking in a cool climate.

Explorer Captain J Forsyth 'discovered' Pachmarhi as late as 1857 and set up the first Forestry Department at Bison Lodge in 1862. Always keen to move to a cool hill station, the British army set up regional headquarters here, starting an association with the military that remains today.

Orientation

The road from Pipariya passes the bus stand at the northwest end of the small town, which

has a bazaar and several hotels, before running southwest for about 2km to the seven-way junction called Jaistambha.

Sights and midrange accommodation are rather spread out, so hire a bicycle – it's pleasant riding.

Information

Bagri Internet Cafe (Patel Rd; per hr ₹ 40; ☎ 7am–11pm)

MP Tourism (☎ 252100; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Fri) Brochures, plus advice on accommodation and excursions. At the bus stand.

Post office (☎ 252050; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Sat)

State Bank of India (cnr main road & Patel Rd) MasterCard and Visa ATM.

Sights & Activities

Captain Forsyth named **Bison Lodge** (☎ 225130; Indian/foreigner ₹ 15/200; ☎ 8am–noon & 4–7pm Tue–Sun Apr–Oct, 9am–1pm & 3–7pm Tue–Sun Nov–Mar), Pachmarhi's first forest lodge, after a herd of bison he spotted here. It's now an interesting museum focusing on the history, flora and fauna of the Satpura region.

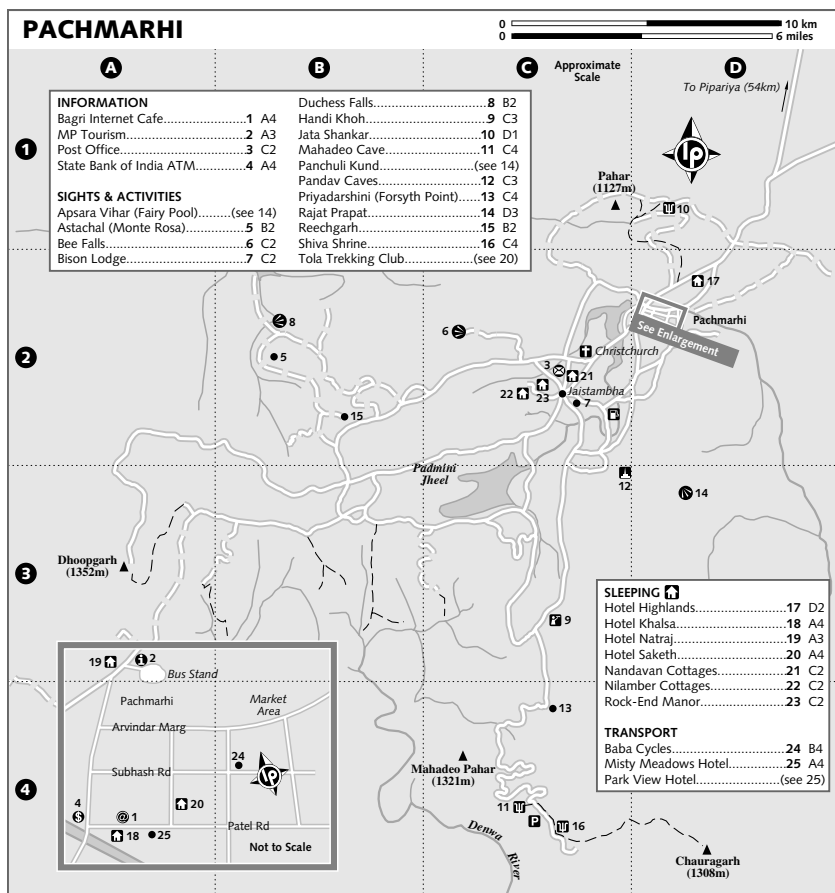
Most of Pachmarhi's sights are accessible by road and a short walk. More demanding hikes, such as those around **Astachal** (Monte Rosa) and **Duchess Falls** from the trailhead of **Reechgarh**, might require a guide.

Discuss hiking plans with helpful Vinay Sahu of **Tola Trekking Club** (☎ 252256; ☎ 9am–5pm), based at Hotel Saketh, off Patel Rd. His guides (₹ 200 per person per day) can take you deep into the highlands, with the option of camping or staying at an Adivasi village (₹ 1500 including food and transport).

MP Tourism's one-day **bus tour** (₹ 100; ☎ 9.30am) covers most of the following sights, while Tola Trekking Club offers a hike from Priyadarshini to Chauragarh, then down to Mahadeo Cave.

The Shiva shrine atop **Chauragarh** (1308m), Madhya Pradesh's third-highest peak, attracts tens of thousands of pilgrims during Shivaratri Mela (see the boxed text, p663). On the way there, stop at **Handi Koh**, also known as Suicide Point, to gawk down the 100m canyon into the dense forest. You'll spy Chauragarh in the distance from here and **Priyadarshini** (Forsyth Point).

About 3km beyond Priyadarshini the road ends at **Mahadeo Cave**, where a path 30m into the damp gloom reveals a lingam with attendant priest. This is the beginning of the



1365-step pilgrim trail to Chauragarh (five hours' return hike). A kilometre further on, another **Shiva shrine** is at the back of a terrifyingly narrow passage created by sticks holding open a fissure in the cliff.

Bee Falls (Indian/foreigner Rs 15/200, own petrol 4WD Rs 100, hired jeep Rs 200; ☎ 8am-7pm) are popular and accessible. Turn right south of Christchurch, then right again down a dirt road. You have the option of a 2km hike downhill or sharing a jeep. From the chai stalls at the bottom, several flights of steps lead to a lookout and the base of the falls.

Jata Shankar is a cave temple in a gorge about 2.5km along a good track that's signed just north of the town limits. The small Shiva shrine is hidden under a huge overhanging rock.

Pachmarhi's name derives from **Pandav Caves**. Legend has it that the Pandava brothers, of the Mahabharata, stayed in the five caves, some 2km southeast of Jaistambha, during their 13-year exile. The foundations of a brick Buddhist stupa have been excavated on top of the caves, which are believed to have been carved by Buddhists as early as the 4th century.

About 1km southeast of the caves, a 1km track leads from the car park to **Rajat Prapat** (Indian/foreigner Rs 15/200, own petrol 4WD Rs 100, hired jeep Rs 200; ☎ 8am-7pm), or Big Fall, where a waterfall cascades down a gully in a sheer cliff. In the forest nearby are **Panchuli Kund**, five descending rock pools leading to **Apsara Vihar** (Fairy Pool).

Sunset Point on **Dhoopgarh** (1352m), Madhya Pradesh's highest peak, is a great place to finish the day.

Vinay Sahu, of **Tola Trekking Club** (☎ 252256; ☹ 9am-5pm) was setting up rafting, parasailing, paragliding, rock-climbing and horse-riding trips at the time of research.

Sleeping & Eating

High seasons are from April to July and December/January, when places fill up and room rates rocket, especially during holidays and festivals. Hotel Saketh and Hotel Khalsa have the best restaurants.

BUDGET

Hotel Khalsa (☎ 252991; Patel Rd; r Rs 300) Portraits of gurus decorate this Sikh-run hotel. The professional managers make the most of the old rooms with battered furniture and toilets of varying quality. The restaurant (meals Rs 60), which has a riverside section overlooking two of the town's thoroughfares, serves Gujarati, Chinese and, of course, Punjabi dishes.

Hotel Natraj (☎ 252151; r Rs 300-450) Opposite the bus stand, this place is a little frayed but rooms are reasonable, with TVs, sit-down toilets and tiled floors. The Sai Baba-following management offers yoga classes.

Nandavan Cottages (☎ 252018; fax 252207; cottages Rs 450-500) A quiet place in a garden dotted with swings, behind the restaurant on Jaistambha and opposite the post office. The more expensive huts are smaller but newer and marginally better – and they look like flying saucers. If you're on a tour, you'll likely stop at the outdoor restaurant – it pays commission.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Hotel Saketh (☎ 252165; r Rs 150-800; ☹) There is a wide range of rooms in this friendly hotel on a quiet side street off Patel Rd, from budget classics to midrange options with AC and bath tub. The restaurant Raj Bhoj (meals Rs 50) produces Gujarati, Bengali Chinese and South Indian dishes, including dosa (lentil-flour pancakes) for breakfast.

Hotel Highlands (☎ 252099; hhmpdtc@dataone.in; Pipariya Rd; r Rs 590) MP Tourism's 40 rooms in tiled, colonial-style bungalows in flowery gardens are good value, with comfortable furniture and even little dressing rooms and backyards.

Nilamber Cottages (☎ 252039; d Rs 809) Above Rock-End Manor, Nilamber's six air-cooled cottages have cable TV and hot water. They're

uninspiring but have great views across the hills from their verandas.

Rock-End Manor (☎ 252079; mptremph@sancharnet.in; r with AC Rs 2990; ☹) Pachmarhi's top hotel, another MP Tourism enterprise, was used by the local Maharaja and later the Indian army. There is still a distinguished air to the high ceilings, dressing rooms, large bathrooms, and verandas overlooking the hilltop grounds.

Getting There & Away

There are frequent services to Bhopal (Rs 103, six hours, 7am, 8am, 9am, 1.30pm, 3pm, 3.30pm and 6.30pm) via Pipariya (Rs 30, two hours) and one to Indore (Rs 197, 12 hours, 6.30pm). MP Tourism's 18-seater to Bhopal (Rs 103, six hours, 3.30pm) also goes via Pipariya (Rs 43, two hours) – book ahead (Rs 15).

Getting Around

A place in a shared jeep costs about Rs 150 for a half-day trip. **Baba Cycles** (Subhash Rd; ☹ 9.15am-9pm) hires out bikes (per 24 hours Rs 30) and **Misty Meadows Hotel** (☎ 252136; Patel Rd) rents out motorcycles (per hour/day Rs 50/350), as does nearby **Park View Hotel** (☎ 252855; Patel Rd).

WESTERN MADHYA PRADESH

UJJAIN

☎ 0734 / pop 429,930

Ujjain initially seems like an outpost of Indore – a nondescript city where sadhus (spiritual men) squatting on the pavement are occasional flashes of colour. But sit at a chai stand on the ghats at sunset, alongside fellow customers clapping along with the music drifting across the water, and it becomes clear what has drawn the sadhus. An energy undeniably pulses through the temples – perhaps because of their Hindu significance or perhaps because the Tropic of Cancer runs through Ujjain.

The holy city is one of the sites of the Kumbh Mela (see the boxed text, p1136), during which millions bathe in the Shipra River. It takes place here every 12 years – book now to get a room during the 2016 event.

History

On an ancient trade route, Ujjain has a distinguished history with origins lost in time. As Avantika, it was an important city under

Ashoka's father; later Chandragupta II (AD 380–414) chose to rule from here rather than his capital, Pataliputra.

With the passing of the Guptas and the rise of the Parmaras, Ujjain became the centre of struggle for Malwa, before eventually passing into the hands of the Mandu sultans.

Following the demise of the Mughals, Maharaja Jai Singh (of Jaipur fame) became Governor of Malwa, building the observatory and several new temples. With his passing, Ujjain experienced more turmoil under the Marathas, until the Scindias finally took it in 1750. When they moved their capital to Gwalior in 1810, Ujjain's prominence declined rapidly.

Orientation

The train line divides the city: the old section, including most of the temples and ghats, is to the northwest; the new section is to the southeast, centred around the wedding-cake clock tower. Budget hotels line Subhash Rd, within walking distance of the train and bus stations. Indore is the closest place to change money (see p698).

Information

Cyber Dhoom (LM Complex; per hr Rs 8; ☎ 10am–10pm)

MP Tourism (☎ 10am–5pm) Tourist information and MP Tourism hotel bookings; it's at the train station.

Post office (☎ 222542; Clock Tower; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, 9am–2pm Sat)

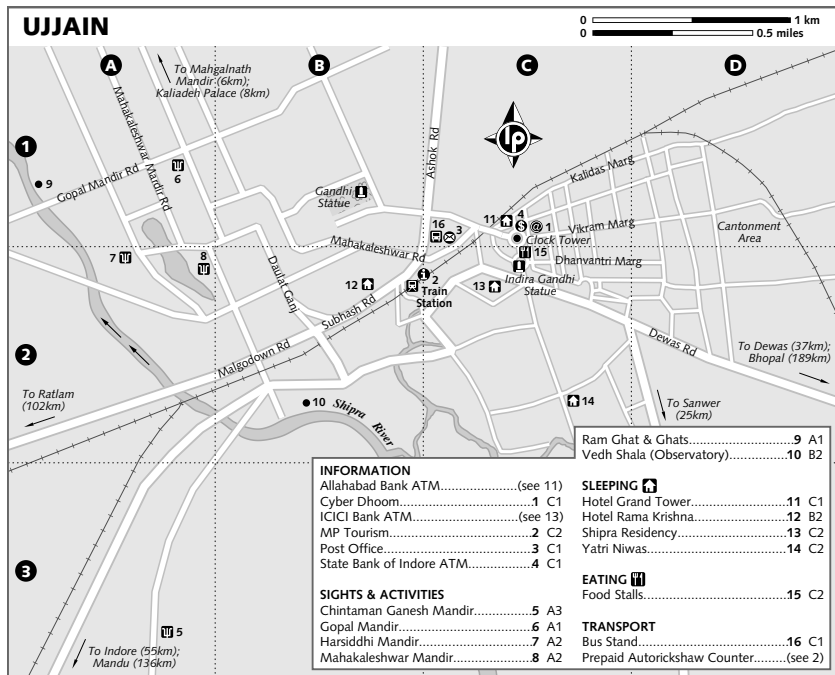
State Bank of Indore Near the Clock Tower. Has a MasterCard and Visa ATM. There are also ATMs at the Allahabad Bank.

Sights

TEMPLES

Mahakaleshwar Mandir

While not the most stunning temple, tagging along behind a conga-line through the underground chambers can be magical. At other times, the marble walkways are a peaceful preamble to the subterranean chamber containing one of India's 12 *jyoti linga* – naturally occurring lingam believed to derive currents of *shakti* (creative energies) from within themselves rather than being ritually invested with *mantra-shakti* by priests. The temple was destroyed by Altamish in 1235 and restored by the Scindias in the 19th century. You may be asked to give a donation, but it's not compulsory.



Harsiddhi Mandir

Built during the Maratha period, this temple enshrines a famous image of goddess Annapurna. At the entrance, two blackened stone towers bristling with lamps are a special feature of Maratha art. They add to the spectacle of Navratri (Dussehra) in September/October when filled with oil and ignited.

Gopal Mandir

The Scindias built this magnificent, marble-spired example of Maratha architecture in the 19th century. Muslim pillagers originally stole the sanctum's silver-plated doors from Somnath Temple in Gujarat (p745) and installed them in Ghazni, Afghanistan. Mohammed Shah Abdali later took them to Lahore (in present-day Pakistan), before Mahadji Scindia brought them back here.

Chintaman Ganesh Mandir

This temple is believed to be of considerable antiquity – the assembly hall's artistically carved pillars date to the Parmara period. Worshippers flock here to pray to the deity, whose name means 'assurer of freedom from worldly anxieties'.

Mangalnath Mandir

A holy banyan tree, supposedly planted by Parvati, stands near this Shiva temple where the Shipra and Khilchipur Rivers meet. The Mughals cut and barricaded the tree, but it soon sprang back to life. Pilgrims tie threads around its limbs and make wishes, including for successful pregnancies for childless wives.

GHATS

The best times to visit the ghats including **Ram Ghat**, the largest, are dawn and dusk when the devout chime cymbals and twirl fire at the water's edge.

VEDH SHALA (OBSERVATORY)

Ujjain has been India's Greenwich since the 4th century BC and this **observatory** (Jantar Mantar; admission Rs 2; ☞ dawn-dusk) was built by Maharaja Jai Singh in about 1730. He also built observatories in Jaipur, Delhi, Varanasi and Mathura, but Ujjain's is the only one still in use. Among the instruments are a small planetarium and a telescope used to determine the locations of heavenly bodies for astrological divinations. Ujjain is the first meridian of longitude for Hindu

geographers, and the Tropic of Cancer passes through here.

KALIADEH PALACE

The Mandu sultans built this island **water palace** in 1458 on the site of a sun temple in the Shipra River. Nasir-ud-din added the tanks, through which river water is diverted to stir up cooling breezes – he liked to purge himself with mercury, which raises the temperature. The central dome is a good example of Persian architecture. The palace gradually fell to ruins following the downfall of Mandu, and was restored by the Scindias in 1920 before sinking into disrepair again.

Sleeping & Eating

The cheap hotels on Subhash Rd fill up at festival time, so book ahead.

Hotel Rama Krishna (☎ 2553017; Subhash Rd; s/d Rs 240/330, with AC Rs 540/660; ☞) The rooms with TV and sit-down toilet are grubby and mosquitoes could be a problem, but the accommodating management will provide a coil. Meals Rs 40.

Yatri Niwas (☎ 2511398; yatrinivas@sancharnet.in; dm Rs 90, r Rs 690) MP Tourism's budget hotel has four air-cooled doubles and 58 beds in dorms with shared bathrooms and squat toilets. Its inconvenient location is at least quiet.

Shipra Residency (☎ 2551495; mptujjishpra@sancharnet.in; s/d Rs 490/590, with AC from Rs 990/1090; ☞) MP Tourism has done it again. The cool-coloured rooms are the best in their price bracket, prices include breakfast in the reasonable restaurant (other meals Rs 50), and the bar is the perfect place to unwind after the temples.

Hotel Grand Tower (☎ 2553699; 1 Vikram Marg; s/d from Rs 500/600; ☞) With their light wood furnishings, the 15 modern rooms have poky bathrooms but are better value than hotels near the train station. The vegetarian restaurant (meals Rs 50) serves good Kashmiri, Punjabi and Chinese food.

Food stalls at the Clock Tower sell ice creams, snacks and juices.

Getting There & Away

There are frequent buses to Indore (Rs 25, two hours) and one to Bhopal (Rs 97, four hours, 3pm) and to Kota, Rajasthan (Rs 120, 12 hours, 6.30pm).

Getting Around

Tempos chug out to the sites from the centre. Alternatively, hire a rickshaw at the prepaid

MAJOR TRAINS FROM UJJAIN

Destination	Train No & name	Fare (Rs)	Duration (hr)	Departure
Delhi	2919 <i>Malwa Exp</i>	488/1196/1563	16½	3.40pm
Jaipur	9775 <i>Mysore-Jaipur Exp</i>	380/918/1175	8½	9.50pm(1)
Jaipur	2967/2969 <i>Chennai-Jaipur Exp</i>	400/948/1205	8½	9.40pm(2)
Jaipur	8473 <i>Puri-Jodhpur Exp</i>	380/918/1175	9	9.50pm(3)
Mumbai	2962 <i>Avantika Exp</i>	459/1114/1444	13½	5.30pm
Varanasi	9167 <i>Sabarmati Exp</i>	515/1723(A)	29	6.10am(4)

A – sleeper/2AC; 1 – Fri & Sun; 2 – Mon, Wed, Sat; 3 – Thu; 4 – Wed, Fri, Sun

counter at the train station – Rs 100 to tour the three central temples – or take a more-romantic tonga (horse-drawn carriage).

INDORE

☎ 0731 / pop 1,64 million

Indore is Madhya Pradesh's business powerhouse – nearby Pithampur is known as the Detroit of India for its car factories. Check your emails, and perhaps imagine the days when the city reached its cultural peak under the Holkar dynasty, before fleeing the traffic, flyovers and crooked smiles.

Orientation

The railway divides Indore, with most sights to the west and facilities to the east – largely around the Nehru and Gandhi statues, which are linked by thoroughfare RN Tagore Rd.

Information**INTERNET ACCESS**

Rimzim (Silver Mall; per hr Rs 10; ☎ 8am-midnight)

LEFT LUGGAGE

Sarwate bus stand (per piece/day Rs 10; ☎ 24hr)

MEDICAL SERVICES

MY Hospital (☎ 2527788; MY Hospital Rd)

Raj Medical (Tuko Ganj; ☎ 10am-10pm) Pharmacy.

MONEY

State Bank of India (☎ 2703548; AB Rd;

☎ 10.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-2.30pm Sat)

Changes travellers cheques and currency, and has an ATM.

State Bank of Indore ATM Takes Visa and MasterCard; at Mrignayani and the airport.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Lazor Color Lab (7 Mahatma Gandhi (MG) Rd;

☎ 10am-7pm) Film, processing and printing.

POST

Main post office (☎ 2700023; AB Rd; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun)

TOURIST INFORMATION

MP Tourism (☎ 2528653; mptourismind@airtelbroad

band.in; Jhabua Tower, RN Tagore Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm

Mon-Sat, closed 2nd & 3rd Sat of month) Tourist information, plus MP Tourism hotel and car booking.

Dangers & Annoyances

Some rickshaw drivers aggressively demand more money at the end of a journey – clearly agree on a fee before setting off. If you are using the meter and he turns it off, ask him to stop so you can resolve the matter.

Sights

Built between 1886 and 1921, **Lal Bagh Palace** (☎ 2473264; Indian/foreigner Rs 5/100, camera/video Rs 10/50; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) is the finest building left by the Holkar dynasty. Replicas of the Buckingham Palace gates creak at the entrance to the 28-hectare garden, where there is a statue of Queen Victoria. The palace is dominated by European styles, with baroque and rococo dining rooms, an English library with leather armchairs, a Renaissance sitting room with ripped sofas, and a Palladian queen's bedroom.

The **Central Museum** (☎ 2700374; AB Rd; Indian/foreigner Rs 5/30, camera/video Rs 20/50; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun), another Holkar building, has one of Madhya Pradesh's best collections of medieval and premedieval Hindu sculptures, along with tools, weaponry and copper-engraved land titles. Skirmishes took place here during the Indian Uprising – the well in the garden was poisoned during the struggle.

The Gothic **Gandhi Hall** (Town Hall), built in 1904 and originally called King Edward's Hall, stands incongruously next to MG Rd like a ghost of the Independence era.

Tours

MP Tourism (opposite) offers one-day **bus trips** (incl food, entry fees & guide Rs 325) to Maheshwar and Omkareshwar (Monday and Tuesday), Ujjain (Wednesday and Thursday) and Mandu (Saturday and Sunday), leaving **Tourist Bungalow** (☎ 2521818; tbindore@touchtelindia.net; RN Tagore Rd) at 8.30am.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Neelam (☎ 2466001; 33/2 Patel Bridge Corner; s/d from Rs 200/275, with AC Rs 375/475; 🏠) The friendliest of the budget hotels vying for trade between the Sarwate bus stand and train station, Hotel Surya's sister operation has basic budget rooms popular with travelling salesmen. The doubles are pleasanter than the singles and can be had at single-occupancy rates.

Tourist Bungalow (☎ 2521818; tbindore@touchtelindia.net; RN Tagore Rd; s/d Rs 490/590, with AC Rs 790/890; 🏠) MP Tourism's six rooms are decrepit but spacious and quiet, hidden from the road by another building.

Hotel Surya (☎ 2517701; www.suryaindore.com; Surya Circle; s/d from Rs 700/900; 🏠) The 50 air-cooled and AC rooms are not as grand as the reception suggests,

but it's worth staying here for the bar-restaurant (meals Rs 100) – one of the best in town.

Hotel Planet (☎ 2520808; www.presidenthotels.com; 3 RN Tagore Rd; s/d from Rs 2500/3000; 🏠) Suitelike rooms, which have hosted the English cricket team, are set around an atrium with glass lifts, a 24-hour café and an excellent restaurant.

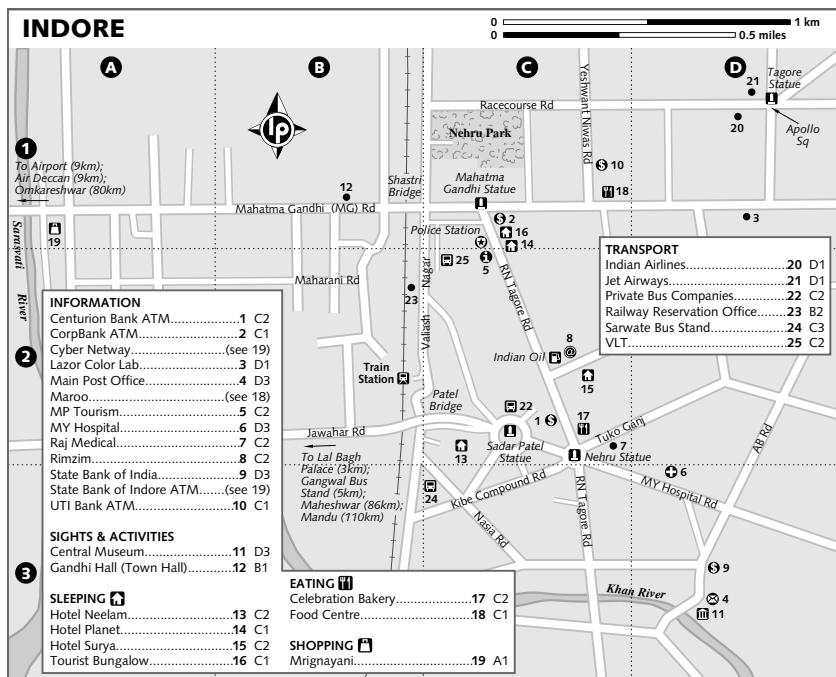
Food Centre (City Centre Shopping Complex; meals Rs 20-30; 🍴) A busy cafeteria serving tasty South Indian food.

Celebration Bakery (Hotel Shreemaya, Tuko Ganj; snacks Rs 20-70) Down a flight of stairs, this AC bakery is the place for Indore's affluent youth to be seen, pigging out on pizzas, burgers, cookies and all manner of dairy treats. Upstairs, the champagne-coloured hotel restaurant (meals Rs 100) is reasonable and better than Woodlands in nearby Hotel President.

The best place for cheap eats is around Sarwate bus stand.

Shopping

Mrignayani (165 MG Rd; 🕒 11am-1.30pm & 2.30-8pm Mon-Sat) The government shop takes Visa and MasterCard, but the fixed prices are higher than elsewhere. Its two floors are crammed



MAJOR TRAINS FROM INDORE

Destination	Train No & name	Fare (Rs)	Duration (hr)	Departure
Bhopal	9323 <i>Intercity Exp</i>	409(a)	3¾	7.15am
New Delhi	2919 <i>Malwa Exp</i>	505/1243/1630	18	2pm
Howrah	9305 <i>Shipra Exp</i>	615/1579/2129	31½	11pm(1)
Mumbai	2962 <i>Avantika Exp</i>	475/1161/1512	15	3.50pm

a – chair car; 1 – Tue, Thu, Sun

with handicrafts from across the state including leather toy animals, an Indore speciality.

Getting There & Away**AIR**

Indian Airlines (☎ 2431595; Abhay Prashal, Dr RS Bandari Marg; ☎ 10am-1.15pm & 2.15-5pm) flies daily to Delhi (US\$120, 7.30am) via Bhopal (US\$65) and to Mumbai (US\$90, 8.30pm). There are additional Wednesday, Friday and Sunday services to Delhi (9.05pm) and Mumbai (5.35pm).

Jet Airways (☎ 2544591; Vidhyarati Complex, Racecourse Rd; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat) flies to Delhi (US\$140, 9.45am and 8pm), via Bhopal (US\$90) in the morning, and to Mumbai (US\$120, 8am and 8.45pm).

Air Deccan (☎ 2620047; ☎ 11am-6pm), based at the airport, has a daily budget flight to Delhi (5.05pm) via Gwalior; **Air Sahara** (☎ 2432281; B-6 Industry House, 16 AB Rd) serves Delhi (10.45am and 8.10pm).

BUS

Frequent buses from **Sarwate bus stand** (☎ 2465688) serve Omkareshwar (Rs 40, two hours), direct or via Barwaha, Ujjain (Rs 30, two hours); and Bhopal (Rs 97, five hours). One overnight bus goes to Aurangabad (Rs 255, 13 hours, 9pm) and Pachmarhi (Rs 197, 12 hours, 9.30pm).

For Mandu, catch a bus from **Gangwal bus stand** (☎ 2380688; Jawahar Rd) to Dhar (Rs 34, 1¾ hours, frequent), from where buses head to Mandu (Rs 20, two hours, frequent).

Among the private bus operators on the service road parallel to Valiash Nagar and at Sadar Patel Statue, **VLT** (☎ 2512791) runs buses to Nagpur (Rs 350, 13 hours, 6.30pm) for Pench Tiger Reserve, Udaipur (Rs 200, 11 hours, 8pm), Mumbai and Pune (both Rs 350, 14 hours, 6.30pm), Jodhpur (Rs 330, 16 hours, 3.30pm), Gwalior (Rs 200, 12 hours, 9pm) and Aurangabad (Rs 250, 10 hours, 8.30pm). Sleeper berths cost Rs 100 more.

MP Tourism's 18-seater goes to Bhopal (Rs 135, four hours, 8.30am and 3.30pm) and back – book ahead (Rs 15; p687).

CAR

An alternative to the slow public transport to Mandu, Omkareshwar and Maheshwar is a taxi or hired car. MP Tourism charges from Rs 50 per hour of driving and Rs 250 for a night halt – you may get a better price outside the bus or train station.

TRAIN

There's a **train reservation office** (☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun) 300m north of the train station.

Getting Around

The airport is 9km from the city; autorickshaws charge Rs 80 and taxis Rs 200. Autorickshaw journeys around Indore cost about Rs 20, and drivers generally use their meters. Tempos and new city buses ply the major routes.

**AROUND INDORE
Omkareshwar**

☎ 07280

A regular mini Varanasi, Omkareshwar is an Om-shaped island that has long attracted sadhus in droves but is only beginning to show up on travellers' itineraries. When the sadhus aren't sleeping off their pilgrimages in the island's warren of lanes, among colourful stalls selling souvenir linga, they attend **Shri Omkar Mandhata**. This cave-like temple, which houses the only shapeless *jyothi lingam* (p696), is one of many Hindu and Jain monuments on the island.

You can walk 8km round the island or up the 370 steps to the ruined **Gaudi Somnath Temple**, from where you can descend the hill to the northern tip of the island, where sadhus bathe in the confluence of the holy Narmada and Keveri Rivers.

ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

Most activity takes place on the 500m of main drag Mamaleshwar Rd between the bus stand and main square Getti Chowk, from where the old bridge crosses to the island. South of the old bridge are the ghats, where you can cross the river on boats (Rs 5), and the new bridge and controversial dam (p89).

Crowds gather for *puja* (prayer) performed in the temple three times a day. Initiates may ask you to give a financial token, but remember this is strictly voluntary.

Satir STD (Mamaleshwar Rd; per hr Rs 60; ☎ 8am-10pm) is one of two highly temperamental internet cafés. The **State Bank of Indore ATM** (Mamaleshwar Rd) accepts Visa and MasterCard.

SLEEPING & EATING

Manu Guest House (s/d Rs 100/120) On the island, this is a good representative of Omkareshwar's many *dharamsalas* (basic accommodation for pilgrims).

Ganesh Guest House (☎ 271370; r Rs 100-150) Lost up a maze of lanes off Mamaleshwar Rd, friendly Ganesh has spotless budget rooms. Its shaded garden restaurant overlooking the ghats is among Omkareshwar's best eateries.

Gita Shri Guest House (☎ 271560; r Rs 150-300, with AC Rs 600; 🚿) The 14 rooms are clean enough, with squat toilets and bucket showers, and the friendly management plans to open a rooftop restaurant. It's off Mamaleshwar Rd.

Tourist Bungalow (☎ 271455; tbomkareshwar@sancharnet.in; dm Rs 85, r with breakfast Rs 680, with air-cooler Rs 1025, with AC Rs 1370-1830; 🚿) Reached by road from the bus station or by lanes from the market, MP Tourism's hilltop hotel is out of the Omkareshwar aura but is a pleasant, breezy retreat.

When we visited, a Spanish resident of Omkareshwar was setting up Narmada Café, off Mamaleshwar Rd, promising to serve everything from Indian grub to pizza and quality coffee. Vikas, at the bus stand, and Om Shiva, off Getti Chowk, are the best of many vegetarian *dhabas*.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Regular buses serve Indore (Rs 40, two hours, 8am to 5pm) and Maheshwar (Rs 40, two hours, 7.30am to 3.30pm); alternatively, take a tempo to Barwaha (Rs 12, 45 minutes) and change there.

Maheshwar

☎ 07283

Maheshwar has long held spiritual significance – it's mentioned in the Mahabharata and Ramayana (p66) under its old name, Mahishmati, and still draws sadhus and *yatris* (pilgrims) to its ancient ghats and temples on the holy Narmada River. The town enjoyed a golden age in the late 18th century under Holkar queen Ahilyabai, who built the towering fort and many other monuments.

SIGHTS

Its battlements, buttresses and balconies overlooking the Narmada, the **fort** (admission free; ☎ 7am-6.30pm) encloses several tiered **temples** within its 1.5km circumference. Central to the fort is the Maheshwar Palace and within the main courtyard, among a collection of rusty matchlocks and dusty palanquins, is a glass-cased statue of Ahilyabai, treated with the reverence of a shrine. Nearby is a Shiva Temple with a golden lingam – the starting point for palanquin processions on her birthday (see the boxed text, p663) and Dussehra. Ahilyabai gave over her kingdom to Shiva and her descendants have all ruled in his name.

From the ramparts there's a view of boats and incense smoke drifting across the water to the **Shiva Temple** in the middle of the river. Descending to the dhobis (clothes washers) at the **ghats**, you pass two stone temples. The one on the right, guarded by stone Holkar sentries and a frieze of elephants, houses more images of Ahilyabai and two candle towers, lit during festivals.

Before the temples a small doorway announces the NGO **Rehwa Society** (☎ 273203; www.rehwasociety.org; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 2.30-5.30pm), a craft cooperative where profits are ploughed back into the education, housing and welfare of the weavers. Maheshwar saris are famous for their unique weave and complex patterns; you can watch the weavers at work and buy shawls, saris, scarves and fabrics (Rs 500 to 5000) made using silk, cotton and wool.

SLEEPING & EATING

Akash Deep (Fort Rd; r Rs 150) Owned by a comedic Indian family, these nine basic rooms with squat toilets and bucket showers include three on the roof with fort views. Check-out time is 10am.

Labboo's Café (☎ 273329; r Rs 700) The four clean, simple rooms flanking the main fort

gate are small but there are views across town from the battlements. The management organises boat rides and the café (meals Rs 70), set in a shady courtyard, serves snacks and continental dishes.

Narmada Retreat (☎ 273455; mptmaheshwar@sancharnet.in; r with breakfast Rs 690, family r Rs 890, r with AC Rs 990-1490; 🍴) Located 1km out of town on the banks of the Narmada, MP Tourism's cottages are tastefully decorated with local prints and terracotta paintwork. The restaurant (meals Rs 100) is the perfect place to see in the sunset.

Ahilya Fort (☎ 273329, Delhi 011-41551575; www.ahilyafort.com; r per person with full board US\$120-300; 🍴 📺) This heritage hotel at the fort is owned by a descendent of Ahilyabai and its turquoise swimming pool, library and gardens below the battlements have a quietly regal atmosphere. The rooms are beautifully understated – exposed beams, terracotta pots, antique furniture and scatter cushions abound.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are regular buses to Indore (Rs 45, four hours) – direct or via Dhamnod – and Omkareshwar (Rs 35, two hours). For Mandu, see p705.

MANDU

☎ 07292 / pop 8550 / elev 634m

Mandu is home to India's finest examples of Afghan architecture, clinging to the edges of a ravine-riddled 20-sq-km plateau overlooking the hazy plains. With monuments on every corner – from Rupmati's Pavilion, scene of India's *Romeo and Juliet*, to obscure ruins such as the wet nurse's tomb, and of course the wet nurse's sister's tomb – the mountain village has a 'lost world' atmosphere.

History

Mandu was founded as a fortress retreat in the 10th century by Raja Bhoj and conquered by the Muslim rulers of Delhi in 1304. When the Mughals captured Delhi in 1401, the Afghan Dilawar Khan, governor of Malwa, set up his own little kingdom and Mandu's golden age began.

Although Dilawar Khan established Mandu as an independent kingdom, it was his son, Hoshang Shah, who shifted the capital from Dhar to Mandu and raised it to its greatest splendour. Hoshang's son Mohammed ruled for just one year before being poisoned by

the militaristic Mohammed Khalji, who then ruled for 33 years.

Ghiyas-ud-din succeeded Mohammed in 1469 and spent the following 31 years making his father turn in his grave, devoting himself to women and song (but not wine). He was poisoned, aged 80, by his son, Nasir-ud-din.

In 1526, Bahadur Shah of Gujarat conquered Mandu, only to be ousted in 1534 by the Mughal Humayun, who in turn lost the kingdom to Mallu Khan, an officer of the Khalji dynasty. Ten more years of feuds and invasions saw Baz Bahadur eventually emerge in the top spot, but in 1561 he fled Mandu rather than face Akbar's advancing troops.

After Akbar added Mandu to the Mughal empire, it kept a considerable degree of independence, until taken by the Marathas in 1732. The capital of Malwa was then shifted back to Dhar, and the slide in Mandu's fortunes that had begun with the absconding of Baz Bahadur became a plummet.

Orientation & Information

The Royal Enclave, the most impressive of the three main groups of monuments, stands northwest of the bus stand, near Delhi Gate, the main entrance to the fort. Most activity takes place along Main Rd between Shivani Restaurant and the post office, particularly around the bus stand, where you'll also find the Village Group. The Rewa Kund group is 4km south of the village.

ASI's excellent guidebook *Mandu* (Rs 20) is available at the Royal Enclave and guides can be hired from Rs 50 per hour. You may be able to change money at Shivani Restaurant (p705).

Post office (☎ 263222; Main Rd; 📧 9am-5pm)

Vinayak Internet (Main Rd; per hr Rs 100; 📧 8am-10pm) The slow connection makes this useful only for emergencies.

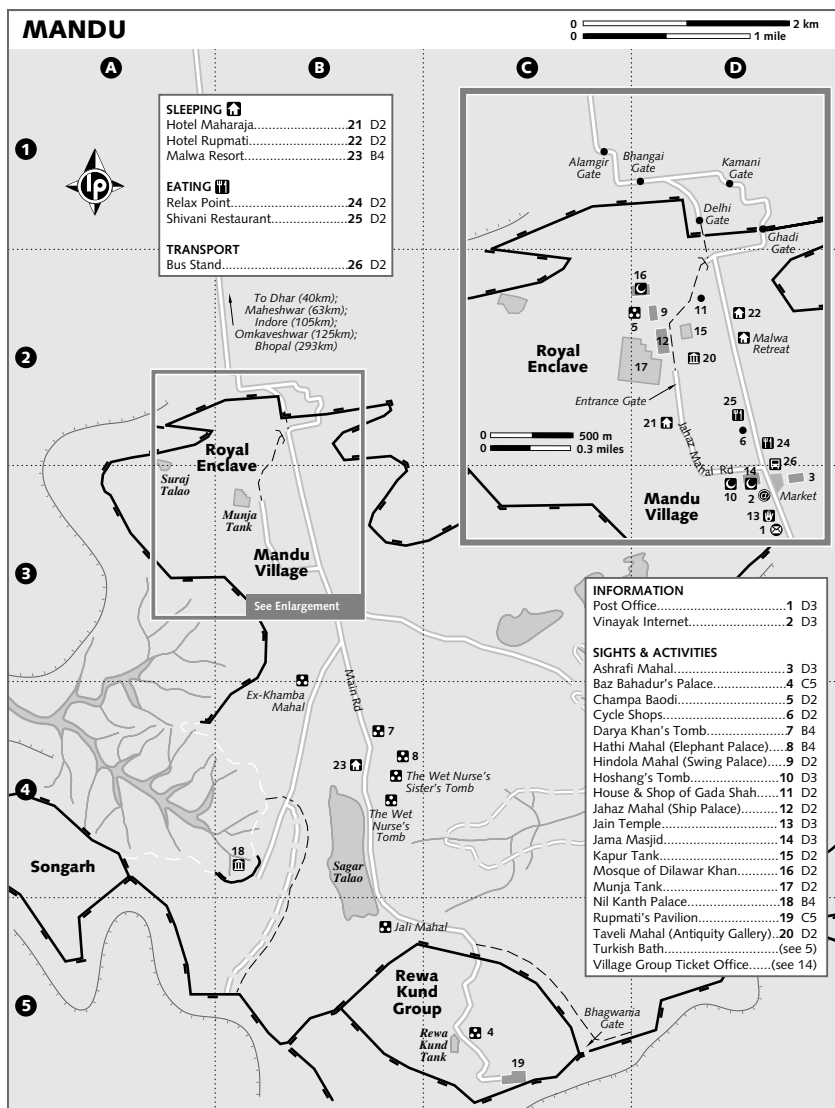
Sights

ROYAL ENCLAVE

These **ruins** (Indian/foreigner Rs 5/100, video Rs 25; 🌅 dawn-dusk Sat-Thu) are the most visited in Mandu.

Jahaz Mahal

Also called the Ship Palace, this is the most famous building in Mandu. Built on a narrow strip of land between Munja and Kapur Tanks, with a small upper storey like a ship's bridge, it's far longer (120m) than it is wide (15m). Ghiyas-ud-din constructed its lookouts, scal-



loped arches, airy rooms and beautiful pools for 'grand entertainment' (in the words of one visitor) with his reputed harem of 15,000 maidens.

Taveli Mahal

These stables were converted into a guest-house and now house the ASI's **Antiquity Gallery**

(🕒 9am-5pm Sat-Thu), which features artefacts found here including stone slabs with Quranic text dating back to the 15th century.

Hindola Mahal

Just north of Ghiyas' stately pleasure dome is **Hindola Mahal**, or Swing Palace, so called because the slope of the walls is supposed

to create the impression that they are swaying. The ramps are said to have been built to enable the royal ladies to ascend on ponies, palanquins or even elephants.

House & Shop of Gada Shah

The house is within the enclave but the shop is outside on the road to Delhi Gate. As the buildings' size and internal workmanship suggest, their owner was more than a shopkeeper. His name, which means 'beggar master', is thought to identify him as Rajput chief Medini Ray, a powerful minion of the sultans. The 'shop' was a warehouse for saffron and musk, imported and sold at a handsome profit when there were enough wealthy people to shop here.

Mosque of Dilawar Khan

Built by Dilawar Khan in 1405, this mosque is Mandu's earliest Islamic building. Typically for this era, there are many Hindu elements to the architecture, notably the pillars and ceilings inside.

Turkish Bath & Champa Baodi

Champa Baodi, so called because its water supposedly smelt as sweet as the champak flower, is a step-well surrounded by subterranean vaulted chambers cooled by Munja Tank. Stars and octagons perforate the domed roofs of the adjacent *hammam*, which had hot and cold water and a hypocaust sauna.

VILLAGE GROUP

One ticket covers the three **monuments** (Indian/foreigner Rs 5/100, video Rs 25; ☒ dawn-dusk).

Jama Masjid

Entered by a flight of steps leading to a 17m-high domed porch, this disused **mosque** dominates the village of Mandu. Hoshang begun its construction, basing it on the great Omayyad Mosque in Damascus, Syria, and Mohammed Khalji completed it in 1454. It's reckoned to be the finest and largest example of Afghan architecture in India – despite its plain design and the distinctly Hindu decoration of the imam's (Muslim religious leader's) 'pulpit'.

Hoshang's Tomb

As with Jama Masjid, the work of Hindu sculptors employed by the Muslim sultans can be seen on Hoshang's imposing **tomb**. Reputed to be India's oldest marble building, the tomb is crowned with a crescent thought

to have been imported from Persia or Mesopotamia. Inside, light filters into the echoing dome through stone jalis, intended to cast an appropriately subdued light on the tombs. An inscription records Shah Jahan sending his architects – including Ustad Hamid, who worked on the Taj Mahal – here in 1659 to pay their respects to the tomb's builders.

Ashrafi Mahal

Mohammed Shah originally built his **tomb** as a madrasa (Islamic college), before converting and extending it. The overambitious design later collapsed – notably the seven-storey circular tower of victory. The building is an empty shell, but intricate Islamic pillar-work can be seen at the top of its great stairway.

JAIN TEMPLE

Entered by a turquoise doorway, this complex is a splash of kitsch among the Islamic monuments. The richly decorated temples feature marble, silver and gold *tirthankars* with jade eyes, and behind them is a themepark-like museum with a walk-on replica of Shatrunjaya, the hilltop temple complex at Palitana (p738) in Gujarat. In the colourful murals, bears devour sinners' arms, crocodiles chew their heads, and demons saw one evil character in half, lengthways. One panel shows the consequences of drinking and meat eating: a drunken carnivore lies in the street with dogs urinating on him.

REWA KUND GROUP

About 4km south of the village, past Sagar Talao, is the **Rewa Kund group** (Indian/foreigner Rs 5/100, video Rs 25; ☒ dawn-dusk).

Baz Bahadur's Palace

Baz Bahadur was the last independent ruler of Mandu. His palace, constructed around 1509, is beside the Rewa Kund Tank where a water lift at the northern end supplied water to the palace. A curious mix of Rajasthani and Mughal styles, it was actually built decades before Baz Bahadur came to power.

Rupmati's Pavilion

Standing at the top of a cliff plunging 366m to the plains, Rupmati's Pavilion has a subtle beauty unmatched by the other monuments. According to Malwa legends, the music-loving Baz Bahadur built it to persuade a beautiful Hindu singer, Rupmati, to move here with

him from her home on the plains. From its terrace and domed pavilions Rupmati could gaze down at the distant glint of the sacred Narmada River, still visible on a clear day.

In fact, the pavilion was built in two or three phases and the style of its arches and pillars suggest it was completed 100 years before Rupmati's time. Nonetheless, the love story is a subject of Malwa folk songs – not least because of its tragic ending. Lured by tales of Rupmati's beauty, Akbar marched on the fort and Baz Bahadur fled, leaving his lover to poison herself.

For maximum romantic effect come and catch the breezes at sunset, or under a full moon. Bring a torch, as there's no lighting on the road back.

DARYA KHAN'S TOMB & HATHI MAHAL

Hathi Mahal (Elephant Palace), a pleasure resort that was converted into a tomb, is so named because the pillars supporting its dome have massive proportions – like elephant legs. Nearby, **Darya Khan's tomb** has domed corners like Hoshang's tomb and was once decorated with intricately patterned mosaic tiles.

NIL KANTH PALACE

Leave Main Rd at the red Shivani Restaurant advertisement to reach this Mughal palace, which is well worth the journey on a covered road and stone steps built into the cliff. It stands at the head of a ravine, on the site of an earlier Shiva shrine – its name means God with Blue Throat – and is now used as a place of worship. A stream built by one of Akbar's governors trickles through a spiral channel. Persian inscriptions record Akbar's delight at his visit here and warn against vanity and pomposity.

Sleeping & Eating

Mandu has quality accommodation, which is lucky because the day you intend to spend here can easily turn into a week.

Hotel Maharaja (Jahaz Mahal Rd; s/d Rs 200/300) This budget option is the only disappointment in Mandu's otherwise good sleeping options.

Hotel Rupmati (☎ 263270; Main Rd; d Rs 550, with air-cooler/AC Rs 650/1100; 🍽️) Sandwiched between a ruin and a cliff, these colourful bungalows are a little overpriced but you pay for the view – the best offered by any hotel in the state. The management is also open to negotiation.

Malwa Resort (☎ 263235; tcmandav@sancharnet.in; Main Rd; r with/without AC Rs 1790/1090; 🍽️) The 20

rooms, including 10 suite-like AC rooms, are in cottages with new furniture and verandas overlooking the lake. It's the more pleasant of two MP Tourism hotels (the other is Malwa Retreat), and prices include breakfast.

Relax Point (dishes Rs 20-30) The village shop and gathering point serves basic vegetarian fare and snacks for that pilgrimage to Rupmati's Pavilion.

Shivani Restaurant (meals Rs 60) This superb restaurant serves South Indian, Chinese, and local specialties such as the delicious *mandu kofta* (dumplings in a mild sauce). There are Kit-Kats in the fridge and the friendly owner can organise beer.

Look out for the green, hard-shelled seed of the baobab tree – it's a bit like eating sweet-and-sour chalk. Mandu is one of the few places in India where you'll see the baobab, which looks like it has been planted upside down with its roots in the air.

Getting There & Away

There are four buses to Indore (Rs 50, 3½ hours, 7am, 9am, 9.30am and 3.30pm), from where transport heads to Bhopal. Coming from Indore you must change at Dhar.

Maheshwar is tricky by bus – take a taxi (Rs 500, 1¾ hours); for Rs 1200 you can continue to Omkareshwar, though bus is a reasonable option after Maheshwar.

The alternative is hiring a car in Indore; see p700.

Getting Around

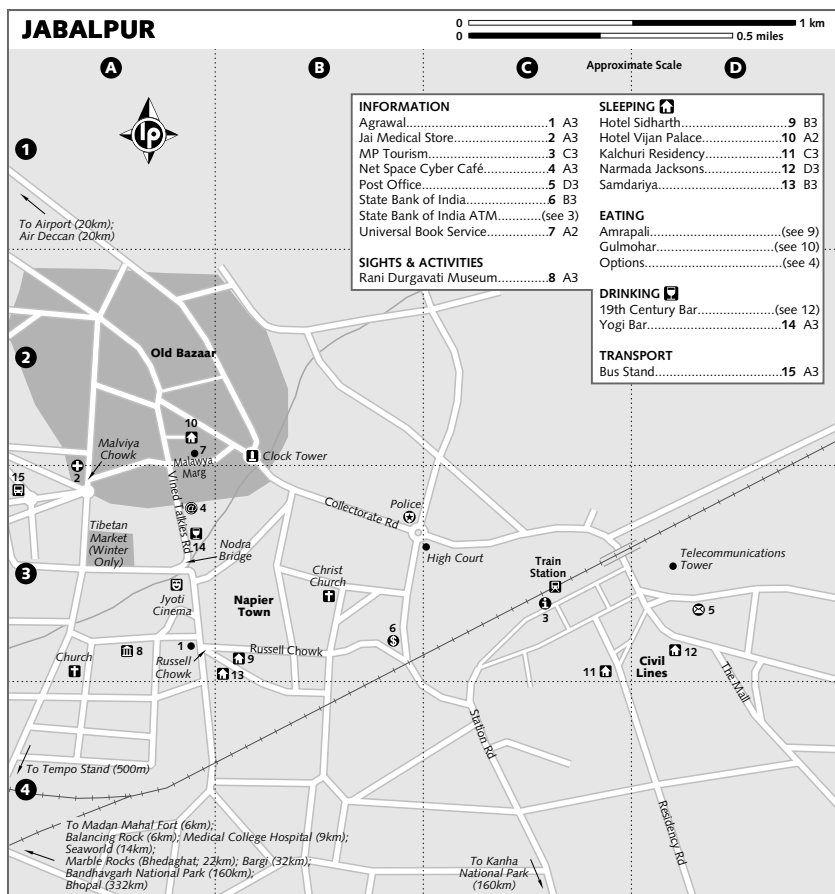
Cycling is best, as the terrain is flat, the air clear and the countryside beautiful. Shops on Main Rd hire out bikes from Rs 20 per day. You can tour the monuments in half a day using a taxi, autorickshaw or moped (from Rs 150).

EASTERN MADHYA PRADESH

JABALPUR

☎ 0761 / pop 1.12 million

A military and industrial centre, the capital of eastern Madhya Pradesh is a grimy city of *chowks* and working men's taverns, which will likely give you a dose of culture shock if you're emerging from the surrounding bush. The High Court is one of the buildings left by



the British, for whom Jabalpur was capital of the Central Provinces.

Information

Agrawal (☎ 2411056; Russell Chowk; ☎ 10am-10pm) Film printing, memory cards and CD burning.

Jai Medical Store (☎ 2610457; Malviya Chowk; ☎ 10am-10pm)

Medical College Hospital (☎ 2371251; Nagpur Rd)

MP Tourism (☎ 2677690; ☎ 10am-5pm) At the train station; books MP Tourism accommodation and cars, and provides information.

Net Space Cyber Café (Vined Talkies Rd; per hr Rs 20; ☎ 10am-10pm) On the 1st floor.

Post office (Residency Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat)

State Bank of India (☎ 2677777; South Civil Lines;

☎ 10.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-12.30pm Sat) Changes travellers cheques and currency. There's an ATM at the train station which takes MasterCard and Visa.

Universal Book Service (☎ 2310591; 718 Karam chand Chowk; ☎ 10am-9pm) Stocks the essential literary travelling companions: Harry Potter and Lonely Planet.

Sights

RANI DURGAVATI MUSEUM

West of Russell Chowk, this **museum** (Indian/foreigner Rs 5/30, camera/video Rs 20/50; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) has a collection of 10th-century sculptures from local sites such as Chausath Yogini (p708). Upstairs are letters and photographs relating to Mahatma Gandhi, coins and an elaborate gallery exploring tribal culture.

Activities

WATER SPORTS

Some 14km towards Marble Rocks is a **Sea-world** (☎ 4917601; Bhedaghat Rd; adult/child Rs 90/60; ☎ 10am-7pm), a swimming-pool complex with outdoor slides and pools.

MP Tourism is building a water-sports complex at Bargi, 32km southwest of Jabalpur.

Sleeping

Hotel Vijan Palace (☎ 5063310; Vijan Market; r Rs 270-810; ☎) Hiding down a lane off Vined Talkies Rd, the busy Vijan spans budget and midrange. Room service, checkout and hot water are all 24-hour; cheaper rooms have squat toilets.

Hotel Sidharth (☎ 4007779; hotel_sidharth@hotmail.com; Russell Chowk; s/d from Rs 450/500; ☎) An old-fashioned lift leads to comfortable, compact rooms in this no-frills midrange hotel. AC rooms are no smarter than non-AC.

Kalchuri Residency (☎ 2678491; mptkalch@sancharnet.in; Residency Rd, Civil Lines; s Rs 790-1190, d Rs 890-1290; ☎) It's not just its proximity to the train station that recommends this MP Tourism hotel – the rooms are a little worn but have touches such as balconies and curvy bedheads. Ask to see a few rooms as they vary greatly.

Samdariya (☎ 2316800; www.thesamdariyahotel.com; s/d/ste from Rs 1100/1350/3000; ☎) This 64-room hotel off Russell Chowk offers a swimming pool and health club, a travel desk, online commodity trading, a disco, an astrological consultant and, for all its long red carpets, Indian eccentricity in spades. More expensive rooms have little more than standard options apart from fridges and tiled floors.

Narmada Jacksons (☎ 5001122; info@hoteljacksons.com; South Civil Lines; s Rs 1295-2500, d Rs 1495-3000, ste Rs 5000-6000; ☎) Jabalpur's top spot is

nominally a heritage hotel but its splashes of primary colour look wholeheartedly contemporary. Rooms have attractive furnishings and internet connectivity; the five-star facilities include three restaurants (meals Rs 120 to 200) and a health club.

Eating & Drinking

Options (☎ 4006279; Vined Talkies Rd; meals Rs 50-75; ☎ 10am-11pm) This classy 1st-floor vegetarian restaurant with stripy seats among metal and glass is popular with Jabalpur's youth, who come here to down mocktails, pizza, *paneer*, *paratha* and Chinese food.

Hotel Vijan Palace's restaurant **Gulmohar** (☎ 5063310; Vijan Market; meals Rs 60-100) and Hotel Sidharth's **Amrapali** (☎ 4007779; Russell Chowk; meals Rs 60-120; ☎ 11am-11.30pm) have a good offering of Indian and Chinese food and snacks.

19th Century Bar (Narmada Jacksons, South Civil Lines) is the coolest bar in town. Jabalpur is also thick with seedy drinking dens – one of the more salubrious establishments is **Yogi Bar** (Vined Talkies Rd; dishes around Rs 40).

Getting There & Away

AIR

Air Deccan (☎ 2901048; ☎ 6am-3pm) at the airport has a daily budget flight to Delhi (9.20am or 10.20am), via Bhopal (9.20am) on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

BUS

Buses go to Raipur (Rs 186, 12 hours, 9.30am and 6am), calling at Kawardha (Rs 105, seven hours), and to Kanha National Park (Rs 84, 5½ hours, 7am and 11am). Between October and June, MP Tourism runs an AC coach to Kanha from the train station (Rs 150, four hours, 9am) and is introducing a cruise boat from Bargi (see left) to Mandla.

MAJOR TRAINS FROM JABALPUR

Destination	Train No & name	Fare (Rs)	Duration (hr)	Departure
Delhi Nizamuddin	2411 <i>Gondwana Exp</i>	492/1207/1579	15½	3.55pm
Jalgaon(a)	5018 <i>Tilak Exp</i>	395/961/1238	11½	11.10pm
Mumbai	2321 <i>Howrah–Mumbai Mail</i>	511/1260/1656	17½	5.50pm
Pipariya(b)	3201 <i>Tilak Exp</i>	271/591/705	2¾	3.55pm
Satna(c)	2141 <i>Rajendranagar Exp</i>	291/631/750	2¾	2.50pm
Umariya(d)	8233 <i>Narmada Exp</i>	230/561/663	4½	6.35am
Varanasi	5017 <i>Gorakhpur Exp</i>	377/911/1165	11½	1.10am

a – for Ajanta & Ellora Caves; b – for Pachmarhi; c – for Khajuraho; d – for Bandhavgarh National Park

Getting Around

Most budget and midrange hotels are within a 10-minute walk from the bus stand. Rs 10 should get you anywhere in the city in a cycle rickshaw; Rs 30 in an autorickshaw.

For Marble Rocks, catch a bus along the main road to the turn-off for the rocks (Rs 10, 45 minutes), where tempos wait to take you the last 3km (Rs 10).

AROUND JABALPUR

Madan Mahal Fort

About 6km along the Marble Rocks road a track leads left to steps up to **Madan Mahal Fort**, built by Gond ruler Madan Shah in 1116. It's a small watchtower perched on a bulbous rock on a hilltop with extensive views over the rocky landscape.

Partway along the track is an amazing **balancing rock** perched precariously on another, looking as if a sneeze would dislodge it.

Marble Rocks

Known locally as Bhedaghat, this **gorge** on the holy Narmada River is 22km west of Jabalpur. The marblelike magnesium limestone cliffs turn different colours in different lights, from pink to black. Locals say the 'snow-white marble', as described by Captain J Forsyth in *The Highlands of Central India* (1889), is nature's answer to Khajuraho (p673). The gleaming cliffs are an impressive sight by moonlight, and parts are floodlit at night.

The trip up the 2km-long gorge is made in a shared **rowboat** (Rs 20; ☎ 6am-7pm, full moon 8pm-midnight 1 Oct-30 Jun) from the jetty at Pan-chvati Ghat; alternatively bargain for your own boat. As you glide upstream, naturally sculpted crags crowd around you. An amusing commentary is given in Hindi – if someone translates, you'll learn which star sang from which crag in which Bollywood film. Otherwise, hire a guide (Rs 100) or take a stroll by yourself; turn right just before Motel Marble Rocks.

Dhuandhar (Smoke Cascade) is a worthwhile 2km walk uphill from the jetty. Along the way is the exquisitely carved **Chausath Yogini**, a circular 10th-century temple dedicated to the goddess Durga. It is said to be connected to the Gond queen Durgavati's palace by an underground passage.

Hotel Marble Palace (☎ 2830443; Bhedaghat; r from Rs 300) is a reasonable budget choice in the village. It has clean rooms, some on the roof, with

showers and sit-down toilets, while **Shagun Resort** (☎ 3296061; cottage/ste Rs 400/600; ♿) has six fan-cooled cottages and four AC suites in a sham-bolic garden with swing chairs, a basic restaurant (meals Rs 50), and views of Dhuandhar.

There are cheap cafés in the village.

PENCH TIGER RESERVE

☎ 07695 / tiger pop 50

Pench is but a pug mark compared with Kanha National Park (opposite), but there are plenty of reasons to take a trip into this corner of the southern Satpura Hills. Apart from its tigers, leopards and literary associations, the 758-sq-km reserve has the highest concentration of prey of any park in India and some 250 species of bird. You're also unlikely to get stuck in a jeep jam here.

Orientation & Information

A 12km track winds between Khawasa, 80km from Nagpur on Hwy 7 towards Jabalpur, and the accommodation in Turia. Head to Nagpur for an international airport, a train station on three major lines, and other facilities.

The main gates to the **park** (☎ 223794; 1 drive Indian/foreigner Rs 25/500, elephant ride Rs 100/600, watchtower Rs 150/500, camping Rs 500/2000; ☎ dawn-dusk 1 Oct-30 Jun) are 2km past Turia. See the boxed text, p710.

Sleeping & Eating

Kipling's Court (☎ 232830; kipling@sancharnet.in; s/d American Plan with air-cooler Rs 1640/1990, Jungle Plan Rs 6900/9200; ♿) MP Tourism's hotel, popular with domestic tourists, has smart midrange rooms ringing a shambolic garden, a watchtower overlooking a water hole, and a quiet bar-restaurant.

Pench Jungle Camp (☎ 232817, Delhi 011-30988460; www.wildlife-camp-india.com; Village Avarghani; s/d US\$150/200, Jungle Plan US\$260/320; ♿) Commune with nature without surrendering your creature comforts at this eco-friendly, English-run retreat. The 12 marble-floored tents, three cottages and four rooms have locally made wicker, teak, bamboo and cut-glass furniture. There are cheaper rates for Indian nationals.

Bagh Van (☎ 232829, Delhi 011-66503559; Jungle Plan per person US\$600; ♿) A 5.2-hectare Taj Wilderness Lodge with a library and riverside swimming pool. The 12 cottages have watchtowers and bamboo-covered walkways linking bedroom and bathroom, complete with indoor and outdoor showers.

MOWGLI WAS HERE

Generations of children have followed the adventures of Baloo et al in Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book* (1894). But what prompted this tale of a boy raised by wolves, and where is it set? Kipling (1865–1936) probably never visited Pench Tiger Reserve, but the idea of Mowgli likely comes from a case recorded in 1831 by William Henry Sleeman of a wolf-boy captured in the Seoni district. The writer would also have drawn on RA Strendale books including *Seonee – Camp life in Satpura Hills*, Dunbar Brander's *Wild Animals of Central India* and Captain J Forsyth's *The Highlands of Central India*.

Kanha National Park has also laid claim to *The Jungle Book*. But 'Seonee' (Seoni) Hills, Kanhiwara village and Waingunga River gorge, where Shere Khan meets his end, are all actual locations around Pench. The consolation prize for Kanha is that in Kipling's day both parks were part of the same jungle belt.

Getting There & Away

Regular buses link Khawasa – connected to Turia by jeep (Rs 120) – with Nagpur (Rs 51, 2½ hours) and Jabalpur (local/private bus Rs 120/230, five/3½ hours).

KANHA NATIONAL PARK

☎ 07649 / tiger pop 131

Kanha regularly tops lists of the best places to glimpse a tiger in India. Unfortunately, this attracts many visitors to its sal forests and meadows, but they are outnumbered by a four-legged population, including more than 200 tigers and leopards, 350 *barasingha* (swamp deer) and 22,000 spotted deer, and more than 300 species of bird.

Orientation & Information

The 1945-sq-km **park** (☎ 07642-250760; 1/2/3 drive Indian Rs 25/40/60, foreigner Rs 500/750/1000, video Rs 200/350/500, own vehicle entry Rs 150/250/350, compulsory guide 1 drive Rs 100-400, 2 drive Rs 175-700, 3 drive Rs 250-1000, elephant ride Indian/foreigner Rs 100/600, camping from Rs 400; ☎ dawn-dusk) is 160km southeast of Jabalpur. See the boxed text, *Visiting Tigers*, p710.

Khatia Gate, the entrance to the 1005-sq-km buffer zone, is at the village of Kisli. Some 4km further into the park, Kisli Gate, the main gate, is the entrance to the 940-sq-km core zone. Mukki Gate, 35km southeast on the far side of the park, is more remote.

There are few facilities outside the hotels, and nowhere to change money.

VISITOR CENTRES

There are **visitor centres** (☎ 8-11am & 3.30-5pm 1 Oct-15 Feb, 7.30-10.30am & 4.30-6pm 16 Feb-15 Apr, 7-10am & 5.30-7pm 16 Apr-30 Jun) at Khatia and Mukki Gates and Kanha (within the park). The latter centre is the most impressive, with several galleries.

Wildlife Safaris

Book gypsies in advance, either through your hotel or at one of the gates. Gypsies typically cost Rs 900 per 60km – enough for a good look at the park – and Rs 13 per kilometre thereafter.

Sleeping & Eating

KISLI

Apart from Baghira Log Huts, the following are within 500m of Khatia Gate. There are some small *dhabas* in the same area.

Panther Resort (☎ 277233; dm Rs 240, r Rs 350-900) The best budget option is run by friendly Tushar, who has a handle on everything going on in Kisli. Basic, fan- and air-cooled rooms are housed in emerald-green bungalows and meals are cooked over an open fire.

Pugmark Resort (☎ 277291; pugmark1kanha@yahoo .co.in; s/d Rs 800/1400, American Plan Rs 1200/2400, Jungle Plan Rs 900/1800) The 12 pink-and-white cottages are a little lacking in character but there's a gazebo-covered campfire and a naturalist family run the show.

Hiawatha (☎ 277269; hiawatharesortkanha2002@yahoo.co.in; s/d US\$35-65, American Plan US\$75/90, Jungle Plan US\$125/250) Named after the 16th-century Native American chief, Hiawatha has 16 aged cottages with big windows and fireplaces overlooking a wildlife-attracting pond.

Baghira Log Huts & Tourist Hostel (☎ 277227; Kisli Gate; s/d American Plan from Rs 1640/1990, Jungle Plan s/d Rs 6900/9200; ☎) This gem among MP Tourism properties is the only hotel in the core zone. The huts are a little old but bolstered by new furniture and views of a meadow where the animals go about their business. The bar-restaurant is also prime wildlife-watching territory.

MUKKI

There is less traffic through this gate thanks to fewer hotels.

Kanha Safari Lodge (☎ 07637-226029; s/d American Plan with air-cooler Rs 1640/1990, with AC Rs 2140/2490; 🚽) As at the other Mukki hotels, you pay for access to the quieter gate at this MP Tourism establishment. The rooms have hot water and there's a basic restaurant.

Kanha Jungle Lodge (☎ Delhi 011-26853760; www.tiger-resorts.com; s/d Jungle Plan US\$160/290) Owned by the family of the founder of Project Tiger, the 4.5-hectare resort blends into the surrounding sal, bamboo and medicinal plants through

verandas, plenty of windows and an open-air dining area.

Bagh (☎ 07637-206585; vaccanes@vsnl.net; Gudma; s/d American Plan US\$140/200, Jungle Plan US\$220/300; 🚽) The owners of Pench Jungle Camp (see p708) were dusting down this 6.8-hectare retreat that comes with mountain views at the time of research. Overlooking a pond and Mughal-style watchtowers, the 16 rooms have dark Barmatic wood furniture and marble bathrooms.

VISITING TIGERS

The attraction of Madhya Pradesh's four national parks – Panna (p681), Pench (p708), Kanha (p709) and Bandhavgarh (opposite) – is a spine-tingling meeting with a tiger; maybe in the undergrowth or padding along the road. There are a number of lesser players, from leopards to sloth bears, jackals, wild dog, and several species of deer. Innumerable birds make the jungle their home, as do myriad fluttering butterflies.

The bigger parks are circuslike. We visited Kanha on the first day of the season, when there were 45 gypsies (small, diesel-powered jeeps) in the park, as opposed to the 150 it receives during peak season. A line of gypsies surrounded one tiger, and coach parties squeezed onto elephants to get close to another. However, there is no greater buzz than heading through the sal trees on a misty morning in search of Shere Khan. A knowledgeable driver or guide will take you off the beaten track.

Entrance to the parks is strictly controlled – take your passport. You can cut costs by sharing a gypsy with others. If you get a knowledgeable driver, you can get a cheap guide (the bigger parks offer four levels of compulsory guide, from basic escort to experienced naturalist). Book ahead, as gypsies and naturalists do run out during peak season.

Entrance is priced according to 'drives' or 'rounds', with the cost of each decreasing the more you buy. Two four-hour drives take place a day, after dawn and before sunset when the animals are most active. Some of the parks are now open all day, all year round, but sightings are still most likely on morning visits, when prior to your arrival mahouts (elephant drivers) on elephants track down the tiger population. Information on sightings is relayed to a central point, where you break for tea after maybe an hour of wandering around. If a tiger is sighted, elephants are used to take you close to the quarry.

Pug marks (footprints), presence of a recent kill, alarm calls from other animals and the experience and intuition of the expert all help to find the hidden tiger, but a sighting can never be guaranteed. It's a good idea to let a week pass after the 1 October opening to let rangers get an idea of where tigers currently live.

Sightings are more likely in the February to June period, when obscuring foliage has withered away and water holes are drying up, concentrating both hunter and prey. The hottest months are May and June, when temperatures can reach 42°C in the afternoon. December and January are the coldest months – night-time temperatures quickly plunge to zero and below as the parks are generally in mountainous country. You must have adequate clothing for zero temperatures in those months, and dress to blend in with the vegetation at all times.

Sleeping & Eating

Most national park private accommodation offers guests a Jungle Plan, which in addition to full board includes entrance to the park, guide fees, jeep hire costs and the services of a naturalist; all you have to pay is your video fee. American Plan includes room and full board. Most resorts fill up during peak season, and prefer advance booking through their head office but do accept walk-in visitors. Hotels generally close when the parks close – those that stay open offer hefty discounts between July and September.

Getting There & Away

There are buses from Kisli Gate to Jabalpur (Rs 84, 5½ hours, 6.20am, 8.15am and 12.30pm) via Khatia Gate. Between October and June, MP Tourism runs a coach (Rs 150, four hours, 2pm). Alternatively, catch one of the many buses to Mandla (Rs 30, 2½ hours). For travel from Jabalpur, see p707.

There are frequent buses from Mandla to Jabalpur (Rs 50, 2½ hours, 6am to 8.30pm) and Kanha (Rs 36, 2¾ hours, 10.15am, 3pm and 4.15pm), one to Nagpur (Rs 145, 6½ hours, 9pm) and two to Raipur (Rs 140, seven hours, 12.45pm and 9.30pm).

There are a few daily buses between Mandla and Mukki (Rs 50, five hours) via the other gates, often changing at Baihar.

BANDHAVGARH NATIONAL PARK

☎ 07653 / tiger pop 65

Bandhavgarh may be smaller than Kanha but it claims to have the world's highest-density tiger population – offering day-trippers a 99.99% chance of spotting a big cat. In addition to its tigers (27 in the 105-sq-km core area), the 448-sq-km park is inhabited by some 40 leopards, 250 species of bird and some 35 species of mammal, including nilgais, wild boars, jackals, gaurs, sambars and porcupines.

The park takes its name from the ancient fort atop the 800m-high cliffs of the escarpment, part of the Vindhyan mountain range. The ramparts of the fort, reached by a one-hour uphill hike, provide a home for vultures, blue rock thrushes and crag martins.

Bandhavgarh owes its existence to the Maharajas of Rewa, who preserved it as their hunting ground; on the other hand they endangered many species with rampant slaughter – Maharaja Raman Singh dispatched 111 tigers.

Orientation & Information

The park (☎ 222214; www.bandhavgarhnationalpark.com; 1/2/3 drive Indian Rs 25/40/60, foreigner Rs 500/750/1000, video Rs 200/350/500, compulsory guide Rs 100/200/300, vehicle entry Rs 150/250/350, jeep hire per drive Rs 700, elephant ride Indian/foreigner Rs 100/600, watchtower per day Rs 200/2000; ☽ dawn-dusk 1 Oct-30 Jun) is entered at Tala, 197km northeast of Jabalpur and 32km from railhead Umaria on the Rewa road. See the boxed text, opposite.

There is web access at **Yadav Cyber Café** (per hr Rs 60; ☽ 7.30am-10pm), but nowhere to change money.

Sleeping & Eating

All accommodation is on or signposted from the main road through Tala.

Kum Kum Home (☎ 265324; r Rs 250-350) The staff are obliging but the barren rooms with dingy bathrooms look like they're about to be reclaimed by the jungle.

Whispering Grass (☎ 265328; bharat_mandhyan@yahoo.com; s/d American Plan Rs 1500/2000) Out in the bush, with a thatched dining area and hammocks hanging by the stream. Accommodation is in brightly painted cottages and cotton tents with cement bases and private bathrooms. The real attraction is the passionate naturalist owner.

Tiger's Den (☎ 265365, Delhi 011-27049446; www.naturesafariindia.com; s Rs 175-250, d Rs 275-350, American Plan s Rs 1700-2500, d Rs 2200-3000, Jungle Plan s Rs 3500-5000, d Rs 4000-5500; 📶) Smart complex with 26 pleasant cottages and a barbecue among the palms. Deluxe rooms have carved wardrobes and tiled blue bathrooms with bathtubs.

White Tiger Forest Lodge (☎ 265366; wtfmpt@sanchar.net.in; s/d American plan from Rs 1640/1990, Jungle Plan Rs 5140/5490; 📶) MP Tourism's riverside operation is a little run-down but the AC rooms in particular, linked by elevated walkways between the trees, are smarter than their façades suggest. Postpark fun includes a campfire, tribal dancing displays and wildlife documentaries.

ourpick King's Lodge (☎ Delhi 011-25885709; www.kingslodge.in; s/d Jungle Plan US\$180/270; 📶) Luxurious resort with eight huts on stilts and four cottages with verandas set around a water channel in 4 hectares of grounds, also boasting an ecofriendly swimming pool and elevated massage deck.

Bandhavgarh Jungle Lodge (☎ 265317, Delhi 011-26853760; www.tiger-resorts.com; tw Jungle Plan US\$300) Garden paths wind between old and new village-style mud-brick 'huts' decorated in Rajasthani style at this eco-resort. Entertainment includes astronomy classes, bird-watching and an eco-shop.

There are *dhabas* in the village and the hotels have restaurants. **Tiger's Den restaurant** (meals Rs 200) serves tea-time nibbles, perfect for post-tiger hunger.

Getting There & Away

Tala is connected with Umaria, the nearest railhead, by frequent buses and shared jeeps (Rs 15, one hour) and taxis (Rs 300).

Useful trains out of Umaria: 8478 *Kalinga Utkal Express* to Puri (Rs 531/1343/1788, 25

hours, 6.17am) and 8477 *Kalinga Utkal Express* to Delhi Nizamuddin (Rs 466/1160/1524, 17 hours, 8.50pm).

For other places it's best to go to Jabalpur on the 8234 *Narmada Express* (Rs 230/561/663, 4½ hours, 4.25pm), which continues on to Pipariya (for Pachmarhi), Bhopal, Ujjain and Indore.

CHHATTISGARH

Chhattisgarh split from Madhya Pradesh in 2000 and is coming out of the bigger state's shadow. It's one of the eastern states associated with the Naxalite guerrillas (an ultra-leftist political movement that began in Naxal Village, West Bengal), but they rarely stray from their remote hideouts on Chhattisgarh's borders. It also suffers from dire roads and scant buses outside the Raipur–Jagdalpur stretch of Hwy 43, but for intrepid travellers, the state is a forested Adivasi kingdom. The tribes' pointillist paintings and spindly sculptures are as vivid as the colourful *haats* (markets) that take place across the Bastar region. The forests also hide waterfalls and unspoiled nature reserves.

RAIPUR

☎ 0771 / pop 605,000

Judging by the buildings shooting up in the city centre, Raipur will soon look like a state capital should. For now, there isn't much to recommend it, but it is worth stopping here to change money and have a decent meal before moving south to Bastar.

Information

Business Network Solution (Krishna Complex, Shastris Chowk; per hr Rs 20; ☎ 9.30am–9.30pm) Internet access.

Chhattisgarh Tourism Board Head office (☎ 4066415; www.chhattisgarhtourism.net; Paryatan Bhawan, GE Rd; ☎ 10am–5pm); train station (☎ 6456336; ☎ 10am–5pm); airport (☎ incoming flights) Can help organise tribal visits, transport and accommodation.

State Bank of India (☎ 2535176; Jaistambh Chowk; ☎ 10.30am–5.30pm Mon–Fri) Cashes travellers cheques and foreign currency, and has a MasterCard and Visa ATM; also has an ATM at the train station.

Sights

The **MGM Museum** (☎ 2537404; Cali Chowk; admission Rs 1; ☎ 10am–5pm Tue–Sun) has statues and artefacts from local temples, culminating in two

impressive models of temples – Sirpur's Laxman Temple and the Boramdeo Temple near Kawardha.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Jyoti (☎ 2428777; s Rs 300–550, d Rs 375–750; ☎) A tranquil retreat after a long bus journey, but book ahead because it's normally full. It's conveniently opposite the bus stand.

Hotel Radhika (☎ 2233806; Jaistambh Chowk; r Rs 240–650, ste Rs 800–900; ☎) Right in the centre, with a neon-lit bar and large rooms that look like the setting for a dream sequence.

Hotel Babylon (☎ 4093101; www.hotelbabylon.com; VIP Rd; s/d/ste from Rs 2500/3000/6000; ☎) A top-class hotel, its 80 rooms revel in thick carpets, marble, mirrors and wood panelling. Facilities include two restaurants (meals Rs 150 to 450), a café, a bar and a nightclub. Located some 5km out of the city towards the airport.

Girnar Restaurant (☎ 2234776; Jaistambh Chowk; meals Rs 90–150; ☎ 10.30am–10.30pm; ☎) A largish place with many tables, it fills up rapidly after 8pm so either come early or book a table. It's renowned for its thali and sweets.

Some reasonable snack bars are **Indian Coffee House** (GE Rd; dishes Rs 15–65; ☎ 7am–midnight), **Mahendra** (meals Rs 50), opposite the bus stand, and **Food Junction** (meals Rs 50), opposite the train station.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Indian Airlines (☎ 2583072; Jeewan Beema Bhawan; ☎ 9.30am–5.30pm Mon–Sat) flies daily to Chennai (US\$190, 1.40pm) via Visakhapatnam (US\$120); Delhi (US\$260, 8.55pm); Mumbai (US\$240, 12.35pm) via Bhubaneswar (US\$140); and on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday to Nagpur (US\$110, 8.05am) and on to Delhi.

Jet Airways (☎ 2418613; ☎ 9.30am–5.30pm), at the airport, flies daily to Mumbai (\$220, 12.05pm). **Air Deccan** (☎ 2418755; ☎ 6am–3pm), also at the airport, has daily budget flights to Delhi (9.35am or 11.30am); Kolkata (Calcutta) via Ranchi (9am), Mumbai (10.30am); and on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday to Bhubaneswar (9.35am).

BUS

There are frequent buses to Jagdalpur (Rs 200, seven hours). Various firms run interstate to Jabalpur (Rs 150 to 165, 12 to 14 hours, 8pm and 9.30pm), Nagpur (Rs 180, seven hours, 7am and 10pm), Sambalpur (Rs 150, nine hours,

7.15pm and 9.30pm), Bhubaneswar, Puri and Cuttack (all Rs 350, 12 hours, 7.15pm).

TRAIN

Train 8237 *Chhattisgarh Express* goes to Delhi (Rs 555/1410/1886, 28½ hours, 4.15pm), No 2859 *Gitanjali Express* travels to Howrah (Rs 478/1167/1520, 13 hours, 11.55pm) and No 8404/8406 *Ahmedabad–Puri Express* goes to Puri (Rs 466/1160/1524, 17¼ hours, 4.45pm Monday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday).

AROUND RAIPUR

Kawardha

Some 113km northwest of Raipur, **Palace Kawardha** (☎ 07741-232085, Mumbai 022-24042211; www.nivalink.com/palacekawardha; s/d full board plus entertainment US\$130/260), the home of the local maharaja, invites guests to revel in the luxuries and atmosphere of the 1930s. Activities on offer include trekking, bird-watching and trips to tribal villages and temples.

Sirpur

One of the oldest brick temples in the country, the 7th-century **Laxman Temple** (☎ 0771-2283042; asiraipur@sify.com; Indian/foreigner Rs 5/100; ☞ dawn-dusk) can be found 84km northeast of Raipur. Sirpur was a significant Buddhist settlement and **monasteries** have been unearthed by excavations of some 25 of the hundreds of mounds here.

NORTHERN BASTAR

There are a few places in and around the forested Bastar region to break up the journey from Raipur to Jagdalpur along Hwy 43.

Kanker

Be a guest of the distinguished Pratap Deo family at the 1930s **Kanker Palace** (☎ 07868-222005; kankerpalace@rediffmail.com; s/d with full board US\$151/222; ☞ Sep-Apr), 138km south of Raipur. Accommodation is in luxury tents; five rooms with four-poster beds, antique furniture and Adivasi decorations; or a nearby farmhouse bordering a bird sanctuary. Excursions are run to tribal areas (Rs 3000).

Keskal

Some 28km south of Kanker is **Forest Lodge** (s/d Rs 100/200), built by the British in 1936. The two basic rooms have vintage fittings and there's a lookout tower surveying the hills. It's at the top of the hairpin bends 2km north of Keskal village. Meals cost around Rs 100.

Kondagaon

Some 76km north of Jagdalpur is a craft complex run by NGO **Saathi** (☎ 07786-242852; saathibastar@yahoo.co.in; Kondagaon; training & daily board Rs 400, weekly materials Rs 500; ☞ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat), encouraging tribal people in production of terracotta, woodcarving and metalwork. You can visit craftspeople at work, there's a shop and training can be given. Volunteers with design and craft knowledge are welcome.

JAGDALPUR

☎ 07782

Fifty years ago, the maharaja would stand atop Jagdalpur palace shooting at animals in the surrounding jungle. Since then, Bastar's amiable capital has claimed a patch of forest and the palace has been joined by imposing statues of Hanuman and a Bison Horn Maria tribesperson. Jagdalpur is a good base for meeting the tribes and discovering their artwork.

Information

Chhattisgarh Tourism Board (☎ 221686; Hotel Rainbow, Sanjay Market; ☞ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat) Information on Bastar, guides and transport.

State Bank of India (☎ 222344; ☞ 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) MasterCard and Visa ATM only; at the old bus stand. **tinu.com** (per hr Rs 25; ☞ 8am-11pm) Internet access. Located off Main Rd, two doors from State Bank of Indore.

Sights

The **Anthropological Museum** (☎ 229356; Chitrakote Rd; admission free; ☞ 10.30am-5.30pm) on the outskirts of town gives a fascinating insight into Bastar's tribes.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Rainbow (☎ 221684; hotelrainbow@indiatimes.com; s/d with air-cooler Rs 380/480, with AC Rs 700/825; ☞) A friendly well-managed place where helpful staff look obviously proud of their hotel. The 12 rooms are lavishly decorated – even the non-AC options (which have squat toilets). The restaurant (meals Rs 70 to 120) is Jagdalpur's best.

Getting There & Away

BUS

There are regular services to Raipur (Rs 160 to 200, seven hours) and Kanger Valley National Park (Rs 25, 30 minutes), three to Chitrakote (Rs 30, 1½ hours, 9am, 1pm and 6pm) and interstate buses to destinations including Visakhapatnam (Rs 225, 12 hours, 6.30pm) and Hyderabad (Rs 280, 16 hours, 8pm and 4pm).

BASTAR BISON HORNS

With some 400,000 Adivasi inhabitants, Bastar is one of the best areas in India to see tribal culture. The Adivasis are a significant presence here, making up almost a third of Bastar's population, but they are marginalised as in other states. This has enabled the Naxalites to exploit them as foot soldiers by offering them more in the way of electricity, roads and infrastructure than the state and central governments have.

As well as their handicrafts – vastly different to anything produced by other Indian craftspeople – these animist people are famous for Ghotals. These are a tribal version of boarding school, where teenagers live away from their parents in order to learn how to behave in society outside the home. The students sleep in mixed dormitories, an arrangement that often sees sexual education informally added to the curriculum. Ghotals are now dying out due to media focus on the sleeping arrangements.

Bastar's eight major tribal groups include the Bison Horn Maria, named after the head-dresses they wear while dancing. The tribes are also known for their reverence for alcohol and tobacco, which have long been central to everything they do, from settling territorial disputes to visiting the *deogudi* (temple). A major feature of a *haat* (market) is the liquor market, where wines, beers and 60%-proof spirits fermented from rice, palm, millet and *mohwa* flowers are doled out using metal and earthenware ladles. In contrast, they might serve food using a rough wooden spoon.

TRAIN

The *Kirandul-Visakhapatnam* train (No 2VK) heads over the scenic Eastern Ghats on India's highest broad gauge line to the Andhra Pradesh coast. **Train reservations** (📞 8am-noon & 2-4pm Mon-Sat, 8am-noon Sun) can be made at the train station.

AROUND JAGDALPUR

With no government buses in Chhattisgarh, the best way to see the Jagdalpur area is by car (per day Rs 1200) – ask at the tourist office (p713). If you're planning to visit tribal areas, you'll need a guide (per day Rs 500). Again, head to the tourist office; Awesh Ali is an outstanding guide.

Village Haats

Visiting a market with a guide is an excellent way to get an overview of Bastar's vibrant tribal culture. Different tribes walk up to 20km to trade everything from their distinctive, almost fluorescent saris to red ants, which they eat with salt and chilli.

Bastar sees *haats* most days – the tourist office has details.

Chitrakote Falls

A late afternoon outing to Chitrakote Falls, 38km northwest of Jagdalpur, is a must for

when the setting sun lights up the face of these falls, two-thirds the size of Niagara.

On the right of the road, some 8km before the waterfalls, is a tribal burial ground featuring a headstone sculpted to resemble a car: the grave of an elder who longed for a car in life.

Chitrakote Log Huts (📞 07859-288387; s/d Rs 700/1000) is five elevated bamboo huts with verandas and all mod cons inside. Meals cost around Rs 50 to 150.

Kanger Valley National Park

The 200-sq-km **park** (📞 07782-227596; Indian/foreigner Rs 25/200, camera/video Rs 25/200, vehicle entry Rs 50; 🕒 8am-4pm 1 Nov-30 Jun), some 40km south-west of Jagdalpur, consists of ancient forest flanking the Kanger River.

Some 4km from the park entrance are **Tirathgarh Falls**, where water drops 100m through three sets of cascades. Open all year, they're best visited after the monsoon. Three **caves** (compulsory guide Rs 25, lights hire Rs 25; 🕒 8am-3pm 1 Nov-30 Jun) with stunning, pristine formations can also be visited.

Wildlife includes deer, boars, sloths and leopards. Small lake **Bhaimsa Darha** is the habitat of turtles and crocodiles.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'