



Andhra Pradesh

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Best Places to Eat

- » Waterfront (p901)
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Best Places to Stay

- » Taj Mahal Hotel (p899)
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Why Go?

Andhra Pradesh won't hit you over the head with its attractions. It doesn't brag about its temples or its colourful history. It's forgotten most of its palaces and royal architecture – you'll have to purposely seek them out.

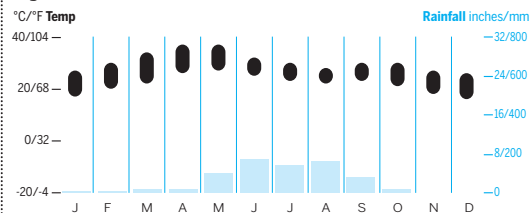
Andhra plays hard to get: its charms are subtle. But if you look closely, you'll find a long, fascinating history of arts, culture, spiritual scholarship and religious harmony. In Hyderabad's Old City, Islamic monuments, Persian-inspired architecture and the call of the muezzin speak of the city's unique heritage.

Dig a little deeper and you'll find another Andhran history: the region was an international centre of Buddhist thought for several hundred years from the 3rd century BC.

So come, but only if you're prepared to dig for the jewels to be found here. Keep your eyes open and your curiosity sharp and you're bound to find something that even Andhrans, in their modesty, hadn't thought to mention.

When to Go

Hyderabad



Dec–Jan Explore Hyderabad's sights in perfect 20–25°C weather.

Ramadan (around Jun–Aug) Join locals digging into *haleem*, a Ramzan favourite.

Jun–Sep Monsoons make travel tough, but surfing at beaches around Vizag is decent.

MAIN POINTS OF ENTRY

Hyderabad's new Rajiv Gandhi International Airport is the main arrival point. The main train stations are Nampally and Secunderabad in Hyderabad; Imlibun is the interstate bus station.

Visakhapatnam has monthly ferries leaving to Port Blair in the Andaman Islands.

Fast Facts

- » Population: 84.7 million
- » Area: 276,754 sq km
- » Capital: Hyderabad
- » Main languages: Telugu, Urdu, Hindi
- » Sleeping prices: \$ below ₹800, \$\$ ₹800 to ₹2500, \$\$\$ above ₹2500

Top Tip

Hotels charge a 5% 'luxury' tax on all rooms over ₹300; it's not included in the prices quoted in this chapter. All hotels listed have 24-hour checkout unless otherwise stated.

Resources

- » APTDC tourism (www.aptdc.in)
- » Deccan Chronicle (www.deccanchronicle.com)
- » Fully Hyderabad (www.fullhyderabad.com)

Food

Hyderabad is a city known for its love of good food, and locals take great pride in their city's offerings. Andhra Pradesh's cuisine has two major influences. The Mughals brought tasty biryanis, *haleem* (pounded, spiced wheat with goat or mutton) and kebabs. The Andhra style is vegetarian and famous for its spiciness.

If you're travelling around Andhra Pradesh during Ramadan (known locally as Ramzan), look out for the clay ovens called *bhattis*. You'll probably hear them before you see them. Men gather around, taking turns to vigorously pound *haleem* inside purpose-built structures. Come nightfall, the serious business of eating begins. The taste is worth the wait. In September 2010, this love of the dish was taken a step further, being patented as 'Hyderabadi haleem'; prohibited to be served under that name unless it meets the strict quality guidelines.

DON'T MISS

The splendid architecture of **Hyderabad's** glory days is what brings most visitors to the region.

The 16th-century Qutb Shahi produced some masterful architecture including the stunning **Charminar**, **Golconda Fort** and their final resting place at the opulent tombs.

The lavish 18th-century nizam lifestyle is on display at sites such as **Chowmahalla Palace**, **Nizam's Museum** and the **Falaknuma Palace**, previously the residence of the sixth nizam and now a decadent hotel.

Top State Festivals

- » Sankranti (Jan, statewide) This important Telugu festival marks the end of harvest season. Kite-flying abounds, women decorate their doorsteps with colourful *kolams* (or *rangolis* – rice-flour designs), and men decorate cattle with bells and fresh horn paint.
- » Lumbini Festival (2nd Fri in Dec, Hyderabad, p894, Nagarjunakonda, p907) The three-day festival honours Andhra's Buddhist heritage.
- » Visakha Utsav (Dec/Jan, Visakhapatnam, p911) A celebration of all things Visakhapatnam, with classical and folk dance and music performances; some events are staged on the beach.



Andhra Pradesh Highlights

- 1** Absorb the meditative vibrations of monks past at **Sankaram** (p913), **Bavikonda** and **Thotlakonda** (p913)
- 2** Revel in the carnival beach atmosphere, at Visakhapatnam's **beaches** (p911)
- 3** Admire incredible carved images at **Veerbhadra Temple** in Lepakshi (p918).
- 4** Marvel at the genius design of **Golconda Fort** (p895)
- 5** Join millions of Hindu pilgrims taking *darshan* (deity viewing) at **Tirumala** (p915)
- 6** Sit back and enjoy the view on one of India's most scenic train trips to **Araku** (p913)
- 7** Learn about the state's rich ethnic diversity at the **tribal museums** in Hyderabad (p896) and Araku (p913)

History

From the 2nd century BC the Satavahana empire, also known as the Andhras, reigned throughout the Deccan plateau. It evolved from the Andhra people, whose presence in southern India may date back to 1000 BC. The Buddha's teaching took root here early on, and in the 3rd century BC the Andhras fully embraced it, building huge edifices in its honour. In the coming centuries, the Andhras would develop a flourishing civilisation that extended from the west to the east coasts of South India.

From the 7th to the 10th century, the Chalukyas ruled the area, establishing their Dravidian style of architecture, especially along the coast. The Chalukya and Chola dynasties merged in the 11th century to be overthrown by the Kakatiyas, who introduced pillared temples into South Indian religious architecture. The Vijayanagars then rose to become one of the most powerful empires in India.

By the 16th century the Islamic Qutb Shahi dynasty held the city of Hyderabad, but in 1687 was supplanted by Aurangzeb's Mughal empire. In the 18th century the post-Mughal rulers in Hyderabad, known as nizams, retained relative control as the British and French vied for trade, though their power gradually weakened. The region became part of independent India in 1947, and in 1956 the state of Andhra Pradesh, an amalgamation of Telugu-speaking areas plus the predominantly Urdu-speaking capital, was created.

Hyderabad & Secunderabad

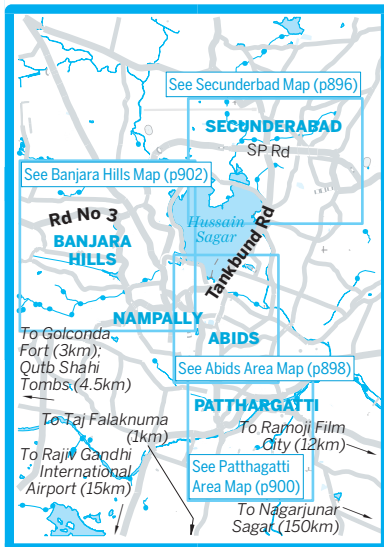
☑040 / POP 5.5 MILLION / ELEV 600M

Hyderabad, City of Pearls, is like an elderly, impeccably dressed princess whose time has past. Once the seat of the powerful and wealthy Qutb Shahi and Asaf Jahi dynasties, the city has seen centuries of great prosperity and innovation. Today, the 'Old City' is full of centuries-old Islamic monuments and even older charms. In fact, the whole city is laced with architectural gems: ornate tombs, mosques, palaces and homes from the past are tucked away, faded and enchanting, in corners all over town. Keep your eyes open.

In the last decade, with the rise of Hyderabad's west side – our aged princess's sexy and popular granddaughter – a new decadence has emerged. 'Cyberabad', with Bengaluru (Bangalore) and Pune, is the seat of India's mighty software dynasty and generates

Hyderabad & Secunderabad

0 2 km
0 1 miles



jobs, wealth and posh lounges. Opulence, it would seem, is in this city's genes.

History

Hyderabad owes its existence to a water shortage at Golconda in the late 16th century. The reigning Qutb Shahis were forced to relocate, and so Mohammed Quli and the royal family abandoned Golconda Fort for the banks of the Musi River. The new city of Hyderabad was established, with the brand-new Charminar as its centrepiece.

In 1687 the city was overrun by the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, and subsequent rulers of Hyderabad were viceroys installed by the Mughal administration in Delhi.

In 1724 the Hyderabad viceroy, Asaf Jah, took advantage of waning Mughal power and declared Hyderabad an independent state with himself as leader. The dynasty of the nizams of Hyderabad began, and the traditions of Islam flourished. Hyderabad became a focus for the arts, culture and learning, and the centre of Islamic India. Its abundance of rare gems and minerals – the world-famous Kohinoor diamond is from here – furnished the nizams with enormous wealth. (William Dalrymple's *White Mughals* is a fascinating portrait of the city at this time.)

When Independence came in 1947, the then nizam of Hyderabad, Osman Ali Khan,

considered amalgamation with Pakistan – and then opted for sovereignty. Tensions between Muslims and Hindus increased, however, and military intervention saw Hyderabad join the Indian union in 1948.

Sights

Charminar

MONUMENT

(Four Towers; Map p900; Indian/foreigner ₹5/100; ☉9am–5.30pm) Hyderabad's principal landmark was built by Mohammed Quli Qutb Shah in 1591 to commemorate the founding of Hyderabad and the end of epidemics caused by Golconda's water shortage. The dramatic four-column, 56m high and 30m wide structure has four arches facing the cardinal points. Minarets sit atop each column. The 2nd floor, home to Hyderabad's oldest mosque, and upper columns are not usually open to the public, but you can try your luck with the man with the key. The structure is illuminated from 7pm to 9pm.

Golconda Fort

FORT

(off Map p894; Indian/foreigner ₹5/100; ☉9am–5pm) Although most of this 16th-century fortress dates from the time of the Qutb Shah kings, its origins as a mud fort have been traced to the earlier reigns of the Yadavas and Kakatiyas.

The citadel is built on a granite hill, 120m high and surrounded by crenellated ramparts constructed from large masonry blocks. The massive gates were studded with iron spikes to obstruct war elephants. Outside the citadel there stands another crenellated rampart, with a perimeter of 11km, and yet another wall beyond this. At Naya Quila (new fort), adjacent to the golf course, you can find a magnificent 400-year-old **baobab tree** (Hathiyan – elephant tree), with a circumference of 25m, said to be planted by seedlings carried by African regiments from Abyssinia. Exploring the crumbling rampart in the area you'll find cannons strewn about (some with beautiful inscriptions) and great views of the fort and tombs.

Survival within the fort was also attributable to water and sound. A series of concealed glazed earthen pipes ensured a reliable water supply, while the ingenious design of the diamond-shaped ceiling Grand Portico creates an acoustic system that carries even the smallest echo across the fort complex up to the highest point of the fort – used as a security system. Guides can also demonstrate the equally impressive acoustics in the royal palace where one's whisper into

the corner of the wall can be heard perfectly through the walls in the opposing corner, designed to catch out conspirators.

Knowledgeable **guides** (1½hr tour ₹600) are organised through the AP Tourism table in front of the entrance. Small guidebooks to the fort are also available.

Mornings are best for peace and quiet. An autorickshaw from Abids costs around ₹150. It's a one hour bus journey either with Bus 119 from Nampally station or Bus 66G from Charminar.

A trippy **sound-and-light show** (admission ₹50; ☉in English 6.30pm Nov–Feb, 7pm Mar–Oct) is also held here.

Laad Bazaar

MARKET

(Map p900) West of the Charminar, the crowded Laad Bazaar is the perfect place to get lost. It has everything from fine perfumes, fabrics and jewels to musical instruments, secondhand saris and kitchen implements. Artisans are tucked away creating jewellery and scented oils, large pots and burkas. The lanes around the Charminar also form the centre of India's pearl trade. Some great deals can be had – if you know your stuff.

Salar Jung Museum

MUSEUM

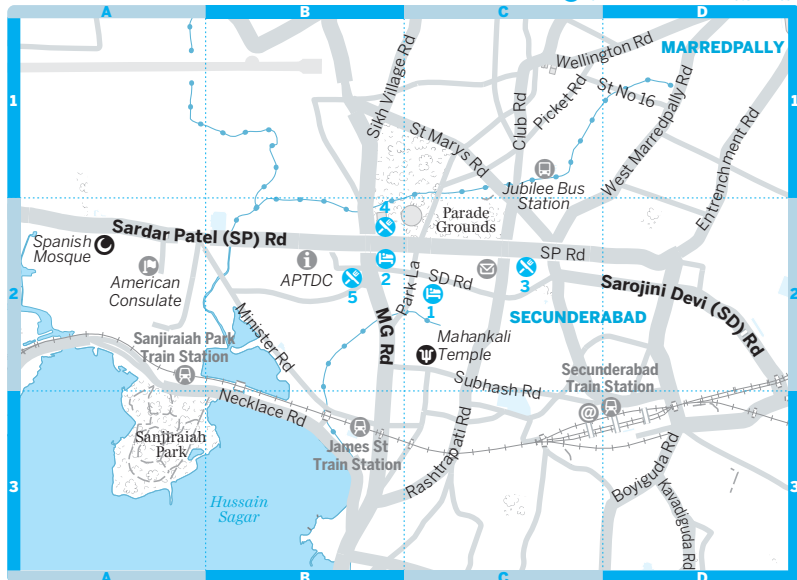
(Map p900; www.salarjungmuseum.in; Salar Jung Marg; Indian/foreigner ₹10/150; ☉10am–5pm Sat–Thu) The huge and varied collection, dating back to the 1st century, was put together by Mir Yusuf Ali Khan (Salar Jung III), the grand vizier of the seventh nizam, Osman Ali Khan (r 1910–49). The 35,000 exhibits from every corner of the world include sculptures, wood carvings, ivory (including a sadly ironic set of carved elephants), devotional objects, Persian miniature paintings, illuminated manuscripts, weaponry, toys and more than 50,000 books. The impressive nizams' jewellery collection is sometimes on display. Cameras are not allowed. Avoid Sunday, when it's bedlam. From any of the bus stands in the Abids area, take bus 7, which stops at **Afzal Gunj bus stop** (Map p900) on the north side of the nearby Musi River bridge.

Just west of the bridge is the spectacular **Osmania General Hospital** (Map p900), on the north side, and, on the south, the **High Court** (Map p900) and **Government City College** (Map p900), all built under the seventh nizam in the Indo-Saracenic style.

Chowmahalla Palace

MUSEUM

(Khilwat; Map p900; www.chowmahalla.com; Indian/foreigner ₹30/150, camera ₹50; ☉10am–5pm Sat–Thu) The nizam family has sponsored a



restoration of this dazzling palace – or, technically, four (*char*) palaces (*mahalla*). Begun in 1750, it was expanded over the next 100 years, absorbing Persian, Indo-Saracenic, Rajasthani and European styles. The southern courtyard has one *mahal* with period rooms that have been reconstructed with the nizams' over-the-top furniture; another *mahal* with an exhibit on life in the zenana (women's quarters); antique cars; and curiosities like elephant seats, and a Remington Urdu typewriter.

In the northern courtyard is the **Khilwat Mubarak**, a magnificent durbar hall houses exhibitions of photos, arms and clothing.

HEH the Nizam's Museum

MUSEUM

(Purani Haveli; Map p900; adult/student ₹70/15, camera ₹150; ☀10am-5pm Sat-Thu) The 16th-century Purani Haveli was home of the sixth nizam, Fath Jang Mahbub Ali Khan (r 1869–1911), rumoured to have never worn the same garment twice. His 72m-long, two-storey Burnese teak wardrobe, the first room you'll enter, certainly seems to substantiate the claim. In the palace's former servants' quarters are personal effects of the seventh nizam, Osman Ali Khan (1886–1967) and gifts from his Silver Jubilee, lavish pieces that include an art deco silver letterbox collection. The museum's guides do an excellent job putting it all in context.

The rest of Purani Haveli is now a school, but you can wander around the grounds and peek in the administrative building, the nizam's former residence.

Qutb Shahi Tombs

TOMBS

(off Map p894; admission ₹10, camera/video ₹20/100; ☀9am-5pm) These graceful domed tombs sit serenely in landscaped gardens about 1.5km northwest of Golconda Fort's Balahisar Gate. Seven of the nine Qutb Shahi rulers were buried here, as well as members of the royal family and respected citizens from entertainers to doctors. You could easily spend half a day here taking photos and wandering in and out of the mausoleums. The upper level of Mohammed Quli's tomb, reached via a narrow staircase, has good views of the area. The Qutb Shahi Tombs **booklet** (₹20) may be available at the ticket counter.

The tombs are an easy walk from the fort, but an autorickshaw ride shouldn't be more than ₹25. Bus 80S also heads here from the fort.

Nehru Centenary Tribal Museum

MUSEUM

(Map p902; Masab Tank; Indian/foreigner ₹10/100; ☀10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) Andhra Pradesh's 33 tribal groups, based mostly in the north-eastern part of the state, comprise several

Secunderabad

Sleeping

- 1 Minerva GrandC2
- 2 YMCAB2

Eating

- 3 Kamat HotelC2
- 4 Kamat HotelB2
- 5 Paradise Persis RestaurantB2

million people. The recently refurbished museum, run by the government's Tribal Welfare Department, exhibits photographs, dioramas of village life, musical instruments and some exquisite Naikpod masks. It's basic, but you'll get a glimpse into the cultures of these fringe peoples. There's an excellent library with 13,500 books covering tribal groups of India, and next door is the tiny **Girijan Sales Depot**, selling products made in tribal communities.

FREE Paigah Tombs

TOMBS

(off Map p894; Phisalbanda, Santoshnagar; ☉10am-5pm Sat-Thu) The aristocratic Paigah family, purportedly descendants of the second Caliph of Islam, were fierce loyalists of the nizams, serving as statespeople, philanthropists and generals under and alongside them. The Paigahs' necropolis, tucked away in a quiet neighbourhood 4km southeast of Charminar, is a small compound of exquisite mausoleums made of marble from Agra and lime stucco. The main complex contains 27 tombs with intricate inlay work, surrounded by delicately carved walls and canopies, stunning filigree screens with geometric patterning and, overhead, tall, graceful turrets. The tombs are down a small lane across from Owasi Hospital. Look for the Preston Junior College sign. *The Paigah Tombs* (₹20) booklet is sold at the AP State Museum, but not here.

Buddha Statue & Hussain Sagar

MONUMENT

Hyderabad has one of the world's largest free-standing stone **Buddha statues** (Map p898), completed in 1990 after five years of work. However, when the 17.5m-high, 350-tonne monolith was being ferried to its place in the Hussain Sagar, the barge sank. Fortunately, the statue was raised – undamaged – in 1992 and is now on a plinth in the middle of the lake. It's a magnificent sight when alit at night.

Frequent **boats** (adult/child ₹50/25) make the 30-minute return trip to the statue from both **Eat Street** (Map p902; ☉2-8.40pm)

and **Lumbini Park** (Map p898; admission ₹10; ☉9am-9pm), a pleasant place to enjoy sunsets and the popular musical fountain. The Tankbund Rd promenade, on the eastern shore of Hussain Sagar, has great views of the Buddha statue.

AP State Museum

MUSEUM

(Map p898; Public Gardens Rd, Nampally; admission ₹10, camera/video ₹100/500; ☉10.30am-5pm Sat-Thu) The continually renovated State Museum hosts a rather dusty collection of important archaeological finds from the area, as well as a Buddhist sculpture gallery, with some relics of the Buddha and an exhibit on Andhra's Buddhist history. There are also Jain and bronze sculpture galleries, a decorative-arts gallery and a 4500-year-old Egyptian mummy. The museum, like the gorgeous **Legislative Assembly building** (Map p898) down the road (both commissioned by the seventh nizam), is floodlit at night.

Mecca Masjid

MOSQUE

(Map p900; Shah Ali Banda Rd, Patthargatti; ☉9am-5pm) This mosque is one of the world's largest, with space for 10,000 worshippers. Women are not allowed inside.

Several bricks embedded above the gate are made with soil from Mecca – hence the name. To the left of the mosque, an enclosure contains the tombs of Nizam Ali Khan and his successors.

Since the 2007 bomb blasts here, security is tight; no bags are allowed inside.

Birla Mandir & Planetarium

HINDU TEMPLE, MUSEUM

(Map p898) The Birla **mandir** (☉7am-noon & 2-9pm), constructed of white Rajasthani marble in 1976, graces Kalabahad (Black Mountain), one of two rocky hills overlooking the Hussain Sagar. Dedicated to Venkateshwara, the temple is a popular Hindu pilgrimage centre and affords excellent views over the city, especially at sunset. The **library** (☉4-8pm) here is worth a visit

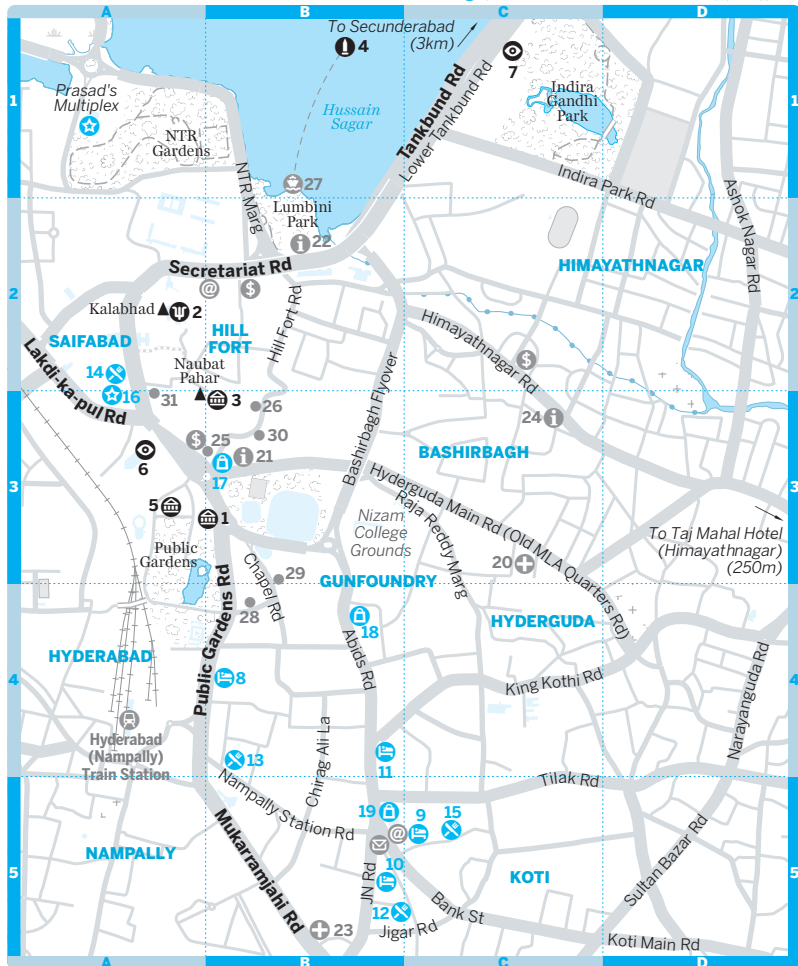
Next door are the **Birla Planetarium & Science Museum** (museum/planetarium ₹20/35; ☉museum 10.30am-8pm, to 3pm Fri, planetarium shows 11.30am, 4pm & 6pm) and the worthwhile **Birla Modern Art Gallery** (admission ₹10; ☉10.30am-6pm).

Hyderabad has a burgeoning contemporary art scene:

ICCR Art Gallery

ART GALLERY

(Map p898; ☎23236398; Ravindra Bharati Theatre, Public Gardens Rd; ☉11am-7pm)

**Kalakriti**

ART GALLERY
 (Map p902; www.kalakriti.in; Rd No 10, Banjara Hills; ☎11am-7pm)

Shrishti

ART GALLERY
 (www.shrishtiart.com; Rd No 15, Jubilee Hills; ☎11am-7pm)

Courses**Vipassana International Meditation Centre**

BUDDHIST MEDITATION
 (Dhamma Khetta; ☎24240290; www.khetta.dhamma.org; Nagarjuna Sagar Rd, 12.6km) The Vipassana International Meditation Centre has intensive 10-day meditation courses in

its peaceful grounds 20km outside the city. Apply online or at the Hyderabad **office** (☎24732569). A shuttle runs to/from Hyderabad on the first and last day of courses.

Tours

APTDC (p906) tours the city (₹270), Ramoji Film City (₹600), Nagarjuna Sagar (weekends, ₹450) and Tirupathi/Tirumala (three days, ₹1950). The Sound & Light tour (₹200) takes inHITEC City, the botanic gardens and Golconda Fort's sound-and-light show, but you may spend much of it in traffic. Tours leave from APTDC's Secunderabad branch (Map p896)

Abids Area

📍 Sights

- 1 AP State Museum..... B3
- 2 Birla Mandir..... A2
- Birla Modern Art Gallery (see 3)
- 3 Birla Planetarium & Science Museum..... B3
- Birla Temple..... (see 3)
- 4 Buddha Statue..... B1
- 5 Health Museum A3
- ICCR Art Gallery..... (see 16)
- 6 Legislative Assembly..... A3
- 7 Snow World..... C1

🛏 Sleeping

- 8 Hotel Harsha..... B4
- 9 Hotel Mandakini Jaya International..... C5
- 10 Hotel Suhail..... B5
- 11 Taj Mahal Hotel..... B4

🍴 Eating

- 12 Kamat Andhra Meals..... B5
- Kamat Coffee Shop..... (see 12)
- 13 Kamat Hotel B4
- 14 Kamat Hotel A2
- Kamat Jowar Bhakri..... (see 12)
- Kamat Restaurant (see 12)

- 15 Sagar Papaji Ka Dhaba C5

🎪 Entertainment

- 16 Ravindra Bharati Theatre..... A3

🛍 Shopping

- 17 Kalanjali..... B3
- 18 Lepakshi..... B4
- 19 Meena Bazar..... B5

ℹ Information

- 20 Apollo Pharmacy..... C3
- 21 APTDC..... B3
- 22 APTDC..... B2
- 23 Care Hospital..... B5
- 24 Indiatourism C3

🚗 Transport

- 25 Air India..... B3
- 26 AirAsia..... B3
- 27 Boats to Buddha Statue B1
- 28 GSA Transworld Travels..... B4
- Indian Airlines..... (see 25)
- 29 IndiGo..... B3
- 30 Jet Airways B3
- 31 Neo Globe Tours & Travel A3

Passionate local **Abbas Tyabji** (📞9391010015) is an experienced guide/ photojournalist who can take you to less-touristy sights – such as toddy tappers at work or nature walks in the city's outskirts.

Society To Save Rocks WALKING (📞23552923; www.saverocks.org; 1236 Rd No 60, Jubilee Hills) This NGO organises monthly walks through the Andhran landscape and its surreal-looking boulders. Check website for details.

🛏 Sleeping

TOP CHOICE Taj Mahal Hotel (Himayathnagar)

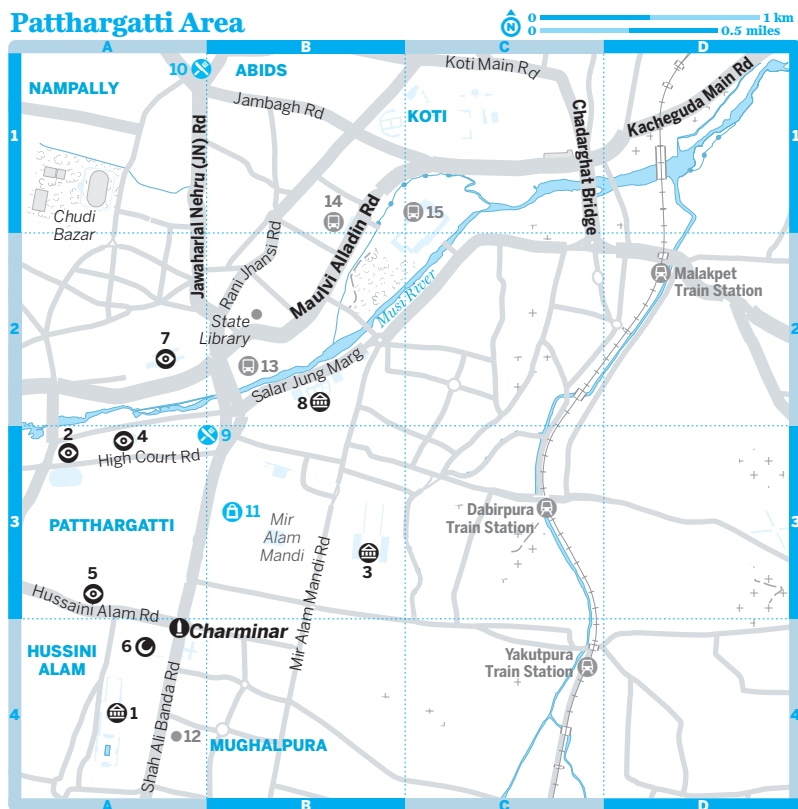
HOTEL \$\$
(off Map p898; 📞27637836-9; tajcafe@gmail.com; Himayathnagar; s/d from ₹900/1200; 🍴🍷) Despite its unfortunate location in front of an overpass on Himayathnagar Rd, the Taj is a peaceful, sunny, stylish place where the staff are warm and welcoming and the hallway floors look like Jaipuri marble. Rooms are surprisingly tasteful, with sleek lamps and chunky, contemporary wooden furniture. Comfy and classy for less than the going rate makes this a great choice.

Golden Glory Guesthouse HOTEL \$

(Map p902; 📞23554765; www.goldengloryguesthouse.com; Rd No 3, Banjara Hills; s/d incl breakfast from ₹650/900, s incl breakfast without bathroom ₹290; 🍴🍷) Nestled among the mansions of ritzy Banjara Hills, this gem of a hotel scores big on location. Tucked down a quiet residential street, it's the perfect place to escape the madness of Hyderabad. First impressions are grand with sparkling lobby and spiral staircase, and while the cheaper rooms are boxy, they're very clean and good value (and include a simple breakfast). Pricier rooms are more spacious with balconies and bathtubs.

Taj Falaknuma Palace HOTEL \$\$\$

(off Map p894; 📞24388888; www.tajhotels.com; Engine Bowli, Falaknuma; s/d from ₹16,500/17,625) Nowhere suits the term 'fit for royalty' better than at the Falaknuma Palace, the former residence of the sixth nizam. Taking over a decade to restore, the Taj Group's latest luxury hotel has most certainly been worth the wait. The 'cheapest' rooms have Italian marble floors, colonial furniture and great city views, while the Presidential Suite (an astounding ₹500,000 per night) was



the nizam's living quarters and has its own swimming pool and personal butler! If you don't have a spare half million, you can still pop in for high tea in the Jade Room, which has hosted royalty from around the world.

Minerva Grand

HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p896; ☎66117373; www.minervagrand.com; SD Rd, Secunderabad; s/d incl breakfast from ₹4000 /4400; 📶📶📶) It's rare to find a hotel that has genuine style; this place has nailed it. Standard rooms (one wheelchair-accessible) have striking deep-fuchsia walls, white furniture, tasselled bedspreads and piles of pillows. More-expensive rooms are also bold in design, and all rooms have hardwood floors, gentle lighting and sleek, spacious bathrooms. A diamond in the rough of Sarojini Devi Rd.

Hotel Mandakini Jaya International

HOTEL \$\$

(Map p898; ☎9810068858; www.mandakinijayaintl-hyderabad.com; Hanuman Tekdi Rd; s/d incl break-

fast from ₹1690/1790; 📶📶) Under new management, the former budget Jaya International has reinvented itself as a smart and modern business hotel. Rooms are great value, comfortable and ultramodern. Its downside is the scungy hallways.

Nand International

HOTEL \$

(☎24657511; www.nandhotels.com; Kacheguda Station Rd; s/d/tr from ₹535/635/735; 📶) The Nand is a pleasant surprise near Kacheguda Station. It has a roof garden with potted geraniums (and chai on order), sitting areas, water coolers, and well-looked-after peach-coloured rooms hung with weird mixed-media art.

YMCA

HOSTEL \$

(Map p896; ☎27801190; secunderabadymca@yahoo.co.in; cnr SP & SD Rd, Secunderabad; r from ₹500, without bathroom from ₹350; 📶) One of the better cheapies, this cheery hostel has clean, no frill rooms, some with private balcony. It's near the clock tower.

Patthargatti Area

📍 Top Sights

Charminar A4

📍 Sights

- 1 Chowmahalla Palace..... A4
- 2 Government City College..... A3
- 3 HEH The Nizam's Museum..... B3
- 4 High Court..... A3
- 5 Laad Bazaar..... A3
- 6 Mecca Masjid..... A4
- 7 Osmania General Hospital..... A2
- 8 Salar Jung Museum..... B2

🍴 Eating

- 9 Hotel Shadab B3

10 Mozamjahi Market A1

🛒 Shopping

- 11 Hyderabad Perfumers B3
Bazaars (see 5)

Information

12 COVA..... A4

Transport

- 13 Afzal Gunj Bus Stop B2
- 14 Koti Bus Station B1
- 15 Mahatma Gandhi (Imlibun) Bus
Station..... C1

Hotel Suhail

HOTEL \$

(Map p898; ☎24610299; www.hotel.suhail.in; Troop Bazaar; s/d/tr from ₹475/620/900; 🍷🍷) If all budget hotels were like the Suhail, we'd all be much better off. Staff are friendly and on top of it, the rooms are large and quiet, have balconies and constant hot water. It's tucked away on an alley behind the main post office and the Grand Hotel – away from the Hyderabad bustle, but it's also unlit at night; some readers find it sketchy.

Taj Mahal Hotel

HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p898; ☎24758250; tajmahal_abid@rediffmail.com; cnr Abids & King Kothi Rds; s/d with AC from ₹1200/1650; 🍷) This rambling 1924 heritage building has a magnificent exterior, plants peppered about and decent, though ultimately overpriced rooms. Each is different so ask to see a few: the better ones have boudoirs, crystal-knobbed armoires and wood-beam ceilings.

Hotel Harsha

HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p898; ☎23201188; www.hotelharsha.net; Public Gardens Rd; s/d incl breakfast from ₹1600/1800; 🍷🍷) Rooms don't have tonnes of character, and can be noisy (ask for a rear facing room) but they're bright, have fridges, the furniture is in good taste and the art is a step up from the usual schlock. The overall effect is polished but comfy. The lobby smells like success, with lots of glass and marble. One of the city's best deals.

Green Park

HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p902; ☎66515151; www.hotelgreenpark.com; Greenlands Rd, Begumpet; s/d incl breakfast from ₹5500/6500; 🍷🍷🍷) Don't bother going beyond the standard rooms here, which are

comfy and classy with sleek desks, bamboo flooring and flower petals in the bathroom. The lobby is a paragon of peace and gentle lighting, while smiley staff look on.

Secunderabad

Retiring Rooms

RAILWAY RETIRING ROOMS

(Map p896; dm/s/d from ₹50/250/450; 🍷)

If you arrive late at Secunderabad train station, this is a good deal.

🍴 Eating

Per local usage, we use the term 'meal' instead of 'thali' in this chapter.

CITY CENTRE

TOP CHOICE Waterfront

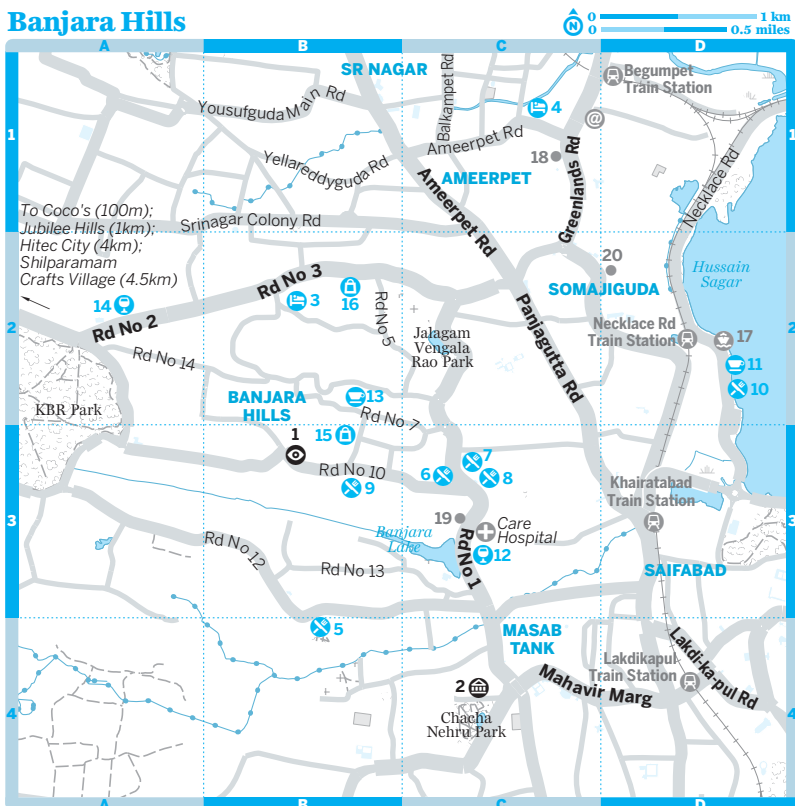
ASIAN FUSION \$\$\$

(Map p902; ☎65278899; Necklace Rd; mains ₹175-650; ☀️noon-2.30pm & 7-11pm) The outdoor deck here on the water (dinner service only) may have the best ambience in all of Hyderabad, with soft lighting overhead, the Buddha Statue and the entire Hussain Sagar and the Birla Mandir all twinkling in the distance. Eating indoors, alongside enormous picture windows, isn't bad either. But it's the Chinese, Indian and Thai food that's to die for – their take on *phad kea mou* (noodles with tasty bok choy) is a must-eat.

Hotel Shadab

INDIAN \$\$

(Map p900; High Court Rd, Patthargatti; mains ₹60-250; ☀️noon-midnight) One meal at Shadab and you'll be forever under its spell. The hopping restaurant is *the* place to get biryani (₹95 to ₹200) and, during Ramadan (Ramadan), *haleem*. It has even mastered veg biryani (!) and hundreds of other veg and non-veg delights (if you try the chocolate



chicken or pineapple mutton, let us know how it goes). Packed with Old City families and good vibes.

Kamat Hotel

(Map p896; SD Rd, Secunderabad; mains ₹45-75; ☺7am-10pm) How much do we love Kamat Hotel? Words can't say. Each Kamat is slightly different, but they're all cheap and good. There are two branches on SD Rd; the others are in Saifabad and on Nampally Station Rd (Map p898). Meals (from ₹36) are reliably delish.

Kamat Andhra Meals

(Map p898; Troop Bazaar; meals from ₹45; ☺noon-4pm & 7-11pm) Excellent authentic Andhra meals on banana leaves, topped up till you almost faint with pleasure, and finished off with a banana. Its sister restaurants in the same compound – **Kamat Jowar Bhakri** (Maharashtran), **Kamat Restaurant** with air-con (North and South Indian) and

Kamat Coffee Shop – are likewise friendly family joints full of happy diners. No relation to Kamat Hotel.

Also recommended:

Paradise Persis Restaurant

(Map p896; cnr SD & MG Rds, Secunderabad; mains ₹125-245; ☺11.30am-11pm) Ask any Hyderabadi about biryani, and they'll mention Paradise.

Mozamjahi Market

(Map p900; cnr Mukarramjahi & Jawaharlal Nehru Rds; ☺6am-6pm) A great place to buy fruit and vegies (or ice cream), while enjoying the alluring architecture of the stone building, commissioned by the seventh nizam and named after his son.

Sagar Papaji Ka Dhaba

(Map p898; Hanuman Tekdi Rd; mains ₹45-110; ☺noon-4pm & 7-11pm) Always busy, Papaji's has profoundly delicious veg and non-veg biryanis, curries and tikkas. Watch the

INDIAN \$

INDIAN \$\$

MARKET \$

INDIAN \$

INDIAN \$

Banjara Hills

📍 Sights

- Girjan Sales Depot..... (see 2)
1 Kalakriti B3
2 Nehru Centenary Tribal
 Museum..... C4

🛏 Sleeping

- 3** Golden Glory Guesthouse..... B2
4 Green Park C1

🍴 Eating

- 5** 24-Lettered Mantra..... B4
6 Angeethi..... C3
7 BBQ Nation C3
8 Fusion 9..... C3
9 Ofen B3
10 Waterfront..... D2

☕ Drinking

- Barista..... (see 6)
11 Café Coffee Day D2
12 Liquids Et cetera..... C3
13 Mocha B2
14 Touch A2

🛍 Shopping

- 15** Fabindia B3
16 Meena Bazaar..... B2

🚗 Transport

- 17** Boats to Buddha Statue..... D2
 Emirates..... (see 6)
18 Kingfisher Airlines..... C1
19 Qatar Airways..... C3
20 Sri Lankan Airlines..... D2
 Thai Airways..... (see 8)

guys making naan and throwing it in the tandoor while you wait for a table.

BANJARA HILLS & JUBILEE HILLS

Those looking for a finer dining experience should head to the hills, home to Hyderabad's more well-heeled residents.

Fusion 9

CONTINENTAL \$\$\$

(Map p902; ☎65577722; Rd No 1; mains ₹325-425; ☎12-3.30pm & 7-11pm) Soft lighting and cosy decor set off pan-fried Norwegian salmon (₹650), lamb cutlets with rosemary and crispy potatoes (₹395), or pork chops (₹425). One of the best international menus in town also features (less expensive) Mexican, Thai, pizzas and veg dishes, and lots of imported liquor.

Angeethi

PUNJABI \$\$

(Map p902; 7th fl, Reliance Classic Bldg, Rd No 1; mains ₹180-290; ☎noon-3.30pm & 7-11pm) Designed to resemble an old Punjabi *dhaba* (snack bar), jazzed up with vintage Bollywood posters on the walls, Angeethi does outstanding North Indian and Punjabi dishes, such as corn *methi malai* (sweet-corn stew with fenugreek leaves; ₹185).

Coco's

INDIAN/CONTINENTAL \$\$

(off Map p902; ☎23540600; Rd No 2; mains ₹120-325; ☎11.30am-11.30pm) This chilled-out rooftop restaurant/bar almost succeeds in resembling a bamboo beach shack, though it's position on a busy road above a Chinese restaurant was always going to make it tough. Looking out over KBR Park, relaxed Coco's

exudes ambience and serves decent Indian and Western dishes.

Big Dosa Company

INDIAN \$

(Rd No 45, Jubilee Hills; dosas ₹75-135; ☎8am-11pm) There's a lot that's big about this dosa joint: the portions, the taste and the very idea itself of a gourmet dosa. The 'feta cheese and roasted pepper' dosa, served with sundried-tomato chutney or the 'shredded chicken' dosa make the journey out to Jubilee Hills worthwhile.

24-Lettered Mantra

GROCERY SHOP

(Map p902; www.24lettermantra.com; Rd No 12; ☎9.30am-10pm) Healthy people will appreciate this tiny grocery shop with organic produce, snacks and juices.

Ofen

BAKERY \$\$

(Map p902; www.theofen.com; Rd No 10; desserts ₹15-110; ☎11am-11pm Mon-Fri, 9am-11pm Sat & Sun) Two words: Linzer torte. Scrumptious desserts (some vegan and sugar-free), fresh-baked bread and comfort food like sandwiches and pasta (₹90 to ₹250). Does all-day continental breakfasts.

BBQ Nation

INDIAN, CONTINENTAL \$\$

(Map p902; www.barbeque-nation.com; Rd No 1; lunch Mon-Sat ₹344, Sun ₹544, dinner ₹600; ☎noon-3pm & 7-11pm) All you can eat BBQ meat, seafood and vegetarian skewers served at your table.

Little Italy

ITALIAN \$\$

(☎64566692; Apollo Rd, Jubilee Hills; mains ₹200-500 ☎noon-3pm & 7-11pm) Classy vegetarian Italian fare with good wine list.

KITSCHABAD

Mixed in with Hyderabad's world-class sights, you'll find some attractions that err on the more quirky side; which can provide some good relief from the 'proper' sightseeing.

Ramoji Film City

FILM STUDIO

(www.ramojifilmcity.com; adult/child ₹500/450; ☀9.30am-5.30pm) The home of South India's burgeoning film industry, known as Tollywood, Ramoji Film City is undoubtedly the premier kitsch sight of Hyderabad. Set on more than 670 hectares, this is the world's largest movie-making complex, producing Telugu, Tamil, Hindi and the occasional foreign film. Though you won't actually get to see any being made, the four-hour bus tour will take you through flimsy film sets and gaudy fountains, stopping for dance routines and stunt shows. Located in the outskirts of town, around 20km from Abids, you can jump on bus 205 or 206 from Koti Women's College, northeast of Koti station, which take an hour to get here.

Health Museum

MUSEUM

(Map p898; Public Gardens Rd, Nampally; admission free; ☀10.30am-5pm Sat-Thu) A throwback to a 1950s classroom, this museum houses a bizarre collection of medical and public-health paraphernalia. It features a rather terrifying giant model of a crab louse.

Snow World

AMUSEMENT PARK

(Map p898; Lower Tankbund; admission ₹300; ☀11am-8pm) The perfect place to escape the heat, Snow World is, hands down, the coolest attraction in town (in a literal sense, of course...). It's a bizarre experience to suddenly find yourself in heavy-duty waterproof clothing amid people hurling snowballs, riding toboggans and playing snow volleyball. There's a snowfall on the hour, accompanied by cheers, a snow disco and lightshow.

Sudha Car Museum

MUSEUM

(www.sudhacars.net; Bahadurpura; Indian/foreigner ₹30/150; ☀9.30am-6.30pm) Featuring the genius work of Sudhakar, here you'll find working cars in the shape of a toilet, computer, cricket bat, hamburger or condom, among other wacky designs. He holds the Guinness world record for the largest tricycle, standing a whopping 12.8m tall. You can poke your head into the workshop to see his latest project (at the time of research it was a 'stiletto shoe' car). It's located east of the Nehru Zoological Park.

NTR Park

PARK

(Map p898; child/adult ₹10/20; ☀2.30-8.30pm) Making for a nice stroll about, with pleasant gardens, theme park rides and a games arcade, taking the cake in the kitsch stakes is the gaudy restaurant shaped like a giant fruit bowl.

Amurutha Castle

HOTEL

(www.bestwesternamruthacastle.com; Saifabad; d from ₹4800) Always dreamt of staying in a Bavarian castle while in Hyderabad? Probably not, but in case you did, this massive castle-hotel, based on the Schloss Neuschwanstein, is the place to do it. It ain't cheap though.



Drinking & Entertainment

Hyderabad's scene is growing, but drinking establishments are limited by an 11.30pm curfew law. Unless stated otherwise, the following bars are open to 11.30pm (but don't get going till 9pm). All serve food and charge covers (₹500 to ₹1000) on certain nights – for couples, that is: guys usually need a gal to enter. Beer starts at ₹150, cocktails at ₹300.


Coco's

BAR

(off Map p902; ☎23540600; Rd No 2, Banjara Hills) Rooftop bar makes it the perfect place for a cold beer or cocktail on a balmy evening. Has live music.

Mocha

CAFE

(Map p902; Rd No 7, Banjara Hills; ☀9am-11pm) Full of trendy twenty-somethings smoking hookahs (from ₹225), but the decor, the garden and

the coffee are fabulous. Menu also has good breakfasts, paninis and shakes.

Liquids Et cera BAR

(Map p902; ☎66259907; Bhaskar Plaza, Rd No 1, Banjara Hills) Regularly featured in the papers' Society pages, Liquids is the reigning queen of Hyderabad nightlife. There's no sign, and its name changes slightly each year.

Excess Club BAR

(☎23542422; Novotel, Madhavpur; ☎7pm-2am Tue-Sun) Set over a huge space, Excess was the current most happening place; open the latest, the best DJs, but the furthest away – past Hitech City.

Touch BAR

(Map p902; ☎23542422; Trendset Towers, Rd No 2, Banjara Hills); ☎7pm-midnight Wed, Sat & Sun) Touch is all about image. It's a stylish, comfy place to watch the beautiful people. Also has an 'ice bar' with temperatures set at -23°.

Café Coffee Day CAFE

(Map p902; Eat Street, Necklace Rd; ☎7.30am-11pm) Decent coffee and snacks.

Barista CAFE

(Map p902; Rd No 1, Banjara Hills; ☎8am-11pm) Another reliable coffee option.

Ravindra Bharati Theatre THEATRE

(Map p898; ☎23233672; www.artistap.com; Public Gardens Rd) Regular music, dance and drama performances. Check local papers.



Shopping

The bazaars near the Charminar (p895) are the most exciting places to shop: you'll find exquisite pearls, silks, gold and fabrics alongside billions of bangles.

Hyderabad Perfumers PERFUMERY

(Map p900; Patthargatti; ☎10am-8.30pm Mon-Sat) The family-run Hyderabad Perfumers, which has been in business for four generations, can whip something up for you on the spot.

Meena Bazar CLOTHING

(Map p898; www.meenabazarhyd.co.in; Tilak Rd; ☎10.30am-8.30pm Mon-Sat) Gorgeous saris, *salwar* (trouser) suits and fabrics at fixed prices. Also has a branch in Banjara Hills (Map p902).

Kalanjali HANDICRAFTS

(Map p898; Hill Fort Rd; ☎10am-9.30pm) With a huge range of arts, crafts, fabrics and clothing, Kalanjali (split between two buildings) has higher prices than the

bazaar, but you can get a feel for what things cost in a relaxed environment.

Shilparamam Crafts Village HANDICRAFTS

(off Map p902; www.shilparamam.org; Madhapur; adult/child ₹25/10; ☎10.30am-8.30pm) Near Hitech City, this government-initiative arts village has stalls selling handicrafts and clothes from all over India. A night bazaar is also planned. It has nice gardens with a pond to stroll about.

Fabindia CLOTHING

(Map p902; www.fabindia.com; Rd No 9, Banjara Hills; ☎11am-8.30pm) Clothes and accessories in traditional artisanal fabrics.

Lepakshi HANDICRAFTS

(Map p898; www.lepakshihandicrafts.gov.in; Gunfoundry; ☎10am-8pm Mon-Sat) Andhra crafts.

Information

Internet Access

Anand Internet (per hr ₹15; ☎10.30am-9.30pm) Opposite Secunderabad station.

Net World (Taramandal Complex, Saifabad; per hr ₹15; ☎9.30am-7pm Mon-Sat)

Reliance Internet (Himayathnagar; per hr ₹15; ☎8.30am-11pm)

Reliance Web World (MPM Mall, Abids Circle; per 4hr ₹100; ☎10.30am-9.30pm Mon-Sat, 12.30-9pm Sun)

Media

Good 'what's on' guides include *Channel 6* (www.channel6magazine.com), *GO Hyderabad and City Info*. The juiciest is *Wow! Hyderabad* (www.wowhyderabad.com; ₹25). The *Deccan Chronicle* is a good local paper; its *Hyderabad Chronicle* insert has info on happenings.

Medical Services

Apollo Pharmacy (Map p898; ☎23431734; Hyderguda Main Rd; ☎24hr) Delivers.

Care Hospital Banjara Hills (Map p902; ☎30418888; Rd No 1); Nampally (Map p898; ☎30417777; Mukarramjahi Rd) Reputable hospital with a 24-hour pharmacy.

Money

The banks offer the best currency-exchange rates here. ATMs are everywhere.

State Bank of India (☎23231986; HACA Bhavan, Saifabad; ☎10.30am-4pm Mon-Fri)

Post

Post office (☎8am-8.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) Secunderabad (Rashtapatri Rd); Abids (Abids Circle)

Tourist Information

Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (APTDC; ☎24-hr info 23450444; www.aptdc.in; ☀7am-8.30pm) Bashirbagh (Map p898; ☎23298456; NSF Shakar Bhavan, opposite Police Control Room); Secunderabad (Map p896; ☎27893100; Yatri Nivas Hotel, Sardar Patel Rd); Tankbund Rd (Map p898; ☎65581555; ☀10.30am-5pm) Organises tours.

India Tourism (Government of India; Map p898; ☎23261360, 23260770; Netaji Bhavan, Himayathnagar Rd; ☀9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat) Very helpful for information on Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh and beyond.

Getting There & Away

Air

Hyderabad's massive, modern **Rajiv Gandhi International Airport** (☎66546370; www.hyderabad.aero) is 22km southwest of the city in Shamshabad.

You'll get the best fares online or with a travel agent. Try **Neo Globe Tours & Travels** (Map p898; ☎66751786; Saifabad; ☀10am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun) beside the Nizam Club.

Airline offices are usually open from 9.30am to 5.30pm Monday to Friday, with a one-hour lunch break, and to 1.30pm Saturday.

Domestic airline offices:

GoAir (☎airport 922322111, 180022111; Rajiv Gandhi International Airport)

Indian Airlines (Map p898; ☎23430334, airport 24255161/2; HACA Bhavan, Saifabad)

IndiGo (Map p898; ☎23233590, airport 24255052; Interglobe Air Transport, Chapel Rd)

Jet Airways (Map p898; ☎39893333, airport 39893322; Hill Fort Rd; ☀9am-7pm Mon-Sat) Also handles bookings for JetLite.

JetLite (☎30302020; Rajiv Gandhi International Airport)

Kingfisher Airlines (Map p902; ☎40328400, airport 66605603; Balayogi Paryatak Bhavan, Begumpet)

SpiceJet (☎18001803333; Rajiv Gandhi International Airport)

International airlines:

Air India (Map p898; ☎1800227722, airport 66605163; HACA Bhavan, Saifabad)

AirAsia (Map p898; ☎66666464, airport 66605163; HACA Bhavan, Saifabad)

Emirates (Map p902; ☎66234444; Rd No 1, Banjara Hills)

GSA Transworld Travels (Map p898; ☎3298495; Chapel Rd) For Qantas.

Lufthansa (☎4888888; Rajiv Gandhi International Airport)

Sri Lankan Airlines (Map p902; ☎23372429/30; Raj Bhavan Rd, Somajiguda) Opposite the Yashoda Hospital.

Qatar Airways (Map p902; ☎01244566000, airport 66605121; Rd No 1, Banjara Hills)

Thai Airways (Map p902; ☎23333030; Rd No 1, Banjara Hills)

Bus

Hyderabad's long-distance bus stations are mind-bogglingly efficient. **Mahatma Gandhi bus station** (Map p900; ☎24614406), more commonly known as Imlibun, has **advance booking offices** (☎23434269; ☀8am-10pm). For trips to Karnataka, go with **KSRTC** (☎24656430). Visit www.apsrc.co.in for timetables and fares.

Secunderabad's **Jubilee bus station** (Map p896; ☎27802203) operates Volvo AC buses to Bengaluru (₹801, 11 hours, six daily), Chennai (₹844, 12 hours, daily) and Visakhapatnam (₹701, 13 hours, daily).

Private bus companies with AC services are on Nampally High Rd, near the train station entrance.

Train

Secunderabad (Map p894), Hyderabad (Map p898) – also known as Nampally – and Kacheguda (off Map p898) are the three major train stations. Most through trains stop at Secunderabad

MAJOR DOMESTIC FLIGHTS FROM HYDERABAD

DESTINATION	LOWEST ONE-WAY FARE (₹)	DURATION (HR)	FLIGHTS PER DAY
Bengaluru	3000	1	20
Chennai	3000	1	15
Delhi	5000	2	12
Kolkata	5500	2	5
Mumbai	3000	1¼	25
Tirupathi	2800	1	3
Visakhapatnam	3500	1	5

BUSES FROM HYDERABAD

DESTINATION	FARE (₹)	DURATION (HR)	FREQUENCY (DAILY)
Bengaluru	480-775	12-10	7 (evening)
Bidar	80	4	half-hourly
Chennai	550-880	12-14	3 (evening)
Hospet	280	9	2
Mumbai	550-985	14-12	6 (evening)
Mysore	599	15	1
Nagarjuna Sagar	85-116	4	8
Tirupathi	435-735	12	12
Vijayawada	197-390	6	hourly
Visakhapatnam	470-865	14	12
Warangal	77	3	half-hourly

and Kacheguda, which is convenient for Abids. See p908, for key routes. You can book at Hyderabad and Secunderabad stations from 8am to 8pm Monday to Saturday (to 2pm Sunday). Both stations have a tourist counter. For general enquiries, phone ☎139; for reservation status, ☎135.

i Getting Around

To/From the Airport

The new airport is fabulous, and is a 45 minute drive into town.

BUS Frequent public buses depart from the PTC for Jubilee and Imlihub stations. More comfy are AC **Aerexpress** (☎18004192008; ☺24hr) buses (₹175), which run half-hourly to Charminar, Secunderabad, Begumpet, Mehdiapatnam and Hitec City.

TAXI For prepaid taxis, pay at the counter inside the terminal, then get your cab at the PTC. **Meru** (☎44224422) and **Easy** (☎43434343) 'radio taxis' queue up outside arrivals and charge ₹15 per kilometre, ₹18.75 at night. The trip to Abids or Banjara Hills shouldn't exceed ₹450. Going to the airport, try **Yellow Taxi** (☎44004400).

Autorickshaw

Flag fall is ₹12 for the first kilometre, then ₹7 for each additional kilometre. Between 10pm and 5am a 50% surcharge applies. Unfortunately, the new electronic meters often don't work and lots of drivers won't use them: be prepared to negotiate.

Bus

Lots of local buses originate at **Koti bus station** (Map p900; ☎23443320; Rani Jhansi Rd), so if you come here you might get a seat. The 'travel as you like' ticket (ordinary/express ₹40/50),

available from bus conductors, permits unlimited travel anywhere within the city on the day of purchase. The tiny *City Bus Route Guide* (₹10) is available at bookshops around Koti.

Car

There are several car-hire places around Hyderabad station. **Links Travels** (☎9348770007) is reliable for local or long-distance day-hire.

Train

MMTS trains (www.mmts.co.in) are convenient, particularly for the three main train stations. There are two main lines: Hyderabad (Nampally) to Lingampalli (northwest of Banjara Hills) has 11 stops, including Lakdikapul, Khairatabad, Necklace Rd, Begumpet and Hitec City; the Falaknuma (south of Old City) to Secunderabad line passes by Yakutpura, Dabirpura, Malakpet and Kachiguda among others. Trains will be labelled with their start and end point: HL is Hyderabad-Lingampalli, FS is Falaknuma-Secunderabad and so on. Trains are efficient but only run every 30 to 40 minutes. Tickets are ₹3 to ₹10.

Nagarjunakonda

☎08680

The Hill of Nagarjuna, 150km southeast of Hyderabad, is a peaceful island in the middle of the Nagarjuna dam peppered with ancient Buddhist structures. From the 3rd century BC until the 4th century AD, the Krishna River valley was home to powerful empires that supported the sangha (Buddhist community of monks and nuns), including the Ikshvakus, whose capital was Nagarjunakonda. It's estimated that this area alone had 30 monasteries.

The remains here were actually discovered in 1926 by archaeologist AR Saraswathi in the adjacent valley. In 1953, when it became known that a massive hydroelectric project would soon create the **Nagarjuna Sagar** reservoir, flooding the area, a six-year excavation was launched to unearth the area's many Buddhist ruins: stupas, *viharas* (monasteries), *chaitya-grihas* (assembly halls with stupas) and *mandapas* (pillared pavilions), as well as some outstanding examples of white-marble depictions of the Buddha's life. The finds were reassembled on Nagarjunakonda.

Sights & Activities

Nagarjunakonda Museum

MUSEUM

(Indian/foreigner ₹5/100; ☀8am-5pm) This thoughtfully laid-out museum, located on an island accessible by boat, has Buddha statues and beautifully carved limestone slabs that once adorned stupas. Most are

from the 3rd century AD and depict scenes from the Buddha's life, interspersed with *mithuna* (paired male and female) figures languorously looking on. The reassembled **monuments** are spread around the hilltop outside.

Launches (₹90, one hour) depart from Vijayapuri, on the banks of Nagarjuna Sagar, at 9.30am, 11am and 1.30pm, and stay for one hour. To do the place justice, take the morning launch out and the afternoon one back. Extra morning launches usually run on weekends and holidays. Fisherman out in their dish-shaped coracle boats provide good photographic material.

Anupu

HISTORICAL SITE

Another Buddhist site 10km from the launch point is the peaceful **Anupu** with remains of a stupa, university and amphitheatre; likewise relocated piece by piece prior to the construction of the dam. A tree here was planted by the Dalai Lama during his visit in 2006.

MAJOR TRAINS FROM HYDERABAD & SECUNDERABAD

DESTINATION	TRAIN NO & NAME	FARE (₹)	DURATION (HR)	DEPARTURE TIME & STATION
Bengaluru	2430 <i>Rajdhani</i>	1025/1355 (A)	12	6.50pm Secunderabad (Tue, Wed, Sat & Sun)
	2785 <i>Secunderabad-Bangalore Exp</i>	274/715/970 (B)	11	7.05pm Kacheguda
Chennai	2604 <i>Hyderabad-Chennai Exp</i>	297/779/1058 (B)	13	4.55pm Hyderabad
	2760 <i>Charminar Exp</i>	312/837/1119 (B)	14	6.30pm Hyderabad
Delhi	2723 <i>Andhra Pradesh Exp</i>	465/1252/1715 (B)	26	6.25am Hyderabad
	2429 <i>Rajdhani</i>	1725/2245 (A)	26	7.50am Secunderabad (Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri)
Kolkata	2704 <i>Falaknuma Exp</i>	442/1187/1623 (B)	26	4pm Secunderabad
	8646 <i>East Coast Exp</i>	430/1178/1624 (B)	30	10am Hyderabad
Mumbai	2702 <i>Hussainsagar Exp</i>	312/823/1119 (B)	15	2.45pm Hyderabad
	7032 <i>Hyderabad-Mumbai Exp</i>	297/792/1089 (B)	16	8.40pm Hyderabad
Tirupathi	2734 <i>Narayanadri Exp</i>	284/794/1009 (B)	12	6.05pm Secunderabad
	2797 <i>Venkatadri Exp</i>	277/723/979 (B)	12	8.05pm Kacheguda
Visakhapatnam	2728 <i>Godavari Exp</i>	297/779/1058 (B)	13	5.15pm Hyderabad

Fares: A – 3AC/2AC; B – sleeper/3AC/2AC

MAJOR BUS ROUTES FROM HYDERABAD & SECUNDERABAD

BUS NO	ROUTE
65G/66G	Charminar–Golconda, via Abids
87	Charminar–Nampally
2/2V, 8A/8U	Charminar–Secunderabad station
20D	Jubilee station–Nampally
142K	Koti–Golconda
119OR, 142M	Nampally–Golconda
1P/25	Secunderabad station–Jubilee station
1K, 1B, 3SS, 40	Secunderabad station–Koti
20P, 20V, 49, 49P	Secunderabad station–Nampally

Ethiophala waterfall

WATERFALL

(admission ₹20; ☀8am–6pm) A further 18km from the launch point is the 21m-high Ethiophala waterfall, which, after heavy rain can be a spectacular sight.



Courses

Dhamma Nagajjuna

MEDITATION

(Nagarjunasagar Vipassana Centre; ☎09440139329; www.nagajjuna.dhamma.org; Hill Colony) Keeping the legacy of Buddhism alive in the region, this centre offers intensive 10-day meditation courses in the grounds overlooking Nagarjuna Sagar. Courses are run on a donation basis.



Sleeping & Eating

Nagarjunakonda is popular, and accommodation can be tight during weekends and holidays, though it's easily visited as a day trip. Both hotels have restaurants.

Nagarjuna Resort

HOTEL \$

(☎08642-242471; r from ₹750; 🍷) The most convenient place to stay, across the road from the boat launch. It has spacious, slightly shabby rooms with geysers, balconies and good views.

Vijay Vihar Complex

HOTEL \$\$

(☎277362; fax 276633; r with AC from ₹1800; 🍷🍷) Two kilometres up the hill from the bus stand is the fancy government hotel overlooking the lake. Room balconies have excellent views.



Information

AP Tourism (☎276634; ☀10am–5.30pm Mon–Sat) Has an office at Project House, across from the bus stand.



Getting There & Away

The easiest way to visit Nagarjunakonda is with **APTDC** (☎040-65581555) in Hyderabad. Tours (₹450) depart on weekends at 7am returning at 9.30pm.

You can also make your own way there from Hyderabad or Vijayawada. From Hyderabad, take a bus to Nagarjuna Sagar (from ₹85, four hours). From there, it's a ₹10 shared rickshaw to Pylon, and another ₹10 to the boat launch. The nearest train station is 22km away at Macherla, where buses leave regularly for Nagarjuna Sagar.

Warangal

☎0870 / POP 528,570

Warangal was the capital of the Kakatiya kingdom, which covered the greater part of present-day Andhra Pradesh from the late 12th to early 14th centuries until it was conquered by the Tughlaqs of Delhi. The Hindu Kakatiyas were great builders and patrons of Telugu literature and arts, and during their reign the Chalukyan style of temple architecture reached its pinnacle.

Most buses and trains will stop en route at **Bhongir**, 60km from Hyderabad. It's worth jumping down for a couple of hours to climb the fantastical-looking 12th-century Chalukyan **hill fort** (admission ₹3; ☀9am–6pm). Looking like a gargantuan stone egg, the hill is mostly ringed by stairs.

Warangal, Hanamkonda and Kazhipet are sister towns. The Warangal train station and bus stand are opposite each other, and the post office and police station are on Station Rd. Main Rd connects Warangal and Hanamkonda. It can be easily visited as a day trip.

STATE OF GOOD KARMA

In its typically understated way, Andhra Pradesh doesn't make much of its vast archaeological – and karmic – wealth. But the state is packed with impressive ruins of its rich Buddhist history. Only a few of Andhra's 150 stupas, monasteries, caves and other sites have been excavated, turning up rare relics of the Buddha (usually pearl-like pieces of bone) with offerings such as golden flowers. Nagarjunakonda and Amaravathi were flourishing Buddhist complexes, and near Visakhapatnam were the incredibly peaceful sites of Thakonda, and Bavikonda and Sankaram, looking across seascapes and lush countryside.

They speak of a time when Andhra Pradesh – or Andhradesa – was a hotbed of Buddhist activity, when monks came from around the world to learn from some of the tradition's most renowned teachers. Andhradesa's Buddhist culture, in which sangha (community of monks and nuns), laity and statespeople all took part, lasted around 1500 years from the 6th century BC. There's no historical evidence for it, but some even say that the Buddha himself visited the area.

Andhradesa's first practitioners were likely disciples of Bavari, an ascetic who lived on the banks of the Godavari River and sent his followers north to bring back the Buddha's teachings. But the dharma really took off in the 3rd century BC under Ashoka, who dispatched monks across his empire to teach and construct stupas enshrined with relics of the Buddha. (Being near these was thought to help progress on the path to enlightenment.)

Succeeding Ashoka, the Satavahanas and then Ikshvakus were also supportive. At their capital at Amaravathi, the Satavahanas adorned Ashoka's modest stupa with elegant decoration. They built monasteries across the Krishna Valley and exported the dharma through their sophisticated maritime network.

It was also during the Satavahana reign that Nagarjuna lived. Considered by many to be the progenitor of Mahayana Buddhism, the monk was equal parts logician, philosopher and meditator, and he wrote several ground-breaking works that shaped contemporary Buddhist thought. Other important monk-philosophers would emerge from the area in the following centuries, making Andhradesa a sort of Buddhist motherland of the South.

Sights

Fort

FORT

(Indian/foreigner ₹5/100; ☀9am-6.30pm) Warangal's fort was a massive construction with three distinct circular strongholds surrounded by a moat. Four paths with decorative gateways, set according to the cardinal points, led to the Swayambhava, a huge Shiva temple. The gateways are still obvious, but most of the fort is in ruins. It's easily reached from Warangal by bus or autorickshaw (₹200 return). Admission includes entry to nearby **Kush Mahal**, a 16th century royal hall with artefacts on display.

1000-Pillared Temple

HINDU TEMPLE

(☀6am-6pm) Built in 1163, the 1000-Pillared Temple on the slopes of Hanamkonda Hill, 400m from Hanamkonda crossroads, is a fine example of Chalukyan architecture in a peaceful, leafy setting. Dedicated to three deities – Shiva, Vishnu and Surya – it has been carefully restored with intricately carved pillars and a central, very impressive Nandi (bull; Shiva's mount) of black granite.

Down the hill and 3km to the right is the small **Siddheshwara Temple**. The **Bhadrakali Temple**, featuring a stone statue of Kali seated with a weapon in each of her eight hands, is high on a hill between Hanamkonda and Warangal.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Ashoka

HOTEL \$\$

(☎2578491; Main Rd, Hanamkonda; r from 600; 🍷🍷) Good-value rooms near the Hanamkonda bus stand and the 1000-Pillared Temple. Also in the compound are a restaurant, a bar-restaurant, a pub and the veg **Kanishka** (mains ₹75 to ₹125).

Vijaya Lodge

HOTEL \$

(☎2501222; fax 2446864; Station Rd; s/d from ₹150/240) About 100m from the train station, the Vijaya is well organised with helpful staff, but the rooms are becoming a little dreary.

Information

Lots of ATMs and **SGS Internet** (per hr ₹10) are near Hotel Ratna on JPN Rd. The **Department**

of Tourism (☎2459201; Hanamkonda-Kazhipet Rd, 3rd fl; ☎10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat), tucked off a sidestreet, opposite Indian Oil, is helpful.

i Getting There & Around

Frequent buses to Hyderabad (express/deluxe/luxury ₹77/87/100, four hours) depart from **Hanamkonda bus stand** (☎9959226056).

Warangal is a major rail junction. Trains go regularly to Hyderabad (2nd class/chair ₹67/229, three hours), Vijayawada (2nd class/chair ₹79/278, four hours) and Chennai (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹277/723/979, 11 hours). Many trains go to Delhi daily.

Shared autorickshaws ply fixed routes around Warangal (including to the fort), Kazhipet and Hanamkonda. A shared autorickshaw ride costs ₹5 to ₹7.

Around Warangal

PALAMPET

About 65km northeast of Warangal, the stunning **Ramappa Temple** (☎6am-6.30pm), built in 1234, is an attractive example of Kakatiya architecture, although it was clearly influenced by Chalukya and Hoysala styles. Its pillars are ornately carved and its eaves shelter fine statues of female forms.

Just 1km south, the Kakatiyas constructed **Ramappa Cheruvu** to serve as temple tank. The lake, along with nearby Pakhal Lake 20km south, is popular with migrating birds.

The easiest way to get here is by private car (₹1000), but frequent buses also run from Hanamkonda to Mulugu (₹22), then a further 13km to Palampet (₹10). The temple is about 500m from here.

Visakhapatnam

☎0891 / POP 1.3 MILLION

Visit Visakhapatnam – also called Vizag (*vie-zag*) – during the holiday season and you'll see domestic tourism in rare form: balloons, fairy floss (cotton candy) and, of course, weddings! But the crowds only enhance the area's kitschy coasts. The run-down boardwalk along Ramakrishna Beach has lots of spunk, and the beach at nearby Rushikonda is Andhra's best.

The old beach-resort vibe exists despite the fact that Vizag is Andhra Pradesh's second-largest city, famous for shipbuilding, steel manufacturing and now, call centres, software and film production. It's a big, dusty city, but it's surrounded by little gems:

sweet beaches, a gorgeous temple and, further out, the Araku Valley and several ancient Buddhist sites.

For up-to-date social happenings, grab a copy of *Yo! Vizag* (₹25) from local bookstores.

👁 Sights & Activities

Beaches

BEACH

The long beaches of **Waltair** overlook the Bay of Bengal, with its mammoth ships and brightly painted fishing boats. Its coastal **Beach Rd**, lined with parks and weird sculptures, is great for long walks.

The best beach for swimming is at **Rushikonda**, 10km north of town, one of the nicest stretches of coast you'll find this side of India. Weekends get busy and take on a carnival-like atmosphere. **Surfers** keen for a paddle can rent decent boards from local surf pioneer, Melville, at **SAAP** (Sports Authority of Andhra Pradesh, Rushikonda; ☎9848561052). To avoid unwanted attention, modest swim attire is recommended for females.

On the way to Rushikonda, **Kailasagiri Hill** has a cable car, gardens, playgrounds, toy train and a gargantuan Shiva and Parvati.

Bheemunipatnam, 25km north of Vizag, a former Dutch settlement and the oldest municipality in mainland India, is worth a visit. Here you'll find more bizarre sculptures, a lighthouse dating from 1861, an interesting Dutch cemetery and **Bheemli Beach**, where local grommets surf on crude homemade boards. To get here catch bus 999 (₹19), or otherwise a shared autorickshaw

Submarine Museum

MUSEUM

(Beach Rd, adult/child ₹25/15; ☎2-8.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-12.30pm & 2-8.30pm Sun) A fascinating opportunity to look inside the 91m-long Indian navy submarine. The soviet-built *Kursura* saw battle in 1971 during the Liberation War, (which saw India side with East Pakistan in their struggle for independence from Pakistan – resulting in the birth of Bangladesh) and, exploring within, you'll find a fantastic jumble of knobs, switches, wires, valves, gauges, nuts, bolts and dials.

👉 Tours

APTDC operates full-day tours of the city and surrounds (from ₹300) and Araku Valley.

🛏 Sleeping

Waltair along Beach Rd is the place to stay, but has few inexpensive hotels.

**Sai Priya Resort**

HOTEL \$

(☎2856330; www.saipriyabeachresorts.com; cottages/r from ₹700/1300; 🏠@🏠) Boasting a prime position right on Rushikonda beach, Sai Priya offers either modern rooms, some with sea views, or more rustic bamboo and cane cottages which have more of a beachy feel. The grounds are lush and *almost* really beautiful but, like the rest of the place, they fall short of their potential. Also, checkout's a rude 8am. Guests and nonguests can use the pool for two hours for ₹100.

Park

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎2754488; www.theparkhotels.com; Beach Rd; s/d from ₹7000/9000; 🏠@🏠) Vizag's only five-star is very elegant, very high-design. Even if you don't stay here, visit Bamboo Bay, its beachfront restaurant, for a drink. Checkout is noon.

Haritha Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(☎2562333; Beach Rd, Appughar; r incl breakfast from ₹900; 🏠) This APTDC hotel, formerly Punnami, is near Kailasagiri Hill and right across from the beach. The lowest-priced rooms (with no views) are only so-so; bump yourself up if you can. Checkout is 10am.

YMCA Tourist Hostel

HOSTEL \$

(☎2755826; ymca_visakha@yahoo.com; Beach Rd; dm/s/d from ₹150/550/650; 🏠) Best value in town, with superb views, but always full. Call anyway; you might get lucky.

Gateway Hotel

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎6623670; www.tajhotels.com/gateway; Beach Rd; s/d from ₹7000/8000; 🏠@🏠) The usual Taj classiness, with great sea views. Checkout is noon.

Dumpy budget hotels huddle around the train station:

Retiring rooms

RAILWAY RETIRING ROOMS \$

(dm/r from ₹100/350; 🏠)

Sree Kanya Lodge

HOTEL \$

(☎5564881; Bowdara Rd; s/d from ₹250/500; 🏠) Mostly characterless and a little dirty, but it's the best of the lot around the station.

**Eating & Drinking**

At night, the snack stalls on Ramakrishna Beach and the beachfront restaurants at Rushikonda, next to Punnami, are hopping.

**Sandy Lane****Restaurant & Bar**

INDIAN \$\$

(Beach Rd; mains ₹80-160; ☉11am-12.30pm) In a colonial building a few doors down from

the Park hotel, out the back are tables in the sand on the edge of the beach where you can indulge in delicious spicy fried fish (₹120) and tiger prawns (₹160). It's also a great spot for a cold beer with ocean views and a big outdoor screen. It's an overwhelmingly male clientele, but isn't seedy like some Indian bars.

New Andhra Hotel

INDIAN \$

(Sree Kanya Lodge, Bowdara Rd; mains ₹25-75; ☉11am-3.30pm & 7-10.30pm) An unassuming little place with *really* good, *really* hot Andhra dishes. Meals (₹50/130 for veg/non-veg) and biryani are top-notch.

Masala

INDIAN \$\$

(Signature Towers, 1st fl, Asilmetta; mains ₹60-180; ☉11.30am-3.30pm & 7-11pm) Near Sampath Vinayaka Temple, Masala does out-of-this-world Andhra, tandoori and Chinese. Try the *chepa pulusu* (Andhra-style fish; ₹130).

Kebabri

INDIAN \$\$

(Siripuram Junction; kebabs ₹95-250; ☉5.30-10.30pm) massive succulent BBQ kebabs, from tandoori chicken to seafood, to mouth-watering paneer skewers. Has another branch on Beach Rd.

Pastry, Coffee n' Conversation

BAKERY \$

(PCC; Siripuram Junction; ☉11am-11pm) Hang-out spot for Vizag's hip young crowd, this is the place for pizza, burgers and delicious cakes.

i Information

ATMs are everywhere. RTC Complex has several internet cafes (per hour ₹15), some open 24 hours.

Apollo Pharmacy (☎2788652; Siripuram Junction; ☉24hr)

APTDC RTC Complex (☎2788820; ☉6.30am-9pm); Train station (☎2788821; ☉6am-9pm) Information and tours.

Thomas Cook (☎2588112; Eswar Plaza, Dwarakanagar; ☉9am-6.30pm Mon-Sat) Near ICICI Bank.

i Getting There & Around

You'll have to negotiate fares with autorickshaw drivers here. Most in-town rides will be around ₹20. **Guide Tours & Travels** (☎2754477), reliable for car hire, is opposite the RTC Complex 'out gate'.

Air

Take an autorickshaw (₹200), taxi (₹270) or bus 38 (₹6) to Vizag's airport, 13km west of town.

Domestic airlines and their daily services:

Indian Airlines (☎2746501, airport 2572521; LIC Bldg) Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad and Mumbai.

Kingfisher (☎2503285, airport 2517614; Ardee Bldg, Siripuram Junction) Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Pune and Tirupathi.

SpiceJet (☎airport 2010422) Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Mumbai.

Boat

Boats depart every month-ish for Port Blair in the Andaman Islands. Bookings for the 56-hour journey (from ₹1960) can be made at the **Shipping Office** (☎2565597, 9866073407; Av Bhanoji Row; ☀9am-5pm Mon-Sat) in the port complex. Bring your passport.

Bus

Vizag's well-organised **RTC Complex** (☎2746400) has frequent bus services to Vijayawada (deluxe/Volvo ₹250/530, eight/seven hours) and, in the afternoon, Hyderabad ('super-luxury'/Volvo ₹470/870, 14/12 hours).

Train

Vizag's train station is on the western edge of town, near the port. Visakhapatnam Junction station is on the Kolkata-Chennai line. The overnight **Coromandel Express** (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹333/881/1199, 13½ hours) is the fastest of the five daily trains running to Kolkata. Heading south, it goes to Chennai (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹310/817/1112, 14 hours). Frequent trains head to Vijayawada including 2717, the **Ratnachalam Express** (2nd-class/chair ₹108/477).

Around Visakhapatnam

ARAKU VALLEY

Andhra's best train ride is through the magnificent Eastern Ghats to the **Araku Valley**, 120km north of Vizag. The area is home to isolated tribal communities, and a small **Museum of Habitat** (admission ₹10; ☀10am-1pm & 2-5pm) with exhibits on indigenous life. APTDC runs **tours** (₹500) from Vizag, which take in a performance of Dhimsa, a tribal dance, and the million-year-old limestone **Borra Caves** (admission ₹40, camera ₹100; ☀10am-1pm & 2-5pm), 30km from Araku.

Araku itself is a small dusty town, but its surroundings are beautiful. A bicycle is the perfect way to explore the countryside. You can hire a bicycle (per hour/day ₹50/250) from Hill Resort Mayuri. It's best to check the security situation before heading out, with a reported Naxalite (members of an

ultraleftist political movement) presence in the region.

Chandrika Guest House (☎9490430989; s/d ₹1000/1500), 2km from the station, is the most peaceful option with rooms looking out to fields, though it's overpriced. The **Hill Resort Mayuri** (☎958936-249204; cottages from ₹650; ☀), near the museum, has cottages with good views. There's also a few uninspiring options around the station, otherwise you could try the forest retreat of **Jungle Bells** (Tyda; cottages from ₹800; ☀), 45km from Araku, with cottages tucked away in woods. Book at APTDC. You can sample the local coffee at **Araku Valley Coffee House** (☀9am-9pm), next to the Museum of Habitat.

The Kirandol passenger train (₹20, five hours) leaves Vizag at 6.50am and Araku at 3pm. It's a slow, spectacular ride; sit on the right-hand side coming out of Vizag for best views. For Jungle Bells, get off at Tyda station, 500m from the resort. Frequent buses (₹58, 4½ hours) leave from Araku to Vizag every hour until 7pm.

BAVIKONDA & THOTLAKONDA

The Vizag area's natural harbours have long been conducive to dropping anchor, which helped monks from Sri Lanka, China and Tibet come here to learn and practice meditation. **Bavikonda** (☀9am-6pm) and **Thotlakonda** (☀10am-3pm) were popular hilltop monasteries on the coast that hosted up to 150 monks at a time - with the help of massive rainwater tanks and, at Thotlakonda, a natural spring.

The monasteries flourished during the Theravada period (Bavikonda, from the 3rd century BC to the 3rd century AD, and Thotlakonda, from the 2nd century BC to 2nd century AD) and had votive stupas, congregation halls, *chaitya-grihas*, *viharas* and refectories. Today only the ruins of these massive monastic compounds remain, but they're impressive nonetheless, with a placid, almost magical, air and sea views to meditate on. Bavikonda and Thotlakonda are 14km and 16km, respectively, from Vizag on Bheemli Beach Rd. Vizag's autorickshaw drivers charge around ₹400 return to see both.

SANKARAM

Forty kilometres southwest of Vizag is this stunning **Buddhist complex** (admission free; ☀9am-6pm), better known by the name of its two hills, Bojjannakonda and Lingalakonda. Used by monks from the 1st to 9th centuries AD (p910), the hills are covered with rock-cut

caves, stupas, ruins of monastery structures, and reliefs of the Buddha that span the Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana periods. Bojjannakonda has a two-storey group of rock-cut caves flanked by *dwarapalakas* (doorkeepers) and containing a stupa and gorgeous carvings of the Buddha (some restored). Atop the hill sit the ruins of a huge stupa and a monastery; you can still make out the individual cells where monks meditated. Lingalakonda is piled high with stupas, some of them enormous.

A private car from Vizag costs around ₹800. Or, take a bus to Anakapalle (₹24, one hour; every 20 minutes), 3km away, and then an autorickshaw (₹150 return including waiting time).

Vijayawada

☎0866 / POP 1 MILLION

Vijayawada is a busy, rapidly growing city and an important port at the head of the delta of the mighty Krishna River. It's bustling, but it's also intersected by canals, lined with ghats and ringed by fields of rice and palm. The surrounding area is intensely lush and green.

Vijayawada is considered by many to be the heart of Andhra culture and language and has an important Durga temple. Nearby Amara-vathi, meanwhile, was a centre of Buddhist learning and practice for many centuries.

Om Art Print (JD Hospital Rd, cnr Besant Rd; ☎10am-8.30pm Mon-Sat) sells maps.

👁 Sights

Undavalli Cave Temples

HINDU SITE

(Indian/foreigner ₹5/100; ☎8am-5.30pm) Four kilometres southwest of Vijayawada, these stunning cave temples cut a fine silhouette against the palm trees and rice paddies. Shrines are dedicated to the Trimurti – Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva – and one cave on the third level houses a huge, beautiful statue of reclining Vishnu while seated deities and animals stand guard out front. The caves, in their Hindu form, date to the 7th century, but they're thought to have been constructed for Buddhist monks 500 years earlier. Bus 301 (₹9, 20 minutes) goes here.

Victoria Jubilee Museum

MUSEUM

(MG Rd; admission Indian/foreigner ₹20/100, camera ₹3; ☎10.30am-5pm Sat-Thu) The best part of this museum is the building itself, built in 1887 to honour Queen Victoria's coronation jubilee. In 1921 it hosted the Congress meeting

where a new tricolour flag was introduced: Mahatma Gandhi added a wheel to the design and made it the Indian National Congress's official flag.

The interesting architecture outshines the museum's small collection of art and arms. But the **garden**, where temple sculptures from around the state (dating from the 3rd century AD) line shady paths, is lovely.

🎓 Courses

Dhamma Vijaya

MEDITATION

(Vipassana Meditation Centre; ☎08812-225522; www.dhamma.org; Eluru-Chintalapudi Rd) Offers intensive 10-day *vipassana* meditation courses free of charge in lush palm- and cocoa-forested grounds. The centre is 15km from Eluru; call for details.

🛏 Sleeping

Hotel Sri Ram

HOTEL \$

(☎2579377; Hanumanpet; s/d from ₹360/450; 📍) This cheapie has bright, clean, nondescript rooms near the train station. A conveniently located safe bet.

Swarna Palace

HOTEL \$\$

(☎2577222; swarnapalace@rediff.com; Eluru Rd, Govenorpet; s/d with AC from ₹1400/1500; 📍) Swarna, along with Hotel Ilapuram, are Vijayawada's two best midrange places. Both fall short of the sleekness they aspire to. But they're professionally run – and a little bit sleek anyway.

Hotel Ilapuram

HOTEL \$\$

(☎2571282; ilapuram@hotmail.com; Prakasam Rd; s/d with AC from ₹1500/1700; 📍)

Gateway Hotel

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎6644444; www.thegatewayhotels.com; MG Rd; s/d from ₹3500/4250; 📍@) The most up-market option.

Retiring rooms

RAILWAY RETIRING ROOMS \$

(dm/s/d from ₹75/180/375; 📍) The train station's clean and spacious rooms are a great option.

Bus station dorms

HOSTEL \$

(☎3097809; from ₹100) The bus station, just north of the river, has dorms for guests.

🍴 Eating

Lotus Food City

INDIAN \$\$

(www.lotusthefoodcity.com; Seethanagaram; mains ₹80-150) Set up by APTDC, this food complex has a lovely spot on the Krishna River where you can dine in or outdoors looking out to the shimmering water.

(Museum Rd; mains ₹58-150; ☎6.30am-11pm; ☹) Just around the corner from Big Bazaar, this outpost of the fabulous Minerva chain has great North and South Indian, including top-notch dosas (₹33 to ₹58). Its rava masala dosa (made with semolina) is the best thing ever.

Modern Cafe

INDIAN \$

(Sree Lakshmi Vilas; Besant Rd, Governorpet; meals ₹58; ☎6.30am-10.30pm) With black-and-white-check floors and mismatched wooden chairs, this gritty, down-home veg joint has a heavy 1940s vibe. The meals are great, as are the fresh juices (₹15).

i Information

Apollo Pharmacy (Vijaya Talkies Junction, Eluru Rd; ☎24hr)

APTDC (☎2571393; MG Rd, opposite PWD Grounds; ☎9am-7pm) Don't bother, unless you need brochures.

Department of Tourism (train station; ☎10am-5pm)

KIMS Hospital (☎2570761; Siddhartha Nagar)

MagicNet (Swarnalok Complex, Eluru Rd; per hr ₹20; ☎9.30am-9pm) Internet access.

State Bank of Hyderabad (1st fl, Vijaya Commercial Complex, Governorpet; ☎10.30am-3pm Mon-Fri) Changes currency and travellers cheques.

i Getting There & Around

The bus stand has a helpful **enquiry desk** (☎2522200). Frequent services run to Hyderabad (deluxe/Volvo ₹193/375, six to seven hours), Amaravathi (₹38, two hours), Warangal (deluxe ₹180, 5½ hours) and Visakhapatnam (deluxe/Volvo ₹270/540, nine hours).

Vijayawada is on the main Chennai-Kolkata and Chennai-Delhi railway lines. The daily *Coromandel Express* (2841) runs to Chennai (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹214/544/732, seven hours) and, the other way, to Kolkata (2842; sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹395/1054/1440, 20 hours). *Speedy Rajdhani* (Thursday and Saturday) and *Jan Shatabdi* (daily except Tuesday) trains also ply the Vijayawada-Chennai route. Trains galore run to Hyderabad (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹190/478/639, 6½ hours) and Tirupathi (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹198/502/674, seven hours). The **computerised advance-booking office** (☎enquiry 2577775, reservations 2578955; ☎8am-8pm Mon-Sat, till 2pm Sun) is in the basement.

The train station has a prepaid autorickshaw stand marked 'Traffic Police'.

Around Vijayawada

AMARAVATHI

Once the Andhran capital and a significant Buddhist centre, Amaravathi is India's biggest **stupa** (Indian/foreigner ₹5/100; ☎8am-6pm), measuring 27m high and constructed in the 3rd century BC, when Emperor Ashoka sent monks south to spread the Buddha's teaching. Located 60km west of Vijayawada, all that remains are a mound and some stones, but the nearby **museum** (admission ₹5; ☎8am-5pm) has a small replica of the stupa, with its intricately carved pillars, marble-surfaced dome and carvings of scenes from the Buddha's life (no photography allowed in the museum). In the courtyard is a reconstruction of part of the surrounding gateway, which gives you an idea of the stupa's massive scale. It's worth the trip, but many of Amaravathi's best sculptures are in London's British Museum and Chennai's Government Museum in Tamil Nadu.

About 1km down the road is the **Dhyana Buddha**, an imposing 20m-high seated Buddha built on the site where the Dalai Lama spoke at the 2006 Kalachakra, which gives the place added atmosphere.

Buses run from Vijayawada to Amaravathi every half-hour or so (₹24, two hours), but it may be quicker to head to Guntur (₹12, 45 minutes) and take another bus from there. The drive here will take you through some lovely lush scenery and memorable glimpses of village life.

KONDAPALLI

Kondapalli fort (admission ₹5, camera ₹100; ☎10.30am-5pm), strategically situated on the old Machilipatnam-Golconda trade route, was built in 1360 by the Reddy kings, and was held by the Gajapathis, the Qutb Shahis, the Mughals and the nizams before becoming a British military camp in 1767. Today it's a quiet, lovely ruin. On weekdays, you'll likely have the place to yourself and you can easily spend a few hours hiking around. **Kondapalli village**, 1km downhill, is famous for its wooden dolls. The fort is 21km from Vijayawada; an autorickshaw is ₹400 return.

Tirumala & Tirupathi

☎0877 / POP 302.000

The holy hill of **Tirumala** is, on any given day, filled with tens of thousands of blissed-out devotees, many of whom have endured

long journeys to see the powerful **Lord Venkateshwara** here, at his home. It's one of India's most visited pilgrimage centres: on average, 40,000 pilgrims come each day (the total often exceeds 100,000), and *darshan* (deity-viewing) runs 24/7. Temple staff alone number 12,000, and the efficient **Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams** (TTD; ☎2277777; www.tirumala.org) brilliantly administers the crowds. As a result, although the throngs can be overwhelming, a sense of order, serenity and ease mostly prevails, and a trip to the Holy Hill can be fulfilling, even if you're not a pilgrim.

'It is believed that Lord Sri Venkateshwara enjoys festivals', according to the TTD. And so do his devotees: *darshan* queues during October's **Brahmotsavam** can run up to several kilometres.

Tirupathi is the service town at the bottom of the hill, with hotels, restaurants, and transport; a fleet of buses constantly ferries pilgrims the 18km up and down. You'll find most of your worldly needs around the Tirupathi bus station (TP Area) and, about 500m away, the train station.

👁 Sights

Venkateshwara Temple

HINDU TEMPLE

Devotees flock to Tirumala to see Venkateshwara, an avatar of Vishnu. Among the many powers attributed to him is the granting of any wish made before the idol at Tirumala. Many pilgrims also donate their hair to the deity – in gratitude for a wish fulfilled, or to renounce ego – so hundreds of barbers attend to devotees. Tirumala and Tirupathi are filled with tonsured men, women and children, generating big money from exports to Western wig companies.

Legends about the hill itself and the surrounding area appear in the Puranas, and the temple's history may date back 2000 years. The main temple is an atmospheric place, though you'll be pressed between hundreds of devotees when you see it. The inner sanctum itself is dark and magical; it smells of incense, resonates with chanting and may make you religious. There, Venkateshwara sits gloriously on his throne, inspiring bliss and love among his visitors. You'll have a moment to make a wish and then you'll be shoved out again. Don't forget to collect your delicious *ladoo* (sweet made of flour, sugar, raisins and nuts) from the counter.

'Ordinary *darshan*' requires a wait of anywhere from two to six hours in the claus-

trophobic metal cages ringing the temple. 'Quick *darshan*' tickets (₹300) are recommended, and will get you through the queue faster, though you'll still have to brave the gauntlet of the cage, which is part of the fun, kind of... Upon entry you'll also have to sign a form declaring your support of Lord Vishnu.

👉 Tours

If you're pressed for time, APTDC runs three-day tours (₹1950) to Tirumala from Hyderabad. KSTDC (p849) and TTDC (p998) offer the same from Bengaluru and Chennai, respectively. APTDC also has a full-day tour (₹340) of temples in the Tirupathi area.

🏠 Sleeping & Eating

The TTD runs *choultries* (guesthouses) for pilgrims in Tirumala and Tirupathi, but most non-Hindu visitors stay in one of Tirupathi's many hotels.

Vast **dormitories** (beds free) and **guest-houses** (r ₹50-2500) surround the temple in Tirumala, but these are intended for pilgrims. To stay, check in at the Central Reception Office. Huge **dining halls** (meals free) serve thousands of pilgrims daily. Veg restaurants also serve meals for ₹15. The following places are all in Tirupathi.

Hotel Bliss

HOTEL \$\$

(☎2237773; www.blisstirupati.com; Reniguta Rd; s/d from ₹1710/1980; 🍷@🍷) The most luxurious place in town with ultracomfortable rooms, professional staff and a glass lift with great views and droning pilgrim elevator music.

Hotel Annapurna

HOTEL \$\$

(☎2250666; Nethaji Rd; r from ₹850; 🍷) A wee bit overpriced, but it's convenient and well organised. Rooms are clean, compact and pink, with constant hot water. Since it's on a corner (across from the train station), non-AC front rooms can be noisy. Its veg **restaurant** (mains ₹45-80) has fresh juices and Tirupathi's best food in sublime air-conditioning.

Hotel Mamata Lodge

HOTEL \$

(☎2225873; 1st fl, 170 TP Area; s/d/tr & q ₹200/300/400) A friendly, spick-and-span cheapie. Some of the sheets are stained, but they're tucked in tight and lovingly patched with white squares. Avoid the downstairs lodge of the same name.

Retiring rooms

RAILWAY RETIRING ROOMS \$

(dm/r from ₹45/150, with AC ₹400; 🍷) The station retiring rooms are super value.

The following both serve hearty meals and juices:

Hotel Universal Deluxe INDIAN \$
(49 G Car St; mains ₹35-65; ☎5.30am-midnight)
Near the train station.

Hotel Vikram INDIAN \$
(☎2225433; TP Area; mains ₹43-85; ☎5am-11pm) By the bus stand.

i Information

Anu Internet Centre (per hr ₹15; ☎5.30am-10.30pm) Next to the bus stand.

Apollo Pharmacy (G Car St; ☎24hr)

APTDC (☎2289120; Sridevi Complex, 2nd fl, Tilak Rd; ☎8.30am-8pm) Tourist info and tour bookings.

Police station (☎2289006; Railway Station Rd)

i Getting There & Away

It's possible to visit Tirupathi on a (very) long day trip from Chennai. If travelling by bus or train, buy a 'link ticket', which includes transport from Tirupathi to Tirumala.

Air

Indian Airlines (☎2283992; Tirumala Bypass Rd; ☎9.30am-5.30pm), 2km from town, has daily flights to Delhi via Hyderabad. **Kingfisher Red** (☎9849677008) plies the same route, including Bengaluru and Visakhapatnam. Book with **Mitta Travels** (☎2225981; Prakasam Rd; ☎9am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-12.30pm Sun), next to Manasa Fast Foods, 2km from the train station.

Bus

Tirupathi's **bus station** (☎2289900) has buses to Chennai (deluxe/Volvo ₹70/155, four hours) and Hyderabad (deluxe/Volvo ₹408/717, 12/10 hours). Tonnes of APSRTC and KSTDC buses go to Bengaluru (deluxe/Volvo ₹153/365, six/five hours), and seven buses go to Puttaparthi daily (express/deluxe ₹165/227, eight hours).

Private buses depart from TP Area, opposite the bus stand.

Train

Tirupathi station is well served by express trains, running to Chennai (2nd-class chair/chair (₹62/206, three hours), Bengaluru (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹168/470/628, seven hours), Hyderabad/Secunderabad (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹284/764/1047, 12 hours) and Vijayawada (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹198/502/674, seven hours). The **reservation office** (☎2225850; ☎8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun) is across the street.

i Getting Around

Bus

Tirumala Link buses have two bus stands in Tirupathi: next to the main bus stand and outside the train station. The scenic 18km trip to Tirumala takes one hour (₹54 return); if you don't mind heights, sit on the left side for views. A prepaid taxi is ₹350.

Walking

TTD has constructed probably the best footpath in India for pilgrims to walk up to Tirumala. It's about 15km from Tirupathi and takes four to six hours. Leave your luggage at the toll gate at Alipiri near the Hanuman statue. It will be transported free to the reception centre. At the time of research walking was prohibited from 4pm to 6am due to several leopard attacks on pilgrims. There are shady rest points along the way, and a few canteens.

Around Tirumala & Tirupathi

CHANDRAGIRI FORT

Only a couple of buildings remain from this 15th-century **fort** (Indian/foreigner ₹10/100; ☎8am-5pm), 14km west of Tirupathi. Both the Rani Mahal and the Raja Mahal, which houses a small **museum** (☎10am-5pm Sat-Thu), were constructed under Vijayanagar rule and resemble structures in Hampi's Royal Centre. There's a nightly **sound-and-light show** (admission ₹35; ☎8pm Mar-Oct, 7.30pm Nov-Feb), narrated by Bollywood great Amitabh Bachchan. Buses for Chandragiri (₹10) leave Tirupathi bus station every half-hour. An autorickshaw is ₹200 return.

SRI KALAHASTI

Around 36km east of Tirupathi, Sri Kalahasti is known for its important **Sri Kalahasteswara Temple** and for being, along with Machilipatnam near Vijayawada, a centre for the ancient art of *kalamkari*. These paintings are made with natural ingredients: the cotton is primed with *myrabalam* (resin) and cow's milk; figures are drawn with a pointed bamboo stick dipped in fermented jaggery and water; and the dyes are made from cow dung, ground seeds, plants and flowers. You can see the artists at work in the Aghraharam neighbourhood, 2.5km from the bus stand. **Sri Vijayalakshmi Fine Kalamkari Arts** (☎9441138380; door No 15-890) is an old family business with 40 artists.

Buses leave Tirupathi for Sri Kalahasti every 10 minutes (₹23, 45 minutes); a prepaid taxi is ₹650 return.

Puttapparthi

☎08555

Prasanthi Nilayam (Abode of Highest Peace) is the main ashram of the late Sri Sathya Sai Baba (1926–2011), the deceased afro-haired guru revered by followers from around the world. Setting up the ashram in his hometown of Puttapparthi 60 years ago, he lived here for most of the year, though with his death from a respiratory-related illness on 24 April 2011, the town faces an uncertain future. While the millions of dollars pumped into the nearby hospital, schools and university will ensure the town continues to thrive upon his legacy, long-term it remains to be seen whether devotees will continue to arrive en masse without the presence of the man himself.

When he was 14, Sai Baba declared himself to be the reincarnation of another Sai Baba, a saintly figure who died in 1918 (p764). His millions of devotees regarded him as a true avatar and believed he performed miracles. Coming for the program of *darshan* (here that meant seeing Baba – though since poor health in 2005 his appearances were increasingly sporadic), they packed the ashram twice-daily for chanting and prayer. The sight of clean, well-paved streets lined with internet cafes might come as a surprise here, as will the prevalence of robed foreign devotees.

Everything about Sai Baba was big: the Afro hairdo, the big-name devotees, and the big controversies – allegations of sexual misconduct had led some devotees to lose faith. Others, however, regarded the controversy as simply another terrestrial test for their avatar.

Sai Baba announced he would be reborn as Prema Sai in the district of Mandya in Karnataka, in what would be the third and final incarnation of Sai Baba, supposedly eight years after his own death.

Most people stay at the **ashram** (☎287390; www.srisathyasai.org.in), a small village with all amenities. Lodging is cheap but basic. Advance bookings aren't taken; visitors under 25 must be in a family or group.

Non-ashram options include the clean and simple **Sai Surya Guest House** (☎288134; Gopuram Rd, 1st Cross; r from ₹350), and the excellent-value **Sri Sai Sadan** (Meda's Guest House; ☎287507; srisaisadan@gmail.com; Gopuram Rd; r from ₹810; ☎), near Venugopalaswamy Temple, with a roof garden and spacious rooms with fridges and balconies.

The rooftop **World Peace Café** (German Bakery; Main Rd; mains ₹95-145; ☎7.30am-9.30pm) is an old favourite for saffron lassis,

good filter coffee and healthy food. The Tibetan **Bamboo Nest** (1st fl, Chitravathi Rd; mains ₹55-80; ☎9.30am-2pm & 4.30-9pm) has a memorable veg wonton soup (₹60) and good *momos* (Tibetan dumplings; ₹70).

i Getting There & Around

Puttapparthi is most easily reached from Bengaluru, 160km south; nine KSRTC buses (express/Volvo ₹110/220, four hours) and eight trains (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹133/323/420, three hours) head here daily. The **KSRTC office** (☎288938) is next to the bus station.

From the **APSRTC bus station** (☎287313), uncomfortable buses run to/from Tirupathi (express/deluxe ₹160/200, eight hours, seven daily) and Chennai (₹342, 12 hours, two daily).

The bus station has a **train reservation booth** (☎8am-noon & 5-7pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun). For Hyderabad, an overnight train goes daily to Kacheguda (7604; sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹240/650/870, 10 hours). Overnight train 8564 runs to Visakhapatnam (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹340/940/1300, 20 hours), stopping at Vijayawada. The daily *Udyan Express* (6530) heads to Mumbai (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹350/950/1300, 21 hours).

A free shuttle for ashram visitors runs from the train station. An autorickshaw is ₹80.

Lepakshi

About 75km from Puttapparthi is Lepakshi, site of the **Veerbhadra Temple** (admission free). The town gets its name from the Ramayana: when demon Ravana kidnapped Rama's wife, Sita, the bird Jatayu fought him and fell, injured, at the temple site. Rama then called him to get up; 'Lepakshi' derives from the Sanskrit for 'Get up, bird'.

Look for the 9m-long monolithic **Nandi** – India's largest – at the town's entrance. From here, you can see the temple's **Naga-lingam** (a phallic representation of Shiva) crowned with a seven-headed cobra. The temple is known for its unfinished **Kalyana Mandapam** (Marriage Hall), depicting the wedding of Parvati and Shiva, and its **Natyamandapa** (Dance Hall), with carvings of dancing gods. The temple's most stunning features, though, are the Natyamandapa's ceiling **frescoes**.

To get here, take a Puttapparthi-Bengaluru bus and alight at Kodakonda Checkpost (₹40). From there, take a Hindupur-bound bus (₹14) or an autorickshaw (₹250 return) to Lepakshi. A private car from Puttapparthi is ₹1000. You can also go from Hindupur, a main stop on the Puttapparthi-Bengaluru train line, which has a few hotels. It's 11km from the temple.

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