

*At* **BIKANER**

—  
NARENDRA  
BHAWAN  
*Bikaner*



• H I S T O R Y   O F   B I K A N E R •

*Bikaner's history dates back to 1488 when a young princeling from the Jodhpur dynasty broke away from his family's ancient legacy and sought to establish his own lineage. The site he chose was rather peculiarly called 'Jungladesh' and was an uncontested barren outcrop of land.*

Rao Bika was the second son of the Jodhpur clan-leader and, a true maverick. It is said that Bika had a fractious relationship with his father and brothers and in exchange for giving up his claim to the throne of Jodhpur was allowed to take the family heirlooms with him and leave his patrilineal territory forever. A vastly ambitious Rao Bika naturally didn't stay true to his word and skirmishes between the two bold Rajput principalities continued to flare up.

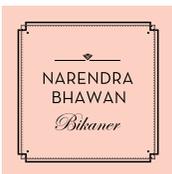
Perhaps because of its rocky start, Bikaner as a dynamic and self-motivated kingdom set out to prove itself. Through the centuries the city-state grew to evolve into a poster-child of competence and able governance through the agency of some exceptional Maharajas and their ministers who advanced an idea of welfare and development that was notable for its time. In a more modern context, the descendants of the founding father Bika - from whose name was derived the city-state Bikaner, served India with aplomb and integrity as sterling examples of benevolent Maharajas, as outstanding Generals in the Indian army, as politicians who steered a young and tentative democracy and, as sportsmen who shone bright on international platforms.

• W E A T H E R •

*Located in the western region of the state of Rajasthan the climate of Bikaner is not very different from the other cities of the same region and is typical of the Thar Desert area with extreme temperatures.*

During the *summer* months, the temperature in Bikaner rises very often above 45 degree centigrade. Any normal summer day in Bikaner is very hot but the evenings are most pleasant.

*Winter* in Bikaner witnesses a drastic change when temperatures come down to 12 degree to 18 degree centigrade. The period from October to February is the most pleasant of the seasons in Bikaner.



• A C C E S S •

*The best time to visit Bikaner is between October and March, the winter months in India. Visitors could try and plan to be in Bikaner in January, when the city comes alive in preparation for the colourful Camel Fair.*

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**BY AIR**

Travellers who wish to fly in to Bikaner will have to use the nearest airport at Jodhpur (253 km) or Jaipur (334 km). Taxis, tourist buses and state roadways buses available outside the airport provide transportation. You could rent a car or jeep through a reliable travel agent or tour operator.

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**BY TRAIN**

Bikaner is well connected to Delhi, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Allahabad (Uttar Pradesh), Bhatinda (Punjab), Kalka (Himachal Pradesh) and Calcutta (West Bengal) by regular train services in both fast and mail train categories after the Western Railway's conversion to broad gauge rail.

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**BY ROAD**

Bikaner is linked by good, all weather roads that are part of the state and national highways linking the major cities of north India like Delhi (458km), Jaipur (334 km), Jodhpur (249km) and Jaisalmer (312 km). State Roadways and private bus owners operate air-conditioned and ordinary bus services from Bikaner to all parts of Rajasthan.

## TEMPLES OF BIKANER

### KOLAYAT TEMPLE

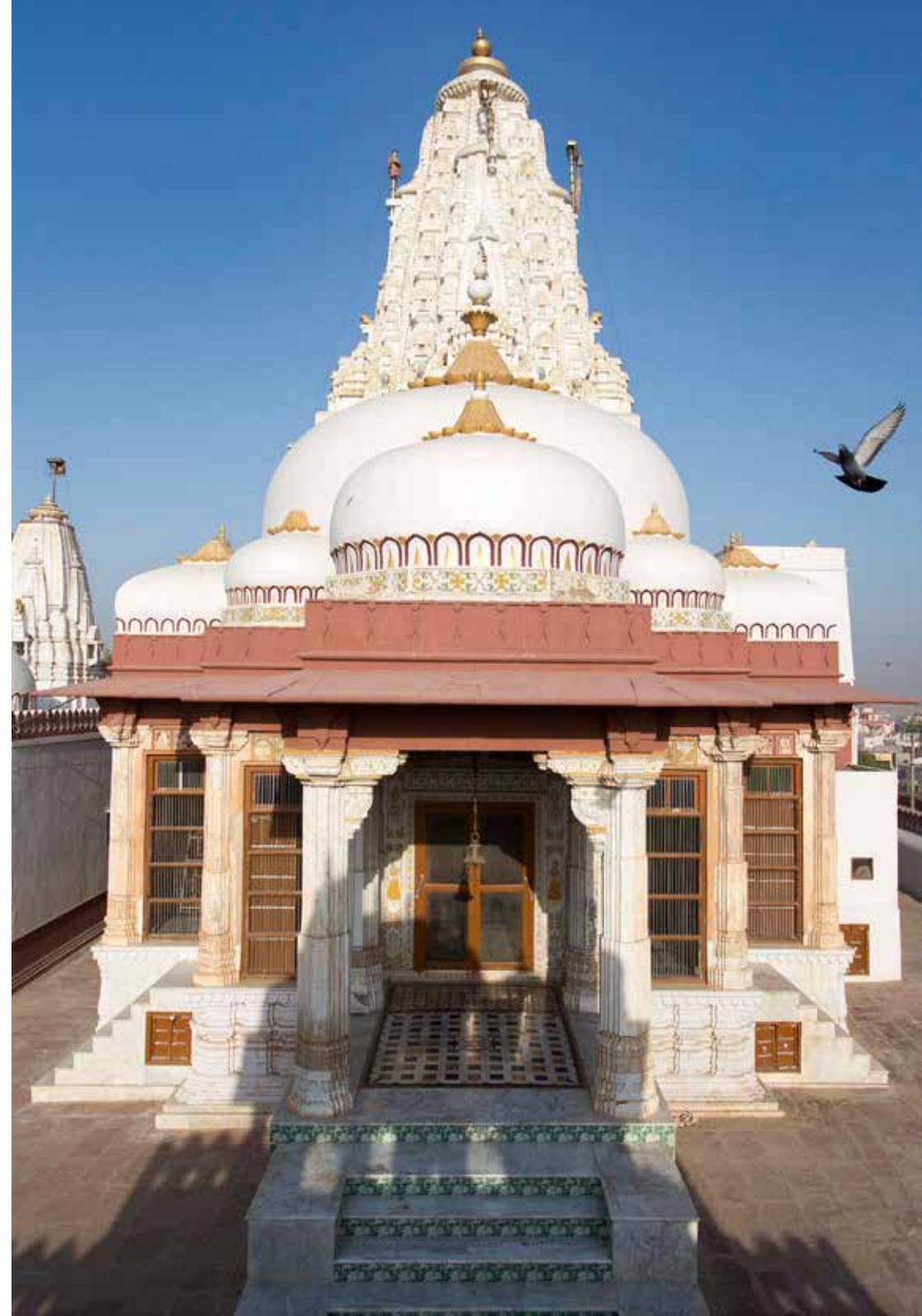
Kolayat is an old pilgrimage centre where Kapil, a celebrated hermit from Vedic lore is believed to have attained enlightenment under a peepul tree. This sacred space has a series of beguiling marble temples, sandstone pavilions and 32 ghats (bathing places) built around a huge artificial lake. It is especially important during the month of Kartik when pilgrims come from near and far to bathe in the cleansing waters of the lake.

### KARNI MATA TEMPLE

The 600-year-old Karni Mata Temple at Deshnoke, 30 km from Bikaner is dedicated to the household goddess of the rulers of Bikaner. The temple, amongst the strangest in India, is not for the squeamish as it is famous for the legions of rats that are feted and worshipped here. Devotees tread warily to reach the inner recesses of the temple for injury to a rat would be sacrilegious.

### BHANDASER JAIN TEMPLE

This 15th century Temple is the oldest and most distinct monument in all of Bikaner and is dedicated to the 5th Tirthankar of the Jain faith. The temple is decorated with rich mirror work, frescoes and gold leaf paintings. It is said that pure ghee (butter oil) and coconuts were used to strengthen edifice when the foundation was laid. Carved in red sandstone and white marble - it is famous for its etchings and wall paintings.



## SIGHTS TO SEE

## JUNAGARH FORT

Unlike most forts in Rajasthan and elsewhere in India, the Junagarh Fort of Bikaner is a land fort. The imposing structure is built from red sandstone and with its cluster of low-rise buildings within has never been conquered, in spite of many battles fought as it equipped with all possible defense mechanisms. On your visit do note the moat, the twisted access and the long metal nails studded into the gates to thwart elephant attacks.

Within the complex the courtyards merit special mention. Each courtyard is different — if one courtyard is built of red sandstone, another is built with sandstone and marble, a third is almost entirely made of marble with coloured tiling, another with painted frescoes, and yet another with inlay work.

The various rooms called 'Mahals' are spectacular in their craft. The Karan Mahal is built with Mughal architectural influences, Anoop Mahal displays dazzling gold inlay work and the delicate Phool Mahal features excellent glass inlay work on stucco. The cavernous Durbar Hall preserves a ceremonial 1,100-year-old sandalwood throne, but the 'mahal' that will take your breath away is Badal Mahal or the palace of clouds. The longing for rain in an arid Bikaner has been captured on every inch of the walls in the Badal Mahal with blue clouds interspersed with lightning motifs painted on its walls and ceilings.





### LAXMI NIWAS PALACE

Built between 1898 and 1902, Laxmi Niwas Palace was commissioned by Maharaja Sir Ganga Singhji to serve as his royal residence. Designed by Sir Samuel Swinton Jacob, Laxmi Niwas Palace is constructed in an Indo-Saracenic style, an architectural movement popularized in the 19th century in British India.

Used exclusively as the private residence for the Royal family and their guests, Laxmi Niwas Palace commanded over Bikaner in all its opulence. With a flair for hospitality, the Maharaja hosted numerous luminaries and dignitaries, including King George V and Queen Mary, the King of Greece, Viceroys, fellow Maharajas, and renowned statesmen.

### LALGARH PALACE

The resplendent Lalgarh Palace was built by Maharaja Ganga Singhji in 1902. Designed by a European architect, Sir Swinton Jacob, one can visibly identify a strong overlay of Victorian architectural influences. The palace has beautiful lattice work and filigree work. The interior walls of the palace are adorned with vintage etchings, hunting trophies and old portraits.

## SIGHTS TO SEE

### THE JUNAGARH MUSEUM

The Fort museum is full of dazzling objects that include a silver throne, a sandalwood throne, a golden swing, palanquins and howdahs used by the royal family, and even a Haviland Plane, among hundreds of other objects. This plane, which is displayed in the Vikram Niwas Durbar Hall, was pieced together from the parts of two shot down DH-9DE Haviland Planes.

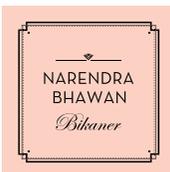
### PRACHEENA MUSEUM

The Junagarh Fort houses a smaller private museum, the delightful Pracheena, a museum that displays contemporary arts and crafts, ritual crafts, period furniture, textiles and costumes that were once used by the royal family. The many rooms display royal photographs and miniatures, among many others personal objet d'arts. There are even framed menus on display as well as the delicate crockery and cutlery.

This museum is a veritable treat for the eyes and gives a glimpse into the everyday life of its earlier patrons.

### GANGA GOLDEN JUBILEE MUSEUM

An excellent little museum, its reputation has been enhanced by its rare collection of terracotta ware, weapons, miniature paintings from the Bikaner School and coins.



## WILDLIFE

### THE NATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE FOR CAMEL WELFARE

The National Research Centre for Camel Welfare is located 10 km from Bikaner city. The Centre has the responsibility to conduct basic and applied research for the improvement of the Camel and over the years it has developed excellent laboratory facilities. An elite herd of Bikaneri, Jaisalmeri and Kachehhi breed of Camel has been developed and maintained by the Centre.

### NATIONAL RESEARCH CENTRE ON EQUINES

The primary objective of this research outfit is to improve and conserve the Marwari Horse breed. Tonga (Horse Carriage) and horse riding is available at the centre.

### GAJNER PALACE & WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Built by Maharaja Ganga Singhji of Bikaner, on the edge of a vast lake, Gajner Palace encloses a private wildlife sanctuary. During the winter months, the lake becomes home to an assortment of migratory birds including the Imperial Sand Grouse.

