

Steeped in the lore of Lord Krishna, there is a mystic charm to the coastal city of Dwarka. It is best experienced as you hop temples on your journey here.

Text and Photographs | **BINDU GOPAL RAO**

Situated on the banks of Gomti Creek, the Dwarkadish Temple is built from soft limestone.

# SPIRITUALITY

# BY THE

# SEA



A city that was submerged many centuries ago, it was the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) excavations that brought the spotlight back on Dwarka. Said to have been established by Lord Krishna, there is a mystical allure about Dwarka that has piqued both the interest and imagination of tourists. And for good reason.

Literally translating to 'Gateway to Heaven', Dwarka is a part of the famed Char Dham (four abodes) pilgrimage. Located in Gujarat, this is a city that is believed to have been rebuilt many times over centuries and what you see today is apparently its seventh version. Steeped in spirituality, the best way to explore the city is to head to its temples where locals will treat you to many tales that will take you back in time.

### TEMPLE TRAILS

With its rich spiritual history, the temples of Dwarka are full of legends, myths and stories that will

surely regale you. Start your journey at the Dwarkadhish Temple that has a towering spire visible from across the city. This is the spot where Gomti River meets the Arabian Sea. It is believed to be the site of Lord Krishna's home.

The temple is several thousands of years old and is believed to have been built by Lord Krishna's great-grandson Vajranabh. The ASI is still working on renovating and excavating several parts of this temple.

The temple follows the Solanki school of architecture. It boasts

a four-armed, black stone statue of Lord Krishna, as seen in the sanctum sanctorum. The Solanki style of temple architecture is characterised by a sanctum, walls that have indentations that reflects light, a closed hall, an open platform and a porch that is connected both internally and externally.

This temple complex has several smaller temples dedicated to Lord Shiva, Goddess Devaki (Lord Krishna's mother) and several goddesses among others. There are two entrances to the temple called



TOP AND LEFT: The Dwarkadhish Temple cuts a contrast against the deep blue sky

Moksha Dwar and Swarg Dwar. The rituals here follow a set timetable in the morning and evening and the flag atop the temple is changed no less than five times a day, with an equally elaborate ceremony each time.

The Rukmini Temple, about 2 km away from the Dwarkadhish Temple, dates back to the 12th century and is characterised by intricate carvings on the outside. The beautiful statue of Goddess Rukmini here is surrounded by paintings that depict the legends associated with her. Also visit the Geeta Temple which is a pristine white marble structure dedicated to the Bhagwad Gita and has scriptures from the book engraved on its walls. Another attraction here is the Gopi Talav, a small pond that has been linked to Lord Krishna's childhood.

## ISLAND MUSINGS

An island in the Arabian Sea believed to be the original residence of Lord Krishna, Bet Dwarka served as a port city. As you approach by boat, you will first be greeted by seagulls. The temple here is known for the traditional offering of rice as it is believed that Sudama, Krishna's childhood friend offered

him rice when he met him after many years.

Shrines dedicated to Shiva, Vishnu, Rukmini, Satyabhama, Jambavati, Lakshmi Narayan Radha, Lakshmi and other deities are also part of this temple. The Hanuman Dandi Temple and Nageshvara Jyotirlinga Mandir are other temples that are worth a visit in Bet Dwarka. The boats operate between 6:00 am and 7:00 p.m. You could also book a tour from Dwarka to visit the place.

## MYRIAD SIGHTS

Head to the beautiful white Dwarka beach with coral reefs

and extensive marine life when you want to take a break from the temple run. In fact, you can spot dolphins and porpoises as well as sea turtles, octopi, starfish and sea urchins here. Located along the Arabian Sea coast, it features many natural caves and cracks on the rocks worth checking out.

Bet Dwarka is also a scuba diving site, thanks to the marine excavations that have happened in the past. The best thing you can see are the remains of old Dwarka which are believed to go as far back as between 3000 to 5000 BC. Live corals and colourful fish in clear waters (these waters are said to be



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**ABOVE:** The view of the Dwarkadhish Temple and the Sudama Setu suspension bridge over the Gomti River presents a continuity between the past and the present.

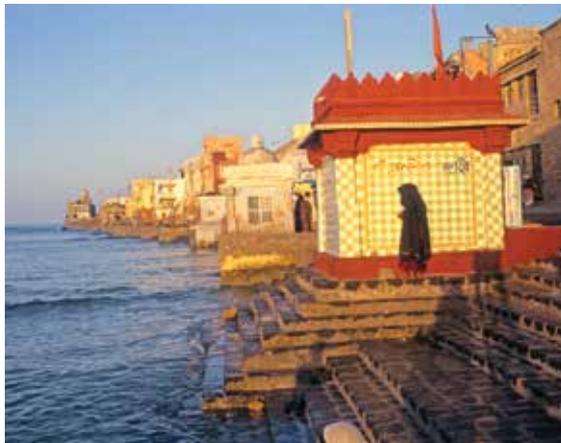
**LEFT:** Located on a hillock in the Arabian Sea, the view from Rukhmini Temple is worth every effort to get there.



**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:** The Dwarka Lighthouse should be on your list if you want to witness a breathtaking view of the sunset.

Patola sarees, usually made from silk, are a must-buy when in Dwarka.

Devotees dot the Gombi Ghat as they pay their respects.



among the clearest in India) make for an incredible experience.

The Sudama Setu inaugurated in 2016 is a pedestrian suspension bridge over the Gomti River which connects Jagat Mandir in mainland Dwarka and Panchkui Tirth in the southeast part of the island. There are five freshwater wells named after the five Pandava brothers at Panchkui. The bridge can carry up to 30,000 people an hour on foot and is an architectural marvel. The

Dwarka Lighthouse, a 43 metre high structure, is a great spot to catch some beautiful sunrises and sunsets.

The Gombi Ghat is where the river meets the ocean against the panoramic view of the city of Dwarka. A bath in these waters is believed to have cleansing properties.

Shopping in Dwarka, especially in the local markets around the temple, will mean that you need to

have your bargaining skills ready.

You can pick up colourful, multi-hued fabrics and silver jewellery. Check out the Patola sarees, *bandhini* fabrics, mirrored and sequined clothes, woven footwear and traditional wall art.

So the next time you are looking for a location that combines spirituality and tradition, head to Dwarka. It's a journey that will leave you with fond memories much after you have returned. 