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Cars are the stars in historic Gondal

Just an hour's flight from Air Tanzania destination Mumbai, the historic city of Gondal is renowned for the opulent palaces of its former Maharaja rulers – many of which visitors can stay in as they are now historic hotels – and the royal family's collection of vintage cars. Murli Menon soaks up the accommodation as well as the automobiles on a recent stay.

A travel journalist's life is not a bad one. I am writing this from my garden-facing suite at the Orchard Palace Resort in Gondal, a heritage hotel managed by the royal family of Gondal. Sumptuous does not even cover it. As if I wasn't feeling lucky enough, as an avid vintage vehicle lover I am in car heaven with the hotel being right next door to the Gondal Antique Car Museum.

The car collection was begun by Maharaja Bhagwat Sinhji who ruled the region in early 20th century and was renowned as a visionary leader and a car fanatic. The collection now includes more than 50 vintage cars and motorcycles, all kept in pristine working order.

Among the highlights are a 1923 Rolls Royce Silver Ghost and a 1931 Studebaker President. Visitors can also see a 1948 Rolls Royce Silver Wraith, a 1951 Chevrolet Styleline, and a 1955 Mercedes Benz 300SL Gullwing.

The museum is open to the public every day except Monday and visitors can take a guided tour of the museum, which is conducted in English and Hindi. It is a fascinating place to visit that offers a glimpse into the history of transportation and a chance to see some truly beautiful and rare vehicles.

The four-wheeled delights don't end there. The Orchard Palace Hotel also has its own museum housing a collection of vintage and classic cars owned by the previous Maharaja of Gondal. His Highness Maharaja Jyotendrasinhji – who died last year – was a keen racing driver with many wins on Indian tracks in the 1960 and the collection includes his favourite fire-red Mercedes-Benz 300 SL Roadster.

I was shown around the collection by the museum manager Mr Bhavesh and I was given all the time I needed to soak in the classic cars, each parked in its own private garage. Highlights for me were a gorgeous, bright orange 1930 Delage designed by Maurice Gaultier and a 1947 top-of-the-line Frazer (Kaiser-Buick convertible). The most unusual "car" dates back to 1907 was made in the United Kingdom. It was called the New Engine, looks more like a tram than a car and was able to run on train tracks as well as the road.

How to get there

By Air: Fly from Mumbai International Airport to Rajkot Airport. The journey takes about an hour. Gondal is about 41km from Rajkot Airport.

Museum ticket

Ticket price is Rs 120 per person plus Rs 280 for photos and video recording per camera. A few cars are displayed behind glass panels, so it is not possible to take successful photos. You need to pay extra to visit other palaces in Gondal.

Where to eat?

There are several restaurants offering Indian vegetarian cuisine located around Gondal. You'll also find plenty of street stalls selling dosas (filled pancakes), khaman (savory steamed sponge) and dhoklas (classic Gujarat cake) are also found here. Dhabas (roadside restaurants) serving Gujarati and Kathiawari vegetarian fare are also plentiful in the city and along the highway from Ahmedabad to Gondal.



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