

# If you're Hampi and you know it

*Our reader could not resist visiting this Unesco World Heritage city of wonders in India.*

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***The great stone chariot of the Vittala Temple. — Photos: YASODHA PANIRSELVAM***

“I AM a traveller, not a tourist” is a tagline I often use to describe myself. Travelling has been part of my life this past 12 years ever since I started studying in a medical school.

One of those amazing journeys I undertook was to Hampi in north Karnataka, India, in March this year.

We (my sister and myself ) initially planned to visit my cousin who is studying in Bangalore, the capital of the state. We decided to also have a relaxing time in Goa and enjoy the Silicon City of Bengaluru. However, our plans changed when I returned from Beijing.

There was a suggestion by a fellow traveller in Beijing to visit Hampi as it was something that should not be missed. Curiosity ensnared this travelling cat.

I basically trawled the Internet using most of the travel resources for all the information I could get. I was truly mesmerised by the reviews and all the photos.

On my return from Beijing, after a long discussion with my sister and cousin, we agreed to add Hampi to the mix. However, we had only six days, and three days were already allocated for Goa. The only way to fulfil our desire to visit Hampi was to make a day trip.

We took a sleeper air-conditioned bus from Bengaluru at 11pm and reached Hospet bus station at 7am. It was a challenging experience to travel with the locals and with no proper toilets around.

At Hospet, we took an auto (like a tuk tuk) to get to Hampi.

So, what's so great about Hampi? This Unesco World Heritage site is so unique that it attracts thousands of tourists every year. Its boulder-strewn hills are a backpackers' paradise – with royal pavillions, ancient markets, aquatic structures, a museum and monkeys!

As we entered the destination, the first sight of Hampi was mindblowing. Our faces lit up with smiles. Glad that we had made the right decision.

We headed to a hostel, had a good breakfast and freshened up quickly as we had only about eight precious hours to spare.

After recharging, we had an auto take us around. We had to take a coracle (round-shaped basket boat, like a floating basket) to cross the river to visit Vittala Temple. Along the river, we saw monuments and temples. The only time I have ever seen anything like it was in Tamil movies. The coracle was truly an amazing and unique experience.

After crossing the river, we walked under the scorching sun to Vittala. I have no words to describe the impressive and extravagant architecture of this temple. Built around the 16th century, it was dedicated to the Lord Vishnu. There was a famous stone chariot of India, called a ratha, in front of the temple.

After Vittala, we took the same auto to visit Hazara Rama Temple Complex. It's a small yet beautiful temple in the centre of the royal enclosure. Dedicated to the Lord Rama, this 15th century temple has some of the most extensive relics found in India.

We also visited the Queen's Bath, the elephant stables, the Badavalinga linga image, the giant monolithic statue Sasivekalu Ganesha and another giant Lakshmi Narasimha statue.

Our last destination was Virupaksha Temple only three minutes away from our hostel. Dedicated to the Lord Shiva, this 7th century temple is the main centre of pilgrimage and the only intact structure in the whole of Hampi. It is still being used as a temple and attracts visitors from everywhere. I felt really blessed to be there.

We then decided to call it a day. After a good shower and a light dinner, we took the bus to Bengaluru. There are many more interesting places and hills to see in Hampi, though. Someday I shall return to add on to my experience.

The views expressed are entirely the reader's own.