
“THE ONLY HILLSTATION OF GUJARAT – SAPUTARA”

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ABSTRACT

Gujarat has a diverse landscape. The state is covered by water from the 3 sides. It has the White Rann of Kutch in its north and two gulfs. It has a lot of heritage sites also located in the various districts. The famous Asiatic Lions’ home is also there in the Heart of Gujarat, The Gir in Saurashtra. Gujarat enjoys various types of Tourism because of the range of climatic conditions and geographic locations. Other states on India have more than one hill station but Gujarat has only one hill station and it is Saputara. The Government of Gujarat has put up special efforts to brand the destination and have invested almost Rs. 60 crores to make the destination tourist friendly. A special Monsoon Festival is designed and held almost for a month’s time at Saputara to attract tourists when the place is at its best in the whole year. The destination is marketed throughout the country as the only Hill station of Gujarat with the Monsoon Festival.

KEY WORDS: Saputara, destination, Gujarat, festival, marketing

Introduction

“*Aavo Padharo*”, are the words used in Gujarati to welcome because it is here that these words ring truly and in the culture of Gujarat “*Atithi Devo Bhava*”: the guest is ‘God’ is truly cherished and the people of Gujarat are gregariously friendly, inviting and enticing you to come again and again.

Gujarat is very versatile in its geological core of the earth with its geological and topographical landscape. Gujarat is full of volcanic outpourings through bedrock to fossil fields of indigenous dinosaurs, to the art of the Neolithic cave painter to the stone masterpieces of a series of civilized architecture. Here in Gujarat you will discover centuries of history as spanning the geological core of the earth onto a fascinatingly vibrant future. Gujarat has it all.

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Ancient cave paintings to historic murals, natural and manmade caves. Art, history, music, culture, all dovetail within each other to form a wondrous matrix that is the cultural exuberance of the people of the state.

TOP DESTINATIONS IN INDIA			
SHARE OF TOP 10 STATES OF INDIA IN NUMBER OF DOMESTIC TOURIST VISITS IN 2011			
RANK	STATE	NUMBER	SHARE IN %
1	UTTAR PRADESH	155,430,364	18.3
2	ANDHRA PRADESH	153,119,816	18
3	TAMIL NADU	137,512,991	16.2
4	KARNATAKA	84,107,390	9.9
5	MAHARASHTRA	55,333,467	6.5
6	MADHYA PRADESH	44,119,820	5.2
7	RAJASTHAN	27,137,323	3.2
8	UTTARAKHAND	25,946,254	3
9	WEST BENGAL	22,256,968	2.6
10	GUJARAT	21,017,478	2.5

Saputara

At the Southern tip of Gujarat, folded into the densely wooded hills of the Sahayadris, lies the abode of serpents—Saputara. In the picturesque Dangs district, this is a hill station with a difference, where you can immerse yourself in a timeless land that is still pretty much the way God made it. After all legend has it that Lord Rama spent 11 years of his exile in these very forests. This picturesque hill station is perched on a plateau in the Dang forest area of the Sahyadri Range. At an altitude of about 1000 m. Saputara witnesses a uniform weather throughout the year. Saputara does not experience any extreme temperature variations and is an ideal getaway for the sun-scorched souls of the plains.

The monsoon rains add to the magic of Saputara. Gujarat Tourism plans to showcase this getaway monsoon destination to the nearby cities like Nagpur, Pune, Mumbai, Nasik in Maharashtra. Maharashtra is seen as the right target segment for this picturesque destination. Pune was the first in the series of cities in which Gujarat Tourism organized a road show to highlight this destination. Over the next 15 days, similar road shows are planned up to be held in other cities of Maharashtra.

The Saputara Monsoon Festival is a month long event where variety of activities/attractions is offered to the tourists. There are some events that are held as a part of the

festival like water sports, adventurous activities, laser show, photography exhibition, heritage walk, cultural evenings, food festival, contests, etc. The idea is to keep the tourists engaged for the entire month through one activity or another in the best manner possible.

The name Saputara literally stands for 'abode of serpents,' a fact that is highlighted by the presence of an image of a snake on the shores of the Sarpagana river, which flows through the town.

This image is worshipped by the region's tribal folk, especially during major festivals such as Holi. Adding to Saputara's mystique is the legend that Lord Rama spent 11 years of his exile in these very forests.

The Monsoon Festival – The best time to visit Saputara

Even as Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) gropes for a serious marketing strategy to sell tourism in Vidarbha, Tourism Corporation of Gujarat Limited (TCGL) on Thursday raised the pitch for its destinations for city tourists.

TCGL hosted a promotional event in the city for Saputara Monsoon Festival', scheduled to be organized from August 16 to September 7 in Saputara, a hill station 80km from Nashik. Saputara is similar to Melghat-Chikhaldara but MTDC has never bothered to market it.

When contacted, Amravati MTDC regional manager Shipra Hake said, "Our packages for Chikhaldara-Melghat are in process." Sanatan Pancholi, resident manager of TCGL, introduced the festival and informed that Saputara offered variety of activities for tourists. Some of the events during this period would include water games, adventure activities, laser show, photography exhibition, heritage walk, cultural evenings, food festival contests etc.

Gujarat Tourism has launched some attractive tour packages from Rs 490 to Rs 5,000 per person. Pancholi urged private tour operators from Nagpur and other cities to evolve their own packages for the festival. The packages on offer include two nights stay that showcases sites like echo point, Wagha Bari, step garden, artistic village, log hut, Saputara museum, lake, sunset point, ropeway etc. It is priced at Rs 5,000 per person.

Senior TCGL official K Biswas added Gujarat Tourism had spent Rs 65 crore towards developing infrastructure at Saputara. "We are focusing on Maharashtra as 37% of tourists there come from here," he said. Saputara, at the southern tip of Gujarat, is located into the densely wooded hills of Sahyadris. It is a hill station that is still pretty. Hindu mythology states that Lord Rama spent 11 years of his exile in these forests.

Biswas also informed about upcoming event Tarnetar fair from August 29 to 31. Tarnetar is held at the temple of Shiva or Trinetrishwar (three-eyed god). The Tarnetar fair covers a large part of Tarnetar village in Saurashtra region with a huge number of stalls put up selling

beautiful local handicraft unavailable elsewhere along with ethnic jewellery, statues of deities and traditional mirror work attires.

Gujarat Tourism had organized a road show in Mumbai to promote the upcoming “Saputara Monsoon Festival” that will be held from 16th August to 14 September 2014.

The Gujarat Government had made an investment of around Rs 60 crores for carrying out development work in Saputara and thereby enhance tourist activity.

The event was attended by Jaynarayan Vyas, minister of tourism, Gujarat government, Kamlesh Patel, chairman, Tourism Corporation of Gujarat Limited (TCGL) and Vipul Mittra, secretary, tourism department of Gujarat in the year 2011. Starting with Nagpur, the department had planned to showcase this monsoon getaway to nearby cities like Pune, Mumbai, Nasik in Maharashtra over a period of 15 days through similar road show format.

Apart from events like laser show, photography exhibition, heritage walk, cultural evenings, food festival, contests that last for a month long event also includes water sports and adventurous activities like parasailing, hot -air ballooning, para-motoring, kayaking and rock climbing. A variety of tour packages have been devised to attract tourist footfall to Saputara.

It is that time of the year when the tourism sector in Saputara, Gujarat’s only hill station, gets ready to attract tourists from across the country.

This time around, with the late entry of the monsoon in south Gujarat, the Gujarat Tourism department has decided to organize the one month monsoon festival from August 16.

Major focus in this year’s monsoon festival is on adventure sports, cultural programmes, kids’ games, craft stalls and Dangi cuisine. Special arrangements have been planned for trekking, hill climbing and ATV rides at the Governor’s Hill.

Apart from this, the tourists wanting to have that extra adrenaline rush could enjoy more than 13 adventure sport activities, including the 300 and 450 metre long Zip Line passing atop Gira waterfall, zorbing, ground obstacle and high rope obstacle, tree walk, hiking and mountain biking.

Official sources said the monsoon festival, being organized jointly by the Dangs district administration and the state tourism department, will be inaugurated in the presence of tourism minister Saurabh Patel.

Kavita Naik, spokesperson, Gujarat Tourism, said, “Saputara has become a 365 days tourism destination. Earlier, the tourists would visit only during the summers. Thanks to the monsoon festival, para-gliding festival and the ad campaign by superstar Amitabh Bachchan, tourism has increased here by leaps and bounds.”

According to Naik, the tourist flow in Saputara has registered a phenomenal 28 percent increase in 2013 compared to last year. In 2013, 3.86 lakh tourists had visited Saputara compared to 2.90 lakh visitors in 2012. The monsoon festival had been the biggest crowd puller event with around 2.30 lakh tourists having visited the hill station last year.

“This year, the expected tourist is around 3 lakh to visit Saputara during the monsoon festival,” she said. While everything outdoors steadily turns clean and green, the call of Mother Nature becomes simply impossible to ignore. The din is growing louder and louder at Saputara, the quaint and picturesque hill station nestled in the plateaus of the Dang region in South Gujarat.

Visitors are delighted to learn about the historical and mythological significance of Saputara. ‘Sitavan’ is the place where Lord Ram, Sita and Lakshman spent years of their exile. The ‘Pandav Gufa’ is rumored to have sheltered the Pandavas during their exile. It is from this hideout that Arjun began his appeasement of Lord Shiva for acquiring the celestial weapons. The ancient Arvalem cave complex stands witness to the rich cultural heritage of India.

The thundering waterfalls, undulating meadows, sparkling fountains and crisp clean air of Saputara assume an ethereal aura in the monsoons with the clouds descending from the hills and engulfing everything around in tiny droplets of rain.

The arts and crafts of the locals from the Dang region are to be seen to be believed. The Artist Village at Saputara gives tourists a great opportunity to explore and experience the Warli paintings and crafts associated with this region. The Tribal museum introduces visitors to the lifestyle, costumes, heritage and ecology of the Vanbandhu culture of the Dangs.

The tourism department of Gujarat organizes customized tours like the ‘Dang Tribal Tour’ and ‘Monsoon Dang Tour’ that cover exotic locales and promise an unforgettable experience to tourists. Amitabh Bachchan calls Saputara the “Aankhon ka Taara” of Gujarat and no amount of words can truly justify the spellbinding beauty and pristine environs of Saputara.

So if you find yourself being drawn to the enchanting environs of Saputara, you are not alone. Join the lakhs of revelers from across the country heading for the Monsoon Festival. The Tourism Corporation of Gujarat is waiting with open arms and first rate amenities to welcome you to soak in the splendid natural brilliance of Gujarat.

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