



# Maharashtra

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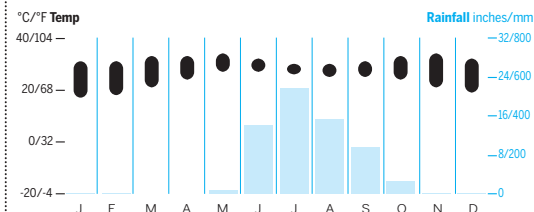
## Why Go?

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

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

## When to Go

### Nasik



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

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

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

## FORTS GALORE

In terms of medieval forts and citadels, Maharashtra comes second perhaps only to Rajasthan. The best of the lot is Daulatabad Fort (p768), a bastion that once played a cameo as India's capital. Equally intriguing is Janjira (p778), a 12th century island fortress that was once an outpost for the seafaring African traders. Best of all are the many forts closely associated with the life of Chhatrapati Shivaji, including the Raigad Fort (p792), and Shivneri Fort (p791), where the Maratha leader was born.

## Fast Facts

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

## Money Matters

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

## Resources

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

## Top Yoga & Meditation Centres

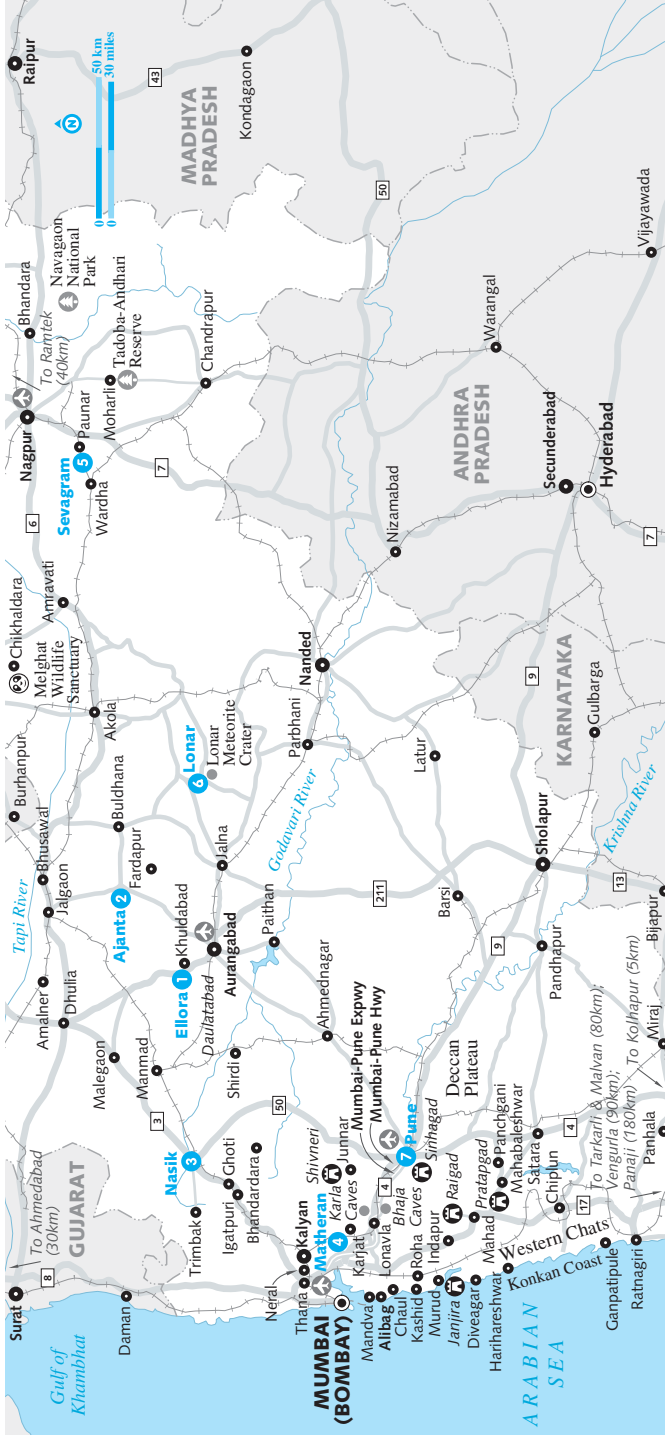
The **Vipassana International Academy** in Igatpuri (p763) has long been a destination for those wishing to put mind over matter through an austere form of Buddhist meditation. The boundaries of yoga, on the other hand, are constantly pushed at the **Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute** in Pune (p787) and the **Kaivalyadhama Yoga Hospital** in Lonavla (p782). For a more lavish and indulgent form of spiritual engagement, there's the super-luxurious **Osho International Meditation Resort** in Pune (p785), where one can meditate in style, while flexing a few muscles in the unique game of 'zennis' (Zen tennis).

## DON'T MISS

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

## Top Festivals

- » Naag Panchami (Aug, Pune, p783, Kolhapur, p793) A traditional snake-worshipping festival.
- » Ganesh Chaturthi (Sep, Pune, p783) Celebrated with fervour all across Maharashtra; Pune goes particularly hysteric in honour of the elephant-headed deity.
- » Dussehra (Sep & Oct, Nagpur, p776, Aurangabad, p764) A Hindu festival, but it also marks the Buddhist celebration of the anniversary of the famous humanist and Dalit leader BR Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism.
- » Ellora Ajanta Aurangabad Festival (Nov, Aurangabad, p764) A cultural festival bringing together the best classical and folk performers from across the region, while promoting a number of artistic traditions and handicrafts on the side.
- » Kalidas Festival (Nov, Nagpur, p776) Commemorates the literary genius of legendary poet Kalidas through spirited music, dance and theatre sessions.
- » Sawai Gandharva Sangeet Mahotsav (Dec, Pune, p783) An extravaganza where you can see unforgettable performances by some of the heftiest names in Indian classical music.



## Maharashtra Highlights

- 1** Drop your jaw at the awe-inspiring beauty of the monumental **Kailasa Temple**, the jewel in Ellora Caves' crown (p769)
- 2** Be mesmerised by antique Buddhist art in the ancient cave galleries of **Ajanta** (p772)
- 3** Sip on a glass of zinfandel or sauvignon, and lose yourself in a holy confluence of faith and ritual in **Nasik** (p760)
- 4** Gallop on a horse to Echo Point, or simply outrun the toy train chugging up the hill in **Matheran** (p780)
- 5** Rediscover the Gandhian way of life at the **Sevagram Ashram** in Sevagram (p777)
- 6** Brush up on your astronomy skills while ambling around the primordial **Lunar Meteorite Crater** (p776)
- 7** Learn more about India's diverse cultures and traditions at the fantastic museums of **Pune** (p783)

## History

Maharashtra was given its political and ethnic identity by Maratha leader Chhatrapati Shivaji (1627–80), who lorded over the Deccan plateau and much of western India from his stronghold at Raigad. Still highly respected today among Maharashtrans, Shivaji is credited for instilling a strong, independent spirit among the region's people, as well as establishing Maharashtra as a dominant player in the power relations of medieval India.

From the early 18th century, the state was under the administration of a succession of ministers called the Peshwas who ruled until 1819, ceding thereafter to the British. After Independence (1947), western Maharashtra and Gujarat were joined to form Bombay state, only to be separated again in 1960, when modern Maharashtra was formed with the exclusion of Gujarati-speaking areas and with Mumbai (Bombay) as its capital.

### **i** Information

**Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation** (MTDC; Map p730; ☎02222845678; www.maharashtratourism.gov.in; Madame Cama Rd; ☀10am–5.30pm Mon–Sat) has its head office in Mumbai. Most major towns throughout the state have offices, too, but they're generally only useful for booking MTDC accommodation and tours. While Sunday is not a business day, many government offices also remain closed on alternate Saturdays.

### **i** Getting There & Away

Mumbai (p752) is Maharashtra's main transport hub, although Pune (p790), Jalgaon (p776) and Aurangabad (p768) are also major players.

### **i** Getting Around

Because the state is so large, internal flights (eg Pune to Nagpur) can help speed up your explorations. Airfares vary widely on a daily basis. AC Indica taxis are readily available, too, and charge around ₹7 per kilometre. For long trips, factor in a minimum daily distance of 250km, and a daily driver's allowance of ₹100.

## HOTEL TAXES

In Maharashtra, hotel rooms below ₹1200 are charged a 4% tax, while those priced higher are slapped a 10% tax. Some hotels may also charge an extra 10% expenditure tax. At popular tourist getaways, tariffs can shoot up manifold over weekends, and holidays such as Diwali, Holi, Christmas and New Year.

The **Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation** (MSRTC; www.msrtc.gov.in) has a superb semideluxe bus network spanning all major towns, with the more remote places connected by ordinary buses. Some private operators have luxury Volvo services between major cities.

**Neeta Tours & Travels** (☎02228902666; www.neetabus.in) is highly recommended.

## NORTHERN MAHARASHTRA

### Nasik

☎0253 / POP 1.2 MILLION / ELEV 565M

Located on the banks of the holy Godavari River, Nasik (or Nashik) derives its name from the episode in the Ramayana where Lakshmana, Rama's brother, hacked off the *nasika* (nose) of Ravana's sister, the demon enchantress Surpanakha. True to its name, the town is an absorbing place, and you can't walk far without discovering yet another exotic temple or colourful bathing ghat that references the Hindu epic.

Adding to Nasik's spiritual flavour is the fact that the town serves as a base for pilgrims visiting Trimbak (33km west; p764) and Shirdi (79km southeast), once home to the original Sai Baba (see the boxed text, p764). Every 12 years, Nasik also plays host to the grand Kumbh Mela, the largest religious gathering on earth that shuttles between four Indian religious centres on a triennial basis. The next congregation in Nasik is due in 2015 (see p1103).

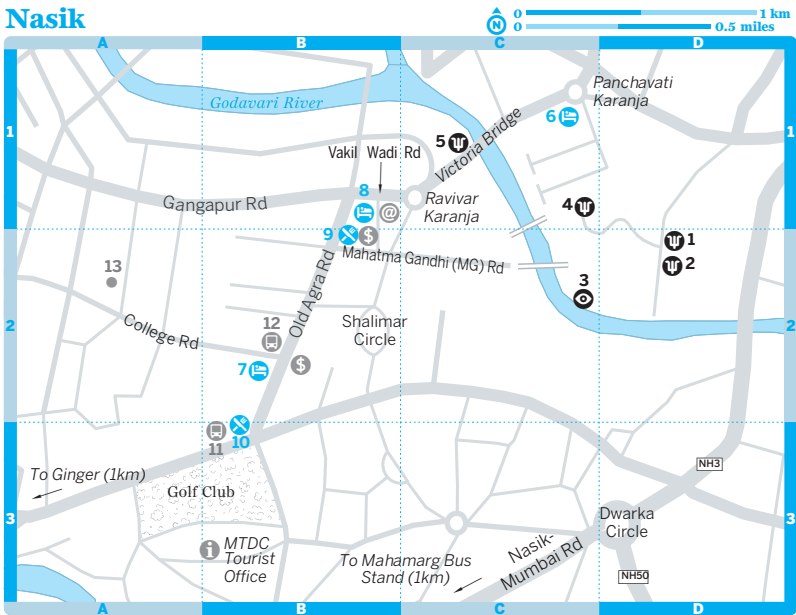
Mahatma Gandhi Rd, better known as MG Rd, a few blocks north of the Old Central bus stand, is Nasik's commercial hub. The temple-lined Godavari flows through town just east of here.

### **i** Sights

#### Ramkund

GHAT

This bathing ghat in the heart of Nasik's old quarter sees hundreds of Hindu pilgrims arriving daily to bathe, pray and – because the waters provide moksha (liberation of the soul) – to immerse the ashes of departed friends and family. For a tourist, it's an intense cultural experience, heightened by the presence of a colourful **market** downstream. It's OK to take photographs, but try not to be intrusive.



## Temples

### HINDU TEMPLES

A short walk uphill east of Ramkund is the **Kala Rama Temple**, the city's holiest shrine. Dating to 1794 and containing unusual black-stone representations of Rama, Sita and Lakshmana, the temple stands on the site where Lakshmana sliced off Surpanakha's nose. Nearby is the **Gumpha Panchavati**, where Sita supposedly hid while being assailed by the evil Ravana.

The ramshackle **Sundar Narayan Temple**, at the western end of Victoria Bridge, contains three black Vishnu deities, while the modern **Muktidham Temple**, about 7km southeast of the city near the train station, has 18 muralled chapters of the Bhagavad Gita lining its interior walls.

All the temples are open from 6am to 9pm.

## 🏨 Sleeping & Eating

### Panchavati

HOTEL \$\$

(www.panchavatihotels.com; 430 Chandak Wadi, Vakil Wadi Rd) To save yourself the hassle of scouting for a comfy bed in town, head straight for this excellent complex, comprising four hotels (and a few popular restaurants) that cover every pocket from budget to top-end, and deliver each rupee's worth. Kicking off at the cheaper end is **Panchavati Guest House** (☎2578771; s/d from ₹500/600; 🏠), which has

## Nasik

### 👁 Sights

- 1 Gumpha Panchavati.....D2
- 2 Kala Rama Temple.....D2
- 3 Market.....C2
- 4 Ramkund.....C1
- 5 Sundar Narayan Temple.....C1

### 🏨 Sleeping

- 6 Hotel Abhishek.....C1
- 7 Hotel Samrat.....B2
- 8 Panchavati.....B1

### 🍴 Eating

- 9 Annapoorna Lunch Home.....B2
- Khyber.....(see 8)
- 10 Talk of the Town.....B3

### Transport

- 11 New Central Bus Stand.....B3
- 12 Old Central Bus Stand.....B2
- 13 Railway Reservation Office.....A2

slightly cramped but clean rooms and prompt service. A more inviting option is **Panchavati Yatri** (☎2578782; s/d from ₹1100/1350; 🏠), which features excellent rooms with hot showers, spot-on service, cooperative staff and an in-house health club. **Hotel Panchavati**

## GRAPES OF NASIK

From wimpy raisins to full-bodied wines, the grapes of Nasik have come a long way. The town had been growing grapes meant for regular consumption since time immemorial. However, it was only in the early '90s that a couple of entrepreneurs realised that Nasik, with its fertile soils and cool climate, boasted conditions similar to Bordeaux. In 1997 industry pioneer **Sula Vineyards** (☎09970090010; www.sulawines.com; Govardhan, Gangapur-Savargaon Rd; ☀11am-10pm) fearlessly invested in a crop of sauvignon blanc and chenin blanc, and the first batch of domestic wines hit the shelves in 2000. It hasn't looked back.

These days, the wine list in most of Nasik's wineries stretch to include zinfandel, shiraz, merlot and cabernet as well as a few reserves and champagnes, and most of these drops can be sampled first-hand by visiting one of the estates. **York Winery** (☎02532230700; www.yorkwinery.com, Gangavarhe, Gangapur-Savargaon Rd; ☀3pm-10pm) offers wine-tasting sessions (₹100) in a top-floor room that has scenic views of the lake and surrounding hills. Sula Vineyards, located 15km west of Nasik, rounds off a vineyard tour with a wine-tasting session (₹150) that features six of its best. It's also possible to stay at some wineries. For an extremely indulging experience, head 3km inland to **Beyond** (☎09970090010; www.sulawines.com; d from ₹6000; ☎☎), an enchanting luxury resort set by a lake bordered by rolling hills, where you can roam the landscape on bicycles, go kayaking on the still waters or laze the hours away at the spa. Or you could try Chateau Indage, another of Nasik's wine biggies, that operates **Tiger Hill Vineyards Resort & Spa** (☎02532336274; www.indagegroup.com; Vilholi, Mumbai-Agra NH3; d from ₹3500; ☎), a stylish getaway-cum-wine bar 10km south of town, where you can pair its signature chardonnay with a relaxing grapeseed-oil massage.

During harvest season (January to March), some wineries also organise grape-crushing festivals, marked by unbridled revelry. Events are usually advertised on the wineries' websites.

(☎2575771; s/d from ₹1299/1499; ☎), fronting the complex, is pricier with classy rooms; it caters largely to business travellers. Last of all is the sumptuous **Panchavati Millionaire** (☎2312318; s/d ₹1600/1950; ☎), a moody affair where lavish rooms are complemented by cosy sit-in areas that are perfect for a steaming morning cuppa.

### Hotel Samrat

HOTEL \$\$

(☎2577211; www.hotelsamratnasik.com; Old Agra Rd; s/d from ₹900/1175; ☎) You'll find little to complain about at the Samrat. Inviting rooms have large windows, are tastefully decorated in brown and beige, with pine-themed furniture thrown in for good measure. Located right next to the bus stand, its spick-and-span vegetarian restaurant is open 24 hours, making it popular as a refuelling stop.

### Hotel Abhishek

HOTEL \$

(☎2514201; www.hotelabhishek.com; Panchavati Karanja; s/d ₹345/450, with AC ₹600/675; ☎) Located off the Panchavati Karanja roundabout, this pleasant budget option packs hot showers, TV and appetising vegetarian food into its well-kept, value-for-money rooms. A few minutes' walk uphill from the Godavari River, it sits amid all the ritualistic action,

and is a vantage point from which to be totally overwhelmed by sacred India at its noisiest but best.

### Ginger

HOTEL \$\$

(☎6616333; www.gingerhotels.com; Plot P20, Satpur MIDC, Trimbak Rd; s/d ₹1799/2299; ☎☎) In another town, Ginger could easily have been our top choice. In Nasik, however, it loses out to its rivals mainly due to its location, which is a couple of kilometres west of the central district. Primarily a business hotel, it features do-it-yourself service, but there are luxe features and conveniences aplenty, and the rooms are as fresh as the autumn breeze.

### TOP CHOICE Khyber

AFGHANI \$\$

(Panchavati Hotel Complex; mains ₹180-230) Taste one succulent morsel of any of Khyber's signature dishes and you might start wondering if you are actually in Kandahar. The Khyber is, without doubt, one of Nasik's top-notch fine-dining establishments, and it works up a great ambience (soft lighting, sparkling glassware, teak furniture) to go with its wide range of delectable offerings. The *murgh shaan-e-khyber*, juicy pieces of

chicken marinated with herbs and cooked in a creamy gravy, is not to be missed.

**Annapoorna Lunch Home** FAST FOOD \$  
(MG Rd; mains ₹50) This fast-moving joint has all the usual quick eats rolling endlessly off its culinary assembly line. No surprises on offer, but it would be hard to find fault with the pan-fresh food that's cheaper than peanuts. Peak lunch hours are a bad time to walk in, as you might have trouble finding a seat.

**Talk of the Town** MULTICUISINE \$\$  
(Old Agra Rd; mains ₹150-180) Next to the New Central bus stand, this place attracts more tipplers than eaters, although that's no indication of the quality of its food. An upscale place comprising dining rooms at split levels, it offers a good selection of coastal, North Indian and Chinese dishes, best washed down with a refreshing pint of lager.

## i Information

**Cyber Café** (Vakil Wadi Rd; per hr ₹20; ☺10am-10pm) Near Panchavati Hotel Complex.

**MTDC tourist office** (☎2570059; T/I, Golf Club, Old Agra Rd; ☺10.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) About 1km south of the Old Central bus stand.

**State Bank of India** (Old Agra Rd; ☺11am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-1pm Sat) Opposite the Old Central bus stand. Changes cash and travellers cheques and has an ATM.

**HDFC Bank** (MG Rd) Has a 24-hour ATM.

## i Getting There & Around Bus

Nasik's **Old Central bus stand** (CBS) is useful for those going to Trimbak (₹27, 45 minutes). A block south, the **New Central bus stand** has services to Aurangabad (semideluxe ₹199, 4½ hours) and Pune (semideluxe/deluxe ₹213/360, 4½ hours). South of town, the **Mahamarg bus stand** has services to Mumbai (semideluxe ₹211, four hours) and Shirdi (₹90, 2½ hours).

**Private bus agents** based near the CBS run buses to Pune, Mumbai, Aurangabad and Ahmedabad. Fares are marginally lower than those charged on state buses. Note that buses depart from Old Agra Rd, and that most Mumbai-bound buses terminate at Dadar in Mumbai.

## Train

The Nasik Rd train station is 8km southeast of the town centre, but a useful **railway reservation office** (1st fl, Commissioner's Office, Canada Corner; ☺8am-8pm Mon-Sat) is 500m west of the CBS. The *Panchavati Express* is the fastest

train to Mumbai (2nd class/chair ₹75/263, 3½ hours, 7am), and the *Tapovan Express* is the only convenient direct train to Aurangabad (2nd class/chair ₹66/233, 3½ hours, 9.50am). An autorickshaw to the station costs about ₹70.

## Around Nasik

### BHANDARDARA

The picturesque village of Bhandardara is nestled deep in the folds of the Sahyadris, about 70km from Nasik. A little-visited place surrounded by craggy mountains, it remains one of Maharashtra's best-kept travel secrets and, with an absence of check-box travellers, makes a fantastic getaway from the bustle of urban India. However, you don't need to be a rocket scientist to figure out that the scene might be very different in the near future – visit while you can.

Most of Bhandardara's habitation is thrown around the spectacular **Arthur Lake**, a horseshoe-shaped reservoir fed by the waters of the Pravara River. The lake is barraged on one side by the imposing **Wilson Dam**, a colonial-era structure dating back to 1910. If you like walking, consider a hike to the summit of **Mt Kalsubai**, which at 1646m was once used as an observation point by the Marathas. Alternately, you could hike to the ruins of the **Ratangad Fort**, another of Shivaji's erstwhile strongholds, which has wonderful views of the surrounding ranges.

The charming **Anandvan Resort** (☎9920311221; www.anandvanresorts.com; d from ₹5500; ☼), an ecoresort with a choice of comfy cottages and villas overlooking Arthur Lake, allows you to camp in style. The **MTDC Holiday Resort** (☎02424257032; d from ₹1200; ☼), located further down the hill, is also a good place to spend the night.

Bhandardara can be accessed by taking a local bus from Nasik's Mahamarg bus stand to Ghoti (₹30, one hour), from where an autorickshaw ride costs ₹60. A taxi from Nasik can also drop you at your resort for about ₹1200.

### IGATPURI

Heard of *vipassana*, haven't you? Well head to Igatpuri to see where (and how) it all happens. Located about 44km south of Nasik, this village is home to the headquarters of the world's largest *vipassana* meditation institution, the **Vipassana International Academy** (☎02553244076; www.dhamma.org), which institutionalises

this strict form of meditation first taught by Gautama Buddha in the 6th century BC and reintroduced to India by teacher SN Goenka in the '60s. Ten-day residential courses (advance bookings compulsory) are held throughout the year, though authorities warn that it requires rigorous discipline, and dropping out midway isn't encouraged. Basic accommodation, food and meditation instruction are provided free of charge, but donations upon completion of the course are accepted.

### TRIMBAK

The moody **Trimbakeshwar Temple** stands in the centre of Trimbak, 33km west of Nasik. It's one of India's most sacred temples, containing a *jiyoti linga*, one of the 12 most important shrines to Shiva. Only Hindus are allowed in, but non-Hindus can peek into the courtyard. Nearby, the waters of the Godavari River flow into the **Gangadwar bathing tank**, where all are welcome to wash away their earthly sins. You also have the option of a four-hour return hike up the **Brahmagiri Hill**, where you can see the Godavari dribble forth from a spring.

Regular buses run from the CBS in Nasik to Trimbak (₹26, 45 minutes).

## Aurangabad

📍0240 / POP 892,400 / ELEV 515M

Aurangabad lay low through most of the tumultuous history of medieval India and only hit the spotlight when the last Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb, made the city his capital from 1653 to 1707. With the emperor's death came the city's rapid decline, but the brief period of glory saw the building of some fascinating monuments, including a Taj Mahal replica (Bibi-qa-Maqbara), that continue to draw a steady trickle of visitors today. These

monuments, alongside other historic relics such as a group of ancient Buddhist caves, make Aurangabad a good choice for a fairly decent weekend excursion. But the real reason for traipsing all the way here is because the town is an excellent base for exploring the World Heritage Sites of Ellora and Ajanta.

Silk fabrics were once Aurangabad's chief revenue generator, and the town is still known across the world for its hand-woven Himroo and Paithani saris (see Shopping, p767).

The train station, cheap hotels and restaurants are clumped together in the south of the town along Station Rd East and Station Rd West. The MSRTC bus stand is 1.5km to the north of the train station. Northeast of the bus stand is the buzzing old town with its narrow streets and Muslim quarters. Interestingly, Aurangabad also has a sizeable Buddhist community who follow in the footsteps of eminent humanist and social leader BR Ambedkar, and celebrate his conversion to Buddhism during Dussehra.

### 👁️ Sights

#### Bibi-qa-Maqbara

MONUMENT

(Indian/foreigner ₹5/100; 🌅dawn-10pm) Built by Aurangzeb's son Azam Khan in 1679 as a mausoleum for his mother Rabia-ud-Daurani, Bibi-qa-Maqbara is widely known as the 'poor man's Taj'. With its four minarets flanking a central onion-domed mausoleum, the white structure bears striking resemblance to the original Taj Mahal in Agra. It is much less grand, however, and apart from having a few marble adornments, most of the structure is finished in lime mortar. Apparently the prince had conceived the entire mausoleum in white marble like the Taj, but was

### SAI BABA OF SHIRDI

His iconic status as a national guru is legendary. And his divinity, to some, is unquestionable. But Sai Baba, for all his popularity, remains one of India's most enigmatic figures. No one knows where he came from, what his real name was, or when he was born. Having stepped out of an obscure childhood, he first appeared in the town of Shirdi near Nasik around the age of 16 (in the mid-1800s). There, he advocated religious tolerance, which he practised by sleeping alternately in a mosque and a Hindu temple as well as praying in them both. The masses took to him right away, and by the time Sai Baba died in 1918, the many miracles attributed to him had seen him gather a large following. Today, his temple complex in Shirdi draws an average of 40,000 pilgrims a day. Interestingly, in Andhra Pradesh, another widely respected holy man Sathya Sai Baba (1926–2011) claimed to be the reincarnation of the original Sai Baba (see p918).



thwarted by his frugal father who opposed his extravagant idea of draining state coffers for the purpose. However, despite the use of cheaper material and the obvious weathering, it's a sight far more impressive than the average gravestone. The central onion dome was being restored during research, and should be back in its untarnished glory by the time you visit.

### Aurangabad Caves

CAVE

(Indian/foreigner ₹5/100; ☀️dawn-dusk) Architecturally speaking, the Aurangabad Caves aren't a patch on Ellora or Ajanta, but they do throw some light on early Buddhist architecture and, above all, make for a quiet and peaceful outing. Carved out of the hillside in the 6th or 7th century AD, the 10 caves, comprising two groups 1km apart (retain your ticket for entry into both sets), are all Buddhist. Cave 7, with its sculptures of scantily clad lovers in suggestive positions, is particularly arty. The caves are about 2km north of Bibi-qa-Maqbara. A return auto-rickshaw from the mausoleum shouldn't cost more than ₹150.

### Panchakki

GARDEN

(Indian/foreigner ₹5/20; ☀️6.15am-9.15pm) The garden complex of Panchakki, literally meaning 'water wheel', takes its name from the hydro-mill which, in its day, was considered a marvel of engineering. Driven by water carried through earthen pipes from the river 6km away, it was once used to grind grain for pilgrims. You can still see the humble machine at work today.

Baba Shah Muzaffar, a Sufi saint and spiritual guide to Aurangzeb, is buried here. His **memorial garden** is flanked by a series of fish-filled tanks, near a large shade-giving banyan tree.

### Shivaji Museum

MUSEUM

(Dr Ambedkar Rd; admission ₹5; ☀️10.30am-6pm Fri-Wed) This simple museum is dedicated to the life of the Maratha hero Shivaji. Its collection includes a 500-year-old chain-mail suit and a copy of the Quran handwritten by Aurangzeb.

## Tours

**Classic Tours** (p768) and the **Indian Tourism Development Corporation** (ITDC; ☎️2331143) both run daily bus tours to the Ajanta and Ellora Caves. The trip to Ajanta Caves costs ₹400 and the tour to Ellora Caves, ₹270; prices include a guide but don't

cover admission fees. The Ellora tour also includes all the other major Aurangabad sites along with Daulatabad Fort and Aurangzeb's tomb in Khuldabad, which is a lot to swallow in a day. All tours start and end at the MTDC Holiday Resort. During quiet periods, operators often pool resources and pack their clients into a single bus.

For private tours, try **Ashoka Tours & Travels** (p768), which owns a decent fleet of taxis and can personalise your trip around Aurangabad and to Ajanta and Ellora.

## Sleeping

### Lemon Tree

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎️6603030; www.lemonreehotels.com; R/2 Chikalhana, Airport Rd; s/d incl breakfast from ₹3499/4499; 🍷🍷🍷) Fresh as lemonade, this swish, all-new boutique hotel (spread lazily around what we thought was the best swimming pool in the Deccan) makes you want to stay back in Aurangabad even after you're done sightseeing. The rooms are done up in vivid tropical shades offset against snow-white walls, and are super snug to boot. Adding a dash of class is the prim Citrus Café, and the Slounge bar, where you can down a drink while hustling a fellow traveller in to a game of pool. It's one place you're sure to have a nice stay.

### MTDC Holiday Resort

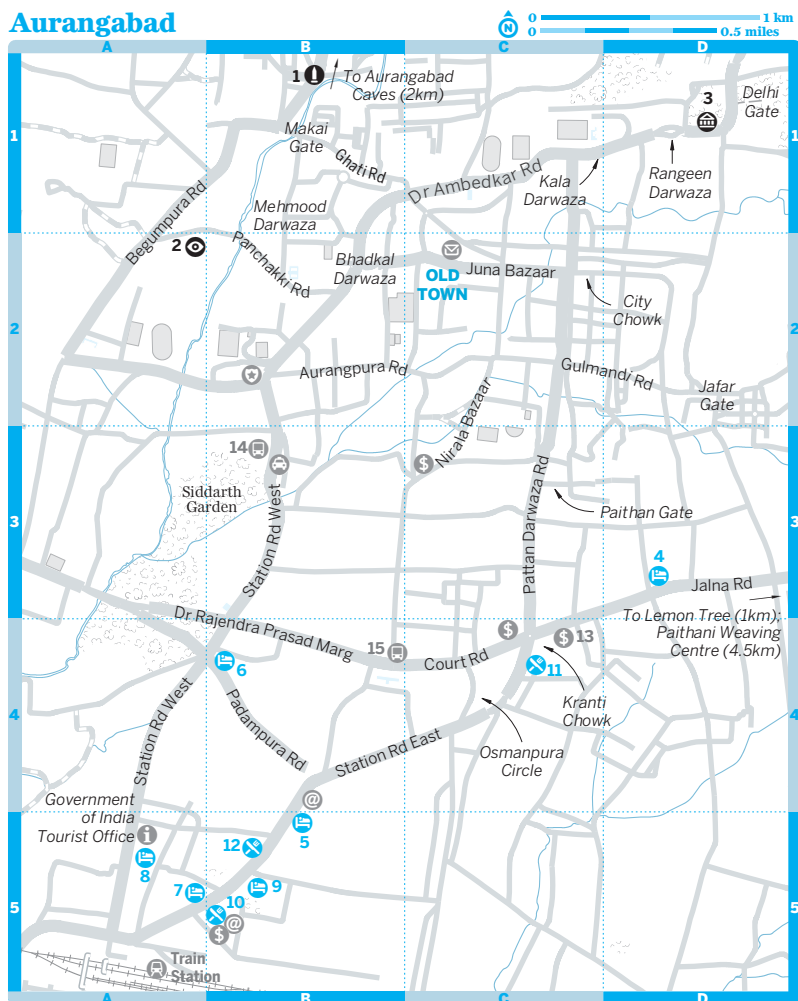
HOTEL \$\$

(☎️2331513; Station Rd East; d from ₹1100, with AC from ₹1300; 🍷) Set around a lovely lawn and shaded by robust canopies, this curiously disorganised hotel is one of the better state-owned operations in Maharashtra. The large residential blocks have recently received a facelift, and the rooms, though lacking in character, are spacious and tidy. Service is prompt, there's also a well-stocked bar, a decent restaurant and a couple of travel agencies and souvenir shops on-site. Come between March and July and you will pay 20% less.

### Hotel Panchavati

HOTEL \$

(☎️2328755; www.hotelpanchavati.com; Station Rd West; s/d ₹525/625, with AC ₹775/900; 🍷) This place is fast establishing itself as one of the more reputed hotels in Aurangabad (quite a turnaround from the days when it took some serious stick from travellers). Generally packed to the gills with guests, it offers a range of compact but thoughtfully appointed rooms, with comfortable beds and patterned rugs on the floor that match the



upholstery and pastel walls. The managers are efficient and friendly and the hotel sits easily at the top of the value-for-money class.

### VITS

HOTEL \$\$\$  
 (2350701; www.vitshotelaurangabad.com; Station Rd East; s/d incl breakfast ₹5500/6500; 📶🚰🚰) Located close to the train station, snazzy-lobbied VITS goes by the motto 'Guest. Rest. Best'. What that basically means is you have a delightfully luxurious room to flop about in, packed with all the usual luxe features you'd find in top-range

hotels. A branch of the Four Fountains chain of spas located within the hotel considerably ups the indulgence quotient.

### Hotel Nandanvan

HOTEL \$  
 (2338916; Station Rd East; s/d ₹450/550, with AC ₹650/750; 📶) Unusually large but clean rooms are on offer at this well-run hotel, set in a prime location close to Kailash Restaurant. The real dealmakers, of course, are the loos, which are cleaner than those of most other budget options in town. The noise coming off the main road might get to you at times, though.

## Aurangabad

### 📍 Sights

- 1 Bibi-qa-Maqbara..... B1
- 2 Panchakki..... A2
- 3 Shivaji Museum ..... D1

### 🏨 Sleeping

- 4 Hotel Amarpreet..... D3
- 5 Hotel Nandanvan..... B5
- 6 Hotel Panchavati..... B4
- 7 MTDC Holiday Resort..... A5
- 8 Tourist's Home ..... A5
- 9 VITS ..... B5

### 🍴 Eating

- China Town ..... (see 4)
- Kailash..... (see 5)
- 10 Prashanth..... B5
- 11 Swad Veg Restaurant..... C4
- 12 Tandoor..... B5

### Information

- Ashoka Tours & Travels..... (see 6)
- Classic Tours ..... (see 7)
- MTDC Office..... (see 7)
- 13 State Bank of India..... C4

### Transport

- 14 MSRTC Bus Stand..... B3
- 15 Private Bus Agents..... B4

### Hotel Amarpreet

HOTEL \$\$

(☎6621133; www.amarpreethotel.com; Jalna Rd; s/d from ₹2800/3600; 🍷🍷) We have to hand it to Amarpreet for trying hard. The rooms might trigger the occasional hunch that you'd have got more bang for your buck elsewhere, but the all-smiles management makes up for it with polite service, excellent housekeeping and a great selection of food and booze. Ask for a room in the western wing, with superb views of Bibi-qa-Maqbara.

### Tourist's Home

HOTEL \$

(☎2337212; Station Rd West; d ₹400, with AC ₹1000; 🍷) This one's as basic as it gets. Although recently given a makeover, most rooms here are barebones, but well-ventilated. There are quite a few rules and regulations to be adhered to, going by the noticeboard at the entrance, but the management is friendly. And it's close to the train station, which is a positive.



### Eating

#### China Town

CHINESE \$\$

(Hotel Amarpreet, Jalna Rd; mains ₹180-200) For a place like Aurangabad, this in-house restaur-

ant at Hotel Amarpreet tosses up Chinese dishes of a surprisingly fine quality. A good range of noodles is on offer, which goes extremely well with the numerous chicken and lamb preparations all presented appetisingly in the restaurant's well-dressed interiors.

### Swad Veg Restaurant

INDIAN \$

(Kanchan Chamber, Station Rd East; mains ₹70-80) This place has come a long way since its formative years, and now offers a fantastic range of Indian snacks and staples – plus a few pizzas, ice creams and shakes – in its prim and clean basement premises. Try the Gujarati thali (₹110), an endless train of dishes that diners gobble up under the benevolent gaze of patron saint swami Yogiraj Hanstirth, whose portrait illuminates a far wall of the restaurant.

### Tandoor

NORTH INDIAN \$\$

(Shyam Chambers, Station Rd East; mains ₹160-180) Offering fine tandoori dishes and flavoursome North Indian veg and non-veg options in a weirdly Pharaonic atmosphere, Tandoor is one of Aurangabad's top stand-alone restaurants. A few Chinese dishes are also on offer, but patrons clearly prefer the dishes coming out of, well, the tandoor.

### Kailash

INDIAN \$

(Station Rd East; mains ₹70-80) Adjacent to Hotel Nandanvan, this busy pure-veg restaurant is a smart glass-and-chrome place where you can sit back after a long day out and wolf down a variety of local delicacies brought to your table by smartly dressed waiters.

### Prashanth

INDIAN \$

(Siddharth Arcade, Station Rd East; mains ₹70-90) Located near the railway station bang opposite the MTDC Holiday Resort, Prashanth has consistently won accolades from travellers for its delightful vegetarian-only dishes, epic fruit juices and enjoyable patio setting. Eat your heart out.



### Shopping

Hand-woven Himroo material is a traditional Aurangabad speciality (though people have differing opinions regarding its aesthetic appeal). Made from cotton, silk and silver threads, it was developed as a cheaper alternative to Kam Khab, the more ornate brocade of silk and gold thread woven for royalty in the 14th century. Most of today's Himroo shawls and saris are mass-produced using power looms, but some showrooms in

the city still run traditional workshops, thus preserving this dying art.

Himroo saris start at ₹1000 (cotton and silk blend). Paithani saris, which are of a superior quality, range from ₹5000 to ₹300,000 – before you balk at the price, bear in mind that some of them take more than a year to make. If you're buying, ensure you're spending your money on authentic Himroo, and not 'Aurangabad silk'.

One of the best places to come and watch weavers at work is the **Paithani Weaving Centre** (Jalna Rd; ☎11.30am-8pm), behind the Indian Airlines office.

## Information

### Internet Access

**Internet Browsing Hub** (Station Rd East; per hr ₹15; ☎8am-10pm)

**Sai Internet Café** (Station Rd East; per hr ₹15; ☎8am-10pm)

### Money

ICICI, State Bank of India (SBI), State Bank of Hyderabad (SBH) and HDFC Bank have several ATMs along Station Rd East, Court Rd, Nirala Bazaar and Jalna Rd.

**State Bank of India** (Kranti Chowk; ☎11am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-1pm Sat) Handles foreign exchange.

### Post

**Post office** (Juna Bazaar; ☎10am-6pm Mon-Sat)

### Tourist Information

#### Government of India tourist office

(☎2331217; Krishna Vilas, Station Rd West; ☎8.30am-6pm Mon-Sat) A friendly and helpful tourist office with a decent range of brochures.

**MTDC office** (☎2331513; MTDC Holiday Resort, Station Rd East; ☎10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat)

### Travel Agencies

**Ashoka Tours & Travels** (☎9890340816; Hotel Panchavati, Station Rd West) Personalised city and regional tours, car hire and hotel pick-ups. Run by former *Lonely Planet* recommended autorickshaw driver Ashok T Kadam.

**Classic Tours** (☎2337788; www.classictours.info; MTDC Holiday Resort, Station Rd East) Trusty place to book transport and tours.

## Getting There & Away

### Air

The **airport** is 10km east of town. En route are the offices of **Indian Airlines** (☎2485241; Jalna Rd) and **Jet Airways** (☎2441392; Jalna Rd).

There are daily flights to Delhi, with a stopover in Mumbai. Fares start from around ₹1500.

### Bus

Buses leave regularly from the **MSRTC bus stand** (Station Rd West) to Pune (semideluxe/deluxe ₹228/390, five hours) and Nasik (semideluxe ₹199, five hours). **Private bus agents** are located around the corner where Dr Rajendra Prasad Marg becomes Court Rd; a few sit closer to the bus stand. Deluxe overnight bus destinations include Mumbai (with/without AC ₹280/220, sleeper ₹610, eight hours), Ahmedabad (₹410, 15 hours) and Nagpur (₹390, 12 hours).

Ordinary buses head to Ellora from the MSRTC bus stand every half hour (₹28, 45 minutes) and hourly to Jalgaon (₹122, four hours) via Fardapur (₹80, two hours). The T-junction near Fardapur is the drop-off point for Ajanta (see p775 for more details).

### Train

Aurangabad's **train station** (Station Rd East) is not on a main line, but two heavily-booked trains, the *Tapovan Express* (2nd class/chair ₹102/338, 7½ hours, 2.35pm) and the *Janshat-Abdi Express* (2nd class/chair ₹127/420, 6½ hours, 6am) run direct to/from Mumbai. For Hyderabad (Secunderabad), take the *Devagiri Express* (sleeper/2AC ₹224/822, 10 hours, 4.05am). To reach northern or eastern India, take a bus to Jalgaon and board a train there.

## Getting Around

Autorickshaws are as common here as mosquitoes in a summer swamp. The **taxi stand** is next to the MSRTC bus stand; share jeeps also depart from here for destinations around Aurangabad, including Ellora and Daulatabad. Expect to pay ₹600 for a full-day tour in a rickshaw, or ₹900 in a taxi.

## Around Aurangabad

### DAULATABAD

This one's straight out of a Tolkien fantasy. A most beguiling structure, the 12th-century hilltop fortress of Daulatabad is located about 15km from Aurangabad, en route to Ellora. Now in ruins, the citadel was originally conceived as an impregnable fort by the Yadava kings. Its most infamous high-point came in 1328, when it was christened Daulatabad (City of Fortune) by eccentric Delhi sultan Mohammed Tughlaq and made the capital – he even marched the entire population of Delhi 1100km south to populate it. Ironically, Daulatabad – despite being better positioned strategically than Delhi –

soon proved untenable as a capital due to an acute water crisis, and Tughlaq forced the weary inhabitants all the way back to Delhi, which had by then been reduced to a ghost town.

Daulatabad's central bastion sits atop a 200m-high craggy outcrop known as Devagiri (Hill of the Gods), surrounded by a 5km **fort** (Indian/foreigner ₹5/100; ☀6am-6pm). The climb to the summit takes about an hour, and leads past an ingenious series of defences, including multiple doorways designed with odd angles and spike-studded doors to prevent elephant charges. A tower of victory, known as the **Chand Minar** (Tower of the Moon), built in 1435, soars 60m above the ground to the right – it's closed to visitors. Higher up, you can walk into the **Chini Mahal**, where Abul Hasan Tana Shah, king of Golconda, was held captive for 12 years before his death in 1699. Nearby, there's a 6m **cannon**, cast from five different metals and engraved with Aurangzeb's name.

Part of the ascent goes through a pitch-black, bat-infested, water-seeping, spiralling tunnel. Guides (₹450) are available near the ticket counter to show you around, and their flame-bearing assistants will lead you through the dark passageway for a small tip. But on the way down you'll be left to your own devices, so carry a torch. The crumbling staircases and sheer drops can make things difficult for the elderly, children and those suffering from vertigo or claustrophobia.

### KHULDABAD

Time permitting, take a pit-stop in the scruffy-walled settlement of Khuldabad (Heavenly Abode), a quaint and cheerful little Muslim pilgrimage village just 3km from Ellora. Buried deep in the pages of history, Khuldabad is where a number of historic figures lie interred, including emperor Aurangzeb, the last of the Mughal greats. Despite matching the legendary King Solomon in terms of state riches, Aurangzeb was an ascetic in his personal life, and insisted that he be buried in a simple tomb constructed only with the money he had made from sewing Muslim skullcaps. An unfussy affair of modest marble in a courtyard of the **Alamgir Dargah** (☀7am-8pm) is exactly what he got.

Generally a calm place, Khuldabad is swamped with pilgrims every April when a robe said to have been worn by the Prophet Mohammed, and kept within the dargah

(shrine), is shown to the public. Across the road from the Alamgir Dargah, another shrine contains strands of the Prophet's beard and lumps of silver from a tree of solid silver, which is said to have miraculously grown at this site after a saint's death.

## Ellora

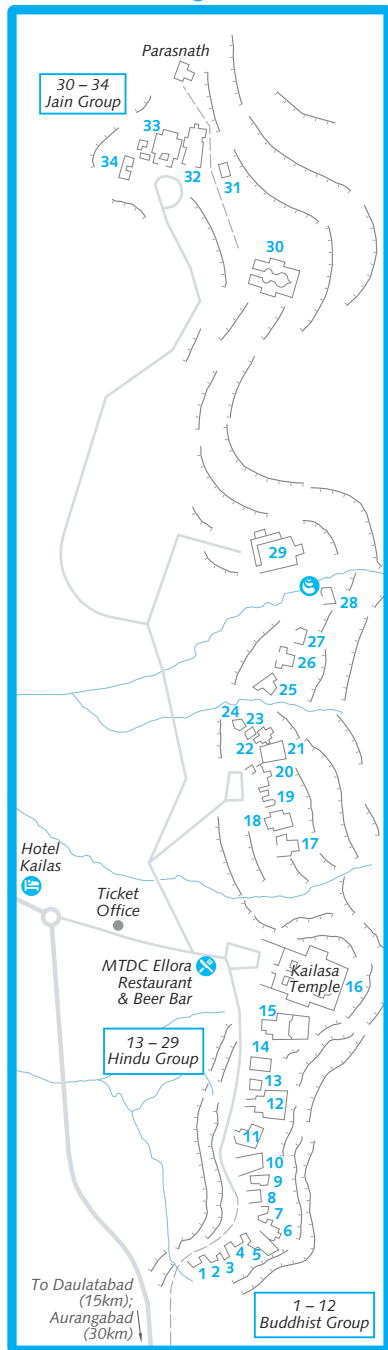
📍02437

Give a man a hammer and chisel, and he'll create art for posterity. Come to the World Heritage Site-listed **Ellora cave temples** (Indian/foreigner ₹10/250; ☀dawn-dusk Wed-Mon), located 30km from Aurangabad, and you'll know exactly what we mean. The epitome of ancient Indian rock-cut architecture, these caves were chipped out laboriously over five centuries by generations of Buddhist, Hindu and Jain monks. Monasteries, chapels, temples – the caves served every purpose, and they were stylishly embellished with a profusion of remarkably detailed sculptures. Unlike the caves at Ajanta (p772), which are carved into a sheer rock face, the Ellora caves line a 2km-long escarpment, the gentle slope of which allowed architects to build elaborate courtyards in front of the shrines, and render them with sculptures of a surreal quality.

Ellora has 34 caves in all: 12 Buddhist (AD 600–800), 17 Hindu (AD 600–900) and five Jain (AD 800–1000). The grandest, however, is the awesome Kailasa Temple (Cave 16), the world's largest monolithic sculpture, hewn top to bottom against a rocky slope by 7000 labourers over a 150-year period. Dedicated to Lord Shiva, it is clearly among the best that ancient Indian architecture has to offer.

Historically, the site represents the renaissance of Hinduism under the Chalukya and Rashtrakuta dynasties, the subsequent decline of Indian Buddhism and a brief resurgence of Jainism under official patronage. The increasing influence of Tantric elements in India's three great religions can also be seen in the way the sculptures are executed, and their coexistence at one site indicates a lengthy period of religious tolerance.

Official guides can be hired at the ticket office in front of the Kailasa Temple for ₹700. Most guides have an extensive knowledge of cave architecture, so try not to skimp. If your tight itinerary forces you to choose between Ellora or Ajanta, Ellora wins hands down.



## Sights

### Kailasa Temple

HINDU TEMPLE

Halfway between a cave and a religious shrine, this **rock-cut temple**, built by King Krishna I of the Rashtrakuta dynasty in AD 760, was built to represent Mt Kailasa (Kailash), Shiva's Himalayan abode. To say that the assignment was daring would be an understatement. Three huge trenches were bored into the sheer cliff face with hammers and chisels, following which the shape was 'released', a process that entailed removing 200,000 tonnes of rock, while taking care to leave behind those sections that would later be used for sculpting. Covering twice the area of the Parthenon in Athens and being half as high again, Kailasa is an engineering marvel that was executed straight from the head with zero margin for error. Modern draughtsmen might have a lesson or two to learn here.

Size aside, the temple is remarkable for its prodigious sculptural decoration. The temple houses several intricately carved panels, depicting scenes from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the adventures of Krishna. Also worth admiring are the immense **monolithic pillars** that stand in the courtyard, flanking the entrance on both sides, and the southeastern gallery that has 10 giant and fabulous panels depicting the different avatars of Lord Vishnu. Kailasa is a temple, still very much in use; you'll have to remove your shoes to enter the main shrine.

After you're done with the main enclosure, bypass the hordes of snack-munching day trippers to explore the temple's many dank, bat urine-soaked corners with their numerous forgotten carvings. Afterwards, hike up a foot trail to the south of the complex that takes you to the top perimeter of the 'cave', from where you can get a bird's-eye view of the entire temple complex.

### Buddhist Caves

CAVES

The southernmost 12 caves are Buddhist *vi-haras* (monasteries), except Cave 10, which is a *chaitya* (assembly hall). While the earliest caves are simple, Caves 11 and 12 are more ambitious, and on par with the more impressive Hindu temples.

**Cave 1**, the simplest *vihara*, may have been a granary. **Cave 2** is notable for its ornate pillars and the imposing seated Buddha, which faces the setting sun. **Cave 3** and **Cave 4** are unfinished and not well-preserved.

**Cave 5** is the largest *vihara* in this group, at 18m wide and 36m long; the rows of stone benches hint that it may once have been an assembly hall.

**Cave 6** is an ornate *vihara* with wonderful images of Tara, consort of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, and of the Buddhist goddess of learning, Mahamayuri, looking remarkably similar to Saraswati, her Hindu equivalent. **Cave 7** is an unadorned hall, but from here you can pass through a doorway to **Cave 8**, the first cave in which the sanctum is detached from the rear wall. **Cave 9** is notable for its wonderfully carved fascia.

**Cave 10** is the only *chaitya* in the Buddhist group and one of the finest in India. Its ceiling features ribs carved into the stonework; the grooves were once fitted with wooden panels. The balcony and upper gallery offer a closer view of the ceiling and a frieze depicting amorous couples. A decorative window gently illuminates an enormous figure of the teaching Buddha.

**Cave 11**, the Do Thal (Two Storey) Cave, is entered through its third basement level, not discovered until 1876. Like Cave 12, it probably owes its size to competition with the more impressive Hindu caves of the same period.

**Cave 12**, the huge Tin Thal (Three Storey) Cave, is entered through a courtyard. The locked shrine on the top floor contains a large Buddha figure flanked by his seven previous incarnations. The walls are carved with relief pictures, like those in the Hindu caves.

### Hindu Caves

CAVES

Where calm and contemplation infuse the Buddhist caves, drama and excitement characterise the Hindu group (Caves 13 to 29). In terms of scale, creative vision and skill of execution, these caves are in a league of their own.

All these temples were cut from the top down, so it was never necessary to use scaffolding – the builders began with the roof and moved down to the floor.

**Cave 13** is a simple cave, most likely a granary. **Cave 14**, the Ravana-ki-Khai, is a Buddhist *vihara* converted to a temple dedicated to Shiva sometime in the 7th century.

**Cave 15**, the Das Avatara (Ten Incarnations of Vishnu) Cave, is one of the finest at Ellora. The two-storey temple contains a mesmerising Shiva Nataraja, and Shiva emerging from a lingam (phallic image) while Vishnu and Brahma pay homage.

**Caves 17 to 20** and **22 to 28** are simple monasteries.

**Cave 21**, known as the Ramesvara Cave, features interesting interpretations of familiar Shaivite scenes depicted in the earlier temples. The figure of goddess Ganga, standing on her makara (mythical sea creature), is particularly notable.

The large **Cave 29**, the Dumar Lena, is thought to be a transitional model between the simpler hollowed-out caves and the fully developed temples exemplified by the Kailasa. It has views over a nearby waterfall you can walk down to.

### Jain Caves

CAVES

The five Jain caves may lack the artistic vigour and ambitious size of the best Hindu temples, but they are exceptionally detailed. The caves are 1km north of the last Hindu temple (Cave 29) at the end of the bitumen road.

**Cave 30**, the Chhota Kailasa (Little Kailasa), is a poor imitation of the great Kailasa Temple and stands by itself some distance from the other Jain temples.

In contrast, **Cave 32**, the Indra Sabha (Assembly Hall of Indra), is the finest of the Jain temples. Its ground-floor plan is similar to that of the Kailasa, but the upstairs area is as ornate and richly decorated as the downstairs is plain. There are images of the Jain *tirthankars* (great teachers) Parasnath and Gomateshvara, the latter surrounded by wildlife. Inside the shrine is a seated figure of Mahavira, the last *tirthankar* and founder of the Jain religion.

**Cave 31** is really an extension of Cave 32. **Cave 33**, the Jagannath Sabha, is similar in plan to 32 and has some well-preserved sculptures. The final temple, the small **Cave 34**, also has interesting sculptures. On the hilltop over the Jain temples, a 5m-high image of Parasnath looks down on Ellora.

## Sleeping & Eating

### Hotel Kailas

HOTEL \$\$

(2)244446; www.hotelkailas.com; d ₹1500, cottages from ₹2000; ☎) The sole decent hotel near the site, this place should be considered only if you can't have enough of Ellora in a single day. The comfy cottages here come with warm showers; those with cave views are ₹500 pricier. There's a good restaurant (mains ₹100) and a lush lawn tailor-made for an evening drink.

The spotless **MTDC Ellora Restaurant & Beer Bar** (mains ₹60-90; ☎9am-5pm), located

within the complex, is a good place to settle in for lunch, or pack takeaways in case you want to picnic beside the caves.

## **i** Getting There & Away

Buses regularly ply the road between Aurangabad and Ellora (₹28); the last bus departs from Ellora at 8pm. Share jeeps leave when they're full with drop-off outside the bus stand in Aurangabad (₹40). A full-day autorickshaw tour to Ellora, with stops en route, costs ₹600; taxis charge around ₹900.

## Ajanta

☎02438

Fiercely guarding its horde of priceless artistic treasures from another era, the **Buddhist caves of Ajanta** (Indian/foreigner ₹10/250; video ₹25; 🕒9am-5.30pm Tue-Sun), 105km northeast of Aurangabad, could well be called the Louvre of ancient India. Much older than Ellora, its venerable twin in the World Heritage Sites listings, these secluded caves date from around the 2nd century BC to the 6th century AD and were among the earliest monastic institutions to be constructed in the country. Ironically, it was Ellora's rise that brought about Ajanta's downfall, and historians believe the site was abandoned once the focus had shifted to the newly-built caves of Ellora. Upon being deserted, the caves were soon reclaimed by wilderness and remained forgotten until 1819, when a British hunting party led by officer John Smith stumbled upon them purely by chance.

The primary reason to visit Ajanta is to admire its renowned 'frescoes', actually temperas, which adorn many of the caves' interiors. With few other examples from ancient times matching their artistic excellence and fine execution, these paintings are of unfathomable heritage value. It's believed that the natural pigments for these paintings were mixed with animal glue and vegetable gum to bind them to the dry surface. Many caves have small, crater-like holes in their floors, which acted as palettes during paint jobs.

Despite their age, the paintings in most caves remain finely preserved today, and many attribute it to their relative isolation from humanity for centuries. However, it would be a tad optimistic to say that decay hasn't set in. Signposts placed at the entrance of the complex list a series of 'Dos

and Don'ts' intended to reduce human impact on this vulnerable site. Please comply.

Authorised guides are available to show you around for ₹600.

## **👁** Sights & Activities

### The Caves

CAVES

The 30 caves of Ajanta line the steep face of a horseshoe-shaped rock gorge bordering the Waghore River flowing below. They are sequentially numbered from one end to the other, barring Caves 29 and 30. The numbering has nothing to do with their chronological order; the oldest caves are actually in the middle and are flanked by newer caves on both sides.

Caves 3, 5, 8, 22 and 28 to 30 remain either closed or inaccessible. Other caves might be closed from time to time due to restoration work – Cave 10, the grandest of them all, was being scaffolded on the outside during research. During rush periods, viewers are allotted 15 minutes within the caves, many of which have to be entered barefoot (socks allowed).

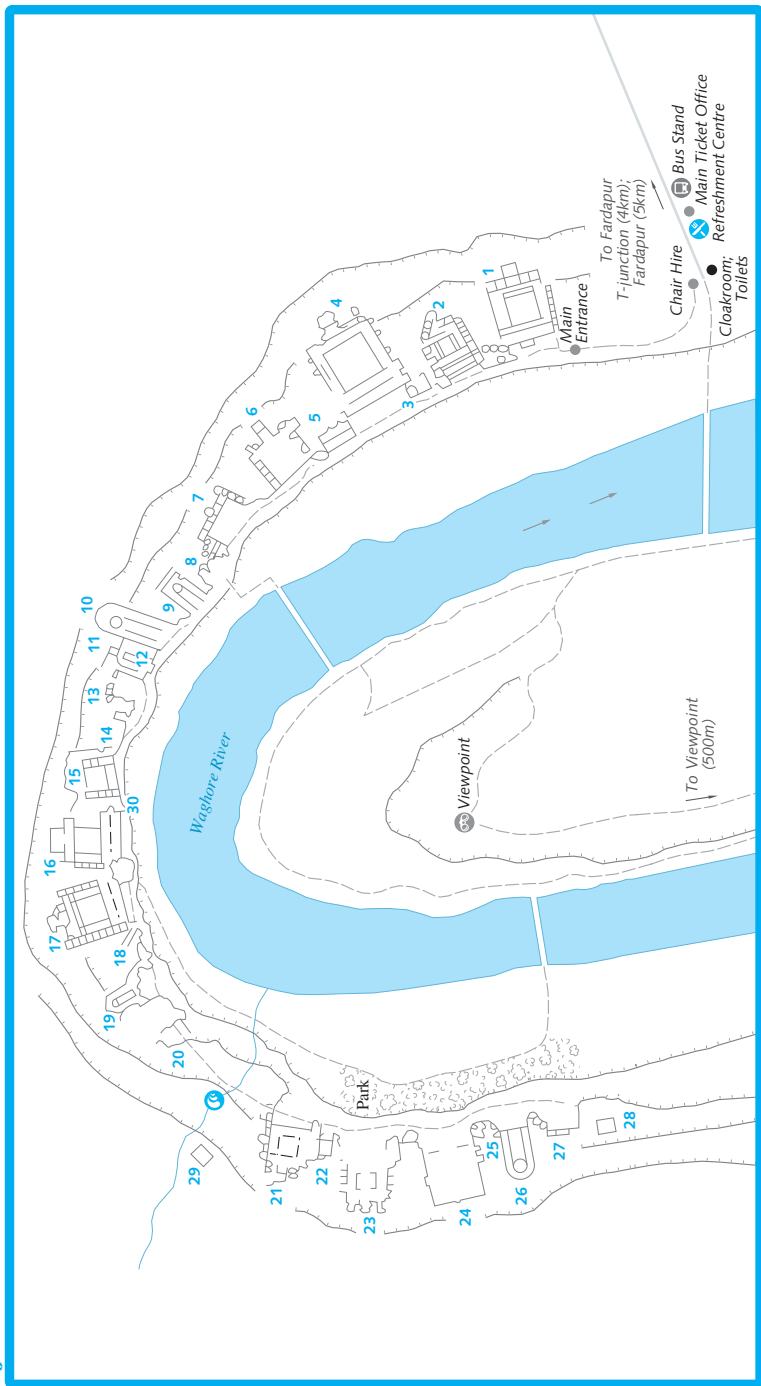
Five of the caves are *chaityas* while the other 25 are *viharas*. Caves 8, 9, 10, 12, 13 and part of 15 are early Buddhist caves, while the others date from around the 5th century AD (Mahayana period). In the simpler, more austere early Buddhist school, the Buddha was never represented directly – his presence was always alluded to by a symbol such as the footprint or wheel of law.

**Cave 1**, a Mahayana *vihara*, was one of the last to be excavated and is the most beautifully decorated. This is where you'll find a rendition of the **Bodhisattva Padmapani**, the most famous and iconic of the Ajanta artworks. A verandah in front leads to a large congregation hall, housing sculptures and narrative murals known for their splendid perspective and elaborate detailing of dress, daily life and facial expressions. The colours in the paintings were created from local minerals, with the exception of the vibrant blue made from Central Asian lapis lazuli. Look up to the ceiling to see the carving of four deer sharing a common head.

**Cave 2** is also a late Mahayana *vihara* with deliriously ornamented columns and capitals, and some fine paintings. The ceiling is decorated with geometric and floral patterns. The murals depict scenes from the Jataka tales, including Buddha's mother's



# Ajanta Caves



dream of a six-tusked elephant, which heralded his conception.

**Cave 4** is the largest *vihara* at Ajanta and is supported by 28 pillars. Although never completed, the cave has some impressive sculptures, including scenes of people fleeing from the 'eight great dangers' to the protection of Avalokitesvara.

**Cave 6** is the only two-storey *vihara* at Ajanta, but parts of the lower storey have collapsed. Inside is a seated Buddha figure and an intricately carved door to the shrine. Upstairs the hall is surrounded by cells with fine paintings on the doorways.

**Cave 7** has an atypical design, with porches before the verandah leading directly to the four cells and the elaborately sculptured shrine.

**Cave 9** is one of the earliest *chaityas* at Ajanta. Although it dates from the early Buddhist period, the two figures flanking the entrance door were probably later Mahayana additions. Columns run down both sides of the cave and around the 3m-high dagoba at the far end. The vaulted roof has traces of wooden ribs.

**Cave 10** is thought to be the oldest cave (200 BC) and was the first one to be spotted by the British hunting party. Similar in design to Cave 9, it is the largest *chaitya*. The facade has collapsed and the paintings inside have been damaged, in some cases by graffiti dating from soon after their rediscovery. One of the pillars to the right bears the engraved name of Smith, who left his mark here for posterity.

**Cave 16**, a *vihara*, contains some of Ajanta's finest paintings and is thought to have been the original entrance to the entire complex. The best known of these paintings is the 'dying princess' – Sundari, wife of the Buddha's half-brother Nanda, who is said to have fainted at the news that her husband was renouncing the material life (and her) in order to become a monk. Carved figures appear to support the ceiling in imitation of wooden architectural details, and there's a statue of the Buddha seated on a lion throne teaching the Noble Eightfold Path.

**Cave 17**, with carved dwarfs supporting the pillars, has Ajanta's best-preserved and most varied paintings. Famous images include a princess applying make-up, a seductive prince using the old trick of plying his lover with wine, and the Buddha returning home from his enlightenment to beg from his wife and astonished son. A detailed

panel tells of Prince Simhala's expedition to Sri Lanka: with 500 companions he is shipwrecked on an island where ogresses appear as enchanting women, only to seize and devour their victims. Simhala escapes on a flying horse and returns to conquer the island.

**Cave 19**, a magnificent *chaitya*, has a remarkably detailed facade; its dominant feature is an impressive horseshoe-shaped window. Two fine, standing Buddha figures flank the entrance. Inside is a three-tiered dagoba with a figure of the Buddha on the front. Outside the cave, to the west, sits a striking image of the Naga king with seven cobra hoods around his head. His wife, hooded by a single cobra, sits by his side.

**Cave 24**, had it been finished, would be the largest *vihara* at Ajanta. You can see how the caves were constructed – long galleries were cut into the rock and then the rock between them was broken through.

**Cave 26**, a largely ruined *chaitya*, is now dramatically lit, and contains some fine sculptures that shouldn't be missed. On the left wall is a huge figure of the 'reclining Buddha', lying back in preparation for nirvana. Other scenes include a lengthy depiction of the Buddha's temptation by Maya.

**Cave 27** is virtually a *vihara* connected to the Cave 26 *chaitya*.

### Viewpoints

VIEWPOINT

Two lookouts offer picture-perfect views of the whole horseshoe-shaped gorge. The first is a short walk beyond the river, crossed via a bridge below Cave 8. A further 40-minute



### WHEN IN AJANTA...

» Flash photography is strictly prohibited within the caves, due to its adverse effect on natural dyes used in the paintings. Authorities have installed rows of tiny pigment-friendly lights which cast a faint glow within the caves, but additional lighting is required for glimpsing minute details, and you'll have to rely on long exposures for photographs.

» Most buses ferrying noisy tourists to Ajanta don't get there until noon, so either stay the previous night in Fardapur or push for an early start from Aurangabad and explore the caves in the morning, when they are pleasantly quiet and uncrowded.

uphill walk (not to be attempted during the monsoons) leads to the lookout from where the British party first spotted the caves.

## Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation options close to the caves are limited and you're better off using Aurangabad or Jalgaon as a base.

### MTDC Holiday Resort

HOTEL \$

(☎244230; Aurangabad-Jalgaon Rd, Fardapur; d with/without AC ₹900/700; 🏠) This government hotel has been given a much-needed overhaul, and it now sits pretty amid lawns just by the main road in Fardapur. Rooms are decent, and the open-air beer bar clinches the deal. It's by far the best lodging option around here.

### MTDC Ajanta Tourist Complex

HOTEL \$\$

(☎09422204325; Fardapur T-junction; cottages ₹1200; 🏠) Located just behind the shopping 'plaza' and the bus stand is this mint-fresh resort, featuring five charming and well-appointed cottages nestled amid grassy lawns overlooking the hills. However, you'll have to forage for your own food from the stalls nearby.

As far as stuffing your face goes, there is a string of cheap, unappetising restaurants in the plaza (at Fardapur T-Junction). You could pack a picnic and enjoy it in the shady park below Caves 22 to 27. There's also a buzzing refreshment centre by the main ticket office (at Ajanta caves), which serves an overpriced vegetarian thali (₹80) and warm beer.

## Information

A cloakroom adjoining the toilets near the main ticket office is a safe place to leave gear (₹5 per item for four hours), in case you are visiting Ajanta en route from Aurangabad to Jalgaon or vice versa. The caves are a short, steep climb from the ticket office; the elderly can opt for a chair carried by four bearers (₹400).

On a rather perplexing note, the authorities were constructing a brand new complex near the T-junction during research, where they reportedly intended to replicate the major caves within modern, climate-controlled domes!

## Getting There & Away

Buses from Aurangabad (p768) or Jalgaon (p776) will drop you off at the T-junction (where the highway meets the road to the caves), 4km from the site. From here, after paying an 'amenities' fee (₹7), race to the departure point for

the green-coloured 'pollution-free' buses (with/without AC ₹12/7), which zoom up to the caves. Buses return on a regular basis (half-hourly, last bus at 6.15pm) to the T-junction.

All MSRTC buses passing through Fardapur stop at the T-junction. After the caves close you can board buses to either Aurangabad or Jalgaon outside the MTDC Holiday Resort in Fardapur, 1km down the main road towards Jalgaon. Taxis are available in Fardapur; ₹900 should get you to Jalgaon.

## Jalgaon

☎0257 / POP 368,000 / ELEV 208M

Apart from being a handy base for exploring Ajanta 60km away, Jalgaon is really nothing more than a convenient transit town. A grubby settlement, it stands on the passing rail trade, connecting northern Maharashtra to all major cities across India. Indeed, it's a place to consider if you're moving out of the state towards northern India, or vice versa.

## Sleeping & Eating

Most of the hotels in Jalgaon have 24-hour check out. Power cuts are common, so carry a torch for emergencies.

### Hotel Plaza

HOTEL \$

(☎2227354; hotelplaza\_jal@yahoo.com; Station Rd; d with/without AC ₹900/500; 🏠📞) It's amazing how Hotel Plaza continues to impress travellers day after relentless day. There's nothing fancy on offer here, but for the money you pay it's a bumper deal. Rooms are squeaky clean, the sheets fresh, and the effusive owner a mine of useful information.

### Hotel Royal Palace

HOTEL \$\$

(☎2233555; Jai Nagar, Mahabal Rd; d from ₹975; 🏠📞) It's worth suffering the 15-minute rickshaw ride from the train station to this smart hotel. Luxuriant by Jalgaon's standards, it has a range of spotlessly clean and prim rooms, and a decent multicuisine restaurant serving eminently edible north Indian, coastal, Chinese and Continental fare.

### Hotel Arya

INDIAN \$

(Navi Peth; mains ₹50-80) Vegetarian-only grub on offer; try one of the lip-smacking Punjabi delights. You may have to queue for a table during meals.

## Information

You can find a couple of banks, ATMs and internet cafes on Nehru Rd, which runs along the top of Station Rd.

## **i** Getting There & Away

Several express trains connecting Mumbai (sleeper/2AC ₹211/721, eight hours), Delhi (sleeper/2AC ₹375/1362, 18 hours) and Kolkata (sleeper/2AC ₹442/1623, 26 hours) stop at Jalgaon **train station**. The *Sewagram Express* goes to Nagpur (sleeper/2AC ₹207/709, eight hours, 10pm).

Buses to Fardapur (₹40, 1½ hours) depart half-hourly from the **bus stand** starting at 6am, continuing to Aurangabad (₹122, four hours).

Jalgaon's train station and bus stand are about 2km apart (₹20 by autorickshaw). Luxury bus offices on Railway Station Rd offer services to Aurangabad (₹140, 3½ hours), Mumbai (₹275, nine hours), Pune (₹275, nine hours) and Nagpur (ordinary/sleeper ₹330/360, 10 hours).

## Lonar Meteorite Crater

If you like off-beat adventures, travel to Lonar to explore a prehistoric natural wonder. About 50,000 years ago, a meteorite slammed into the earth here, leaving behind a massive crater, 2km across and 170m deep. In scientific jargon, it's the only hypervelocity natural impact crater in basaltic rock in the world. In lay terms, it's as tranquil and relaxing a spot as you could hope to find, with a shallow green lake at its base and wilderness all around. The lake water is supposedly alkaline and excellent for the skin. Scientists think that the meteorite is still embedded about 600m below the southeastern rim of the crater.

The crater's edge is home to several **Hindu temples** as well as wildlife, including langurs, peacocks, deer and an array of birds.

**MTDC Tourist Complex** (☎07260221602; d with/without AC ₹1100/900; Ⓢ) has a prime location just across the road from the crater, and offers eight rooms of relatively good value, considering the location.

## **i** Getting There & Away

There are a couple of buses a day between Lonar and Aurangabad (₹125, 3½ hours). It's also possible to visit Lonar on a day trip from Aurangabad or Jalgaon if you hire a car and driver, and don't mind dishing out about ₹2200.

## Nagpur

☎0712 / POP 2.1 MILLION / ELEV 305M

In the heart of India's orange country, Nagpur is located way off the main tourist routes. Apart from being at its festive best during Dussehra, the city – as such – is hopelessly devoid of sites. Nonetheless, it makes a good

base for venturing out to the far eastern corner of Maharashtra. First up, it's close to the temples of Ramtek (p777) and the ashrams of Sevagram (p777). Besides, Nagpur is also a convenient stop for those heading to the isolated **Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve**, 150km south of Nagpur, which has some of India's most dense forest teeming with wildlife, including the famed Bengal tigers.

If you have some time to kill in the evening, take a stroll in the city's Civil Lines area, dotted with some fantastic buildings and mansions dating back to the Raj era, now used as government offices.

## **i** Sleeping & Eating

Nagpur's hotels cater primarily to business-people, not tourists. Needless to say, they're frightfully overpriced. Stay in the Central Ave area if you're on a budget, or have a train to catch in the wee hours. Otherwise, consider moving to Ramdaspath, closer to the city centre.

### Hotel Centre Point

HOTEL \$\$

(☎2420910; fax 2446260; www.centrepointhotel.com; 24 Central Bazar Rd, Ramdaspath; s/d from ₹3750/4250; Ⓢ☎☎) A trusted address that's been setting the standards of luxury in Nagpur for sometime now. Rooms are plush, with fluffy beds, high-speed internet access and cheerful paintings adorning the walls. It's located in the heart of the business and entertainment district.

### Hotel Blue Diamond

HOTEL \$

(☎2727461; www.hotelbluediamondnagpur.com; 113 Central Ave; s/d ₹400/500, with AC ₹1250/1350; Ⓢ) The mirrored ceiling in reception is straight out of a bad '70s nightclub and the rooms are pretty much the type you'd expect above a seedy '70s nightclub. There's a dungeon-like bar on the mezzanine floor. AC rooms have LCD TVs and crumpled linoleum flooring.

### The Pride Hotel

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎2291102; fax 2290440; www.pridehotel.com; opp. airport, Wardha Rd; s/d from ₹5500/6250; Ⓢ☎☎) Located close to the airport and away from the din of the city, this sleek business hotel is a good stopover option for touch-and-go travellers. Royal Lancers, its lobby bar, and Puran Da Dhaba, a souped-up version of a traditional Punjabi eatery, are good places to settle in for the evening.

### Krishnum

SOUTHWESTERN \$

(Central Ave; mains ₹40-50) This popular place dishes out South Indian snacks and fruit juices of agreeable quality. It also has branches in other parts of town.

## Picadilly Checkers

FAST FOOD \$

(VCA Complex, Civil Lines; mains ₹60-80) A favourite eating joint for Nagpur's college brigade. A good range of all-vegetarian quick bites are on offer.

The dozens of *dhabas* (snack bars), food stalls and fruit stands opposite the train station rouse in the evening. Summer is the best time to sample the famed oranges.

## i Information

**Computrek** (18 Central Ave; per hr ₹20; ☎10am-10pm) Internet access on the main drag.

**MTDC** (☎2533325; near MLA Hostel, Civil Lines; ☎10am-5.45pm Mon-Sat) Manned by helpful staff.

**State Bank of India** (Kingsway; ☎11am-2pm Mon-Fri) A two-minute walk west of the train station. Deals in foreign exchange.

State Bank of India, ICICI Bank, Axis Bank and HDFC Bank have ATMs along Central Ave and in Ramdaspath.

## i Getting There & Away

### Air

Most domestic airlines, including **Indian Airlines** (☎2533962) and **Jet Airways** (☎5617888), operate daily flights to Delhi (from ₹3500, 1½ hours), Mumbai (from ₹2500, 1½ hours) and Kolkata (from ₹2500, 1½ hours), as well as linking Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai and Pune. Taxis/autorickshaws from the airport to the city centre cost ₹350/200.

### Bus

The main **MSRTC bus stand** is 2km south of the train station and hotel area. Ordinary buses head regularly for Wardha (₹57, three hours) and Ramtek (₹35, 1½ hours). There are two buses to Jalgaon (₹326, 10 hours), and three to Hyderabad (₹317, 12 hours).

### Train

From Nagpur's **train station**, the *Vidarbha Express* departs for Mumbai (sleeper/2AC ₹140/1159, 14 hours, 5.15pm), and heading north to Kolkata is the *Gitanjali Express* (sleeper/2AC ₹379/1378, 17½ hours, 7.05pm). Several expresses bound for Delhi and Mumbai stop at Jalgaon (for Ajanta caves; sleeper/2AC ₹207/709, seven hours).

## Around Nagpur

### RAMTEK

About 40km northeast of Nagpur, Ramtek is believed to be the place where Lord Rama, of the epic Ramayana, spent some time during his exile with his wife Sita and

brother Lakshmana. The place is marked by a cluster of **temples** (☎6am-9pm) about 600 years old, which sit atop the Hill of Rama and have their own population of resident monkeys. Autorickshaws will cart you the 5km from the bus stand to the temple complex for ₹50. You can return to town via the 700 steps at the back of the complex. On the road to the temples you'll pass the delightful **Ambala Tank**, lined with small shrines. You can take a boat ride (₹20 per head) around the lake if you want.

Not far away from the main temple cluster, **Rajkamal Resort** (☎07114202761; d with/without AC ₹1200/900; ☎) has large, featureless rooms with TVs, and a basic restaurant-bar.

Buses run half-hourly between Ramtek and the MSRTC bus stand in Nagpur (₹35, 1½ hours). The last bus to Nagpur is at 7pm.

### SEVAGRAM

☎07152

Located about 85km from Nagpur, Sevagram (Village of Service) was chosen by Mahatma Gandhi as his base during the Indian Independence Movement. Throughout the freedom struggle, the village played host to several nationalist leaders, who would regularly come to visit the Mahatma at his **Sevagram Ashram** (☎284753; ☎6am-5.30pm).

The overseers of this peaceful ashram, built on 40 hectares of tree-lined farmland, have carefully restored and conserved the original huts that Gandhi lived and worked in, which now house some of his personal effects, including items of stationery, wooden sandals and his walking stick. Overall, it's a wonderful daylong excursion, although slightly out of the way.

Very basic lodging is available in the **Yatri Nivas** (☎284753; d ₹100), across the road from the entry gate (advance booking recommended), and simple vegetarian meals can be served in the ashram's dining hall with prior notice.

Just 3km from Sevagram, Paunar village is home to the **Brahmavidya Mandir Ashram** (☎288388; ☎4am-noon & 2-8pm). Founded by Vinoba Bhave, a nationalist and disciple of Gandhi, the ashram is run almost entirely by women. Modelled on *swaraj* (self-sufficiency), it's operated on a social system of consensus with no central management.

Sevagram can be reached by taking a Wardha-bound bus from Nagpur (₹50, three hours).

### TADOBA-ANDHARI RESERVE

Now under India's Project Tiger directorate, this little-explored national park – with

## THE LEGEND OF 'BABA' AMTE

The legend of Murlidhar Devidas 'Baba' Amte (1914–2008) is oft-repeated in humanitarian circles around the world. Hailing from an upper-class Brahmin family in Wardha, Amte was snugly ensconced in material riches and on his way to becoming a successful lawyer, when he witnessed a leper die unattended in the streets one night. It was an incident that changed him forever.

Soon after, Amte renounced worldly comforts, embracing an austere life through which he actively worked for the benefit of leprosy patients and those belonging to marginalised communities. In the primitive forested backyards of eastern Maharashtra, he set up his ashram called Anandwan (Forest of Joy). A true Gandhian, Amte believed in self-sufficiency, and his lifelong efforts saw several awards being conferred upon him, including the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 1985.

Amte's work has been continued by his sons Vikas and Prakash and their wives – the latter couple also won the Magsaysay Award in 2008. The family now runs three ashrams in these remote parts to care for the needy, both humans and animals. Volunteering opportunities are available; contact the ashram on [mss@niya.org](mailto:mss@niya.org) or [lbp@bsnl.in](mailto:lbp@bsnl.in).

a healthy population of Bengal tigers – lies 150km south of Nagpur. Less visited than most other forests in India, this is a place where you can get up close with wildlife (which also includes gaurs, chitals, nilgais and sloth bears) without having to jostle past truckloads of shutter-happy tourists. The trade-off is that you'll have to make do with basic amenities and low comfort levels. The park remains open through most of the year.

The **MTDC Resort** (d with/without AC ₹1500/1200) in nearby Moharli has a string of decent rooms and dining facilities. The resort can also arrange jungle safaris in jeeps and minibuses. Bookings can be made at the MTDC's Nagpur office (see p777). If you're travelling in groups of six or more, MTDC has an all-inclusive overnight package out of Nagpur (₹3750 per person), which is recommended since it takes care of logistical hassles. Call in advance.

Several state buses ply between Nagpur and Chandrapur through the day (₹110, 3½ hours).

## SOUTHERN MAHARASHTRA

### Konkan Coast

Despite being flanked on both ends by two of India's top urban centres, it's laudable how the Konkan Coast manages to latch on to its virginal bounties. A little-explored shoreline running southward from Mumbai

all the way to Goa, it is a picturesque strip of land peppered with flawless beaches, tropical green paddy fields, rolling hills and decaying forts. Travelling through this peaceful and quaint region can be sheer bliss. However, remember that accommodation is scant, the cuisine unsophisticated though tasty, and the locals unaccustomed to tour groups, especially foreigners. Since transport is both limited and unreliable, a good option is to rent a taxi in Mumbai and drift slowly down the coast to Goa. What you'll get in return is an experience that money can't buy.

### MURUD

☎02144 / POP 12,500

Even if you don't plan on going the whole stretch, the sleepy fishing hamlet of Murud – 165km from Mumbai – should definitely be on your itinerary. Once you step on to its lazy beaches and feel the white surf rush past your feet, you'll be happy you came.

Sight-wise, Murud is home to the magnificent island fortress of **Janjira** (admission free; ☀7am-5.30pm), standing about 500m offshore. The citadel was built in 1140 by the Siddis, descendants of sailor-traders from the Horn of Africa, who settled here and allegedly made their living through piracy. No outsider ever made it past the fort's 12m-high walls which, when seen during high tide, seem to rise straight from the sea. Unconquered through history, the fort finally fell to the spoils of nature. Today, its ramparts are slowly turning to rubble as wilderness reclaims its innards.

The only way to reach Janjira is by boat (₹20 return, 15 minutes) from Rajpuri Port.

Boats depart from 7am to 5.30pm daily, but require a minimum of 20 passengers. You can also have a boat to yourself (₹400), and most oarsmen will double as guides for a negotiable fee (around ₹350). To get to Rajpuri from Murud, take an autorickshaw (₹50) or hire a bicycle (₹50 per hour) from the Golden Swan Beach Resort.

Back in Murud you can waste away the days on the beach, joining in with karate practice or playing cricket with local youngsters. Alternately, you could peer through the gates of the off-limits **Ahmedganj Palace**, estate of the Siddi Nawab of Murud, or scramble around the decaying mosque and tombs on the south side of town.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Golden Swan Beach Resort** HOTEL \$\$  
(☎274078; www.goldenswan.com; Darbar Rd; d incl full board with/without AC from ₹3500/2000; 🍷) With only a thicket of palms separating it from the beach, this upscale hotel offers accommodation in cosy rooms and cottages looking out to the sea. The non-AC rooms are in a charming old bungalow located five minutes away from the main property.

**Sea Shell Resort** HOTEL \$\$  
(☎09833667985; www.seashellmurud.com; Darbar Rd; d with/without AC ₹2500/2000; 🍷🍷) A very smart place with breezy sea-facing rooms, this place scores quite well with Mumbai's weekend travellers. A teeny swimming pool at the entrance is a welcome addition, and dolphin safaris can be arranged upon prior request.

**Hotel Shoreline** HOTEL \$\$  
(☎02232258882; www.ajinkyaholidays.com; Darbar Rd; d from ₹3000; 🍷) It's slightly boxy and brassy in contrast to its surroundings, but it's centrally located and should be alright for a night or two. Only the more expensive rooms face the sea.

**New Sea Rock Restaurant** FAST FOOD \$  
(Rajpuri; ☀9am-9pm) Perched on a cliff overlooking the beach at Rajpuri, this quick-eats joint has an awesome view of Janjira, which looms ahead. A perfect place to steal a million-dollar sunset for the price of a chai (₹10). The proprietors also arrange kayak rides and other water sports during the high season.

**Vinayaka Restaurant** INDIAN \$  
(Darbar Rd; mains ₹100) A great place to tuck into a delicious and fiery Malvani thali, served with pink kokam syrup to smother the spices.

## Getting There & Away

AC catamarans (₹100, two hours) from the Gateway of India in Mumbai cruise to Mandva pier between 6am and 7pm. The ticket includes a free shuttle bus to Alibag (30 minutes), otherwise an autorickshaw will be about ₹150. Ricketty local buses from Alibag head down the coast to Murud (₹35, two hours). Alternatively, buses from Mumbai Central bus stand take almost six hours to Murud (ordinary/semideluxe ₹117/158).

Avoid the train. The nearest railhead is at Roha, two hours away and badly connected.

## GANPATIPULE

 02357

Primarily a temple town, Ganpatipule has been luring a steady stream of sea-lovers over the years with its clean waters and pristine sands stretching to the horizon. Located about 375km from Mumbai, it's a village that snoozes through much of the year, except during holidays such as Diwali or Ganesh Chaturthi. These are times when hordes of boisterous 'tourists' turn up to visit the seaside **Ganesha Temple** (☀6am-9pm) housing a monolithic Ganesha (painted a bright orange), supposedly discovered 1600 years ago.

About 40km southward, Ratnagiri is the largest town on the southern Maharashtra coast and the main train station for Ganpatipule (it's on the Konkan Railway). You'll also find several ATMs strung along Ratnagiri's main street. But once you've refilled your wallet and gone shopping for conveniences, the only sight worth checking out – apart from a dirty beach – are the remnants of the **Thibaw Palace** (Thibaw Palace Rd; admission free; ☀10am-5.30pm Tue-Sun), where the last Burmese king, Thibaw, was interned under the British from 1886 until his death in 1916.

## Sleeping & Eating

**MTDC Resort** HOTEL \$\$  
(☎235248; d with/without AC from ₹1500/1300; 🍷) Spread over a prime complex just off Ganpatipule's beach, this is the best place to camp. It's a smart, well-kept place with an assortment of rooms and cottages, and packs in a **Bank of Maharashtra** that changes travellers cheques, along with a beer bar. Try the Konkani huts, themed on rural Malvani homes, for a unique experience.

**Hotel Vihar Deluxe** HOTEL \$\$  
(☎02352222944; Main Rd, Ratnagiri; d with/without AC ₹1800/1000; 🍷) This gigantic operation is one of a few functional but featureless hotels that line the main strip in Ratnagiri. Rooms are adequate (the loos quite good), and the

## GET MAROONED

Apart from its main sands, the Konkan Coast also features a string of less-explored but heavenly beaches that could arm-wrestle the Maldives any given day. About 17km north of Murud, well connected by share autorickshaws (₹50), lies **Kashid**, a fantastic beach where you can cosy up with your favourite paperback while sipping on tender coconuts. South of Murud is **Diveagar**, swarming with colonies of sand bubbler crabs, scenic **Harihareshwar**, famous for its seaside temple, and serene **Vengurla**, 10km from Tarkarli, a place you probably wouldn't mind being shipwrecked. Most of these places are connected by back roads where public transport is scant, so they are best visited in a hired cab. You might have to ask for directions often, or stay in village homes for the odd night. Be generous with how much you give.

food – especially the seafood – is commendable. A hearty South Indian breakfast is complimentary.

**Tarang Restaurant**

INDIAN \$

(MTDC Resort; mains ₹80-100) Barring beach-side stalls, this is one of the few places where you can grab a decent meal in Ganpatipule.

**i Getting There & Away**

Ordinary buses shuttle between Ganpatipule and Ratnagiri (₹40, 1½ hours). One semideluxe MSRTC bus heads out at 8.45am to Mumbai (₹369, 10 hours), and departs from Mumbai at 8pm. From Ratnagiri's **train station**, the *Janshatabdi Express* goes to Mumbai (2nd class/chair ₹142/460, 5½ hours, 5.50pm). The return train heading for Goa (2nd class/chair ₹122/390, 3½ hours) is at 10.45am. From Ratnagiri's **old bus stand**, semideluxe buses leave for Goa (₹221, seven hours) and Kolhapur (₹135, four hours).

**TARKARLI & MALVAN**

02365

A government tourism promo parades this place as comparable to Tahiti, and for once, you can rest assured that these guys are not exaggerating! Within striking distance of Goa, about 200km from Ratnagiri, pristine Tarkarli has white sands and sparkling blue waters that rekindle memories of the Andamans or Ko Phi Phi in Thailand. What's lacking is a well-oiled tourist industry and urban comforts, but do you care?

The monstrous **Sindhudurg Fort**, built by Shivaji and dating from 1664, lies on an offshore island and can be reached by frequent ferries (₹30) from Malvan. MTDC can arrange snorkelling trips to the clear waters around the fortress.

Of the few hotels and resorts available, the good old **MTDC Holiday Resort** (0252390; d from ₹1800; 卐) is still your best

bet. Enquire at the resort about backwater tours on its fabulous **houseboats** (standard/luxury incl full board ₹6500/7500).

The closest train station is Kudal, 38km away. Frequent buses (₹25, one hour) cover the route from Malvan **bus stand** (0252034). An autorickshaw from Kudal to Malvan or Tarkarli is about ₹400. Malvan has buses daily to Panaji (₹70, three hours) and a couple of services to Ratnagiri (₹130, five hours).

**Matheran**

02148 / POP 5100 / ELEV 803M

Literally meaning 'Jungle Above', Matheran is a tiny patch of peace and quiet capping a craggy Sahyadri summit within spitting distance from Mumbai's heat and grime. Endowed with shady forests criss-crossed with foot trails and breathtaking lookouts, it is easily the most elegant of Maharashtra's hill stations.

The credit for discovering this little gem goes to Hugh Malet, erstwhile collector of Thane district, who chanced upon it during one of his excursions in 1850. Soon it became a hill station patronised by the British and populated by Parsi families.

Getting to Matheran is really half the fun. While speedier options are available by road, nothing beats arriving in town on the narrow-gauge toy train (mini train) that chugs laboriously along a 21km scenic route to the heart of the settlement. Motor vehicles are banned within Matheran, making it an ideal place to give your ears and lungs a rest and your feet some exercise.

**👁 Sights & Activities**

You can walk along shady forest paths to most of Matheran's viewpoints in a matter of hours, and it's a place well-suited to stress-



free ambling. To catch the sunrise, head to **Panorama Point**, while **Porcupine Point** (also known as Sunset Point) is the most popular (read: packed) as the sun drops. **Louisa Point** and **Little Chouk Point** also have stunning views of the Sahyadris and if you're visiting **Echo Point**, give it a yell. Stop at **Charlotte Lake** on the way back from Echo Point, but don't go for a swim - this is the town's main water supply and stepping in is prohibited. You can reach the valley below **One Tree Hill** down the path known as **Shivaji's Ladder**, supposedly trod upon by the Maratha leader himself.

Horses can be hired along MG Rd for rides to the lookout points; they cost about ₹250 per hour (negotiable).

## Sleeping & Eating

Hotels in Matheran are low in quality and unreasonably high in tariff, so if you're not feeling generous, make your visit a day trip from Mumbai. Check-out times vary wildly (as early as 7am), as do high and low season rates. Matheran shuts shop during the monsoons.

### **Verandah In The Forest**

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(☎230296; www.neemranahotels.com; Barr House; d incl breakfast from ₹3000) This wonderfully preserved 19th-century bungalow thrives on undiluted nostalgia. Step past the threshold of one of its quaintly luxurious rooms or suites and find yourself reminiscing about bygone times in the company of ornate candelabras, antique teak furniture, Victorian canvases, grandfather clocks and a rush of other memorabilia. The eponymous verandah is probably the most beautiful location from where to admire Matheran's woods, and there's a good selection of food and beverages to keep you company through idle hours.

### **Lord's Central Hotel**

HERITAGE HOTEL \$\$

(☎230228; www.matheranhotels.com; MG Rd; d incl full board from ₹3600; 🍷🍷) Owned by a gracious Parsi family over six generations, this charming colonial-style affair is one of Matheran's most reputed establishments, and guarantees a pleasant stay within its old-world portals. The rooms are comfy, the swimming pool deck offers fabulous views of the valley and distant peaks, and a jumbo chess board out on the lawns is a nice place to down a beer before an awesome Parsi lunch.

### **Hope Hall Hotel**

HOTEL \$\$

(☎230253; MG Rd; d from ₹2000) 'Since 1875', says a plaque at reception, and frankly, the age shows! However, it's a cheerful place and going by the scores of 'thank you' notes left by guests, it must be an okay place to stay.

### **Hookahs & Tikkas**

INDIAN \$\$

(MG Rd; mains ₹50-110) Operating from a balcony overlooking the main road, this place serves a range of kebabs and savoury Indian fare, as well as hookahs with flavoured tobacco.

### **Rasna**

INDIAN \$

(MG Rd; mains ₹80-100) This restaurant opposite Naoraji Lord Garden serves tasty vegetarian food. Try the popular Punjabi (North Indian) thali (₹90).

## Information

Entry to Matheran costs ₹25 (₹15 for children), which you pay on arrival at the train station or the Dasturi car park.

On the main road into town, **Vishwas Photo Studio** (MG Rd; ☎9.30am-10pm) sells useful miniguides (₹25) and photographic accessories, and doubles as a tourist office. The **Union Bank of India** (MG Rd; ☎10am-2pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) has an ATM.

## Getting There & Away

### Taxi

Share taxis run from Neral to Matheran's Dasturi car park (₹60, 30 minutes). Horses (₹180) and hand-pulled rickshaws (₹200) wait here to whisk you in a cloud of red dust to Matheran's main bazaar. You can also walk this stretch in a little over an hour.

### Train

The toy train (2nd class/1st class ₹35/210) chugs between Matheran and Neral Junction five times daily. The service is suspended during monsoons. From Mumbai, express trains to Neral Junction include the 7.10am *Deccan Express* or the 8.40am *Koyna Express* (2nd class/ chair ₹46/165, 1½ hours). Other expresses from Mumbai stop at Karjat, down the line from Neral, from where you can backtrack on a local train. From Pune, you can reach Karjat by the *Sinhagad Express* (2nd class/ chair ₹47/165, two hours, 6.05am).

## Getting Around

Apart from hand-pulled rickshaws and horses, walking is the only other transport option in Matheran.

## Lonavla

☎02114 / POP 55,600 / ELEV 625M

Cheekily masquerading as a hill station, Lonavla is an overdeveloped (and overpriced) mercantile town about 106km southeast of Mumbai. It's far from attractive, with its main drag consisting almost exclusively of garishly lit shops flogging *chikki*, the rock-hard, brittle sweet made in the area.

The only reason you'd want to come here is to visit the nearby Karla and Bhaja Caves which, after those at Ellora and Ajanta, are the best in Maharashtra.

Hotels, restaurants and the main road to the caves lie north of the train station (exit from platform 1). Most of the Lonavla township and its markets are located south of the station.

The petrol pump opposite Hotel Rama Krishna now has three ATMs dispensing cash. Internet access is available at **Balaji Cyber Café** (1st fl, Khandelwal Bldg, New Bazaar; per hr ₹15; ☎12.30-10.30pm), immediately south of the train station.

### Activities

Founded in 1924, the **Kaivalyadhama Yoga Hospital** (☎273039; www.kdham.com; Indian/foreigner incl full board ₹9000/US\$320), set about 2km from Lonavla en route to the Karla and

Bhaja Caves, combines yoga courses with naturopathic therapies. Room rates cover accommodation, yoga sessions, programs and lectures over seven days. Two-, three- and four-week packages are also offered.

Mumbai-based **Nirvana Adventures** (☎022-26053724; www.flynirvana.com) offers various paragliding courses (Indian/foreigner including full board from ₹6500/€250) or 10-minute tandem flights (₹2000) at Kamshet, 25km from Lonavla.

### Sleeping & Eating

Lonavla's hotels suffer from inflated prices and low standards. All hotels listed here have a 10am check-out.

#### Hotel Adarsh

HOTEL \$\$

(☎272353; near Bus Stand; d from ₹2500; ♿) This is clearly the best-value place in town. Centrally located, it has smart rooms and good service, and seems to be preferred by local yuppies. The terrace pool gives you another good reason to stay.

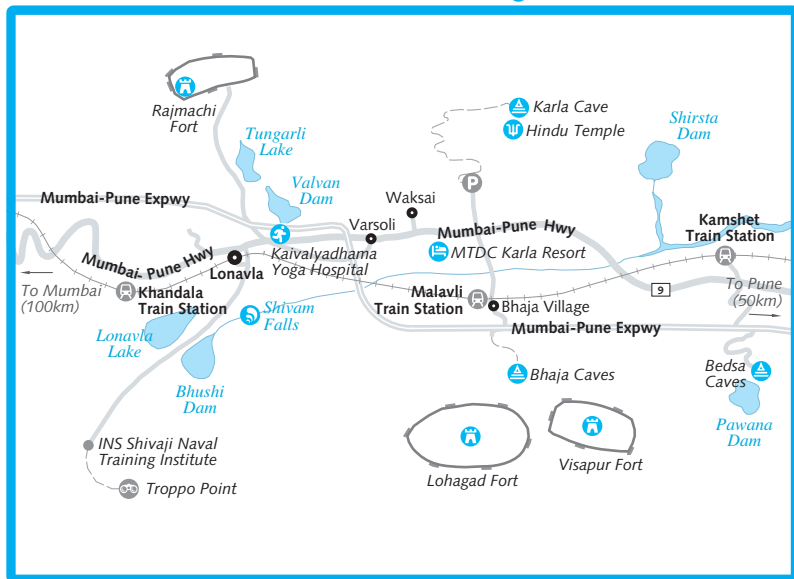
#### Hotel Lonavla

HOTEL \$\$

(☎272914; Mumbai-Pune Rd; d from ₹1195) Fan-only rooms here, but it's cheap by Lonavla's standards. Bulk bookings can often leave you without a room, so enquire in advance. They insist that you clear your bills every third day (who stays that long anyway?).

## Lonavla & Around

0 10 km  
0 5 miles



(Citrus Hotel, DT Shahani Rd, mains ₹180-220) This could be a delightfully redeeming feature of your Lonavla trip. A top-class alfresco restaurant thrown around the lawns of a sleek business hotel about 15 minutes east of the bus stand, Biso serves an excellent selection of pastas, wood oven-fired pizzas and desserts for its upmarket clientele. The penne in basil sauce and the farmhouse pizza are dishes you won't quickly forget.

### Hotel Rama Krishna

INDIAN \$\$

(Mumbai-Pune Rd; mains ₹120-150) This place is famed for its meaty fare, especially the kebabs, and can brim over with travelling parties during meals.

## **i** Getting There & Away

Lonavla is serviced by MSRTC buses departing the **bus stand** to Dadar in Mumbai (ordinary/semideluxe ₹65/94, two hours) and Pune (ordinary/semideluxe ₹55/80, two hours). Luxury AC buses (about ₹130) also travel to both cities.

All express trains from Mumbai to Pune (2nd class/chair ₹57/195, three hours) stop at Lonavla **train station**. From Pune, you can also reach Lonavla by taking an hourly shuttle train (₹15, two hours).

## Karla & Bhaja Caves

While they pale in comparison to Ajanta or Ellora, these rock-cut caves (dating from around the 2nd century BC) are among the better examples of Buddhist cave architecture in India. They are also low on commercial tourism, which make them ideal places for a quiet excursion. Karla has the most impressive single cave, but Bhaja is a quieter site to explore.

### Karla Cave

CAVES

(Indian/foreigner ₹5/100; ☀9am-5pm) Karla Cave, the largest early Buddhist *chaitya* in India, is reached by a 20-minute climb from a mini-bazaar at the base of a hill. Completed in 80 BC, the *chaitya* is around 40m long and 15m high, and sports similar architectural motifs as *chaityas* in Ajanta and Ellora. Excluding Ellora's Kailasa Temple, this is probably the most impressive cave temple in the state.

Karla Cave is also the only site in Maharashtra where the original woodwork, more than two centuries old, has managed to survive. A semicircular 'sun window' filters light in towards a dagoba or stupa (the cave's representation of the Buddha), protected by

a carved wooden umbrella, the only remaining example of its kind. The cave's roof also retains ancient teak buttresses. The 37 pillars forming the aisles are topped by kneeling elephants. The carved elephant heads on the sides of the vestibule once had ivory tusks.

There's a Hindu **temple** in front of the cave, thronged by pilgrims whose presence adds colour to the scene.

### Bhaja Caves

CAVES

(Indian/foreigner ₹5/100; ☀8am-6pm) Across the expressway, it's a 3km jaunt from the main road to the Bhaja Caves, where the setting is lush, greener and quieter than at Karla Cave. Thought to date from around 200 BC, 10 of the 18 caves here are *viharas*, while Cave 12 is an open *chaitya*, earlier than that at Karla, containing a simple dagoba. Beyond this is a strange huddle of 14 stupas, five inside and nine outside a smaller cave.

Once you're done exploring the Bhaja Caves, you can embark on a trek to the ruined twin-forts of **Lohagad** and **Visapur**. You could also check out the picturesque **Pawana Dam**, down a road about 20km east from the Karla-Bhaja access point.

## **i** Sleeping & Eating

### MTDC Karla Resort

HOTEL \$\$

(%02114-282230; d with/without AC from ₹1300/900; ☎) Set off the highway, close to Karla-Bhaja access point. Rooms and cottages are well-kept, and there's a good restaurant.

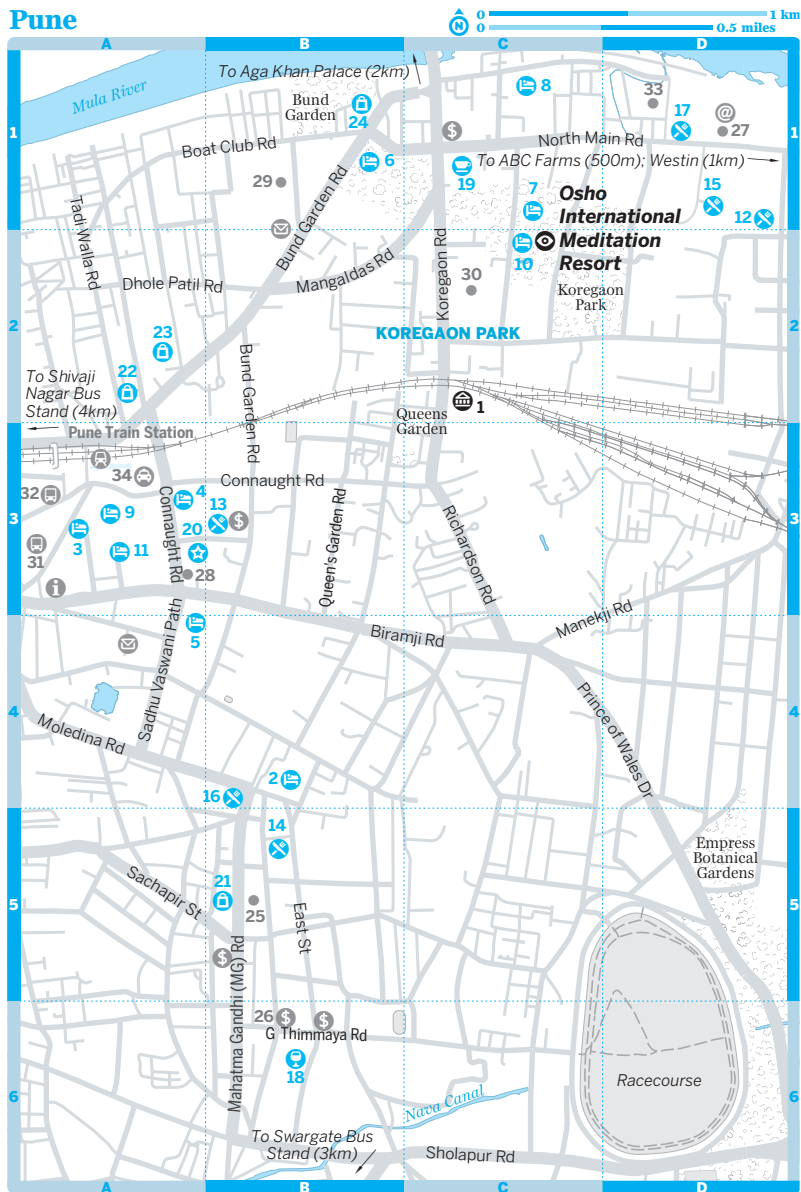
## **i** Getting There & Away

Karla and Bhaja can be visited over a single day from Lonavla. Take a local bus (₹10, 30 minutes) to the access point, from where it's about a 6km return walk on each side to the two sites. An autorickshaw charges about ₹450 from Lonavla for the tour, including waiting time.

## Pune

☎020 / POP 3.7 MILLION / ELEV 535M

With its healthy mix of small-town wonders and big-city blues, Pune (also pronounced Poonaa) is a city that epitomises 'New India'. Once little more than a pensioners' town and an army outpost, it is today an unpretentious, cosmopolitan place inhabited by a cheerful and happy population. A thriving centre of academia and business, Pune is also known globally for its *numero-uno* export, the late guru Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and his ashram, the Osho International Meditation Resort (p785).



Pune was initially given pride of place by Shivaji and the ruling Peshwas, who made it their capital. The British took the city in 1817 and, thanks to its cool and dry climate, soon made it the Bombay Presidency's monsoon capital. Globalisation knocked on Pune's

doors in the 1990s, following which it went in for an image overhaul. However, the colonial charm was retained by preserving its old buildings and residential areas, bringing about a pleasant coexistence of the old and new which (despite the pollution and hectic

## Pune

### 📍 Top Sights

- Osho International Meditation  
Resort ..... C2

### 📍 Sights

- 1 Tribal Cultural Museum ..... C2

### 🛏 Sleeping

- 2 Grand Hotel ..... B4  
3 Homeland ..... A3  
4 Hotel Ashirwad ..... A3  
5 Hotel Ritz ..... A4  
6 Hotel Srimaan ..... B1  
7 Hotel Sunderban ..... C1  
8 Hotel Surya Villa ..... C1  
9 National Hotel ..... A3  
10 Osho Meditation Resort  
Guesthouse ..... C2  
11 Samrat Hotel ..... A3

### 🍴 Eating

- 12 Arthur's Theme ..... D1  
Dario's ..... (see 7)  
13 Flag's ..... B3  
14 Juice World ..... B5  
15 Malaka Spice ..... D1  
16 Place: Touche the Sizzler ..... B4  
17 Prem's ..... D1

### 🍷 Drinking

- 18 1000 Oaks ..... B6  
19 Mocha ..... C1

### 🎬 Entertainment

- 20 Inox ..... A3

### 🛍 Shopping

- 21 Bombay Store ..... B5  
22 Crossword ..... A2  
Either Or ..... (see 22)  
23 Fabindia ..... A2  
24 Pune Central ..... B1

### Information

- 25 Rokshan Travels ..... B5  
26 Thomas Cook ..... B6  
27 Yatra.com ..... D1

### Transport

- 28 Brright Travels ..... A3  
29 Jet Airways ..... B1  
30 Kingfisher Airlines ..... C2  
31 PMT Depot ..... A3  
32 Pune Train Station Stand ..... A3  
33 Simran Travels ..... D1  
34 Taxi Stand ..... A3

traffic) makes Pune a wonderful place to explore. In September **Ganesh Chaturthi** brings on a tide of festivities across the city, and provides a fantastic window for exploring the city's cultural side.

The city sits at the confluence of the Mutha and Mula Rivers. Mahatma Gandhi (MG) Rd, about 1km south of Pune train station, is the main commercial street. Koregaon Park, northeast of the train station, is the undisputed chill-out zone, home to some of the best hotels, restaurants, coffee shops and of course, the Osho Ashram.

## 📍 Sights & Activities

### TOP CHOICE Osho International Meditation

**Resort** MEDITATION  
(☎66019999; www.osho.com; 17 Koregaon Park)  
You'll either like it or hate it. A splurge of an institution, this ashram, located in a leafy, upscale northern suburb, has been drawing thousands of *sanyasins* (seekers), many of them Westerners, ever since the death of Osho (see the boxed text, p786) in 1990. With its placid swimming pool, sauna, 'zennis' and

basketball courts, massage and beauty parlour, bookshop and a luxury boutique guest house (p787), it is, to some, the ultimate place to indulge in stress-busting meditation. Alternately, there are detractors who point fingers at the ashram's blatant commercialisation and accuse it of marketing a warped version of the mystic East to gullible Westerners.

The main centre for meditation and the nightly white-robed spiritual dance is the Osho Auditorium (no coughing or sneezing, please). The Osho Samadhi, where the guru's ashes are kept, is also open for meditation. The commune's 'Multiversity' runs a plethora of courses in meditation and other esoteric techniques. If you wish to take part, or even just meditate, you'll have to pay ₹1150/1550 (Indian/foreigner), which covers registration, a mandatory on-the-spot HIV test (sterile needles used), introductory sessions and your first day's meditation pass. You'll also need two robes (one maroon and one white, from ₹200 per robe). For subsequent days, a daily meditation pass costs ₹300/700 (Indian/foreigner), and you can come and go as you please. If you want

further involvement, you can also sign up for a 'work as meditation' program.

The curious can watch a video presentation at the visitor centre and take a 10-minute silent tour of the facilities (₹10; adults only, cameras and phones prohibited) at 9.15am and 2pm daily. Tickets have to be booked at least a day in advance (9.30am to 1pm and 2pm to 4pm). It's also worth checking out the 5-hectare garden, **Osho Teerth** (admission free; ☀6-9am & 3-6pm), behind the commune, and accessible all day for those with a meditation pass.



### **Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum** MUSEUM

(www.rajaketkarmuseum.com; 1377-1378 Natu Baug, Bajirao Rd; Indian/foreigner ₹20/200; ☀9.30am-5.30pm) This fascinating museum is one of Pune's true delights. Housing only a fraction of the 20,000-odd objects of Indian daily life painstakingly collected by Dinkar Kelkar (who died in 1990), it's worth an entire day out. The quirky pan-Indian collection includes hundreds of hookah pipes, writing instruments, lamps, textiles, toys, entire doors and windows, kitchen utensils, furniture, puppets, jewellery, betel-nut cutters and an amazing gallery of musical instruments. During research, the museum was scouting for a new address with more display space, where it could do justice to the vast unseen

portion of the collection currently rotting away in strongrooms.

### **Tribal Cultural Museum** MUSEUM

(28 Queen's Garden; admission ₹10; ☀10.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) About 1.5km east of the train station, near the army cantonment, this small museum showcases an excellent collection of tribal artefacts (jewellery, utensils, musical instruments, even black magic accessories) sourced from remote tribal belts. It's a great place to familiarise yourself with tribal traditions and cultures of the region. Don't forget to check out the section featuring ornate papier-mâché festival masks, to the rear of the building.

### **Aga Khan Palace** PALACE

(Ahmednagar Rd; Indian/foreigner ₹5/100; ☀9am-5.45pm) Set amid a wooded 6.5-hectare plot across the Mula River in Yerwada, the grand Aga Khan Palace (housing the **Gandhi National Memorial**) is easily Pune's biggest crowd-puller. Built in 1892 by Sultan Aga Khan III, this lofty building was where the Mahatma and other prominent nationalist leaders were interned by the British for about two years following Gandhi's Quit India resolution in 1942. Both Kasturba Gandhi, the Mahatma's wife, and Mahadeobhai Desai, his secretary for 35 years, died here in confinement. You'll find their shrines (containing their ashes) in a quiet garden to the rear.

## **OSHO: GURU OF SEX**

Ever tried mixing spirituality with primal instincts, and garnishing the potent concoction with oodles of panache? Well, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (1931–90) certainly did. Osho, as he preferred to be called, was one of India's most flamboyant 'export gurus' to market the mystic East to the world, and undoubtedly the most controversial. Initially based in Pune, he followed no particular religion or philosophy, and outraged many across the world with his advocacy of sex as a path to enlightenment. A darling of the international media, he quickly earned himself the epithet 'sex guru'. In 1981, Rajneesh took his curious blend of Californian pop psychology and Indian mysticism to the USA, where he set up an agricultural commune in Oregon. There, his ashram's notoriety, as well as its fleet of (material and thus valueless!) Rolls Royces grew, until raging local paranoia about its activities moved the authorities to charge Osho with immigration fraud. He was fined US\$400,000 and deported. An epic journey then began, during which Osho and his followers, in their search for a new base, were either deported from or denied entry into 21 countries. By 1987, he was back at his Pune ashram, where thousands of foreigners soon flocked for his nightly discourses and meditation sessions.

They still come in droves. To house them all, the capacious Osho Auditorium was unveiled in 2002, which saw the centre's name being changed from 'Osho Commune International' to 'Osho International Meditation Resort'. Such is the demand for the resort's facilities that prices are continually on the rise, with luxury being redefined every day. Interestingly, despite Osho's comments on how nobody should be poor, no money generated by the resort goes into helping the disadvantaged. That, resort authorities maintain, is up to someone else.

Within the main palace, you can peek into the room where Gandhi used to stay. Photos and paintings exhibit moments in his extraordinary career, but it's poorly presented.

### Shaniwar Wada

FORT

(Shivaji Rd; Indian/foreigner ₹5/100; ☎8am-6pm) The remains of this fortified palace of the Peshwa rulers are located in the old part of the city. Built in 1732, Shaniwar Wada was destroyed in a fire in 1828, but the massive walls and plinths remain, as do the sturdy palace doors with their daunting spikes. In the evenings, there is an hour-long **sound-and-light show** (admission ₹25; ☎8.15pm Thu-Tue).

### Katraj Snake Park & Zoo

ZOO

(Pune-Satara Hwy; adult/child ₹3/2; ☎10.30am-6pm Thu-Tue) There's a mediocre selection of Indian wildlife on show at the Katraj Snake Park & Zoo. But a trip to this faraway park on Pune's southern outskirts makes sense if you want to know more about snakes, of which there are plenty.

### Pataleshvara Cave Temple

TEMPLE

(Jangali Maharaj Rd; ☎6am-9.30pm) Set across the river is the curious rock-cut Pataleshvara Cave Temple, a small and unfinished (though living) 8th-century temple, similar in style to the grander caves at Elephanta Island off the Mumbai coast. Adjacent is the **Jangali Maharaj Temple** (☎6am-9.30pm), dedicated to a Hindu ascetic who died here in 1818.

### Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute

YOGA

(☎25656134; www.bksiyengar.com; 1107 B/1 Hare Krishna Mandir Rd, Model Colony) To attend classes at this famous institute, 7km northwest of the train station, you need to have been practising yoga for at least eight years.

## Sleeping

Pune's main accommodation hubs are around the train station and Koregaon Park. Most midrange hotels have check-out at noon, and accept credit cards. Some families rent out rooms starting at about ₹400 (without bathroom) to around ₹700 (with bathroom). Rickshaw drivers will know where to look.



### Hotel Sunderban

HOTEL \$\$

(☎26124949; www.tghotels.com; 19 Koregaon Park; s/d incl breakfast from ₹2500/3000; ☎☎) Set around a manicured lawn right next to the Osho Resort, this renovated art deco bungalow effortlessly combines classy antiques with boutique appeal. The huge non-AC

rooms in the main building sport a variety of dated furniture, and have a generally quaint air. The pricier rooms are across the lawns, in a sleek, glass-fronted building. An additional draw is the fantastic in-house fine-dining restaurant, Dario's (see p788).



### Osho Meditation Resort Guesthouse

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎66019900; www.osho.com; Koregaon Park; s/d ₹3900/4400; ☎) This uber-chic designer place will only allow you in if you come to meditate at the Osho International Meditation Resort (p785). The rooms and common spaces in this stylish property are an elegant exercise in modern aesthetics, as minimalist as they are chic. Add to that other ultra luxe features, such as purified fresh air supply in all rooms! Be sure to book well in advance; it's perpetually rushed.

### Hotel Surya Villa

HOTEL \$\$

(☎26124501; www.hotelsuryavilla.com; 294/2 Koregaon Park; s/d ₹1200/1500, with AC ₹1600/2000; ☎☎) A cheerful place with bright, airy and spacious rooms and squeaky-clean loos, this is clearly the best of Pune's midrange options. It stands just off the Koregaon Park backpacker hub, so you're always clued in to the coolest developments in town. There's free internet for guests at the book kiosk below.

### Homeland

HOTEL \$\$

(☎26123203; www.hotelhomeland.net; 18 Wilson Garden; s/d ₹900/1100, with AC from ₹1300/1500; ☎) A surprisingly restful place tucked away from the din of the train station, Homeland is excellent value for money. The labyrinthine corridors lead to rooms with freshly painted walls and clean sheets, and the restaurant downstairs shows movies in the evenings.

### Hotel Srimaan

HOTEL \$\$

(☎26136565; srimaan@vsnl.com; 361/5 Bund Garden Rd; s/d ₹2200/2900; ☎☎) The fact that Srimaan has dropped its tariffs actually makes this centrally-located place quite a steal. Jackson Pollock-inspired paintings lend their colour to the small but luxurious rooms. The pricier rooms have lovely windows with soothing green views outside. A good Italian joint called La Pizzeria is available on-site.

### Samrat Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(☎26137964; thesamrathotel@vsnl.net; 17 Wilson Garden; s/d incl breakfast from ₹1800/2200; ☎☎) A sparkling modern hotel with excellent

rooms opening around a central, top-lit foyer; this place sure knows how to make you feel at home. The staff is courteous and eager to please, and the well-appointed rooms meet every expectation you could have from hotels in this price bracket.

### Westin

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎67210000; www.starwoodhotels.com; 36/3B Koregaon Park Annexe; d incl breakfast from ₹6000; 🏠🚗🚶) Sprawled out like a giant luxury yacht on Koregaon Park's eastern fringes is this mint-fresh business hotel, combining the best of luxury and leisure with impeccable service. The rooms offer lovely views of the river course below.

### Hotel Ritz

HOTEL \$\$

(☎26122995; fax 26136644; 6 Sadhu Vaswani Path; s/d incl breakfast from ₹2550/2750; 🏠) Plush, friendly, atmospheric: three words that sum it all up for the Ritz, a Raj-era building that holds its own in town. The pricey rooms are in the main building, while the cheaper ones are located in an annexe next to the garden restaurant, which serves good Gujarati and Maharashtrian food.

### National Hotel

HOTEL \$

(☎26125054; 14 Sasoon Rd; s/d/q ₹750/850/1100, cottages s/d/q ₹650/750/950) What the National can't provide in terms of comfort, it compensates for with antique charm. Housed in a crumbling colonial-era mansion opposite the train station, the low-end rooms in this hotel can border on suffocating, and may not match your idea of 'clean'. The cottages across the garden are more liveable, and come with tiled sit-outs.

### Grand Hotel

HOTEL \$

(☎26360728; grandhotelpune@gmail.com; MG Rd; d from ₹770, s without bathroom ₹290) Well, it's anything but grand at this budget address. The cheapest beds here (and in all of Pune) are a series of hole-in-the-wall cabins next to the bar. The doubles are converted family homes, not the most luxurious of their kind either. But then, look at how much you're paying, and take comfort in the fact that the patio is a great place to nurse an evening beer.

### Hotel Ashirwad

HOTEL \$\$

(☎26128687; hotelashir@gmail.com; 16 Connaught Rd; s/d from ₹3500/4000; 🏠🚗) A large, smooth-moving joint, this place stands out for its well-kept (though unremarkable) rooms and the popular Akshaya vegetarian

restaurant downstairs, which serves a good range of Punjabi and Mughlai fare.

## Eating

Pune is a great place for those with an adventurous palate. Predictably, there are a host of well-priced, high-quality eateries, many around Koregaon Park. Unless otherwise mentioned, the following are open noon to 3pm and 7pm to 11pm daily; last orders at 10.45pm.



### Malaka Spice

ASIAN FUSION \$\$

(Lane 5, North Main Rd, Koregaon Park; mains ₹220-250) A definitive stop on Pune's food circuit, this upscale alfresco restaurant serves mouth-watering Southeast Asian fare that is given a creative tweak or two by its star chefs. Dishes such as the squid and broccoli tauche, or the burnt garlic and shrimp rice, are simply to die for. There's a souvenir shop too, if you'd like to buy something to remember your hearty meal here.



### Prem's

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(North Main Rd, Koregaon Park; mains ₹180-220; ☎8am-11pm) In a quiet, tree-canopied courtyard tucked away behind a commercial block, Prem's is perfect for those lazy, beer-aided lunch sessions that great holidays are centred around. Its relaxed ambience attracts droves of loyalists throughout the day, who slouch around the tables and put away countless pints before wolfing down their 'usual' orders. The noisy sizzlers are a hit with everyone, so don't leave without trying one.

### Dario's

ITALIAN \$\$

(Hotel Sunderban; mains ₹250-280) This bistro serves only the best of Italian cuisine, made from a selection of local organic produce and handpicked rations flown straight in from Italy. There's a yummy selection of homemade penne, gnocchi and spaghetti on offer, while dishes such as the *torta bombardino* (onion quiche with fresh salad) explode on your palate with a hundred flavours.

### Flag's

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(G2 Metropole, Bund Garden Rd; mains ₹230-250) This super-popular place serves timeless favourites from all corners of the world with Lebanese chicken, Mongolian cauliflower, New Orleans seafood platter and *yakisoba* (fried Japanese noodles) all rubbing shoulders under one roof. There's also a super-hot lunch buffet that goes for a super-cool ₹249.



**Vaishali**

**FAST FOOD \$**  
(FC Rd; mains ₹40-70; ☺10am-10pm) Old-timers can't stop raving about this institution, known for its range of delicious snacks and meals. The scrumptious *sev potato dal puri* (₹45), a favourite of locals, has fed generations of college-goers in Pune, and still garners respect across the board.

**Arthur's Theme**

**CONTINENTAL \$\$**  
(Lane 6, North Main Rd, Koregaon Park; mains ₹200-230) Start off with Don Quixote (deep fried cheese croquettes) or Cleopatra (grilled chicken cubes), before moving on to King Morgan (tiger prawns in herbs and olive oil) or Lancelot (chicken in cranberry sauce). A wacky (and tasty) way to brush up on your history lessons.

**Juice World**

**CAFE \$**  
(2436/B East St; snacks ₹50-60; ☺8am-11.30pm) As well as producing delicious fresh fruit juices and shakes, this casual cafe with outdoor seating serves inexpensive but wholesome snacks such as pizza and *pav bhaji* (spiced vegetables and bread).

**The Place: Touche the Sizzler**

**MULTICUISINE \$\$**  
(7 Moledina Rd; mains ₹180-200) The perfect old-school eating option. A variety of smoking sizzlers, and other assorted Indian fare, is on offer at this family-style eatery in the heart of Pune's business district. The ambience is quaint (read: slightly mothballed), but the overall experience more than makes up for it.

**Swiss Cheese Garden**

**CONTINENTAL \$\$**  
(ABC Farms; mains ₹250-300) About a kilometre east of Koregaon Park, this restaurant leads a pack of smart eateries (many advocating organic food) situated within a leafy campus called ABC Farms. The pastas and the cheese fondues are good.

**Drinking & Entertainment**

Pune puts a great deal of effort into its nocturnal activities, yet some pubs tend to shut up shop as quickly as they open, so ask around for the latest hot spots. Most are open from 7pm to around 1.30am.

**1000 Oaks**

**NIGHTCLUB**  
(2417 East St) This one is an old favourite among Pune's tipplers, featuring a cosy pub-style bar, a compact dance floor and a charming, foliaged and moodily lit sit-out area for those who prefer it quieter. There's

live music on Sundays, to go with your favourite poison.

**Mocha**

**CAFE**  
(North Main Rd, Koregaon Park) This funky café with quirky decor and friendly staff features a brilliant selection of coffees from around the world, from the famed Jamaican Blue Mountain to Indian Peaberry. There are flavoured hookahs on offer too. Carry some form of ID to show at the gate.

**Arc Asia**

**BAR**  
(ABC Farms) An extremely classy affair, rounding off the ABC Farms experience. A great stock of malts, scotches and beers, with groovy music on the PA.

**Inox**

**CINEMA**  
(Bund Garden Rd) A state-of-the-art multiplex where you can take in the latest blockbuster from Hollywood or Mumbai.

**Shopping**

Pune has some good shopping options.

**Bombay Store**

**SOUVENIRS**  
(322 MG Rd; ☺10.30am-8.30pm Mon-Sat) The best spot for general souvenirs.

**Pune Central**

**CLOTHING**  
(Bund Garden Rd, Koregaon Park) This glass-fronted mall is full of Western high-street labels and premium Indian tags.

**Crossword**

**BOOKSTORE**  
(1st fl, Sohrab Hall, RBM Rd, ☺10.30am-9pm) An excellent collection of fiction, nonfiction and magazines.

**Either Or**

**CLOTHING**  
(24/25 Sohrab Hall, 21 Sasson Rd; ☺10.30am-8pm Fri-Wed) Modern designer Indian garments and accessories available at this popular boutique.

**Fabindia**

**CLOTHING**  
(Sakar 10, Sasson Rd, ☺10am-8pm) For Indian saris, silks and cottons, as well as diverse accessories and handmade products.

**Information****Internet Access**

You'll find several internet cafes along Pune's main thoroughfares.

**Arihant Communications** (North Main Rd, Koregaon Park; per hr ₹30; ☺9am-11pm) Opposite Lane 5. Lightning-fast broadband connection.

**Maps**

*Destination Finder* (₹65) provides a great map of the city, along with some key travel information.

## Money

Citibank has a 24-hour ATM on North Main Rd. HSBC dispenses cash at its main branch on Bund Garden Rd. You'll find ICICI Bank and State Bank of India ATMs at the railway station, an Axis Bank ATM on MG Rd and an HDFC Bank ATM on East St.

**Thomas Cook** (☎66007903; 2418 G Thimmaya Rd; ☎9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat) Cashes travellers cheques and exchanges foreign currency.

## Post

**Main post office** (Sadhu Vaswani Path;

☎10am-6pm Mon-Sat)

**DHL** (Bund Garden Rd; ☎10am-8pm Mon-Sat)

## Tourist information

**MTDC tourist office** (☎26126867; I Block, Central Bldg, Dr Annie Besant Rd; ☎10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) Buried in a government complex south of the train station. There's also an **MTDC desk** at the train station (☎9am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 3pm Sunday).

## Travel Agencies

**Rokshan Travels** (☎26136304; rokshantravels@hotmail.com; 1st fl, Kumar Plaza, MG Rd; ☎10am-6pm) These guys shine when it comes to getting you on the right bus, train or flight without a glitch. They also book taxis.

**Yatra.com** (☎65006748; www.yatra.com; North Main Rd; ☎10am-7pm Mon-Sat) The city office of the reputed internet ticketing site of the same name.

## Getting There & Away

### Air

Airline contact information in Pune:

**GoAir** (airline code G8; ☎9223222111; www.goair.in)

**Indian Airlines** (airline code IC; ☎26052147; www.indian-airlines.nic.in; 39 Dr B Ambedkar Rd)

**IndiGo** (airline code 6E; ☎9910383838; www.goindigo.in)

**Jet Airways** (airline code 9W; ☎02239893333; www.jetairways.com; 243 Century Arcade, Narangi Baug Rd)

**Kingfisher Airlines** (airline code IT; ☎1800 2333131; www.flyingfisher.com; Gera Garden, Koregaon Rd)

**SpiceJet** (airline code SG; ☎1800 1803333; www.spicejet.com)

Airlines listed above fly daily from Pune to Delhi (from ₹3100, two hours), Bengaluru (from ₹2200, 1½ hours), Nagpur (from ₹2100, 1½ hours), Goa (from ₹3500, 1½ hours), Chennai (from ₹2300, 1½ hours) and hopping flights to Kolkata (from ₹3500, four hours).

## Bus

Pune has three bus stands: **Pune train station stand** for Mumbai, Goa, Belgaum, Kolhapur, Mahabaleshwar and Lonavla; **Shivaji Nagar bus stand** for Aurangabad, Ahmedabad and Nasik; and **Swargate bus stand** for Sinhadag, Bengaluru and Mangalore. Deluxe buses shuttle from the train-station bus stand to Dadar (Mumbai) every hour (₹260, four hours).

Several private buses head to Panaji (Panjim) in Goa (ordinary/sleeper ₹330/450, 12 hours), Nasik (semideluxe/deluxe ₹180/280, five hours) and Aurangabad (₹170, six hours). Try **Bright Travels** (☎26114222; Connaught Rd).

## Taxi

Share taxis (up to four passengers) link Pune with Mumbai airport around the clock. They leave from the **taxi stand** in front of Pune train station (per seat ₹500, 2½ hours). Several tour operators hire out long-distance taxis over days or even weeks for intrastate travelling. Try **Simran Travels** (☎26153222; North Main Rd, Koregaon Park).

## Train

The computerised **booking hall** is to the left of Pune's main station building. The 7.15am **Deccan Queen**, 6.05am **Sinhadag Express** and 6.35pm **Indrayani Express** are fast commuter trains to

## MAJOR TRAINS FROM PUNE

DESTINATION	TRAIN NO & NAME	FARE (₹)	DURATION (HR)	DEPARTURE
Bengaluru	16529 <i>Udyan Exp</i>	330/1232	21	11.45am
Chennai	12163 <i>Chennai Exp</i>	371/1348	19½	12.10am
Delhi	11077 <i>Jhelum Exp</i>	430/1624	27	5.20pm
Hyderabad	17031 <i>Hyderabad Exp</i>	246/910	13½	4.35pm
Mumbai CST	12124 <i>Deccan Queen</i>	67/237	3½	7.15am

Express fares are sleeper/2AC; *Deccan Queen* fares are 2nd class/chair. To calculate 1st class and other fares see p1187.

Mumbai (2nd class/chair ₹67/237, 3½ hours). For other long-distance trains, see the boxed text, opposite.

## **i** Getting Around

The airport is 8km northeast of the city, and boasts a swanky new building. An autorickshaw there costs about ₹100; a taxi is ₹250.

Autorickshaws can be found everywhere.

A ride from the train station to Koregaon Park costs about ₹35 (₹60 at night).

Turtle-paced city buses leave the PMT depot (opposite Pune train station) for Swargate (bus 4) and Shivaji Nagar (bus 5) and Koregaon Park (bus 159).

Some garages in Koregaon Park hire out motorcycles for ₹300 a day, petrol extra. The boys hanging out at Hotel Surya Villa will know where to look.

## Around Pune

### SINHAGAD

The ruined **Sinhagad** (admission free; ☀dawn-dusk) or Lion Fort, about 24km southwest of Pune, was wrested by Maratha leader Shivaji from the Bijapur kings in 1670. In the epic battle (where he lost his son Sambhaji), Shivaji used monitor lizards yoked with ropes to scale the fort's craggy walls. Today, it's a sad picture of its past, but worth visiting for the sweeping views.

From Sinhagad village, share jeeps (₹40) can cart you 10km to the base of the summit. Bus 50 runs frequently to Sinhagad village from Swargate (₹20, 45 minutes).

### SHIVNERI

Situated 90km northwest of Pune above the village of Junnar, **Shivneri Fort** (admission free; ☀dawn-dusk) holds the distinction of being the birthplace of Shivaji. Within the ramparts of this ruined fort are the old royal stables, a mosque dating back to the Mughal era and several rock-cut reservoirs. The most important structure is Shivkunj, the pavilion in which Shivaji was born.

About 4km from Shivneri, on the other side of Junnar, is an interesting group of Hinayana Buddhist caves called **Lenyadri** (Indian/foreigner ₹5/100; ☀dawn-dusk). Of the 30-odd caves, Cave 7 is the most impressive, and interestingly houses an image of the Hindu lord Ganesh.

A bus (₹70, two hours, 7.15am) goes to Junnar from Pune's Shivaji Nagar terminus. A return bus leaves Junnar at 11.30am. A day cab from Pune will cost around ₹1600.

## Mahabaleshwar

☎02168 / POP 12,700 / ELEV 1372M

Up in the Western Ghats, Mahabaleshwar – founded in 1828 by British governor Sir John 'Boy' Malcolm – was, at one time, the summer capital of the Bombay presidency. However, what was once a pretty town oozing old-world charm is today a jungle of mindless urban construction. Swarms of raucous holiday-makers who throw the place into a complete tizzy only make things worse. Mahabaleshwar's only face-saver is the delightful views it offers, but they're not half as good in practice, given that you'll have to combat the riotous tourists while appreciating them.

The hill station virtually shuts down during the monsoons (June to September), when an unbelievable 6m of rain falls.

The action can be found in the main bazaar (Main Rd, also called Dr Sabane Rd) – a 200m strip of holiday tack. The bus stand is at the western end. You have to cough up a ₹20 'tourist tax' on arrival.

## **👁** Sights & Activities

### Viewpoints

VIEWPOINT

The hills are alive with music, though it's usually blasted out of car stereos as people race to tick off all the viewpoints. To beat them, start very early in the morning, and you can savour fine views from **Wilson's Point** (Sunrise Point), within easy walking distance of town, as well as **Elphinstone, Babington, Kate's** and **Lodwick Points**.

The sunset views at **Bombay Point** are stunning; but you won't be the only one thinking so! Much quieter, thanks to being 9km from town, is **Arthur's Seat**, on the edge of a 600m cliff. Attractive waterfalls around Mahabaleshwar include **Chinaman's, Dhobi's** and **Lingmala Falls**. A nice walk out of town is the two-hour stroll to Bombay Point, and then following **Tiger Trail** back in (maps are available from the MTDC tourist office).

## **👉** Tours

Leaving the bus stand thrice from 2.15pm, the MSRTC conducts a Mahabaleshwar sightseeing round (₹80, 4½ hours) taking in nine viewpoints plus Old Mahabaleshwar. Alternatively, taxi drivers will give a three-hour tour for about ₹500. Tours are also available to lookout points south of town (₹400, 2½ hours), Panchgani (₹450, three hours) and Pratapgad Fort (₹500, three hours).

## Sleeping & Eating

Hotel prices soar during weekends and peak holidays (November to June). At other times you might get hefty discounts. Most hotels are around the main bazaar, while dozens of resort-style lodges are scattered around the village. Check out is usually at 8am or 9am.

**Hotel Panorama** HOTEL \$\$  
(☎260404; www.panoramaresorts.net; Main Rd; d with/without AC from ₹3500/3000; ♿ ♿) Business meets leisure at Mahabaleshwar's most reputed midtown luxury address. Very professionally managed, it boasts clean, comfy and tastefully appointed rooms, and there's some great grub at the restaurant. There's a dunk-sized pool, and a water channel where you might want to ride swan-headed paddle boats.

**MTDC Resort** HOTEL \$  
(☎260318; Bombay Point Rd; d from ₹700) This large-scale operation is situated about 2km southwest from town, and comes with quieter and greener surroundings. Rooms smack of government aesthetics, but it's cheap, so all's forgiven. Taxis can drop you here from the city centre for about ₹80.

**Hotel Vyankatesh** HOTEL \$\$  
(☎260575; hotelvkt@yahoo.com; Main Rd; d ₹1500) A typically overpriced hotel cashing in on Mahabaleshwar's never-ending tourism boom. Located behind a souvenir store, this place has slightly dreary rooms, but so have lots of hotels around town.

**TOP CHOICE** **Grapevine** MULTICUISINE \$\$  
(Masjid Rd; mains ₹140-160) Skip this place, and you've missed half the fun in town. Tucked pleasantly away behind the main drag, this tiny eatery serves a delectable range of Indian, Continental and Thai dishes, along with some excellent Parsi fare including the signature *dhansak*. A charming wrought-iron table set-up tastefully lends the interiors a Mediterranean air, and the restaurant

also boasts a smart wine list to complement your food.

**Hotel Rajmahal** INDIAN \$  
(Main Rd; mains ₹50-70) A good place to dig into some lip-smacking veg delights.

**Aman Restaurant** INDIAN \$  
(Main Rd; mains ₹80-100) Little more than a roadside stall, Aman can pull out some amazing kebabs and other meaty bites.

## Information

**State Bank of India** (Main Rd; ☎11am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-1pm Sat) Handles foreign currency.

**Bank of Baroda** Has an ATM on Masjid Rd.

**RB Travels** (☎260251; Main Rd) Local tours, ticketing, taxi hire and bus services.

**Joshi's Newspaper Agency** (Main Rd; per hr ₹50; ☎10am-7pm) Slow internet access.

**MTDC tourist office** (☎260318; Bombay Point Rd) At the MTDC Resort south of town.

## Getting There & Away

From the **bus stand** state buses leave regularly for Pune (semideluxe ₹123, 3½ hours) via Panchgani (₹15, 30 minutes). There's one ordinary bus to Goa (₹274, eight hours, 8.30am) via Kolhapur (₹139, five hours), while seven buses ramble off to Mumbai Central Station (ordinary semideluxe ₹174/234, seven hours).

Private agents in the bazaar book luxury buses to destinations within Maharashtra, and Goa (seat/sleeper ₹600/800, 12 hours, with a changeover at Surur). Remember to ask where they intend to drop you. Buses to Mumbai (₹450, 6½ hours) generally don't go beyond Borivali, while those bound for Pune (₹230) will bid you adieu at Swargate.

## Getting Around

Taxis and Maruti vans near the bus stand will take you to the main viewpoints or to Panchgani; you can haggle.

Cycling is also an option, but be careful of speeding traffic especially on the outskirts. Bikes can be hired from **Vasant Cycle Mart** (Main Rd; ☎8am-8pm) for ₹50 per day.

## SOLO BLUES

If you're a single traveller, do not schedule a night in Mahabaleshwar. Local laws bar hotels from renting out rooms to loners, especially men. Make sure you have an early departure plan in place, even if you visit for the day.

## Around Mahabaleshwar

### PRATAPGAD FORT

The windy **Pratapgad Fort** (maintenance fee ₹5; ☎7am-7pm), built by Shivaji in 1656, straddles a high mountain ridge 24km west of Mahabaleshwar. In 1659, Shivaji agreed to meet Bijapuri General Afzal Khan here, in an attempt to end a stalemate. Despite

## BERRIES, ANYONE?

Fruity Mahabaleshwar is India's berry-growing hub, producing some of the country's finest strawberries, raspberries and gooseberries. Harvested from November to June, the best crops come around February and can be bought fresh at Mahabaleshwar's bazaar. You can also pick up fruit drinks, sweets, squashes, fudges or jams from reputed farms such as **Mapro Gardens** (☎02168240112; ☀10am-1pm & 2pm-6.30pm), halfway between Mahabaleshwar and Panchgani.

a no-arms agreement, Shivaji, upon greeting Khan, disembowelled his enemy with a set of iron *baghnakh* (tiger's claws). Khan's tomb (out of bounds) marks the site of this painful encounter at the base of the fort.

Pratapgad is reached by a 500-step climb that affords brilliant views. Guides are available for ₹150. The state bus (₹80 return, one hour, 9.30am) does a daily shuttle from Mahabaleshwar, with a waiting time of around one hour. A return taxi ride is about ₹500.

### RAIGAD FORT

Some 80km from Mahabaleshwar, all alone on a high and remote hilltop, stands the enthralling **Raigad Fort** (Indian/foreigner ₹5/100; ☀8am-5.30pm). Having served as Shivaji's capital from 1648 until his death in 1680, the fort was later sacked by the British, and some colonial structures added. But monuments such as the royal court, plinths of royal chambers, the main marketplace and Shivaji's tomb still remain, and it's worth a daylong excursion.

You can hike a crazy 1475 steps to the top. But for a more 'levitating' experience, take the vertigo-inducing **ropeway** (☀8.30am-5.30pm), which zooms up the cliff and offers an eagle-eye view of the deep gorges below. A return ticket costs ₹160. Guides (₹200) are available within the fort complex. **Sarja Restaurant** (mains ₹30), adjoining the ropeway's base terminal, is a good place for lunch or snacks.

Public transport to Raigad is infrequent, so it's best to hire a cab at Mahabaleshwar (₹1300). Squeeze both Pratapgad and Raigad into your day's itinerary, and you've got a deal.

## Kolhapur

☎0231 / POP 505,500 / ELEV 550M

A rarely-visited town, Kolhapur is the perfect place to get up close and personal with the flamboyant side of India. Only a few

hours from Goa, this historic town boasts an intensely fascinating temple complex and a friendly population. In August, Kolhapur is at its vibrant best, when **Naag Panchami**, a snake-worshipping festival, is held in tandem with one at Pune. Gastronomes take note: the town is also the birthplace of the famed, spicy Kolhapuri cuisine, especially chicken and mutton dishes.

The old town around the Mahalaxmi Temple is 3km southwest of the bus and train stations, while the 'new' palace is a similar distance to the north. Rankala Lake, a popular spot for evening strolls, is 5km southwest of the stations.

### Sights

**TOP CHOICE** **Shree Chhatrapati Shahu Museum**

MUSEUM

(Indian/foreigner ₹13/30; ☀9.30am-5.30pm) 'Bizarre' takes on a whole new meaning at this 'new' palace, an Indo-Saracenic behemoth designed by British architect 'Mad' Charles Mant for the Kolhapur kings in 1884. The ground floor houses a madcap museum, featuring countless trophies from the eponymous king's trigger-happy jungle safaris, which were put to some ingenious uses, including walking sticks made from leopard vertebrae, and ashtrays fashioned out of tiger skulls and rhino feet. Then, there's an armoury, which houses enough weapons to stage a mini coup. The horror-house effect is brought full circle by the taxidermy section. However, don't forget to visit the durbar hall, a rather ornate affair, where the kings once held court sessions. Photography is strictly prohibited.

### Old Town

AREA

Kolhapur's atmospheric old town is built around the lively and colourful **Mahalaxmi Temple** (☀5am-10.30pm) dedicated to Amba Bai, or the Mother Goddess. The temple's origins date back to AD 10, and it's one of the most important Amba Bai temples in India. Non-Hindus are welcome. Nearby, past a foyer

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in the Old Palace, is **Bhavani Mandap** (☉6am-8pm), dedicated to the goddess Bhavani.

Kolhapur is famed for the calibre of its wrestlers and at the **Motibag Thalim**, a courtyard beside the entrance to Bhavani Mandap, young athletes train in a muddy pit. You are free to walk in and watch, as long as you don't mind the sight of sweaty, semi-naked men and the stench of urine emanating from the loos. Professional matches are held between June and December in the **Kasbagh Maidan**, a red-earth arena a short walk south of Motibag Thalim.

Shopaholics, meanwhile, can browse for the renowned Kolhapuri leather sandals, prized the world over for their intricate needlework. Most designs are priced from ₹300 to ₹500. The break-in blisters on your feet come free.

## Sleeping & Eating

### Hotel Tourist

HOTEL \$

(☎2650421; www.hoteltourist.co.in; Station Rd; s/d incl breakfast from ₹700/900; 📞) Recently given a facelift, this is one of the nicest places on the main street, and is acclaimed for its excellent service. Cosy though minimalist rooms offer great value (especially the AC ones), and there's an excellent restaurant serving great veg food.

### Hotel Pavillion

HOTEL \$\$

(☎2652751; www.hotelpavillion.co.in; 392 Assembly Rd; s/d ₹950/1150, with AC from ₹1300/1450; 📞) Located at the far end of a leafy park-cum-office area, this place guarantees a peaceful stay in large, clean rooms with windows that open out to delightful views of seasonal blossoms. It's very close to the MTDC office.

### Hotel Pearl

HOTEL \$\$

(☎6684451; hotelpearl@yahoo.com; New Shahu-puri; s/d incl breakfast from ₹1900/2100; 📞) Modelled on big-city business hotels, this place has good rooms, a spa, a travel desk and a decent multicuisine restaurant.

## Surabhi

INDIAN \$

(Hotel Sahyadri Bldg; mains ₹70-80) A great place to savour Kolhapur's legendary snacks such as the spicy *misal* (similar to *bhelpuri*), thalis and lassi. Saawan Dining Hall, located alongside, serves non-veg food.

## Information

**Axis Bank** has a 24-hour ATM near Mahalaxmi Temple.

**SBI** has a 24-hour ATM on Indumati Rd, parallel to Station Rd.

**Internet Zone** (Kedar Complex, Station Rd; per hr ₹20; ☉8am-11pm) Internet access.

**MTDC tourist office** (☎2652935; Assembly Rd; ☉10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) Opposite the Collector's Office.

**State Bank of India** (Udyamnagar; ☉10am-2pm Mon-Sat) A short autorickshaw ride southwest of the train station near Hutatma Park. Handles foreign exchange.

## Getting There & Around

Autorickshaws are abundant in Kolhapur and most drivers are honest with their billing. Most carry conversion charts to calculate fares from outdated meters.

From the **bus stand**, services head regularly to Pune (semideluxe/deluxe ₹228/390, five hours) and Ratnagiri (ordinary/semideluxe ₹100/135, four hours). Most private bus agents are on the western side of the square at Mahalaxmi Chambers, across from the bus stand. Overnight services with AC head to Mumbai (seat/sleeper ₹380/650, nine hours) and non-AC overnighters go to Panaji (₹210, 5½ hours).

The **train station** is 10 minutes' walk west of the bus stand. Three daily expresses, including the 10.50pm *Sahyadri Express*, zoom to Mumbai (sleeper/2AC ₹227/832, 13 hours) via Pune (₹161/574, eight hours). The *Rani Chennama Express* makes the long voyage to Bengaluru (sleeper/2AC ₹294/1097, 17½ hours, 2.20pm).

Services at Kolhapur airport were suspended in mid-2010 due to safety concerns.

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