

Best trails to discover Hampi

by Ami Bhat (Lonely Planet Author) Jan 2017



Virupaksha temple view from Hemakuta hill at sunset.
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Hampi has been my favourite for a while and it is likely to remain on top of my list for a long time. This seems to be the case for most people who have visited the erstwhile capital of the Vijayanagara Kingdom, with historic relics that date back to 14th century. I often refer to this UNESCO world heritage site – Hampi – as the ‘Rome of India’ because no matter where you turn, you are bound to stumble upon some ruins with their own story. I felt like a kid in a candy store, overwhelmed, not knowing where to start. Luckily, there are set trails that ensure that you don’t miss the best of Hampi.

Trail One – centred around Virupaksha temple

View of Virupaksha Temple
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Like most visitors, my first stop was the Virupaksha temple, the iconic landmark of this town. With its tall gopuram, Virupaksha temple is a centre to most commercial activities – be it guide services, autos or cycles on hire, restaurants or just some shopping. The first trail of Hampi starts with this temple and ends back here. Here are the key monuments along this trail:

Sasivekalu Ganesha: The mustard coloured, 8-foot tall monolithic Ganesha hides an interesting story. You will notice a snake tied to his belly and the legend has it that since the Lord overate, he tied the snake to prevent his belly from bursting.

Hemakuta group of temples: Whether these are Jain temples or Shiva temples – it is not certain. But what is certain is that the alluring beauty of the golden symmetrical structures that are enclosed by the Hampi boulders. The best time to plan this trail is during sunset when the rays over these temples create a mesmerising effect – a memory that even now, remains imprinted in my mind.

Hampi Bazaar: The old bazaar, constructed in such a manner that people on a horseback would be able to shop, without dismounting.

Virupaksha temple: From the intricately carved pillars to the beautiful murals, there is enough to admire in Virupaksha temple. One key highlight is a shadow of the inverted gopuram within one of the temple chambers. The phenomenon occurs through a tiny hole in the wall. I am not sure if this is by design or by chance – either way, I was quite in awe.

Trail Two – centred around Vittala temple

Village at sunrise, Hampi, Karnataka, India
Overview of Hampi at sunrise
Image courtesy: ©Arun Bhat/500px

Vittala temple captivated me with its amazing carvings, architecture and science that still baffles many. This trail of Hampi is my favourite. You can start this trail by walking along the Hampi Bazaar towards the Courtesan’s street and then end with Vittala temple or vice versa. Along this trail, you will find:

Courtesan’s Street: Once a lively jewellery market, you can see remnants of it in the delicately carved pillars that still stand erect.

Achyuta Raya’s Temple: Discover a unique pillar with lion-faced Yalis standing on elephants – among other intricately carved pillars. The temple is unexplored and has enough for you to appreciate.

108 Shiva Lingas: A coracle ride and a hike lead to 108 Shiva Lingas carved on a flat bed of stone. Around here, you will also be able to spot several finished and unfinished sculptures of various gods and goddesses.

Kings Balance: This is an old balance that was used to weigh the king with gold, and the equivalent was distributed among the people.

Vittala Temple: Right from the time I walked through the ruined gates of the temple, I was completely spellbound. The magnificent chariot temple, the musical pillars, the ornate pillars, the multi-faceted cornices and the perfectly carved statues of Vishnu and Mohini in the inner sanctums are enough to keep you busy for at least one hour.

Trail Three – centred around Royal Enclosures

Hampi is full of architectural wonders.
Image courtesy: Wikipedia/Dharani.prakashi/CC 0 1.0

Walking along this trail transported me to the royal times of Vijaynagara kingdom. It also made me feel like an explorer – discovering underground temples and secret meeting rooms. This trail has so many treasures that are still being excavated. I started with the underground temple of Shiva and ended at the royal stables. Here are some interesting sites that I encountered.

Underground Shiva Temple: Partially submerged, it is fun wading through the water to explore the inner sanctums of the temple. You will also be able to see the royal marriage halls and the gurukul where the princes used to train.

Royal Enclosures: A huge area that has a royal pavilion that was used by the kings to witness various festivals. It is here that you can find a secret meeting room used by the king. Also contained within this area are a huge public swimming pool and an artistic step-well.

Queen’s bath: An open air bath, complete with massage tables and aqueducts, this heritage building gives you a great insight into the life of the Vijaynagar royalty.

Zenana Enclosure: Though the Queen’s palace no longer exists, you can get a few glimpses of what was through the old watch towers and the gorgeous Hawa Mahal.

Royal Stables: These huge gigantic elephant stables overwhelm and overpower you. It is interesting to spot metal rungs and man-sized holes for the Mahouts to enter and take charge of these beasts.

Trail Four – centred around Anegundi

Bamboo coracle rides on Tungabhadra River are popular in Hampi.
Image courtesy: Manish via See Click Share Repeat

The Anegundi trail takes you away from the centre of this UNESCO site to the other side of the River Tungabhadra. The area is considered to be the old kingdom of Kishkinda – from the Ramayana era. This trail of Hampi allowed me to experience a little bit of nature along with some hiking while exploring more of heritage.

Bukka’s Aqueduct: A huge aqueduct that supplied water from the river to the main kingdom, this bridge like structure is truly impressive.

Pampa Sarovar: Said to be the place where Sabari offered berries to Lord Rama, you will find a pond with water lilies here.

Anjaneya Hill: It is rumoured to be the birthplace of Lord Hanuman but reaching here is not simple. You have to trek up 600 steps to the white temple atop but you’re rewarded with spectacular views, especially at sunset.

Malyavantha Raghunatha Temple: I loved this part of the trail for the lovely temple and the hidden caves around it. It was fun trekking up to uncover these hidden places, where they say Ram and Lakshman spent considerable time before heading to Lanka to rescue Sita.

Sanapur Lake: A surprise that awaits you between the boulders and rocks – the blue, cool waters seemed like a befitting end to my perfect day of trekking and exploration.

I would recommend at least two days here to see at least the major sites of Hampi. For the adventurous, try cycling through these trails. After you are done with these trails, I would not be surprised if you are already planning your next trip to Hampi.

AUTHOR’S BIO: Ami Bhat is senior marketing professional, currently on a break to pursue full-time travel blogging. A travel enthusiast, who loves sports, photography and dancing with equal passion, Ami believes in planning a short escape for every long weekend that can come up through the year. And when she cannot travel physically, she travels virtually through words on her travel. More on: www.thrillingtravel.in



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