

Freya Stark | To awaken alone in a strange town is one of the pleasantest sensations in the world
Travel writer

travel & living

ON THE ROAD



The writer is a software engineer with Intec Telecom Systems

Diptarko Das Sarma

A destination worth the journey

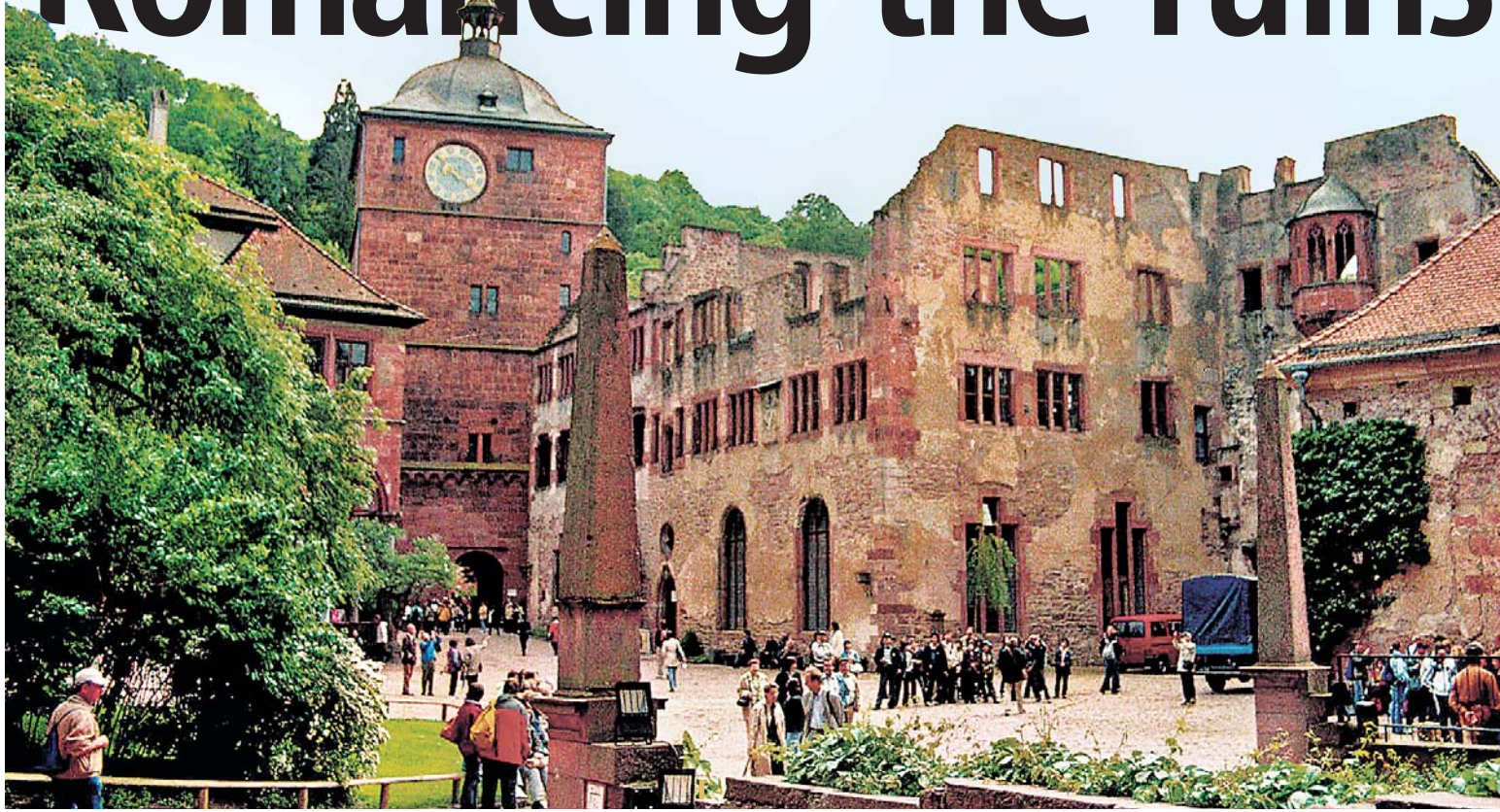
“Channagiri.” The name sounded depressing. “Where is that? Any interesting places to loaf about?” I asked Shivu, who had long been trying to convince me to join him on a trip to his village. “I’ll take you to unfrequented spots,” he offered, as if trying to compensate for the absence of a travel legend. Considering that a bit suspect, I just had to ask, “And what would those be?” The ‘you will find out for yourself’ I earned in return, was hardly inspiring.

Channagiri is located in Davangere district. We travelled to Chitradurga, boarded a connecting bus to Channagiri and reached a non-descript village, Machanayakahalli. After a sumptuous breakfast and piping hot filter coffee, the real journey began on a motorcycle that ridiculed the worst of country roads. Destination one, a manmade tank, Sulekere, supposed to be the second largest in Asia, with a periphery of about 65 km. Surrounded by barren hills, with a choppy face — the lake seemed to be an ocean — with tranquillity running deep. No doubt, it has been christened Shanthi Sagar. The lack of decent roads and lodging, has kept this place virgin. Commercial boating is non-existent, while some fishermen do lend their coracles for a ride. We then moved on to a sleepy town called Santhebennur, a place that boasts of a seventeenth century pond built by a local Nayaka ruler. The Pushkarini, built in red sandstone, is probably the best I have ever seen. A chariot-like stone structure in the middle of the pond — perfect in symmetry — is engraved with exquisite carvings, and can safely be placed in the league of the Hampi ruins. Sitting here, watching the locals bathe in this centuries-old pond, I couldn’t help but think of the ruins in their times of glory.

The day was ebbing, but my thoughts had stirred. We got up to leave. In my preoccupied state, the only thing I managed was a “Thank you Shivu”.

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Romancing the ruins



Neither childhood fascination nor photographs could prepare Hemalatha Narayanan for the grandeur she was about to witness at the ruins of Heidelberg Castle

Several castles define Germany’s history. Heidelberg castle was our choice. Each one in our group had their own reasons to zero in on this structure. Mine was a childhood association, of being part of a school musical called *The Student Prince*, set in Heidelberg — a memory that lingered. So when I got a chance to visit the castle on a recent trip to Europe, I jumped at the opportunity. And I must admit, the castle standing in front of me was far grander than I had imagined.

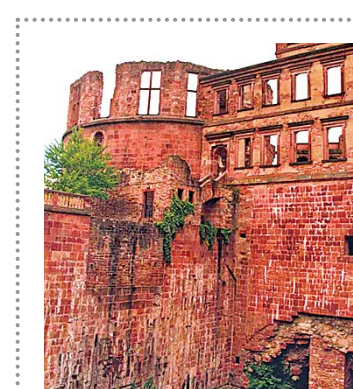
Heidelberg town is an hour southeast of Frankfurt. The castle ruins are among the most important Renaissance remains north of the Alps. As we drove towards this famous German landmark, the cas-

tle, at 262-ft on the Konigstuhl hillside, soon emerged and began to dominate the Heidelberg skyline.

To see the castle, we took a fascinating ride in a cable car — Deutsche Bahn train — up the steep mountain. The cable car uses the unique technique, Funicular technology, wherein two cable cars move on two parallel tracks at the same time, one going up and the other going down. The traction generates the power needed for the train to move in opposite directions. Just as breathtaking as the castle looks from the city, so does the city from the castle.

This castle has a 500-year-old history to its changing structure, from being a victim of all the ups and downs in Europe, to finally collapsing under its weight. Though the earlier castle was built before 1214 AD and expanded into two castles in 1294 AD, it was hit by lightning twice. This destroyed parts of the castle. In between, Tilly’s troops destroyed the castle in 1622, later to be rebuilt by Prince Karl-Ludwig. It was destroyed a second and final time during the War of Succession in 1693. Since its demolition in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the castle was only partially rebuilt by various German kings.

Yet, the castle is the epitome of architecture. Built in red Neckar



ALSO DROP IN AT

Old town and old bridge: Hauptstrasse is one of Europe’s prettiest pedestrian precincts and shopping streets, and the student district is packed with trendy bars and pubs.

University: Germany’s oldest university. Check out the student karzer, the cells where students were jailed for minor offences.

sandstone on the terraced hillside, it has a combination of buildings surrounding an inner courtyard, each highlighting a different period of German architecture. The sculptures atop the boundary wall

have figures depicting celestial planets, influential characters like David, Hercules, Samson and Jackson, to name a few.

As we walked along, we saw the world’s largest wooden wine barrel, the Heidelberg Tun, a wine-cask as big as a cottage. The wine is paid as taxes by wine growers of the Palatine. Some traditions say the cask holds 18,000 bottles, others claiming that it holds 18,000 barrels of wine. To this, Mark Twain had once remarked: “I think it’s likely that one of these statements is a mistake, and the other is a lie.” There’s a narrow walkway that takes you to the top of the barrel, which was sometimes used for dancing. We also saw a little German wine ship here — you can taste the wine before buying it.

Ellin Bar, just outside the ruins, offers exclusive German coffee. Sipping from my cup, I observed how this perspective of the ruins had been a perfect setting for the German Romantic Period, inspiring many songs and romantic texts. The architecture ranging from Gothic to Renaissance appeared to be something out of a textbook.

It is said — a photograph is a secret about a secret. The more it tells you, the less you know. This was my chance to finally find out the truth about the saying.

BY THE WAY

Blog Track



Going solo
Tammie Dooley’s preferred mode of travel is by foot or by a four-wheel drive; all done solo, of course. Her blog www.soloroadtrip.com is an attractively designed invitation to follow along on her journeys.

Event Radar



Goa Carnival, Goa

February 21-25
The Goa carnival is known for its riotous merrymaking, with beautifully decorated floats, live music and dancing of many ethnic origins, a selection of food and drinks, all by the sea. Make your bookings at the earliest.

Abu Simbel Festival, Egypt

February 1-28
During the festival, crowds gather at the Abu Simbel temple at sunrise to watch shafts of light flooding through the stone, illuminating the statues of Ramses, Ra and Amun, providing a spectacular sight. Impressively, it is only the inner sanctum that lights up. Visitors can join the celebrations outside, including a fair and music demonstrations.

Tech Travel



Get rid of ear trouble

Those who frequently fly perhaps accept ear-popping as inevitable. While most try and control this problem by yawning or chewing gum, there is a technological alternative — the Ear Pressure Equalizer, that sucks air from the outer ear canal creating a slight vacuum which gently pushes the eardrum back to its original position. It has a built-in safety vent to stop the build-up of too much pressure.

Off City Limits

Cave exploration

January 31
Sixty kilometres from Bengaluru, Anthargange, in Kolar, is a hill range with huge volcanic rocks and boulders scattered. Anthargange is ideal for a light trek, rock climbing and camping. Big and small boulders form cave-like formations. For more, call 9902027262.

Amid constant change



La Mezquita, or mosque in English, is Cordoba’s (in Spain) most famous tourist site. I used to pass by it every time I walked to school, so I was familiar with the monument and the hordes of tourists it attracted while I was living there.

La Mezquita dates back to eighth century AD, when it was just one of more than 1,000 mosques in the city, but by far the most important. Cordoba used to be the capital of the Islamic world and was an extremely important city. Consequently, it was invaded and conquered many times through its history. La Mezquita reflecting these changes.

It’s no longer a mosque, as in 1236, the Christians took control and converted it to a cathedral. However, they let the mosque remain basically the same as when they captured it.

The eighth century Spanish mosque, La Mesquita, was converted into a cathedral; its architecture echoes an eclectic mix of influences, discovers Caitlin Ritchie

They simply consecrated it and dedicated it to Virgin Mary. Eventually, King Alfonso X had the Villaviciosa Chapel and the Royal Chapel constructed within the mosque.

The giant red and white arches inside the mosque are its main architectural feature. Its Byzantine mosaics add to the romance of the structure

The inside of La Mezquita is full of history. Its sixteenth century Baroque cathedral is very beautiful. One of the most recognisable aspects of the mosque — in addition to its tower — is the giant red and

white arches that make up the interior. There is also a tenth century mihrab, which is a shrine with a dome ceiling. It has Byzantine mosaics, and once was the place where the Koran was kept; it even housed relics of Prophet Muhammad.

The La Mezquita is open to the public and entry is free. The courtyard of La Mezquita is lined with orange trees and is as captivating as the inside. When the trees are in bloom, the air is dominated by the scent of orange blossoms. It’s a calm and beautiful place to sit and relax. La Mezquita is a must-see for any visitor to southern Spain. I often took for granted its beauty and all of the history that it holds. Be sure to delve deeper into its past and take a trip down the lane of history.

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Treks around the city

The winter sun is perfect for a countryside hike. Here’s a pick of doable weekend treks from Bangalore — some easy, some a little hard on the knees. But they’re worth it.



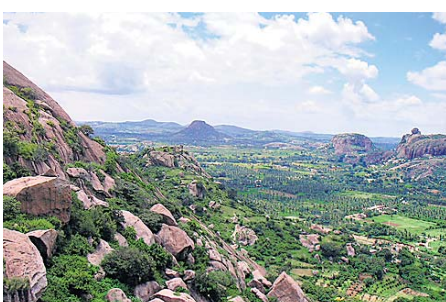
Rangaswamy Betta

1 Rangaswamy Betta is a hill overlooking Kanakapura town. About 50 km from Bangalore, it is one of the highest hills in the area. Atop it is a small temple. The vegetation is quite thick, especially post monsoon. It has a few trails that should be taken with someone familiar with the area. The villagers are keen to accompany. Since 70% of the trek is a climb, one needs to be reasonably fit. The best time of day to trek up is early morning or late in the evening.
Getting there: Reach Rangaswamy Betta via Harohalli on Kanakapura road.



Nandi Hills

2 The Nandi Hills are 65 km from Bangalore. The treks here are for beginners. Rather than driving or riding all the way up, start trekking up from the village at the back of the hill. The other option is to take the flight of 1,175 steps from the base of the hills to the top. The best time to start the trek is early in the morning, after camping overnight at the base.
Getting there: Drive to Devanahalli via Yelahanka, then turn left to the road leading to Karahalli Cross. Taxis and autos ply uphill and back. You can also take a bus.



Ramanagaram

3 Situated in a valley with rocky hillocks, Ramanagaram is located 48 km from Bangalore. Spread on either banks of the Arkavati river, it has become one of the most famous excursions spots around Bangalore. The region has several tall granite hills, and is also home to some of the world’s oldest granite outcrops. There are no set trails in the area, but the forests offer a great chance for exploration. Take a guide along.
Getting there: Bangalore-Mysore trains stop at this station. Take a state transport bus or hire a cab.



Bannerghatta National Park

4 A 25-km drive on Bannerghatta Road and you reach the sprawling natural reserve. Apart from the lion and tiger safaris — through dry deciduous forest and thorny scrub — and a trip to the butterfly conservatory, you can also take a guided nature trek into the park’s herbivore area. The forest department conducts treks into the jungle; just ask the officials at the park. There are three trails, some easy walking and some, a mix of jeep tracks and walking.
Getting there: There are buses from Bangalore to Bannerghatta. Or, hire a taxi.



Savandurga

5 Believed to be among the largest monolith hills in the world, Savandurga is 33 km west of Bangalore. It is famous for a temple and the Arkavathi river flows nearby through the Thippagondanahalli reservoir. To stay on the right trekking track, follow the power lines. Start the trek early. You may want to take along young boys from the village who will be eager to guide you for Rs50-100.
Getting there: Travel on Mysore road with Magadi road to your right. Direct buses from Bangalore are not frequent. But from Magadi, buses and autos are easily available.

SUGGESTED BY: SANTOSH KUMAR, GETOFF UR ASS