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Exploring Mumbai During Monsoon Season

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India

1 Comment

When I booked my airplane ticket to [Mumbai, India](#), I knew that I would be arriving during the monsoon season (mid June to mid September). While I've visited other regions of India in the summer, I was pretty clueless about the torrential rain that affected this part of the country.

Mumbai — the historic, vibrant, and colorful city that's home to playboy billionaires, socialites, and Bollywood stars — sits in the pathway for the seasonal, moisture-laden, Indian Ocean winds. As a result, gray skies and rain are the norm.

Without much warning, gusts of wind swooshed through the congested Mumbai streets as layered dark clouds released bountiful amounts of rain. Locals scurried about as visitors looked on with amazement. Streets flooded. Gridlock occurred. Motorcycles weaved in and out as if they were racing down a slalom ski course. Horns blared non-stop while exuberant kids jumped in muddy puddles on side streets.

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Don't be discouraged if you also find yourself in Mumbai during the monsoon. With a flexible attitude (not to mention an umbrella, a raincoat, and some water-proof shoes), you'll be able to discover Mumbai without much difficulty!

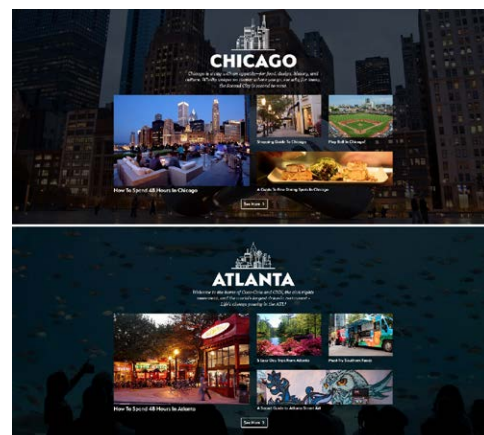
Photographing Landmarks



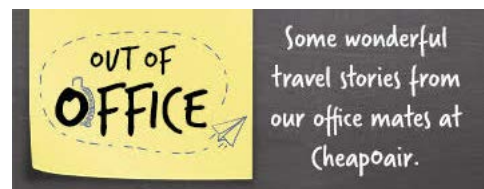
Image via Sandy Bornstein

I learned early on that outdoor photo opportunities would be hit or miss. My pictures of Mumbai's notable landmarks and skyline — Gateway of India, Marine Drive/Chowpatty Beach, Mumbai University, the High Court, Victoria Terminus, Siddhivinayak Temple, and Haji Ali — are less than ideal. But overcast skies and rain-streaked pictures accurately recorded my Mumbai monsoon adventure.

Gateway of India and the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel



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BLACK HISTORY



Image via Sandy Bornstein

Pelting rainstorms oftentimes persuaded me to seek shelter. When I was at the Gateway of India, I bolted across the street to the memorable [Taj Mahal Palace Hotel](#). In 1903, J. N. Tata built this spectacular building. I couldn't resist an elegant snack in the Sea Lounge restaurant with a view of the Arabian Sea and the Gateway of India.

When I exited the modern Tower lobby, I stood silently at the memorial wall next to the waterfall. I read through the names of the 31 people who were murdered during the 2008 terrorist attack.

Kala Ghoda Area



Image via Sandy Bornstein

Within walking distance of the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel are three indoor venues—[Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya](#) (Prince of Wales Museum), [Jehangir Art Gallery](#), and the [National Gallery of Modern Art](#).

I wouldn't recommend cramming a visit to all on one day. While I zipped through the steaming hot natural history section of the Prince of Wales Museum, I spent a couple of hours strolling through the Hindu, Buddhist, Nepal-Tibet, Chinese, Japanese, and European art galleries. Even though the

MONTH STORIES



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Tip #1: Avoid the tourist traps and n squares for meals out.

displays weren't photo friendly, I walked away with an appreciation of Eastern artifacts.

The Jehangir Art Gallery showcases several new artists each week. You could visit this gallery once a week for several years without ever seeing the same artist twice. These onsite artists were eager to talk about their work. If you value contemporary art, this should be "must-see" on your list.

Tip: Before entering the National Gallery of Modern Art, check their website. Sometimes the exhibits are very narrowly focused. You may love or hate the featured artist.

Restaurants



Image via Sandy Bornstein

Heading to a local restaurant is another way to escape the unpredictable downpours and persistent high humidity. When I was in the Kala Ghoda area, I took detours to Kala Ghoda Café, the Nutcracker restaurant, and the Pantry restaurant. These tiny cafés are busy during peak times and serve both Indian and western entrées.

Yep, a crowded restaurant is always a good sign. A lack of foot traffic may cause vendors to use less fresh ingredients or reheated food. I'd rather wait for a table than suffer the consequences of inferior kitchen practices. Trust me. After traveling in India a few times, I'm keenly aware of my food choices. When in doubt, I nibble on some nuts that I carry in my purse

I have to admit that Indian cuisine is rarely my top food choice. When I was in the mood for local cuisine, I followed my expat friends' suggestions and avoided the tempting street food. Instead, I sampled a potpourri of restaurants.



How to Save on Food Whi

TRAVEL QUIZZES



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Are you ready for festival season? That's right, it's almost upon us. If you still haven't gotten one of those...



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There are so many different ways to get outdoors -- whether you simply

I went to Britannia & Company Restaurant (Ballard Estate) for an introduction to authentic Iranian Parsi food. My taste buds soared when I tried an assortment of starters at the Bombay Canteen (Lower Parel). I would definitely return to this restaurant for their innovative twist on Indian cuisine.

I learned about Gujarati food by visiting Swati Snacks (Tardeo and Nariman Point). This is a place where you can taste authentic street food without worrying about getting sick. If you're open to eating seafood, consider Trishna (Kala Ghoda) or Mahesh Lunch Home (Fort, Kurla East & Juhu).

During monsoon season, some pickier eaters choose to avoid Mumbai's remarkable seafood. The local seafood industry is adversely affected by the spawning season and the turbulent tides that limit fishing offshore. Restaurants are forced to import fish from other places. I chose a conservative approach and only ate fish in recommended places.

A Few More Indoor Attractions

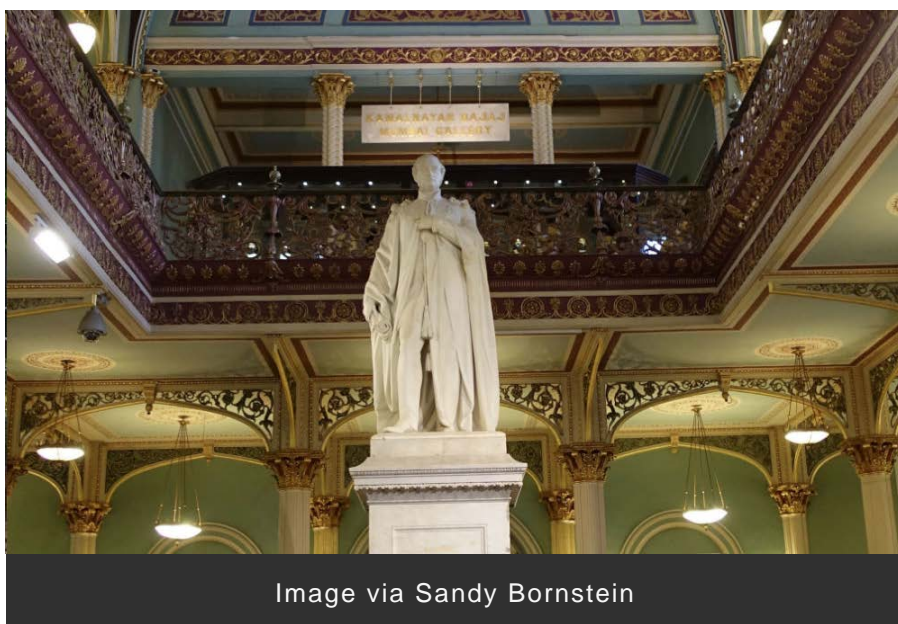


Image via Sandy Bornstein

Three other noteworthy indoor attractions are scattered in other parts of the city. I saw elements of British history when I read the ornate inscriptions that date back to the 18th century in [St Thomas' Cathedral](#) (Fort Area).

I was impressed with the exquisite interior of the [Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum](#) (Byculla). The main floor exhibits will appeal to an adult audience while the dioramas and models of Indian culture on the second floor are better suited for kids. Movie mavens will gawk at the Bollywood photo exhibit.

After visiting [Mani Bhanwan](#) (Gamdevi), my understanding of Indian history and Mahatma Gandhi increased tenfold.

During a mild rain, I watched masses of people dart in and out of trains inside the Victoria Terminus, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Two and a half million commuters walk through the station each day. When the rainfall exceeds a certain level, the trains stop running. I recommend avoiding train stations during those times.

fancy a walk in the park or have your eye set on...



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We might be loving the crisp weather and new snow right now, but give it a couple weeks -- after all that holiday cheer...

Brief Stops Outdoors—Dhobi Ghat and Dabbawalas

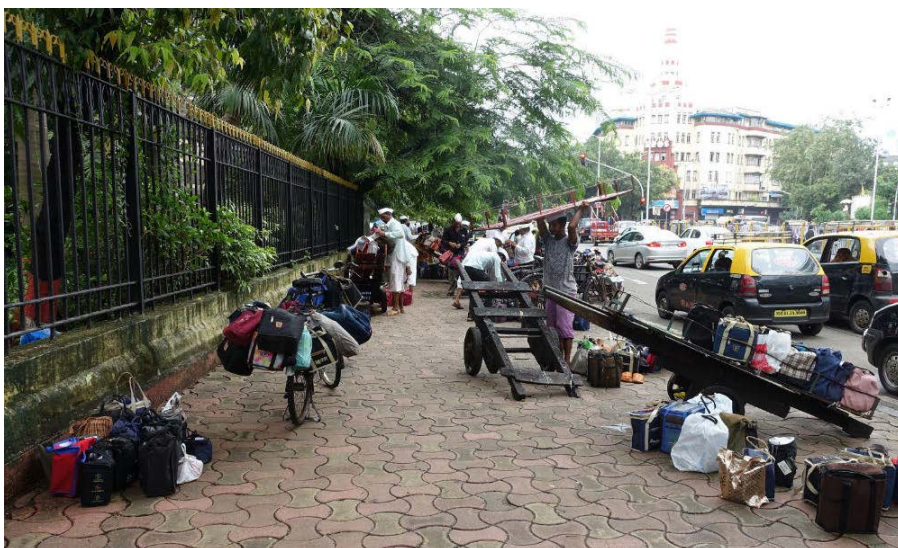


Image via Sandy Bornstein

In between raindrops, I found my way to the Dhobi Ghat near the Mahalaxmi Railway Station. Each day thousands of garments are washed by hand and then line dried. As the next round of rain started to splash onto the pavement, I turned to my tour guide and said, “How does anything dry during the monsoon season?” She shrugged her shoulders and walked away.

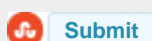
While the weather was cooperating, I went to one of the launching spots for the [Dabbawalas](#) (literally translated: “one who carries the box”). This unique and well-respected food delivery system was highlighted in the *Lunchbox* movie and has operated for more than 100 years. Rain or shine, these individuals deliver more than 200,000 lunches per day.

Outside the gate of the head office for the Western Railway in Churchgate, I photographed dozens of men overloading their bicycles with labeled lunchbox containers before they peddled off.

Just like the Dabbawalas who never let the weather affect their daily rides, I chose to explore Mumbai in and out of the raindrops.

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