

travel
LAND OF THE KING

Ratnagiri is the home of the famed Alphonso mango, and right now is the best time to go. The beaches, forts, temples are a bonus



A worker carries a crate of Alphonso mangoes in Ratnagiri

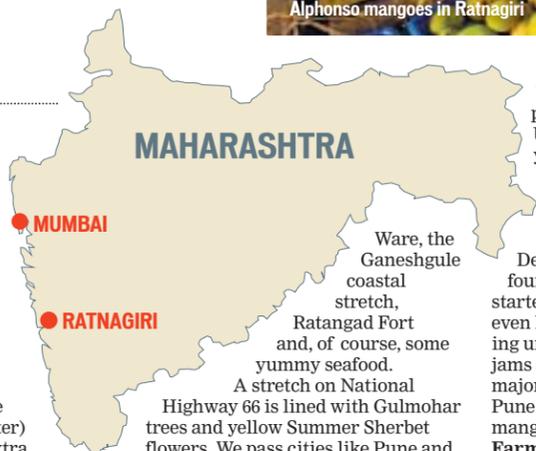
Poorva Joshi
poorva.joshi@hindustantimes.com

The Konkan region of Maharashtra is often considered a hazardous zone for long drives: there are winding roads, blind turns, and steep downward slopes flanking the Arabian Sea on one side. There is also the treacherous continental shelf (slope of land going underwater) which means that an extra step on the beach will land you in dangerously deep waters. As the iconic video game Need for Speed (NFS) aptly puts it: "If you drive off the road, you can sleep with the fishes tonight."

What makes a trip to the area worth it, then? May marks the mango harvest season. The roads are flanked by squat mango shrubs. With over a hundred mangoes hanging from a single tree, the air you breathe is redolent of the king of fruits. Additionally, you can take part in mango picking, visit processing units, as well as ancient forts, and, of course, indulge in Konkani cuisine.

DAY 1

We leave from Mumbai at 6am — it's a long drive to Ratnagiri, one of the major mango cultivation districts (others being Devgad and Sindhudurg) 340km south of Mumbai. The city is known for its pristine beaches including Bhatye Beach, the twin beaches of Aare



MAHARASHTRA

MUMBAI

RATNAGIRI

Ware, the Ganeshgule coastal stretch, Ratangad Fort and, of course, some yummy seafood.

A stretch on National Highway 66 is lined with Gulmohar trees and yellow Summer Sherbet flowers. We pass cities like Pune and Kolhapur, so carrying snacks for the road is unnecessary. Think Misal Pav in Kolhapur for breakfast: the spice ought to wake you up.

We reach Ratnagiri an hour past noon — the perfect time for lunch. We are specifically told to visit **Amantran Restaurant at the Juna Mal Naka**. The place does not disappoint: the pomfret fry and crab lollipops are the perfect beginning to a Konkani holiday.

Post-lunch, we make our way to **Pawas**, a neighbouring town 18km south from Ratnagiri (30 minutes by road on the Maharashtra State Highway 4). We are here to see **Desai Bandhu Ambewale's (DBA) mango farm and processing unit** (desaibandhuambewale.com). One of the oldest (82-years-old) and largest mango producers and exporters in Maharashtra, they own a 100-acre mango plantation in the area. We are surrounded by mango trees — reminiscent of a bamboo farm, but with mangoes dangling from the branches.

We are told that the produce is primarily exported to the US, UK, Dubai and, over the last few years, even Japan.

What's their speciality? They claim the skin of their mangoes is thinner than usual, a secret plantation technique the Desai family has protected since founder Raghunath Bhaurao Desai started the business in 1932. DBA even has an on-site mango processing unit that produces mango pulp, jams and mango-infused breads. The major markets for these products are Pune and Mumbai. Other prominent mango farms in the area are **Anish Farms** (anishfarms.com) and **AAR Mango Farm** (02353-225243).

We leave from Pawas at 6pm and make our way to **Ganpatipule beach** in 45 minutes (26km away). The perpetually-booked Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation resort (we had to book two months in advance) at Ganpatipule runs along the beach. Naked bulbs light the site and red tiled cottages are scattered across. The **Ganpatipule Temple** is a 10-minute walk from the resort.

We treat ourselves to fish chops and sol kadhi (a savoury buttermilk-based drink) for dinner and sleep to the sound of waves crashing against each other.

DAY 2

It's another early morning at Ganpatipule and we visit a neighbouring temple that houses a 400-year-old Ganpati idol. It is believed to have appeared from the surrounding sand. This deity faces west and is said to guard the Western Ghats.

The beach before the temple is cordoned off. The continental shelf is far too steep and has resulted in many accidental deaths over the years. But if you are like us and can't visit a beach without going for a swim, the twin beaches of **Aare Waare** are a 20-minute drive from the temple. The pristine beaches offer a long walking stretch and are safer to go for a short swim in the ocean.

The most exciting attraction in the region, however, is the **Ganeshgule Beach**, a 15-minute drive from the temple. It offers adventure water sports such as banana boat ride, water rafting and jet skies at affordable prices (₹300 per ride onward).

We head back to MTDC for a lunch of puran poli, masala rice (a Maharashtrian preparation of rice) and aamras and then make our way

OTHER MUST-VISIT PLACES



→ **Tilak House**

The birthplace of freedom fighter Bal Gangadhar Tilak. His house has been converted into a museum and features some of his possessions.



→ **Thibaw Palace**

Located in Ganpatipule, the palace was built in 1911 by the British for the exiled king of Burma — King Thibaw. It is an ideal sunset point and offers a panoramic view of Someshwar Creek, Bhatye Bridge, Pawas and the Arabian Sea.

back to Ratnagiri.

The city is also a port and stretches into the Arabian Sea. At the tip of the peninsula, is the **Ratnadurga Fort** and the **Ratnagiri Lighthouse**. Built in the 1300s under the Bahamani Sultanate, the fort is famous for its horseshoe-like shape. After a quick lunch, again at Amantran (the food is worth the repeat) we head back to Mumbai and make it by nightfall.

■ **Ratnadurga Fort; (left) MTDC resort**
PHOTOS: MTDC, KEERTI BHANDARY, GETTY IMAGES



my ideal weekend

'I'M A WORKOUT FREAK'

Actor Urvashi Rautela likes her cheat meals on weekends, but won't miss her workouts

Dine out, order in, or cook a meal on weekends?

Dine out at Wasabi at The Taj Mahal Palace (Colaba).

Can: cook a five-course meal/ make a sandwich/boil water/don't know how the gas works.

I can cook a five-course meal that will satisfy your hunger and won't leave you worrying about eating unhealthy: think salads. Lots of it.

Where do you party?

I don't party. But I like to head to Olive in Bandra for its vibe and great food.

Street food that makes your day?

Vada pav anywhere in Mumbai.



A TV show you could watch reruns of all Sunday?
Baywatch.

Strictly salads and grilled chicken, or cheese/chocolate cheat for the weekend?

Cheat meals can be a great tool to develop your physique. They can reset hormones

responsible for metabolism and insulin regulation, replenish glycogen for increased energy, and keep calorie-burning mechanisms high.

■ A still from Baywatch

On weekends: work out like it's just another day/go easy/exercise... what's that?

I work out at least three times a week.

Where do you love getting your breakfast and what's your go-to order?

It has to be Indigo Deli. It has good quality meats, cheese and bread.

Party till dawn or wake up for yoga at dawn?

Gym. I am a workout freak.

A movie/book you've been meaning to catch up on?

Mary Kom. I am a sports fanatic.

What's the one thing can totally make your weekend?

Spending quality time with my family.

What one thing can break it?

A fight with my little brother.

— AS TOLD TO MEENAKSHI IYER

48hrs

■ **Ganesh Temple in Ganpatipule**



WHERE TO STAY

→ **MTDC** has resorts in Ganpatipule and Velneswar in Ratnagiri district. They also provide Bread & Breakfast (BNB) facility.

☎ 2284 5678

Email: reservation@maharashtra tourism.gov.in

Cost: ₹2,250 onwards (Ganpatipule); ₹1,450 onwards (Velneswar)

→ **Atithi Parinay** offers eco-friendly cottages and traditionally cooked food. Spread over four acres, it is set amidst



mango, coconut and banana plantations and surrounded by the Sahyadris.

☎ Medha Sahasrabudhe on 9049981309
Visit: atithiparinay.com

Cost: Non-AC room for ₹3,500; AC room for ₹3,900 for two

HOW TO REACH

→ **BY ROAD:** Take the Old Bombay Goa Highway; take the right turn at Sangameswar and Hathkhamba to visit Ratnagiri. From Ratnagiri, take the coastal road; Ganpatipule is 25km away.

→ **BY RAIL:** You can board the Konkan Railway or the Jana Shatabdi Express; it takes approximately four-five hours.

■ **Urvashi Rautela**

