



Digital India

From a thriving export industry to improved public transport, **Margot Bigg** reports on the rapid development of Bengaluru

It's unlikely that Kempe Gowda, a vassal under the Vijayanagara Empire, could have predicted how sizeable Bengaluru would become when he founded the city in the 16th century. Often referred to as the Silicon Valley of India, the country's third-largest city is also one of its fastest-growing, thanks to its status as a hotspot for business development, particularly in the fields of IT, outsourcing and biotechnology.

Bengaluru's rapid growth has put a major strain on infrastructure but radical improvements to its roads, airport and public transport, not to mention a growing number of international hotels opening across town, are making it an increasingly attractive place to

do business. "There are tremendous opportunities here," says Aiden McAuley, regional vice-president for Asia-Pacific at Swissotel Hotels and Resorts. His company entered the Indian market with a property in Kolkata in July 2010 and will be opening another hotel in the Bengaluru suburb of Whitefield in 2013.

The capital of the South Indian state of Karnataka, Bengaluru was never intended to be the sprawling metropolis that it is today. In the 19th century, the British set up a military cantonment here, which is still used by the Indian Army. Around the same time, a number of parks and gardens were established, earning it the nickname "Garden City".

After India's independence in 1947, Bengaluru began to attract civilians from

across the country, who flocked there to work in the burgeoning manufacturing industry. Its temperate climate and expansive green spaces also appealed to retirees, and for many years the city was known as a "pensioner's paradise". It was officially reassigned its original name, Bengaluru, in 2008, though most people still use the anglicised Bangalore in conversation.

Bengaluru first began to garner its reputation as an IT hub in the 1980s, when homegrown firms such as Infosys and Wipro, along with foreign players such as Texas Instruments, began setting up operations in the area. Growth in the technology and outsourcing sectors has continued ever since and, today, the city is the Indian base for IT firms from across the world, including Sage Technologies and UK software firm Misys.

Although some companies have shifted outsourced operations to other



Karnataka state is responsible for a third of India's IT exports



Alila Bangalore

countries, such as the Philippines, India's ICT (information and communication technology) sector is growing exponentially. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, ICT exports from India grew by 244 per cent in 2008-09. The sector accounted for 53 per cent of the country's service exports in 2009, and the state of Karnataka is now responsible for about a third of India's IT exports.

With its Raj-era architecture and crumbling old fort, the city centre hasn't changed much in the past century or so, whereas the periphery is characterised by modern architecture and more concrete than flora. Most of Bengaluru's IT and outsourcing companies are based in these relatively new developments, especially on Sarjapur-Marathahalli Road and in the gargantuan Electronics City IT Park.

The Hebbal district north of the city is home to the Manyata Embassy Business Park, which houses the local operations of industry giants such as IBM and Philips. Developers are now eyeing the suburbs of Yelahanka and Doddaballapura as possible areas for further expansion. But the most noticeable recent growth has taken place in Whitefield, near the airport.

"Whitefield is one of those suburbs that has been growing aggressively, and



lots of Fortune 500 companies are there," says Rajeev Menon, area vice-president for India, Malaysia, the Maldives and Australia at Marriott International. "Like in Delhi and Mumbai, cities in India keep expanding and new peripheral business districts come up."

Marriott plans to launch six new properties over the next few years. A JW Marriott was set to open in Whitefield by the end of 2011, and another in the city centre is due in 2012. The company also plans to open a golf

and convention-focused Marriott hotel in 2012 at Nandi Hills, near the airport, and a property under the Renaissance brand in 2013.

For many years, Bengaluru lacked adequate roads for a city of its size, and visitors associated it not with the gardens and pleasant weather touted by tourism brochures and chambers of commerce, but with endless waits in chock-a-block traffic. Although most of



the major business districts are located on the periphery of town, getting around remains a challenge.

Abraham OJ, assistant manager at Karnataka Tourism, says: "Before, the airport was in the city, which caused too many traffic jams. It was shifted [in 2008, to 40km out of town], flyovers have been built and roads have been widened, all very quickly, to alleviate the heavy traffic."

The improvements are largely thanks to aggressive efforts to expand transport infrastructure. In January 2010, the Bangalore Elevated Tollway, one of India's longest flyovers, was inaugurated. It links Bengaluru to Electronics City and takes ten minutes to cross, a relief for the thousands of workers accustomed to spending more than an hour covering the 10km stretch.

Bengaluru's Metro was also launched in October, after five years of construction and a number of delays. Featuring a mix of underground and



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overground stations, it is expected to play a significant role in reducing traffic, despite many residents' dependence on cars. Unfortunately, in its current incarnation, it only serves major locations in the central part of the city, so those in suburbs still have to rely on roads. A second phase of expansion is planned for the future, but it's not yet certain when it will take place.

Even Bengaluru International airport, which has had an annual passenger growth rate of 18 per cent since it opened, is getting a facelift. Terminal 1 is being expanded to handle up to 20,000 passengers per day, and

'We see the city as an upcoming economic and cultural hub'

a new runway is expected to open in 2014. Still, the fact that it is situated some 40km out makes accessibility an issue.

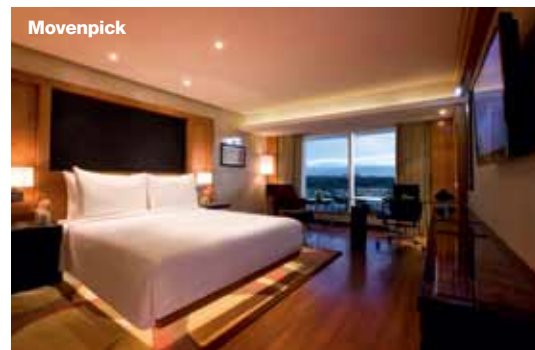
Indranil Dey, research manager at the Bengaluru offices of market research company Ispos, says: "When I flew to Mumbai a few days ago, the journey to the airport took longer than my flight." Initial planning is under way for the Bengaluru High-Speed Rail Link, which will connect it

with Hebbal, Yelahanka and the city centre. If and when it opens (construction bids are still under consideration), the travel time would be reduced to about half an hour.

Meanwhile, major global hotel chains are clamouring to launch properties, including some relatively new entrants to the Indian market. In September, Movenpick opened its first Indian hotel, a 182-room property near the airport. Accor launched an Ibis property in Techpark on Outer Ring Road in November, with a second one on Hosur Road and a Novotel both due for December.

Ritz-Carlton plans to open a 250-room luxury property in central Bengaluru in April, and in 2013, Starwood is to launch an Aloft in Cessna Business Park on Outer Ring Road, joining its existing property in Whitefield. Alila Hotels and Resorts

Movenpick



WHERE TO EAT THE 13TH FLOOR

This popular rooftop lounge bar on Bengaluru's central MG Road offers more cocktails than it does dishes, but it's a great place to experience the city's casual pub atmosphere over after-work drinks. The food is mostly Indian snacks and tandoori cuisine. Most people prefer to sit on the outdoor terrace, which affords good views of the city and is quieter than inside if a DJ is playing.

■ **Hotel Ivory Tower, Barton Centre, 84 MG Road; tel +91 804 1783 333; hotelivorytower.com. Two-course meal for two Rs 600 (£7.50).**

CHEZ MARIANNICK

Run by an expat from Brittany and her Indian husband, Whitefield's Chez Mariannick is a favourite among expats pining for fresh bread and cakes akin to what they might find back in the West. This casual bistro also serves up quiches, crêpes, salads and other light bites. Its pizzas are particularly popular.

■ **1A Anjanappa Building (behind Sorbet), Varthur Main Road; tel +91 973 9406 536. Two-course meal for two Rs 1,000 (£12.50).**

EDO

Inside the centrally located ITC Gardenia hotel, this chic, contemporary Japanese restaurant is an excellent place for business dinners and seats up to 80 people. The sous chef is Japanese, and his compatriots visit the restaurant en masse at weekends to sample the beautifully presented authentic cuisine. Options include fresh sushi, sashimi and *robatayaki* (grilled seafood and vegetables), and there's a rich selection of liquors and sakes.

■ **ITC Gardenia, 1 Residency Road; tel +91 802 2119 898; itshotels.in. Two-course meal for two Rs 3,000 (£38).**



Edo

WHAT TO SEE

CUBBON PARK

This sprawling expanse of flora, which earned Bengaluru the moniker of "Garden City", is the best place to escape the noise and pollution of the city's streets. The 100-hectare park is located in the city centre, and features more than 100 types of plants from India and abroad. It was created in 1870 and is named after lieutenant-general Sir Mark Cubbon, who served as the British commissioner of Mysore State in the mid-19th century.

■ **Sampangirama Nagar. Open daily from sunrise to sunset; entry is free.**

CITY MARKET

Bengaluru's best-known market is as ideal for people watching as it is for shopping. Traders hawk everything from saris to spices, and there are excellent bargains to be had for those who are willing to haggle a bit. The market gets especially crowded in the evenings, when families come to browse and try the street food on offer.

■ **Mysore Road, across from Tipu Sultan's Fort; open daily, timings vary from shop to shop but most are open 10am-9pm.**

NANDI TEMPLE

This small but vibrant temple about 8km south-west of the city centre is dedicated to Nandi, the bull mount of Lord Shiva, the

destroyer in the Hindu trinity. The temple was constructed in the mid-16th century and rebuilt in the early 20th century. The conical roof atop it is fashioned in the South Indian Dravidian style and features bas-relief images of Shiva and Nandi.

■ **Bugle Hill, Basavanagudi; open daily 6am-8pm; entry is free.**

TIPU SULTAN'S SUMMER PALACE

This grand palace was the summer dwelling of Tipu Sultan, the tiger-obsessed monarch who ruled the state of Mysore from 1782

to 1799. The structure was built entirely from teak wood and originally housed an impressive collection of frescoes depicting scenes from the ruler's time in power. Unfortunately, much of the original art has been destroyed over the years, although the wooden interiors, with their intricate archways and embellished pillars, are still an impressive sight. You will need to take your shoes off before entering.

■ **Albert Victor Road; tel +91 802 6706 836. Open daily 8.30am-5.30pm; entry is Rs 100 (£1.25).**



Tipu Sultan's Summer Palace

opened a 120-room property in Whitefield in August, while in October, Taj opened a 327-room hotel under its Vivanta brand in Yeshwantpur, north of Bengaluru, its third Vivanta in the city.

While Bengaluru is seen mainly as a business destination, it is also becoming popular with tourists. "We see the city as an upcoming economic and cultural hub," McAuley of Swissotel says. It certainly has enough temples, parks and historical spots to keep visitors occupied for a few days. It is also well known as a centre for performing arts – particularly traditional dance forms such as *dollu kunitha*, a devotional performance dedicated to the Hindu god Shiva – and the theatre scene continues to thrive.

"Tourism to destinations within a three- to four-hour radius of the city is increasing," notes Marriott's Menon. The area around the metropolis is home to numerous national parks, as well as the city of Mysore, which is 150km to the south-west and one of the most popular tourist destinations in South India.

Mysore is also absorbing some of the spillover from Bengaluru, and an

increasing number of software companies, such as IBM and Wipro, have begun operations there. The small city is also home to Infosys's huge Global Education Centre, which can train up to 14,000 people at a time.

"Mysore will continue to attract new business," says Karnataka Tourism's OJ. All the same, it's unlikely that Bengaluru will be surpassed at any point soon. ■



Rim Naam

RIM NAAM

This al fresco Thai restaurant, set in its own tropical garden on the grounds of the Oberoi hotel, frequently wins awards for its cuisine, although it's the ambience that makes it such a popular fine-dining spot. There is a large selection of curries, noodles and seafood, as well as desserts not commonly available outside of Thailand.

■ **Oberoi, 37-39 MG Road; tel +91 802 5585 858; oberoihotels.com. Two-course meal for two Rs 2,500 (£31).**

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