



A STEP BACK IN TIME

Perched upon the bank of the Saraswati River, the historical city of Patan is home to Rani ki Vav, an epitome of architectural beauty.

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I climb down the staircase. The sun blazes in the sky but the depths promise the relief of shade. Unable to battle the searing heat, I call it quits. The murmurs of tourists rise from below. "Don't give up after having reached this far," says one woman, lending me water. Her trip to Rani ki Vav has just ended whilst I am yet to make the descent.



I had underestimated the October heat of Patan, an ancient city in Gujarat, and made the mistake of carrying insufficient drinking water. Ironical, because the relevance of water has been instrumental to Rani ki Vav, an exquisitely carved seven-level deep stepwell that was designed as an inverted temple to highlight the sanctity of water.

Declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2014, Rani ki Vav is a dream in sandstone. The monument reflects the Maru-Gurjara style of architecture through its intricacy and grandeur in detail and proportions. A series of stepped corridors with multi-storey pavilions lead down to a water reservoir. As I descend, the exquisitely sculpted niches on its wall panels start revealing themselves. In a moment of fatigue, it is easy to imagine the figurines of apsaras etched on the walls freeing themselves from the stone and putting



There is a secret tunnel originating in Rani ki Vav which opens up to Sidhpur, a town 30 km away in Patan district.

FROM TOP:


Rani ki Vav was erected in 1063 by Rani Udayamati in the memory of her husband King Bhima I; the 7 galleries of the stepwell contain over 800 sculptures of Hindu mythological characters

up a performance to please the Gods. Hindu deities and demons unleash their best and worst manifestations on the carvings. I struggle to release my attention from the hypnotic sculptures of the various incarnations of Lord Vishnu and of Goddess Durga striking the buffalo demon king Mahishasura with her trident. Nostalgia sets in, for I have missed the Durga Puja in Kolkata to be here.



The latest lavender-coloured ₹100 currency note bears the motif of Rani ki Vav.

The monument used to be supported by 292 exquisitely carved pillars, of which 226 remain. Peeking through a set of them, I stare at the Seshayana form of Vishnu reclining under the hood of a serpent. Between the deity and me stretches a trench — the reservoir of the stepwell. In divine company, I regain my lost energy. I am ready to head back to the sun-stained world.

As the copper sunset waves me goodbye, I realise that Patan deserves more attention its way. 

FROM LEFT:

Rani ki Vav is one of the two UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Gujarat; Lord Vishnu is the main theme of the sculptures