



Outside the Howrah railway station in Kolkata



Mumbai Chhatrapati Shivaji terminal from the outside



Gateway of India, a prolific sight against water and earth, best viewed at sunset.

LIFE STYLE

BACK TO INDIA

The most compelling part of my India story lies between these two cities – Kolkata and Mumbai. It involves a 37 hour train ride that leaves the Howrah Junction to arrive at the Mumbai Chhatrapati Shivaji terminal a day and a few hours later.

PART 2

KOLKATA-MUMBAI

It was in the wee hours of the morning when I was helping my father carry back tea in traditional kulhars inside Howrah station in Kolkata. How those clay cups had migrated all the way from North India, I didn't know but my family had decided to give in to yet another of my father's fixations to continue to discover India during the Eid holidays. But of course, in ways he believed it was meant to be viewed the best – economic, lengthy and with multiple detours! Though at the time and age, I was not particularly fond of the style, much later in life, on a solo trip in Kolkata, I realised just how much of that I had inherited.

Swinging my feet and sipping my hot cuppa, my attention was suddenly drawn by an older gentleman who took up the chair next to me. He had a long, grey beard and

wore simple white kurta/pyjama, the day-to-day outfit of a local Indian. But it was not his clothes that appealed to me but those deep set, grey eyes that seemed to hold a world of wisdom that prompted a rather shy fourteen year old to open up to a complete stranger.

The gentleman and his wife both taught Sanskrit at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The troupe that he was travelling with and I was later introduced to, was an odd looking bunch, made up of people who seemed to have come from all walks of life. There were fishermen and especially women, dressed in a manner, with saris tucked between their legs that I had only seen on television up until then. There was a twenty-something year old student, clearly bred overseas, with an impeccable English accent. There were a few men and women dressed in their holy colours of saffron, who seemed completely zoned out of this world,

quite literally. But the strangest part was that they were all travelling together, as a group.

The secret unfolded for me in the next 37 hours of my train ride to Mumbai, as I spoke to each member of the troupe individually but mostly heard the story from my Gandalf the Grey doppelganger of a narrator. This group met twice a year to travel by road through different cities in India and celebrate Hinduism through art, music and dance. To think that anyone could have that kind of a commitment for free and would seemingly enjoy it so, was a concept inconceivable to the fourteen year old me.

The rest of the journey and destination held many more revelations like this that are pictorially depicted below.

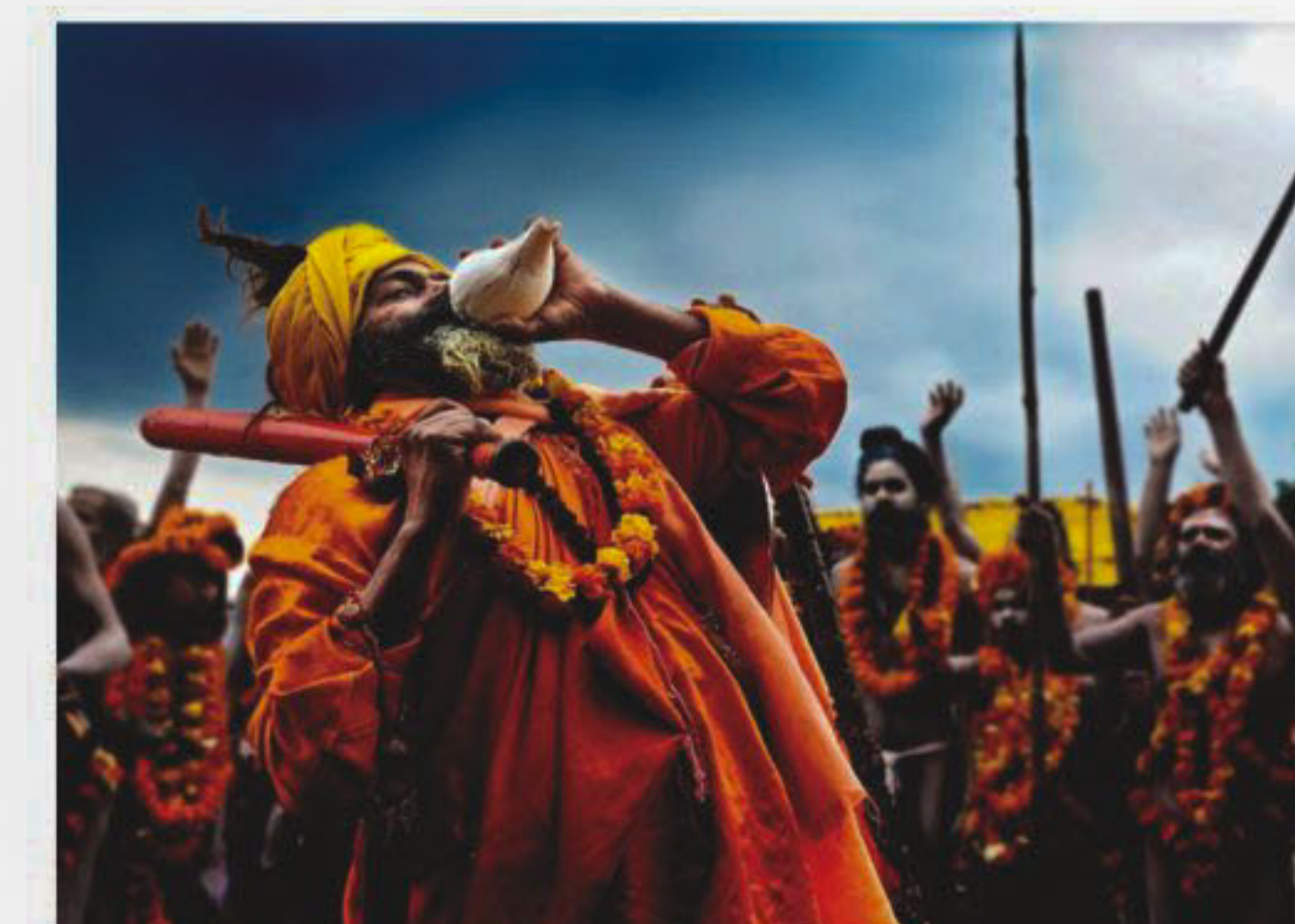
By Naaz Fahmida
Photo: Naaz Fahmida



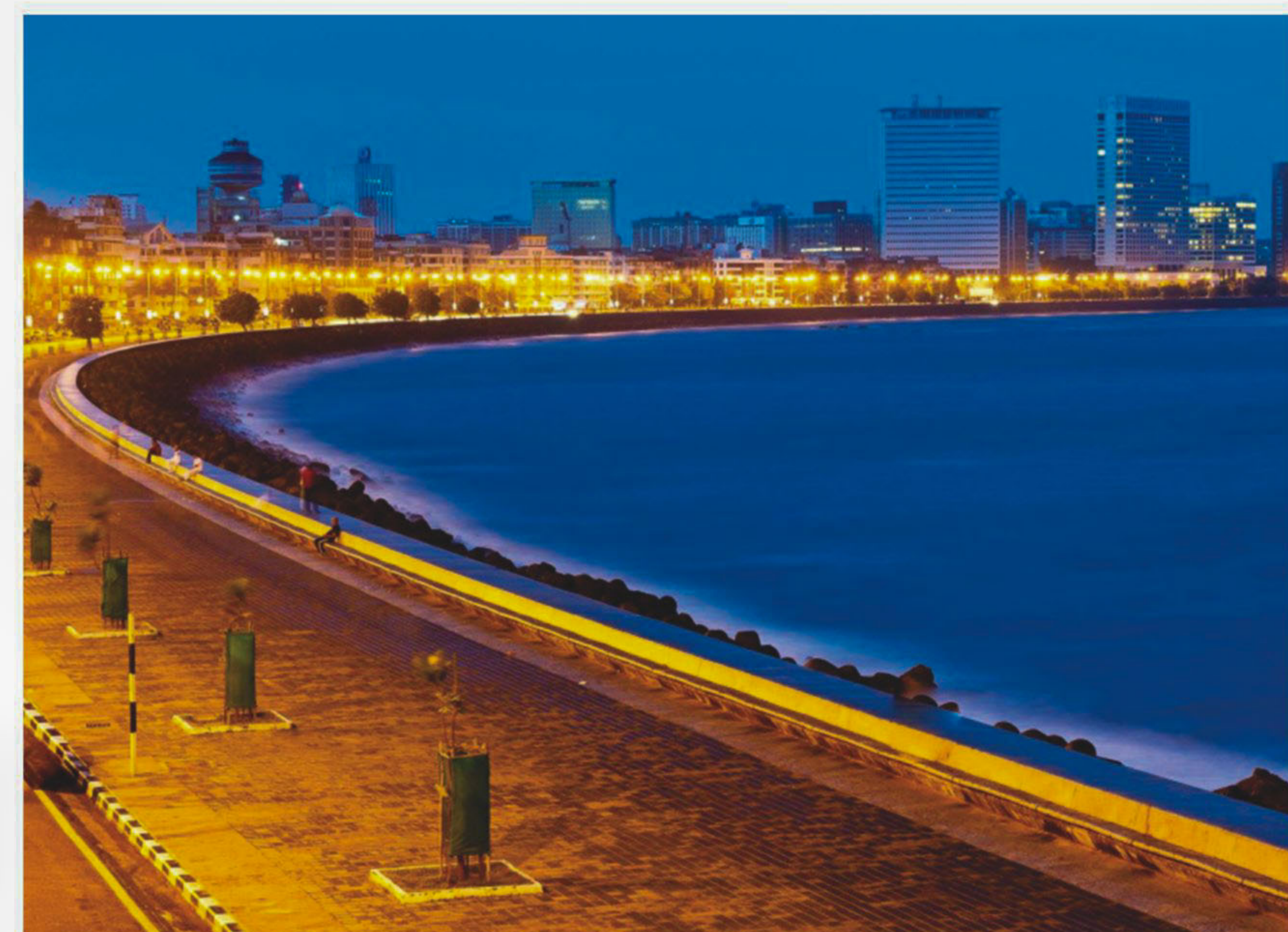
The famous bridge that links Haji Ali Dargah to the rest of Mumbai and slips under water at night



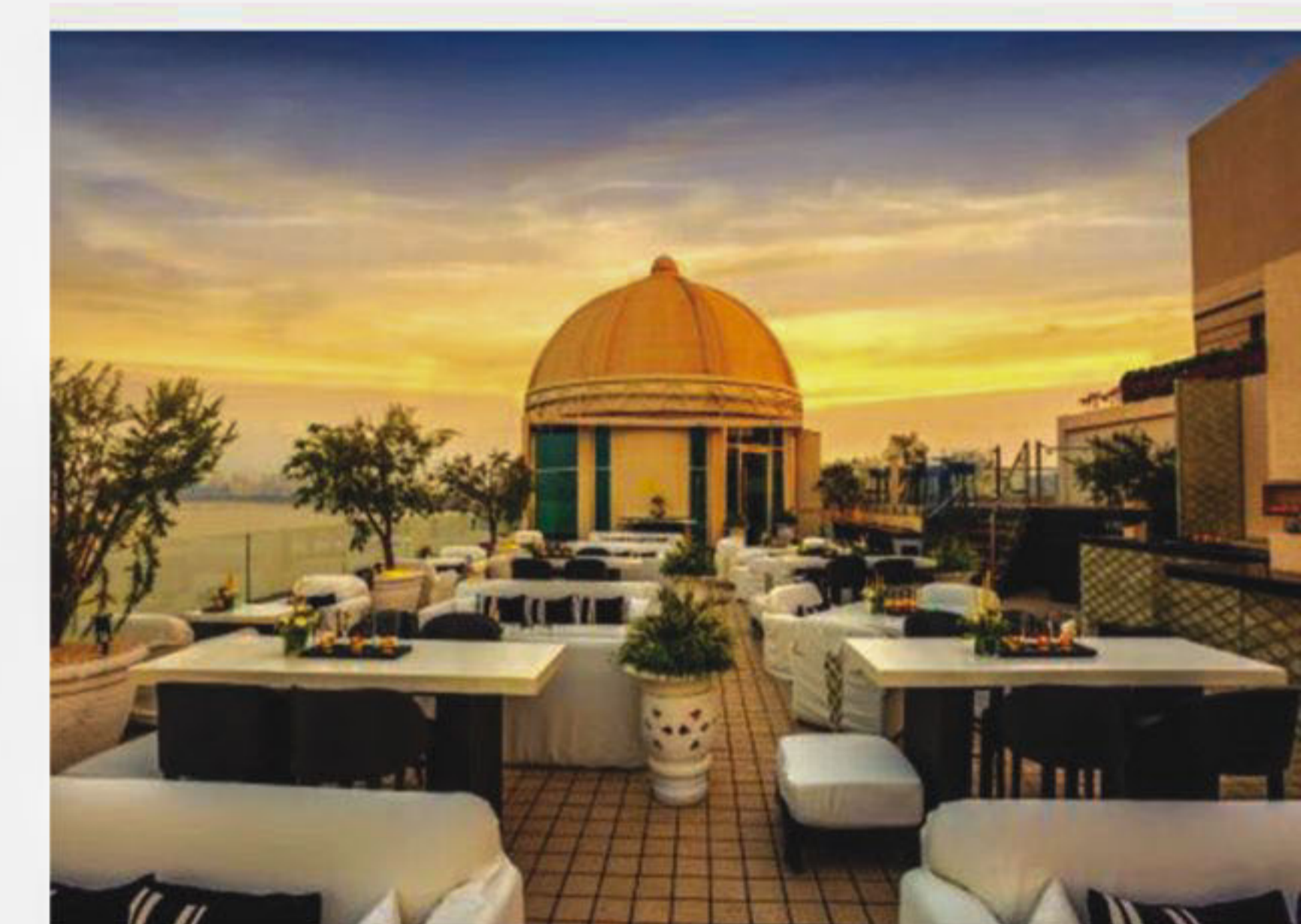
Fishing at Dholi Ghat, though not listed on trip advisor, this place holds the key to Mumbai's laundry needs.



Nashik, the ancient holy city of Maharashtra where the famous "KumbhMela" is held



Mumbai skyline from the marine drive



DOME RESTAURANT:
One of the best places to view the city skyline from



Nagpur, on the way to Mumbai