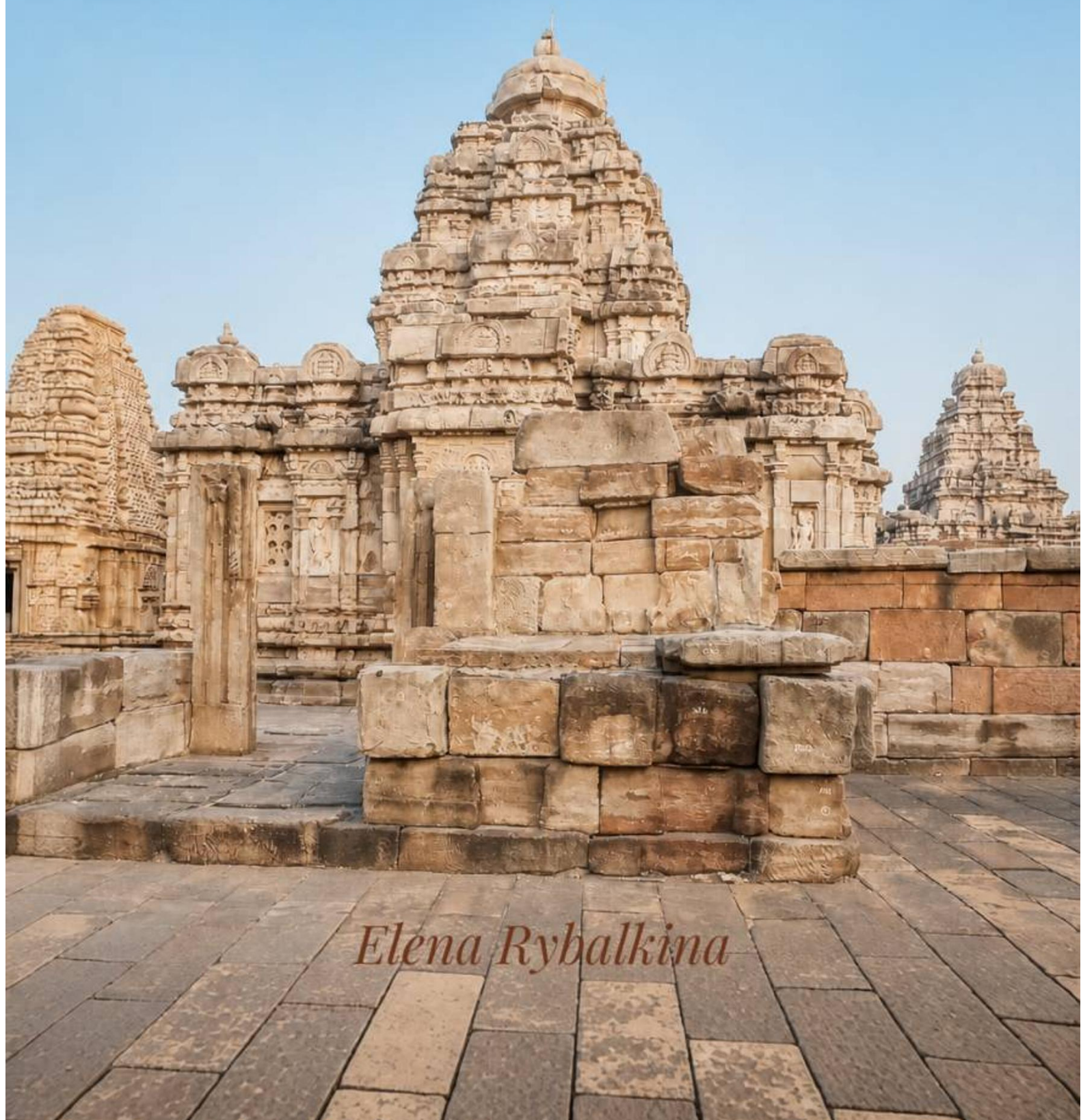


India. Exploring Karnataka



Elena Rybalkina

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«АВТОР»

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India is one of the popular destinations in Asia. The multitude of states allows you to explore this country from any part of it. This book is about the cleanest state in India – Karnataka. Sacred places, Little Tibet, forts and waterfalls. Elena Rybalkina spent three years exploring the state of Karnataka as an individual traveler. She will tell you about the main attractions of Karnataka and places that not even all local residents know about. The guidebook contains legends from Indian mythology associated with the objects described in it, local rituals, as well as the authors impressions, route maps, and a playlist in the Kannada language.

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Chapter 1

Preface

In recent years, people around the world, including in Russia, have been discovering yoga, and along with it, immersing themselves in mindfulness and religion. Hinduism is captivating young people, and India has become a favorite travel destination.

I was no exception and went to India in search of adventure, my true path and answers to my questions.

Over the course of three years, I visited many cities in different states of India and visited both well-known places and those that not every local resident knows about.

In this guide, I'll share with you what I consider to be the most picturesque places in the state of Karnataka, places that I believe are a must-see for all adventurers and souls yearning to embark on a spiritual path. By visiting these places, you'll experience a taste of India and fall forever in love with this ancient and sacred land.

The guidebook describes natural attractions, temples of various religions, and forts. Some of the places described may not be found in popular India guidebooks.

In writing this guide, I drew on historical facts, the stories of local and Russian-speaking guides, and, of course, my own experiences as a solo traveler, seeing everywhere, both permitted and prohibited, which allowed me to see things the average package tourist never sees. I should point out right away that this doesn't describe every sight in Karnataka, but only those I've personally visited and highly recommend.

P.S. You'll likely find typos in this book. I've decided to leave them in as a reminder that even the best travel experiences have minor imperfections.

Chapter 2

Preparing for the trip

What do you need to do to make your trip comfortable?

India differs significantly from European countries in terms of sanitary standards. Therefore, if you are concerned about contracting any infections, it is best to get vaccinated before traveling. Vaccinations are especially important against dysentery, hepatitis A and B, malaria, typhoid fever, and cholera.

Travel insurance is a must, especially if you're planning extreme activities or renting a bike. Honestly, in three years, I've never needed it thanks to a well-stocked first aid kit.

Your first aid kit should definitely contain antipyretics, painkillers, medications for intestinal disorders, adsorbents, anti-allergy medications, antiseptics, broad-spectrum antibiotics, and medications that you take on a regular basis.

In India, as in other Asian countries, it is not customary to use toilet paper, so take it with you if you want to save money and avoid wasting time searching for it in markets.

The sun in India is quite hot, so don't forget sunscreen.

Indian food is very spicy, and if your stomach isn't used to it, it's best to bring your own food—something like instant noodles. But this isn't necessary. If you do your research and don't limit yourself to the menu and ask questions of cafe and restaurant staff, you'll always find chicken broth, potatoes, and plain salad. And, of course, flatbreads.

Chapter 3

You've arrived. Where to go?

The majority of tourists arrive in India at Indira Gandhi International Airport in Delhi. Those traveling to the state of Goa, beloved since the hippie era, will arrive at Dabolim Airport or the new airport in Mopa.

After clearing customs and collecting your luggage, you'll need to obtain some local currency—rupees. The exchange rate at the airport isn't very favorable, but depending on your next destination, you may not be able to exchange currency elsewhere. Incidentally, you can also exchange rubles for rupees when departing from Moscow at Sheremetyevo Airport, Terminal C.

Where can I buy a SIM card? There are several mobile operators in India: Airtel, Idea, and Vodafone. In Karnataka's cities, SIM cards are rarely sold to tourists; it's best to arrange this at the airport. If you do decide to buy a SIM card in the city, you can buy them on the main street in Gokarna. Keep in mind the siesta period, from 1:00 PM to 4:00 PM.

Next, you need to decide how to get to the hotel. From the airport, you can take a taxi or public transportation. However, it's safer to book a transfer in advance.



1 Indira Gandhi Airport, Delhi

Chapter 4

Karnataka

India is a densely populated country, and its territory is divided into 28 states. In 2023, India's population reached 1,425,775,850.

The average package tourist begins their exploration of India with a trip through the Golden Triangle or a beach holiday in Goa. My exploration of India began in the state of Karnataka, located in southwest India.

The capital of Karnataka is Bangalore.

Karnataka is considered the cleanest state in India, but this does not negate the general rules of hygiene, such as hand washing and drinking only bottled water.

Karnataka has a subequatorial tropical monsoon climate. The rainy season begins from June to October. The best time to travel in Karnataka is from January to March.

Average temperature +27...+33.

The rainy season is best for visiting the waterfalls.

The language spoken in the state is Kannada, but almost everyone speaks English.

Chapter 5

Gokarna

Tourists most often travel to Gokarna from the state of Goa. You can get there by intercity bus from Margao. You can also take a train from Madgaon station near Margao. The bus journey takes about four hours, and the train takes two hours.

You can use taxi services.

Gokarna coordinates: 14.5478586, 74.31884099999999.

There are many sacred cities in India, but Gokarna is the most sacred. According to legend, it was here that the great Hindu god of destruction, Shiva, was born from a cow's ear. The city is located on a peninsula shaped like a cow's ear, hence the name Gokarna. "Go" means "cow" and "karna" means "ear." The town's population is primarily composed of priests (Brahmins).

That's why the local population dresses in white or orange. Religious ceremonies held in Gokarna are believed to have special powers. Gokarna is a Hindu pilgrimage site. It is here in the waters

They perform ablutions in the Arabian Sea.

The city's main temple is Mahabaleshwar, where Hindus gather to worship the Shivalinga, which is over a million years old.

Foreigners are not allowed into this temple, but you can enter the grounds. A sacred white humped bull the size of an elephant lives at the entrance.

Several other temples are worthy of tourist attention: the Ganesha temple, the Naga (snake) temple, where they pray for the birth of children.

Hidden among the narrow streets of Gokarna lies the sacred lake of Koti Tirtha, believed to be filled with water from the Ganges. Brahmins perform ablutions here; it is believed that all sins are washed away.

The lake is deep, and a sign warns of this, stating that people drown here every year. There's also a sign warning of the presence of crocodiles. I didn't see one, and during our walk around the lake's perimeter, the crocodiles didn't eat a single Brahmin bathing. The remains of deceased relatives are also immersed in the tirtha after cremation.

Sacred places aren't just temples. In Gokarna, the "Ear of Shiva" cave is worth visiting.

The path to the cave from Main Beach is uphill, so it's best to bring plenty of water. Be careful along the way, as the entrance to the cave leads through bushes and it's easy to miss the sign.

The "Shiva's Ear" cave is as sacred as Gokarna itself, so it's never deserted. It's said that even at night, some people come here to spend the night. The cave is the very place where Shiva was born from that very same cow's ear.



The cave entrance is low and narrow, so we had to let some Hindus exit to enter. A small round opening above illuminates the cave with natural light.

Inside the cave there are some not very pleasant representatives of the fauna, namely huge cockroaches.

Coordinates: 14°32'52.3" N 74°19'07.8" E



2 Gokarna. Automobile Street

Chapter 6

Murdeswar

What's hidden inside the world's tallest Shiva statue?

The town with the strange name of Murdeswar attracts visitors with its unique landmark – a temple complex containing the second largest statue of Shiva in the world.

A trip to Murdeswar can be combined with a trip to Gokarna.

How to get there: You can get to Murdeswar from Goa by train (it takes 3 hours 20 minutes) or by taxi.

Coordinates: 14.094804, 74.488564.

You definitely won't get lost in Murdeswar. The four-armed Shiva statue will gaze at you from every angle. To say the statue is large is an understatement. Its size amazes you long before you even approach it. Standing beneath its might, you feel dwarfed. This gigantic statue stands 37 meters tall.

Entrance is strictly barefoot, descending the scorching stone steps. Inside the statue is a cave museum dedicated to the Indian epic.

The life-size wax figures in the museum tell the ancient legend of the magical Atma Lingam, which the ten-headed king Ravana coveted after gaining Shiva's trust. As usual, legends must have a happy ending, so the stone was saved, but the evil king threw it to the ground in the town of Gokarna. The stone split into three pieces, and cities were formed where the fragments fell. One of them is Murdeswar.

By the way, the Shiva statue's facial expression changes in different lighting. Take a closer look.

Around the statue of Shiva, you can see a beautiful park and huge sculptures of the sacred bull Nandi, a chariot with the gods Arjuna and Krishna, and a huge golden sun symbolizing the god, Surya.

Descending the steps, you'll find yourself at an equally significant and majestic site—the gopuram, the gate tower. Like the statue, the gopuram is the tallest, standing 75 meters high. Inside, the tower is equipped with elevators that take you to the very top, to the observation deck. The views from the top are worth the fifteen rupees entrance fee.

Once you go down, you can take your time and examine the life-size elephants standing at the entrance.

In a city located on the coast, it's impossible to miss the beach. Hundreds of boats are moored on one side of the shore. The city's residents primarily engage in fishing. The other part of the coast is a beach area, where Indians conduct a brisk trade no less eloquent than at the once-famous Cherkizon. This is the dirtiest part of the coast.

Hindus used to use banana leaves instead of plates for food, throwing them away afterward. These centuries-old traditions have become embedded in modern life, and now Hindus habitually throw anything that can't be consumed on the ground.

You can have lunch at the Naveen Beach Restaurant, which is located on the opposite side of the Gopuram on the coast.



3 Murdeshwar

Chapter 7

The Lost Kingdom of the Jains

Pepper Queen Chennabhairadevi not only built the Mirjan fort and ran a successful spice trade, but also professed Jainism, building many Jain basadis in Karnataka.

My curiosity and thirst for adventure left me no choice but to set out in search of the lost kingdom of the Jains. All that remains of the kingdom are ancient basadis and various artifacts dug up from the depths of the earth.

The entrance to the Chaturmukha Basadi isn't always open, and access is always left to the mercy of the universe. I was lucky: the temple doors were open. Nothing remains of the Jain kingdom after seven centuries. All that remains are the Basadi temple, a well, and a couple of outbuildings where archaeologists store discovered artifacts.

Chaturmukha translates as "four-faced," hence the temple's perfectly symmetrical structure and four entrances facing the Garbhagriha. The Garbhagriha features four free-standing sculptures of Tirthankaras, facing the four exits. The Tirthankaras symbolize the all-encompassing knowledge of the cosmos.

What is surprising is that the temple is built from carved granite rocks without any binding material - just stone on stone.

The Jains who lived here preached non-harm to any living creature. They observed strict asceticism: their elders died by abstaining from food. To avoid accidentally swallowing a fly, Jains wear face coverings. They walk the streets with a broom to avoid crushing any living creatures. A kind of ancient Greenpeace.

You can get to the temple from the town of Karkala by car or taxi.

Coordinates: 14°13'43.4"N 74°39'53"E / 14.228722°N 74.66472°E / 14.228722; 74.66472



4 Chaturmukha basadi main entrance



5 Chaturmukha basadi from the end

Chapter 8

Green Fort Mirjan

Little-known and dilapidated landmarks attract me no less than those that have retained their integrity and attract crowds of tourists. We visited one such place near Kumta. Fort Mirjan doesn't look like a defensive structure at all, but rather like a castle. A queen's castle.

This is partly true. According to one theory, the fort was built to store and protect spices shipped by river to Europe. The exact date of its construction is unknown. Some sources say it dates back to the 13th century, others to the 16th century, and was restored in the 17th.

A plaque at the entrance claims it was built in the 17th century. This fact is both admirable and perplexing. The fort was built of volcanic rock, a rather loose substance. How it has survived to this day remains a mystery. However, it is unknown what remains of the original after the restoration of 2000–2001, when the laterite stone was replaced.

The fort's original construction is attributed to Queen Chennabhairadevi, who ruled the area for 54 years and also resided in the fort. The queen successfully traded in the finest black pepper, earning the nickname "Pepper Queen." Pepper was more valuable than gold in the 16th century and had to be guarded. Besides pepper, the fort also stored wild nutmeg, saltpeter, cassia, and betel nut. During the reign of the "Pepper Queen," matriarchy reigned in South India.

After suffering defeat at the Battle of Talikota, which destroyed the Vijayanagara Empire, the queen fled from the Mirjan fort to safety on an island in the Sharavati River. According to another version, she was captured and met her death in prison.

After the death of Bednur's last ruler in 1755, his wife assumed control, representing her 17-year-old adopted son, Chanbasaviya. When her adopted son objected to her taking a lover, she killed him. This led to a revolt by the agitated local population, and, taking advantage of the situation, the Marathas captured the fort. In the 18th century, the fort was captured by the British. The British maintained the fort until 1947, when India gained independence.

Coordinates: 14.493267, 74.423750



6 Fort Mirjan

Chapter 9

The flooded church of Shettihalli

Churches are often closely associated with mysticism. What could be more mystical than a church rising from the water at a certain time?

A mystical wonder hidden in the vastness of the Indian city of Hassan and hovering above the water is the French Christian church of Shettihalli.

During the monsoon season, the church submerges and resurfaces in the summer. Upon learning of this miracle, I was ready to swim there on anything, even a small basin. The floating basin became our means of transportation between the submerged and majestic ruins. Not the most comfortable, but very romantic.

This mysterious Gothic church was built to serve the Christian communities living in Karnataka in 1830 by French missionaries. A hundred years later, civilization, in the form of a burst dam, forced the people to leave, leaving this grandiose building to nature.

As I mentioned earlier, the flooded church now has a rather mystical appearance, and if you visit after sunset, you'll surely get a thrill, mistaking the silhouettes of the birds living inside for ghosts. Before sunset, however, floating between the church's arches, reflected in the water and appearing golden in the rays of the setting sun, you'll feel an incredible sense of peace and tranquility.

You can get to the church from the city of Khasan by bus, telling the driver to make a stop at the church, and then walk 10 minutes.

Coordinates:54.716354, 20.524586







7 Kirkha Shettihalli

Chapter 10

Belur. Chennakeshava Temple

Various architectural mysteries always captivate the human mind, causing us to freeze, as if petrified, for a moment, near exquisitely crafted massive stones. Especially when these stones are ancient.

The lacework of Hindu temples remains a centuries-old mystery for modern man. The enormous carved columns and openwork elements of the temples spark heated debate about how the ancient Indians could have sculpted such beauty using hammers and chisels. Or did they have lathes or other more sophisticated tools?

Belur was the second capital of the Hoysalas, hosting refugees from Halebid during the war with the Muslims. The Chennakeshava Temple in Belur took 103 years to build. It was built by the Hoysala king Vishnuvarhana. The temple's architectural style is Hoysala. Its base resembles a star.

The facade walls are decorated with horizontal friezes depicting scenes from the Puranas, Upanishads, Ramayana and Mahabharata.

Among the sculptures, the figures of dancing girls—apsaras—are particularly noteworthy. Particularly famous is the sculpture of Darpana-sundari—a beauty looking into a mirror. Apsaras from the Belur Temple, Karnataka, 1117 CE.

Demigoddesses in Hindu mythology, spirits of clouds or water. Beautiful women in rich clothing and wearing jewelry. In Vedic mythology, they are the wives and lovers of the Gandharvas. Celestial dancers and courtesans. According to legend, Apsaras also indulges heroes fallen in battle in Indra's paradise.

There are several versions of the origin of the apsaras. The Ramayana mentions that the apsaras were created during the churning of the ocean by the gods and asuras; neither of them wanted to marry them, and they became the property of everyone. According to other legends, the most famous apsaras (such as Menaka, Urvashi, Tilottama, and others) were created by Brahma, while the rest were the daughters of Daksha.

Apsaras, who were in direct service to the gods, were often used by them to seduce ascetics or holy hermits, who, through asceticism, could become equal to the gods. The figures are well detailed, but unfortunately, elements of some sculptures have been lost.

The temple's interior is supported by 22 solid stone pillars. The central pillar, depicting Narasimha (an avatar of Vishnu), bears over a hundred images of deities. The Narasimha pillar, made of soapstone, once had the ability to rotate. Touching the pillar creates the sensation of touching soap.

The physical properties of soapstone are softness, non-porosity, low electrical conductivity, high heat capacity, heat resistance, and resistance to acids and alkalis.

The temple is quite dark, so the Indian guides periodically turn on a flashlight to illuminate the carved ceilings and the Vishnu murti. Vishnu holds a conch in his upper right hand, a chakra (discus)

in his upper left hand, a lotus in his lower right hand, and a club in his lower left hand. His consorts, Shridevi and Bhudevi, stand on either side.

Inside the temple, at one of the entrances, you can see Ananta Shesha—one of the forms of God in Hinduism and Vedic religion, a thousand-headed serpent, the king of all nagas. He is depicted with five to seven heads, and most often with multiple heads, each wearing a crown adorned with precious stones and patterns.

The temple was used not only as a religious building, but also for meetings of the raja and his advisers, and justice was administered here.

On the temple grounds there is a pond with fish and turtles.

You can reach the temple from Belur.

The most convenient way to get to Mysore is by air. There are also flights from Goa to Bangalore, followed by car or taxi.

A trip to Belur can be conveniently combined with a trip to Mysore.

Coordinates: 13.16293, 75.860593



8 Chennakeshava Temple in Belur

Chapter 11

Mysore

Mysore is the third largest city in the state of Karnataka. It was the capital of the Mysore kingdom for nearly six centuries, from 1399 to 1947.

It was part of the Vijayanagar Empire until its collapse; it later became one of the most important cities of the sultanate of the same name.

Today, Mysore is a large modern city with developed tourism and traditional crafts (sandalwood and ivory carving).

Mysore is the birthplace of Ashtanga Yoga, where Guru Pattabhi Jois taught. It is one of the main centers for yoga study and teaching for people from all over the world.

The world-renowned spiritual leader Sadhguru was born in Mysore. Here he meditated on Chamundi Hill and achieved enlightenment.

Mysore is known as the city of palaces. The main palace is Amba Vilas.

Chapter 12

Amba Vilas Palace in Mysore

The most secure area and the second most visited landmark in India after the Taj Mahal is the Amba Vilas Palace in Mysore. To enter, you must undergo security checks that are stricter than those at the airport. Overall, it's worth it. Bulky backpacks and cameras with interchangeable lenses are not recommended—they will be left in storage. You'll also need to store your shoes in storage; barefoot entry is required.

The palace of the former kings of India, the Wodeyars, was built in the 14th century, restored in the 19th century, and only acquired its current appearance in 1940. The palace combines several styles: Hindu, Gothic, Muslim, and Rajput. The building is located within a fort. In addition, there are 12 Hindu temples built at various times, from the 14th to the 20th centuries. The most popular are:

- Someshvara;
- Lakshmiramana;
- Shweta-Varahaswami.

The palace itself is a three-story gray granite structure with pink marble domes and 44-meter-high five-story towers. The façade features seven wide arches and two smaller ones, supported by tall columns. Intricately carved rosewood doors and ceilings, marble figurines, paintings by members of the royal family, and other personal items reflect its former opulence.

The palace was last rebuilt from 1897 to 1912 in the Indo-Saracenic style, distinguished by mashrabiya (harem) windows, pointed arches, numerous towers, minarets, and open pavilions. Atop the central arch, one can see a sculpture of Gajalakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity.

Eight halls are available for tourists.

Amba-VilasaThe Audience Hall is a spacious and luxurious room where the royal family received distinguished guests. The walls are paneled with mahogany and ivory, the ceiling features stained glass and large crystal chandeliers in the shape of flowers. A gilded column stands in the center of the room.

Gombe-Totti (Doll Gallery) – This gallery houses a collection of traditional Indian dolls from the 19th and 20th centuries and several sculptures created by European artists. The room's decor is complemented by ceremonial attributes, three-dimensional patterns, paintings, and plaster moldings.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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