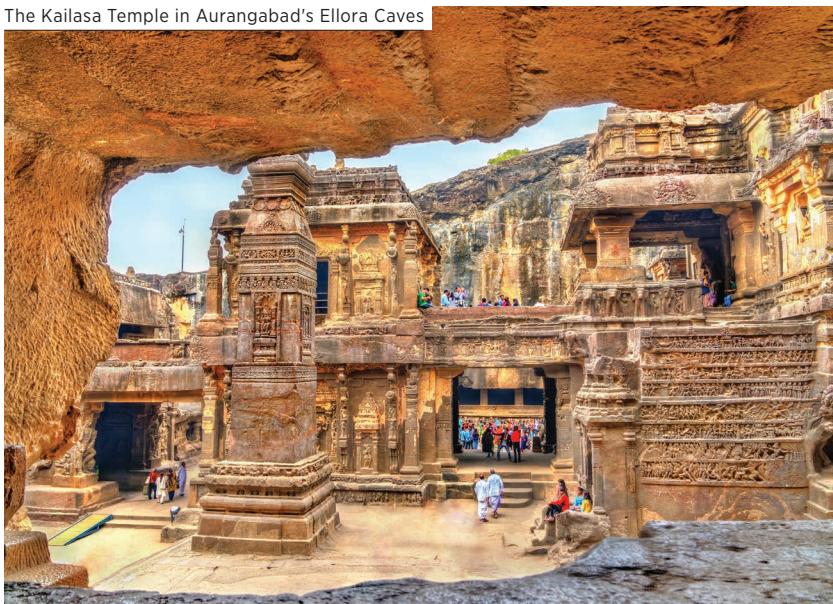


The Kailasa Temple in Aurangabad's Ellora Caves



## AURANGABAD

Often thought of as a gateway to the Ajanta and Ellora caves, Aurangabad is an excellent destination by itself courtesy a variety of sights that comprise varied experiences. Start your exploration at the Bibi ka Maqbara, the replica of the famed Taj Mahal. Built in 1679 by Prince Azam Shah, Aurangzeb's son, in memory of his mother, Begum Rabia Durani, this mausoleum is a fine example of Islamic architecture and has a hexagon shape and four towering minarets. Also do stop at the Aurangabad Caves. A set of 12 caves has been carved from soft rock and it dates back to the period between the 6th and 8th century. The caves are home to not just intricate carvings of Buddha but also many Gods and Goddesses. If you are a history buff, the medieval Daulatabad Fort, located about 15 km away from the city, is believed to have the tallest spire in India. Aurangabad is also home to Grishneshwar Mandir, one of the 12 Jyotirlinga sites in the country. Nature lovers will love the Jayakwadi Bird Sanctuary, a haven for migratory birds as well as the Salim Ali Sarovar Lake, a biodiversity hot spot.

## THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The capital of Kerala is flanked by Tamil Nadu on its eastern side and the Arabian Sea on the western. Clean and green, Thiruvananthapuram is one of the most beautiful cities in the country. It is named after Anantha Padmanabha or Lord Vishnu. Those with a religious bent of mind throng the city for its numerous ancient temples. One of the most prominent among these is the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. Believed to be the world's richest temple, this temple is a blend of the Kerala and Dravidian styles of architecture. With a history stretching back to the 8th century, it is one of the 108 sacred Vishnu temples in the country. Thiruvananthapuram is also renowned for its long shoreline with internationally renowned beaches, historic monuments, backwater stretches and a rich cultural heritage. Among the main tourist attractions are the Shankumugham Beach, Napier Museum and the Thiruvananthapuram Zoo.

## RIYADH

Saudi Arabia's capital city Riyadh is one of

the most populated cities in the region and is named after the meadows (rawdah) in the region. Start your exploration at the Masmak Fortress located in the heart of old Riyadh that has a museum as well. At the King Abdul Aziz Historical Centre you will see the Murabba Palace, a royal fortress that dates back to the 20th century. This complex, also home to the National Museum, has some important exhibits like a Kiswah cloth that is said to have once covered the Qaaba in Mecca. To admire the city's modern architecture, head to the Kingdom Centre which is the second tallest building in Saudi Arabia and makes for a compelling sight when it is lit up at night. For some shopping head to the malls at the Al Faisaliyah Centre and the Kingdom Centre or stop at the Deira's Souq Al-Thumairi that is a treasure trove of local crafts.

## JEDDAH

Often referred to with the sobriquet 'Bride of the Red Sea', Jeddah is the second largest city in Saudi Arabia and is often a gateway to Mecca and Medina, the holiest of all Islamic sites. The city that is a well-known port as it is located overlooking the Red Sea, has a history of maritime trade that is impossible to miss. With this kind of background the city has a rich cultural and spiritual history that combines trade, pilgrimage and architectural traditions. Often dubbed as the commercial capital of Saudi Arabia, this is a city that wears its heritage and modernity with equal pride. With a beautiful water front corniche, the city's high rises are a symbol of its new age development. To know the city's history better head to the Jeddah Regional Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography and the Abdul Raouf Khalil Museum. The latter chronicles a pre-Islamic history that dates back to 2500 years and showcases an impressive collection of items of the