

# Town with a colonial past

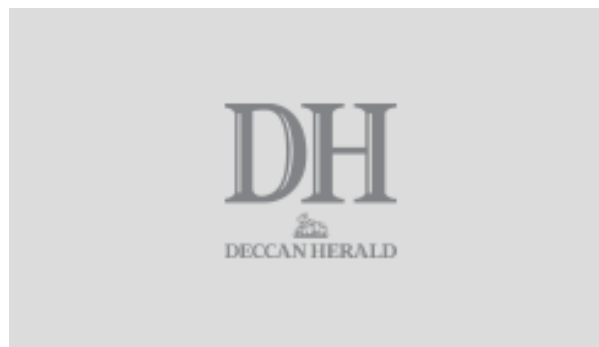
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Shefali Tripathi Mehta,

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Pachmarhi has a history of long battles between the British and the inhabitants of the Satpuras who had lived there for centuries. And it was only when their ruler, Raja Bhabhut Singh, was defeated in 1857 that the British took over. They declared the Satpura forest area as reserve forests, India's first, and Pachmarhi with its invigorating climate was developed as a sanatorium for the British army in 1862. It became an army cantonment and the Army Education Corps Training College & Centre was established in 1921.

It is still, predominantly, a cantonment town and it is not uncommon to see platoons marching on the broad, tree-canopied, endless roads, or catch the musical notes wafting out of the military music wing on a wondrously silent evening. The lush landscape of Pachmarhi is dotted with old British bungalows, churches and cemeteries. Literally, a one-horse town, Pachmarhi used to have only one tonga as public transport till the early '80s.

Evening walks along never-ending, wide, no-vehicle roads were interrupted only by clouds descending and enveloping you in a mist for a few moments. By day, one could wade through clear streams and walk miles in the sun-dappled pine forests around town. More tourists have since discovered Pachmarhi, but the beauty is still unmarred. It is not crowded like the typical hill stations of Shimla-Manali and is an ideal place for a relaxed holiday.

Largely untouched even today, people throng to see the stunning natural sights of Pachmarhi — gigantic falls, clear pools, gaping ravines and breathtaking sunsets. Famed for its magnificent waterfalls and bathing pools, a dip in the crystal clear waters of a

natural spring pool is a must-do in Pachmarhi.

The most famous waterfall, the Big Fall or the Rajat Prapat, which literally means silver falls, is so called because the water turns to a shimmering silver colour in the sunlight. It is a 350-foot, horsetail fall. Bee Fall is another spectacular sight that this hill station offers. The waterfall scatters wide as it cascades and the sound it makes is likened to the buzz of bees. A dip in the pool here is irresistible. Another stunning attraction is the Duchess Fall, which flows down in three cascades. To reach the base of the first, one must trek down a steep and rough track. All the pools at the falls are safe for swimming. Dhoopgarh, the highest peak of the Satpuras, is a sunset point and commands a magnificent view of the Satpura ranges. The red sandstone hills and rock faces all round assume a crimson hue in the light of the setting sun. As opposed to this desolate landscape, Handi Khoh is a 300-foot-steep gorge amidst a dense forest cover.

The Pandavas are believed to have spent a part of their exile here in what is known as the Pandava Caves. Now a protected monument, these caves have lent Pachmarhi its name. There are several other places of religious significance, many of these dedicated to Lord Shiva. Around 1,200 steps lead up to Chauragarh where the devotees of Shiva congregate on Mahashivratri. Jatashankar is a formation of rocks in an underground cave that looks like the locks of Shiva.

The place has over a hundred shivlings and a stream runs through the cave. The source of the stream has remained a mystery, and therefore it is called the Gupt Ganga. There is also the Bada Mahadev and the Gupt Mahadev, other sites worth a visit.

#### Local attractions

- Pure honey and locally grown chironji nuts are good local products to buy.
- Pachmarhi can be visited year-round. n After the rains, Pachmarhi struts its beauty in lush greenery.
- The Jain, Gujarati, Maharashtrian thali meals are wholesome, light and quite suitably 'unlimited'. They are a real treat.
- Places to stay range from the economy lodges and guest houses to exclusive cottages and heritage hotels run by Madhya Pradesh tourism. Jeeps can be hired for sightseeing.

#### How to get there

- Rail: The nearest and most convenient railhead is Pipariya, 47 km away, on the Itarsi-Jabalpur rail line.
- Air: The nearest airport is Bhopal (200 km).
- Road: Madhya Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation runs regular luxury bus service from Bhopal to Pachmarhi. Private and roadway buses as well as taxis are also available from Pipariya, Bhopal and other cities located nearby.

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