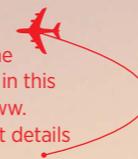


BOARDING NOW

SPICEJET CONTINUALLY ENRICHES THE TRAVEL EXPERIENCE BY ADDING NEW, UNDEREXPLORED DESTINATIONS

SpiceJet flies to all the destinations covered in this feature. Log on to www.spicejet.com for flight details



The Golden Fort overlooks the sprawling city of Jaisalmer

Trust SpiceJet to always keep the flying passenger in mind. Its slew of continuous innovations, by way of new products and services, have contributed significantly towards making it India's favourite and most loved airline. Another major contributory factor has been the addition of newer destinations.

In the short span of a little over a year, SpiceJet has added nearly a dozen new destinations on its routes. In this feature, we look at six of them, hitherto neglected but each with immense tourism potential. Two of these destinations, Jaisalmer and Puducherry, come under the ambit of the grand UDAN (Ude Desh Ka Aam Naagrik) scheme launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on April 27, 2017.

SpiceJet has been a very enthusiastic supporter of the UDAN regional connectivity scheme that is enhancing connections to smaller towns and cities. Over the years, many states had been clamouring for the revival of dysfunctional airports and starting operations on un-served ones. This twin demand is being addressed by UDAN.

SpiceJet has been awarded six proposals and 11 routes under the first phase of UDAN. Out of the six finalised proposals, four will cater to unserved markets of Adampur, Kandla, Puducherry and Jaisalmer whereas two will be for underserved markets of Porbandar and Kanpur. Apart from Jaisalmer and Puducherry, SpiceJet flight operations have already commenced at Kandla and Porbandar.

That SpiceJet always has the convenience of its passengers in mind was evident from the words of Mr. Ajay Singh, CMD, SpiceJet, on October 28, 2017, while flagging off Jaisalmer as a new destination as well as introducing a

slew of flights to Rajasthan.

"SpiceJet is proud to connect Rajasthan like never before. Today is a very special day for us as we announce the launch of multiple new flights to Rajasthan, India's most vibrant and colourful state, which will greatly aid both leisure and business travelers," he said. "We are proud of the fact that SpiceJet will be the first and only airline to offer direct air connectivity between Jaipur-Jaisalmer; Jaisalmer-Delhi and Jaipur-Varanasi and we hope to continue to serve the people of Rajasthan with the same vigour in future."

A similar sentiment was expressed a little earlier on October 3, 2017 when SpiceJet had added Dibrugarh as its 50th destination, further enhancing connectivity to the North East. Shri Sarbananda Sonowal, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Assam had then said: "We thank SpiceJet and especially Mr Ajay Singh for accepting our request and providing air connectivity to the citizens of Assam and North East. I hope that this service continues unabated. I had personally requested Mr. Singh to look into the gaps in air connectivity left by other operators and I am happy to share that the same was looked into with great urgency."

Rajasthan and Assam are just two of the many regions of the country that SpiceJet has been improving connectivity to, one new destination at a time. Read on and explore some more gems of destinations that had been under the radar so far.

JAISALMER, RAJASTHAN

Located at the heart of the Thar Desert, the beautiful town of Jaisalmer has a mystical charm that instantly draws you towards it. Perhaps it is the desert, the fort or its amazing natural sights – this is a potpourri of all things quintessential



The Mehrangarh Fort in the Blue City of Jodhpur

Rajasthan. Being a rather small town on the border, Jaisalmer's primary attraction is the Jaisalmer fort that happens to be a living fort where thousands of people live within its lofty ramparts. Named after the Bhati ruler Maharawal Jaisal, it is called the Golden Fort as the fort and residential buildings are made of yellow sandstone. The 5 km fortification wall has 99 bastions.

Walking through the fort and seeing the sights I felt a sensory overload of colour in the form of the little street-side shops that sell local handicrafts and clothes. The old homes here take you back to the past and the beautiful Jain temple has stunningly intricate carvings.

Walking through the lanes I stop at the Patwa ki Haveli that has been preserved carefully and is a perfect ode to life in the past. I also recommend you check out the Kothari Patwa Haveli Museum that has a display of the erstwhile Patwa's gracious lifestyle. I also loved the Nathmal ki Haveli that was the residence of the prime minister of Jaisalmer – it has a painting made with real gold. While you are here, take a morning drive to the Gadisar Lake, an artificial reservoir whose banks are dotted with small temples and shrines.

Take a boat ride in the lake and feed the catfish or simply soak in the serenity while you observe the many birds that flock here. Your trip to Jaisalmer is not complete without a desert safari. There are two kinds – a camel safari that will take you on a bit of a bumpy ride on the sand dunes and reward you with stunning sunset visuals. The bone rattling jeep safari is another must-have experience. Usually this is a package that is teamed with a cultural programme and tasting local food, so make sure you have this on your to-do itinerary.

- Bindu Gopal Rao

JODHPUR, RAJASTHAN

A friend once told me: "If you want to see the real Rajasthan, you must visit Jodhpur." These words somehow stayed with me and on a recent trip to the Blue City, the second largest city of Rajasthan, I knew exactly what my friend had indicated. True to its moniker, everything in the old city is swathed in hues of blue that lends the city a unique character. I start my journey at the majestic Mehrangarh Fort that stands tall 400 feet above the city and is full of tales of valour and victory of the Rathore kings of Marwar. This is one of the largest forts in the country and you also have access by way of a lift. The Chowkelao Garden at the foot of the fort is over 200 years old and is a riot of colour courtesy the stunning floral cover. The Mehrangarh museum has several galleries that display a fine collection of arms, textiles, headgears, palanquins, manuscripts and decorative art. The Phool Mahal here has gold filigree and mirror ceiling and the walls are painted with moods depicting Indian classical ragas, royal portraits and incarnations of Lord Vishnu and Durga. The Moti Mahal and Sheesh Mahal are also particularly spectacular

SPICEJET HAS BEEN A VERY ENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORTER OF THE UDAN REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY SCHEME THAT IS ENHANCING CONNECTIVITY TO SMALLER TOWNS AND CITIES. OVER THE YEARS, MANY STATES HAD BEEN CLAMOURING FOR THE REVIVAL OF DYSFUNCTIONAL AIRPORTS AND STARTING OPERATIONS ON UN-SERVED ONES. UDAN MEETS THIS TWIN DEMAND



Typical buildings in the French Quarter of Puducherry and (right) children at the Namphake Buddhist Monastery during the Poju Chang Ken water splashing festival



courtesy their opulent design. While you are in Jodhpur, stop by at Umaid Bhawan Palace that has a whopping 347 rooms and a part still serves as the residence of the royal family. Apart from a hotel, the museum here has a special exhibition on Maharaja Umaid Singh and the making of the palace. The lifestyle gallery is an ode to the palace in the 40s and 50s and has art deco furniture, dining and writing sets as well as a sporting section. There is also a collection of antique clocks here. Another monument is the Jaswant Wada, a beautiful white structure dedicated to Jaswant Singh, who ruled Jodhpur. And while you shop in the busy Sadar Bazaar, stop by to admire the lovely Ghanta Ghar, the clock tower.

- Bindu Gopal Rao

DIBRUGARH, ASSAM

Don't be dissuaded by 'well-meaning' friends who warn you that the only touristy attractions in Dibrugarh are acres and acres of tea gardens. True, I found majestic tea gardens in the

easternmost part of Assam. But I also found much more on my maiden visit to one of the fastest growing cities in the state. Apart from tea, as I was to discover in my short stay, the city contributes significantly to the economic growth of the state by hosting industries like oil and natural gas, power generation and fertilizer. Just 12 km away from the centre of Dibrugarh is the Jokai Botanical Garden, a part of the Jokai Forest Reserve. A Germplasm Section here showcases the valuable and endangered plants in the region. Other sections of the garden include orchids, medicinal plants, aromatic plants and rainforest specimen plants.

Among the other attractions in and around Dibrugarh, I was bowled over by the Tilinga Mandir, a 53-year-old Shiva temple in Tinsukia district. Tilinga means bell in the local language so tourist brochures also call it Bell Temple. The name is derived from the bells of different sizes and materials within the temple premises. It is believed that your wish will be granted in this temple if you donate a bell here.

History buffs will love checking out the various maidams. The Barbarua Maidam, about 14 km to the south of Dibrugarh, houses two graveyards, one of Deka Dihingia Barbarua and the other of Bura Dihingia Barbarua. Both were important officials from the Ahom dynasty. The Bahikhowa Maidam graveyard is dedicated to Bahikhowa Dasarath Dowerah, a Chief of the Army from the Ahom dynasty. The graveyard is in ruins now but it's worth a visit for history lovers. Finally, there are the graves of Sarumechlow and Bormechow, queens of King Sukhampha Khura. These, my guide informed me, are two of the very few graves dedicated to royalty in Dibrugarh.

- Aparna Nambiar

PUDUCHERRY, PUDUCHERRY

Puducherry (Pondy to locals) is one of those places that effortlessly envelopes so many worlds within itself that it is difficult to figure where one ends and the other begins. Located on the east coast of peninsular India, the sea of course is a constant presence here but it is the quaint overlapping of cultures that makes it endearing and irresistible.

By far, the French Quarter had always held a charming novelty for me and I wandered around mesmerised by the yellow facades, the lovely arched gateways, the beautiful windows and a plethora of other details. It was both fun and surreal to chance upon distinct



The Patna Museum houses many attractive metal and stone sculptures

French flavour through street names such as Rue Romain Rolland and Rue du Bazar St Laurent. The beautiful Notre Dame des Anges (Our lady of the Angels Church) on Rue Dumas with its stained glass windows, tall columns, and ornamental figures, and the statue of Joan of Arc across from it, caught my breath.

In contrast, it was fascinating to wander around Auroville, a concept township that owed its origins to the Aurobindo Ashram. Houses interspersed with lush greenery, winding paths on which there were more bicycles than fuel vehicles, and interesting enterprises all populated this refreshing community. In the middle of all this was the brilliant Matrimandir, a beautiful golden dome and a sanctuary for peace and meditation, set amidst landscaped gardens.

Auroville also had a Visitors' Centre, where I browsed through several shops which sold a variety of things made within the community such as garments, ceramics, jewellery, soaps, handmade

THE BRILLIANT MATRIMANDIR IN THE CONCEPT TOWNSHIP OF AUROVILLE IS A BEAUTIFUL GOLDEN DOME AND A SANCTUARY FOR PEACE AND MEDITATION, SET AMIDST LANDSCAPED GARDENS

paper, and much more. Adjacent to the township was the Auroville beach which was scattered with people engrossed in meditation, yoga and other activities. There were also walkers and joggers, but it was the serenity, offset by the gentle lashing of waves against the beach, that was most heartening.

Back in town, the place to be in the evening was the Beach Road. It was crowded with people, pushcarts and sundry vendors. But I preferred to perch on a secluded stretch of the beach and watch the horizon grow gradually darker. Lights came on and the water shimmered, and it became utterly serene.

It was strange to think that in a

single day in Pondy, I had undergone such a range of emotions.

- Anita Rao-Kashi

PATNA, BIHAR

Once called Patliputra, Patna is among the world's oldest capital cities. It is now the fifth fastest growing city of the country. Many tourists use it as a gateway to visit the nearby Buddhist and Jain historic sites of Nalanda (90 km away), Rajgir (102 km), Pawapuri (90 km), Gaya-Bodhgaya (125 km) and Vaishali (90 km). But as I was to discover in my one-week long stay in the capital of Bihar, there are many other attractions within the city too, most of them unknown to people in other states.

There is Patna Museum with its metal and stone sculptures from the Maurya and Gupta periods. The Jalan Museum has a rich collection of Jade, Chinese Paintings and Louis XIV chairs and crockery. The Harmandirji at Patna Sahib is a shrine consecrating the birthplace of Guru Gobind Singh. Patna is also home to the world famous Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Library. Set up at the turn of the century, the library has a distinguished collection of rare Arabic and Persian manuscripts, Rajput and Mughal paintings and oddities like an inch wide Quran.

I would also recommend the Sanjay Gandhi National Park aka Patna Zoo. Established in 1970 over an area of 34 acres, the park is now spread over 153 acres. It is home to mammals like tiger, leopard, lion, rhinoceros and hippopotamus, apart from various kinds of birds, reptiles and fishes. Patthar ki Masjid, built in 1621 by Parvez Shah, son of Emperor Jahangir, stands out for its stunning medieval architecture, with two big minarets at the entrance and four smaller ones at the corners. The Nawab Shahid Ka Maqbara tomb contains the grave of Nawab Zainuddin

The Swami Vivekananda smarak in Belagavi



Haibat Jung, the Governor of Bihar (1740-48) and father of Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah, whose defeat at the battle of Plassey in 1757 had paved way for the establishment of British rule in India. The Padri-ki-Haveli (Mansion of Padre), is also worth visiting. The oldest church in Bihar (since 1713), this is the place where Mother Teresa received her training.

-Mitesh Garodia

BELAGAVI, KARNATAKA

At first sight Belagavi (formerly known as Belgaum) in North Karnataka seemed like an ordinary town whose life hinged on outright commercial activity. Though Kannada was widely spoken, it was also common to hear snatches of Marathi owing to its proximity to the Maharashtra border. But the city had so many other different layers that were revealed only while wandering around it.

The city itself was quite sprawling, with the city centre going back to historic

times while the outer layers were more modern. At the heart of the city was the Belgaum Fort, in a ruined state currently but there was enough to point to its bygone majesty. It was built in 1204 by the Rattas who belonged to the Rashtrakuta Dynasty.

But it was constantly ravaged and occupied by various dynasties including Vijayanagar, Bahmani, Adilshahi, Mughal, Hyder and Tipu of Mysore, the Marathas, and ultimately the British. It was roughly oval with a deep moat around, a majestic gate, imposing bastions, other defensive elements, guard chambers, temples, mosques and much more, incorporating several architectural styles and decorative motifs. Among the fascinating things inside the fort were the two Jain temples – Kamal Basadi and Chikki Basadi. The former was most elaborate with pillars, lotus pedestal, dome and elaborate roof details. The latter was in partial ruins but had equally arresting details on the

facade, especially carving of musicians, dancing figures and flowers. Other religious structures included Hindu temples dedicated to Ganesha and Durga, and mosques called Jamia Masjid and Safa Masjid.

After wandering around for more than a few hours I sat down to a North Karnataka meal that was earthy, spicy and delectable. However, I rather enjoyed the local sweet, kunda, made with milk and sugar. Suitably fortified, and wanting a change of scene, I headed out of the city.

Belgaum is surrounded by a plethora of waterfalls and forests but I opted to go towards the Northeast to Gokak Falls, which has earned itself the name of Niagara of the South for its horse-shape waterfalls on the Ghataprabha river. It was fascinating also for the Chalukyan era monuments and temples that were around, and made for a perfect end to the trip.

- Anita Rao-Kashi

ALAMY