



Pushkar is a town in the state of Rajasthan in India. Pushkar means born due to a flower. Hindus believe that the gods released a swan with a lotus in its beak and let it fall on earth where Brahma would perform a grand yagna. The place where the lotus fell was called Pushkar. It is situated at 14 km North West from Ajmer and is one of the five sacred dhams (pilgrimage sites for devout Hindus.) It is often called "Tirth Raj" - the king of pilgrimage sites - and has in recent years become a popular destination for foreign tourists.

Pushkar is one of the oldest cities of India. The date of its actual origin is not known, but legend associates Lord Brahma with its creation. It is mentioned that Brahma performed penance here for 60,000 years to have glimpse of Radha Krishna.

Pushkar boasts of temples, though not many can be considered very old since many were destroyed by Aurangzeb, a Mogul ruler and subsequently rebuilt. The most famous among all is the Brahma Temple, said to be the only temple in the world dedicated to this deity.

Pushkar lies on the shore of Pushkar Lake. It has five principal temples, many smaller temples and 52 ghats where pilgrims descend to the lake to bathe in the sacred waters. One of the primary temples is the 14th century temple dedicated to Brahma, the Hindu god of creation. Very few temples to Lord Brahma exist anywhere in the world. Other temples of Brahma include those at Besakih in Bali, Bithoor in Uttar Pradesh, India, village Asotra near Balotra city of Barmer district in Rajasthan and Prambanan in Indonesia. Pushkar is also famous for its annual Pushkar Camel Fair.

### **Special Attractions -**

The picturesque lake of Pushkar is set in a valley just about 11 kilometres northwest of Ajmer, surrounded by hills on three sides and sand dunes on the fourth. Pushkar forms a fascinating location and a befitting backdrop for the annual religious and cattle fair. Turbaned heads of men, and colorful veils and skirts of the women, bring alive the arid desertscape. The village women dress in their best colourful clothes and finery for the five-day mela.

Like Varanasi, Pushkar is one of the sacred places for the Hindus, with 400 temples of which the most important is dedicated to Lord Brahma - the creator of the universe. Fifty-

two ghats bind the lake. During the days of the mela, the otherwise tranquil lake is engulfed with religious fervor. Thousands of devotees collect to take a dip, sadhus descend from the Himalayas and people pray for salvation to the sound of verses from the Holy Scriptures, which fill the air.

In the afternoons, people crowd the stadium where camels, horses, and cows are paraded and raced. Camels are bought and sold during the Pushkar fair.

On the roadside, stalls of all kinds are set up to sell a cornucopia of items. Almost every household is engaged in setting them up as the locals try to capitalize on the massive influx of people. It is impossible to drive around because of the large crowds. Either you hire a camel or you walk. In this aspect, it is truly a rural bazaar.

An interesting part of the Pushkar Fair is the mass trading of camels. Of course, cattle and other livestock are also traded, but it's camels that hold center stage at Pushkar. Camel-traders and villagers from miles away converge to Pushkar with their humped beasts. Over 25,000 camels (on the conservative side) are traded; making this world's largest camel fair. Since Pushkar is a religious place alcohol and non-vegetarian food is prohibited.

### **Pushkar Fair - Rituals and Traditions -**

These five days are a period of relaxation and merry-making for the villagers, despite being the busiest for them, as this is one of the largest cattle fairs in the country. Animals, mainly camels, are brought from miles around. Trading is brisk as several thousand heads of cattle exchange hands. All the camels are cleaned, washed, adorned, some are interestingly shorn to form patterns, and special stalls are set up selling finery and jewelry for the camels. Camels at the Pushkar fair are decorated with great care. They wear jewelry of silver and beads. There are silver bells and bangles around their ankles that jingle-jangle when they walk. An interesting ritual is the piercing of a camel's nose.

Races and competitions are organized. Camels lope across the sands sometimes throwing their riders on to the vast sands, amidst cheers and jeers from thousands of spectators. An interesting event is the camel beauty contest, where they are adorned and paraded. The camels preen before the crowds, enjoying every moment of the attention they get.

It is believed that for five days every year, all the gods visit Pushkar and bless the devout. This accounts for the unbelievable number of devotees who flock to the lake to wash away their sins.