



A stall keeper sits amid paintings during the Chitra Santhe annual streetside art bazaar

BEYOND THE IT TAG

MULTI-FACETED BENGALURU IS PARADISE FOR DIFFERENT KINDS OF VISITORS TO INDULGE IN CULTURE, ART, HISTORY, FOOD PURSUITS AND MORE
BY BINDU GOPAL RAO

Garden City, Silicon Valley of India, Pub City, Cosmopolitan City, the sobriquets just don't end there. As a city that has arguably the best weather in the country, Bangalore or now Bengaluru is the city that is most sought-after whether to make a home or as a must-see travel destination. Kempe Gowda, who is widely believed to have laid the foundation of the city in 1537, had demarcated it with a mud fort and four towers. While the towers have stood the test of time, the city itself has spread far beyond its original boundaries.

As a city whose landscape is continually changing, the best thing about Bengaluru is that it retains an old world charm that makes it a city like no other. A melting pot of cultures, it is home to the best in education, information technology and offers work-life balance that is hard to match. Little wonder then that it always makes it to the lists of the top cities to visit in the country.

The city holds innumerable options and fascinating delights for the traveller. It is one of the rare cities in India that offers huge lung spaces in the form of its famed parks. The Lal Bagh, a botanical garden, commissioned by Hyder Ali

in 1760, is spread over 240 acres and has more than 1,000 species of flora and a glass house. It also houses one of the towers erected by Kempe Gowda. A biannual flower show held here in January and August is a huge draw.

A favourite with walkers, the park also attracts migratory birds like pelicans and is an absolute must-visit. Another must-see is the 300-acre Cubbon Park, located in the heart of the city. It holds special interest for children offering them a toy train ride, horse rides, boating and Bal Bhavan, a special play area for kids. The Government Aquarium that adjoins the park and spread across three levels displays a massive collection of aquatic freshwater fish, both exotic and indigenous.

If you like to revisit history stop by the Tipu Sultan Summer Palace that dates back to 1791. Located near the old town of K R Market, this is a two-storied wooden structure with exquisitely carved pillars, balconies and arches. Likewise the Bangalore Palace constructed in 1862 near Mekhri Circle is built to look like a smaller replica of the Windsor Castle in England and is a perennial hit with tourists. Some other buildings that have stood the test of time include the Mayo Hall, designed in memory of Lord Mayo – a fine example of British architecture. Also check out the Banerghatta National Park – you can go on safaris and watch wild

animals in their natural habitat. The Butterfly Park is an interesting addition to the park and the zoo is a must-see for children.

The government buildings that have been part of several film shoots occupy an important place on the city tour map. The Attara Kacheri or the Karnataka High Court and the Vidhana Soudha that houses the state legislature of Karnataka located opposite each other are architectural marvels that must not be missed. An imposing granite structure, the legislature building dates back to 1956 and has Indo-Saracenic, Rajasthani Jharokha and Dravidian styles of architecture and is accessed by a short flight of stairs. Recently, an exact replica called the Vikasa Soudha that houses government offices was built right next to the Vidhana Soudha.

The Karnataka High Court building is an attractive red brick and stone building in the Greco-Roman style of architecture and adjoins Cubbon Park. Located in the same vicinity is the Visvesvaraya Industrial and Technological Museum that was instituted as part of the centenary celebrations of engineer-statesman Sir M Visvesvaraya and is not just for students but adults as well since the space is dotted with interactive exhibits. Do make sure you have at least a couple of hours free to do justice to this space. The exhibits at the Venkatappa Art Gallery and Government Museum next door are spread over two floors. The government museum established in 1865 houses antiques from Mohenjo-Daro and terracotta from Mathura as well as traditional paintings including some gems from artist K Venkatappa.

Known for its aviation prowess and home to Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), the city has the unique HAL Heritage Center and Aerospace Museum that showcases the growth of the Indian aviation industry and HAL. The museum displays various aircraft and helicopters, aircraft engine models, flight simulators, a mock Air Traffic Control Tower and slices of Indian aviation history.

The tour map will also lead you to the Bull Temple located in the old area of Basavangudi. This temple is unique since it houses one of the biggest granite monolith Nandi idols in the world. This temple was built by Kempe Gowda and is characterised by Dravidian-style architecture. Adjoining this temple is the famed Dodda Ganesha (Big Ganesha) temple that again has a massive idol of Lord Ganesh. In the vicinity you will also find a huge monolithic statue of Hanuman in the Karanji Anjaneya temple. The Bugle Rock Park that houses the bull temple has interesting rock formations and must be on your must-see list. Another old temple located here is the Gavi Gangadhareshwara Temple also known as Dakshina Kashi. What sets this temple apart is that the first rays of the sun fall on the Shivalinga only on the day



Flower sellers in the city market

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of Makara Sankranti (usually on January 14) and it is believed that the cave tunnel underneath leads all the way to Varanasi.

Other places of worship that have gained prominence recently include a huge Shiva temple on the Old Airport Road made of Plaster of Paris as also the ISKCON Temple, a blend of modern technology and spiritual harmony. The city is also host to some of the oldest churches like St Mary's Basilica, the only church in the state that has been elevated to the status of a minor basilica and is known for the festivities held during the St Mary's Feast in the month of September each year. Another old monument is St Patrick's Church that was built in 1844.

However the Infant Jesus church has gained huge popularity in the city and attracts people from all faiths. The Masjid-e-Khadria is one of most beautiful mosques in the city.

While in the city you will never go hungry irrespective of the size of your pocket. The city is a gastronomical delight. What sets Bengaluru apart from other cities is the presence of *darshinis* or small cafes that serve traditional South Indian breakfast, lunch and evening snack/dinner options at economical rates. Most of these cafes work on a self-service model and serve fresh wholesome food that is simple, hygienic and tasty. MTR or Mavalli Tiffin Room is a must-visit to try staple vegetarian fare and is an iconic eatery in the city. However make sure you call and reserve a table in advance but do be prepared to wait for some time. Another option is to head to Food Street located at V V Puram. Open in the evenings, the main action takes place on a narrow street lined with stalls selling everything from soft idlis and crispy dosas to Indianised Chinese fare and traditional sweets.

True to its cosmopolitan nature the city is home to all kinds of international cuisine from Japanese to Lebanese, Mexican, Vietnamese and Arabic and all the star hotels offer a choice that is hard to beat. Being the beer hub of the country, Bengaluru is also home to several micro breweries that are a huge draw with the denizens. Take your pick from The Biere Club, TOIT or the newly-opened Punjabi by Nature, among others, for a sip of freshly brewed beer. The city also recently saw the launch of its first gastropub, The Monkey Bar. However as far as nightlife is concerned, most places close by 11:30 pm due to government restrictions.

The city witnesses several events that are unique and if you happen to be travelling at that time you must not miss them. The traditional Groundnut Fair called Kadlekai Parshe in the last week of November is a two-day fair at the Bull Temple Road at Basavanagudi. Akin to a village fair, you will see numerous mounds of groundnut - raw, fried and boiled and hundreds of small, makeshift stalls selling items like jewellery, trinkets, plastic items, dolls and more. And if you are hungry just dig into the mouth-watering *bhajias*, coloured sugar candies, sugar-coated gram, coloured sodas, popcorn or munchies that are available everywhere. There is something for all and children would find the fair good fun with a makeshift merry-go-round being thrown in as well. You can try your hand at some unique art or get a henna tattoo as well.

In January, the Bengaluru Habba, the city's signature cultural festival, sees the city playing host to performances from varied fields like art, dance, music, theatre, folk arts and more. Spread across different venues in the city, this

Bengaluru became the third
Indian city to have a Metro
Rail service



The Groundnut
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is the time when known names perform and the cultural bonhomie is palpable. The biannual flower show at Lalbagh held around Republic Day and Independence Day is also unique since the theme changes every season and the park is a riot of colour. The Bengaluru Ganesh Utsava, an annual cultural festival coinciding with Ganesh Chaturthi, is a 10-day celebration that sees the best in dance, music, art and culture with Bollywood biggies taking centre stage. The event also hosts a unique food festival called Aromas of Karnataka where tradi-

tional food (over 100 items) from six distinctive regions of Karnataka are served.

If you want to do things differently go on a wine tour where you can stroll through the picturesque landscape of vineyards and take part in the process of making wine. Grover Vineyards (near Nandi Hills) and Heritage Winery (on Mysore Road) offer tours that include wine tasting as well. Alternatively, you can go on a walking tour of the city. Whether a Green Heritage Walk around the famed parks or a Victorian Bangalore Walk or a Medieval Bengaluru

Walk, these weekend walks are a wonderful way of discovering the city on foot. Another interesting way to look around is to take the bicycle tour. The Art of Bicycle Trip Day Safari offers cycling, walking and hiking trips to the most beautiful areas around Bengaluru.

Bengaluru is a shopper's paradise. Apart from the numerous swanky malls that dot the city, must-visits include the famed M G Road, Brigade Road and Commercial Street as well as local markets for some of the best the city has to offer. Among the newer malls check the Orion Mall, spread over four floors and covering 8.5 lakh sq ft. It has ample parking and a wide range of shopping, food and entertainment options. Phoenix Mall located at Mahadevapura on the way to ITPL is another newer shopping space. Mantri Square spread across 1.7 million sq ft in Malleshwaram is a one-stop destination for shopping, eating and entertainment. For the best in international fashion and gourmet cuisine, stop by at UB City, arguably the city's hippest address. Among the older malls check out Forum Mall, which has become a hotspot for the city's youngsters.

The Lalbagh Flower Show is a big draw



Mantri Square is located in the Malleshwaram locality

With amusement parks, clubs, resorts, golf courses, pubs and discos, bowling alleys, billiard halls, pool parlours, skating rinks and more there is never a dull moment in the city that is bustling with life. Wonderla, an amusement park located near Bidadi, 28 km from the city has unique water rides while closer by is the Innovative Film City. The place is divided into Amusements, Attractions, Studio and Style. Amusements include Aqua Kingdom, Funplex, Go-Karting, Mini Golf, Ripley's Enchanted Mirror Maze and Toddler's Den.

If you want to experience a beach in Bangalore, you must check out Aqua Kingdom. Other attractions in the amusement park include Cartoon City, Dinosaur World, Fashion Cafe, Haunted Mansion, Miniature City, Roller Skates and Wild Wild West. Dinosaur World reminds you of Jurassic Park where Tyrannosaurus Rex, Diplodocus and many more jostle for your attention. You should also visit Louis Tussaud's Wax Museum and Ripley's Believe It or Not. The museum here makes for some amazing sights and great experiences.

For theatre buffs, the Rangashankara Theatre in J P Nagar and Jagriti in Whitefield are the best bets.

The city has today transformed from what used to be a pensioner's paradise into one of the hottest destinations for young people pursuing careers in IT, BPO, Biotechnology and Knowledge Management. With a host of tech parks like ITPL, Bagmane Tech Park, Manyata Tech Park, Global Village Tech Park, Kalyani Magnum Tech Park, Electronics City Phase I & II, Embassy Golf Links, Eco Space Tech Park, Prestige Tech Park, Salarpuria Tech Park, Brigade Tech Park, Vrindavan Tech Park and Whitefield RMZ Centennial, today the city is abuzz with youngsters chasing their dreams. The newly constructed Reach 1 of the Metro is now all set to expand to connect other parts of the city and change the face of public transport.

The traffic is growing with every passing day and there is a continual influx of people from other parts of the country. Yet, the city manages to retain its own identity and exude a charm like no other. No wonder most travellers go back with pleasant tales about Bengaluru and rightly conclude that a visit to the southern city is an experience that they will cherish for long.

QUICK FACTS

▶ GETTING THERE

GoAir connects Bengaluru to major cities across India.

▶ WHEN TO GO

The fag end of September and the three months starting from October – the weather is very pleasant during this period.

▶ WHERE TO STAY

Bengaluru offers a plethora of options as far as budget, luxury and premium hotels are concerned. The city is also home to a large number of service apartments and boutique properties that offer good deals for long stay travel.

▶ WHAT TO DO

Walk around in the city's huge parks; visit the Tipu Sultan Summer Palace, the Bangalore Palace and beautiful places of worship; enjoy vegetarian fare at the Mavalli Tiffin Room; participate in the city's numerous fairs; go on a wine tour and sign up for a cycling trip.