



O my friend, Ganesha!

Rotund and generally jolly, Ganesha is distinguished from other Hindu deities because he has the head of an elephant. Ganesha is a symbol of prosperity and profound knowledge and is believed to be destroyer of all obstacles which come in our way in our undertakings

An elephant deity riding a mouse is one of the best known and most worshipped deities in the Hindu pantheon. Ganesha, also called Ganapati, is the god of wisdom, prudence, and salvation. Ga means "knowledge", na means "salvation", and isa and pati mean "lord". His image is found throughout India. Hindu sects worship him regardless of other affiliations. Devotion to Ganesha is

widely diffused and extends to Jains, Buddhists, and beyond India.

The son of the Hindu deities Siva and Parvati is a god of luck and of "opening the way." His image appears on numerous Hindu products, such as incense and foods.

His symbol is the swastika, which he bears in the palm of his hand. His identifying weapon is an elephant goad, to move stubborn people, but he is not always shown

bearing it. Sometimes he carries a conch shell, holds a book, or receives offerings of sweet foods. Usually, one of his tusks is broken and his vehicle is a rat, who may be shown stealing one of the food offerings placed at his feet.

Ganesha became the Lord (Isha) of all existing beings (Gana) after winning a contest from his brother Kartikeya. When given the task to race around the universe, Ganesha did not start the race like Kartikeya did, but simply walked around Shiva and Parvati, both his

father and mother as the source of all existence.

He is a popular figure in Indian art. Unlike those of some deities, representations of Ganesha show wide variations and distinct patterns changing over time. He may be portrayed standing, dancing, heroically taking action against demons, playing with his family as a boy, sitting down, or engaging in a range of contemporary situations.

He is also the most widely worshipped

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A holy excursion

Ashtavinayaka literally means “Eight Ganeshas” in Sanskrit. Ganesha is the Hindu deity of prosperity and learning. The term refers to eight Ganeshas. Ashtavinayaka yatra refers to a pilgrimage to the eight Hindu temples in Maharashtra state of India that house eight distinct idols of Ganesha, in a pre-ascertained sequence

The Ashtavinayaka yatra or pilgrimage covers the eight ancient holy temples of Ganesha which are situated around Pune. Each of these temples has its own individual legend and history, as distinct from each other as the murtis in each temple. The form of each murti of Ganesha and His trunk are distinct from one another. However, there are other temples of eight Ganesha in various other parts of Maharashtra; the ones around Pune are more well known than the former. According to Shastra, first you have to visit Moreshwar of Moregaon. Then visit Siddhatek, Pali, Mahad, Thevur, Lenyandri, Ozar, Ranjangaon, and then again Moregaon will end your Ashtavinayak Yatra.

Some of these murtis are called Swayambhu effigies or the self-existent in Sanskrit. This is to indicate that no human created these murtis, they were found completely formed by nature.

Mayureshwar



This is the most important temple on this tour. The temple, built from black-stone during the Bahamani reign, has four gates. The temple is situated in the centre of the village. There is a

Nandi (Shiva's bull mount) sitting in front of this temple entrance, which is unique, as Nandi is normally in front of only Shiva temples. However, the story says that this statue was being carried to some Shivamandir during which the vehicle carrying it broke down and the Nandi statue could not be removed from its current place. The murti of Lord Ganesha, riding a peacock, in the form of Mayureshwara is believed to have slain the demon Sindhu at this spot. The idol, with its trunk turned to the left, has a cobra (Nagaraja) poised over it protecting it. This form of Ganesha also has two other murtis of Siddhi (Capability) and Riddhi (Intelligence). The temple is situated at a distance of 55 km from Pune, next to the river Karha in the village of Moregaon.

Siddhivinayak



God Vishnu is supposed to have vanquished the asuras Madhu and Kaitabh after propitiating Ganesha here. This is the only murti of these eight with the trunk positioned

to the right. It is believed that the two saints Shri Morya Gosavi and Shri Narayan Maharaj of Kedgaon received their enlightenment here.

The temple is North-facing and is on a small hillock. The stomach of the murti is not wide, but Riddhi and Siddhi murtis are sitting on one thigh. This murti's trunk is turning to the right. The right-sided-trunk Ganesha is supposed to be very strict for the devotees. To make one round (pradakshina) around the temple one has to make the round trip of the hillock. This takes about 30 minutes with moderate speed.

This temple is situated off the Pune-Solapur highway about 48 km from the town of Srigonda in Ahmadnagar district. The temple is situated next to Bhima river. On Pune-Solapur railway, Daund Railway station is 18 km from here.

Ballaleshwar



Ganesha is believed to have saved this boy-devotee, Ballala, who was beaten by local villagers and his father (Kalyani-seth) for his single-minded devotion to him. The original wooden temple was reconstructed in to a stone temple by Nana Phadanavis in 1760. There are two small lakes constructed on two sides of the temple. One of them is reserved for the puja (worship) of the Deity. This Temple faces the east and has two sanctums. The inner one houses the murti and has a Mushika (Ganesha's mouse vahana) with modaka in his forepaws in front of it. The hall, supported by eight exquisitely carved pillars demands as much attention as the idol, sitting on throne carved like a Cyprus tree. One speciality of this temple is that the prasad offered to this Ganapati at Pali is Besan Laadu instead of Modak that is normally offered to other Ganapatis. The temple is located in the town of Pali, off the Mumbai-Pune highway, about 11 km before Nagothane on the Mumbai-Goa highway. This is located 30 km to the South-West of Karjat Railway Station. Mumbai-Panvel-Khopoli-Pali is 124 km. Pune-Lonavla-Khopoli-Pali is 111 km.

Varadavinayak



The handsome Prince Rukmangad refused sage Vachaknavi's wife Mukunda's illicit call, and was cursed to suffer from leprosy. Mukunda was satisfied by Indra who deceived her as Rukmangad and she bore a child by name Grutsamad. When Grutsamad came to know about the real story he cursed his mother Mukunda to become the tree of Bori and she in turn cursed him to bore a demon son named Tripurasur, the one who was defeated by Shiva after praying to the Ranjangaon Ganesha. Grutsamad after getting cursed went to the forest of Pushpak and worshipped Ganesha. Sage Grutsamad is famous for the mantra GaNanaN Tva. He founded the temple and called this Ganesha: Varada-Vinayak.

Ganesha is said to reside here in the form of Varada Vinayaka, the giver of bounty and success. The temple is located three kilometers off the Pune-Mumbai highway near Khopoli (80 km from Pune), and is thus closest to Mumbai city. Karjat Railway Station, Karjat on Mumbai-Pune railway is 24 km from this place and 6 km from Khopoli.

Chintamani



Ganesha is believed to have got back the precious Chinatamani jewel from the greedy Guna for sage Kapila at this spot. However, after bringing back the jewel, sage Kapila put it in Vinayaka's (Ganesha's) neck. Thus the name Chintamani Vinayak. This happened under the Kadamb tree, therefore Thevur is known as Kadambanagar in old times. Thevur's Chintamani was the main worshipped god

of Senior Shrimant Madhavrao Peshwa. He suffered from tuberculosis and died at a very young age (~27 years). He is supposed to have died in this temple. His wife, Ramabai went as Sati with him on 18 November 1772.

The temple is located 22 km from Pune, off the Pune-Solapur highway, and is hence the nearest from Pune. The village of Thevur sits at the confluence of three major regional rivers—Mula, Mutha & Bhima.

Girijatmaj



It is believed that Parvati (Shiva's wife) performed penance to beget Ganesha at this point. Girija's (Parvati's) Atmaj (son) is Girijatmaj. This temple stands amidst a cave complex of 18 caves of Buddhist origin. This temple is the 8th cave. These are called Ganesh-leni as well. The temple is constructed such that during the day it is always lighted up by the sun-rays. The temple is situated 12 km from Narayangaon, which is about 94 km from Pune on the Pune-Nashik highway. Nearest railway station is Talegaon. From Junnar, Lenyadri is about 5 km. Shivaneri castle is close by (5 to 6 km) where Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj was born.

Vighnahr



The history encompassing this idol states that Vighnasur, a demon was created by the King of Gods, Indra to destroy the prayer organized by King Abhinandan. However, the demon went a step further and destroyed all vedic, religious acts and to answer the people's prayers for protection, Ganesh defeated him. The story goes on to say that on being conquered, the demon begged and pleaded with Ganesha to show mercy. Ganesha then granted in his plea, but on the condition that demon should not go to the place where Ganesha worshipping is going on. In return the demon asked a favour that his name should be taken before Ganesha's name, thus the name of Ganesha became Vighnahr or Vighneshwar (Vighna in Sanskrit means a sudden interruption in the ongoing work due to some unforeseen, unwarranted event or cause). The Ganesha here is called Shri Vighneshwar Vinayak. This temple is located just off the Pune-Nashik Highway, in the town of Ozhar. It is enclosed on all sides by high stone walls, and its pinnacle is made of gold. The temple is situated on the banks of river Kukadi. Via Mumbai-Thane-Kalyan-Bapsai-Saralgaon-Otur, Ozhar is 182 km.

Mahaganapati



Shiva is believed to have worshipped Ganesha before fighting the demon Tripurasura here. The temple was built by Shiva where he worshipped Ganesha, and the town he set up was called Manipur which is now known as Ranjangaon. The temple is situated 50 km from Pune on the Pune-Ahmednagar highway in the village of Ranjangaon.