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A journey of diversity to the Statue of Unity & Ekta Nagar

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It was curiosity that got me on the plane to Vadodara in Gujarat to visit the country's new tourist hot spot, the tallest statue in the world, the Statue of Unity at Ekta Nagar.

This two-night journey turned out to be not only about learning about Iron Man and Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel, but also about a brand-new township, Ekta Nagar (formerly Kevadia village). There is little doubt that standing at 182 meters, the awe-inspiring Statue of Unity (SOU) is a technological and engineering marvel, and an apt tribute to the leader who united India. However, the unexpected diversity in this circuit is a delight that unfolds layer by layer during the stay.

I checked in at the spacious luxury resort, Statue of Unity Tent City 1 by Evoke Experiences. I quickly realised that this is one of the best locations to start

exploring Ekta Nagar. This riverside property perfectly showcases the valley between the Vindhya and Satpura ranges, as well as the tremendous diversity of flora and fauna that the Narmada fosters.

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Here are fabulous views, fantastic flora and fauna, music of bird calls echoing through the forest and pristine river waters flowing like silver ribbons through the terrain. I also had a taste of rustic yet

charming tribal and local cuisine that introduces new flavours to the palate.

Staying at this convenient yet elite accommodation, I was advised to book out early. Hence, it is best to plan, especially if you are planning a conference or wedding for which Tent City 1 is ideally suited. With all meals included, a convenient way to explore the attractions is to take advantage of the packages on offer here, which include sightseeing tours featuring boat cruises, river rafting, a taste of local culinary staples like thepla, kadi, and fafda, as well as a glimpse into tribal living. Once these practical details are taken care of, nothing distracts from the immersive experience.

With private vehicles barred, tourist transportation is provided by regulated, free, or nominally charged buses, permit taxis, as well as charming pink three-



wheelers driven by local women. This ensures the serenity of the area is undisturbed, a rare bonus for any tourist destination.

The Statue of Unity standing on the former Sadhu hillock is top billing. A tour to Ekta Nagar is even more relevant now as we celebrate the 150th centenary of Sardar Patel for a year from October 31, his birthday. The SOU venue is ticketed at two price points: an economical one to visit the ground level and a more expensive one that cuts waiting time and also lets you enjoy the vastness and breathtaking high-altitude views from an observation desk at 153 metres. From here, you get a stunning panoramic view of the Sardar Sarovar dam and its reservoir.

Built swiftly over a record 46 months, the Statue of Unity has three stories and includes a garden, museum and exhibition area. Whatever ticket you choose, both are delightful options.

The view from the observation deck at the heart of the statue is indicative of its vast



scale, while the museum situated within the body of the structure provides context for the monument. Now a shiny bronze, the guide informs that in 100 years, the Patel statue will be like the Statue of Liberty - bright green, oxidised by a natural process.

For visitors like me, this is an exciting detail since one can already see that the toe of Iron Man is turning green! Looking up at the towering structure from ground level is staggering, as you are a mere speck against the enormity and complexity of the gigantic, yet artistic, sculpture created by national awardee Ram Sutar.

The Statue of Unity ticked, and I moved into a slower tempo to enjoy the richness of the terrain. Lush forests roll down to the sparkling waters of the Narmada River, now swollen by the monsoon rain. The smooth, wide roads are spotless and free

from trash. Profuse greenery melts to beautiful orange sunsets. Now and then, along the way, you glimpse Sardar Patel looming large over the skyline and the incredible Sardar Sarovar Dam with water gushing through its sluice gates.

An unexpected pleasure is walking through a variety of well-curved green spaces, such as the Arogya (wellness) garden, the Cactus garden, the Butterfly garden, or the Valley of Flowers garden (great for photography). For children, there is a well-populated zoo with exotic inhabitants. By evening, get ready to wind down to a spiritual evening aarti and more.

As dusk descended, an unforgettable touristic experience unfolded at the Statue of Unity. The mood shifted to awe as a high-tech, stunning laser show illuminated the sky, followed by a sound and light show and a novelty, the Glow Garden. Post a typical Gujarati dinner thali, the in-house storyteller at SOU Tent City 1 captivates an interested audience with charming folk tales of the region.

Getting to Ekta City is convenient from Vadodara by air, rail (it has its own railway station) and scenic road drive. Solo, with family, or in a group, the trip will remain a montage of diverse memories - amazing technology and engineering, art and architecture, culture, and cuisine, nature and serenity, adventure and spirituality and also a homage to the statesman who made modern India.

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