

Ellora Caves

Prelims: Current events of national and international importance | History

Why in News?

Recently, the historian William Dalrymple has urged the Maharashtra government to highlight the lesser-known treasures of the Ellora Caves, beyond the famous Kailasa Temple.

- **Location** - Charanandri Hills, near Aurangabad, Maharashtra.
- It is among India's **1st UNESCO World Heritage sites**.
- **Timeline** - Excavated between 600-1000 AD, showcasing continuous artistic and religious activity.
- **Belief** - Buddhism, Hinduism (Brahmanism), and Jainism — illustrating religious tolerance in ancient India.
- **Extent** - **34 monasteries** and temples carved into a basalt cliff, stretching over more than 2 km (17 Brahmanical, 12 Buddhist and 5 Jain).
 - **Buddhist caves** (1-12) - Excavated from 5th-8th centuries - Both Mahayana and Hinayana.
 - **Hindu (Brahmanism) caves** (13-29) - 7th-10th centuries.
 - **Jain caves** (30-34) - 9th-12th centuries, with delicate carvings and paintings dedicated to the **Digambara sect**.
- **Managed by** - Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).
- **Protected under** - Multiple acts, including the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act (1958).
- **Features** -
 - **Rock-cut architecture** - The structures were created by carving into the rock face, rather than stacking stones.
 - **Monolithic Architecture** - Kailasa Temple (Cave 16) is the **world's largest monolithic structure**, carved top-down from a single rock and resembling Mount Kailash.
 - **Multi-story Caves** - Features double and triple-story caves, showcasing a unique design.
 - **Patronage** - Patrons included the **Rashtrakutas and Chalukyas**,

with guilds from states like Vidarbha, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu also contributing.

- **Art and Sculpture** - Includes elaborate sculptures and **fresco murals**, such as the Kailashnath Temple, depicting mythological scenes.

• **Some important caves -**

Cave No.	Name / Feature	Highlights
10	Vishwakarma Cave (Carpenter's Cave)	Buddha seated in Dharmachakra Mudra with Bodhi tree carved behind
12	Buddhist Cave	Stout female figure with cobra headgear; Khadrivani-Tara holding a cobra
14	Ravan ki Khai Cave	Known as one of the Hindu caves at Ellora
15	Dashavatar Temple	Dedicated to Vishnu's ten incarnations
29	Dhumar Lena Cave	Large Hindu cave with Shiva sculptures
30	Chhota Kailash (Jain cave)	Smaller replica of Kailasa temple, Jain tradition
32	Indra Sabha (Jain cave)	Richly decorated Jain cave with detailed carvings
33	Jagannath Sabha (Jain cave)	Another Jain cave, part of the Sabha group

Quick Fact

Highlights of neglected sites around Ellora

- **Empty tomb of Abdulmejid II** (last Ottoman Caliph) - located in Khuldabad, Maharashtra, built by his daughter (married to the Nizam Mir Osman Ali Khan's son), though the Caliph died in Paris.
- **Malik Ambar's tomb** - the Ethiopian-born regent of the Deccan, a towering figure in 17th century history.
- **1st Peshwa's tomb** - pre-dating the Marathas, tied to the Ahmednagar rulers.
- **Sufi shrines & Naga traditions** - representing centuries of spiritual continuity before and alongside Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain monuments.
- **Suggestion** - Historian suggests linking Ajanta, Ellora, Daulatabad, and Khultabad into a unified tourism circuit by creating **Golden Quadrangle of Heritage**.

References

1. [The Hindu | Unknown treasures at Ellora Caves](#)
2. [UNESCO | Ellora Caves](#)

