

# WINTER CHRISTMAS

## OF A DIFFERENT KIND

**WHY NOT GIVE THE COLOUR OF THE SEASON, WHITE, A TWIST, BY WELCOMING CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR IN THE RANN OF KUTCH?**

**BY BINDU GOPAL RAO**

It is evening as I hop on to a camel cart that is taking me to a landscape that I have heard so much about but never seen. As the cart trudges along, I am flooded with memories of images, social media posts and news articles I have read about the place. My reverie is jolted as I finally step on the Rann of Kutch. And as I

walk towards the desert, the sand makes way for a milky whiteness that stretches as far as eye can see. And the perfect sunset framed by the orange-hued sky makes my long-cherished dream of seeing the beautiful White Rann come true.

### **Wow whites**

The Great Rann of Kutch, covering an area of 7,500sqkm, is a white desert formed by

the salt marshes that appear post monsoon. These marshy salt flats turn completely white after the shallow water dries, giving the landscape an ethereal feel. If you are lucky to be here on the full moon, the entire landscape shines like diamonds and you will be forgiven to think you are over the moon, quite literally.

The best time to enjoy the Rann is in the morning when you can see a stunning sunrise. During chilly winters, this happens a little after 7am. The landscape transforms into another zone in the evening, when you can catch some dramatic sunsets perfectly framed by the white salt land. If you are looking for an offbeat white Christmas ex-

perience, this is one you must plan. To add some sparkle, you must also sign up for a session of stargazing here as the Rann is also one of the darkest places in India. A professional guided session will help you spot planets. Do not miss Saturn with its rings, the many constellations as well as the sighting of shooting stars.

### **Winter wonders**

The best way to experience this magical landscape is to book a stay at Tent City at

Dhordo, a village that won the United Nations World Tourism Organisation's (UNWTO) Best Tourism Village award in 2023. This is a temporary luxury accommodation which allows you to explore the surroundings comfortably and is available from November till the end of February. This one-of-its-kind space brings together comfortable stay options, arts and crafts (there are live demonstrations and craft stalls), and culture (local artists perform every night showcasing traditional music

and dance).

The Tent City is spread over a whopping 500,000sqm of land and has over 400 tents in various categories. There are dining areas that service these tents. All meals and sight-seeing come included in all packages. I stayed at the luxury Rajwadi Suite that has a well-furnished living room, master bedroom, dressing room, attached bathroom, sit-out, three AC's, flat-screen TV, and a non-alcoholic minibar - all within a 900sqft area. This apart, there are Darbari Suites (the

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most premium ones at 1600sqft) as well as Super Premium Tents and Premium Tents (475sqft), Deluxe AC Swiss Cottages and Non-AC Swiss Cottages (390sqft), that you can choose to stay in. Bhavik Sheth, CEO, Evoke Experiences that manages the space explains, “Experiencing the tent city is unique in itself because of the temporary facilities, accommodation, and luxury that we create in the middle of desert which is otherwise inaccessible because of the diverse climatic conditions. The white desert gets formed because of the natural phenomenon in the winter months. There are over 300 artisans here who come from the surrounding local villages showcasing local art forms.”

### Sights and sounds

The unique landscape can be explored with itineraries from one to four days where all your sightseeing is taken care of by the team at Tent City. When you are here, an absolute must-do is exploring the ancient city of Dholavira. This UNESCO site is a Harappan City with a history of over 1800 years showcasing the best planned civilisations of that era in the remains that have been excavated. The adjoining museum showcases ornaments, vessels and clay that have been found.

However, the best part is the road that takes you here that is rightly dubbed ‘way through heaven’. Flanked by water bodies on either side of the road, the route has an ethereal feel and it is common to sight the Greater Flamingos here as well. A visit to Kala Dungar or Black Hills, the highest point in Kutch at 462m, Nirona Village to see how one family has kept the tradition of Rogan Art alive, and natural rock art formations at Kadiya Dhro are also ways to add to your travel experience here.

“The main beauty of this festival is that it is the most unique hospitality experience in India. Meticulously planned for eight months, in collaboration with over 15 agencies, it ensures that the four-month event gives guests an experience that is not seen elsewhere. It is a model of how tourism can uplift local communities which is a win-win for everyone,” signs off Sheth.

Visit [www.rannutsav.net](http://www.rannutsav.net) for more information. **W**

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Rann Utsav, The Tent City



Musicians at the White Rann



A camel cart taking tourists to White Rann

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The Tent City at a distance in the blue hour