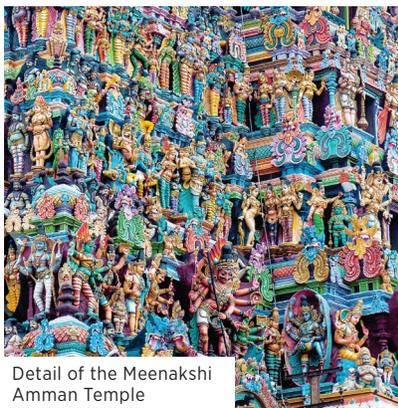


the Mubarak Mandi Palace in the old city; the 19th century chateau-style Amar Mahal Palace that was designed by a French architect and is now a museum with artefacts of the region; the Hari Niwas Palace, now a heritage hotel; and the Dogra Art Museum built in the late 19th century.

MADURAI

Madurai is an ancient pilgrim town located on the Vaigai River. Long renowned for its patronage and tradition of art, architecture and learning, it is regarded as the cultural capital of Tamil Nadu. The city radiates culture and sanctity from the presence of the deeply revered Meenakshi Amman Temple whose 14 colourful gopurams (temple gateways) rise high above the cityscape and mark its pervading presence. The gopurams, the sculpted pillared halls (especially the hall of a thousand pillars), shrines and main temple are graced with elaborate carvings. At a short distance from the Meenakshi Amman Temple is the grand 17th century Thirumalai Nayak Palace that speaks of the wealth of King Thirumalai Nayak even though only part of the original complex stands today. The Gandhi Museum located in a heritage palace has exhibits related to Gandhiji and the freedom movement. Madurai also has many educational



Detail of the Meenakshi Amman Temple

institutions and industries. It is known as the jasmine capital of the country as the Madurai malli jasmine — with a heady, long lasting fragrance — is grown near the city.

KOLKATA

Kolkata — the capital of West Bengal and often referred to as the cultural capital of India — is a vast, pulsating city. It was the capital of British India from 1772 to 1911, and during that period was regarded as the second city of the British Empire after London. It formed the nucleus of the 19th and early 20th century Bengal Renaissance. Graced with majestic buildings, gardens and broad roads, it developed as a city of culture, business and administration and retains the grace of an imperial city in its buildings; in its heritage museums and academic institutions; its roots anchored in culture; and its cosmopolitan populace.

In this city that straddles old-world charm, Bengali culture and contemporary artistic expression are numerous sacred and secular sights that bring one in touch with a genteel way of life. While vast bridges stretch across the Hoogly River, the ghats by them are wonderful places to enjoy a stroll and take in the sights.

The city's museums, especially Indian Museum founded in 1814; the grand white marble Victoria Memorial; Eden Gardens, an iconic cricket stadium; old churches and temples; the buzz of shops at Chowringhee and New Market; the vast maidans, lovely boutiques with crafts and textiles; numerous sweet shops and bakeries; book shops and fairs, art galleries; and the vast sparkling Kolkata Creativity Centre are the city's most popular spots for travellers.

GUWAHATI

Guwahati, the largest city in Assam and the north-east of India, spreads out on the south bank of the mighty

Brahmaputra River. While the origins of the city are traced to ancient times and it was a seat of power of different rulers over time, its present fast-paced growth has made it a hub of education, industry, media, commerce and the tea industry.

The religious heart of the city pulsates at its many revered temples that trace their beginnings to ancient times. The hilltop temple of Goddess Kamakhya that is one of the oldest Shakti Pithas in the country; the Umananda Temple, dedicated to Shiva, located on Peacock Island in the Brahmaputra; and the Navagraha Temple dedicated to the nine planets, are deeply revered.

The city has several interesting museums and places of interest including a planetarium and parks. The Assam State Museum has an extensive collection of antiquities and artefacts that showcase the rich culture and heritage of Assam. Srimanta Sankaradev Kalakshetra has a cultural museum, library and is a centre for cultural performances. The Assam State Zoo cum Botanical Garden is a popular spot for seeing a variety of animals and a cruise down the Brahmaputra connects one with the soul of the city. Assam's rich natural life is seen at reserves such as the Amchang and Pobitora wildlife sanctuaries near the city and the Dipor Bil (lake) a good spot for birding near the city.

MANGALURU

Mangaluru, named after the Hindu Goddess Mangaladevi whose temple stands in the city, is a port-town in Karnataka and is located on the Arabian Sea. It has been an active port through the centuries. Being of strategic importance, it was controlled and ruled by different powers and dynasties over the centuries. Monuments and places of worship of different faiths — the Gokarnanathe-