

Many faces of Hampi

A new heritage village next to Hampi's world-famous ruins offers an offbeat experience to travellers who want a taste of ancient culture but also desire an overall sensory experience, finds Joanna Lobo



The Vitthala temple

"It's a heritage place," was the most common response I got when I told people about my four-day trip to Hampi. Yes, I knew Hampi was a world heritage site and the former capital of the powerful Vijayanagara Empire. I was kicked and ready to take in whatever Hampi held for me — ancient stones and hippie crowds included.

Vijayshree Heritage Village, our home for the next four days, gave us (we were a group of seven media people) a very warm welcome. Spread over 17 acres, midway between Hospet and Hampi, the resort calls itself the only Satvik resort in the country. In other words, you cannot eat non-vegetarian food, smoke or drink in the premises. Vijayshree is like a mini-village, with its own marriage hall/garden, dining area, conference room, recreation centre with spa, swimming pool and a game room and of course, fully-equipped suites (more like cottages). One of the main reasons to visit this heritage village is for their Rajasthani-themed village concept: we started off doing the *kachhi ghodi* (horse dance), enjoyed spicy chaat, took a camel ride, witnessed a spectacular *Ghumar* and *Kalbelia* performance, followed by a fire-eating show, and finally a puppet show. And to finish off our evening, a typical Rajasthani spread, involving huge amounts of *ghatte ki sabzi*, *chola*, *barji roti*, *dal-bati-churma*, *bajra khichra* with dollops of ghee, chaas, and chilli, lasun and lal mirchi chutneys. The manuhar concept, typical of the re-

gion, involves force-feeding guests, in this case, us. So, we had no option but to give in to repeated offerings of food, jalebis and spoonfuls of ghee.

Stone attractions

Our second day was dedicated to doing a quick round of the major attractions Hampi had to offer, the 20-20 version, according to our guide, Basava. A smooth-talking young lad, his English was fluent and his stories held us captive, every time. And he reserved the most beautiful place for last: the magnificent Vitthala Temple, known for its musical pillars — about a hundred of them which can play 81 different types of music, and the stone chariot (Garuda shrine). Another famous attraction is the Virupaksha Temple. Home to 47 idols and 11 shiv-lingams, the temple has Muslim architecture and an outdoor area with rooms to let. It is situated outside the Hampi bazaar, once a gold and diamond market that now sells everything from clothes to brass statues, semi-precious stones and food.

Most of the temples, Jain and Hindu are spread across a single large area, giving a 360 degree view of Hampi's best stone works. There is a hush in the air and each monument or stone sculpture has a story (some of which can be traced back to the Hindu epics), be it the 'peanut Ganpati', so called because it is shaped like one, the Bal Krishna temple that has directions that help you find water and understand the solar/lunar eclipse, the Badavilinga, surround-



ed by water that was built using the life savings of a poor woman, and the mantapas surrounding the Jain temples that were used as resting areas.

Fusion rules

While Hampi doesn't have a cuisine particular to the place, the food is all vegetarian. A small city, home to around 2,000 people and some 500 houses, rice is the main crop and being a holy place, non-vegetarian food and alcohol isn't served, at least in the main city. Our sightseeing day was our only opportunity to try food outside the resort and what an experience that turned out to be! Mango Tree is one of the most famous eating places in Hampi. Situated amidst a sprawling banana plantation, we took a 1km walk through the plantation

that led us to our dining area, right on the banks of the gushing Tungabhadra River, with mango trees for shade. Fusion food was the order of the day, with an interesting mix of Chinese, Italian, Lebanese and Tibetan, and Indian food. The thali is good, as are the vegetarian preparations and the only non-vegetarian items on the menu is egg fried rice. That, coupled with an interestingly flavoured coconut lassi, made it one satisfying meal.

Dam experience

In Hampi, we were told, it usually rains only during nights. And rain it did, for three straight nights, swelling up the Tungabhadra river, flooding her banks. The next day, we decided to pay a visit to the Tungabhadra Dam. But since darkness fell soon, the most we could see of the dam was the lights. Then, after crossing a bridge and climbing two flights of stairs, we were told that we could not enter the dam. We could see the water-swollen to bursting. It was a scary sight, made worse by the sound of waves crashing against the gates.

How to get there:

The main entry is through Hospet. From Mumbai, there are three routes — flight to Hubli and a train to Hospet, a direct bus to Hospet, or a flight/train to Bangalore and then a bus/train ride to Hospet. For more information on Vijayshree Heritage Village, log onto www.vijayshreeheritagevillage.com.



A view of the Virupaksha Temple



The thali at Mango Tree



Vijayshree Heritage Village

RESTAURANT

PAN-ASIAN at a new address



The spacious Balthazar in Juhu offers an Asian-themed dining experience which can be hit or miss for discerning customers, writes Uttarika Kumaran

Balthazar is the newest offering to Juhu's swish set — a bunch that's already inundated with fine dining options. But in a city where space comes at a premium and ambience is often lacking even in restaurants that serve quality food, Balthazar's instant selling point is its expansive interiors. Terming itself a 'colossal' fine dining restaurant, this 6,500 plus sqft restaurant's Asian theme is strongly reflected in its high ceilings, glowing columns and oodles of ambient lighting. Overall, the interiors could seem over the top to some but might be in line with those seeking a more formal dining experience. The upper level smoking room and a private area which can be booked for exclusive use, makes this a favourable place to throw an intimate party or entertain colleagues.

The food, which is primarily pan-Asian, could seem anti-climactic in both taste



and presentation, especially considering the carefully constructed ambience in which it is served, but offers some interesting surprises. Among the starters, the prawns and chive dumplings are tastefully seasoned while the distinct sweetness of the roasted pork puffs leaves you wanting more. The menu offers a vast selection for the main course — the pan-fried sliced fish in chilli oil and chicken chilli blackbean sauce are heavily spiced and tend to stick to the palate but will certainly appease the appetites of those who come here to sample the restaurant's true highlight — the extensive bar menu.

Balthazar boasts of three bars and is still adding to its selection of 18 beers from around the world. The long



list of cocktails and a wine library featuring wines from five different countries is sure to attract those who enjoy spirits, although non-alcoholic drinkers might be disappointed by the absence of an equally extensive

mocktail menu. The desserts menu sticks to the traditional options, but we recommend the fried custard-filled buns for its freshly baked bread oozing with thick yellow custard — wholesome and satisfying.

For now, the restaurant attracts kitty party regulars and families with children in the afternoon, while the evenings see a more mixed dining crowd. But Balthazar will really have to up the stakes in terms of cuisine to stand out in an area that has well-established eating joints which cater to the already fine-tuned culinary needs of the locals.

Balthazar is located next to SNDT College, Juhu Road. For reservations, call 9930999930

From Screen to Screen THE INTERNET ON CELLULOID

The internet has inspired many movies over the years; here are a few timeless classics which get better with age

The internet has long been avoided cautiously by filmmakers, despite its overwhelming presence in our daily lives. How interesting could a movie with geeks staring endlessly at computer screens be? Turns out, very. *The Social Network*, a David Fincher movie set to release this weekend across the US has caused ripples pre-release with rumours of its negative portrayal of Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg. However, it has been declared unanimously to be one of the best movies of the year, and Oscar whispers are already making the rounds. But there have been movies before which dared to make the foray into reflecting a screen of another kind - with wildly divergent results.

Me and You and Everyone We Know (2005)

An incisive, deadpan comedy that laid bare the potential of the internet as a plot device, *Me and You and Everyone We Know* is a cult favourite that should be savoured for its originality. Writer-director Miranda July sketched out the scenario of two characters who meet, having known each other only through the internet.

Before you start getting *You've Got Mail* flashbacks, be aware that neither is what the other expected them to be, but what they find is less important than what gets them to each other. If you need an added incentive to watch the movie, it was also the originator behind one of the most widely used emoticons on the internet. Geeks ahoy!

Hackers (1995)



Many a film, though widely planned at their release for being over the top and goofy emerge decades later as cult favourites that can wrangle out multiple viewings from an entranced audience. *Hackers* is one such creation. The movie is a visualisation of cyberspace, which now may seem dated to an audience inundated with *Matrix*-like ideas. However, this film is still worth a viewing for its stylised and VR-heavy graphics, not to mention its almost Bollywood approach to storylines and dialogues. The added incentive to watch it? It's got the one-two punch of Angelina Jolie and Fisher Stevens.

Startup.com (2001)

The internet is a graveyard of misplaced aspirations and big dreams gone bust. The first web boom — the one before Facebook and before everything became '2.0' — culminated in the dotcom bubble collapse of 2000. In *Startup.com*, documentary-makers Chris Hegedus and Jehane Noujaim captured the glorious rise and astonishingly rapid de-

scend of a prototypical dot-com enterprise, *GovWorks.com*, from inception to implosion. This insider's view (very similar in approach to *The Social Network*) gives viewers a bird's-eye view of the brainstorming sessions, emergency board meetings, team-building exercises and the venture-capital pitches that are the beating heart of every dotcom startup. The youthful enthusiasm and naivety culminates with executive backstabbing, massive layoffs and an epic collapse.

Antitrust (2001)

This film is a guilty nerd pleasure if ever there was one. Ryan Phillippe stars as a young coder recruited into a vast computer conglomerate called NURV, where he's assigned to develop what amounts to a satellite version of the Internet - a system that will link together all communication devices on Earth (including pagers and PDAs, both of which were still popular at the time). Alas, NURV turns out to be evil and its 'fascist monopolist' boss, played gleefully by Tim Robbins, is revealed as a serial killer who doesn't hesitate to prey on open-source developers. Now that's how a real monopolist/fascist handles competition!

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