CHAPTER THREE

INDIA AS A PARADISE
India as a Paradise

India is a paradise with its rich cultural heritage and national beauty with colourful people. It is the place where from North to South and from East to West the people are different, customs are different, traditions and also the country is different. India offers an opportunity to the visitors to see the sanctuaries, beaches, mountains, art and historical monuments. No other country in the world can provide such absorbing interests for the scenes as well as the soul such as the unpresented beauty of her variety of customs, festivals, folks religion, philosophy, art and architecture, monuments and memories of one of the oldest civilizations.

India's Main Tourist Spots

DELHI

Capital of India, Delhi is of two cities in one-first the Old Delhi of the Mughals, created by Shah Jahan and still a medieval place of forts, mosques and bazaars; second, the New Delhi built by the British. an elegant metropolis of broad avenues, stately homes and
landscaped gardens. The coexistence of the old and the new, a common feature of modern Indian cities, is nowhere more obvious than in Delhi; with the poor inner city leading a life of its own, the rich and the political elite retire to the sophisticated diplomatic enclaves, and debate the encroaching poverty from behind closed doors. Delhi is the seat of India government, and what visitors see here is a reflection of what is happening in the country as a whole.

When the great costed cities of India were still mud flats, Delhi was already a thriving capital of an ancient empire. Legend has it that the Pandavas, heroes of the Mahabharata epic, founded a city on this site, called Indraprasha, around 1200 BC. Certainly, it has for many, many centuries exerted a powerful influence on the history of the country. Its strategic situation between the Aravali hills known here as the Ridge, and flanked to the east by the river Yamuna, was one that no prospective Hindu ruler or northern invader could afford to ignore. Consequently, it was built, fought over, defended, destroyed, deserted and rebuilt on several occasions over the ages. In the process, it absorbed many different cultures and became uniquely cosmopolitan in its outlook.
No fewer than 15 different cities are said to have risen and fallen in and around Delhi since the 11th century. The first four 'Dillis' were Rajput structures, erected in the southern hills near the present situation of the Qutb Minar. The first historically recorded citadel was Lal Kot, built by the Tomar Rajputs (founders of 8th-century Dillika) in AD 1060. Taken by the Chauhan Rajputs in the 12th century, it was enlarged and renamed Qila Raj Pithora. Then came the Turk slave-king Qutb-ud-Din Aibak, the first Sultan of Delhi (1206), who built India's first mosque (Quwwat-ul-Islam) and her symbolic tower of victory, Qutb Minar. Under the Khilji dynasty, Islam's influence spread and the prosperous city of Siri sprang up (Delhi II 1290-1320) near to present-day Hauz Khas. Next came the Tughlaqs, a bulldog breed who built no fewer than three new cities here in the 14th century-first Tughlaqabad, a massive 13-gate fort 10 km (6.3 miles) south-east of Qutb Minar (used for only five years), then Jahanapanah (rapidly abandoned by the mad Sultan Mohammed, who marched the whole population off to distant Daultabad, near Aurangabad and then marched them all back again 17 years later), and finally Ferozbad (creation of Mohammed's more stable successor,
Feroz Shah), in its day the richest city in the world. This fifth version of Delhi marked the critical move north to the river settlement along the river Yamuna. It lasted a remarkably long time (Delhi's turbulent history considered), the Tughlaq's successors (Sayyids and Lodhis) being too busy building tombs to construct new cities. Emperor Sher Shah, the Afghan unsurper, displaced the Mughals just enough to build a sixth Delhi, Shergarh, before they won it back again (1555). But it wasn't for another century that the seat of Mughal power transferred back to Delhi from Agra. The move took place under Emperor Shah Jahan, who built Shahjahanabad (the present Old Delhi) between 1638 and 1648, obliterating most of old Ferozabad and Shergarh to provide building materials. His son, Aurangzeb, made some improvements to the new capital, but the succession of weak Mughal rulers who came afterwards only paved the way for infamous invasion of Nadir Shah (1739) when 30,000 Delhi inhabitants lost their lives overnight. After this the Mughal emperor could only sit sadly in his sacked Red Fort (Lal Qila) and utter the epitaph of his conquered dynasty: 'My kingdom extends no further than these four walls' Delhi then fell to the British, returning only
briefly to Mughal rule during the Indian Mutiny. The last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah, was reluctantly persuaded out of retirement for this and suffered for his decision by being marched off into exile in Rangoon. It was the end of the great Mughal Empire in India.

Under British rule, Delhi remained in the backward until 1911. When The King announced the creation of a new city, New Delhi and the transfer of the government from Calcutta, and became a capital once more. To mark its new status as a brand-new city, the eighth (New Delhi) was constructed. The creation of two British architects - Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker - it was designed in magnificent style to reflect the might of the British Empire in India and to accommodate 70,000 people. The new, modern city sprang up from out of a bare wilderness previously inhabited only by wild animals - a mirage of planned gardens, noble monuments and enormous avenues. Completed in 1931, on the very eve of Independence, it is today considered either the blindest folly of the British Raj or (being generous) its finest gift to modern, free India.

Today, New Delhi remains distinctly British. The imperiousness of the Viceroy has become the political
elitism of the Indian ruling-class, and many of the parliamentary, legislative and educational procedures of the Raj remain not only intact, but reinforced the Indian love of red tape. In Connaught Place, while young gumchewing Delhiites queue with foreign tourists in fast-food Wimpy bars, politicians and place-hunters jostle with filmstars and media types in swanky upmarket hotels and restaurants, and at private dinners. It's not difficult to detect the ghost of the Raj.

Delhi elicits strong likes and dislikes amongst foreign travellers. On the plus side, It's an easy introduction to India, with some of the best hotels, restaurants and facilities in the country, and it's a very convenient base for sightseeing: from here you can jump off to Rajasthan Varanasi. Kashmir (if the political situation allows) and the ever-popular Golden Triangle. But many find it lacking in colour, character and expression- a city without a face, not like real India at all. In an important sense, what started out being considered the Raj's greatest contribution to free India- the splendid new city of Delhi-could well become a long-term hindrance, a continuous reminder of a past best forgotten.
PLACE TO VISIT

1. Fort
2. Jantar Mantar
3. Qutub Minar
4. Humayun's Tombs
5. India Gate
6. Old Fort
7. Rastrapati Bhawan
8. Laxmi Narayan Temple

AGRA

Little is known about the city's early history but a small settlement was possibly first established some 5000 years ago. Agra's strategic situation on the right bank of the Yamuna made it an ancient frontier defence of the Aryans. At one time it may have been known as Agrabana (Paradise in Sanskrit), a possible corruption of the name of its founder, Maharahaj Ugersen. But the city achieved fame and wealth as the capital of the Mughals. Today, it is famous as the home of the Taj Mahal, the most popular tourist attraction in India.

Agra rose to sudden prominence in the early 16th century when the Mughals seized it from Hindu Lodhi
dynasty. In 1566 the modern city of Agra was established by the Emperor Akbar, and was made capital of the Mughal empire. Fabulously wealthy, it soon rose to great importance. The commentator Abul Fazal reported.

A great city having esteemed healthy air. Pleasant houses and gardens inhabited by people of all nations and exhibited with the production of every climate are built on both banks of the river (Yamuna). A castle of red sandstone, like of which no traveller has ever seen, has been created by the Emperor. The fort alone contains five hundred wonderfull stone buildings of Bengal, Gujrat and other styles. Formerly Agra was only a village depending upon Bayana, where Sikander Lodi (founder of Sikandra, 8 km (5 miles) out of present Agra) held his courts. At the same spot his Majesty has laid the foundations of a most magnificent city.

Under Akbar's son, the talented drunkard Jahangir, Agra became a major industrial and commercial city. But it was Shah Jahan, Jahangir's successor, who left Agra her most enduring monument—the Taj Mahal. This most beautiful (and most costly) monument to love remains today the finest wonder of the modern world. Having created it, Shah Jahan moved his capital from Agra to Delhi, and the city,
and the fortunes of the Mughals in general, fell into slow decline. In 1803 (after a long period of being ransacked and pillaged by local Maratha and Jat forces) it came under British rule and, until 1877, became the capital of North-western Province (now Uttar Pradesh). It never, however, regained its former glory. Agra remained trapped in time, a bitter-sweet reminder of the peak of Mughal power and glory.

Today Agra is a city of over a million people, a busy centre of education and commerce. Its main industry, by virtue of its many well-preserved Mughal monuments, is tourism. The area around, but luckily not within, the three principal sights—the Taj, the Fort, and the ghost town of Fatehpur Sikri—are flooded with touts, beggars and touristy emporia. By contrast, the old British cantonment with its wide, spacious streets, its peaceful parks and gardens and its several lesser palaces and monuments, is surprisingly relaxing.

PLACE TO VISIT

1. Agra Fort
2. Taj Mahal
3. Fatehpur Sikri
4. Etmodud Daula
Gwalior

The strategically important fort at Gwalior dominates the city and for centuries controlled one of the major routes between north and south India. Its history goes back 2000 years, with rock inscriptions from the 5th century still to be found. From the 12th century control of the fort and surrounding area passed through a succession of Muslim, Tomar Rajput, Afghan, Mughal and finally Maratha rulers. During the 12th century Qutb-ud-din-Aibak was the first Muslim ruler to hold it but eventually the Tomars took possession. Perhaps the most famous was Man Singh who came to power in 1486. It was during this period that many of the great battlements and interior palaces were built. After a short period of control by the Lodhis (Afghans), the first Mughal Emperor Babur took the fort, and described it as the pearl among the fortresses of Hind'. During the slow collapse of the Mughal empire the Scindia line of Marathas conquered the area in 1754. At times during the Maratha wars the British took control of the fort. They held it for 30 years after capturing the Rani of Jhansi within its walls in 1858, thus bringing to a close the Indian Mutiny.
Once one of the largest and richest of the Indian Princely States, Gwalior is the main city of a rich agricultural region with an expanding industrial base. The new town, Lashkar, is south of the fort; the very smart railway station, to the south-east.

PLACES TO VISIT
1. Jain Sculptures
2. Alamgir Gati
3. Teli Ka Mandir
4. Archeological Museum
5. Royal Chhatris
6. Jai Vilas Palace

KHAJURAO

The famous temples of Khajuraho are major tourist magnet, partly because, situated in all dry, hot of Madhya Pradesh and miles from anywhere, they have an alluring quality of romantic isolation; partly because they include the most sublime, sensuous and erotic temple sculpture in India; and finally, because they are remarkably intact, their remote situation having spared them the customary desecrations inflicted by Muslim invaders on other northern temples.
Over 80 temples, of which 22 survive, were built by the mighty Chandella dynasty, which claimed descent from the legendary moon god Chandra. The bulk of them appeared in a single, sudden burst of creative and religious energy, between the mid-10th and mid-11th centuries. The much reduced Chandella kingdom lasted almost 500 years; their capital at Kalangar having fallen in 1203 they remained at Ajaygarh until the early 18th century. When their ancient religious centre of Khajuraho was deserted is not known. But the sculptures live on. Though the 'dirty postcard' touts at Delhi would have you believe otherwise, Khajuraho is not a place for the thrill-seeking voyeur. It is, rather, just a frank expression of joy in life, a remarkable symphony in stone erected in praise of love and women. And the purpose of the sculptures has been an object of discussion and academic debate since the temples were rediscovered by Capt T.S. Burt in 1838. The skill and the vivacity of the carvings themselves have rarely been equalled.

Khajuraho is a small peaceful village of some 5000 inhabitants. Many of them continue to tend their fields and animals. It comes as a real surprise to many visitors
to find such a green, well-maintained garden environment, though even the park benches and the pastoral setting can't take your mind off the heart. Khajuraho has an extreme climate—very hot in summer, very cold in winter. The most comfortable months are November to February. If you don't like crowds, come in March. The special Dance Festival which takes place every year (end February/early March) over seven days is a marvellous opportunity to see some of India's top dancers and musicians performing in an original setting (the floodlit temple grounds) for a nominal cost of between Rs 10 and Rs 100 per seat.

PLACES TO VISIT

1. Temples
2. Archeological M-useum
3. Kandariya Mahadev
4. Chitragupta Temple

VARANASI (BENARES)

The centre of Hinduism, and most important pilgrimage place in the country, Varanasi is one of the seven ancient Sacred Cities of the Hindus. The spiritual heart of Uttar Pradesh state, this is a city of colourful
bazaars, bright quality silks, festivals, temples, mosques and palaces-all centring round the teeming ghats of the Holy Gange (Gangas). Nearby Sarnath is a total contrast- a peaceful Buddhist centre of stupas, shrines, monasteries and museums, where the Buddha came to preach his first sermon. Ancient capital of Hindu faith and learning, Varanasi is one of the oldest living cities in the world and certainly the most fascinating.

In many ways this is India in a nutshell- an inextricable maze of narrow, winding streets and alleys, domes and minarets, pinnacles and towers, derelict 18th-century palaces and hundreds of temples, the whole a continuous riot of noise, colour and clanging temple gongs. A haunting city of dignified buildings, many crumbling and sliding inexorably into the holy Ganges, the old 'eternal' city retains a very special vitality.

Varanasi's early history is lost in antiquity accounts like the Mahabharata and Skanda Purana mention its existence at least 3000 years ago, though traditionally it was founded around 1200 Bc. The Chinese pilgrims Fa-Hsein and Hieun Tsiang, writing in the 5th and 7th centuries AD respectively, give the first historical
accounts of its many Hindu temples and monasteries, but it had long since become a flourishing centre of religion, education and commerce. The Buddha came to Sarnath, just 10Km (6 miles) north of the city, to preach his eight-fold path to truth and enlightenment. And along the holy ghats by the Ganges, numerous shrines and temples arose, dedicated to Shiva, the presiding deity. Rich and powerful, Varanasi became an inevitable bone of contention between local rules, and an irresistible lure to northern invaders. From the 11th century on, it was regularly looted by the Muslims, and later on by Aurangzeb, the Mughal Emperor (he destroyed nearly all the temples and rebuilt the most famous one as a mosque). Few of the present Varanasi shrines, therefore, are older than the 18th century. Only in 1738, with the accession of a strong Hindu monarch, was firm rule reestablished. Ceded to the British in 1775, Varanasi finally entered an era of consolidation and rehabilitation. Mark Twain, who visited India in the late 19th century, wrote that 'Benares is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend, and looks twice as old as all of them put together'.
The present name of Varanasi is a restoration of its ancient title meaning the city between two rivers—the Varuna and the Asi. Its spiritual name is Kashi, meaning the city that shines with Kasha (divine light). The city's other name of Benares by which it was known for the last 300 years or so, is probably a corruption of Varanasi. Most visitors are pilgrims making the requisite once-in-a-lifetime Hindu visit to clean away all since, and all will want to return at the end of their life, it being believed that to die here ensures rebirth in the most favourable circumstances possible. They all attempt the 55-Km (36 mile) pilgrimage walk round the Panchakroshi Road, even the many old, sick and infirm who come here to die. And all visit the Holy Ganges for the purification dip. Here, more than anywhere else in India, religion—with all its rituals, dedications and celebrations—is an intrinsic part of life.

Varanasi is just as popular with tourists as with pilgrims. Yet tourists—deterred by the noise, the hassle, the sweet (and not so sweet) smells of sanctity—stay just one or two days. Some people (those who look like easy pickings) can't walk five paces down the road without a money changer, a dope fiend, a silk emporium man or a begger accosting them. Others, who stick it out and get it out and get beneath the surface annoyances, discover the spiritual depth and beauty of the place. Intense, yet
rarely overpowering, it is the amazing street-life that absorbs visitors most—a rapid, continuous slide-show of crazy traffic, clamouring pilgrims, mucky kids, sacred cows, road-side barbers and flamboyant funeral precessions; while on the riverside it is a kaleidoscope of temple priests, sadhus on the ghats, smouldering cremation pyres, and money-changes dispensing small coins for beggars.

Varanasi is coolest but most crowded from November to February. For a warm but less stressful stay, come in March/April, when most foreign tourists have migrated north to Nepal or Himachal Pradesh. To get the feel of the place, turn up for the Dussehra festival of September/October and performances of the Ramlila. This is 30 days of continuous fun and frolic.

PLACES TO VISIT

1. River Ganga
2. Nepalese Temple
3. Vishvanath Temple
4. Gyanvopī Mosque
5. Durga Temple
6. Bharat Kala Bhawan
7. Tulsi Mans Temple
Surrounded on three sides by the rugged Aravali hills, Jaipur is the picturesque capital of Rajasthan. It takes its name from the prince, soldier and astronomer Jai Singh II, who moved his capital here in 1727. The old capital, Amber (or Amer), had long been a stronghold of Rajput power, but had become too cramped at its mountain site. Although it had been attacked by various rulers of Delhi the Kachhwaha rulers were secure in the Jaigarh fort. When the Mughals arrived Maharajah Mansingh (the then ruler of Amber) guaranteed the safety of his kingdom on becoming a general and minister in Akbar's court and by giving his sister to the Emperor in marriage. With his new position and wealth Man Singh built the imposing fort-palace of Amber below the earlier fort. But the Kachwahas of Amber were seen by other Rajput rulers as having sold out, a blot on her record which transferred to Jaipur, and which time has not erased.

Jai Singh built Jaipur as a planned city. It is divided into seven rectangular blocks, built on a grid of nine square as details in the Shipla Shastra, an ancient Hindu architectural treatise. The broad well-laid-out main
streets (33.8 m: 110 ft wide) cut the side lanes at sharp right-angles. The entire city is encircled by fortified, crenellated walls, and guarded by seven gates.

An attraction of Jaipur is its distinctive pink-orange colouring. The whole of the old city, including many fine palaces and buildings, was constructed from solid blocks of sandstone or faced with the same stone. But it was only in 1853, when Prince Albert visited and the city was painted pink for the first time that it gained its famous title of the 'Pink City'. The soft glow of its buildings and monuments, most magical at sunset have fascinated visitors for over two centuries.

Jaipur is the real gateway of Rajasthan. Though a very busy, commercial capital, the underlying Rajput spirit stubbornly lives on. The traditional dress, decoration and colour can be seen everywhere—the station porters in bright red turbans and jackets, the veiled women in loose-flowing robes of red, orange and yellow, the tiny khol-eyed infants in swaddling clothes of rich embroidered silk. Inside the old city, the atmosphere is electric—a bustling jolly round of ringing bicycle bells,
teeming traffic, itinerant sacred cows, busy bazaars and tourist-hungry rickshaws.

Situated on the plains, Jaipur gets pretty hot. Coolest from October to February, busiest and most popular from January to March, it remains pleasant to mid-April (not too hot but less crowded). Two important dates for your diary are the Elephant Festival just before Holi in March and the spring festival of Gangaur in March/April which culminates on the 17th day after Holi when the Goddess Gauri (Parvati) is paraded from the City Palace and through the City streets. The Teej Festival during early August is an important festival for local women and celebrates the monsoon.

PLACES TO VISIT

1. Nawab Sahib Ki Haveli
2. Hawa Mahal
3. Amber Palace
4. Jantar Mantar
5. City Palace
6. Museum
UDAIPUR

The lake city of Udaipur—City of Dreams' or 'Venice of the East'—is perhaps the most beautiful of all Indian centres. With a relatively low population, it is certainly one of the quietest. A romantic collection of exotic gardens filled with blossoming trees, and fantasy island palaces shimmering in mirror-calm lakes—it is a firm favourite with travellers.

Udaipur was founded by Maharajah Uda Singh, who moved the Mewar capital here following the third and final sack of Chittor in 1567. Uda Singh was ruler of the foremost Rajput clan, the Sisodias, who claimed direct descent from the sun. He was also a keen garden, and he chose this site not only because of its excellent natural protection (encircled by the rugged Aravali mountains), but because it had a good water supply. Under his auspices, Udaipur quickly gained fame as a place of colourful, scented, landscaped gardens, island parks, pavilions and fountains.

But the city's history is mainly one of blood and glory. Uda Singh left his son, Maharana Pratab, a
difficult legacy—the new city of Udaipur fell under immediate attack from Akbar, the Mughal emperor of Delhi. Pratap was a stubborn, yet courageous man angry at the capitulation of Jaipur's Mansingh to the Mughals, he made it a matter of personal honour to resist the northern invaders. With only meagre resources at his disposal, he kept the Mughals successfully at bay for 25 years, before finally being overpowered in 1576. Subsequent Maharans were involved in constant intrigue, war-fare and bloodshed, and Udaipur regained its peace only in 1818 when it came under British control, like much of the rest of Rajasthan.

PLACES TO VISIT

1. Sunset Point
2. Sahelion ki Bari
3. Fateh Sagar lake
4. Nehru Park
5. City Palace & Museum
SRINAGAR

Srinagar is the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir state, and a major tourist attraction for over a hundred years. Lying deep in the heart of the Kashmir valley, it offers beautiful mountain and lake scenery, also a wide range of activities including boating, fishing, trekking, pony-riding, water-sports and golf. An ideal holiday situation it is especially popular as a cool, refreshing break from the summer heat of the Indian plains. Travellers come here to relax, to wind down and so spend at least a few days languishing on a luxury houseboat on Dal Lake. Then they go touring or trekking. Srinagar is the perfect base from which to explore the rest of Kashmir.

The origin of Srinagar is obscure. It was probably founded by the Emperor Ashoka some 2000 years ago, following his pilgrimage to the area. It is said that his daughter Charumati fell in love with Dal Lake, and that to please her Ashoka built a small vihara on the site. A small township grew up round it called Srinagar or city of beautiful scenery. The present city was established by Rajah Pravarasen II in the 6th century AD though it was
during the reign of the great Badshah (King Zain-ul-Abidin, 1421-72) that Persian and Central Asian artisans were brought in, and Kashmir's famous traditions of carpet-weaving, shawl-making and handicraft production originated. Later, under the rule of the Mughals, Srinagar acquired its remarkable mosques, its garden and waterways, and its popular label of 'Paradise on Earth'.

The houseboats came into being during the British Raj. The Dogra Maharajahs of Kashmir were just as appreciative of Srinagar's cool, scenic climate as the British (who had ceded them sovereignty of Kashmir in 1846), and forbade them to build or to own land here. Undismayed, the British officers took to the lakes instead, living on the waters of the Dal in fully-equipped beautifully ornate houseboats. The first one was constructed in 1857. Today, there are over 1300 houseboats on Srinagar's lakes.

In 1947, Jammu and Kashmir became part of the Indian Union. Since then, the area has been continually under dispute. Both Pakistan and India want Kashmir but all Kashmir wants is to be left alone. Her main industry is
tourism and its success depends much on a quick and regular turnover of her famous handicrafts

PLACES TO VISIT

1. Nehru Park
2. Shalimar Bagh
3. Nishat Bagh
4. Dal lake
5. Floating Gardens
6. Hughal Garden

KULU

Kulu town is situated on the banks of the winding River Beas, looking down the beautiful 'Valley of Gods' from a cool altitude of 1200 m. Unlike Manali it has not been developed for tourism but the town of Kulu is the administrative centre of the district. This means less facilities, but more peace and quiet. In fact the whole valley is often referred to as the Kulu Valley although this title is not strictly correct.

Kulu is mentioned in Hieum Tsiang's travelogue, and changed hands many times over the centuries before
coming under British rule in the 19th century. Much of its history is tied up in its principal landmark, the temple of Raghunath, dedicated to Lord Rama. The story goes that in the mid-17th century, the Rajah of the area fell sick, and took advice from his holy men to send out to the locality of Iydya for the murtis (sacred images) of raghunath (Rama). In thanks for his prompt recovery, he donated the entire valley to the gods, and made Kulu the permanent home of the holy icons, erecting the present temple for their safekeeping.

Like Manali, Kulu has a wide variety of hill and mountain people. The women wear mainly traditional costumes- woollen homespun dresses (usually cordbelted), embroidered shawls and leather moccasins. The men, compromising with Western fashions, wear a strange combination of Kulu caps and wool jackets, and Levi jeans and plastic anoraks. Unlike in Manali, where there are so many tourists it is common to be 'blanked' by locals, the people of Kulu are very open, friendly and keen to talk to foreigners. They are also urbanised- a thriving chain of hi-fi camera and electrical shops (plus several video parlours) have sprung up between the old, tumbling wooden
houses manned by grizzled tailors, dentists and fruit-and-nut men. Surprisingly, few of the 'locals' at all but come from neighbouring valleys and other parts of Himachal.

The valley stretches northward for almost 80 km (50 miles) from near Mandi at only 760 m to the Rohtang Pass at 3978 m. Kulu is prettiest from April to June, and is best for mountain treks and views from September to November. But the town itself really comes alive only during the important Dussehra festival, which takes place in October after the monsoons. The festival starts on the 10th day of the rising moon, and continues with mounting vigour (and increasingly competitive dance competitions) for 7 days. All over India, Dussehra is celebrated to commemorate Rama's victory over the demon king Ravana. But in Kulu, it is Raghunath as main man of the valley who is the focus of festivities: some 200 gods from temples all over the valley are brought here to pay him tribute. Hadimba is brought down from Manali to commence proceedings, and celebrations continue until she goes away again.

PLACES TO VISIT
1. Shiva Temple
2. Raghunath
3. Vaishno Devi Temple
SHIMLA (Simla)

Former summer capital of British India, Shimla is the largest hill station in the world and the one most associated with the 'old Raj'. Spread over a high 12-Km (7 1/2 mile) ridge on the lower spurs of the north-west Himalaya, its cool heights (2100 m) have always endeared it to foreign visitors. Favoured by politicians, army officers, writers (Kipling based his Plain Tales of the Hills on Shimla) and now tourists, it is a place designed for complete relaxation with lovely views, a pleasant climate, and more than just a memory of the Raj still clinging to it. It is the least 'Indian' of all hill station, a probable hangover of the 'affectation that existed among officials of 'being very English', of knowing nothing at all about India, of eschewing Indian words and customs' (P. Woodruff, The Guardians).

Shimla probably derives its name from 'Shyamla', a title of the goddess Kali whose temple was found in the thickly wooded his region of Jackoo in the early 19th century. Another explanation traces of its origin to 'Shyeamalay', the blue-slate house, erected by a fakir on Jackoo, the first nucleus of the settlement. However, 'Shimlah' or 'Shumlah' as pronounced by the local
hill-people, is probably the actual word from which the station takes its name.

Presently a peaceful holiday resort, Shimla was born out of the turmoil of the early 19th-century Gurkha wars. Discovered by heat-weary British officers during the conflicts of 1819, its cool, healthy climate made it an ideal hill station on which to erect a summer-village of military tents and bivouacs. Then in 1822, young Major Kennedy started the ball rolling by building the first permanent residence. Nurtured and popularised by the Government, the elite and the traders, a town rapidly grew up, and Shimla became a highly fashionable retreat—particularly for place-hunting young officers who wanted to 'get on' by ingratiating themselves with the military high-ups holidaying here. It was popular also with those who had been banished from India for misconduct, who escaped to Shimla to build themselves a substitute life of gay parties and revelry. Most notable as a place to escape the heat of the plains, it was only when Lord Lawrence visited Shimla as Viceroy in 1864 that it was at last accepted as the official summer capital of the Raj.
In 1904 the construction of the remarkable Kalka-Shimla railway provided easy access to the hill station. By this time, Shimla had become a thriving town of English red-roofed cottages, Georgian-style houses and Gothic government buildings like Barnes Court, Kennedy House, the old Viceregal Lodge, and Gordon Castle. The palatial residences of the Governor and the Commander-in-Chief were the sites of regular summer balls where frenetic dance and revelry were the order of the day. Polo, cricket and tennis tournaments gave way in the evenings to packed houses at the Gaiety Theatre (built to look like the old Garrick in London), while twice-weekly gymkhanas and races in the spacious playground occupied any remaining free time. In its heyday, Shimla represented the most sophisticated seat of British high society in India.

BOMBAY

Bombay, is a dynamic, go-ahead city of tycoons, skyscrapers, film studios and big business— the nearest thing to the West in the East, and the modern Gateway to India. In just 40 years, it has mushroomed from a small,
though thriving, coastal port-town of 500,000 inhabitants to a crowded industrial metropolis of 11 million people. A futuristic vision of India, with gleaming luxury hotels, high-rise business houses, and air-conditioned shopping centres, it is an irresistible land of opportunity for the masses of homeless, jobless poor, and refugees that flood in at an average rate of 6000 new families per day. They come in search of work or glamour or money, and most of them end up sleeping on the streets. The result is severe overcrowding and an appalling shortage of housing. A second city of ragged, squalid slum dwellings has grown up alongside the modern business capital of gleaming plate glass buildings. Bombay is, like Calcutta, a city of powerful contrasts. though it's not just all the problems of modern India that are highlighted here, but all her potential and brighter prospects too. Here there is hope, optimism, and great prosperity—for Bombay handles half the country's foreign trade, manufactures the same percentage of her textiles, and pays a third of her income tax. The affluent rich—a hardworking cosmopolitan mixture of Hindus and Parsis, Jews and Jains, Arabs and Sikhs—divert surplus revenue to the philanthropic
construction of hospitals, schools, museums and rest houses. But it is Bombay's action that draws everybody here—this is a city bursting with life, colour, noise and vitality. And you can almost smell the money.

All this has happened since the Second World War since the rise of India's new business class in the wake of Independence. Up until the 18th century, Bombay was just a marshy, diseased quag of seven islands. Inhabited by a simple fisherfolk called the kolis. Their name for the place was Mumbai or Mombaim, after their patron goddess Mumba Aai (Mother Mumba). This was later corrupted into Bom Bahia 'good bay) by the Portuguese. Ptolemy mentioned the islands as Heptanesia in the 2nd century, AD, after which they faded from historical sight until occupied in the 13th century by the Hindu King, Bhimdev. The Sultans of Gujarat held the site briefly, and then the Portuguese arrived (1534). The first flush of Portuguese enthusiasm wore off—they saw its potential as a port, but the malarial swamps dissuaded them from developing it as a trading post and they offloaded it on the British, as part of Catherine of Braganza's dowry when she married Charles II of England (1661). Charles didn't see its possibilities either, and leased Bom Bahia, port
islands both to the British East India Company for a nominal £10 per year in gold (1668). The Company's President, Gerald Aungier, became the founder father of modern Bombay, bringing in the influential Parsi merchant class and a host of assorted artisans and builders, to make possible the conversion of the port from pestilential swampland to thriving trading-centre. By his death, it was well on the way to becoming the centre of all west coast trade in India. But it was in the mid 19th century that development suddenly became rapid—the railway arrived so did the first textile mills and Bartle Frere's stately Victorian buildings. A series of large-scale land-reclamation projects took place (1862), the seven isolated mu-flat islands were joined into a single land mass, and Bombay's future success was assured. An excellent biography of Bombay, City of Gold by Gillian Tindall was reprinted by Penguin India in 1992.

PLACES TO VISIT

1. Gateway of India
2. Aquarium
3. Jain Temple
4. Hanging Garden
5. Kamla Nehru Park
6. P.W. Museum