

MODHERA...

the Sun God's Seat

Treasures of time:

As one traverses the length and breadth of Gujarat, one constantly stumbles upon architectural legacies of the 'Solanki' era. A soothing drive amidst green farmlands, just 35 km away from Mehsana, reposes the village of Modhera. Set along the backdrop of river Pushpavati, surrounded by a garden of flowering trees and songs of birds, rests the famed Sun temple of Modhera. According to Skand Purana and Brahma Purana, the areas near Modhera were known as Dharmaranya, literally meaning the forest of righteousness - and are associated with the Ramayana era.

The Sun temple was built by Rishabh Bhimdev-I of the Solanki dynasty. In 1026 AD the Solankis were considered to be Suryavanshi Gurjars or descendants of the Sun God. The temple was so designed that the first rays of the Sun fell on the image of Surya at the time of the equinoxes.

The temple was destroyed by Allauddin Khilji, however enough has remained of the temple to convey its grandeur.

As you enter the historical complex, you first come across the magnificent Surya Kund, also known as the Rama Kund, built in a rectangular shape containing 108 shrines dedicated to various Gods and Demi-Gods, carved in between the steps inside the tank. Devotees are required to perform ceremonial ablutions here before worshipping the Sun God. The Surya Kund is the finest example of geometry. The organization of stone into composition gives shape to a dazzling pattern of art. It is proportioned with innumerable stone steps leading devotees to its base. The three main shrines positioned on the three sides of the kund, dedicated to Lord Ganesh, Lord Vishnu, the Nataraj (Lord Shiva) and Sittlamata are a marvel created during the Solanki era.

Relax and soothe your nerves, become one with nature and open your mind to the poetry in stone, dedicated to the Sun God. Living glimpses of an era far elapsed emerge out of the intricacies of narrative sculptures. The remains of the Sun Temple at Modhera are relics of times gone by when reverence of the natural elements - fire, air, earth, water and sky were at their peak, sharing space with myriad manifestations of Vedic Gods. The ancient philosophy venerating natural elements and its association with humans was considered the prime force and energy of the life cycle. A walk around the serene temple campus makes you aware of the positively strong aura of energy which the place radiates and through it brings one closer to the environs.



The temple is a classic example of the material aspect of Solanki architecture, namely mastery over the elegantly intricate carving of stone and the judicious use of lime mortar. Enconced in an undulating landscape of green foliage, the design element of the temple follows the tenets of Vastu - Shilpa. The kund and the entrance passageway face East in an aura of welcome to the tantalizing rays of the sun, and the entire structure floats on a plinth resembling a flowering lotus as an ablution to the Sun God. The design specs of the steps are a stylized mirror image of the temple 'shikhar', thus symbolically linking fire and water, dream and reality. The main complex is divided into three parts, the entrance which is the 'Sabha Mandap', 'Antaral' the connecting passage and the 'Garbagruha', the sanctum sanctorum.



Sabha Mandap

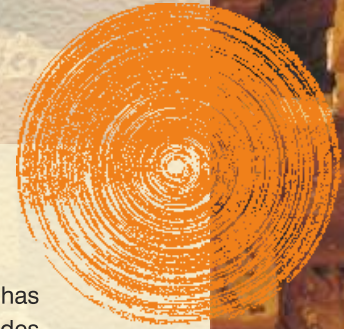
The hall of religious gatherings is a magnificent pillared hall. It is open from all sides and has 52 intricately carved pillars representing 52 weeks in a year. The carvings depict episodes from the epics of Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Krishna Leela.

Between Sabha Mandap and the sanctum sanctorum is a beautiful hall with pillars and arches whose façade has been renovated and partially redone. The walls have 12 niches showing the different aspects of the Sun God in each month.

Walk up the steps to the 'Sabha Mandap' or the assembly and convene with sculpted renderings of twelve 'Adityas' (another name for the Sun God). The twelve representations carved on the pillars represent the Sun according to the twelve months. It is believed that these 'Adityas' are the base myth to the temple of the Sun; the legend imparts Adityas to be sons of 'Aditi', the Goddess of Infinity and the constant within the inter-connectedness of the universe.

Sanctum Sanctorum

This is called the main temple or the sanctum sanctorum. Lotuses open at sunrise and close at sunset; it is considered to be the sun's flower. The entire temple is therefore based on an inverted lotus-base plinth. It was designed so that the rays of the rising and setting sun on the day of the equinox (20th March and 21st September generally) fell on the bejeweled pure gold idol of the Sun riding on his chariot driven by Saarthi Arun. The Sun's chariot has seven horses and Saarthi Arun sits on the fourth. The entire gold idol (including the charioteer, chariot and horses) was placed on a pit that was 15 feet deep and filled with gold coins. It was built by the Solankis in honour of their ancestral God. It was plundered by Mahmud Gazni. The entire gold idol was taken away by him.



The temple complex was constructed as a magnificent offering in sculpture to the lord of life and light, fiery Surya, the Sun God. The king, Bhimdev I of Solanki dynasty, was a patron of the arts and an equal supporter of all religions. The Solanki kings of Anhilwad Patan enshrined their eminence in history through stone, most notably the Rani-ki-Vav at Patan, the Jain temples at Taranga, Rudra Mahal at Sidhpur and the Sun temple at Modhera which incidentally is the only temple structure to have a 'kund' or ceremonial tank seamlessly dovetailing into the main complex thus emphasizing the dichotomy of the elements of fire and water.

Savor your voyage through time to the magnificent eons of the Golden period as you get welcomed personally by the life-like icons, narrating stories and legends of Modhera!

With the waning of the Solanki dynasty and a decline in Sun worship, vagaries of time, Islamic iconoclasts and devastating earthquakes, the temple's fable saw many ups and downs. In spite of it all, the Modhera sun temple is a magnificent work of art in stone, bathing seekers in a bright light of enlightenment.

Trained tourist guides are available at the temple complex who will give authentic information.

Modhera is a protected monument under the Archaeological Survey of India which carries out restoration work, and looks after the upkeep and beautification of the complex.

The annual Modhera Dance Festival is a great draw where internationally famed artists perform. It is generally organized on the weekend after the Uttarayan - kite festival.

Location: 35 km from Mehsana on the banks of Pushpavati River, Modhera.

Visiting hours: 07.00 am to 06.00 pm, every day.

Toran Cafeteria, Modhera: +91 2734 284334.

How to reach here:

By Road: Distance from Ahmedabad to Modhera is 101 km and it takes around 1.45 hours. From Mehsana it is 26 km.

By Rail: The train can take you as far as Mehsana (1.5 hours).

By Air: Nearest airport is Ahmedabad.

Nearest Tourism Office:

H. K. House, Opposite Bata Showroom, Ashram Road, Ahmedabad.

Tel: +91 79 2657 8044 /46 / 2658 9172.

