

# FROM HYDERABAD TO CYBERABAD

India's "City of Pearls" – and now information technology corridor – entices with a thriving food scene, palatial hotels and ancient natural wonders.

STORY BY  
Charukesi Ramadurai  
PHOTOS BY  
Kunal Bhatia

**A** The city is a sparkling backdrop to the performers on the terrace of the Taj Falaknuma Palace.

**B** Welcoming guests of the Taj Falaknuma Palace with flowers.

**T**here is an apocryphal story about Hyderabad that punctuates most conversations about the city's history: the last ruling Nizam Mir Osman Ali Khan, used the Jacob Diamond – the seventh largest in the world, today valued at over US\$100 million – as a paperweight on his writing table. After all, the ruler of what was then a princely state was known to be as eccentric as he was wealthy. In February 1937, Time magazine featured Khan on its cover as the richest man in the world.

The Nizam's fortunes declined when the state of Hyderabad was annexed by the Indian government in 1948. The Falaknuma Palace, his royal residence, fell into disrepair. It was given a fresh lease of life when it was finally restored by the Taj Hotels Resorts and Palaces group in 2010, and opened to guests.

Now, those who take a guided walk around the opulent Taj Falaknuma Palace ([tajhotels.com](http://tajhotels.com)), will see the very table upon which the diamond once purportedly rested. ➔





There is no better address in Hyderabad today. Regardless of whether you stay at the palace, drop in for a meal (be sure to reserve ahead) at the Indian restaurant Aada, known for its authentic recipes from the erstwhile royal kitchens. Or take high tea in the manner of sahibs (masters) from another age at The Jade Room, which provides splendid views of the old city.

Life in the old city represents a Hyderabad from the past, with its iconic 16th-century Charminar monument, calls

for prayer from the Mecca Masjid mosque, and rows of shops selling glittery bangles and smooth pearls.

A note of quirkiness still exists in this part of town, perhaps a legacy of the Nizams. The Sudha Cars Museum (19-5-15/1/D, Bahadurpura X-Road, Tel: 91 40 2446 3376), which proudly labels itself the "world's only wacky car museum", is proof of this. Fully functional, the cars here come in all shapes, ranging from billiards tables and burgers to cricket bats and cameras.

But to see how Hyderabad really lives now, head out of its crowded heart towards the area known as Secunderabad. Called Hyderabad's twin city by locals, Secunderabad was established by the British in the early 19th century as a cantonment. It was later absorbed by the city of Hyderabad and now comprises its more cosmopolitan suburbs.

#### BY THE LAKE

Start your exploration of Secunderabad with a stroll on the boulevard known as Necklace Road, along the manmade Hussain Sagar Lake. This is where young ➔



READ THIS  
STORY ONLINE AT  
[SILVERKRIS.COM](http://SILVERKRIS.COM)

**C** The very desk where the Jacob Diamond was purportedly used as a paperweight.

**D** A horse-drawn carriage takes arriving guests from the gate to the entrance of the Taj Falaknuma Palace.

**E** The 16th-century Charminar monument.





**F** The lakeside Olive Bistro is the place for a leisurely lunch or drink.

**G** The spicy chepa vepudu from Simply South.



FOR THE INTERACTIVE VERSION OF THIS STORY, DOWNLOAD SILVERKRIS ON TABLET

## HIDDEN HYDERABAD

**JONTY RAJAGOPALAN**, who runs Detours tours in Hyderabad, shares her local favourites.

### LOCAL EATS

Move beyond the Hyderabadi biryani and challenge your stomach to a hot Andhra thali (meat or vegetarian platter) at The Spicy Venue (Road No. 10 Jubilee Hills, Tel: 91 40 6559 5522). If not the thali, try their fiery and tart dosakaya mutton and gongura chicken with rice.

### BARGAIN BUYS

I always love shopping for kalamkari (hand-painted) stoles and dupattas (scarves) at Creative Bee ([creativebee.in](http://creativebee.in)). They also stock some of the most unique handwoven saris.

### HERITAGE HAUNTS

One of my newfound passions is exploring the granite rock formations in and around Hyderabad. Society to Save Rocks ([saverocks.org](http://saverocks.org)) organise a guided walk on the third Sunday of every month. The rocks are more than two billion years old and are of cultural and religious significance.

### UNIQUE EXPERIENCES

Keep a lookout for interactive art and cultural events at Our Sacred Space ([oursacredspace.in](http://oursacredspace.in)) in Secunderabad. They also have interesting activities for children, especially during holidays.

and old gather to catch up with friends once the sun goes down. With several parks, fast food joints and a giant statue of the Buddha looking on from the middle of the lake, this is a good place to shoot the breeze with locals.

If you prefer to enjoy views of the lake from the comfort of your room, check in to The Park Hyderabad ([theparkhotels.com](http://theparkhotels.com)). Its star attraction is the Kismet nightclub, especially on Friday evenings when the DJ plays peppy Bollywood numbers.

### HIGH ON THE HILLS

The real action, however, is in the swanky suburbs of Jubilee Hills and Banjara Hills, where the rich and famous of Hyderabad have always resided. The undulating terrain in this area gives these adjacent neighbourhoods their suffix.

Begin with an authentic south Indian meal at the modern Simply South ([chefchallu.com](http://chefchallu.com)). If you can bear the spice, try the chepa vepudu (dry fish) or uragai mamsam (pickled mutton), or play safe with a mild appam (rice pancake fermented with

yeast) and stew. And don't leave without tasting Hyderabad's signature dish, the mutton biryani (spiced rice dish).

"Hyderabad is changing and the young crowd is ready to experiment with new [dishes]. Yet, they keep coming here because they also like to remain in touch with the flavours of home," says its chef Chalapathi Rao, who is better known as chef Challu.

Once you've had your fill of Indian food, head to the new Olive Bistro ([olivebarandkitchen.com](http://olivebarandkitchen.com)) with the hip Hyderabadis. With its lakeside location by the Durgam Cheruvu, and Mediterranean menu, it's just the place for a long leisurely lunch. Think Greek-style farmer's salad, wood oven-baked cannelloni, and saffron and vanilla panna cotta.

Follow lunch with Belgian craft beers at MOB (Road 92 Jubilee Hills), which fans have christened Mad Over Beer. The Trappist beer Westmalle Dubbel and the fruity La Pecheresse are especially popular.

If mixed drinks are more to your taste, head to Over the Moon ([overthemoon.in](http://overthemoon.in)), ➔

AD

an open-air lounge bar with excellent cocktails – regulars swear by the cucumber martini – and a dance floor. Co-owner Sanjay Bathla calls his clientele the new face of Hyderabad. "I get a good mix of software professionals, senior managers and even film celebrities," he says.

### CULTURE AND SHOPPING

Stop by cultural space Lamakaan (*lamakaan.com*) to catch a local theatre production, literary event or show. You might even stumble upon a stand-up comedy gig or a quick lesson in classical music here.

Shop for premium designer wear at Anahita in Banjara Hills (8-2-418, *Krishnama House, Road No. 7, Tel: 91 40 2335 0101*), which stocks, among others, Hyderabad resident Anand Kabra's feted collections featuring traditional embellishments on both Indian and Western designs.

For exclusive handcrafted jewellery, your best bet is Suhani Pittie's flagship store (*suhanipittie.com*). A favourite among Bollywood celebrities, Pittie was recently named by Vogue Italy as one of the five designers in India to watch.

### ON TO CYBERABAD

The information technology corridor that has sprung up in the last decade has earned Hyderabad the moniker "Cyberabad".

This area is dotted with gleaming shopping malls and luxury hotels, including the popular Avasa Hotel (*hotelavasa.com*), with its clean and contemporary design elements, such as its mostly white decor punctuated with vibrant colour.

For a memorable experience, make your way to Dialogue In The Dark (*dialogueinthedarkindia.com*) at the swanky Inorbit Mall (*inorbit.in/cyberabad*). With a presence in 30 countries, this interactive 45-minute exhibition takes place in complete darkness, allowing you to understand the world through senses other than sight, such as touch, smell and sound. Its eatery, Taste of Darkness, provides a similar experience for diners, serving meals in a darkened area.

While the Nizams are long gone, Hyderabad has found prosperity once more. The software industry has enticed global giants such as Google, Facebook and Microsoft, bestowing boomtown status on the city. ■

**H** Inorbit Mall is home to the Dialogue In The Dark exhibition which is experienced by the senses other than sight.

**I** Jewellery by Suhani Pittie is favoured by Bollywood luminaries.

### Fast Facts

**CURRENCY**  
Indian Rupee  
US\$1 = 61.3 INR

**VISA**  
Requirements vary.  
Visit [indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa](http://indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa) for details.

**BEST TIME TO VISIT**  
October to March is the best time to visit, after the monsoon months and before the scorching summer. Major festivals like Diwali and Sankranti take place during this time.

**HOW TO GET THERE**  
Singapore Airlines' regional wing SilkAir operates 9 flights per week from Singapore to Hyderabad during the peak travelling period (December to January), and 7 flights for the rest of the year.

**MORE INFORMATION**  
[incredibleindia.org](http://incredibleindia.org)



PHOTO COURTESY INORBIT MALL

AD