



Margot Bigg finds peaceful spaces and havens for booklovers in the Gujarati city



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5 SWATI SNACKS Gujarat is known for its sweet-and-spicy cuisine, and no visit to Ahmedabad would be complete without sampling the local fare. Citizens swear by the vegetarian Swati Snacks, about a mile from the Art Book Centre. The casual café has simple, sleek interiors and attracts a steady flow of executives for lunch. Even if you aren't very hungry, it's a great place to take an air-conditioned break over a cooling yoghurt *lassi*.

The menu features a wide selection of snacks and traditional main courses – dishes include *panki chatni*, pancakes steamed in a banana leaf, and *dhokla*, savoury cakes made of lentils and gram flour. You could also opt for the *dahl dhokli* (lentil stew with flatbread dumplings), although be warned that the dahl in Gujarat is much more sugary than in other parts of the country. As with most restaurants in this "dry" state, alcohol is not served. Open daily 12pm-10.30pm; Law Garden, Netaji Rodd, Ellisbridge; tel +91 79 2640 5900; swatisnacks.com

6 LAW GARDEN Finish by heading across the street to Law Garden, a leafy park that's popular with joggers and well-heeled locals out for strolls. It is an excellent people-watching spot at any time of day, but it's certainly at its most colourful – and photogenic – at sundown, when it is transformed into a lively night market featuring dozens of clothing vendors and street food stalls. The market is known for its wide selection of *ghagra cholis* (traditional matching skirt and top sets) and Gujarati costume jewellery. Many people just come to browse, but if you do intend to buy, make sure to bargain hard. Open daily dawn-10pm; Law Garden Road. ■

AHMEDABAD

1 SABARMATI ASHRAM (GANDHI'S ASHRAM) Start your tour of Gujarat's largest city with a visit to the Sabarmati Ashram, more frequently referred to as "Gandhi's ashram". The Mahatma founded the ashram (a spiritual hermitage) in 1915 and moved it to this site, on the banks of the River Sabarmati a short distance from the city centre, two years later. He lived here for about 12 years, and it was from here that he led a march to the coastal city of Dandi, over 400km away, in protest of the British Salt Law – an event that was instrumental in helping India to gain independence.

Today, Sabarmati Ashram is a museum with exhibits about Gandhi's life, including a photo gallery and an archive of his letters and journals, and you can tour the his old living quarters. A bookstore sells tomes on Gandhi (in English) that aren't available outside the subcontinent. Children play cricket on the ashram's grounds, and you may even be asked to join in. Open daily 8.30am-6.30pm; free entry; Ashram Road, Old Vadaj; sabarmati.org

2 JAMA MASJID For about Rs 150 (£1.80), you can hire an autorickshaw to take you the 6km from the ashram to the Jama Masjid (Friday Mosque), one of the city's most spectacular buildings. Built in 1424 under the auspices of Ahmedabad's founder, Ahmed Shah, the yellow sandstone structure blends traditional Indian aesthetics with Islamic structural design.

At its centre is a 75-metre-long courtyard, while the huge prayer hall is flanked with 260 intricately carved domes that support 15 domed sections. The interiors incorporate decorative elements and iconography usually associated with the Jain and Hindu faiths, including lotus flowers and the *Om* symbol – it is believed that the mosque was constructed using remnants of destroyed Hindu and Jain temples, and the non-Muslim symbols were likely pulled from these previous holy sites. Both men and women should dress modestly – ladies should cover their heads. Open daily dawn-dusk; free entry; Mahatma Gandhi Road.



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3 NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF DESIGN Grab an autorickshaw from the front of the Jama Masjid to take you to the National Institute of Design (NID), a 15-minute drive away. As one of India's premier arts schools, the NID attracts the best and brightest budding designers in the country. Its campus doubles up as an open-air art museum, and there are displays showcasing the best of the students' projects dotted around the campus.

Make sure you visit the gift shop, where you'll find a high-quality selection of everything from handmade jewellery to unusual furniture, all designed by the NID's students, faculty and alumni. Open Mon-Fri 9am-6pm; free entry; Bhagtacharya Road, Paldi; nid.edu



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4 ART BOOK CENTRE This family-run bookstore, about a five-minute ride away, is located on the first floor of a quaint old house and specialises in hard-to-find art and design books from across India, and primarily in English. Since opening in 1970, the Art Book Centre has become something of an Ahmedabad institution, drawing in a steady stream of bibliophilic visitors and students from the NID. It's an excellent place to find rare and out-of-print titles, and the knowledgeable owners are welcoming and helpful. Even if you don't plan to buy anything, it's worth dropping in to browse the beautiful antique hardbacks. Open Mon-Sat 10am-6pm, Sun 10am-5pm; Madalpur, Near Jain Temple, Ellisbridge; artbookcenter.net

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