Junagadh district of Gujarat is located at the foot of the Girnar hills. The earlier name of this princely city was "Sorath". Junagadh is a significant city in the history of India and was ruled by many powerful dynasties like the Mauryan dynasty, the Solanki dynasty and in the mid 17th century it came under the Mughal rule.

Junagadh is one of the most attractive tourist destinations of Gujarat. This primitive city holds many evidences of the history it has witnessed. Numerous forts and monuments built by the rulers of different dynasties can be seen here. Placed on the outskirts of the city, an inscription with fourteen Edicts of Ashoka can be found on a large boulder. The city is also home to the eternal shrine of Lord Shiva, the Somnath temple. The temple shelters one of the twelve sacred Jyothirlingas and attracts devotees from all across India and outside the country. Besides, the place is also sanctuary of the wild Asiatic Lions. The Sakkarbaug Zoo and the wildlife museum can give you a sight of wildlife prevalent in the place.

There is evidence of a prehistoric settlement around Junagadh. In 4th-3rd century BCE, Junagadh formed a part of the Saurashtra janapada. The word Junagadh and its earlier version, Jirnadurga, literally mean old fort. Junagadh is a walled city with the central Dhal Road running through it. Every other road in this town is either twisting or narrow or both. It is best to start with Bahauddin (or Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel) Gateway, across the railway station. Palatial pastiche The most bizarre of all Junagadh's buildings must be the 19th-century Mahabat Maqbara, built by Bahadur Khan III for his father Mahabat Khan II. The structure, a mixture of Indo-Saracenic, Islamic and European architecture, is awesome. A board next to it calls it 'an excellent example of post-medieval Islamic architecture in an Indian environment'.

Next to it is the elaborate Bahauddin Maqbara (built in 1878-92) with its elegant corkscrew towers straight out of a fairy tale. Request someone from the neighbouring Jumma Masjid to open its doors A picture of the past In the 19th-century Junagadh Palace, near Diwan Chowk, is the Durbar Hall Museum with an unusual collection of artefacts associated with Junagadh Nawabs. It has chairs and thrones arranged to imply an imminent durbar session. On its walls hang portraits, including two of Mahabat Khan III with his dogs wearing jewelled collars. TIP GUJARAT-DAMAN & DIU 556 HERITAGE HOLIDAYS IN INDIA Another section has ornate brass howdahs and palanquins. There are elaborately sculpted female chauri (plumed fan) bearers being swallowed by fish. There's also a macabre weapons collection, including a walking stick with a small pistol built into its handle.

You'll have to remove your shoes at the ticket counter The bazaar in front of the Junagadh Palace celebrates late 19th-century kitsch with Gothic arches, standing next to Awadhi style gateways, and surmounted by a European clock tower. A mosque unlike any other The 19th-century Jumma Masjid, with its Gothic arches, chandeliers and colonial ceiling fans, can be easily mistaken for a ballroom, if it wasn't for the mimbar. Its multi-coloured pillars are a bit of an eyeful. Out of this world Near Khapra Khodia lies the 19th-century Maqbara of Naju Bibi, an ambitious and powerful begum who briefly ruled over Junagadh in the name of her teenage son. It is fashioned in a distinctly indigenous Junagadh style and the dome actually looks like something akin to a UFO.

Next to Naju Bibi's tomb is Barah Shahid, the graves of 12 martyrs — soldiers of the Tughlaq Sultanate of Delhi who died in a failed ambush against the Rajput ruler of Junagadh. The graves are housed in an oblong, early medieval building. Visible from Naju Bibi's maqbara are the 2nd-century CE
caves of Khapra Kodia. An erstwhile Buddhist monastery, also referred to as Khengar’s Palace, it is a rock structure carved into a series of cells, passages and stairways. Fortified Uperkot, the sprawling ancient fort that dominates the city, is layered thick with myths. Believed to date back to the reign of Chandragupta Maurya, it gives Junagadh its name — ‘Old Fort’. Its history speaks of 16 sieges. For example, the 11th-century ruler Rah Khengar is remembered for his defiance of Sidhraj of Patan — he married Sidhraj’s bride-to-be, Ranakdevi. Insulted, Sidhraj lay siege to Uperkot. Local historians claim the siege lasted 12 years, after which Sidhraj stormed the fort and killed Khengar.

The Navghan Vav (stepwell) in the fort dates from Khengar’s time. The fort was apparently abandoned between the 7th and 10th centuries CE before being discovered again. The approach of the fort is through a strangely narrow gateway with an ancient archway, a fine example of the Hindu torana. The top of the fort is flat and crossed by paths linking the principal sites. Inside, on the western wall, are two colossal cannons, Neelam and Manek. Neelam Tope was cast in 1531 in Egypt, and is 17 ft long. It is beautifully wrought and intricately detailed (and was probably incredibly destructive in its prime). The inscription on it makes its purpose clear, “to fight the incursive Portuguese, who are the infidel enemies of State and religion”. Close by is the 15th-century Jama Masjid of the Uperkot fort, built from the remains of a former Hindu palace, said to be that of Rah Khengar and Rani Ranakdevi. A little further are the Buddhist caves, some dating back to 2nd CE or perhaps even earlier. Coin hoards of the Saka Kshatrapa kings, found during excavations, hint at links between monastic Buddhism and worldly trade — monasteries often tended to serve as the repositories for the safekeeping of merchants’ money.

Due to the profusion of western Kshatrapa coins found here, it has been surmised that there was a mint. The caves have an elaborate cistern system for water. Greco-Scythian style carvings beautify the lower hall, three storeys underground but open to the sky! To the east of the caves are two breathtaking stepwells. The first is the Adi-Chadi Vav, named after two slave girls of Rah Navghan who are said to have constructed it in the 11th century. This looks as much a natural wonder as a manmade one. The rock is cleaved by a narrow, wind-eroded staircase that descends 100 ft to a broad well. The second, Navghan Vav, plunges even deeper to 170 ft. It’s said to have been completed in 1060 CE. It has rock-cut circular stairs going to the bottom, with occasional apertures in the shaft for light. Not for the faint-hearted, the vertiginous or the weak-legged! The Uperkot fort also has a reservoir from the time of the Junagadh Nawabs — with a pumping station still in use and even a few visiting water birds. The approaches of the fort are through a strangely narrow gateway with an ancient archway, a fine example of the Hindu torana. The top of the fort is flat and crossed by paths linking the principal sites.

Going to Girnar Girnar Hill, rising 3,000 ft over the otherwise flat plain of Sorath, dominates the horizon and the imagination of Junagadh. The flag of Nawabi Junagadh preserved in the Durbur Hall has a sun rising over a mountain (Girnar) and a lion (from Gir), the emblems of the state. At the foot of GUJARAT-DAMAN &amp; DIU 558 HERITAGE HOLIDAYS IN INDIA Girnar Hill is the rock on which Ashoka’s 14 edicts in Brahmi script are carved. Girnar also attracts Hindu and Jain pilgrims to Junagadh. One gets to the historically important Jain temples climbing 3,700 steps up the cliff, past some caves, after a thick deciduous forest at the base of the hill. The steps were built in 1889, after funds were collected by floating a lottery. There are shops for refreshments on the way, and the view is breathtaking. At over 1,500 ft, after crossing many garish new constructions, you come to what looks like a 16th-century fortress clinging to a cliffside. This is the Jain temple complex of Girnar. There are 16 shrines here, with the biggest dedicated to the 22nd Tirthankara, Neminath, dating back to the 12th century. Architecturally, the most striking is the Vastupla Temple with an image of Mallinath. It is actually three temples joined together.

There are elaborate carvings on the exterior and interior. The complex has an air of tranquility about it, increased by the sound of the bells tied to the shikharas of the temples. This temple complex is only halfway up Girnar. There are many temples and kunds all the way to the top, all of 7,000 steps, including the Bhairon Jap (from where people would jump off to be reincarnated as kings in the next life!). Great views of the Junagadh city and the plains beyond. Fortuitously, as enterprise is never too far from religion in India, there are masseurs waiting to attend to your aching calves and thighs when you descend from the mountain! The ideal time to climb up the hill is just before sunrise, in the relative absence of pilgrims. Photographing the idols is not allowed.

The town does not offer too much for visiting shoppers. There is a local market called panchatadi which has shops selling saris and daily provisions. On Azad Road, there is a Khadi Gram Udyog where one can pick up handmade products native to Gujarat that are marketed by the Khadi and Village Industries Commission. Gondal (64 km) Halfway between Rajkot and Junagadh, Gondal was said to be the only princely state in Saurashtra that did not tax its subjects in the 19th century. During Bhagwat Sinjhi’s rule in Gondal (1884-1944), railway lines were laid, a school was built and a nine-volume history of Aryan Medical Science was written. It appears that the income generated by freight trains passing through the region raised sufficient revenues for the state. To get a fair idea of the history of Gondal and its fascinating maharaja, start at
the Naulakha Palace. Have a look at the impressive Vintage Car Collection of the Gondal royal family.

To truly enjoy Junagadh and its surroundings, head for a heritage stay at Gondal. Within the grounds of the Gondal palace are two luxury hotels on the Junagadh-Rajkot Highway. The Riverside Palace is a colonial-style bungalow and the residence of the crown prince. The same management runs the Orchard Palace, once a royal guest house. Guests can also stay (for the same price) at the luxury railway saloon of the erstwhile royal family. Apart from a bedroom with attached bath, the coach has dining and sitting rooms, but no AC or TV. Charges include entry fee to Naulakha Palace and Vintage Car Collection. Taxi (1½ hrs) to Gondal from Junagadh charges INR 6-11 per km.

Somnath (89 km) The drive to Somnath, south of Junagadh, is as interesting as the destination. It passes through Vanthali (16 km), where you will see a number of 1940s Fords being operated as taxis! Just short of Somnath lies Veraval, a port with a history of maritime trade. Even today, it is a major ship building centre for dhows. The wood comes from Malaysia. Between Veraval and Somnath is the Bhalka Tirth, where Krishna is believed to have died. The site is disappointingly modern and kitschy. But drive past the wooded graveyards along the beach, and you can imagine a forest of reeds here, planted by a curse — as the legend goes. It is said that the reeds turned into maces, with which Krishna’s drunken Yadav clan slashed each other to death. Horrified, Krishna ran into the forest, where he was killed by a hunter’s arrow. Somnath has been a pilgrimage spot for long. It could be because of the Triveni Ghat, the confluence of three rivers, Hiran, Kapil and the mythical Saraswati. The Somnath Temple stands by the sea, its wall thrashed by waves.

The first temple is said to have been built by Somraj, the Moon God himself. The current temple was built in 1961 after excavating the remains of the former temple at the site. The Somnath Temple faced many Muslim raids after Mahmud Ghaznavi’s attack in 1026; it was rebuilt by Hindu devotees. The irony is that local Muslims have died defending Somnath, and Hindu rulers have plundered pilgrims taking gifts for the deity. Sculptures and remains from the earlier temples are now housed in the Old Museum (5 minutes from the temple). The Somnath Temple Trust conducts a mini-bus tour to all key sites (2 hrs, adults INR 20, kids INR15). Taxi fare is INR 6-11 per km to Somnath.
Uperkot, the sprawling ancient fort that dominates the city, is layered thick with myths. Believed to date back to the reign of Chandragupta Maurya, it gives Junagadh its name — which means ‘Old Fort’. Its history speaks of 16 sieges. The approach of the fort is through a strangely narrow gateway with an ancient archway. The top of the fort is flat and crossed by paths linking the principal sites. Inside, on the western wall, are two colossal cannons, Neelam and Manek. Neelam Tope was cast in 1531 in Egypt, and is 17 ft long. Close by is the 15th-century Jama Masjid of the Uperkot Fort, built from the remains of a former Hindu palace. The construction of these caves are highly inspired by the Satavahanas period, based on their architectural style.

The Durbar Hall Museum with an unusual collection of artefacts associated with the Junagadh nawabs, also houses silver thrones, carpets with exquisite detail and finery, together with huge life size chandeliers. Some of these one can get a glimpse of in terms of relics, and the others through some archaic paintings and photographs.

Buddhist Cave Groups in Uperkot can be broadly classified into three groups—Baba Pyare Caves, Khapra Kodiya Caves and Buddhist Caves. Baba Pyare Caves - These caves are also known as Baba Pyaras. They are located close to Modhimath. There are four caves on the northern end. There is another set of caves which lie on the eastern end of the first set of caves. It consists of a chaitya hall and a spacious court. The construction of these caves are highly inspired by the Satavahanas period, based on their architectural style.

Jayshree Cinema - The chambers of these caves follow an east-west orientation as they are divided by a longitudinal ridge. The caves date back to the 3rd and 4th century CE. There are two main components in this cave; one is the western wing that houses water tanks and the second is an L-shaped wing that is serves useful as
apartments.

Buddhist Caves - The caves here are divided into three tiers. These caves were built between the 2nd and 3rd century CE. The upper floor consists of a tank that is surrounded verandahs on all three of its sides. The lower floor has corridors and pillars. The floor below this has beautifully carved pillars. The capital, shaft and base of these pillars carry decorative designs that were unique to the Satavahana period.

Where To Eat

1. **Garden Restaurant**
   - Rajkot National Highway, Vadal, Junagadh-362310, India
   - +91-2622-2680727
   - A modest restaurant in a garden setting offers the best value for money, serving pure vegetarian food. Both South Indian and Punjabi cuisines are available in the restaurant. A wholesome treat is completed by the picturesque Girnar Hills, towering above the restaurant.

2. **Swati Restaurant**
   - Maharshi Arvinda Marg, Kalwa Chowk, Sardar Patel Bhawan, Junagadh.
   - +91-2852625296

3. **Santoor Restaurant**
   - Mahatma Gandhi Road, Junagadh, Gujarat-362310, India
   - +91-2622-2623661
   - A simple but wonderful Indian restaurant in Junagadh, Santoor offers Punjabi and South Indian dishes along with mouth-watering mango shakes. A perfect outing for a family, aided by dimly lit ambiance.

4. **Geeta Restaurant**
   - Station Road Near Railway Station
   - +91-2076243670

5. **Raj Bhog Restaurant**
   - Station Road
Quick LOCATE


See
A: Uperkot Fort
B: Jama Masjid
C: Darbar Hall Museum
D: Jayshree Cinema
E: Buddhist Cave Groups

Accommodation
F: OYO 29105 Hotel Magnum Inn
G: Hotel Somnath
H: Gir Jungle Lodge
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