

Maharashtra Special

(10 days, with option to extend)

Highlights: Mumbai sights and slum visit, Aurangabad, Ajanta and Ellora caves, Pune city, home stay and NGO visit (& Goa optional)

Day 1: Mumbai

Morning arrival in Mumbai. After an early lunch get ready for a city tour of sights including Gateway of India, Chowpatty Beach, Marine Drive, Museums, markets, etc.

Mumbai / Bombay is a frantic melange of India's extremes. It is the country's financial powerhouse and its vogue centre of fashion and film. Glistening skyscrapers and malls mushroom amid slums and grinding poverty. Half of the population lives in slums, and religious-based social unrest tugs at the skirt of Mumbai's financial excess. Mumbai has a wealth of Art Deco and grand colonial relics, temples, bazaars, and much more worth seeing. Gateway of India: The bold basalt arch faces out to Mumbai Harbour at the tip of Apollo Bunder. Derived from the Islamic styles of 16th-century Gujarat, it was built to commemorate the 1911 royal visit of King George V. It was completed in 1924: ironically, the gateway's British architects used it just 24 years later to parade off their last British regiment, as India marched towards independence.

*Imposing, exuberant and overflowing with people, the **Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (Victoria Terminus)** is the city's most extravagant Gothic building, the beating heart of its railway network, and an aphorism for colonial India. It's a meringue of Victorian, Hindu and Islamic styles whipped into an imposing, Daliesque structure of buttresses, domes, turrets, spires and stained-glass windows. Designed by Frederick Stevens, it was completed in 1887, 34 years after the first train in India left this site. Today it's the busiest railway station in Asia. Officially renamed Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (CST) in 1998, it's still better known locally as VT. It was added to the Unesco World Heritage list in 2004.*

***Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya** (Prince of Wales Museum) is the biggest and best museum is an intriguing hodgepodge of Islamic, Hindu and British architecture displaying a mixture of exhibits from all over India. Opened in 1923 to commemorate King George V's first visit to India, its flamboyant Indo-Saracenic style was designed by George Wittet - who also did the Gateway of India. The vast collection inside includes impressive Hindu and Buddhist sculpture, terracotta figurines from the Indus Valley, miniature paintings, porcelain and some particularly vicious weaponry. **Mani Bhavan museum:** As poignant as it is tiny, this museum is housed in the building in which Mahatma Gandhi stayed during his visits to Bombay from 1917 to 1934. Dedicated to this amazingly insightful leader, the museum showcases the simple room where Gandhi formulated his philosophy of satyagraha (truth, nonviolence and self sacrifice) and launched the 1932 civil disobedience campaign that led to the end of British rule. There are rooms showcasing a photographic record of Ghandiji's life, along with dioramas and original documents such as letters he wrote to Adolf Hitler and Franklin D Roosevelt. Nearby August Kranti Maidan, is where the campaign to persuade the British to 'Quit India' was launched in 1942.*

***Haji Ali Mosque:** Floating like a sacred mirage off the coast, this Mosque is one of Mumbai's*



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most striking shrines. Built in the 19th century, it contains the tomb of the Muslim saint Haji - legend has it that Haji Ali died while on a pilgrimage to Mecca and his casket miraculously floated back to this spot. A long concrete causeway reaches into the Arabian Sea, providing access to the mosque.

Day 2: Mumbai

After breakfast travel by boat to one of India's most important early Hindu cave temples on the Elephanta Island. On return to the main island enjoy lunch at one of the oldest restaurants in town. Visit the remaining sights in Mumbai (those not seen the day before).

*In the middle of Mumbai Harbour, 9km northeast of the Gateway of India, the rock-cut temples on **Elephanta Island** are a spectacle worth crossing the waters for. Home to a labyrinth of cave-temples carved into the basalt rock of the island, the artwork represents some of the most impressive temple carving in all India. The main Shiva-dedicated temple is an intriguing latticework of courtyards, halls, pillars and shrines, with the magnum opus a 6m tall statue of Sadhashiva – depicting a three-faced Shiva as the destroyer, creator and preserver of the universe. The enormous central bust of Shiva, its eyes closed in eternal contemplation, may be the most serene sight you witness in India. The temples are thought to have been created between AD 450 and 750, when the island was known as Gharapuri (Place of Caves). The Portuguese renamed it Elephanta because of a large stone elephant near the shore, which collapsed in 1814 and was moved by the British to Mumbai's Victoria Gardens.*

Day 3: Mumbai

Spend the whole day in Dharavi (one of Asia's largest slum) interacting with people there to see how important Dharavi is, not just to the Indian economy but to that of the world as well. This is an experience not to be missed. You will be escorted by people from NGOs which work in the slum.

***Dharavi** lies on prime property right in the middle of Mumbai and is home to more than a million people. Many are second-generation residents, whose parents moved here years ago. Today's Dharavi bears no resemblance to the fishing village it once was. A city within a city, it is one unending stretch of narrow dirty lanes, open sewers and cramped houses. In a city where house rents are among the highest in the world, Dharavi provides a cheap and affordable option to those who move to Mumbai to earn their living. It also has a large number of thriving small-scale industries that produce embroidered garments, export quality leather goods, pottery and plastic. The annual turnover of business here is estimated to be more than \$700m a year. The state government has plans to redevelop Dharavi and transform it into a modern township, complete with proper housing and shopping complexes, hospitals and schools.*

Day 4: Mumbai - Aurangabad

Transfer to the airport for a flight to Aurangabad. In the afternoon visit the Buddhist caves (4th and 5th century), Shah Ganj Masjid (ca. 1720), Purwar Museum, Mogul tombs and Bibi-ka-Maqbara (ca. 1679).

***Aurangabad:** Despite its newfound business wealth, Aurangabad retains much of its Muslim past, and you can sometimes glimpse an earlier period when the city flourished at the crossroads of ancient trade routes. The city was founded in 1610 on the Khan River.*

Day 5: Aurangabad - Ajanta Caves

Travel to the World Heritage site of the Buddhist caves of Ajanta.

*The **Ajanta caves** date from around 200 BC to AD 650 and, as Ellora developed and Buddhism gradually waned, the glorious Ajanta caves were abandoned and forgotten until 1819, when a British hunting party stumbled upon them. The miraculously preserved paintings and sculptures that decorate 30 caves cut into the basalt rock of a beautiful crescent-shaped gorge provide the most extensive idea of early Buddhist artistic traditions in India. They are also the sources for iconography and styles found in later Asian and far eastern Buddhist art.*

Day 6: Aurangabad – Ellora Caves

Travel to the other World Heritage cave temples of Ellora.

***Ellora cave temples** are the pinnacle of Deccan rock-cut architecture. Over five centuries, generations of monks (Buddhist, Hindu and Jain) carved monasteries, chapels and temples from a 2km-long escarpment and decorated them with a profusion of remarkably detailed sculptures. Because of the escarpment's gentle slope, in contrast with the sheer drop at Ajanta, many of the caves have elaborate courtyards in front of the main shrines. The masterpiece is the breathtaking Kailasa Temple (Cave 16). Dedicated to Shiva, it is the world's largest monolithic sculpture, hewn from the rock by 7000 labourers over a 150-year period. Altogether Ellora has 34 caves: 12 Buddhist (AD 600–800), 17 Hindu (AD 600–900) and five Jain (AD 800–1000). 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 sculptures show the increasing influence of Tantric elements in India's three great religions and their coexistence at one site indicates a lengthy period of religious tolerance.*

Day 7: Aurangabad - Pune

Drive to Pune and after lunch enjoy some sights. Overnight with an Indian host family or in the village.

*A place where old and new India interweave without a second thought, **Pune** (pronounced Poona) is a thriving centre of academia and business as well as a historic centre and home to the Osho Meditation Resort. The great Maratha leader Shivaji would be astonished to see how his city has changed in 500 years. He was raised here after the city was granted to his grandfather in 1599. The town fell to the British in 1817 and became their alternative capital during the monsoon. Many maharajas had palaces here, too, taking advantage of its cooler climate.*

***Aga Khan Palace and Gandhi National Memorial** is set in 6.5 hectares of gardens across the Mula River in Yerwada. After the Mahatma delivered his momentous Quit India resolution in 1942, the British interned him and other leaders of India's Independence movement here for nearly two years. Both Kasturba Gandhi, the Mahatma's wife, and Mahadoebhai Desai, his secretary for 35 years, died while imprisoned here. Their ashes are kept in memorial samadhis (shrines) in the gardens.*

***Shaniwar Wada Palace:** The ruins of this fortress-like Palace stand in the old part of the city. Built in 1732, the palace of the Peshwa rulers burnt down in 1828, but the massive walls remain, as do the sturdy palace doors with their angry spikes.*

*The **Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum** is one of Pune's true delights. The exhibits are the personal collection of Sri Dinkar Gangadhar, who died in 1990. Among the 17,000 or so artworks and curios he collected are a suit of armour made of fish scales and crocodile skin, hundreds of hookah pipes and a superb collection of betel-nut cutters.*

Day 8 and 9: Pune

Spend the next 2 days in a few villages in the Shirur Taluka, near Pune, where Astha No Kai (an NGO) is active in improving the livelihood of villagers. The group has an option of participating in village activities (undertake chores with women, prepare lunch for the group, play with children at the local school, teach for a few hours) which will bring you closer to the local people and help understand them better. Overnight with an Indian host family, in the village or in Pune.

***Ashta No Kai (ANK)** is dedicated to empowering rural women. ANK, through its efforts to promote and facilitate the capacity-building of marginalized women is seeking lasting solutions to illiteracy, poverty, economic inequities and social injustice. ANK aims to make a difference in rural women's lives by providing them with the education, vocational skills, and resources they need to become economically independent and self-reliant. It hopes to assist women in search of their own voices to make the transition from passive acceptance of their fate to becoming vocal and active partners in their own development.*

Ashta No Kai's action oriented programme has been implemented since October 1998 in 10 villages of Shirur Taluka in Pune District of Maharashtra State. The target area drought prone villages and hamlets the project covers are located at distances of 45 to 70 kms from Pune with an approximate population of 19,000. The villages, in sharp contrast to the developed



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industrialized cities on their fringes, are agrarian, economically marginalized, and lack basic infrastructure, such as adequate and clean water supply, electricity, basic health care facilities, and transportable roads.

As in other parts of the country, the status of women in Shirur Taluka too is low. Poverty, ignorance, illiteracy, social traditions, superstitions and political pressures still continue to hamper women's progress and improvement in the quality of their lives. A survey conducted by ANK in the project area villages in 1998 indicates that there is a high level of illiteracy among women as compared with men. Women suffer from a lack of opportunities due to village traditions and superstitions. In addition, most villages lack skill or vocational training facilities as well as job opportunities for them.

Day 10: Pune - Mumbai

Spend the day shopping, sightseeing or relaxing. A meditation / yoga session at the Osho Rajneesh Ashram can be arranged. Those returning home take the evening flight to Mumbai International airport for flights home. Those continuing on catch the local flight to Goa.

Extend your stay by 4 days for a relaxing holiday in Goa – **Optional**