

BOMBAY

The Harbor That Gave the Name 'Bombay' to Mumbai

A bit of history of the port we LOVE

Mumbai Harbor
Today



Mumbai harbor has been the gateway to the world for commerce and travel since the British took control of the island city from the Portuguese in 1660s. However, the group of seven islands acquired the name 'Bombay' from the Portuguese, the first Europeans to set their foot on these islands.

In 1508, the Portuguese explorer and trader, Francis Almeida's ship sailed into the deep natural harbor of the island. Being impressed by favorable geographical and oceanographic conditions, the Portuguese called it Bom Bahia (Good Bay). Thus, the city of 'Bombay' got its name from this natural harbor.

The harbor and the city of Mumbai acquired its international status since the British established their settlement during the last quarter of the seventeenth century.

Mumbai is a natural harbor with three enclosed wet docks: The Princess Dock built in the year 1885, the Victoria Dock (1891) and the Alexandra Dock (Indira Dock) which was completed in 1914. These docks handle the cargo meant for export and imported goods from abroad.

Mazgaon Dock is a dry dock attached to the Mumbai harbor. The activities at the Mazgaon Dock include ship-building, repairs to ships and fabrication of off-shore structures. The yard has a capability to build warships, submarines and merchant ships. It also constructs Off-shore Patrol Vessels for the Indian Coast Guard. These are multipurpose ships meant for patrolling, policing and search and rescue operations in the Exclusive Economic Zone of India. Besides these, the Mazgaon Dock also fabricates off-shore platforms and jack up rigs for oil exploration.

The small community of the Parsis had played an important role in the development of the city of Mumbai in general and the shipping industry in particular. One of the Parsi families, the Wadias was instrumental in developing the docks at Mumbai. Realizing the enterprise and integrity of the Wadias, the British had persuaded them to move from Surat to Mumbai.

The pioneer ship-builder of the Parsi family, Lovji Nusserwanji Wadia was well-known among the foreign traders for his high standard and fine workmanship in ship building. The British East India Company secured the services of Lovji for building docks and ships in Mumbai in 1736. The Mumbai dry dock, the first dry dock in Asia, was built by Lovji and his brother Sorabji in 1750.

Lovji Nusserwanji Wadia has been called the 'Father of the shipping industry in Mumbai'. After his death in 1774, his sons Maneckji and Bomanji continued the tradition of their father.

Seven generations of Wadia master ship-builders have constructed ships in Mumbai that have plied the seven seas of the world. Between 1735 and 1863, the Wadia Master Ship-builders constructed 170 war-ships for the East India Company, 34 battle-ships for the British Navy, 87 merchant vessels for private firms, and three vessels for the Queen of Muscat.

The 'Star Spangled Banner', the national anthem of the United States, was written in 1812 on a Wadia built British Navy ship, the 'HMS Minden'.

In order to promote shipping activities in the Mumbai harbour, the British established the Bombay Port Trust in 1870. In 1872, Jamshedji Wadia, a Parsi master ship-builder constructed the "Cornwallis", a frigate with 50 guns for the East India Company, a success which led to several orders from the British Navy.

The historical island of Elephanta is one of the six islands that lie in the Mumbai harbor. Other islands include Butcher Island (Jawahar Dweep), Cross Island, Oyster Rock, Middle Ground and Salsette Island. Jawaharlal Nehru Port and Navi Mumbai are situated to the east of the Mumbai harbor on the mainland.

The Gateway of India facing the sea with the famous Taj Mahal Hotel in the background is one of the important landmarks of the city of Mumbai. It is a tourist attraction for both foreign and India tourists. A number of tourists make it a point to take a round of the harbor in launches and other mechanized boats.

The Mumbai harbor is also the home for a number of exquisite migratory sea-birds which is an added attraction to the tourists.

Presently, Mumbai is one of the busiest harbors on the west coast of India. It is also the headquarters of the Western Naval Command of Indian Navy.

