

36 Hours

HYDERABAD, INDIA

An increasingly high-tech city steps up efforts to preserve its rich and storied history.

By SARAH KHAN

Hyderabad is fast cementing its reputation as a formidable global tech capital — Amazon, Google and Facebook have set up offices in the south-central Indian city, and a cutting-edge metro system is in the works. But amid this steady march to the future, the city's rich past and regal architectural legacy sometimes fall by the wayside. Fortunately, a recent wave of attempts at preservation is helping to save and restore some of Hyderabad's storied heritage before it's too late. To immerse yourself in local traditions, the best time to visit might be the month of Ramadan, which starts in June this year. While Muslims fast during daylight hours, the streets surrounding the Charminar monument in Hyderabad's Old City come alive after dark, transforming into a vibrant night bazaar — thousands of people pack the lanes to feast on haleem and biryani, sip on Irani chai and get a head start on their Eid holiday shopping.

Friday

5 P.M. > CULINARY CLASSIC

Variants of biryani, a fragrant dish of rice layered with meat, fish or vegetables, are a staple across much of India and Pakistan; to those who know a thing or two about food, though, Hyderabad's take on the classic is the finest you'll find anywhere in the world. Here, basmati rice is steamed in an airtight pot with chicken or lamb marinated in yogurt and spices, and laced generously with cardamom and cloves. Debates rage across the city about who has the best biryani — Hotel Shadab, Cafe Bahar and Shah Ghouse all have fervent followings — but the home-grown chain Paradise might be the most foreigner-friendly. Head to the original Secunderabad flagship, which opened in the 1950s, and take your pick of one of the many spotless dining rooms spanning multiple levels. A generous platter of Paradise's melt-in-your-mouth mutton biryani will set you back 254 rupees (about \$3.80).

8 P.M. > CULTURE BREAK

A former home in a quiet Banjara Hills lane was converted into a refuge for Hyderabad creative types back in 2010. Lamakaan buzzes throughout the day with young thinkers brainstorming new ideas over chai, and on any given weekend, the space plays host to theatrical productions, comedy shows, concerts, Pecha Kucha presentation evenings and literary festivals. Check the schedule online to see what's running; recent events have included cooking classes, a quiz night and a Hindi play.

Saturday

11 A.M. > ART AND COFFEE

Curious about the artistic talent emerging from this region of India? Then a visit to the Kalakriti Art Gallery at Banjara Hills Road No. 10 is a requisite. Here, you'll browse works by B. Srinivas Reddy, Kausar Qureshi, Balaji Ponna and Muktinath Mondal — but first, brunch. At the adjacent Gallery Café, choose from ice cream waffles (150 rupees), a corn-and-spinach focaccia sandwich (160 rupees) or a paneer-paratha-tortilla wrap (180 rupees). Just be sure to have your cappuccino (90 rupees) with a slice of cardamom-spiced carrot cake (80 rupees).

1 P.M. > FASHION FINDS

While Hyderabad attire is synonymous with opulent threadwork, heavy tiers of silk and gilded beading, the contemporary fashion scene is evolving as well. Almari ("close") is a glossy showroom for top fashion designers from around the country, and the glittery blouses and purses suspended from the ceiling give the space a gallery-like feel. For a more traditional ambience, head to Manomay, an opulent boutique modeled after the 18th-century Chowmahalla Palace in Hyderabad's Old City. The warren of rooms is the setting for designs by Astha Narang, Kiran Uttam Ghosh, Ranna Gill and more, and the interior's Old World details are



Top, the Qutub Shahi Tombs at sunset; above left, holiday shopping near Charminar just before Eid; Manomay, a luxury boutique.



thoughtfully conceived: An antique palanquin serves as a showcase; an intricately carved bookshelf doubles as a shoe rack.

3 P.M. > ROYAL REPRIEVE

From a faux palace, make your way to a real one. The late-19th-century Falaknuma Palace stands high atop a hill overlooking Hyderabad's Old City, but it might well be from another world altogether: The architecture and interiors are an unexpected mix of English, Venetian, Japanese, French, Chinese and Moghul influences. The opulent estate once served as a guesthouse for royal visitors of the Nizam, Hyderabad's fabulously wealthy erstwhile ruler; in 2010 it was transformed into one of India's finest palace hotels. Even if an overnight stay is a touch too pricey, you can always make a reservation for a meal and request a guided tour. Afternoon tea (2,250 rupees a person) begins at 3:30 at the Celeste restaurant, near the Gol Bungalow terrace with its gilded

dome. Choose from an English high tea with sandwiches and biscuits or a Nizami version with samosas and pakoras; either repast is fit for a king. Visitors need a reservation for tea or for a meal at one of the restaurants to make it past the gates.

5 P.M. > A VIEW WORTH THE CLIMB

At the heart of Hyderabad's Old City, Charminar, an archway and mosque constructed in 1591 by the then-ruler Mohammad Quli Qutub Shah to commemorate the end of a plague outbreak, is Hyderabad's most widely recognized landmark — there's even a gilded tribute erected in the city's ultramodern IT hub, about 13 miles away. Make a circuit around the structure, admiring its intricate domes and minarets hewed from limestone and granite, but be sure to climb to the top for a panoramic late-afternoon view over the chaotic lanes of the old city below. It's a fairly easy walk up (albeit through an ancient and very congested

IF YOU GO

- 1 Paradise Food Court**, Paradise Circle, S D Road, Secunderabad; paradisefoodcourt.com.
- 2 Lamakaan**, lane next to the Vengala Rao Park, opposite GVK One Mall, off Road No. 1, Banjara Hills; lamakaan.com.
- 3 Kalakriti Art Gallery and Gallery Café**, Plot No. 468, Road No. 10, opposite Ofen Bakery, Gaffar Khan Colony, Banjara Hills; gallerycafe.in.
- 4 Almari**, 8-2-686/B/1, first floor, above Oma Home Décor store, Road No. 12, Banjara Hills; facebook.com /Almari-173476069481263.
- Manomay**, 8-2-596 Road No. 10, Banjara Hills; facebook.com /manomayindiastore.
- 5 Taj Falaknuma Palace**, Engine Bowli, Falaknuma; taj.tajhotels.com/en-in /taj-falaknuma-palace -hyderabad.
- 6 Charminar**.
- 7 Laad Bazaar**, Khilwat, Charminar.
- 8 SodaBottleOpenerWala**, Unit 4, Ground Floor, Niharika Jubilee One, Road No. 1, Jubilee Hills; facebook.com/sbow.hyd.
- 9 Minerva Coffee Shop**, 3-6-199/1, Himayath Nagar; minervacoffeeshop.in.
- 10 Qutub Shahi Tombs**, Fort Road, Toli Chowki.
- 11 Karachi Bakery**, opposite Hotel Taj Banjara, Road No. 1, Banjara Hills; karachibakery.com.

staircase), and admission is a mere 100 rupees per person for non-Indians.

7 6 P.M. > GLITTERING GIFTS

Despite its landlocked location, Hyderabad is lovingly referred to as the City of Pearls, thanks to its bustling jewelry trade. And while diamond mines outside the city may have unearthed some of the world's most famous diamonds — the Kohinoor and Hope among them — there is bling for every budget on offer in Hyderabad. In one of the lively arteries off the Charminar, Laad Bazaar is famed for its glittery glass bangles in every conceivable color and pattern; don't leave the city without at least an armful, either for yourself or as an inexpensive gift.

8 8 P.M. > THROWBACK DINING

Many Indians lament the decline of the beloved Irani cafe; the team behind the ultra-hip SodaBottleOpenerWala went ahead and reinvented one. The original Irani cafes were once a mainstay in Mumbai's Parsi community, thanks to their lively ambience and staples like berry pulao (rice with vegetables, nuts and berries) and bunmaska (bread and butter). The playful SodaBottleOpenerWala, a chain with outposts in Delhi, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Bangalore, is a whimsical tribute to retro cafe culture, from the throwback interiors (checkerboard floors, vintage photographs, an old jukebox) to the food (eggs kejrival, mutton dhansak, kheema pav). Dinner will come to less than 2,000 rupees for two.

Sunday

9 9 A.M. > BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS

Kick off your day with the ultimate South Indian breakfast. The strictly vegetarian Minerva Coffee Shop is perennially packed, drawing a loyal following for its behemoth crispy masala dosa (crepe) with all the fixings — sambar, curried potatoes, and coconut, ginger and tomato chutneys. If you come after 11:30, it's also worth considering the idli, vada or traditional South Indian thali, a round tray dressed with a banana leaf laden with puris, rasam and lentils, curd and more. Try them all for less than 500 rupees, and wash it all down with a strong filter coffee.

10 11 A.M. > CEMETERY OF THE SULTANS

While the sprawling Golconda Fort and the nearby Qutub Shahi Tombs are best visited in the same trip, if time is an issue, choose the atmospheric tombs. The 106-acre spread is dotted with dozens of domed mausoleums housing the remains of the Qutub Shahi dynasty's sultans and their families, dating back to the 16th and 17th centuries. Even if you've visited the necropolis before, it's well worth a return: The tombs are in the midst of a huge restoration project undertaken by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, and the gleaming white domes of the refreshed structures stand in stark contrast to the weatherworn buildings awaiting their turn for a face-lift. In fact, the makeover might render the tombs unrecognizable to most Hyderabadis, who've long loved their distinctive sepia tint. And speaking of love: Be prepared to dodge plenty of couples who duck behind the colonnades for romantic interludes. Admission, 10 rupees.

11 2 P.M. > SNACKS AND SOUVENIRS

On your way out of Hyderabad, stop by the gleaming Banjara Hills branch of Karachi Bakery. You can stock up on prepacked boxes of their famed tutti-frutti-studded fruit biscuits, laced with rosewater; if those are too cloying for your tastes, opt for the salty-sweet Osmania biscuits instead — invented as a digestive by the Nizam's doctors, they're now a teatime essential in Hyderabad. You can also cobble together a quick lunch from Indian snack staples here: veggie puffs, tandoori paneer sandwiches and pav bhaji, all for around 150 rupees.

ONLINE: **AN OVERVIEW**
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CHECK IN
INDIAN SPRINGS, CALISTOGA, CALIF.

A Spa Grows Without Losing Its Charm

Rates
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Basics

With its mix of understated luxury and restorative amenities like volcanic ash mud baths and an enormous geothermal swimming pool, Indian Springs in Calistoga, Calif., has long been one of the Napa Valley's most popular spa hotels. Last year, Indian Springs completed a \$20 million renovation and expansion. While taking care to preserve the resort's early-1900s character, the owners added 75 new guest rooms, enhanced the hotel's gardens and grounds, and opened the resort's first restaurant, Sam's Social Club, named for Sam Brannan, the Gold Rush entrepreneur who built the original spa on the site in 1861.

Location

Indian Springs is about 90 minutes by car from San Francisco, Berkeley and Oakland. Downtown Calistoga is a few minutes'

walk from the hotel. There are several wineries within easy cycling distance of Indian Springs, and the hotel maintains a fleet of snappy single-speed bikes from the San Francisco-based company Public.

The Room

Last April, my wife and I booked a Geyser View room, one notch above a basic unit, on the second floor of one of several new Mission Revival-style buildings. A private balcony offered a view of the valley's eastern hills, steam pluming

from one of Indian Springs' three active geysers, and an attractively landscaped pond in which a pair of resident mallards quacked quietly. Spotlessly clean, bright and airy, its décor a pleasing mix of earth tones and pastels, the room was outfitted with a good-size closet (with plush robes for the pool and spa), a writing desk, two lounge chairs, a credenza with a mini-fridge, and a drip coffee maker.

The Bathroom

Fittingly, for a mineral spring spa hotel, the bathroom's focal point was a luxuriously big shower clad in handmade Ecuadorean tiles. Shower and sink were stocked with an array of verbenascented shampoo, soap and lotion from Pharmacopia.

Amenities

An Olympic-size geyser-heated pool, built in 1910, is the relaxing social hub of Indian Springs. A second, smaller pool nearby is reserved for adults. A new steam



Indian Springs, which has three active geysers, has added 75 rooms and a restaurant and has enhanced the gardens and grounds.

room, also heated by the geyser, which bubbles softly beneath the planks of the benches, offers an additional degree of thermoregulation. Indian Springs' spa offers mud and mineral baths, massages, facials and a variety of body treatments, although these services are not included in the price of a stay.

Dining

There is no room service, but Sam's Social Club is just a quick stroll on the new pea gravel path that nearly encircles the property. That Sam's serves some of the tastiest food in the Napa Valley is perhaps not surprising. Its chef, Kory Stewart, worked at some of San Francisco's most highly re-

garded restaurants, including Postrio and Michael Mina. Virtually everything is made in-house from scratch, from its bread and its beer to the fresh mozzarella on its Neapolitan-style pizzas. The pizzas and several other dishes are available as takeout. Note to the weak-willed: In a clever play, takeout must be ordered from the bar, where tempting drinks, costing \$12 to \$13, abound. (The Mermaid, a citrusy constitutional made with top-flight tequila, is outstanding.)

Bottom Line

Indian Springs has managed to triple its capacity while keeping the resort's historic aesthetic and mellow feel intact. The crowds at the swimming pools may be bigger — on weekends, especially — but in every other regard, a very good thing has gotten even better.
NICK CZAP

Indian Springs, 1712 Lincoln Avenue, Calistoga, Calif.; 707-942-4913; indianspringscalistoga.com