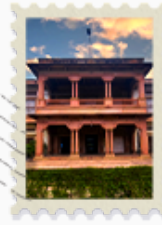


Incredible India  
Calling



Varanasi

Issue 20 • October 2024

# City spotlight: Varanasi



## **JOURNEY TO INDIA'S SPIRITUAL HEART, ENDURING CHARM AND FESTIVE SPIRIT**

Varanasi, also known as Kashi or Banaras, has its roots tracing back over 3,500 years. Located on the sacred banks of the holy river Ganga, this city holds great importance in Hindu mythology, believed to be the very place where the world was created. Legends whisper that it was upon the soil of Varanasi that the first ray of light fell, igniting the spark of life and humanity. The city's alleyways echo with chants of priests performing sacred rituals, mingling with the bustling sounds of daily life. The omnipresent fragrance of incense blends with the aroma of freshly prepared street food, enticing visitors to indulge in the culinary delights unique to this sacred city. The ghats along the Ganga are witness to the city's spiritual legacy, with ash-covered sadhus clad in saffron robes offering glimpses into age-old wisdom.

In October and November, Varanasi transforms into a magical realm of festivity and delightful celebrations, starting with the nine-night festival of Navratri that culminates on the tenth day with Dussehra, and then Diwali and Dev Diwali. During Diwali, the 'Festival of Lights', homes and temples gleam with oil lamps and fairy lights, and the air is filled with joy and laughter. Just a fortnight later, Dev Diwali takes the festivities to the ghats, where thousands of glittering earthen lamps float on the river, creating a magical spectacle. There is devotional music, dance performances, and grand feasts, embodying the communal spirit of Varanasi. Walking through the bustling bazaars, you'll find shops offering everything from intricate silk saris, exquisite jewellery, local handicrafts and musical instruments, to aromatic spices and traditional sweets.



## TOP 6 EXPERIENCES IN VARANASI



### A spiritually enriching visit to Kashi Vishwanath Temple

The Kashi Vishwanath Temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva, is the spiritual heart of Varanasi and one of India's most revered pilgrimage sites. Its striking golden spire rises above the city, a guiding light for the millions who visit each year to seek blessings and pray to the almighty. The temple's sanctum sanctorum, housing the Jyotirlinga of Shiva, exudes a powerful aura of devotion. A visit to this sacred shrine not only offers a chance to connect with ancient Hindu traditions but also witness the unwavering faith that has thrived here for centuries.

### Dashashwamedh Ghat is the pulse and life of Varanasi

Dashashwamedh Ghat, the epicenter of Varanasi's ghats, has a fascinating blend of spirituality and daily life. This historic ghat is renowned for the evening Ganga Aarti, a glorious ritual that sees priests performing synchronised prayers with large diyas (fire lamps), incense, and chanting, creating an unbelievable spectacle that evokes devotion. The ghat's bustling atmosphere, with pilgrims, sadhus, and vendors, adds to its charm, offering an authentic glimpse into the age-old traditions that define Varanasi. Witnessing the Ganga Aarti here is an unforgettable experience.



### Visit Sarnath, the birthplace of Buddhist enlightenment

Sarnath lies just a short drive from Varanasi, a calm and historically significant site where Lord Buddha delivered his first sermon after attaining enlightenment. The tranquil gardens and ancient ruins of Sarnath offer a stark contrast to the bustling streets and temples of Varanasi, providing a quiet place to retreat for contemplation and prayer. The highlights include the Dhamek Stupa, a huge structure marking

the spot of Buddha's first teachings, and the Ashoka Pillar, an enduring symbol of India's rich Buddhist heritage. Sarnath's museums and monasteries further enrich the experience for any visitor.

## Assi Ghat is the soulful confluence of the spiritual and cultural

Assi Ghat, the southernmost and one of the most peaceful ghats in Varanasi, offers a quiet escape from the city. This ghat is a favourite with locals and tourists for its tranquil and picturesque views of the Ganga. Early mornings at Assi Ghat are particularly enchanting, with yoga sessions and the soothing sounds of morning prayers setting a calming mood. As the day progresses, the ghat becomes a lively gathering spot, with people coming to bathe, meditate, or simply enjoy the togetherness by the river over a cup of chai and samosa. The evening aarti here, though more intimate, is equally captivating and a must-see.



## Varanasi's emergence as a leading hub for MICE events

Varanasi is becoming recognised as a premier destination for MICE events, for its traditional charm with modern amenities. The city offers exceptional venues like the Rudraksha International Convention Centre, designed in the shape of a shivling, which has a spacious auditorium with a 1200-person capacity, along with versatile meeting rooms and a gallery. Complementing this, Varanasi's state-of-the-art cruise ship and Ro-Ro boats provide a unique setting for events on the water. Additionally, there are excellent hotels for accommodation and smaller functions and events, making Varanasi an attractive and cost-effective choice.

## Find the choicest textiles that embody the pride of Varanasi

Varanasi is a treasure trove of exquisite textiles. The city's artisanal prowess is famous, and so much in demand for its luxurious silk sarees, woven with intricate patterns and graceful colours that reflect centuries of craftsmanship. These Banarasi sarees, known for their opulent zari work and delicate motifs, are coveted worldwide. Beyond sarees, Varanasi is celebrated for its wide range of handwoven textiles, including shawls and stoles that feature traditional techniques passed down through generations. The city's markets also brim with a variety of handicrafts, from intricately designed metalware to beautifully carved wooden pieces.



[Read more on the oldest living city of Varanasi](#)

# India Celebrates



Visiting India in October offers a culturally rich experience, as the country comes alive with numerous festivals and celebrations. Navratri, dedicated to the worship of Goddess Durga, features nine nights of traditional dance, music, and prayer. In addition, the Durga Puja in West Bengal is marked by grand processions and beautifully crafted idols and pandals. October also sees the celebration of Dussehra, with dramatic enactments of the Ramayana. These festivities across the country, combined with much cooler weather, make October an ideal time to visit India.

## TOP FESTIVALS TO EXPERIENCE IN OCTOBER



### Gandhi Jayanti & Lal Bahadur Shastri Jayanti

October 2nd holds a special place in India's heart, marking the birth anniversaries of Mahatma Gandhi and Lal Bahadur Shastri. Gandhi Jayanti commemorates Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation, whose philosophy of non-violence and relentless pursuit of truth and justice led to India's independence. His principles of Satyagraha and Ahimsa still influence the world. On the same day, the nation also celebrates Lal Bahadur Shastri Jayanti, honouring the second Prime Minister of India, who is remembered for his integrity, humility, and decisive leadership. Shastri's famous slogan, 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan', reflects his commitment to the welfare of the armed forces and the farmers.

#### When and where to celebrate:

02 October 2024

Celebrated all across India, these are best experienced in New Delhi. At Raj Ghat, Mahatma Gandhi's memorial, people gather to pay their respects with prayers, and songs. Commemorative events are held at Vijay Ghat, where Lal Bahadur Shastri is honoured.

### Navratri

Navratri, one of India's most eagerly awaited festivals, is a nine-night celebration that honours Goddess Amba (Durga), for her ultimate triumph of good over evil. Parvati, the wife of Lord Shiva is believed to have taken different forms to destroy the demon Mahishasura. The festival is marked by elaborate decorations, folk music and dance forms like Garba and Dandiya, and sumptuous feasts, offering a surreal cultural experience. From energetic dance nights to spiritual rituals and processions, Navratri is a time when people come together in devotion and a festive spirit, celebrating the power of 'Shakti', the divine feminine energy.

#### When and where to celebrate:

03 - 12 October 2024

Navratri is celebrated across India but the cities of Ahmedabad and Vadodara are renowned for grand celebrations, where entire neighbourhoods transform into dance arenas filled with Garba music, elaborate stage setups with traditional costumes, and an infectious energy.





## Durga Puja

Durga Puja, one of India's most spectacular festivals, invites visitors to come and enjoy the devotion and artistry. Held in honour of Goddess Durga, the festival celebrates her victory over the demon Mahishasura. According to Hindu mythology, Durga was created by the collective powers of the gods to defeat the demon, and her arrival is celebrated on this day. Grand stages are set up in elaborate pandals with intricately crafted idols, dazzling lights, and community feasts. The air is filled with the sound of dholaks (drums), the fragrance of incense, and the colours of festive attire. On the 10th day, Vijaydashami, the idols are taken for 'visarjan' in processions to mark the departure of the goddess to her celestial abode.

### When and where to celebrate:

09 - 13 October 2024

Kolkata's Durga Puja is unparalleled for its creativity and devotion. Iconic locations like Kumartuli, where artisans meticulously craft the idols, and grand celebrations on Kolkata's famous Maddox Square and Park Street, offer an unbelievable experience. Delhi, Mumbai, and Guwahati also host grand Durga Puja celebrations.

## Dussehra

As the festivities in India continue, the festival of Dussehra celebrates the homecoming of Lord Rama after 14 years in exile, and his victory over Ravana, with righteousness dispelling darkness. Visitors to India during Dussehra are treated to dramatic enactments of the Ramayana, and the spectacular burning of effigies of Ravana, Meghnath, and Kumbhakarna. The festival is a riot of colours, lights, music, dance, and drama with people coming together to celebrate. Temples and homes are decorated with flowers and lights, creating a joyous atmosphere, highlighting the enduring power in the belief of good over evil.

### When and where to celebrate:

12 October 2024

Mysore hosts a 10-day festival culminating in an elaborately decorated elephant procession. Other places include Kolkata, coinciding with Durga Puja; Kullu, for its week-long festivities, and Delhi, for its dramatic Ramlila performances.



## Dhanteras

Dhanteras, also known as Dhanatrayodashi, marks the beginning of the Diwali festivities and is a day dedicated to wealth, prosperity, and well-being. On this auspicious occasion, homes and offices are beautified with lights and decorations, and people follow the tradition of purchasing gold and silver, for the invocation of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. Markets and shops are abuzz with activity and the streets come alive with festivities, the aroma of delicious sweets, and the sounds of prayers and devotional songs. Dhanteras gives hope to people for good fortune in the coming year.

### When and where to celebrate:

29 October 2024

Visit markets across India - from Zaveri Bazaar in Mumbai, where precious gold and silver jewellery are sold, to the lively streets of Delhi's Chandni Chowk and Karol Bagh, and the markets in Jaipur for a blend of traditional and contemporary celebrations.

# Explore India in October-November

The mild weather in October and November is perfect for exploring the ancient ruins of Hampi and the architectural marvels of Agra. In Darjeeling, clear skies reveal breathtaking views of starry skies against the snow-capped Himalayas, while Munnar's lush tea gardens are at their flourishing best. The golden sands of Jaisalmer are comfortably cool, making desert safaris a delightful adventure. These months transform India into a paradise for travellers.



## A journey back in time at the rugged ruins of Hampi

Step into the spellbinding world of Hampi, where ancient ruins and stunning landscapes converge to tell a tale of a bygone era. Wander through the magnificent temples and palaces that echo the grandeur of the Vijayanagara Empire. Marvel at the intricately carved stone structures, each narrating stories of mythology and history. Whether it's the colossal Virupaksha Temple or the surreal boulder-strewn landscapes, Hampi offers a fascinating experience that you will remember for many years to come.

## Agra is the epitome of Mughal brilliance and romance

Discover the timeless beauty of Agra, home to the iconic Taj Mahal, a symbol of love and architectural brilliance. Visit Mehtab Bagh for a stunning view of the Taj Mahal at sunset. Stroll through the majestic Agra Fort and Akbar's citadel of Fatehpur Sikri, both UNESCO World Heritage Sites, drawing attention to the magnificence of the Mughal era. Don't miss Itimad-ud-Daulah's Tomb, often called the 'Baby Taj', with its intricate marble inlay work. As you explore the bazaars and relish the local delicacies, you'll be awestruck by the city's rich heritage, romance, history, and artistic wonders.



## Cosy cafes serve the world's best Darjeeling tea amidst a serene ambiance

Journey to the hill station of Darjeeling, to explore tea gardens, enjoy wide mountain views, and the charming old colonial atmosphere. Ride the famous Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and soak in the breathtaking views of valleys, meadows and gurgling streams in the lap of the Himalayas. Visit the busy local markets for handicrafts and souvenirs, monasteries for some quiet time, and botanical gardens for their unique blossoms, all set against the backdrop of the mighty Kanchenjunga. Darjeeling offers a refreshing escape with its lovely climate, beautiful landscapes, and warm hospitable people.



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## Enjoy the lush green charm of Munnar in the Western Ghats

Escape to Munnar for its heavenly green natural beauty, and for its renowned sprawling tea plantations, misty hills, and exotic wildlife.

Traverse through the undulating hill slopes, visit the aromatic tea museums to understand the process of tea-making and its history, and enjoy peaceful boat rides on the lakes around Munnar. The Eravikulam National Park, home to the endangered Nilgiri Tahr, and the cascading waterfalls after the monsoons, add to the allure of this hill town. And for the adventurous, you could explore the forests around the Anamudi Peak, the highest point in South India.



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## Visit the city of Jaisalmer to see one of the only lived-in forts in India

Explore the 'golden city' of Jaisalmer, where the sands meet the majestic Rajput architecture. Visit the Jaisalmer Fort, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and wander through its narrow alleys filled with havelis, temples, and bustling bazaars. Take a boat ride on the scenic Gadisar Lake, surrounded by temples and ghats. A camel safari into the desert offers a unique adventure, allowing you to behold the stunning sunset over the dunes. Stop at the hauntingly deserted village of Kuldhara en route, adding a touch of mystery to your journey. Jaisalmer offers a desert adventure filled with history and unforgettable surroundings.

# Beyond Incredible



## JOIN THE 'CHALO INDIA' MOVEMENT TO PRESENT THE WONDERS OF INDIA TO THE WORLD

Let's share the magic of our bounteous country with the world. Become an ambassador of India to promote the rich cultural heritage, sightseeing wonders, and unforgettable experiences that it offers. From the mighty Himalayas in the north to the calm backwaters of Kerala in the south, from the golden sands of Rajasthan in the west to the lush tea gardens of Assam in the east. The marvel of ancient architectural wonders like the Taj Mahal, the palaces of Rajasthan, and the temples of Khajuraho; the thriving wildlife of national parks like Ranthambore and Jim Corbett; coastal delights along India's extensive shoreline offering beautiful beaches in Kerala, Andaman Islands, and Tamil Nadu. India's landscapes and experiences are as varied as they are stunning.

Beyond its scenic beauty, India is rich in traditions, festivals, and rituals, which are a part of everyday life. The culinary delights are equally diverse, offering a rich spread of regional flavours from spicy street food to gourmet dishes. Whether you are wandering through bustling markets, enjoying classical music and dance performances, or participating in yoga and meditation retreats, India offers a deeply immersive experience. Let's highlight not only the well-known destinations but also the hidden hinterland, encouraging travellers to explore the true essence of this incredible country.

[Read more about travelling in India and the experiences it offers](#)

## ENJOY A RICH CULTURAL AND FLAVOURFUL JOURNEY IN INDIA



### SPIRITUAL

Discover ancient wisdom and profound tranquility at India's ancient temples, ashrams, and sacred sites.



### ADVENTURE

Embark on thrilling adventures, from trekking in the Himalayas to white-water rafting in India's many rivers.



### CRAFTS

Learn about the intricate artistry of traditional Indian crafts, from the finest textiles to exquisite pottery and metal work.



### CUISINE

Savour the rich and diverse flavours of Indian cuisine on a culinary journey exploring street food and gourmet delights.



# Truly Indian

Travelling to the hinterland of India offers a unique and enriching experience, distinct from the hustle and bustle of big cities. These small towns, with their serene landscapes and rich heritage, provide a refreshing escape into nature and tradition. Visiting these areas promotes sustainable tourism, allowing travellers to appreciate and preserve local ecosystems. It also supports village economies, as tourism brings much-needed revenue to small businesses, artisans, and farmers. Embracing the simplicity and charm of these regions can be both a memorable adventure and a positive contribution to sustainable development.

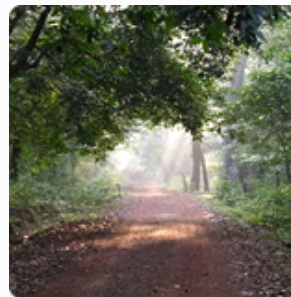
## EXPERIENCE NATURAL BEAUTY AND AUTHENTIC VILLAGE CULTURE NEAR GOA



### Cotigao

Cotigao village has been awarded as the 'Best Tourism Village 2023' in the Bronze category. It is steeped in five centuries of history, and lies in the beautiful forests near Goa. The village has a wildlife sanctuary with an assortment of flora and fauna, including some rare and endangered species like the Black Leopard, Sloth Bear, Painted Bat, etc. Mhadei River flows through the village, sustaining agriculture and enhancing its ecological significance. The harmonious coexistence of the local community with nature makes for a unique experience. Their cultural heritage can be seen through several festivals, like the Shishirani festival, a 2-century old celebration with deep-rooted customs and community spirit, and the Lokotsav celebrates tribal life with cultural practices and their artistry.

The Government of India has recognised Cotigao for its exceptional efforts in sustainable tourism and conservation, making it an exemplary model for other rural tourism initiatives. Visitors to Cotigao can take part in various activities that connect them with nature and the local culture. The village's picturesque surroundings, cascading waterfalls, flowing rivers, and the butterfly park are perfect for a variety of outdoor activities. You can explore the dense forests on a guided trek, engage with the local artisans, or have a picnic experience while enjoying the serene environment. The village provides an accommodation facility consisting of 6 rooms and 12 beds.



### Things to do:

- **Visit local artisans** and learn about their traditional craftmaking prowess.

- ▶ **Explore the Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary** and spot some rare species, including endangered ones in their natural habitat.
- ▶ **Swim and take a refreshing dip** to cool off in the invigorating natural waterfalls of Cotigao.
- ▶ **Experience the local culture** through interactive village tours and attending folk performances.
- ▶ **Join hands in eco-friendly workshops** focusing on sustainable practices and environmental conservation.
- ▶ **Learn about the processes** of traditional jaggery making and the intricate art of bamboo craftsmanship.
- ▶ **Support local economy** by purchasing locally made jaggery products and bamboo handicrafts.
- ▶ **Stay in a traditional accommodation** that offers a comfortable and responsible tourism experience.
- ▶ **Places to visit nearby:**
  1. **Kasmakade, Badem (8 km):** A significant local council where important community decisions are made.
  2. **Shri Mallikarjun Temple, Kuskem (10 km):** Wander through this sanctuary to see migratory and resident bird species in their natural habitat.
  3. **Shri Mallikarjun Temple, Avem (15 km):** Another important temple dedicated to Lord Mallikarjun, an incarnation of Lord Shiva.
  4. **Kuskem Waterfalls (12 km):** A stunning natural waterfall nearby, perfect for a refreshing dip.
  5. **Butterfly Park (20 km):** A beautiful must-visit park teeming with various butterfly species.
  6. **Palolem Beach (22 km):** Known for its coastal beauty and exciting nightlife, located near Cotigao.
  7. **Agonda Beach (30 km):** A serene and less crowded beach perfect for relaxation, also near Cotigao.
  8. **Cabo de Rama Fort (35 km):** Offers historical insights and panoramic views of the Arabian Sea.
  9. **Netravali Wildlife Sanctuary (45 km):** A biodiversity hotspot, ideal for nature lovers.
  10. **Dudhsagar Waterfalls (65 km):** A four-tiered waterfall located on the Mandovi River, a short drive from Cotigao.



# Win with Incredible India!



Welcome to the Varanasi Quiz!

Varanasi, also known as Banaras or Kashi, is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world and holds immense historical, cultural, and spiritual significance in India. Located on the banks of the River Ganga in Uttar Pradesh, Varanasi is a major pilgrimage destination for Hindus and a hub of Indian classical music and dance. This quiz will test your knowledge about the rich heritage, landmarks, and cultural essence of Varanasi. You stand a chance to win a prize.

Good luck!

**Q1.** Which is the main river flowing through Varanasi?

- |           |              |
|-----------|--------------|
| a. Yamuna | b. Saraswati |
| c. Ganga  | d. Narmada   |

**Q2.** Which is the most famous temple dedicated to Lord Shiva in Varanasi?

- |                            |                     |
|----------------------------|---------------------|
| a. Kedarnath Temple        | b. Somnath Temple   |
| c. Kashi Vishwanath Temple | d. Lingaraja Temple |

**Q3.** What is Varanasi famous for producing?

- |                |                   |
|----------------|-------------------|
| a. Silk Sarees | b. Gold Jewellery |
| c. Tea         | d. Spices         |

**Q4.** Which famous ghats in Varanasi are known for the Ganga Aarti ceremonies?

a. Raj Ghat and Assi Ghat

b. Har Ki Pauri and Dashashwamedh Ghat

c. Sangam Ghat and Ram Ghat

d. Dashashwamedh Ghat and Assi Ghat

Mail your answers to us at [incredible-india@gov.in](mailto:incredible-india@gov.in) with your Name, Age, Country for a chance to win prizes.

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