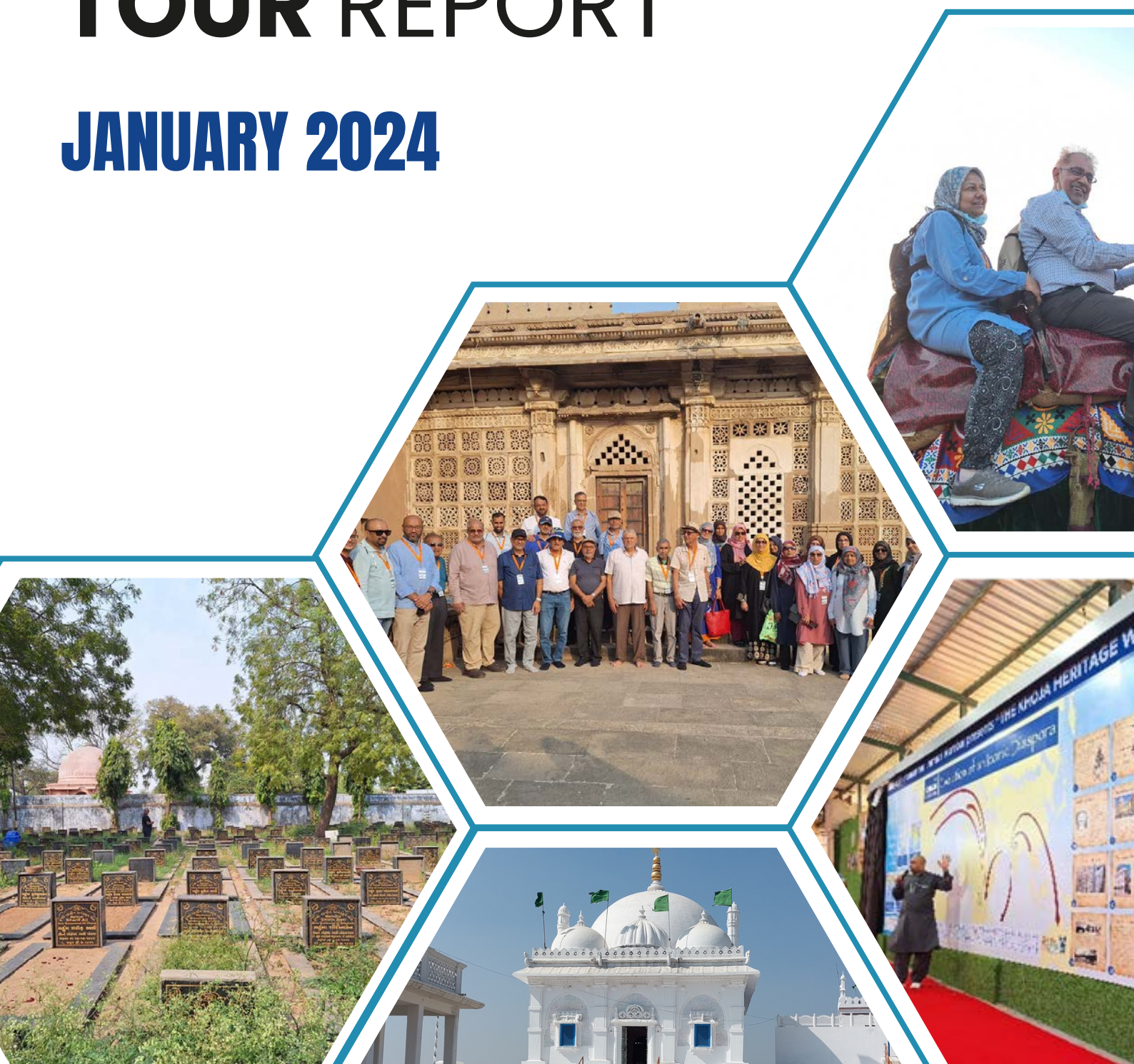


KHOJA HERITAGE TOUR REPORT

JANUARY 2024



About Us

The World Federation's grassroots program, The Khoja Heritage Project, proudly organised the 6th Annual Khoja Heritage Tour in India in January 2024.

This two-week-long tour is rapidly emerging as a flagship project, garnering an enthusiastic response from our community members. As anticipated, the tour reached its maximum capacity, with participants eager to embark on this enriching journey.

In this report, we aim to provide you with comprehensive details and insights into the Tour in India. Our goal is to offer you an immersive experience that facilitates a deeper connection with your roots.

AIM & OBJECTIVES

The Mission of the Khoja Heritage Project (KHP) is the preservation, documentation and appreciation of the religious and cultural heritage of the KSI Community.

01

Promote and preserve all aspects of heritage of the Khoja Shia Ithna-Asheri Community.

02

Collaborate with other Khoja communities in promoting the shared heritage of the Khojas

03

Engage with academia to enhance the field of academic Khoja Studies.



**KHOJA
HERITAGE
PROJECT**

**KHOJA
HERITAGE
TOUR**

A journey in
इसार्चे of our
roots!!



Registered Charity (UK) No. 282303
www.world-federation.org

Meet Our Team



Dr Hasnain Walji

KHP Chairperson
Historian



Asad Virani

Manager – WF India Team
KHT Managing Committee



Mohamedali Patel

KHT Managing
Committee



Zahra Merchant

KHT Managing
Committee

Tour Summary

19th January	Arrival in Mumbai & Welcome dinner
20th January	Mumbai: Opening Ceremony & Heritage visits
21st January	Mumbai: Sightseeing
22nd January	Arriving in Bhuj & Nagalpur: Heritage visit
23rd January	Kera: Heritage visits & Mandvi: Sightseeing
24th January	Bhuj: Sightseeing
25th January	Jamnagar: Heritage visit
26th January	Arriving in Bhavnagar
27th January	Bhavnagar: Heritage visit & Sightseeing
28th January	Bhavnagar: Heritage visits
29th January	Arriving in Ahmedabad
30th January	Ahmedabad: Heritage visit & Sightseeing
31st January	Closing Ceremony
1st February	Check Out at 10 AM



Welcome Pack -
Customised bag with an ID
card, pen and participant
handbook given to all
participants

13
DAYS

8
CITIES

31
PARTICIPANTS

Daily Activities Summary

📍 Mumbai - Day 1

The tour started with a lavish meet-and-greet dinner at the hotel we were staying in Mumbai – Hotel Auris. Our participants had a good time meeting each other, and some even found out that they were relatives even though they had never met, definitely proving the saying, “All Khojas are related to each other in one way or another”.



📍 Mumbai - Day 2

The official opening day of the KHT, we had an early start of our day with the visit to the Mulla Qadir Hussain Mehfil for our opening ceremony at Dongri. The KHT lead, Br Asad Virani, started with the introduction of Mulla Qadir Hussain Sahab and the spread of Khojas. We had a local historian, Dr Sadiq Uttanwala, who explained the history of Khojas in Bombay.



After the introductions and a delve into the history, we proceeded to the Khoja Masjid via a walk through the Khoja Mohalla. Walking on the land where our ancestors once walked made us nostalgic. The Mahe Rajab decorations adorning the Masjid for the upcoming birth anniversary celebrations of Imam Ali (a) created a spiritual environment and uplifted our spirits. Our participants experienced a historic legacy moment when one of our participants – Br Muslim Khimji recited the Dhohrain Adhaan at the Khoja Masjid. Br Muslim's great grandfather, Alibhai Dhanjee, was the first ever Moaz'zin at this very same mosque when it was constructed in 1901. He wanted to follow in the footsteps of his ancestors, even if just for a moment, and the KHT team was more than happy to facilitate this.



Mumbai - Continuation of Day 2

For our lunch, we were joined by Br Haji Parekh, Br Irfan Karim and Br Nadeem Halani, the Office Bearers of the Mumbai Jamaat. We ate lunch with them while learning more about the Jamaat's history. From there, we visited the Khoja Kabrastan, also known as the Aarambaugh, where we were given detailed explanations about the biggest Khoja Wall in the world and the significance of the Kabrastan in Khoja history by Br Asad and a continuation of the historical discussions with a tour of the Kabrastan visiting the graves of the luminaries of the community by Dr Uttanwala. This was the highlight of our day. We ended our day with a fast-food dinner at our hotel and a promise to explore the most popular tourist destination in Mumbai the next day!



Mumbai - Day 3

Refreshed and energised after a good night's rest, we were all ready to explore the city of dreams as they so fondly call, "Mumbai". We started the day with a visit to the Mani Bhavan Sangralaya – the house of Mahatma Gandhi for his 17-year stay in Bombay. Br Asad gave a brief intro of the place before we entered. An hour of cultural exploration looking at the miniatures demonstrating the olden times, made us appreciate

the early life and the struggle our ancestors went through to get where we are today. After a lavish lunch at the popular Delhi Darbar Restaurant in Colaba, we continued our journey towards the highlight of the day – a visit to "Gateway of India" and the boat ride. The chirping of the birds passing by our boat and the evening sun cast an orange glow on the city, proving it to be the perfect time for the ride. We ended our last day in Mumbai with a grand dinner at our hotel.



Kandla, Nagalpur, Bhuj - Day 4

We had an early start to our day as we flew from Mumbai to Kandla in the morning. When we arrived at Kandla, we were surprised by the KHT team with a visit to the Nagalpur Jamaat which was not on the itinerary. We visited the Nagalpur Jamaat centre and did our salaah and lunch with the community members. From there, we proceeded to check in to our hotel, Hotel KBN in Bhuj. After a short rest, we visited the Bhuj mosque for the evening prayers and wrapped up our day with a hearty delicious dinner with students at the Tauheed Boys Hostel.



Bhuj - Day 5



This was another day we were looking forward to as we were going to visit the Mandvi beach. The day started with a visit to Bharapar, where we saw a 125-year-old Mosque and the 100-year-old Meghjee Bhai Pradhan Trust Eye Charitable Hospital. Although both of these are not in use anymore, the structures still stand tall, bearing witness to the far-sighted visions of our

philanthropist community members. Continuing our journey to Kera, we met the members of Kera Jamaat and had our salaah and lunch with them. We went on to visit the dargah of Peer Ghulam Ali Shah, who is credited for reverting our ancestors to the right path. Br Asad gave us a detailed speech covering Peer Ghulam Ali Shah's arrival in Gujarat and his contribution to the religion, and Br Mehboob spoke about the burial of the Peer.



📍 Bhuj - Continuation of Day 5



After a quick look around the area, we left Kera and proceeded towards Mandvi Shipbuilding Yard. When we reached the shipbuilding area, we saw a ship-in-the-making standing tall in all its glory. Our group was fortunate to get the chance to see the belly of the ship from inside. The on-site construction manager, Mr Anwar, explained the shipbuilding process and answered all our queries. The visit to the shipbuilding yard put all our thoughts into gear as we kept thinking this was how our ancestors left Gujarat, in desperate and dangerous situations. As the time for sunset was approaching soon, we quickly boarded the bus to see the sunset at Mandvi beach. Pink-hue sunset skies made a majestic sight as we enjoyed camel rides and other beach activities. We also drank the madaaf, which felt like nature's welcome drink! Lots of pictures, laughs, and memories later, we boarded the bus again to return to our hotel for dinner and to call it a day.

📍 Bhuj - Day 6

Each day is better than yesterday. Just when we think it can't get any better, the programs keep surprising us! The morning for the day was allocated for something the ladies were impatiently waiting for – Shopping! We visited the Ambedkar Nagar village to shop for some traditional Kutchi handicraft items. All items for sale were handmade, right from jewellery and glass coasters to dresses and quilts. Half an hour of shopping later, we continued our journey to the Mehfile Rann Resort for our salaah and lunch. We prayed the Zuhraan prayers in Jamaat and had one of the best vegetarian thali with 12 items for lunch. The food was so good that we needed to take a nap in the coach while we were on the way to the Rann.



📍 Bhuj - Continuation of Day 6



Once we reached the Rann of Kutch, or the “White Sand Desert”, we were awestruck by the sight that awaited us. Pristine white salt covered the entire area as far as the eyes could see, making it seem like the land was covered in snow. Our local guide Bharat bhai, briefed us about how the salt, which looks like snow, came to be in a desert region and that the entire stretch was about 300 kms. We took a dozen pictures at the Rann and, after spending around an hour, headed back to the hotel to freshen up for the 13th Rajab Khushali Program at the Bhuj Jamaat’s Mahdi centre. The members of the Jamaat welcomed us with an Imam Zamin ceremony as we joined them for their jashn program, reciting manqabats and ashaars (poetry) in the praises of Ahl al-Bayt (a). We ended our day with proper Kutchi veg food, biryani, and kheer puri with the Bhuj community members.

📍 Jamnagar - Day 7



Our time in Bhuj came to an end as we proceeded towards the next leg of the journey – Jamnagar. We spent a good part of the day travelling from Bhuj, arriving in Jamnagar at Hotel Fern Residency in the early evening. After a short rest in the hotel, we visited the Jamnagar Masjid and were greeted with flower garlands by the members of the Jamnagar Jamaat, who were waiting for us for dinner. Delicious dinner and meeting community members rejuvenated us, and we're already looking forward to the next day's program.



📍 Bhavnagar- Day 8

Time flies by quickly when we are having a good time. It's been a week since we started this journey, and we can already see the end of it around the corner. It was another travel day for us as we departed from Jamnagar to go to Bhavnagar. We took a few halts on the way for Salaat, lunch and washroom breaks, and the team even purchased and distributed some fruits for us. Arriving in Bhavnagar in the early evening, we checked into our accommodation at EFCEE Sarovar Premier. According to the itinerary shared by the KHT team on the WhatsApp group, there were no programs in the evening, so the participants could catch up on the much-needed rest. So, in the evening, we were free to rest, go shopping, or simply just stroll around. We ended our day early with food packs for dinner delivered to our rooms by the team members.



📍 Bhavnagar- Day 9



With a good night's rest, all of us were ready for today's programs. Our morning started with a visit to our community-owned Mahdi School, one of the reputed schools in Bhavnagar. On our arrival, each participant was allocated with a guide-student, who showed us around the school and explained the activities. An hour of looking around at different projects by students and other activities, we finally came to the assembly hall, where arrangements for refreshments were made. The school had prepared a special program for the participants, including short speeches and dramas by the students. We thoroughly enjoyed these programs and appreciated the efforts put in by the students and teachers. Concluding the program, Mr Parvez Merchant, Principal of the Mahdi School and College, gave us a detailed presentation on the school and relevant statistics, to help us understand the school's position better. We prayed our salaah and had a feast lunch with the members at the school.



📍 Bhavnagar - Continuation of Day 9



Our visit to the Mahdi School coincided with Alhaj Safder bhai's visit, the President of TWF. Safder bhai interacted with our participants, expressing his delight in meeting them. We then continued towards the next visit to Gogha Masjid, the first KHT visit to the site.



The structure of the mosque was compact; however, the most unique thing about it is the Mehrab, which still faces the direction of Baitul Muqaddas instead of the Holy Kaaba, which makes the mosque estimated to be around 1,400 years old. We returned to the hotel in the evening and had free time until 20:00 for shopping and rest. We concluded our day with a dinner hosted by India Federation at Sabirbhai Varteji's house

📍 Bhavnagar - Day 10



She explained the activities of the trust in detail, and we were astonished to hear the outreach of her work. Parveen ben has been doing philanthropic work for the community for the last 39 years. We were also joined briefly by Safder bhai, the President of TWF, for lunch. The final activity for the day was a visit to some of the projects managed by Umme Kulsum Trust. We visited the under-construction site for housing for girls and the centre for differently abled ladies in Shishuvihar. Currently, the centre is home to 12 ladies, who are cared for and looked after by the trust. We ended our day with yummy biryani food packs provided to us by the team members.

Today, we started our day with a visit to the Haji Naji Kabrastan, where we were greeted by the students and members of the Haji Naji Trust. The students of the Haji Naji Boarding had organised a short program for our participants consisting of Tilawat of the Holy Qur'an, Manqabat and a short speech on the life and contributions of Allama Haji Naji Sahab. We paid our homage at the grave of Haji Naji Sahab and left the Kabrastan to visit the KSI Masjid at Amba Chowk for salaah. Our lunch was organised by the Umme Kulsum Trust at Zainabiya Hall, where we met with Parveen ben, the Chairlady of the Umme Kulsum Trust.



📍 Ahmedabad - Day 11



We successfully wrapped up our programs in Bhavnagar and proceeded towards the last leg of the journey – Ahmedabad. On our way, we stopped at Vartej for a brief visit to Vartej Jamaat members. As we had a long day ahead of us, after hearing the history of the Jamaat by Br Asad and local historian Br Abbas Jivani, we quickly boarded the bus again to continue our journey towards Ahmedabad. We took a few breaks on the highway for salaah, lunch and washroom, and upon our arrival in Ahmedabad in the evening, we checked into Fortune Park hotel. We were given a short break to freshen up and offer Maghrib prayers, after which we proceeded to a restaurant for a hot meal to put a perfect end to our day.



📍 Ahmedabad - Day 12



After a late start of the day, we arrived at the Haji Naji KSI Kabrastan in Kalupur to learn more about the Khoja history. We were joined by a local historian, Dr Aliraza Khunt, who explained to us the history of how we came to be defined as the Khoja Shia Ithna Asheri in the late 1800s and the contribution of Haji Naji Sahab to Gujarati literature. The session with Dr Aliraza was very insightful, and he was kind enough to bring with him the 120-year-old original Gujarati transliteration and translation of the Holy Qur'an, published by Haji Naji Sahab and the deed papers of the Kabrastan, which was purchased by Haji Naji Sahab in 1906.



📍 Ahmedabad - Continuation of Day 12

We prayed our salaah and had lunch at the Kabrastan, after which we visited a popular tourist attraction in Ahmedabad – The Sarkhej Roza, a 500-year-old mosque and tomb complex built during the Sultanate period in India. We ended our day with a dinner under the open sky at a plush-themed restaurant, along with the office bearers of Sarkhej Jamaat.



📍 Ahmedabad - Day 13



As all good things must come to an end, so does this tour. Today, the entire day was allocated solely for shopping. Dr Aliraza's wife, Atika bai, shared locations of popular shopping sites in Ahmedabad with our participants, so everyone left the hotel in the morning to explore these sites. The team had informed us beforehand that the closing ceremony would take place in the evening and that we needed to be back by 18:00 to leave for the venue on time.

Our very punctual group left for Hotel Regenta for the final program of this tour. As we reached the venue, the team welcomed us, and the ceremony began with a beautiful recitation of the Holy Qur'an by our fellow participant, Br Fazle Abbas Rashid. The Chair of the Khoja Heritage Project, Dr Hasnain Walji, also joined the ceremony via zoom as he spoke with the participants, thanking them for their cooperation and support throughout the tour.



📍 Ahmedabad - Continuation of Day 13



The team had organised a quiz session, quizzing us about the history we learned throughout the tour, and the prizes given at the end of the quiz were hilarious, giving us all a good laugh. We then moved to the last item on the agenda, the feedback forms, which were filled out by all of us. Finally, we wrapped up the 6th Khoja Heritage Tour with a gala dinner and a promise to all the participants to remember each other and keep in touch!



Participant Testimonials

Azmat Mawani, UK

KHT is a wonderful exploration of the history of our grandparents and their journey to Africa (from India). We have learnt so much about their journey and their faith.

Zakiya Hasham, Canada

The KHT will be etched in our memory forever.

Fatma Ranji, UK

Excellent way to experience our heritage sites and food. The places visited were invaluable for all participants. Great friendships were created that will be lifelong.

Ferhana Bhogadia, UK

Getting to know our history and heritage with the sacrifices of the great pious personalities makes me proud to be known as a Khoja Shia Ithna Asheri

Muslim Khinji, Kenya

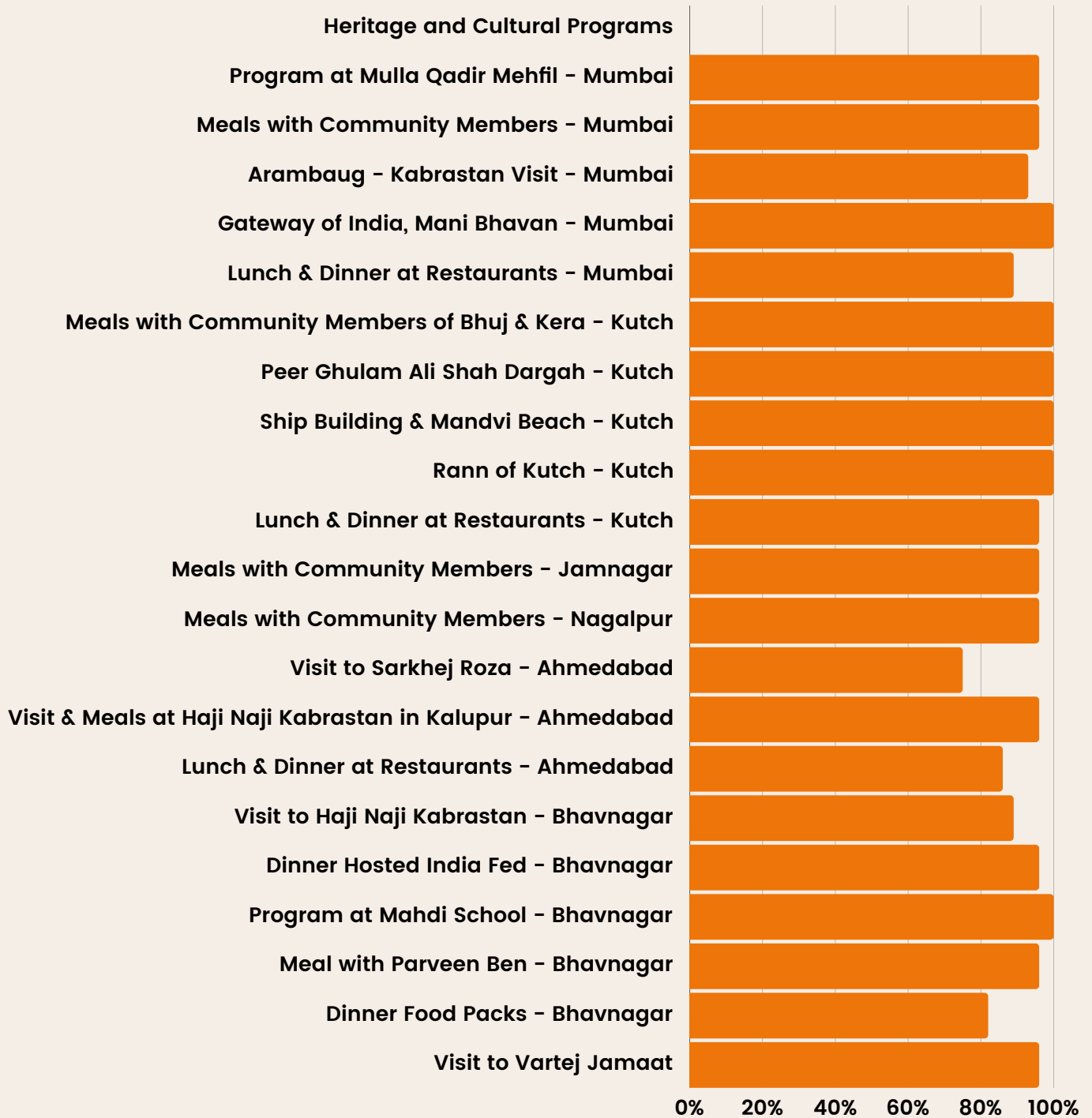
.. Whilst in India I was feeling at home, and just to mention, the group was kind and helpful in various ways. The tour and brochures were informative and quite well organised without any complaints. Meals and hotels were of course, of very good standards. I will recommend to friends in Nairobi to come and attend such programs. Special thanks to Asad bhai, Mohamedali bhai and Ya Allah Ya Allah – Sr Zahra. The entire tour was Hakuna Matata!

Shahin Ismail, UK

For the first time in my life, I feel I am at home. This was an emotional journey to reconnect with our forefather's history, "Jamin Kheenche". I will be back very often.

Participant Feedback

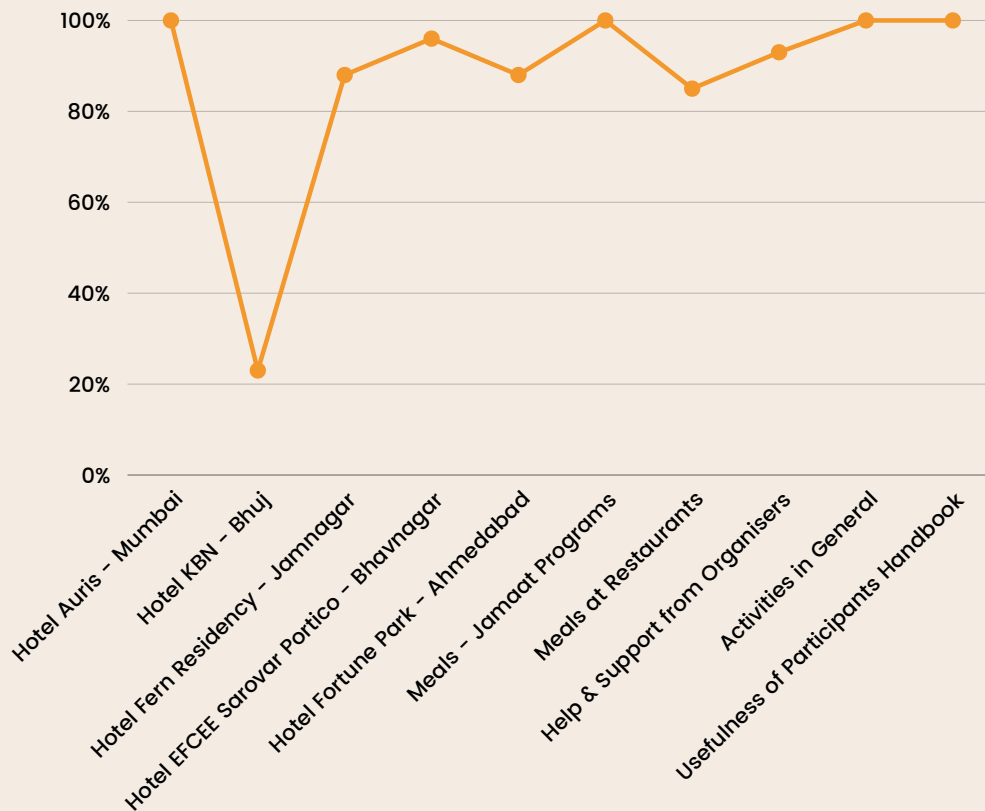
Tour Activities – Rating Percentage



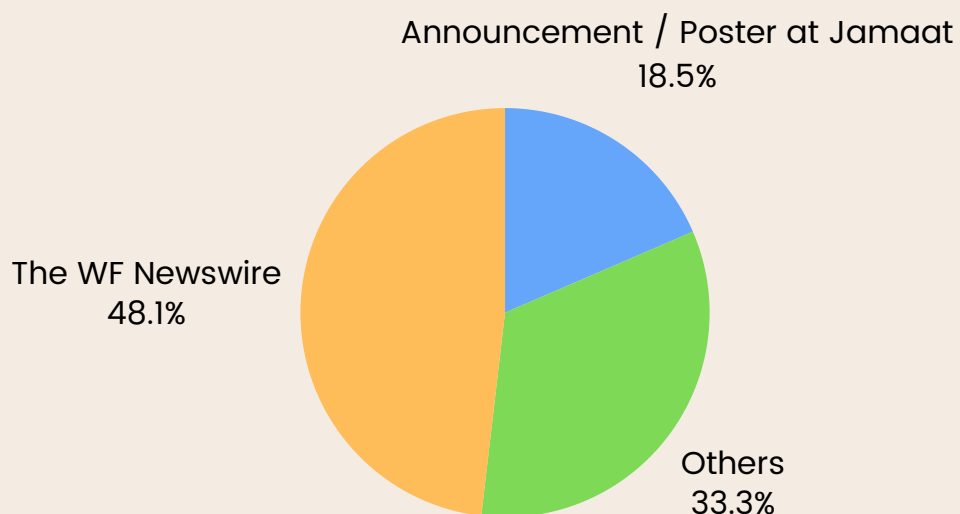
Participant Feedback



Overall Feedback - Rating Percentage



How did you find out about the tour?



Closing Comment from the KHT Team



The Managing Team of the Khoja Heritage Tour extends heartfelt gratitude to all participants for their unwavering support and cooperation, which greatly contributed to the success of the tour. Serving the esteemed seniors of our community was truly a privilege, and we cherished the opportunity to learn from their invaluable stories and experiences. Being a part of your journey as you retraced the steps of your ancestors filled us with immense joy.

As we conclude this memorable tour, we sincerely pray that the bonds of camaraderie developed during our time together strengthen over time. InshaAllah, may we have the opportunity to reunite again in the near future!

With Salaams and Duas
*Dr Hasnain Walji,
Asad Virani, Mohamedali Patel
and Zahra Merchant*



Registered Charity (UK), No. 282303

The World Federation of Khoja Shia Ithna-Asheri Muslim Communities

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