

Hampi :

Replay the glorious past in the world's largest open air museum, listen to the echoes of thundering hooves and clanging swords, walk in the footsteps of Mighty Kings and be a witness to a time of magnificence and glory. Come discover Hampi and rediscover yourself.

Hills of bare rock rise beside the swift Tungabhadra River as it swirls and curves through a barren landscape strewn with giant boulders. In this daunting terrain, many centuries ago, rose a magnificent medieval city that rivalled the most famous cities of the world- the imperial Capital of Vijayanagar Kingdom "Hampi". "The City carved in Stones". "The city was such that the pupil of the eye has never seen a place like it, and the ear of intelligence has never been informed that there existed anything to equal it in the world," marveled a 15th century Persian ambassador.

Hampi's Mythological Pauranic dimensions appear to lie beyond the categories of historical times. The typical modern history of Hampi starts with a folklore. Two local Chieftains, Hakka & Bukka, reports to their Guru an unusual sight they saw during a hunting expedition. A Hare chased by their Hound suddenly turns courageous and start chasing the Hound. Sri Vidyaranya, The Guru, tells them that the place is very special and asks them to establish their local Capital at this place. The seed of an Empire was sown.

Over the next 200 plus years (1336 AD - 1565 AD) four dynasties ruled Vijayanagar Empire. The Capital of Vijayanagar Empire "Hampi" was one major trading centre of every sort of thing on earth." Merchants offered diamonds, pearls, fine silks, brocades, horses. The Rulers were great patrons of Art, Architecture and Religion. Most of the kings associated names of their favorite gods with their names. Some of the kings were renowned for their ambitious projects. King Krishnadeva Raya (1509-1529 AD) of the Tuluva Dynasty stood tall among the rest. The Vijayanagar Empire saw the 'Golden Era' during his regime. This Great City fell to the Bahmani rulers in 1565 after the disastrous battle of Talikota and subsequently lapsed into decline and abandonment.

The Ruins of Hampi are charismatic even in its ruined state. Dotted around the hills and valleys over an area of about 25 sq kms are innumerable monuments which have stood the ravages of man and time and still evoke memories of the grandeur of a bygone era. In Hampi at every turn there is a surprise. Every rock, every path and every monument at Hampi speak the same language; a language of glory and beauty. There is always something new to discover.

Hampi is called "**Dakshina Kashi**" it is one of the most sought places by Hindu Pilgrims. Its also the birth place of Legendry Hanuman and place where Lord Rama met the Monkey King Sugriva. Also on the banks of River Thunga Bhadra at Nava Vrundavana lie the Brundavanas of Seers.

A visit to Hampi is a sojourn into the past. The best way to experience this World Heritage Site is to take a leisurely stroll through the eloquent ruins. Most of the important structures and ruins are located in two areas, which are generally referred to as the Royal Centre and the Sacred Centre. The Royal Centre in the southwest part of the site contains structures that seem to have been palaces, baths, pavilions, royal stables, and temples for ceremonial use. The Sacred Centre is situated on the northern edge of the city along the banks of the holy Tungabhadra river.

The Sacred Centre :

Is situated on the northern edge of the city along the banks of the holy Tungabhadra river. The Sacred Centre of Vijayanagara is made up of distinct temple districts, partly defined by fort walls.

Sasivekalu Ganesha :

On the slope of Hemakuta Hill is the Sasivekalu Ganesha about 2.4 metres tall and ironically named as Sasivekalu or mustard seed. The God is seated in a large open mantapa with plain rough square pillars. The right hands hold the ankusa and broken tusk, while the upper left holds a looped pasa or noose. The lower left hand and the trunk are broken. This four handed god is a fine example of the Vijayanagara's artistic skills. This Ganesha is fashioned out of a single boulder in sitting position.

Kadalekalu Ganesha :

Near the Sasivekalu Ganesha is another monolith called, the Kadalekalu (gram seed) Ganesha. The huge seated God, carved in the round out of a massive boulder, is about 4.5 metres high and is housed in a large shrine with a fine open pillared mantapa in front. The tall slender granite pillars with many mythological themes carved decorated the front hall of this shrine which is singularly classical in its architectural proportions. The temple also forms one of the important vintage points from which a good and picturesque view could be had of the Hampi monuments.

Virupaksha Temple :

The Virupaksha Temple rises majestically at the western end of the famous Hampi Bazaar. This temple dedicated to the Hindu god of destruction Shiva. The temple has a 120 feet tall tower on its eastern entrance. Virupaksha temple is believed to be one of the oldest active temples (from 7th century AD) in India Parts of this temple are older than the Vijayanagar kingdom itself. The temple contains the shrines of Lord Shiva, Pampa and Bhuvaneshwari. What was once a small shrine, in course of time, developed into a large complex under the Vijayanagara rulers. At present, the main temple consists of a Sanctum, three ante chambers, a pillared hall and a Mukha Mantapa also called Ranga Mantapa or an open pillared hall. A pillared cloister, entrance gateways, courtyards, attendant shrines and other mantapas surround the temple. In 1510 A.D. Krishnadevaraya added the above-mentioned Ranga Mantapa.

Virupaksha Bazaar :

Virupaksha Bazaar is the largest of the many bazaars of Vijayanagara. Each major Temple complex had its own bazaar around which a township developed. This is the only bazaar around which a township of a sort still exists. This bazaar is flanked by the main gopura of Virupaksha temple called Bishtappa's gopura on the one end and the monolithic Nandi at the other end. The 9 storied, 53 meters high gopura adds elegance to the 732 meters long and 28 meters wide Virupaksha Bazaar.

"You have a broad and beautiful street, full of rows of fine houses and mantapas, in this street live many merchants and there you will find all sorts of rubies, and diamonds, and emeralds, and pearls and seed pearls and clothes, and every other sort of thing there is on earth and that you wish to buy" exclaimed Domingo Paes, a Portuguese traveler who visited Hampi during the reign of Emperor Krishnadevaraya.

Hemakuta Hill Temples :

According to mythology, Lord Shiva did penance on the Hemakuta Hill before he married Parvati. This was also the place where Lord Shiva burnt Kama, the God of lust. This sacred hill lies to the proper right of the Virupaksha temple.

On the hill are a large group of temples built in pre- Vijayanagara and Vijayanagara periods. According to the inscription found on the second of these temples, the temple was built in 1309-1310 A.D. Two temples, facing north, have a compact three-celled plan with an antechamber, a pillared hall and an entrance porch. Their beauty is enhanced by the well balanced but simple Shikhara or spires above the sanctum. These shikaras are different from the other shikaras found in Hampi. They are stepped pyramidal in shape, resembling the Shikaras of Jain temples. Hence these temples are also mistakenly called as Jain temples.

Achyutaraya temple :

This temple can be reached either from Kodanda Rama Temple through the Bazaar wrongly called "Soolai Bazaar" or from the Virupaksha Bazaar by climbing the steps next to the monolithic Nandi at the end of the bazaar. Achyutaraya Temple is a large complex built by an officer of the King Achyutaraya, Salakaraju Tirumaladeva. This temple is better known as Achyutaraya temple, in whose period it was built rather than the name of the deity "Tiruvengalanatha" or Lord Venkateshwara.

Unlike the other temple complexes, this temple complex has two enclosures, each marked by an entrance gopura. The main temple is situated within the second enclosure. Opposite to the temple is the shrine for Garuda, the celestial bird and the vehicle of Vishnu. To the south west of the temple is a shrine for Devi. Running around the inner courtyard is the pillared cloister. The Kalyana Mantapa is located in the northwestern corner of the outer enclosure. Like all major temple complexes, this temple complex was also provided with a Kalyana Mantapa where the annual marriage ceremony of the deity was conducted. The slender pillars of this Mantapa bear dexterously carved bas relief including a few erotic. The basement of the Kalyana Mantapa is richly decorated with the relief of elephants.

Kodanda Rama Temple :

The Kodanda Rama Temple is situated towards the east of Hampi at the end of the Virupaksha Bazaar. A small pathway from Virupaksha Bazaar at the east end leads along the river bank to this temple. This temple faces Chakrathirtha, the most sacred bathing ghat in the river. Compared to other temples at Hampi, this is of more religious than architectural significance. The spot marks the place where Lord Rama crowned Sugriva as the King of Kishkhinda. The rectangular "Garbha Gruha" of the temple contains about 15 feet tall standing figures of Lord Rama, Sita and Lakshmana. These figures are carved out of a natural boulder.

Yantroddaraka Anjineya Temple :

Just behind the temples of Kodanda Rama are the temples for Sudarshana in the shape of a human figure with sixteen hands and Yantroddaraka Anjaneya or Hanuman.

Going through the footsteps behind the Kodandarama Temple, just to the side of Suryanarayana temple, a flight of steps takes you to Yantroddaraka Anjineya Temple. Here is the idol of Anjineya sitting in a unique posture with special amulets established by Saint Vyasaraya in 1500 AD.

Bala Krishna Temple :

Krishnadevaraya built this temple in 1513 A.D. to commemorate his victory over Prataparudra Gajapati, the ruler of Orissa. This temple is dedicated to lord Krishna, one of the ten incarnations of lord Vishnu. During the battle he seized an image of child Krishna and brought it to Vijayanagara.

The inner sides of the entrance exhibit beautifully sculptured Apsaras standing on mythical animals and holding scrolls filled with panels showing the ten incarnations of the lord. An inscription describing the conquest and the consecration of this temple is found on a slab in front of this temple. Like all major temple complexes, Krishnapura, a suburb, is developed around this temple.

Lakshmi Narasimha :

This image of Lakshmi-Narasimha, popularly called Ugranarasimha, meaning Narasimha of terrifying countenance, is the largest icon in Hampi. This 6.7 m giant monolithic statue of Narasimha which is one of the ten incarnation of lord Vishnu was cut in a single boulder. Originally, the icon bore a smaller image of Lakshmi sitting on his lap.

The entire image is set within a Makara torana, or arch, with a lion-mask above the hoods of Adishesha. This gigantic image was mutilated and the figure of Lakshmi was entirely damaged and vandalized. Narasimha with an articulately chiseled and well delineated mane and large bulging eyes and broad chest still retains His awesome charm.

SisterStones :

On the way to the underground temple from Narasimha idol, the road passes adjacent to a natural archway formed by two massive stones leaning on each other. These stones are called as Sister Stones in the local parlance.

Undereground temple :

This temple is one of the earliest in the capital, built during the Sangam rule. The temple is dedicated to Lord Prasanna Virupaksha or Shiva. This ruined temple is fairly large with a few Mantapas and the pillared cloister. The Sanctum and other parts of the temple are perennially under water.

The maha-mantapa leads to the three-aisled ardha-mantapa, the large cubical pillars of which are also of an early type, with cubical base, octagonal shafts, a thin pioned kumbha and large idol. The Kalyanamantapa is ornate and was built during the 15th century.

Pattabhirama Temple :

This is a sprawling temple campus dedicated to lord Rama. Datable to 16th century, this is one of the largest temples. The pillared halls are of special note. Tall mythical beasts carved in the shape of a series of pillars

THE ROYAL CENTRE :

The Royal Centre occupies the southwestern part of the site. The Royal Centre is where the Vijayanagara kings and their private households lived and conducted the daily business of ceremony and government.

Hazara Rama Temple :

This temple for Lord Rama is popularly called "Hazari Rama Temple" or "Hazara Rama Temple" because of the large number of Ramayana panels on the walls. This temple is believed to have been the private place of worship of the Royal family.

Originally, the temple consisted of a sanctum, an ardha mantapa and a pillared hall to which an open porch with tall and elegant pillars was added subsequently. The pillar hall is notable for its unique pillars in black-stone.

The story of Ramayana (the Hindu epic) is impressively carved on all around the shrine walls like a comics strips on stone. Incidents in the story like Dasaratha performing a sacrifice to beget sons, the birth of Rama, his exile into the forest, the abduction of Sita and the ultimate fight between Rama and Ravana are all carved in a vivid manner. In these panels, the story of Rama and through it the triumph of good over evil is brought out.

The temple is special with its exceptionally carved outer walls, an unusual feature in other Vijayanagara temples. These bas-reliefs are narrative in nature. These panels represent symbolically the power of the rulers and the might of their fighting forces paraded annually at the time of the Dusshera festival.

Royal Enclosure :

The seat of the erstwhile kings, this is a fortified campus. Royal enclosure is a sprawling area. The area between Hazara Rama temple and the Mahanavami dibba is a complex of great many ruins of secular structures. Here are the remnants of Durbar Hall, King Palace, Stepped Tank, Underground Chamber, the mint and the elaborate water works, aqueducts, tanks and drains.

Durbar Hall :

The Durbar Hall, often called King's Audience, facing north, is the largest of the structures in the Durbar Area. Built on a high platform, with a flight of steps to reach it, this once gorgeously decorated hall was burnt down by the enemies in 1565 A.D. All that now remains of this hall is the large basement of about 40 square meters.

It was a 100-pillared hall, with 10 rows of wooden pillars, each row containing 10 pillars. This can be made out from the remains of the pillar sockets or peg holes. On the west end of the basement is seen a stone staircase which seems to be a later addition. Outside this hall, to the east, can be seen a monolithic stone trough, about 12.5 meters long, in which water was stored. This was obviously meant for the use of the horses of the nobles who came to attend the Durbar.

Kings Palace :

To the Southeast of the Durbar Hall can be seen the remains of pedestal of a palace. A flight of steps flanked by elephants leads to the top of the plinth. It is ornately decorated with the bold carvings of Elephants, Horses and Dancers. The ornate moldings on the basement and its proximity to the Durbar Hall strengthen the suspicion that the king himself probably used this residence. The brick and plastered walls were destroyed in the after-math of the 1565 war as the debris included a large quantity of wood ash revealing that the structure was burnt.

Mahanavami Dibba :

Dasara Platform, also called the Mahanavami dibba, is the most imposing of the ruins in the Royal enclosure. It was built when Krishnadeva Raya came back from his victorious expedition against the King of Orissa. As the name indicates, this was the platform from which the kings reviewed the nine-day festivities of Dasara, which were conducted in a spectacular manner, mirroring the splendor of the Vijayanagara Empire.

Stepped tank :

One of the beautiful remains in the Durbar area is the Stepped Tank built in chlorite schist, used by the royals and for religious purposes. The small but neat tank is about 22 square meters and about 7 meters deep. It has five distinct tiers, each fitted with steps set in a pleasing pattern. The mason marks on the individual blocks indicating the direction, the row and the location of the steps reveal that the layout of this stepped tank was well thought out in advance and all the different block stones were prepared in accordance with the plan elsewhere and assembled on the site later. This tank was discovered during the recent excavations.

Zenana Enclosure :

The Zenana enclosure meaning Ladies quarters consists of the Queen's Palace, the Lotus Mahal, the Quarters for maids and a water pavilion. The whole area is enclosed with a high curtain wall and provided with three watchtowers. Of the Quarters palace, only the basement remains. Looking at the size of this tier basement, one can imagine that the palace was of considerable size. The palace was built of wood, the pillars gilded and the whole palace beautifully painted.

Lotus Mahal :

Lotus Mahal is one of the most well known buildings among the Hampi monuments. It is a fine example of Indo-Islamic architecture, noted for a pleasing blend of two distinct types of architecture. The pillars, the arches and the windows are Islamic in character, while the Sikharas or spires are of the Hindu order.

Elephant Stables :

Located outside the Zenana Enclosure, on the East, is an oblong structure of considerable size, called the Elephant stables which was the shelter for the royal elephants. This building is also fine example of Indo-Islamic style of architecture. This long structure is made of a series of chambers with domical roofs. Each chamber is big enough to accommodate two elephants. The elephants were tied to the chairs hanging from the centre of the ceiling as can be made out from the iron hooks embedded in some of the ceilings. Apart from the royal elephants, temples also had elephants of their own to perform various pujas. One such elephant can still be seen in Hampi.

Guards Quarters :

The building facing south adjacent to the Elephant stables is the Guards quarters. It is a rectangular structure with a verandah in front. It has a very fine facade comprising of eleven arches. Inside, the building is an open courtyard surrounded by a pillared cloister with vaulted roof.

Queen's bath :

Hampi abounds in water channels and water tanks, a telling testimony to the engineering skill, which had been achieved. The building is a large square structure, remarkable for the contrast between its plain exterior and the very ornate interior. The bath is 15m square and 1.8m deep and surrounded by delicately decorated arched corridors and projecting balconies. The carved stucco ornamentation on the ceilings and vaults above each of the arched bays is characteristic of Islamic architecture. It is truly a bath for a queen, discreet in its outer appearance and rich and elaborate in the enclosed inside.

Bhojana Shala :

On the way to Kamalapura from Hampi, a series of schist stone plates running to a distance of nearly 10 mts is laid on either side deep water channel which was meant for festive occasions.

Vittala Temple :

The most splendid monument of Hampi is undoubtedly the Vithala Temple Complex . This temple complex dedicated to Vittala, a form of the Hindu god Vishnu is an architectural highlight of Hampi. If one wants to witness the competition between man and Vishwakarma (the Architect God of Hindus), this is the place on earth. Any number of words would fail to do justice to this wonderful monument. Legend has it that Lord Vishnu found it too grand to live in and thus returned to his own humble home.

The construction of this temple started during the reign of King Krishna Deva Raya in the year 1513 AD. The project was so colossal that the additions continued for almost five decades until the Empire fell down in the year 1565 AD.

Vithala Temple is Hampi's crowning glory, Equally impressive is the large rangamantapa with 56 musical pillars that resound the musical chimes when struck. Resting on a richly sculpted basement, its roof is supported by huge pillars of granite, about 15 feet in height, each consisting of a central pillar surrounded by detached shafts, all cut from one single block of stone. Several of the carved pillars were attacked with such fury that they are hardly more than shapeless blocks of stones and a large portion of the central part has been destroyed utterly.

The Stone Chariot :

By far, this is the most amazing monument in Hampi and is portrayed as the icon for Hampi. One will fall short of words if he/she tries to describe the beauty of this wonderful man-made piece of art.

It resembles the temple chariots or rathas in which the idols of the temple are taken out on a traditional procession. An image of Garuda (the eagle god, according to the Hindu mythology, is the vehicle of lord Vishnu) was originally enshrined within its sanctum.

The chariot is built on a rectangular platform of a feet or so high. All around this base platform is carved with mythical battle scenes. Though the chariot is not resting on it, the four giant wheels attached mimic the real life ones complete with the axis shafts & the brakes. A series of concentric floral motifs decorate the wheels. It appears from the marks on the platform, where the wheels rest, the wheels were free to move around the axis.

You can still see the remains of the painting on the carvings of the chariot. Probably because it was relatively protected from the natural wearing elements, the undercarriage of the chariot spots one of the best preserved specimens of this kind of paintings. It is believed the whole of the Vittala Temple's sculptures were once beautifully painted in similar fashion using the minerals as medium.

In front of the chariot two elephants are positioned as if they are pulling the chariot. In fact these elephants were brought from elsewhere and positioned here at a later stage. Originally two horses were carved in that position. The tails and the rear legs of the horses can be still seen just behind these elephant sculptures. A broken stone ladder once gave access to the sanctum is kept between the elephants. You can still spot the marks on the floor and the doorsill where once the ladder stood.

Stone Chariot represents the sparkling creativity of the artistes of the fifteenth century.

King's Balance :

To the southwest of Vijayavithala Temple, one can find the monument popularly known as the King's Balance. where kings were weighed against grain, gold or money which was then distributed to the poor. Also known as Tula Bhara or Tula Purushadana, it consists of two lofty carved granite pillars about 15 feet high supporting a stone beam about 12 feet, provided with three hoops on the underside. One of the pillars has a bas-relief depicting a king and two queens, possibly Krishna Deva Raya and his consorts.

Purandaradas Mantap :

While coming back to Hampi Bazaar on the same path, one can see to the right a small Mantapa with a small Tower on the Bank of Tungabhadra River. That is Purandaradas Mantapa. Going further to the Hampi Bazaar through riverside path, one can see a big cave marked with red and white color. It is called Sugriva Cave where Sugriva was supposed to have kept Sita's jewels. A white mark on the rock is called Sita's Saree border (Siteya serugu).