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GETAWAYS



eastern madhya pradesh

A guide for thoughtful, immersive travel







EASTERN MADHYA PRADESH

A GUIDE FOR THOUGHTFUL, IMMERSIVE TRAVEL

First Edition 2018

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ISBN 978-81-89449-81-0

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Printed and published by

INDRANIL ROY on behalf of Outlook Publishing (India) Private Limited from AB-10,
Safdarjung Enclave, New Delhi-110029

Printed at ACME TRADEX INDIA PVT LTD., B-70, Sector-80, Phase-2, Noida-201305 (U.P)

THE CENTRE OF ATTRACTION

Khajuraho, Orchha, Ujjain, Indore, Bhopal, Sanchi, Omkareshwar, Mandu, Maheshwar, Panchmarhi, Jabalpur, Kanha, Bandhavgarh, Pench... There are plenty of reasons to visit Madhya Pradesh—there always were. As life gets busier, and holidays get shorter, travel is no longer about how much you see, but *how* you see it. And we suggest you see Madhya Pradesh well!

To make it easier for you, we've distilled the best and brightest experiences from this state in a series of pocketbooks. Curated into easy, doable itineraries that focus on a specific region, there's something for everyone here: Whether you have a day to spare, or a week; whether you're travelling solo or with your family; whether your pockets are deep or shallow... So take your pick and immerse yourself in the natural and cultural, historical and spiritual charms of this central Indian magnet.

Discover Madhya Pradesh. And let it discover *you!*





2



1. *Rajgira chikki* being sold at Sarafa Bazaar in Jabalpur 2. Cable cars take passengers to the top of Trikoota hill in Maihar 3. On a boat ride on the Narmada, the scenic Marble Rocks of Bhedaghat 4. Dance performance by the Baiga community 5. A sculpture by renowned artist Chandra Prakash at Art Ichol, near Maihar 6. Gaur, the Indian bison is a large, wild cattle species found in the forests of MP. It can weigh up to 1,000kg



5



6

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	8
ITINERARY 1: 1 Night/2 Days A Whisper in the Wild	14
▶ DAY 1 JABALPUR-KANHA	
▶ DAY 2 KANHA-JABALPUR	
ITINERARY 2: 1 Night/2 Days Fossils and Forest Wonders	18
▶ DAY 1 GHUGHWA-TALA	
▶ Day 2 BANDHAVGARH	
ITINERARY 3: 2 Night/3 Days Something for Everyone	22
▶ DAY 1 JABALPUR-BHEDAGHAT	
▶ DAY 2 PENCH	
▶ DAY 3 PENCH-JABALPUR	
ITINERARY 4: 2 Nights/3 Days Forest Lore	26
▶ DAY 1 JABALPUR-BANDHAVGARH	
▶ Day 2 BANDHAVGARH	
▶ Day 3 GHUGHWA-JABALPUR	
ITINERARY 5: 3 Nights/4 Days Wild Crafts	31
▶ Day 1 JABALPUR	
▶ Day 2 BANDHAVGARH	
▶ Day 3 KANHA	
▶ Day 4 KANHA-JABALPUR	

ITINERARY 6: 3 Nights/4 Days Landscapes of Central India	36
▶ DAY 1 BHEDAGHAT	
▶ Day 2 KANHA	
▶ Day 3 PENCH	
▶ Day 4 PENCH-JABALPUR	
ITINERARY 7: 6 Nights/7 Days The Great Central Indian Outdoors	41
▶ DAY 1 BHEDAGHAT	
▶ Day 2 BANDHAVGARH	
▶ Day 3 BANDHAVGARH	
▶ Day 4 GHUGHWA-KANHA	
▶ Day 5 KANHA	
▶ Day 6 PENCH	
▶ Day 7 PENCH-JABALPUR	
ITINERARY 8: 6 Nights/7 Days Communities of the Wild	48
▶ DAY 1 JABALPUR-ICHOL-MAIHAR	
▶ Day 2 ICHOL-MAIHAR	
▶ Day 3 BANDHAVGARH	
▶ Day 4 BANDHAVGARH	
▶ Day 5 KANHA	
▶ Day 6 KANHA	
▶ Day 7 JABALPUR	
PHOTO ESSAY	54
LISTINGS	70
TRAVEL SLOW	78



TRAVELLING EAST

■ BY MALAVIKA BHATTACHARYA

Replete with natural bounty, centuries-old traditions, and thriving art, Madhya Pradesh is India's wild heart. In India's second largest state, holy rivers, lush forests, and ancient fossils share space with historic cities and luxurious stays.

The eastern part of Madhya Pradesh offers a myriad palate of experiences: Explore stunning natural landscapes, get up-close to wildlife, interact with tribal communities, shop for local arts and crafts, and learn about natural history.



ABHINAV KAKKAR

Barasingha drink water from a small pond in Kanha National Park

Revered as the giver of life, the mighty River Narmada winds its way through the state. At Jabalpur's riverside ghats, vibrant aartis draw the community to the Narmada every evening. At Bhedaghat, the river displays her might as she slices a channel through towering marble cliffs, and then crashes down in the 100-foot Dhuandhar Falls.

Beyond the city, million-year-old fossils lie preserved in little-known Ghughwa National Fossil Park. On the fringes of an industrial town called Maihar, Art Ichol, a glorious artist's retreat, is a hub of ceramic and stone installations, upcycled art, and creative spaces in the lap of nature.

More than a quarter of Madhya Pradesh is covered in forest. Within



lush jungles of sal, mahua, and teak, roams the elusive Royal Bengal tiger. India is home to half the world's tiger population, and with its many protected reserves, Madhya Pradesh is tiger country.

As one of the last great refuges of the striped cat, measures are in place to protect this delicate ecosystem. Heart-warming stories of conservation, like that of the barasingha, were born in this land. Found only in Kanha National Park and brought back from the brink of extinction, this remains one of India's greatest conservation successes.

Gond and Baiga tribal villages dot the fringes of Madhya Pradesh's forest reserves. On a wildlife getaway in the Bandhavgarh, Kanha, and Pench National Parks, it is well worth the time to stop at the villages on their periphery. Explore traditional blue and green mud homes, kitchen gardens, bamboo crafts, and hear stories of the wild. For centuries, these indigenous Gond and Baiga tribal communities have coexisted with the forest, harbouring an innate knowledge of the plants and animals they share space with. This proximity to nature translates into the Gond art form—a colourful, characteristic style that is slowly making a mark on the world art map. Similarly, the Baiga tribes' vibrant folk dances tell stories of the seasons, the harvest, the wildlife, and other



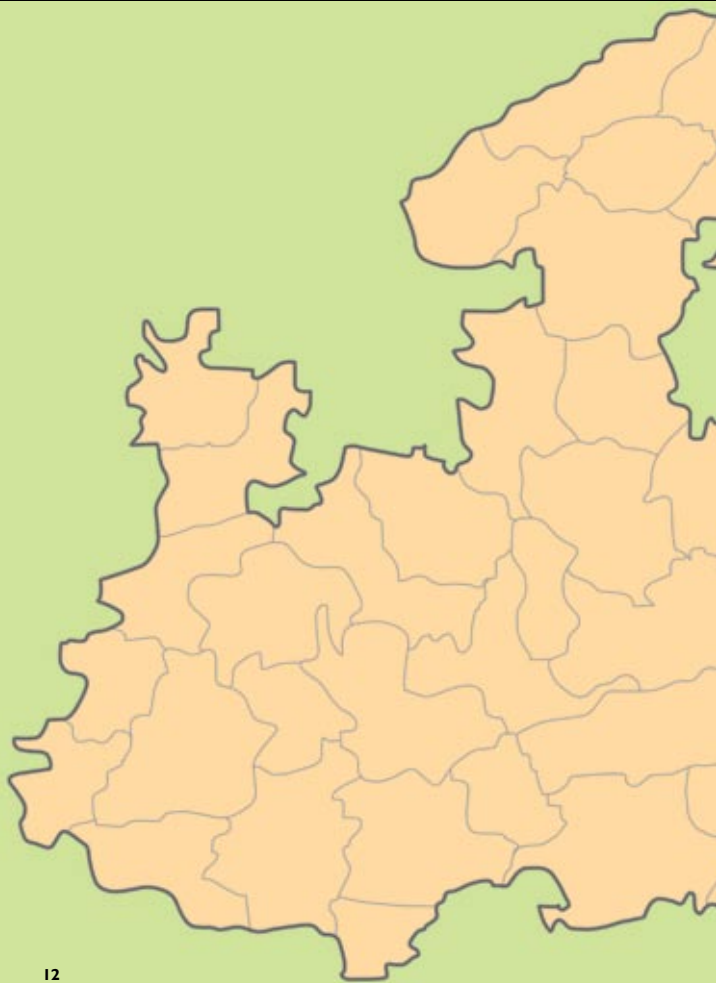
From far left: A naturalist from Pugdundee Safaris, Pench; chital or axis deer; a Gond woman; Mardhari village in Bandhavgarh; a tiger; traditional Begasaj

aspects of nature that impact their lives every day.

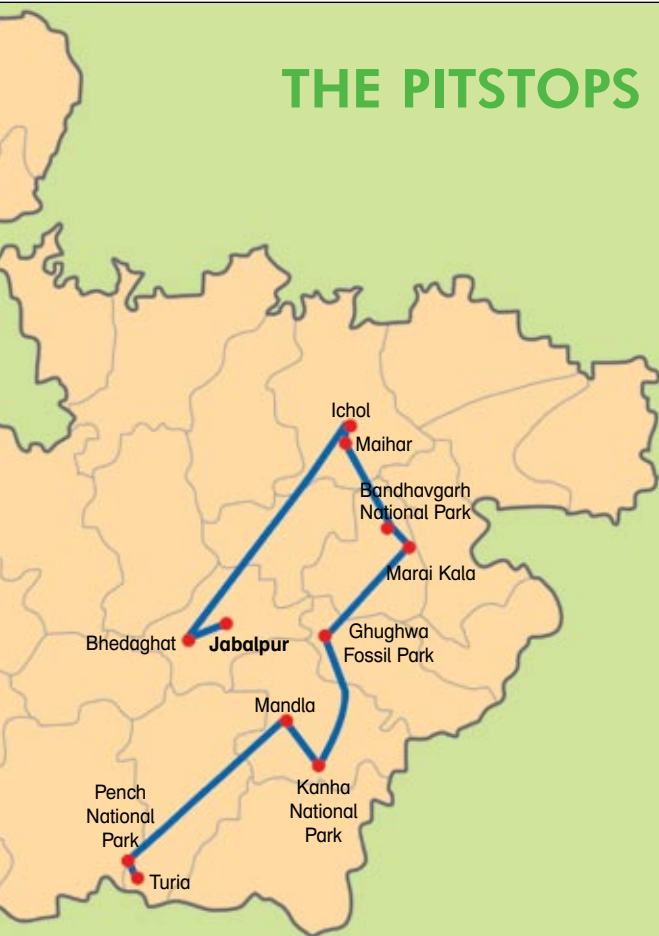
A holistic experience in the jungle goes much beyond a twice-daily safari. The art, dance, and traditions of the communities that coexist with the wild are an intrinsic part of the forest's tapestry.

A clutch of eco-conscious properties is pioneering initiatives in a bid to offer guests an immersive holiday. Incorporating traditional architectural styles, housing Gond art displays, inviting Baiga dancers to perform, and serving locally grown produce at meals, these luxurious, responsible lodges introduce guests to the region's charming, diverse culture. At the heart of these experiences lies the intimate connection guests foster with the wild. Knowledgeable in-house naturalists raise the bar on game drives through the national parks, and lead guests on informative nature walks.

To truly know the region, choose to stay with responsible hosts, explore the local arts and crafts, learn about magnificent creatures beyond the tiger, and come away with varied memories of a lifetime.



THE PITSTOPS



Photographs by ABHINAV KAKKAR



A herd of barasingha in Kanha; Facing page (from top): A chocolate pansy butterfly; an Indian roller, near Bhimodi Lake; a crested hawk-eagle in Kanha

A Whisper in the Wild

Even a short wildlife getaway is enough to get up-close to a host of fine feathered friends

Route: Jabalpur—Kanha National Park's Mukki Gate (198 km/5 hr) via Bargi Dam and Baihar—Jabalpur (198 km/5 hr)

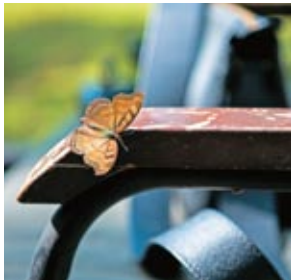
DAY 1 JABALPUR-KANHA

Before hitting the road to Kanha, grab a bite at Jabalpur's iconic **Indian Coffee House**, where locals love both the masala dosa and *chole bhature*. Afternoon safaris at Kanha begin at 3 p.m. and require that you leave the lodge half an hour prior. If you don't arrive in time, go instead to **Bhimodi Lake**, around 15 minutes from the Mukki Gate, where a

host of feathered visitors gather every morning and evening through the year. Train your binoculars on the large waterbody at the edge of the forest's buffer zone, and spot fat little **cotton pygmy geese** glide between the water lilies, **little grebes** diving into the water, and **cormorants** sunning themselves. Overnight at the luxurious cottages of **Singinawa Jungle Lodge**.

DAY 2 KANHA-JABALPUR

Rise before the sun for a 6 a.m. open-top jeep safari. The drive takes you past the boulder-strewn **Banjar River**, where **big cats** sometimes quench their thirst. Through the Mukki Gate travel into the beautiful sal forests of the 2,051-sq-km (including core and buffer zones) of Kanha tiger reserve. The tiger may be the apex predator, but keep your eyes open for the unsung star of these forests—the stately **barasingha** or **swamp deer**—brought back from the edge of extinction. Scan the canopy to spot some of the 300 species of birds that live here, like **woodpeckers**, **kingfishers**, **spotted doves**, and **yellow-footed green pigeons**. Exit the park by 11 a.m.; get lunch before driving back to Jabalpur.



*Sunlight carpets the open
grasslands of Kanha
National Park*





Fossils and Forest Wonders

A short road trip to discover ancient fossils, learn about local crafts, and explore the vibrant forests of Bandhavgarh.

Route: Jabalpur—Ghughwa (85 km/2 hrs) via Amjhar and Chaurai Khurd—Bandhavgarh's Tala village (97 km/2 hrs) via Shahpura and Umaria—Jabalpur (160 km/3.5 hrs)

DAY 1 GHUGHWA–TALA

Hit the road as soon as you arrive in Jabalpur. En route to Bandhavgarh, stop at the wonderfully untamed **Ghughwa Fossil Park**, where 65-million-year-old fossils of eucalyptus, palms, and other plants are displayed on outdoor plinths. Step in to the museum to learn the fascinating story of how Central India's landscapes evolved over millions of years.

After checking-in to your lodge in Bandhavgarh, spend the evening exploring Tala village at the national park's Tala gate. Nearly all the 20 families here are engaged in **bamboo crafts**, providing furnishings and

Ghughwa Fossil Park is the largest fossil park in Asia and second-largest in the world; Facing page: Wood-boring insects often lay eggs on bark

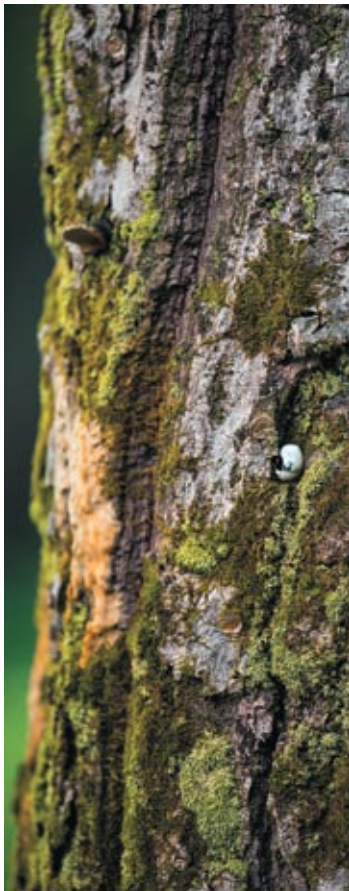


Photographs by ABHINAV KAKKAR

decor to many of the lodges in the area. Watch them weave intricate baskets and lampshades, and place an order if you like something. Overnight at the charming **Bandhavgarh Jungle Lodge**, a wooded property with independent cottages, ideally located near the Tala gate.

DAY 2 BANDHAVGARH

An early morning **game drive** (from 6-11 a.m.) will take you through Bandhavgarh's lush grasslands and forests of sal, bamboo, and mahua. Each zone offers the chance to experience a different landscape: forested hills, riverine plains, vast meadows, and ancient caves. Formerly the hunting ground of the maharajas of Rewa, the reserve now thrives with animal and bird life and is among the world's most densely populated tiger habitats. While driving through the woodland, keep an eye out for dhole, gaur, sambar, and herds of chital. The canopy abounds with langurs, and 250 bird species, including MP's beautiful black-white-and-orange-hued state bird, the Asian paradise flycatcher. Get a hearty lunch at your lodge before the long ride back to Jabalpur.







Clockwise from top: Craftspeople working with bamboo at Bandhavgarh; a 'crafty' coconut at Malaya Handicrafts, Tala village; a sculpture at Rani Durgavati Museum; a female plum-headed parakeet in Bandhavgarh

Photographs by ABHINAV KAKKAR



Bhedaghat's Marble Rocks have featured in numerous Bollywood movies, including Asoka and Mohenjo Daro

Something for Everyone

A packed weekend of exploring a city, a stunning natural landscape, lush forests, and a tribal village.

Route: Jabalpur—Bhedaghat (25 km/45 min)—Pench (206 km/4.5 hrs)—Jabalpur (210 km/4 hrs).

DAY 1 JABALPUR—BHEDAGHAT

Spend the early morning in **Jabalpur** exploring the 12th-century **Madan Mahal Fort**, set high atop a hill in the city. After brunch at the local favourite **Indian Coffee House**, set out for a half-day excursion to **Bhedaghat**, best known for its **Marble Rocks**. The Narmada River slices its way through towering cliffs of marble. Navigate this otherworldly landscape by boat, listening to your guide's lyrical tales. Walk the long path around nearby **Dhuandhar Falls**, to see the Narmada crashing down in a 100-foot drop.

For a different view, ride the **Narmada Ropeway** above the falls. Overnight at Motel Marble Rocks in Bhedaghat.

DAY 2 PENCH

Drive to Pench and arrive at **Taj Baghvan**, near the Turia Gate of **Pench National Park**, by lunch. In the afternoon, head to the Gond village of **Khamba** on the periphery of the national park. Khamba is one of three villages in the region on board with **Tiger Tribes**—a community-led rural tourism programme. Go on a guided tour of a village home, try your hand at traditional cooking methods, and sample farm-fresh organic snacks like *ghugri* (a toor dal salad). Listen to fascinating tales about the Gond community's life on the fringes of the forest.

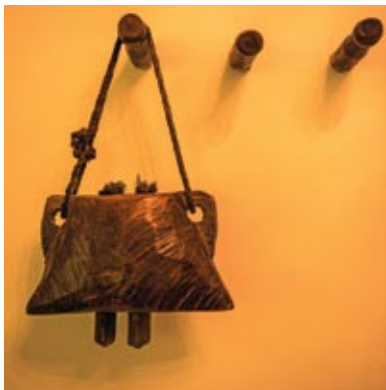
DAY 3 PENCH-JABALPUR

Pench National Park was the inspiration for Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book*. Head deep into the forests on a morning **game drive** (6-11 a.m.). A healthy population of 57 tigers roam here, along with jackals, dhole, chital, gaur, and sambar. Look into the canopy of mahua, teak, and saja to spot nearly 300 bird species, including vultures, fish eagles, and the rare Eurasian cuckoo. After lunch at your lodge, head back to Jabalpur.

An Indian bison or gaur grazes leisurely at Pench National Park. It's among the 10 largest land animals in the world, sometimes weighing up to 1,000 kg







Clockwise from above: A traditional cowbell; a “doh” or pool that sustains wild animals and birds during the dry season; children lean against white and blue walls, popular colours for local homes

Forest Lore

Uncover ancient legends and Central India's rich natural history on this short weekend getaway to Bandhavgarh and Ghughwa.

Route: Jabalpur—Bandhavgarh (165 km/4 hrs) via Shahpura and Umaria—Ghughwa (97 km/2 hrs)—Jabalpur (85 km/2 hrs)

DAY 1 JABALPUR—BANDHAVGARH

Arrive at Jabalpur around noon and grab a quick lunch at the **Indian Coffee House** before heading out to Bandhavgarh. Once you reach by sundown, settle in to the wood-lined **Bandhavgarh Jungle Lodge**, and watch a Baiga tribal dance performance in the evening.

The tiger is considered auspicious among Central India's tribal communities, and is often illustrated in local paintings, at temples, and on apparel





Ghughwa Fossil Park has well-preserved plant fossils dating back 65 million years

DAY 2 BANDHAVGARH

On a morning **game drive** (6-11 a.m.), watch the forest shake off its slumber. The bamboo thickets, sal, mahua, and tendu trees begin to buzz with langurs, rufous treepies, hornbills, and nearly 250 other avian species. This park hosts one of the highest densities of tigers in the world, along with a variety of prey like chital, sambar, and wild boar.

After lunch at the lodge, head into the Tala zone for an afternoon game drive (3-6 p.m.). Legends surround the 1,536-sq-km national park (including core and buffer zones). **Bandhavgarh Fort**, high on the crest of a hill, dominates the Tala zone. The story goes that Ram stopped in Bandhavgarh on his return from Lanka and gave the fort to his brother Lakshman, lending the region its name: “Bandhav” means brother, “garh” translates to fort. Although at the time of writing, the fort wasn’t open to tourists, you could visit the 12-metre long statue of a reclining Vishnu, called **Shesh Shaiya**, located halfway up the hill. Next to the statue is the source of the Charanganga River.



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जबलपुर

APSARA

11th CENT. A.D.

JABALPUR



Clockwise from left: A sculpture at Rani Durgavati Museum, Jabalpur; British coins at the Museum; a fishing net fashioned from locally abundant bamboo

DAY 3 GHUGHWA- JABALPUR

Depart for Jabalpur, stopping en route at **Ghughwa Fossil Park** to see the fascinating “trees of stone”. Millennia ago, when India, Africa, and Australia were part of one landmass called Gondwanaland, the Ghughwa region lay close to the equator. An evergreen forest thrived here, and the 65-million-year-old fossils of eucalyptus and palm trees from that time, are now displayed at the park.



TRIBAL ART





Gond paintings at the Singinawa Jungle Lodge, Bandhavgarh; Facing page: more murals near Malaya Handicrafts & Café at Tala village, Bandhavgarh

Wild Crafts

A variety of Central India's vibrant arts and crafts can be found on the fringes of the forest

Route: Jabalpur—Bandhavgarh (225 km/4 hrs) via Shahpura—Kanha (232 km/5 hrs) via Shahpura and Mandla—Jabalpur (178 km/4 hrs) via Mandla

DAY 1 JABALPUR

Most flights to Jabalpur arrive only in the second half of the day. Spend half a day here exploring the city. Shop for Madhya Pradesh's naturally dyed handloom fabrics like Bagh prints and Behrugarh batik (*dabu*) at the **Mrignayanee Emporium**. Visit **Rani Durgavati Museum**, and browse through ancient excavated sculptures and coins, dating back to the 10th century. Overnight at **Hotel Samdareeya**.



DAY 2 BANDHAVGARH

Set out early for Bandhavgarh and settle in at the ultra-luxurious **Samode Safari Lodge**. Before lunch, explore the crafts at the park's Tala Gate. At **Tala village**, watch as families use the locally abundant bamboo to create baskets, and weave thatched roofs and lampshades, which they supply to many lodges in the region. Next, pop in to **Malaya Handicrafts and Café** on the Tala Main Road. The shop is crammed with handmade crafts from across India: terracotta animals, Gond paintings, kalamkari and Warli prints, and more.

After lunch, head into the park for an afternoon **game drive** (from 3-6 p.m). Chances of spotting the big cat are high, as Bandhavgarh is home to one of the highest concentrations of tigers in the world. Peer deep into the bamboo and sal forests to catch a glimpse of chital, dhole, gaur, and sambar.

DAY 3 KANHA

Aim to reach Kanha well before lunch. **Kipling Camp**, near Kanha National Park's Kisli Gate, is the perfect place to stay for those interested in regional art. Browse through the beautiful **Gond art** display in the central sitting space. These were created by artists from Patangarh village. These artists often visit the camp with collections of their work for interested guests to buy. It's fascinating to listen to the stories and thought behind each piece.

On an afternoon game drive (3-6 p.m) through the national park, watch the landscapes morph from lush sal, mahua, and tendu forests, to thickets of bamboo and wide-open grassland. Watering holes are havens of activity, as barasingha, chital, sambar, gaur, and many bird species congregate here. If you're lucky, you'll even spot the big cat stalking its prey.

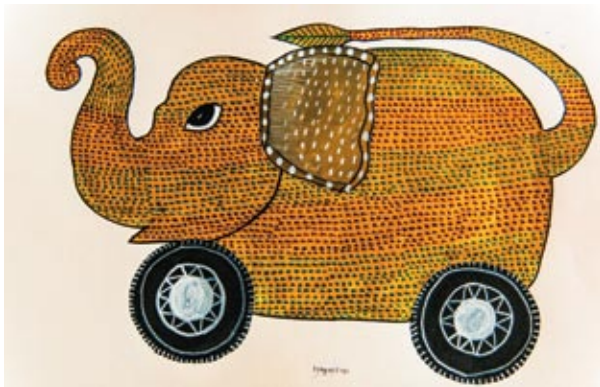
DAY 4 KANHA-JABALPUR

After breakfast at the lodge, hit the road to Jabalpur to catch your flight or train.

A craftsman splits bamboo at Tala village; Facing page: iron figurines at Samode Safari Lodge, Bandhavgarh



Clockwise from right: The tiger is a recurring motif in Gond paintings because it's considered auspicious and a guardian of the forest. This tiger painting is by Ram Kumar Shyam; a Gond painting at the Singinawa Jungle Lodge, Kanha; a yellow elephant also painted by Ram Kumar Shyam. Artists from Patangarh village often travel to local hotels to sell their art to travellers







Tiger in Pench National Park; Facing page: an Indian jackal, like the character of Tabaqui, in Rudyard Kipling's The Jungle Book

Landscapes of Central India

Explore Central India's diverse landscapes on this route; encounter marble cliffs that tower over you, mighty rivers, dense forests and sprawling grasslands.

Route: Jabalpur—Bhedaghat (25 km/45 min)—Kanha (193 km/5 hrs) via Bargi Dam and Baihar—Pench (193 km/4.5 hrs) via Seoni—Jabalpur (210 km/4 hrs)

DAY 1 BHEDAGHAT

Grab lunch on the go in Jabalpur and head straight to **Bhedaghat**. The half-day excursion allows you to explore the stunning natural landscapes on the fringes of Jabalpur. Bhedaghat is best known for the **Marble Rocks**—towering cliffs of pale marble that rise on either side of the Narmada River. Meander down the channel by boat, as guides point out animal shapes in the contours of the rock face. Pick up a hand-

carved marble souvenir, and drive five minutes away to the thundering **Dhuandhar Falls**. For a close-up view, walk the long path that curves around the falls to the river. Ride the **Narmada Ropeway** above the falls for a beautiful aerial perspective of the river crashing down in a 100-foot drop.

DAY 2 KANHA

Depart early for Kanha National Park's Mukki Gate so you are in time for an afternoon **game drive** (3-6 p.m). Look into the dense canopy of towering sal, tendu, and crocodile bark trees, thriving with nearly 300 bird species. Jungle transforms to wide grasslands, where the regal barasingha like to roam. The **Bamni Dadar** plateau dominates the Mukki zone, purple in the lowering sun. Drive past narrow streams and wide waterbodies, where animals come to quench their thirst. Exit the park and drive across the wide Banjar River, where tigers sometimes sprawl on the muddy banks. Overnight at the luxurious tents at **Shergarh**.

DAY 3 PENCH

After a quick breakfast, go on a nature walk in the park's buffer zone or just within Shergarh's grounds, where the waist-high wild grass is the perfect habitat for jungle cats and ground birds like lapwings.

Arrive at **Pench Tree**

Lodge by lunch. Located near the Pench National Park's quiet Karmajhiri Gate, the bucolic countryside is perfect for long cycle rides. Ride past expansive cornfields and a scattering of mud homes. Spot a number



Photographs by ABHINAV KAKKAR



A seasonal stream at Pench National Park; Facing page: Tilwara Ghat, one of several spots in the country, where Mahatma Gandhi's ashes were immersed

of brightly coloured birds along the way, like the Indian roller and the black-headed oriole.

DAY 4 PENCH-JABALPUR

Head into the 757-sq-km Pench National Park for a morning safari (6-11 a.m). Pench stands apart from Kanha with its teak forests and rocky terrain. Deep gorges of black rock are the prime habitat of the stealthy leopard. Young, slender teak trees allow you to look deep into the forest and spot nilgai, chital, and gaur. The grasslands conceal jackals and dhole. Stop and observe birdlife by the wide Pench River, bordered on one side by forest and on the other, by grassland. Exit the park by 11 a.m and head back to Jabalpur after lunch at the lodge.





The Great Central Indian Outdoors

On this week-long tour, sail past marble cliffs, discover 65-million-year-old fossils, and explore three thriving national parks in Madhya Pradesh.

Route: Jabalpur—Bhedaghat (25 km/45 min)—Bandhavgarh (190 km/4.5 hrs) via Shahpura and Umaria—Ghughwa (100 km/2 hrs)—Kanha (130 km/3 hrs)—Pench (193 km/4.5 hrs) via Seoni—Jabalpur (210 km/4 hrs)

DAY 1 BHEDAGHAT

Most flights to Jabalpur arrive around midday. Drive around an hour out of the city to the **Marble Rocks** at **Bhedaghat**. Cliffs of pale marble rise on either bank of the Narmada, changing hues, from pink to ash-grey, in the light of the sun. Row down the river by boat and pick out shapes in the rugged rock faces. Five minutes away, the Narmada River crashes down in a 100-foot drop at **Dhuandhar Falls**. Get an aerial perspective of the stunning sight from the **Narmada Ropeway**,

Bandar Kudni is a popular landmark atop Marble Rocks; Facing page: a view of Dhuandhar Falls from the cable car at Bhedaghat



Photographs by ABHINAV KAKKAR

which goes across the waterfall and deposits you on the river bank. Pick up carved marble souvenirs from the many stalls that line the town's main thoroughfare. Stay overnight at **Motel Marble Rocks** in Bhedaghat.

DAY 2 BANDHAVGARH

Set out early to reach **Bandhavgarh** in time for lunch. Check-in to the luxurious **Samode Safari Lodge**, near the Dhamokar Gate. After lunch at the lodge, set out on an afternoon **game drive** (3-6 p.m.). Look into the canopy of sal, bamboo, and mahua to spot some of the 250 bird species, including the racket-tailed drongo, and at ground-level birds like the rare lesser adjutant stork. Most people visit the national park hoping to catch a glimpse of the tiger and the chances are high since Bandhavgarh hosts one of the highest concentrations of tigers in the world. Keep an eye out for chital, dhole, gaur, and sambar in the grasslands and the forest.

After the monsoon, Bandhavgarh's bamboo and sal forest is a dense tangle, and in the morning, the sun's rays fight to pierce the canopy





Open grasslands in Ghughwa Fossil Park

DAY 3 BANDHAVGARH

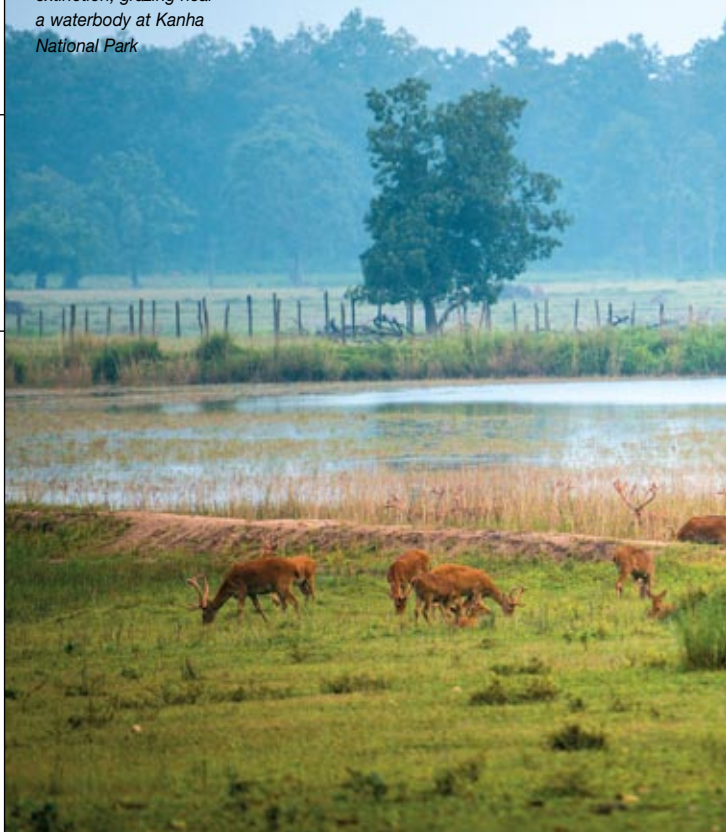
Head out for an early morning **game drive** (from 6-11 a.m.) into a different zone of the Bandhavgarh National Park. No two drives in the 1,536-sq-km national park (including core and buffer zones) are the same, as landscapes transform from vast meadows and dense forest to lush hillocks, riverine plains, and ancient caves.

After the drive, spend the afternoon exploring the **Mardhari village** at the Dhamokar Gate. Learn about the lives of the Gond and Baiga tribal communities who live on the fringes of the forest, sharing space with all the jungle's residents. Walk past blue mud homes, rice fields, and vegetable gardens. In the evening, watch the cattle coming home.

DAY 4 GHUGHWA – KANHA

Depart Bandhavgarh early the next morning for **Kanha National Park**. En route, stop at the often-overlooked **Ghughwa Fossil Park**. Here, 65-million-year-old fossils of eucalyptus, palms, and other evergreen plants are displayed in an open meadow. Central India's landscapes evolved over millions of years, and the museum at Ghughwa is a good place to learn about the region's natural history.

A herd of barasingha, brought back from near extinction, grazing near a waterbody at Kanha National Park





Reach the tented camp of **Shergarh**, near Kanha's Mukki Gate, in time for lunch. Spend the afternoon exploring Kanha on foot. Walk with trained naturalists through the camp's wild grounds, where jungle cats and ground birds like lapwings inhabit the wild grass. On the seven-kilometre Bamni Nature Trail, walk past winding streams, rocky outcrops, forested patches and the Banjar River. Look out for brightly coloured butterflies, like the orange-and-black-hued striped tiger butterfly. Chital and sambar are often seen on the trail, and sometimes, you'll spot pugmarks of a tiger or leopard.

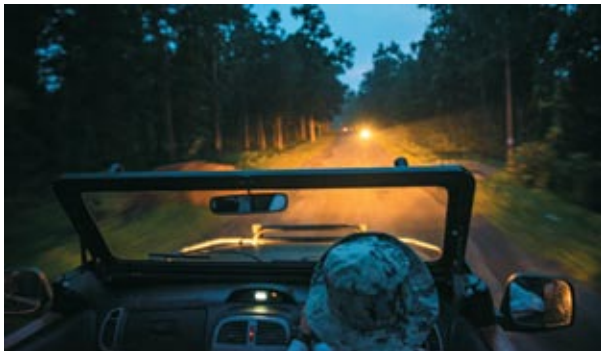
DAY 5 KANHA

Depart for an early morning **game drive** (6-11 a.m.) in the 2,051-sq-km Kanha National Park (including core and buffer zones). Talk to the accompanying naturalists about the inspiring story of the barasingha's revival—it is one of India's biggest conservation success stories. The stately deer, distinct because of their 12-point antlers, roam Kanha's



grasslands. Look into the branches of the sal trees to spot some of the 300 species of birds that live here, including yellow-footed green pigeons, woodpeckers, kingfishers, and spotted doves.

After lunch at the camp, grab a cycle and explore the villages surrounding the national park. Ride past lush rice fields and settlements of blue mud homes. Explore the Gond villages on the periphery of the forest at a leisurely pace, observing the local architectural styles: tiled sloping roofs, sal wood columns, mud walls. Visit an afternoon village *haat* (local market), which usually takes place on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays at most



Darkness descends as safari vehicles head back at dusk in Kanha; Facing page: Kanha is lush green, the growth dense, after the monsoon season

villages here. Snack on wild cucumbers, while shopping for local souvenirs like bamboo baskets.

DAY 6 **PENCH**

Depart Shergarh in the morning to arrive at **Pench Tree Lodge** before lunch. The untamed tree house camp is set within the agricultural fields of Sarrahirri village, near **Pench National Park's** Karmajhiri Gate. An afternoon **game drive** (3-6 p.m.) takes you into the beautiful teak forest of the 757-sq-km national park (including core and buffer zones). Wide meadows with tall wild grass are the domain of jackals, dhole, and chital. Scan watering holes to spot gaur, sambar, nilgai, and a plethora of birds. The Pench River is the best spot for bird watchers, as grey-headed fish eagles, vultures, ibises, and cormorants are found here.

DAY 7 **PENCH-JABALPUR**

Squeeze in an early morning cycle ride to nearby Sagar village. As you ride past rice and corn fields, spot birds like the turquoise-hued Indian roller and jungle owlet. Spend an hour walking within the blue-and-green mud homes. Head back to Jabalpur after breakfast at the lodge.

Photographs by ABHINAV KAKKAR



A Durga idol is taken in a truck for immersion in Jabalpur

Communities of the Wild

Discover a rich legacy of art, music, and dance, along with the thrills of jungle safaris, on this route through eastern Madhya Pradesh

Route: Jabalpur—Ichol-Maihar (160 km/4 hrs)—Bandhavgarh (92 km/3 hrs)—Kanha (235 km/5.5 hrs) via Mandla—Jabalpur (178 km/5 hrs)

DAY 1 JABALPUR-ICHOL-MAIHAR

Depart Jabalpur for **Art Ichol**, a gorgeous artist's retreat and gallery set amidst mustard fields along the Khajuraho-Bandhavgarh highway. Set up by artist Ambica Beri near Ichol village, the lush space is dotted with stone and metal sculptures, and unique pieces created from innovatively upcycled scrap materials. Artists from India and around the world have created stunning installations here, drawing curious visitors and art enthusiasts every day.

Guests can stay in lovely rooms within the grounds, or at Ambica's home, **Maihar House**, in the nearby town of Maihar. The delightful heritage home is an oasis of greenery and calm within the industrial city. Watch artists at work, try your hand at pottery, ceramic art, or painting.

DAY 2 ICHOL-MAIHAR

Every morning, the fifth generation Maihar Band practices at the **Maihar music school**. Watch them play beautiful Hindustani classical melodies composed by the legendary sarod player who hailed from Maihar, Baba Alauddin Khan.

Explore **Ichol village** and meet with the local community, many of whom work or learn at Art Ichol. Older mud-walled homes feature motifs of birds and flowers—patterns that recur in many creations at Art Ichol. Take a break by the peaceful Tamas River in the afternoon, and then spend the rest of the day watching artists at work, and exploring every stunning corner of Art Ichol.

DAY 3 BANDHAVGARH

Depart early for Bandhavgarh and settle into **Bandhavgarh Jungle Lodge**. If you are not in time for an afternoon game drive (3-6 p.m), go to Bijaria village near Tala Gate. Home to the Baiga community—one of Central India's forest-dwelling tribes—the village sits amidst mahua trees, corn and rice fields. The Baigas have a rich tradition of folk music and dance. On a walk through the village, ask the locals to show you their traditional instruments like the *mandar* drum. Notice the corn and mahua flowers drying in the courtyards of

Rural terracotta artefacts on a wall at Jungle Lodge



*Cable cars ferry travellers
to the top of Trikoota hill
in Malhar*







blue-green mud homes. In the evening, enjoy a traditional Baiga dance performance at the lodge.

DAY 4 BANDHAVGARH

On an early morning game drive (6-11 a.m), explore the thriving sal and bamboo forest of Bandhavgarh National Park. The meadows, caves, and jungle support a variety of fauna, including dhole, sloth bear, the massive Indian bison or gaur, chital, and leopard. The tiger dominates these tracts, and Bandhavgarh is one of the best places to spot the striped cat. Look into the canopy to spot langurs and more than 250 bird species, including the grey Indian hornbill.

After lunch, explore Tala's main market stretch. Pick up organic haldi from **Her Café**. The nearby Bagdara Farms provides the café and shop with 27 kinds of turmeric for various medicinal purposes. Drive to the Dhamokar Gate in the late afternoon to explore Gond and Baiga villages in the park's buffer zone. Watch the cattle come home before sundown, a wonderful sight, especially for children.

DAY 5 KANHA

Depart Bandhavgarh to reach **Kipling Camp** at Kanha National Park before lunch. No fences separate the camp from the forest's buffer zone. Watch birds, butterflies, and maybe even herds of chital in the sal, mahua, and jamun thickets. Go on a **nature walk** to the Banjar River with Rahim, the camp's naturalist. Along the way, he will point out drongos, orioles, and other hard-to-spot birds and animals native to Kanha.



From far left: A girl in Ichol upcycles plastic to make mats; a member of the Maihar band; at Sarekha village; a Baiga mother; beedis from tendu leaves

Browse through the collection of beautiful **Gond art** in the Shamiana, the lodge's common space. The ancient, intricate art form is an essential component of the Gond community's culture. For those interested in buying Gond art, artists like Ram Kumar Shyam from Patanagarh village often visit the camp with a selection of works for sale. It is fascinating to see how the forests of Madhya Pradesh lend inspiration to Gond art.

DAY 6 KANHA

Go on a morning **game drive** (6-11 a.m) into the dense sal forests of Kanha. This is the only habitat of the hard-ground barasingha—the stately deer with 12-point antlers—brought back from the edge of extinction in Kanha. Chat with the camp's naturalists about this fascinating story of revival. Look into the foliage for other animals like the gaur, dhole, sambar, and of course, the big cat.

In the afternoon, go on a **walking trail** through nearby villages. **Sarekha village** is particularly pretty, with large white homes framed with sloping red roofs built around courtyards. An afternoon **market (haat)** takes place here on Friday, when locals sell fresh vegetables, wild honey, daily supplies, and some locally woven bamboo crafts.

DAY 7

Drive back to Jabalpur early the next morning.



*Sunset at Kanha, with the
Bamni Dadar plateau in
the background*



Eastern Madhya Pradesh

A KALEIDOSCOPE

The eastern reaches of this vast state offer up a wealth of natural, cultural and artistic wonders that celebrate all things local

Photographs by **ABHINAV KAKKAR**

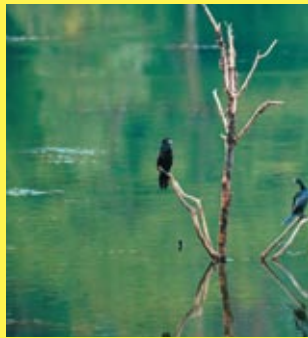




Clockwise from left: Naturalists name tigers (over 24 months of age) based on territory or markings. This 18-month-old cub is the son of Mahavir; fresh pug-marks of a tiger and cub near a waterbody in Kanha; a fawn near a pond in Kanha; gaurs with distinctive white 'socks'; monkeys groom each other



PHOTO ESSAY





Clockwise from above: Bhimodi Lake, close to the Mukki Gate of Kanha National Park; cormorants find a comfortable perch on the lake; a beautiful eurema hecabe butterfly, also known as the large grass yellow; a group of egrets atop a large tree near the lake



Clockwise from top: A weekly haat in Chakki Khamaria village; a family on a bullock cart; a farmer from Lagma village wakes his son up; a young Baiga girl; a Baiga woman displays her tattoos. Each tattoo is done at a particular age, on a specific part of the body





Clockwise from top: Marble Rock's craggy rock faces are reflected in the calm waters of the Narmada at Bhedaghat; the cable car offers a great view of the Dhuandhar Falls here; locals at Bhedaghat often dig up pieces of quartz to sell them to tourists









The jagged beauty of the rocks of Bhedghat are offset by a placid, glassy Narmada

Clockwise from right: ceramics displayed at Maihar House, Ambica Beri's 100-year-old home; a sculpture made of paper displayed at Art Ichol; carved stone figures by renowned artist Chandra Prakash, also at Art Ichol; an upcycled carpet made by a girl from Ichol village, using discarded packets of chips, chewing tobacco, and other scraps of waste







Clockwise from above: A sculpture made of mud at Art Ichol; an artefact at Sanskriti Ceramics at Maihar Heritage Home, a ceramic and pottery workshop space dedicated to owner Ambica Beri's late father; another wood carving on display at Maihar Heritage Home; a creative interpretation of the Vitruvian Man at the artists residency, Art Ichol, dotted with stone, metal, ceramic, and wood sculptures; Deviji, a sculpture by Narayan Sinha, at the entrance of Maihar Heritage Home, is made from gas stove burners, locks, kitchen utensils, and oil lamps







Listings

JABALPUR & BHEDAGHAT

STAY*

Hotel Samdareeya

Address: Russel Chowk, Dr. Barat Road, Napier Town, Jabalpur.

Tel: +91 76140 04132

Tariff: Doubles from ₹2,899 per night including taxes.

Motel Marble Rocks

Address: Bhedaghat, Madhya Pradesh 483053.

Tel: +91 76128 30424

Tariff: Doubles from ₹3,290, plus taxes.

WOW Rooms Homestay

Address: 22A, Ideal Grand, Bhim Nagar, Jabalpur

Tel: +91 88189 36565

Tariff: Doubles (non AC) ₹1,100 per night; AC ₹1,265 per night, plus taxes.

EAT

Indian Coffee House

Address: Kingsway Cantt, Just off Sadar Main Road, Jabalpur
Tel: +91 76126 21380

Kalchuri Residency

Address: Opp. Circuit House no. 2, Civil Lines, Jabalpur
Tel: +91 76126 78491

Badkul Sweets

Address: Sarafa Bazaar, Kamania Gate, Jabalpur

Gatpat Wala

Address: Sarafa Bazaar, Kamania Gate, Jabalpur

EXPLORE

Rani Durgavati Museum

Address: Bhanwartal Park, Napier Town, Jabalpur
Hours: 10 a.m. –5 p.m.
Entry: ₹10 (Indians); ₹100



(foreigners); ₹50 (cameras).

Madan Mahal Fort and Balancing Rock

Address: Ratan Nagar, Madan Mahal, Jabalpur

Entry: Free

Hours: none, but it's advisable to go only in the daytime

Boating at Marble Rocks

Open: Operational from Oct 15 – June 15, but can start earlier if the monsoon recedes.

Tariff: Shared boat rides cost ₹100 per person, while a private boat (seats 5) starts at ₹400.

Narmada Ropeway

Hours: 10.30 a.m. to 6 p.m., closed for lunch from 1.30 p.m.- 2 p.m.; Closed for the monsoon.

Tariff: Round-trip tickets cost ₹95 per person.

SHOP

Mrignayanee Emporium

Address: 9/14-15 Civic Centre, Marhatal, Jabalpur

Tel: +91 76124 11690

MAIHAR

STAY*

Art Ichol (Maihar Heritage Home)

Address: NH7, Rewa Road, Maihar 485 771. Dist: Satna. Madhya Pradesh

Website: artichol.in

Tel: +91 98310 09278

Tariff: Doubles ₹6,500 per person per night, includes all three meals and use of vehicle locally; taxes extra.

EXPLORE

Art Ichol (Museum)

Address: Khajuraho-Bandhavgarh Highway, Ichol

Village, Near Maihar, Madhya Pradesh

Hours: 9 a.m–8 p.m

Entry: ₹50 per person

Maa Sharda Devi Temple

Address: Trikoot Hill, Maihar

Hours: Sunrise-Sunset

Baba Allauddin Khan's Home and Mausoleum

Address: Medina Bhavan, Maihar

Ghughwa Fossil Park

Address: MP State Highway 11, Dindori district

Hours: Daily 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

Entry: Indians ₹11; foreigners ₹165.

Samode Safari Lodge



ABHINAV KAKKAR

Contact: Dindori Forest Division HQ:

Tel: 07644-234400/066;

DFO +91 94247 92600, Fossil Park Guide Priyanka +91 77479 80014

BANDHAVGARH

STAY*

Samode Safari Lodge

Address: Village Mardhari, Post Dhamokar District Umaria -484661, Madhya Pradesh

Open: Oct 1- Jun 15

Website: www.samode.com

Tel: +91 76532 80579, Lodge Manager +91 95759 56442

Tariff: Doubles ₹66,550 including meals, drinks, and two safaris; plus taxes.

Bandhavgarh Jungle Lodge

Address: Tala Gate, Bandhavgarh National Park

Website: www.bandhavgarhjunglelodge.com

Tel: 011-26516770

Dates: Oct 1- Jun 15

Tariff: Doubles ₹8,500 per night, includes all meals and taxes. Shared safaris cost ₹6,000 per jeep (seats six).



Bandhavgarh Jungle Lodge

EXPLORE

Bamboo Crafts at Tala Village

Address: Near Tala Main Gate, Bandhavgarh

Safaris

Open: Oct 1-Jun 30

Hours: Twice daily open-top jeep safaris from 6 a.m. to 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.; park closed on Wednesday afternoon.

Booking: Get permits online at forest.mponline.gov.in.

Entry: Permits per jeep cost ₹1,550 (core zones) and ₹1,250 (buffer zones). Each jeep seats six. Vehicle and guide charges are extra and payable at the gate,

shared by all occupants of the jeep. Carry government-approved photo ID.

SHOP

Malaya Handicrafts & Café

Address: Tala Main Road, Bandhavgarh

Hours: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Tel: +91 94073 25100, +91 984284 13002

Website: www.cafemalaya.com

Her Café

(Buy organic turmeric)

Address: Tala Main Road, Bandhavgarh

Hours: 10 a.m. – 9 p.m.

Sunday Haat

Address: Near Umariya Railway Station

KANHA

STAY*

Shergarh

Address: Kanha Tiger Reserve, Village Bahmni, Post Kareli, Tehsil Baihar, District Balaghat, Madhya Pradesh 481111

Open: Oct 15-May 15 only

Website: www.shergarh.com

Tel: +91 90981 87346

Tariff: Luxury tented doubles cost ₹15,000 per night, including

Shergarh



ABHINAV KAKKAR

meals, plus taxes.

Shared jeep safaris cost ₹6,000 per couple and ₹4,500 for a single person. Do ask for special deals and discounts for low season.

Kipling Camp

Address: Morcha Village, P.O. Kisli - Kanha National Park, District Mandla, Madhya Pradesh 481768

Open: Oct 16 – May 15

Website: www.kiplingcamp.com

Tel: +91 76492 77218

Tariff: Doubles ₹16,600 including meals, village visits, nature walks; plus taxes. Shared safaris cost ₹5,500 per jeep (seats 5); taxes, park entry, and guide charges extra.

Singinawa Jungle Lodge

Address: Mukki Gate, Kanha National Park

Website: www.singinawajunglelodge.com

Tel: 0124 4908610

Tariff: Doubles from ₹20,000 per night inclusive of all meals and taxes.

EXPLORE

Kanha Museum of Life and Art

Hours: 7 a.m – 5 p.m



Kipling Camp; Singinawa Jungle Lodge

Entry Fee: ₹500 per person; free for guests of Singinawa Jungle Lodge.

Address: Village Kohka, Tehsil Baihar, near Mukki Gate, Kanha National Park, MP.

Website: www.singinawajunglelodge.com

Tel: 0124-4908610

Birding at Bhimodi Lake

Address: Near Kanha's Mukki Gate on the southern side.

Safaris

Open: Oct 1-Jun 30

Hours: Twice daily open-top jeep safaris from 6 a.m. to 11a.m. and

3 p.m. to 6 p.m.; park closed on Wednesday afternoon.

Booking: Book permits online at forest.mponline.gov.in.

Entry: Permits per jeep cost ₹1,550 for the core zones and ₹1,250 for the buffer zones. Each jeep seats six. Vehicle and guide charges are extra and payable at the gate, shared by all occupants of the jeep. Carry government-approved photo ID.

SHOP

Friday Haat

Address: Sarekha Village

Hours: 2.30 p.m.- 4 p.m

PENCH

STAY*

Baghvan – A Taj Safari Lodge

Address: Baghvan, Pench National Park, Village Awargani, Post Duria, Tehsil Kurai, District Seoni, Madhya Pradesh – 480881.

Tel: 022-66011825

Website: taj.tajhotels.com/en-in/baghvan-pench-national-park

Tariff: Doubles from ₹43,920 per night, including all meals; plus taxes. Rates are dynamic and also vary by season. Shared safaris cost ₹3,000 per person, plus taxes.

Rates for the village visit (Tiger

Tribe Trail Experience) ₹1,500 per person, plus taxes.

Pench Tree Lodge

Address: Pench Tree Lodge, Pench National Park, Gram Sarrahirri, Tehsil Kurai, Seoni, Near Karmajhiri Gate

Website: www.penchtreelodge.com

Tel: 0124-2970497, 2570404, 2571404

Tariff: Tree house doubles cost ₹16,000 per night inclusive of all meals and taxes; add-on one (shared) jeep safari for an additional ₹4,000 per night. Safaris cost ₹8,500 per jeep (accommodates six). Six additional ground-level

Pench Tree Lodge; their tree houses are made from local sal wood



Photos: ABHINAV KAKKAR



Common hall area at Taj Baghvan Lodge

cottages are expected to be up and running from December 2017.

EXPLORE

Tiger Tribe Trail at a local village

Booking a local experience:

Book a local village trail and experience through your lodge. The Tiger Tribe Trail tour costs ₹450 per person plus the lodge's fee. Free for children below 10.

Website: www.tigertribes.com;
Grassroots (Mumbai Contact):
+91 88794 77437

Safaris

Open: Oct 1-Jun 30

Hours: Twice daily open-top jeep

safaris from 6 a.m. to 11a.m. and 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.; park closed on Wednesday afternoon.

Booking: Book permits online at forest.mponline.gov.in.

Entry: Permits per jeep cost ₹1,500. Each jeep seats six. Vehicle and guide charges are extra and payable at the gate, shared by all occupants of the jeep. Carry government-approved photo ID.

SHOP

Monday Haat

Address: Village Chakki Khamaria

Hours: Afternoon, until sundown

6 WAYS TO BE A RESPONSIBLE TRAVELLER

When travelling to MP, take a pledge to respect local culture, community and the environment

■ GARIMA PURA

Access to travel has expanded over the past few years, and the advent of social media has changed the ethics of travel in ways unimaginable. Tourist destinations worldwide received 369 million international tourists in the first four months of 2017 alone, according to the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer. It is estimated that tourism will continue to grow at an average of 3.3% annually until 2030. That is why it's important for travellers to contribute to making travel more ethical and sustainable, and to plan their holidays in a way that leaves a lasting positive impression on them and the people they visit.

Ditch the Tried and the Tasted

Try the local cuisine. Enjoy the way different combinations of indigenous crops may be tossed in locally procured herbs and spices to produce exciting and unfamiliar flavours. While you're on a holiday, it might be a good idea to take your taste buds for a ride too.

Find Yourself a Home

There are several community-run and individually-owned homestays that are hosted by locals and their families, which you can patronise. With humble means, limited resources, and plenty of warmth, such accommodations find innovative and eco-friendly measures to ensure their guests have an authentic homely experience. Take pride in your reduced carbon footprint when you realise the water for your bath was heated by solar panels.

Cycle or Stroll

Try not to hop from one prescribed destination to another in a motor

vehicle. You may lose out on the opportunity to see what a day in the life of a local resident looks like. Take a walking tour of the place you are visiting, or rent a bicycle. Allow yourself to pause along the way. See what they sell at the bazaars, what colour flowers blossom on trees, what they decorate their homes with, what games the children play.

Live Like a Local or with One

Get a local talking and be prepared to be hear lots of local legends. Ask about the folklore shared with children, the secret ingredient that makes their curry taste distinctly delicious, or the hacks that keep their cattle content. In case you're lucky, they might also teach you the beat to a local song on a home-made percussion instrument. There are quite a few villagers who routinely host travellers. You only have to ask.

Hand-Pick the Hand-made

Nothing expresses the socio-cultural heritage of a place more than its handicrafts. Local artisans source materials and motifs from their immediate environment to produce a stunning range of aesthetically designed artefacts. Each can be traced to its region by identifying the technique and the motifs depicted. Gond art, for instance, reflects the landscape and jungles of Madhya Pradesh. Buying local handicrafts supports local artisans and saves age-old art forms from dying out. As a responsible tourist you would do well to put some money into the local economy. And finally, what better way to remind you of the land you once visited than its portrayal by a local artisan?

Let the Animals Be

Humans and animals were meant to co-exist. We have towns and cities to ourselves so the least we can do is to let the animals roam free in their homes, without disturbing or destroying their habitat. Take safaris, but watch the animals from afar. Don't break the rules by going into prohibited areas, or outside permitted timings, just so you can get a better view of a predator.

Gift yourself a more fulfilling holiday, a lasting experience. Be a thinking, responsible traveller.

PHOTO CREDITS

Cover

Front: **ABHIJIT BHATLEKAR**

The Royal Bengal tiger at Pench National Park

Front inside: **DINODIA PHOTO**

LIBRARY

Waterfall at Narmada river, Jabalpur

Back Inside: **ABHINAV KAKKAR**

Antlers are present only on male spotted deer, also known as chital or axis deer

Inside the book

ABHINAV KAKKAR

Page 4, Top: Rajgira chikki being sold at Sarafa Bazaar in Jabalpur

Page 4-5, Middle: On a boat ride on the Narmada, the scenic Marble Rocks of Bhedaghat

Page 4, Bottom: Dance performance by Baiga community

Page 5, Top: Cable cars take passengers to the top of Trikoota hill in Maihar

Page 5, Bottom Left: A sculpture by renowned artist Chandra Prakash at Art Ichol

Page 5, Bottom Right: Gaur, the Indian bison is a large, wild cattle species, which can weigh a thousand kilos

Page 10, Left: Gaurav Dhotre, a naturalist who works with Pugdundee Safaris, Pench

Page 10, Middle: Antlers are present only on male spotted deer, also known as chital or axis deer

Page 10, Right: A Gond woman, in traditional attire, carries her shopping home
Page 11, Left: Windows are often not included in traditional structures.

At Mardhari village in Bandhavgarh, baked earthen tiles are used to lay sloping roofs

Page 11, Middle: Tigers can often be spotted during the early morning or late evening when they wander in search of prey or water

Page 11, Right: A performer wears traditional attire called Begasaaj

Page 54-55, Sunset at Kanha, with the Bamni Dadar plateau in the background
Page 70, Middle: Maihar Heritage Home is an atmospheric building with a 100-year-old history

Page 70, Right: The cable car offers a great view of Dhuandhar Falls

Page 71, Left: Darkness descends as safari vehicles leave the park and head back to the

lodges at the end of the "afternoon" safari in Kanha

Page 71, Middle: Chaat

Page 71, Right: Baba's sarod is still kept in the Maihar band's music school in Maihar



eastern madhya pradesh

A guide for thoughtful, immersive travel

You think you know Madhya Pradesh? Flip through the pages of this handy pocketbook to discover new experiences, even in the most popular cities and destinations.

As life gets busier, and holidays get shorter, travel is no longer about how much you see, but *what* you see and *how* you see it. Discover Madhya Pradesh, and more importantly, let it discover YOU!

- Jabalpur ■ Bhedaghat ■ Ichol ■ Maihar ■ Bandhavgarh
- Ghughwa ■ Kanha ■ Pench



ISBN 978-81-89449-81-0