

TOURISM UPDATE

MUMBAI!



▲ **High Finance:** The towering Bombay Stock Exchange building in downtown Mumbai symbolises its business and financial might.

◀ **Heritage Central:** The Chhatrapati Shivaji train terminus is more than 120 years old and a UNESCO heritage site.

▼ **Towering Dreams:** Revellers during the Ganesh festival watch transfixed as a devotee climbs to the top of a human pyramid to reach a pot full of goodies.

Magical Mumbai!

This cultural melting pot blends history that's ancient and dreams that are tomorrow's. **BY RUCHIRA MITTAL.**

Mumbai is not just India's most populous city, it is also the most popular. Thirteen million, and counting, its residents are highly focussed, industrious, tough, hardworking, resilient and fun-loving. Numerous books, songs and movies have eulogised and romanticised this sea-side financial hub, easily the New York of India. And like its transcontinental counterpart, the city hosts some of the mightiest industrial giants of India, indeed the entire world. From the Tatas, Godrej, Reliance, Cadbury, Essar, Jet Airways, Larsen & Toubro to Zee Telefilms, Mumbai is headquarters to the virtual who's who



of Indian industry and commerce. It is also where the influential Bombay Stock Exchange is located, as also the nation's financial regulator the Reserve Bank of India.

Renamed from Bombay, the city pulsates with a rare and potent vibrancy. Some say this life force comes from Mumbai being ideally located according to the ancient Indian science of town planning and architecture, Vastu Shastra—on the western coastline, with the Arabian Sea curling around it. Others insist its energy comes from its people. For anybody who has a dream

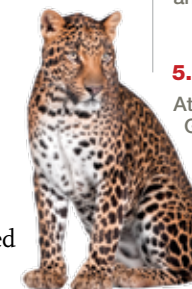
to fulfill and is willing to work for it, Mumbai aids every step of the way. No wonder then, it is the melting pot of diverse cultures from across India and home to many foreigners. Its character affects all, and soon, everyone who lives in Mumbai, becomes a Mumbaikar. The land of the mighty Marathas, Mumbai is hospitable and welcoming to a fault.

For the history buff, exploring the magic and mystery of the ancient caves in and around Mumbai is mandatory. Let your imagination soar recreating history around the Elephanta Caves. Discovered by 17th century Portuguese explorers, the caves are actually temples of Lord Shiva. They are best visited during the Elephanta festival. It takes 30 minutes by boat from the Gateway of India in south Mumbai, to reach this UNESCO World Heritage site. Ferries leave at regular intervals. But before you board a boat, pause at the historic Gateway of India, and admire the majestic and world famous Taj Hotel. You can spend a few meditative hours among hundreds of circling pigeons and the Arabian Sea smashing against the large landing platform, right behind you. An 85-foot high basalt arch, the Gateway was built by the British in 1911, to welcome King George V and Queen Mary of England. It used to be the mariner's first sight upon landing in what was then called Bombay. The last of the British ships leaving an independent India also sailed out of this place.

Less than five kilometres away, near the commercial city-centre of Fort, you must visit the Chhatrapati Shivaji Train Terminus, earlier known as the Victoria Terminus. The magnificent building blends Indian elements with British architecture to form a style unique to Mumbai. Its stunning stone dome, turrets and pointed arches are close to traditional Indian palace architecture. Lit up and dazzling at night, the terminus is a monument worth visiting.

The imposing 29-storey Phiroze Jeejeebhoy Towers, not far from the train terminus, houses the Bombay Stock Exchange, symbolising the city's, indeed the nation's, thriving economy.

Not far away, the stunning Marine Drive, also called the queen's necklace for its evenly spaced street lights, glitters like diamonds. In Mumbai, do sample Pav Bhaji, a spicy, high-octane vegetable-and-bread speciality of Mumbai. It's a wholesome meal, spiked with pickled



FIVE KEY HIGHLIGHTS

1. MODERN MONUMENT



The 5.6 km long Bandra Worli Sea Link connects downtown to Bandra and the western suburbs.

2. ICONIC GATEWAY



Astride the waterfront facing the world famous Taj Mahal Hotel, the Gateway of India symbolises the city's friendliness.

3. AWE-INSPIRING ART



Set in a 2.5 km long island, the basalt caves of Elephanta house fine stone sculptures and ancient rock art.

4. SUNSET BEACH



The wind-swept Juhu beach in suburban Mumbai attracts locals and tourists alike.

5. ANIMAL INSTINCT

At Mumbai's Sanjay Gandhi National Park watch spotted leopards. Go birdwatching in one of the world's most visited parks.



▲ **Amazing Rock Art:** A network of sculpted caves dating back to the 5th century, 10 km from the Gateway of India, the famed Elephanta Caves are a major tourist attraction.

onions and chutney for a man on the move. The Chowpatty beach, at the far end of Marine Drive, is known for its creamy handmade ice cream in scores of flavours. The beach also has the best of the other local favourite, Bhelpuri, a mouth-wateringly tangy snack made from puffed rice. The Parsi Brun Maska (bun and butter) and the Marathi Vada Pav are no less delectable and can be found at street-corner shops and kiosks.

The city comes alive during festivals and the Ganesh Festival is the city's own, in a sense. It bridges the gap between religions and is celebrated as one big carnival by all. For the art lover, the Jehangir Art Gallery and Prithvi Theatre are a must. Situated right behind the Prince of Wales museum in the Fort area, it is so prestigious, that painters and sculptors have to wait years to exhibit their works here. There are easy and affordable bus and train rides to each of these places.

Mumbai boasts of contemporary architectural marvels like the Bandra Worli Sealink, Nehru Science Centre and the IMAX Dome Theatre. The 5.6 km long Sealink is India's longest bridge and the first in the country to be built over the open sea. Kiran Kurundkar, managing director of the Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation, says: "At Maharashtra Tourism, we want to tell the world the stories of Mumbai that ring out from her every street. The story of a colonial dominion breaking free, and in 60 years becoming a global economic power."

The spirit of Mumbai is indomitable. It rises above each challenge, bouncing back to life and even stronger. Come what may, the city bedecks itself for the night. The vibrancy of Mumbai is an enduring symbol of the resilience and pride of the Mumbaikar and his beloved city. ■