

**FOUR  
HOURS IN**

# HYDERABAD

**Margot Bigg** discovers opulent architecture, gourmet biryani and a lush oasis in the Indian city



## SALAR JUNG MUSEUM

Start your tour of the lively Andhra Pradesh capital at the Salar Jung Museum, at the heart of the city centre. With the world's largest single-owner collection, this enormous museum is among India's finest. The crescent-shaped building dates back to 1951 and houses art, relics and manuscripts from around the world, some of which date back to the second century BC. Most of the collection once belonged to the late Mir Yousuf Ali Khan, also known as Salar Jung III, an aristocratic bachelor who devoted 35 years of his life – and much of his fortune – to travelling the planet, collecting artefacts.

The museum's 38 galleries are spread over two floors. You'll find everything from European glass vessels to Mughal jade sculptures, as well as Chinese, Japanese and European paintings. There's also a large collection of clocks, the most famous of which is a 19th-century musical timepiece that Khan purchased on a trip to England. Every hour, a tiny wooden man emerges from the clock's face and rings a miniature bell, while a blacksmith hammers away at an anvil. Open Sat-Thurs 10am-5pm; entry is Rs 150 (£1.90); Jubilee Post, Afzal Gunj; salarjungmuseum.in



## LAAD BAZAAR

About 2km south of the museum along Pathergatti Road, Laad Bazaar is one of Hyderabad's oldest markets. As much of the bazaar and the areas around it are closed to traffic, it's easiest to get here by foot or bicycle rickshaw. Laad Bazaar is a fascinating place to browse, take photos and people-watch, even if you don't intend to buy anything. It is known for colourful bangles, and many of its tiny shops are lined from floor to ceiling with stacks of thousands of shimmering glass and tin bracelets.

The market is also the hub of the city's famous pearl trade, and if you don't find bargaining too stressful then you can get some incredible deals. You'll find a decent selection of textiles too, ranging from simple cotton sheaths to embroidered wedding saris. If you dare, try some of the fiery kebabs available in many of the little lanes that weave behind the main drag. At the east end of the bazaar stands the minaret-crowned Charminar, the city's most iconic monument. Most shops are open 10am-10pm daily.



## CHOWMAHALLA PALACE

A five- to ten-minute stroll down Khilwat Road from Laad Bazaar will take you to the five-hectare Chowmahalla Palace, a recently restored royal property featuring four palaces, two spacious courtyards and a series of lush gardens. The complex, which is believed to have been modelled on the Shah's Palace in Iran, was once the seat of the Asaf Jahi dynasty, also known as the Nizams of Hyderabad, who ruled the city and its environs from the mid-18th century until India's independence from the Crown in 1947.



Although construction began at around the same time they came to power, the complex wasn't completed until 1869. This has led to an interesting blend of architecture, with Mughal, Persian and Indo-Saracenic influences. Everything from royal armoury to ceremonial garb is on display, although the biggest draw for most visitors is the Khilwat, or Durbar Hall. This beautiful marble room is lined with pillars, archways and 19 crystal chandeliers. Open Sat-Thurs 10am-5pm; entry is Rs 150 (£1.90); Khilwat, 20-4-236, Motigalli; chowmahalla.com



INDIA



### FIRDAUS RESTAURANT

Finish up by driving east to road number one, then turn left. Within five minutes you'll come to the Taj Krishna hotel, home to fine-dining restaurant Firdaus, which takes its name from the Urdu word for paradise. The interiors are lavish without being over-the-top, with intricately woven rugs and hand-carved chairs. Sample Hyderabad biryani, the city's most famous dish. This rich concoction of rice, meat (usually goat) and fragrant spices is traditionally sealed in a terracotta vessel known as a *handi* and slow-cooked over hot coals. It's served with cooling *raita* and much spicier chilli-based gravy.

Also on offer are a variety of kebabs and vegetable dishes inspired by the royal cuisine of the Nizams. Hyderabad cuisine is notoriously hot, so tell your waiter if you'd prefer a milder meal. Open daily 12.30pm-3pm, 7.30pm-12am; two-course meal about Rs 1,300 (£16); tel +91 406 629 3306; tajhotels.com



### LOTUS POND

For only a few hundred rupees, you can hire an autorickshaw in front of the palace for the remainder of your tour. Head to the Lotus Pond, one of the city's most tranquil green spaces, for your next stop. This quiet municipal park is in the heart of the upscale Banjara Hills neighbourhood, about 20 minutes' drive northwest of Chowmahallah Palace. At its centre sits a large pond filled with pink and white lotuses.

The park was developed at the turn of the century as an ecological haven, and the materials used to create it were sourced locally, keeping the wetland's delicate ecosystem in mind. The pond is flanked by a well-maintained rock trail that is popular with joggers, and dozens of different species of bird visit the spot throughout the year. There are plenty of benches, as well as a gazebo and a bridge that looks as if it could have been plucked out of Monet's Giverny. The dense foliage and the pond help to keep temperatures low, making it an attractive place for outdoor relaxation. Open daily 6am-10am, 4pm-6pm; road number 86, MLA Colony, Banjara Hills.



### KALAKRITI ART GALLERY

A five- to ten-minute drive east of the Lotus Pond, the multi-roomed Kalakriti Art Gallery opened its doors a decade ago and has hosted dozens of exhibitions of contemporary Indian art. While the curators feature works from more established painters and sculptors from time to time, they specialise in promoting emerging artists from across the country. As a result, it's possible to find pieces here for just a few hundred

pounds. An extensive collection is also available on its online gallery, and purchases can be shipped internationally. Open daily 11am-7pm; entry is free; 468 road number 10, Banjara Hills; tel +91 406 656 4466; kalakriti.in

