

# CAMEL FAIR

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The dark monsoon clouds keep shutting out the sun on the eve of the annual Bhed Mata Mela, the camel fair that plays out on the hills of Sanosara, a small village some 35 km off Bhuj in Kutch in September. There is excitement in the air and two young Rabari girls, Hetal and Rajal, climb the tallest hill in the village willing the sun to set so that the next day welcomes the mela, just two km from their village.

While there are plenty of livestock fairs in the country, the camel fair here is different as it closely linked to the worship of Bhed Mata. The Rabaris partake in the mega “Kheer” prasad made of camel milk and take blessings of the goddess for a bountiful year and good health of humans and camels, says Lakhan Rabari, 18, who owns a camel and works as a health worker in a private hospital in Bhuj.

Rabaris are nomads that follow the rain in search for good pasture for cattle, travelling east from Gujarat to Rajasthan and go well into Uttar Pradesh.

It has rained well this year. The smiles on the faces of the Kachhi Rabaris are a giveaway that the year has been good. Normally, the Kutch region of Gujarat receives very less rain, making it highly likely for people, including the Rabaris, to migrate with their camel. In Sanosara, the population is mostly of the Kachhi Rabaris. The village has 500 houses, not one of them with a concrete ceiling. They depend on camels for a living. During drought years, many of them are forced to switch over to other business.

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