

Charles Dickens  
Author

One always begins to forgive a place as soon as it's left behind

# travel & living



Hema Narayanan

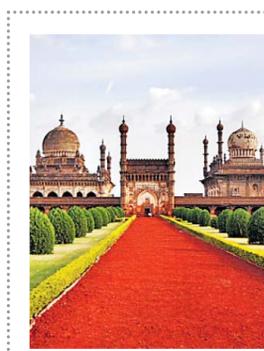
Ibrahim Rauza's beauty can make getting dicked in front of the Taj Mahal, pale in comparison, says Hema Narayanan

## Bijapur's black Taj

Though the Taj Mahal is one among the Seven Wonders of the World, few know of the inspiration behind the marvel. When Emperor Shah Jahan set out to build a monument for his beloved, he had his best-in-class architects study the design of the finest and celebrated monuments. Out of this arduous exercise of analysing drawings at great length, emerged two designs that fascinated the emperor: Tomb of Mandu in Madhya Pradesh and Ibrahim Rauza in Bijapur. And eventually, the detailing, carvings and splendour of the latter made the cut. Ibrahim Rauza, the garden tomb of the Ibrahim Adil Shah II, was built in Bijapur in North Karnataka in 1626 AD, while construction of the Taj Mahal started in 1636 AD. After personally seeing the Rauza, I realised anyone in the emperor's shoes would have chosen this monument. Truly underrated, Rauza's beauty can make getting photographed in front of the Taj, pale in comparison. Its minarets, parapets,

cupolas and cornices, with richly decorated walls and perforated stone windows, humble the style quotient of the visitor. The word 'Rauza' literally means a garden. It is a square garden that consists of two buildings — on the left, a tomb containing the remains of Ibrahim Adil Shah and his wife and on the right, a mausoleum with a mosque and four minarets. Built on a single rock bed, this palatial structure is noted for the symmetry of its features. Skirted by intricately sculpted gardens enclosed within an imposing wall, the entire structure lies above a basement that houses secret passages and living quarters for the cavalry. Adil Shah had wanted this structure to be elaborate in style, with exquisite detailing. He chose iconic architect Malik Sandal for the task, whose grave lies within the courtyard, on request that he be buried close to the sultan. Today, Bijapur has many polytechnic colleges, art and architecture institutes named after Malik. It is said that most structures

built by the Adil Shahi dynasty have a sense of mysticism about them. If one stands in the mausoleum by the Sultan's grave, one can distinctly hear the prayers being said at the other end, in the prayer hall. This place is also a shutterbug's paradise as the monument makes for countless magical frames. At sunset, as the birds fly back home over the Rauza, the aura of the place amplifies. Bijapur itself is a one-stop-shop for tourists, for it encompasses many immaculate monuments in a single city; it has over 50 mosques, more than 20 tombs and a number of palaces, architecture that proliferated between the tenth and eleventh centuries. In the words of renowned traveller and historian, Fergusson: "There is nothing in Hindustan which can compare with the grandeur of conception of the Gol Gumbaz nor any so elaborately rich in ornamental detail as the group of buildings comprised in the Ibrahim Rauza. The tombs of Humayun and Akbar will not bear comparison with



### BIJAPUR BASICS

- By air: The nearest airport to Bijapur is in Belgaum, 205 km away
- From there, you can hire a taxi or take a bus
- By rail: Bijapur has its own railway station and is situated 2 km from the city centre
- By road: Many buses ply from Bangalore (550 km)
- Local transportation: Auto rickshaws are the major mode of transport. You can hire a motorbike or a cycle from the main bus stand

them. Some will, no doubt, be inclined to think that the Taj Mahal in Agra is superior to anything in the South; but it is very difficult to compare the two." Ibrahim Rauza, referred to as the Black Taj, has had a great impact on the other monuments of India.

Like the adage goes: "A heart in love with beauty never grows old." Maybe that was the reason for Shah Jahan to pick Ibrahim Rauza over the Tomb of Mandu; he never wanted his love for Mumtaz, or his proposed creation, the Taj Mahal, to grow old.

On a road trip through Dakshin Kannada, Gurudarshan Somayaji gets acquainted with a colour-free but no less vibrant version of the festival

## How about some Hohlii?



Gurudarshan Somayaji

The colours of Holi often leave us with a hangover, in the shape of more than just stray stains. This unique version of the festival, in that context, offers the perfect antidote. On a motorbike ride through Dakshin Kannada, a small community of Koodukattus, or Koodalike people, colourful costumes caught our attention. This was on our way to Agumbe hills through Hebri. Subsequently we spotted a group of people dancing and singing outside Karje, a small town. Curious, we decided to stop and find out more. The performers were dressed in bright multi-coloured clothes, complete with patterned head gear and decked in Kanakambara flowers.

Their celebration of Holi doesn't involve the usual rituals: smearing synthetic colours on each other, the bonfire or the bhang sessions. Instead, the community, which swears allegiance to Durga Parameshwari, is performing outside 'Ammunje's' house — who is the village head. However, they perform wherever they are invited to perform, largely by land lords and shop owners to invoke good luck. This community is distributed across the foothills of Agumbe through small villages around Hebri and stretch as far as Kundapur, a good 85 km away. They claim to be descendants of the Marathas who took flight during Shivaji's time. At Karje, the performers are farmers and day labourers who have taken five days off to perform Hohlii, their name for the festival, for five days, and they have chosen to do that outside a row of shops which includes a hotel, a provision store and a barber shop.

The dance is slow with no complex movement, but graceful enough to draw you into becoming a hapless bystander; the songs have a melancholic character, but are not mournful — songs in praise of Lord Rama and sometimes Durga Parameshwari by way of *Devi Aradhana* which essentially means 'worshipping the goddess'. The singing is largely in a Marathi dialect, but sometimes they sing in Kannada. The percussion ensemble comprises Ghumats, clay pots covered in monitor lizard skin, and loud anklets, which form an integral part of the rhythm section. The beat, though not up-tempo, is steady enough for the dance. While alcohol is not customary, one source slurred: "A little tippie helps us when we are dancing away late in the night." What's more, the entire troupe is willing to put on a full show for "tourists" for as little as Rs250. We say this is terrific value for money.

### BY THE WAY

#### Blog Track



**Road trip notes**  
From mid-2006 to June 2007, Joe and Rachel drove 26,964 miles through the US, Mexico, Central America and Canada in a van. Joe passed away in 2008. Their blog isn't updated anymore, but it's a reminder to live the life you want to live. <http://van-down-by-the-river.blogspot.com>

#### Event Radar



**La Feria de Abril, Spain**  
April 28-May 3  
La Feria de Abril, celebrated in the town of Seville, began as a cattle trading fair in 1847. Through the years, it has evolved into a round-the-clock spectacle of all that is Spanish. Seville is considered the centre of flamenco music and culture, also known as 'Sevillana' because many of the composers and songs come from this Andalusian city. Visit [www.sol.com/feria/index-en.htm](http://www.sol.com/feria/index-en.htm).

**Mewar Festival**  
March 29-31  
Celebrated to welcome the advent of spring, the Mewar Festival is followed only in Udaipur. On this day, a ceremonial procession of colourfully attired women carrying the images of Isvar and Gangaur and through different parts of the city, make their way to the Lake Pichola. Here, the images are transferred to special boats amidst singing and festivity.

#### Tech Travel



**Collector's army knife**  
When an 84-tool Swiss Army Knife isn't enough, you need Wenger's Giant Collector's Swiss Army Knife. This 8-inch monstrosity boasts 85 tools. And it's only \$1200 (Rs 62,244). The only thing missing? Flamethrower. You just never know when that'll come in handy.

#### Off City Limits

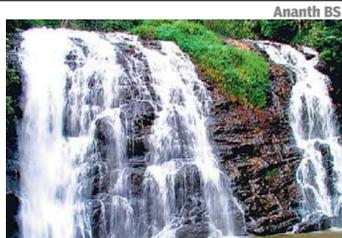
**Aquasports camp at Karwar**  
March 27-29  
Bangalore Mountaineering Club has a camp at Karwar planned, where you'll get to try out kayaking, canoeing, surf-boarding, banana boat ride, and camp on the beach too. For details e-mail [team@bmcindia.org](mailto:team@bmcindia.org) or call 9902027262.

## KARNATAKA'S HILL STATIONS

With the summer promising to be severe, you could look at the hills close to home for a weekend getaway



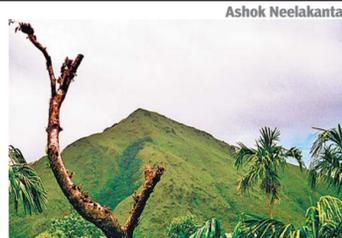
Gurudarshan Somayaji



Ananth BS



Pavan Keshavamurthy



Ashok Neelakanta



Roshan Rao

**1 Agumbe**  
For those who loved *Malgudi Days*' TV adaptation, Agumbe, in Shimoga district, will not be unfamiliar. The small village is known for its sunset, beautiful treks (Narasimha Parvatha in particular), and nearby waterfalls like Onaki Abbi, Barkana falls and Jogigundi falls. It's advisable to take a local guide along, who'll help with the trek routes, as the jungle is dense. Staying in the village is a pleasant experience. [www.agumbe.com](http://www.agumbe.com)  
**Getting there:** A direct bus plies from Bangalore. If you miss it, you can go to Shimoga and take a mini-bus to Agumbe.

**2 Madikeri**  
Misty hills, lush forests, acres and acres of tea and coffee plantations, and breathtaking views are what make Madikeri an idyllic setting. Dotted with red-roofed dwellings and a bustling bazaar, the town has a charming old-world feel. Attractions include the nineteenth century Madikeri Fort, Raja's Seat and Omkareshwara Temple with its mix of Islamic and Gothic styles of architecture  
**Getting there:** The nearest airport is Mangalore. The nearest railheads are Mysore and Mangalore. Regular buses operate between Madikeri and Bangalore.

**3 Kodachadri**  
Kodachadri, a pleasant hill station overlooking the vast Western Ghats, is reputed for its splendid sunrises and sunsets. The peak of Kodachadri can be reached after a five-hour trek. On the western part, the hill descends almost steeply until it joins the forest of Udipi district. A section of this region constitutes the Mookambika Nature Reserve. The best time to visit the hill station of Kodachadri is between the months of October and May.  
**Getting there:** Kodachadri is 400 km from Bangalore. Shimoga is the closest railway station and Mangalore the nearest airport.

**4 Chikmagalur**  
Chikmagalur is located in the south west part of Karnataka. Situated deep in the Baba Budan hills, it is a tranquil town packed with hills, valleys, streams and snow-white coffee blossoms. Located 251 km from Bangalore, it appeals greatly to trekkers due to its steep mountain trails. Places of interest include Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary (38 km), Hebbe Falls (55 km) and the Kalhatti falls.  
<http://chikmagalur.nic.in>  
**Getting there:** Chikmagalur is linked by road and rail to Bangalore. The closest airport is Mangalore (170 km).

**5 Kudremukh**  
Kudremukh is situated about 95 km south-west of Chikmagalur. Located along the Arabian Sea, the broad hills are connected to each other by deep valleys and undulating precipices. It is comparatively a less frequented station. The dense forests, rivers, waterfalls and exotic orchids draw people here. Within close proximity is the Jamalabad Fort. [www.hill-stations-india.com/kudremukh](http://www.hill-stations-india.com/kudremukh).  
**Getting there:** Kudremukh is well connected by road to Chikmagalur, Mangalore and Sringeri. Nearest railhead and airport is at Mangalore (130 km).