

Historical Caves in and around Mumbai

ELEPHANTA CAVES

- A. BBC Documentary : <https://youtu.be/uaHuJRrAB7Q>
- B. Maharashtra Tourism : https://youtu.be/jDfN_b9EKDo
- C. Shutterfly Media : https://youtu.be/jt3BaSX-_2E
- D. The Lost History Channel : <https://youtu.be/ozf6vAoVKOk>
- E. UNESCO Video : <https://youtu.be/3s8uB4Rlooc>



OTHER CAVES:

1. Mahakali Caves

<https://www.holidify.com/places/mumbai/mahakali-caves-sightseeing-2877.html>







Mahakali caves, Mumbai Overview

Mahakali Caves, also known as Kondivite Caves, are centuries old and are located in the western part of the city of Mumbai in Andheri. Mahakali Caves comprise a total of nineteen rock-cut monuments, built between 1st and 6th century. The main cave consists of Buddha figures and stupas and there are several Buddha idols carved on the rocks too. These solid basalt caves are a favourite place for history lovers, and archaeologists. Surprisingly clean and efficiently maintained, the caves are far from the city area hence give a sense of serenity.

Beautifully carved out of solid black basalt rock, the caves exist since the Ashokan Empire. The existence of a Buddhist Stupa indicates the dwelling of Buddhist monks here. The walls contain scriptures in Pali, a language older than Sanskrit. A majority of the caves are on a low-lying hill, rising only a few meters above the surroundings. Since the caves are carved in volcanic trap breccias, they are prone to weathering. The caves are small in size and contain numerous rock-cut cisterns. Though the images today are not clearly visible, the Mahakali caves are indeed one of the most beautiful specimens of the rock-cut monastery.

Architecture

Located in the eastern suburb of Andheri, this Buddhist Monastery consists of two groups of rock-cut caves; which composes of four caves in the northwest direction, while the rest fifteen caves in the southeasterly direction. Most of these caves are viharas and cells for monks. Only cave number 9 is chaitya and contains mutilated figures from the Buddhist mythology as well as the seven depictions of Buddha. The Mahakali caves in total have twenty entrances. The south-eastern group of caves is older than the north-western group of caves. Some caves even consist of verandahs and courtyards. In the North-West category, two of the four caves were used as dwelling while one was used as a dining place. The next group has a chapel, the significant cave 9, few shrines, and some dwelling places.

The area between both the groups of caves consists of several broken tombstones. There are a few more fascinating rock-cut monuments including a small auditorium made for teacher and his disciples. Several broken stone steps from the west lead down to the southern group of caves.

Cave number 9 of Mahakali Caves

Cave number 9, Chaitya is a unique cave out of the fifteen caves. Being the largest cave at Kondivite, it has seven depictions of Lord Buddha and several other figures from Buddhist mythology. Sadly all of these have now been mutilated. Part of the southeastern group of caves, it has a peculiar plan and is evidently one of the oldest in the group. It composes of an inner shrine and a stupa which is enclosed in a curved wall, 8 inches thick and has a central door along with a latticed window on either side. It has a 2.34 m high dagoba comprising of four holes on the top of the umbrella.

The shrine has a hemispherical dome, and the stupa which it contains is now erroneously considered to be a lingam. Over the window on the right side lies a two-line inscription in Pali. These inscriptions belong to the 3d century AD. It reads as: "Gift of a Vihar, with his brother, by Pittimba a Brahman of the Gotamas gotra, an inhabitant of Pachi Kama." Moreover, there is also a carved panel of Buddha along with his attendants and other figures.

How To Reach Mahakali caves

Several local buses operate from Saibaba Mandir Marol Bus Station, Takshila Bus Station, Model Town (Majas) Bus Station, Holy Spirit Hospital Bus Station etc. making these caves an easy reach. Furthermore, local trains being the heart of the city, you can take a train to Jogeshwari and Andheri which are the nearest railway stations. From here you can take a taxi or an auto to reach the caves.

2. Kanheri Caves, Mumbai Overview

<https://www.holidify.com/places/mumbai/kanheri-caves-sightseeing-2876.html>







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Located in the Sanjay Gandhi National Park, near Borivali in Mumbai, the Kanheri Caves in Mumbai are a group of rock-cut monuments in the form of caves. The caves and the paintings, themselves, illustrate the Buddhist influence on the Indian art and culture. The caves are famous for their 109 special entrances as well as for their ancient sculptures, carvings, paintings and inscriptions dating back to the 1st century to the 10th century that adorn their basalt formations. Standing in sharp contrast to the verdant greenery of the surrounding hills, Kanheri Caves can be accessed through a series of rock cut steps.

While the caves provide an excellent insight into history, it can be clearly seen that they were built over an extensive period of time. The older of the Kanheri Caves are plainer in their design, while the newer caves are more ornamented. What ties the design of each of these caves is an individual stone plinth on which they rest, which is common to all. In addition to the caves, a congregation hall, intricately carved pillars, Buddhist stupas, and ingenious water channels carved out stone are some of the exciting aspects to witness and marvel. Another one of the caves here has been converted into a monastery and holds special importance for the Buddhist community.

History of Kanheri Caves

Kanheri Caves have a long and illustrious history associated with their name, which is delicately intertwined with the spread of Buddhism in the region as well. The word Kanheri has been derived from the Sanskrit word "Krishnagiri" which literally means black mountain. It was named so because of its black basaltic stone, which makes this attraction quite prominent against its surroundings. The unique feature of this cave is that it is formed from a single rock bed, unlike the other caves in the country. Kanheri caves were an important Buddhist learning centre and a pilgrimage site for the Buddhist monks between 9th and the 1st centuries BCE. The congregation halls with the large stupas indicate the importance of the cave as a Buddhist shrine and the focal point of Buddhist settlement during the 3rd century. It became a distinctive institution for Buddhist congregational worship, study and meditation.

Main attractions near the Kanheri Caves

There is a lot to see in and around the Kanheri Caves. This destination houses 34 unfinished Buddhist paintings and the prayer hall depicts the Buddhist way of life and culture. If you are looking for adventure, there are planned tours of adventure sports like trapezing and trekking around the Sanjay Gandhi National Park in which the caves are situated. Since the caves are located on hilly terrain, there are also some minor waterfalls to witness. The natural rivers and waterbodies around the caves create a soothing and beautiful environment and is the perfect location to enjoy a small picnic with your family.

Inside the Kanheri Caves

Kanheri Caves is a fascinating collection of rock - cut caves that have about 51 legible inscriptions and 26 epigraphs including inscriptions in Brahmi, Devanagari and 3 Pahlavi. Most of the caves here were used as Buddhist Viharas, which are meant for studying, meditation and accommodation, and had stone platforms in place of beds. The larger caves among the Kanheri Caves called the Chaityagrahas were used as halls of worship and religious congregations during the olden times. These halls are rectangular in shape and are adorned with stone pillars, each of which has their own unique construction style and no similarity to another. There is a row of 34 pillars that divide the Grahas and have intricate carvings of Buddha and the Bodhisattvas.

As you move out of the Chaityagraha, you are welcomed into a large front porch which can be easily compared to a verandah. Both the Viharas and the Chaityagrahas have sculptures and carvings relating to Buddhism ornamenting their pillars, roofs and walls. The Avalokiteshvara is the most prominent figure in the Kanheri Caves, who is a bodhisattva that represents love and compassion for all. Another inscription describes Satavahana ruler Vashishtiputra Satakarni's wedding to the daughter of Rudradaman I.

Trekking in Kanheri Caves

When one thinks about Mumbai, trekking is probably the last thing that crosses your mind. However, Kanheri Caves in the city are an unlikely and very popular destination

for this adventure sport. The two-hour trek to the caves takes you through the forest areas in the Sanjay Gandhi National Park. The hills on which the Kanheri Caves are located are quite easily navigable and is a relatively simple terrain for both beginner and seasoned hikers. The view is quite mesmerising too, with the green of the forest combined with gushing waterfalls nearby making this destination a nature lover's delight. If you are lucky, you might also catch a glimpse of the animals in the park. Tribal women sell light snacks while relating stories of the caves, which makes a trip to Kanheri even more interesting. Once you reach the end point of the trek, the view of the caves more than makes up for the hard work. Trekking in Kanheri makes for the perfect way to explore the landscape of the Sanjay Gandhi National Park and is a must - do weekend activity indeed!

Tips For Visiting Kanheri caves

1. Carry a water bottle, sunglasses, sunscreen and all necessary protection against the sun when you visit Kanheri Caves
2. Be careful as you trek through the hills
3. Maintain the decorum and cleanliness in the premises.
4. Make sure you wear comfortable footwear so that you can trek and walk through the caves.

How To Reach Kanheri Caves

It is located towards the north of Mumbai. You can take the local train to Borivali from any other station on the Western Line, which will take about an hour. From there you can take an autorickshaw right up to the park gate. Or if the weather permits, even a pleasant 10 -minute walk from the station to Sanjay Gandhi National Park, can prove to be refreshing. The Kanheri caves are located within the national park itself.

3. Mandapeshwar Caves

<https://www.holidify.com/places/mumbai/mandapeshwar-caves-sightseeing-125134.html>



History

Mandapeshwar Caves were built around 520 CE by Buddhist Monks. During the time when the caves were built, several routes through the mountains in Maharashtra were important nodes on the trade routes. The Western Ghats of India, in particular, served as an important junction for traders who would often take the sea trade routes. The monks carried the responsibility to share the message and teachings of Lord Buddha to the population. The Western Ghats of India were deemed suitable for meeting this goal. The monks thus built these caves inside the hill and created separate chambers like the halls, stupas and rooms for themselves. They then named the structure, “Mandapeshwar Caves”, which means “The Hall of Lord” and continued living, praying and meditating in the caves.

The monks who stayed at the Mandapeshwar Caves would communicate with traders travelling through the route. For the merchants, the caves provided a good point to rest whereas, the monks used it as an opportunity to introduce and share the teachings of Gautama Buddha and his meditation techniques. The monks also welcomed those who renounced the worldly possessions and accepted monkhood. After the caves were built, the monks hired some Persian artists travelling through the mountains to paint the interiors. They created magnificent works of art on the walls of the caves that, unfortunately, can barely be seen today. The caves outlived the tests of time but their significance changed over the centuries.

Archaeologists discovered that several sculptures of Hindu Gods and Goddesses were created inside the caves during the 8th century. This denotes that the Buddhist Viharas were later occupied by the Hindus and transformed into shrines for the deities. Till the early 18th century, the Mandapeshwar Caves were used by locals, travellers etc. as a place of worship or to rest. Above the caves, on the mountain, are the ruins of a 16th Century church and a graveyard which were founded by a Franciscan Missionary. This denotes that the Portuguese also lived and travelled in this region. In 1739, the Marathas invaded this part of Mumbai. The caves were left deserted and they got hidden in the dense forest that grew around them. Later in the 20th Century, the Mandapeshwar Caves were discovered again and designated as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

Architecture

Mandapeshwar caves are a good example of rock-cut architecture in Mumbai. They were built according to the traditional Buddhist Cave architecture and have several chambers for prayers, meditation and lodging purposes. These chambers were excavated into the ancient rock formations and have an L-shaped corridor with carved pillars on the outside. They consist of the Prayers Halls which are called Chaitya Grihas, Votive Stupas, and several private rooms for the monks. The walls of the caves also have carvings of Lord Shiva, Goddess Parvati, Nataraja, Ardhanarishwara, Lord Ganesha, Brahma, Lord Vishnu and Sadashiva. These works of art depict significant stories from Hindu Mythology like the wedding of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati.

How To Reach Mandapeshwar Caves

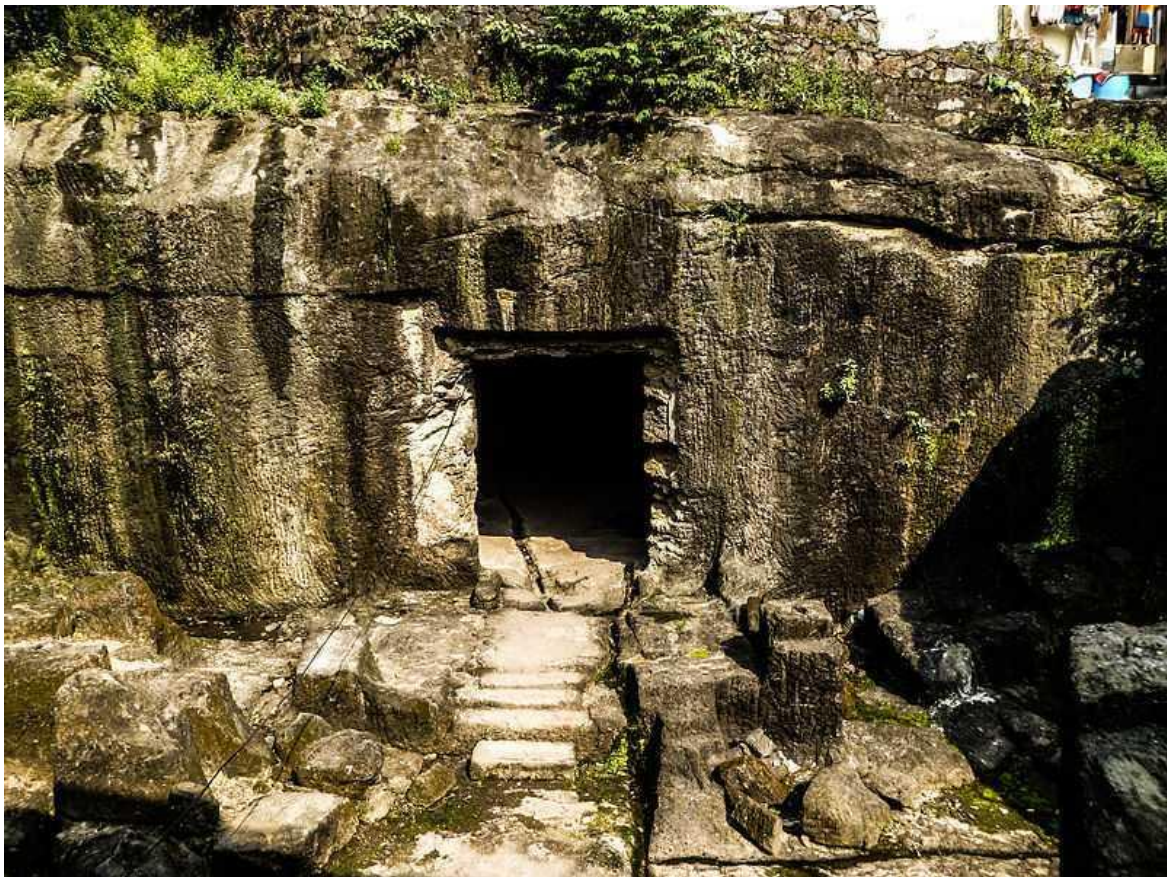
Mandapeshwar Caves are located in I C Colony, Borivali West, Mumbai on Laxman Mhatre Road. The closest landmark is Mount Poincur. It is very well connected by roadways with other parts of Borivali. The nearest bus station to the Mandapeshwar Caves is the Borivali Sukurwadi Bus Station which is located about 3 kilometres away. Travellers can board one of the state transport buses to head to Borivali Bus Station. Upon disembarking, they can take an auto-rickshaw or a taxi to reach the attraction via this route – M G Road – Kasturba Ched Marg – Sudhir Phadka Flyover – Devidas Road – Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Road – Laxman Mhatre Road.

Other than state transport buses, Indian Railways are also convenient to reach Borivali. Borivali Railway Station is barely 2.6 kilometres away from the attraction. This railway junction also connects all the other railway stations of Mumbai City. So, boarding a local train can prove to be an affordable option for budget travellers. Once travellers reach Borivali Sukurwadi Bus Station, they then need to take the same route given above via M G Road - Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Road to reach Laxman Mhatre Road where the attraction is located.

The closest airport is the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Airport which is located about 20 kilometres away from the attraction. Travellers can choose between the roadways and the railways to reach the attraction from the airport. Santacruz Railway Station is the closest railway station to the airport. It is located about 7 kilometres away and has trains operating to Borivali every 20 to 30 minutes. If one wants to take the roadways instead, they can opt for a city bus or a rental cab. The route that leads to Mandapeshwar Caves from Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Airport goes via Sahar Road – Western Express Highway (towards Ahmedabad)/ NH 48 – Sudhir Phadka Flyover - Devidas Road – Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Road – Laxman Mhatre Road.

4. Jogeshwari Caves, Mumbai Overview

<https://www.holidify.com/places/mumbai/jogeshwari-caves-sightseeing-125135.html>



Located in the heart of Mumbai, Jogeshwari Caves are one of the oldest cave temples in the whole of India and also the largest. These former Buddhist caves date back to the 6th century and have been home to Hindu and Buddhist sculptures. There are various temples of Lord Hanuman, Shiva, Ganesha and of Goddess Jogeshwari (known as Kuladevi) within the caves and many locals worship them. The Jogeshwari Caves are popular amongst those with an eye for architectural beauty. The beautiful sculptures and the history that the place holds make them a must-visit for any history-lover.

The region in and around Jogeshwari Caves experience are victims of a tropical wet and dry climate and hence the summers around the area are extremely hot. Hence, the best time to visit Jogeshwari Caves is from October to mid-April. These caves, considering their limited popularity to locals and students looking for a quiet place to study, had been severely neglected by authorities until a few years back. Water and

sewage filled the premises however, an ASI appointed agency now takes care of the caves and does a routine clean-up and a maintenance check. If you are a traveller that loves exploring places that are hidden, then Jogeshwari Caves are the place to be!

History and Architecture

The Jogeshwari caves date back to around 520 BC. The caves that we see today are the last of the Mahayana Buddhist architecture structures, later taken by Hindus. Jogeshwari caves are at least 1,500 years old, excavated during the unearthing of Ajanta and Elephanta caves. They were formally known as Amboli caves. The caves are confined by rocks on both their sides. There are Buddhist shrines and temples in the caves because before the caves were actually built, there were Buddhist Shrines under the Vakataka Dynasty during the 1st century BC. The Hindu community living in that region were prompted to do the same and thus the temples came into existence.

The entrance to the caves has a flight of stairs leading visitors to the main hall of the immense space. This main hall has many pillars with a Lingam (a symbol of Shiva) at its ends. Six such pillars form the central section of the cave. Several idols of Hanuman, Ganesha, and Dattatreya line the walls. There are relics representing doormen. Not only this, but the cave also has footprints of Goddess Jogeshwari (Kuladevi) whom the area is named after. Goddess Kuladevi is worshipped by Gujrati Brahmins and also some Marathi people. There is also an idol of Goddess Kuladevi.

Things to do Around

1. Mahakali Caves: At a 15 minutes distance from Jogeshwari caves, Mahakali Caves (also known as Kondivite Caves) is located in Andheri. Comprising of a group of 19 rock-cut monuments, it is the perfect place to go to after visiting the Jogeshwari Caves.
2. Mandapeshwar Caves: At a 45 minutes distance from Jogeshwari caves, this 8th Century shrine dedicated to Lord Shiva is located in Borivali, near Poinzur. They were originally Buddhist viharas and were soon occupied by the Brahmins. If you want to do a cave trail, Mandapeshwar Caves is the perfect place to visit after visiting both - Jogeshwari caves and Mahakali caves!

3. Sanjay Gandhi National Park: Around 35 minutes away from Jogeshwari Caves, Sanjay Gandhi National Park is a scattered, forested home to Kanheri Caves, nature trails, and a lion & tiger safari. Plan a day trip, however, beware of the time as Sanjay Gandhi National Park closes at 5:30 pm.
4. Chotha Kashmir: Around 25 minutes away from Jogeshwari Caves, in the green of Aarey Colony, lies Chotha Kashmir, a picnic spot and a relaxing recreational area that has a lake for paddle boats with your family, a carnival with rides for children & eateries.

How To Reach Jogeshwari Caves

Jogeshwari caves can be found in Jogeshwari (East) within a colony of Pratap Nagar near a busy flyover which is part of the Western Express Highway. It is easily accessed by public transport.

- By Train: One can catch a local train to Jogeshwari railway station or Goregaon station from any place in Mumbai. On reaching there, visitors can either take a cab, a rickshaw or an auto rickshaw to the caves. It is about 3 km away from Jogeshwari station and is 4 km from Goregaon Station.
- By Car: If coming from South Mumbai one can reach Jogeshwari Caves via Western Express highway. There are two routes via Western Express Highway - one from either Santacruz (taking Chembur Link Road) or by Andheri Kurla Rd/Magan Nathuram Road. If coming from North Mumbai, one has to take a route via SV road and Western Express Highway. A narrow passage, which was the entrance to the temple has now been converted into a parking space.

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