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# ECOTRAIL

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**SERVICE LEARNING  
FOR BETTER FUTURE CITIZENS**



**CORPORATE TREKS**

# INSIDE THIS ISSUE

## 3 FROM THE EDITOR



## 4 STRIDES IN SCIENCE

## 4 ON THE BRINK



## 5 INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY



## 6 TREKS AND TRAIL



## 6 CORPORATE TREK



## 8 MULTIACTIVITY CAMP



## 9 TRAILBLAZERS FOUNDATION IN ACTION





## 12 SUMMER CAMPS




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# Service Learning

What would your answer be if asked, why should children be enrolled in schools? Without getting into the debates of formal schooling versus home schooling and other similar alternatives, I expect that a majority of conventional (largely Indian) parents will vouch for the institution's unparalleled ability to impart knowledge to their children. Most of us, as teachers and parents strongly believe that in schools, minds are nurtured, personalities shaped, characters built. What we don't say but definitely expect, is that schooling will enable our children to evolve as good human beings even as they strive towards becoming intelligent, successful and famous among other things. While it would be interesting to see courses in eternal goodness, empathetic instinct or selfless service being offered in schools alongside the conventional subjects of Math, Science or Sports; currently the schools try to enhance the students' Emotional Quotient (EQ) in addition to their Intelligence Quotient (IQ) through the medium of Service Learning – an educational approach that combines learning objectives with community service in order to provide a pragmatic, progressive learning experience while meeting societal needs.

You may be aware of International Baccalaureate's Creativity-Action-Service (CAS) initiatives, or The Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations' Socially Useful Productive Work (SUPW) component which make it mandatory for students to do voluntary work as a

source of experiential learning. Similar to these but not mandatory, is the Government's National Cadet Corps and National Service Scheme whose student-members are expected to partake in social service and community development initiatives. Having implemented CAS and SUPW initiatives for several schools through our Outdoor School pedagogy, we vouch for the potential of Service Learning initiatives to deliver learning outcomes unparalleled by classroom teaching. For example, we conducted a camp in Vajreshwari where children were exposed to village planning and governance as well as tribal welfare programmes run by an NGO. Students could have read several books or watched a dozen films on the subject but nothing beats the charm of personal conversation or the experience of having visited a 'model village' and witnessing the result of modernity of thought in a rural setting. Helping to build a path leading to school, greening it, developing plant nurseries, cleaning the school walls with beautiful messages etc have all been initiated as part of service learning.

I however see Service Learning as a tool with a dual agenda. 'Service' imbues in students an awareness (at having lived in a parallel reality devoid of deprivation), empathy as a fellow human being with resources (that can be used for betterment) and accountability (towards effecting that betterment). 'Learning' offers students an opportunity for learning from another context

where the community or the outdoors becomes a teacher, and therefore an entity to be respected. Service learning therefore is a balanced trade-off that on one hand enables students to envisage and utilize the potential in their abilities to address development concerns; and on the other nips in the bud, any sense of entitlement or superiority they may harbour as service providers by making the beneficiary (the recipient community), the benefactor.

Thus with their hearts (and their attitudes) in the right place, I believe our students have the potential to ideate pathbreaking solutions for every grave problem our world faces. After successfully partaking in Service Learning initiatives I see them becoming able members of the development sector in Government or NGOs, where their projects will build the agency of underprivileged communities to work towards their own growth. Or I imagine them excelling in the corporate sector by executing responsible business practices or corporate social responsibility initiatives driven by the experiences they have gained through Service Learning initiatives in their schools.

Provoke initiative...build aptitude and resilience for challenging work...develop skills such as collaboration, problem solving and decision making. I read these off a brochure for an MBA and realised Service Learning promises these and more. Could a parent's reason for sending their child to school, be any clearer?

**Ranjan Biswas**  
Editor

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## On the Brink...

Amboli Toad (*Xanthophryne tigerina*) is a critically endangered endemic species of toad found only in Western Ghats region of Amboli ghat in Maharashtra state. The toad belongs to the family Bufonidae, which is one of the largest species in the amphibian world.

In the past, Amboli Toad was considered to be the same species of toad found in Koyna Wildlife Sanctuary (300 km from Amboli) which is *Bufo koynayensis*, until recently sighting in Amboli ghat where the population found was described as a separate species in genus *Xanthophryne*.

Amboli Toads are nocturnal in nature and can be seen on laterite rocky plateaus. During day time



Image courtesy: Gaurav Gharat

these toads seek shelter in rock crevices and are difficult to be seen in open. Amboli toad breeds during June to the last week of August, mostly after second or third showers. The eggs are laid in temporary rainwater puddles on laterite rocks in small clutches; with each average clutch would have 30-35 eggs. Since these toad species are habitat specific and not much is known about their habitat distribution, they are listed as critically endangered species as per the IUCN Red list.

Major threats to their survival are habitat destruction, climatic change and road kill. No conservation actions are currently known for this species. Since their breeding colonies are located close to human settlements, protection of fragmented forest habitat is imperative.



## Clean Energy

Scientists have developed an artificial leaf that absorbs sunlight to generate hydrogen fuel from water, an advance that may provide clean energy for powering eco-friendly cars in the future. The ultra-thin wireless device mimics plant leaves to produce energy using water and sunlight. "It is known that hydrogen generation from renewable resources will be the ultimate solution to our energy and environment problems," said Chinnakonda S Gopinath, a senior principal scientist at the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)-National Chemical Laboratory in Pune. The device consists of semiconductors stacked in a manner to simulate the natural leaf system. When visible light strikes the semiconductors, electrons move in one direction, producing electric current. The current almost instantaneously splits

water into hydrogen - which researchers believe is one of the cleanest forms of fuel as its main byproduct is water. In view of pressing energy and environmental issues, it was important to produce hydrogen from natural resources such as sunlight and water, Gopinath said. "In the present work, we have made an attempt to generate solar hydrogen. The preparation method reported is simple and practicable and hence there is a very good possibility of scaling it up," he said. The research, published in the Scientific Reports, an online, open-access journal from the publishers of Nature, states that the device of an area of 23 sq cm could produce 6L of hydrogen fuel per hour. The work has been produced in the lab so far and a lot was still needed on the project, he said.

## E-Skin

Scientists have developed a soft, flexible artificial skin integrated with stretchable electronics that could allow robots to have a sense of touch. Researchers from the University of Houston in the US developed a new mechanism for producing stretchable electronics, a process that relies on readily available materials and could be scaled up for commercial production. They created the stretchable composite semiconductor using a silicon-based polymer known as polydimethylsiloxane (PDMS) and tiny nanowires to create a solution that hardened into a material which used the nanowires to transport electric current. "The work is the first to create a semiconductor in a rubber composite format, designed to allow the electronic components to retain functionality even after the material is stretched by 50 per cent," said Cunjiang Yu, assistant professor at the University.

## DNA Robots



In a study published in the journal Science, researchers at the California Institute of Technology designed a group of DNA robots with 'bodies', 'hands', 'arms', and 'feet.' "We call [them] DNA robots because they can also perform mechanical tasks, but at the nanometre scale," said Lulu Qian, who led the research with graduate student Anupama Thubagere. The robots worked together to find and collect fluorescent molecules. "We would like to send molecular robots to minuscule places where humans can't go, such as the bloodstream," Dr Qian said.

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# INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY - LEARNER CENTERED

## COOPERATIVE

Cooperative learning involves small groups working together to accomplish a learning task.

## PRESENTATIONS

Presentations are learner presented assignments. Students can do these in groups or individually.

## PANEL/EXPERT

Panels are a way to include many voices on a subject. Students can write and ask the questions in a Q&A session.

## KWL

Put it on the poster. What do you know? Want to know? Learn? How about the enhanced version-KWHLAQ?

## BRAINSTORMING

Brainstorming puts the thinker to work. Present a situation. Ask learners to creatively think.

## CREATE MEDIA

Present an issue and have the students create a public service video.

## DISCUSSION

Present an issue and have the students talk about it. If they need add info, have them go out and find it.

## SMALL GROUP

What can a group of people accomplish? Draw out the best characteristics of the group. Assign roles.

## CASE STUDY

Use case studies in the classroom to learn about complex issues, apply critical thinking and explore scenarios.

## JIGSAW

Break students into groups, giving each member a different task. Bring group back together and share.

## LEARNING CENTER

Break up the classroom into different activities. After a set time ask students to rotate to new activity.

## EXPERIMENTS

Design experiments and have students engage. Or, ask students to design the experiment.

## ROLE PLAY

Role playing allows the learner to try out the experience. It can be instructor created or learner created.

## SIMULATION

Computer simulation has grown. Use technology to simulate a real event. Practise without fear of failure.

## LAB

Setting up the class in a lab style enables students free movement and hands-on activities.

## WORKSHOP

Students can create the workshop and conduct it with her peers. The peers can then give feedback.

## DEMONSTRATION

Demonstrations are a fun way to get students involved. Try cooking demonstrations or science demonstrations.

## INDEX CARD

There are 101 ways to use an index card. Give the students the index card and ask them to create the activity. Set the guidelines together.

## INQUIRY BASED

Inquiry based learning starts with a question. It comes in many forms. Try guided inquiry for more structure. Try open enquiry for less.

## MENTAL MODELS

Build mental models that can withstand new information. Draw out your mental model. Test it. Challenge it. Build it.

## PROJECT

A project simulates what a learner could do at the workplace. It could also be a service project where students create positive change.

## PROBLEM

Problem based learning seeks to solve problems. It might be a part of the problem. Learner finds solutions while instructor facilitates.

## DISCOVERY

Discovery can be broad or narrow in scope. Some discovery learning allows the learner to choose a topic and explore.

## Q&A

A Q&A session allows learners and facilitators to learn more from each other.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Use social media to effectively share a message. Get feedback. Keep it short and to the point. Did you convey effectively the message?

## GAMES

Games can be used to teach concepts, to give a learner a break to think, or to challenge one's ideas.

## COMPETITIONS

Students can engage in competitions locally or internationally. This allows the learner to engage with others around the world.

## DEBATE

During a debate, students challenge each other. The debate can take a break at intervals for additional research.

By Mia MacMeekin- <https://anethicalisland.wordpress.com>

# Lake Trail



The trek to the highest point in Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) during monsoon is a favorite among adventure loving Mumbaikars. The Buddhist basaltic caves - Kanheri Caves - are the starting point for the trek to highest point in SGNP. Trailblazers conducted this exciting trek for a group of children. The group crossed the caves and went towards the open rock plateau leading to the Gaumukh temple from where one can see magnificent views of the surrounding city. To see the three cascading lakes namely Tulsi, Vihar and Powai Lakes, we trekked a bit more to the highest point - Jambulmal. Trailblazers experts shared information on fauna and flora spotted on the trek. Once at the highest point, magnificent views of the lakes were enjoyed by one and all. The silvery shimmer ensconced in a carpet of green mesmerised the group.

# Fort Trail



Trailblazers conducted an overnight trek for winners of a contest run by a prominent sportswear company from US. This trek gave an opportunity for winners to meet, bond and explore the historic fort of Rajmachi in the Sahyadris over a period of two days.

Since the trek was conducted in monsoon season, participants witnessed innumerable waterfalls and trekked through lush green meadows to reach

the base village of Udhewadi. They had a unique experience of staying in a village which has no electricity and has minimum facilities. The group had food in a villagers home, which for them became an experience to remember for lifetime. The groups had adrenaline pumping moments when they walked through strong winds and mist, braved waist deep water and got rewarded with hot tea upon reaching the top of the fort.

An experienced Trailblazers team took the responsibility of organising and executing this two day trek with high standards of safety and ensured they made it memorable for the participants.

So eight participants from different walks of life, who met for the first time, bonded and made memories which they would cherish forever.

# Tribal Trail

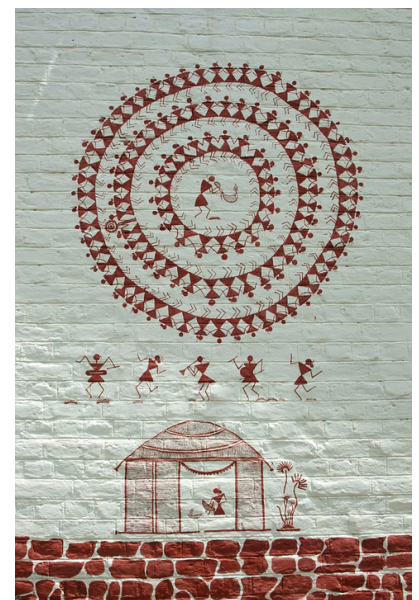
The Western Ghats is one among the oldest mountain ranges found on Earth; it is now a UNESCO world heritage site and also an important biodiversity hotspot of South East Asia. Western Ghats spread from borders of Gujarat in the Dangs to southern tip of Kerala in Kanyakumari, an area of 1600 km is covered under the Ghats. Located at a distance of 60 km from Mumbai city in a serene mountain range of Maharashtra, is the most well known tourist destination called Vajreshwari. This famous site is known for its landforms – scenic views of mountains, hot springs and Tansa River. Apart from landforms, Vajreshwari is also a pilgrimage site with the Vajreshwari temple, an important sacred place for the Hindu community.

Students visited a small village in Vajreshwari known for its cleanliness and good hygiene standards followed by resident villagers. The village consists mainly of the local Marathi community and the Warli tribes living in the nearby forest. Warli tribes are known for their interdependence with nature and their paintings. While there are no records of the exact origins of this art, its roots may

be traced to as early as the 10th century AD. Research suggests that the tribals are the propagators of a tradition which originated sometime in the Neolithic period between 2,500 BC and 3,000 BC. This art carry on a tradition stretching back to 2500 or 3000 BC

Trailblazers conducted a student camp in the small town of Vajreshwari for grade 9 & 10 for a Mumbai based international school. The objective of camp was to study and understand landforms and village tourism. As part of camp, the students visited the Ideal village as well to interact with the Sarpanch (the head of the village) and learned about the importance of hygiene standards in villages, water conservation through rain harvesting, vermi-composting and biogas generation. The village head also shared information on the national and international awards and recognition that the village has received and how community service and team building helped them to achieve these accolades. A short walk near Usgaon Dam was also conducted to learn and understand the concepts of water harvesting and role of dams in water conservation.

After a traditional village meal at a local NGO which has been working with Warli tribes from past 20 years in areas of women empowerment, career guidance, health and child education, the students interacted with various members of the NGO and learned about the challenges that they face when dealing with tribal communities and government officials. The visit to the NGO also covered short sessions on vermi-composting, biogas generation and herbarium making. The outdoor camp ended with memories etched forever in their minds.



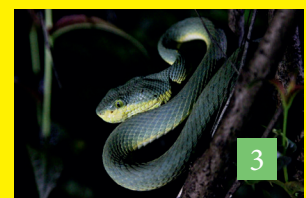
# Reptiles Vs Amphibians

## Do you know the difference between reptiles and amphibians?

Reptiles are born from eggs on land and amphibians are born from eggs in water. Amphibians have gills when they are young, whereas reptiles have lungs. The early stage of amphibians is called the larval stage. Tadpoles are the larval stage of frogs. Both amphibians and reptiles are cold-blooded vertebrates. Amphibians have moist skin and lack scales like reptiles.

### Classification of Snakes

- **1. Non venomous (Python, Sand Boa)**  
Absence of venom glands, fangs are absent and teeth are present.
- **2. Semi venomous or mildly venomous (Green Wine Snake)**  
Venom is more effective on smaller prey but not on humans. Fangs may or may not be present
- **3. Venomous (Bamboo Pit Viper)**  
Venom glands and fangs are present, venom is highly toxic



## Jasmine Splendour

As an Outdoor School, Trailblazers always thinks of innovative ways to communicate with young minds. Trailblazers outdoor programmes have a focused approach which enhances the learning experience of a student. An outdoor camp to the heritage city of Madurai and hill city of Kodaikanal was organized for a Mumbai based school. The camp focused on monument history of South India, Dravidian architecture along with multiple adventure and creative activities.

In the time period of 2500 years, Madurai was under the regime of the Pandyas, the Cholas, the Sultanate, the Vijayanagar Empire, the Nayaks, the Carnatic Kingdom and Chanda Sahib at different times of its historic evolution. During 1801-1947, Madurai city served as a British Colony in South India.

The Meenakshi Amman Temple or Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple is the icon of Madurai. The Temple complex is dedicated to Goddess Parvati and Lord Shiva, who are worshiped as Meenakshi and Sundareswarar respectively. The temple complex is known for its exemplary specimen of the Dravidian architecture with 14 towering gateways known as gopurams and 33,000 sculptures. which were gazed with

wonder by all the students. The visit to this splendid temple monument is sure to last in the memories of all students. The temple is built in the heart of the city thus giving it the name "Athens of East" as the city of Athens had a Greek Pantheon which is located on a elevated plane so that it is visible from any part of the city just like Meenakshi temple in Madurai.

Students enjoyed various activities in Madurai including a scavenger hunt at the temple and art of making beautiful, colored terracotta jewellery. A traditional meal on the banana meal was savoured by all.

Just few kilometers from Meenakshi temple is the famous palace of King Thirumalai Nayak and is known for its imposing edifice of "Stuccowork" on its domes and impressive arches which is considered to be a marvel of Indo-Saracenic architectural style. Students enjoyed the show which covered historical stories of palace and the great Madurai King with special effects of light and sounds. Besides the famous Meenakshi Temple, the city of Madurai is also famous for jasmine flowers known by the local name 'Madurai Malli'. Madurai's unique link with the jasmine probably dates back to 300 BC or earlier

and references are found in Sangam literature. Madurai Malli has been given the Geographical Indication (GI) mark by the Geographical Indications Registry. Since Madurai Jasmine holds a unique fragrance and this flower has the highest value in the industry. Jasmine flower trade is very important to Madurai's economy. To understand how the trade and commerce works, the group visited the jasmine farms and market. The cycle begins at the farms where the flowers are harvested early morning and then traded in the market thereby reaching the consumers. Views from traders and farmers on economic importance of flower market were shared with students.

After exploring the Madurai city, the student visited the hill station of Kodaikanal where the lush green forest and cool weather was enjoyed by all the participants. Students were thrilled to do adventure activities like zip line, Charlie Chaplin's walk and Burma bridge. Various team activities like sandwich making, pottery, rope work, survival skills session and fun games kept the group engaged and helped in bonding with each other as well as boosted their self-confidence. Students thoroughly enjoyed this multiactivity camp.





## Edenwoods Trail

Trailblazers Foundation in association with FERN organized Tree Watch for Tree lovers. They had gathered at Edenwoods to learn more about the trees in this green cover of 7.6 acres. Blessed as it is with floral diversity and a fairly high tree density, Eden Woods has as many as 598 plants belonging to 36 families, comprising of 64 genera. The prevailing floral stature is largely dominated by trees by virtue of avenue plantation. It is one of the few housing societies in Thane where a tree census has been done and trees have been identified and geo-tagged.

Tree experts Mr. Rajendra Karnik, Retired professor Botany and Ms. Niyati Pimprikar, both of FERN, and resident Mrs Mala Biswas, Trustee, Trailblazers Foundation and Sachin Sata of Trailblazers Adventure Travel Pvt Ltd guided the participants during the programme.

Thanks to Ms. Nutan Pant & Mr. T N Raghunath for participating and also informing about the green activities of Edenwoods to the Tree Watch participants. The participants thoroughly enjoyed the trail.



Edenwoodians and tree lovers enjoyed the Tree Watch session organized by Trailblazers Foundation and FERN.

1. Mrs. Mala Biswas, Trustee, Trailblazers Foundation and Botanist interacting with tree lovers. 2. Mr. Rajendra Karnik, retired Professor and Botanist, FERN interacting with participants 3. Mr. Sachin Sata, Environment Programme Officer, Trailblazers Adventure Travel 4. Ms. Nutan Pant, Edenwoods Resident 5. Ms. Niyati Pimprikar, FERN

## Multiply the Message: Dow-Trailblazers Initiative

The theme of Multiply the Message workshop for 2017 was Water – the Gift of Life with special reference to Plastic - a boon or scourge. Sessions included modules on outdoor and indoor activities on Environment Education. Keynote speakers on polymer chemistry and plastic recycling were invited to share their knowledge during each of the three workshops. The first workshop had Prof. M O Garg, Chemical Engineer from IIT Bombay as a keynote speaker, who in his simple and lucid style explained how plastic can be recycled to extract petroleum. In the second workshop, Mr. Shirish N. Phadtare, Chairman, Rudra Environmental Solution (India) Ltd. Pune showcased how plastic can be collected from cooperative societies and recycled into fuel. In the third workshop, Mr. Tushar K Bandopadhyay, Technical Director, ICPE Secretariat explained how plastic is the choicest of all materials for packaging and boon if we learn to dispose it properly and manage it to recycle. Pedagogies shared during the workshop included collaborative learning and teaching; role play, demonstrations, drama, conservation music and audiovisual presentations with sessions on identification of birds and trees, water audit along with nature games on food chain and water cycle. The role of teachers as the single most important and influencing entity in the lives of students was emphasized. At the end of the workshop, student teachers pledged to multiply the message of conservation and sustainability to peers, students and society.



1. & 2. Mr. Ranjan Biswas, Trustee Trailblazers Foundation addressing the Student Teachers and inaugurating the workshop along with Mrs Sarla Gavane, CSR, Manager and Mr. Shirish Phadtare. 3. & 5. Keynote speakers Mr. Shirish N. Phadtare, Chairman, Rudra Environmental Solution (India) Ltd & Prof. M O Garg, Chemical Engineering at IIT Bombay respectively  
4. (L to R) Mr. Biswas, Mrs Mala Biswas, Trustee, Trailblazers Foundation on the dias with Mr. Tushar K Bandopadhyay, Technical Director, ICPE Secretariat addressing the student teachers 7. Students enjoying the activities during the workshop.  
6. & 8. Mr. Sachin Sata and Mr. Prathamesh Desai conducting activities during the workshop.

# Ecology and Economy

Mr. Ranjan Biswas, Trustee, Trailblazers Foundation was invited as a guest lecturer at Nirmala Niketan to give a lecture on Ecology and its link to Economy. Ecology comes from Greek oikos "house, dwelling place, habitation" + -logia "study of". Ecology is the study of how organisms interact with one another and with their physical environment. What better way to learn the ecology than to be a part of it. Each student was assigned a role as component of ecosystem and were asked to link all the components to each other. They understood the ecological services provided by each component and its worth. How nature tries to balance the imbalance created by humans to an extent but there is a limit to it was explained to them. Conservation of natural resources and sustainable lifestyle was stressed.

Thank you to Nirmal Niketan Ms Nilima Rodrigues, Coordinator of Extension Centre and Dr. Ronald Yesudas, Assistant Professor for coordinating and facilitating the visit.



1. Ranjan Biswas, Trustee Trailblazers Foundation with students at Nirmala Niketan. 2. Food Web Demonstration 3. L-R: Dr. Ronald Yesudas, Assistant Professor; Ms. Nilima Rodrigues, Coordinator of Extension Centre, Nirmala Niketan and Mr Biswas.

# Volunteerism and Service Learning



1. Mr. Ranjan Biswas, Trustee Trailblazers Foundation taking lecture on Volunteerism and Service Learning 2. Mr. Biswas flanked by St Xavier's Principal Dr. Sosamma Samuel on the left; Manager Fr. Blaise D'souza SJ on the right and Assistant Professor Ms. Sadab Paloji (Left)

Value education, service to community and volunteerism is the need of hour. Teacher as always has responsibility of not only providing knowledge but also inspire the youth to be a part of community and be useful to it. This early lessons to serve the community paves the path for better citizens of tomorrow. Students are constantly looking for role models to follow in Teachers.

Community service or volunteering or service learning can be done in many ways, be it a project to clean the roads or surroundings, or to teach a skill to lesser privileged students helping them to be better equipped or run a campaign on conservation of environment or spread the awareness on health and hygiene. Mr. Biswas covered these topics in detail for the benefit of St Xavier's College Teachers. Trailblazers Foundation congratulates and thanks St Xavier's Principal Dr. Sosamma Samuel, Manager Fr. Blaise D'souza SJ and Assistant Professor Ms. Sadab Paloji for conducting this short term course successfully for their teachers.

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### India's first World Heritage City

The Walled City of Ahmedabad, founded by Sultan Ahmed Shah in the 15th century, has been declared India's first World Heritage City. The World Heritage Committee (WHC) of UNESCO had made this announcement in Poland's Krakow. On the eastern banks of Sabarmati river Ahmedabad presents a rich architectural heritage from the sultanate period, notably the Bhadra citadel, the walls and gates of the Fort city and numerous mosques and tombs, including important Hindu and Jain temples of later periods. The 5.5 km walled city area with approximate population of four lakh living in century old wooden residences in around 600 *pols* or neighbourhoods is regarded as living heritage and the UNESCO had preferred Ahmedabad's entry over Delhi and Mumbai, country's two main metro cities. Ahmedabad's nomination had received huge support from around 20 countries, who lauded the peaceful co-existence of dominant Hindu, Islamic and Jain communities in the Walled City. Besides its architectural marvels of wooden havelis, the world community also stressed on the fact that the city was the epicentre of non violent freedom struggle that led to country's independence from colonial rulers in 1947.

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