

The wonders of Belum Caves- second longest caves in India

by Ami Bhat (Lonely Planet Author)

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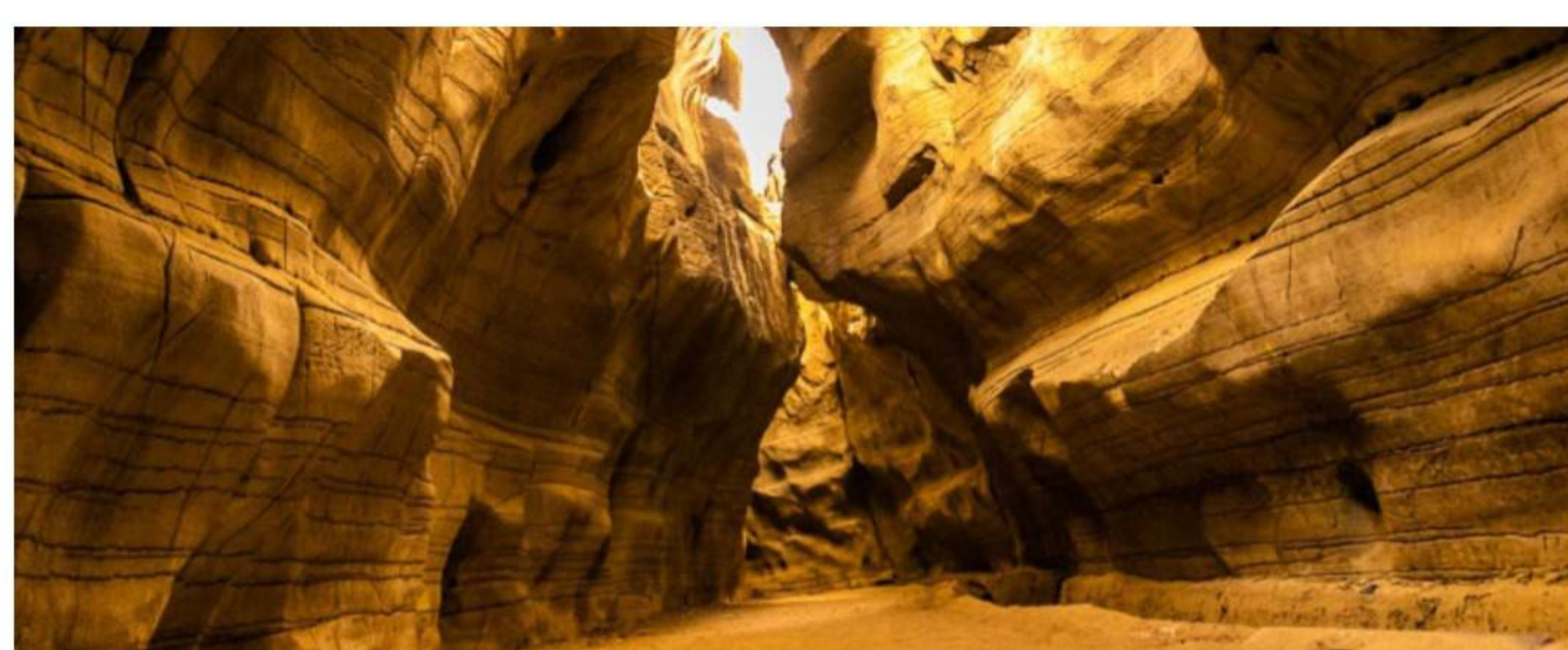


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From the origin of mankind, the one constant that we have always had are caves. They have been our classic shelters. For some they have been meditation hubs. And yet for others, an underground lair that led them to safety. Among the many natural caves in India, the Belum Caves in Andhra Pradesh is one such fascinating tale. The 2nd longest caves of India were home to many Buddhist monks and today, form an offbeat attraction for those looking for beauty and adventure.

Located near Kurnool, the Belum Caves are made up of a labyrinth of tunnels that wind around for over 3230 m. They were discovered in the 1880s but were unexplored and unmapped till the 1980s. While these are the known dates, there has been evidence of them being used much before this time. Scores of prehistoric vessels of 4500 BC have been found here – along with relics from the time when the Jain and Buddhist monks used the caves for meditation.

The textured passages of the Belum Caves turn and twist to take you through the highs and lows of unique stone formations of its caverns. You will find yourself crouching and squeezing through gaps to discover an interesting formation created by nature. Well lit, aerated and marked, the Belum Caves are perfect for any traveller – from young to old. Here are some of the key attractions of these caves.

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The Pillidwaram

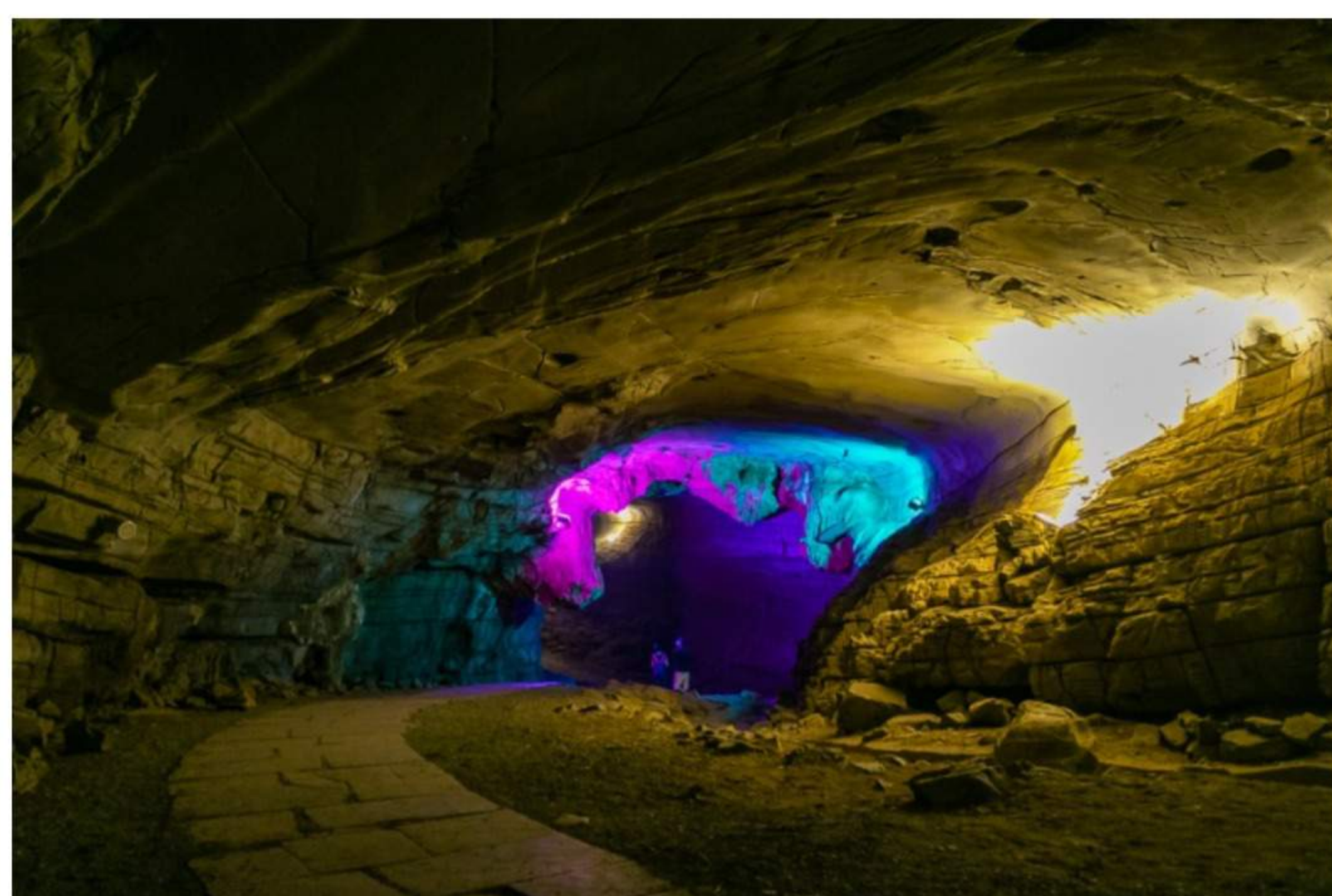


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The name literally means “Cat’s door”. This is the official entrance to the long network of Belum Caves. The stalactites form an arch on the ceiling of the caves to resemble the open mouth of a tiger or cat.

Paatalganga

Paatalganga is the deepest part of the Belum Caves. Here exists an underground stream whose depth is unknown. The stream is said to be the breeding ground of an unusual living organism that thrives only in the deep corners of a cave. It is believed that this underground stream emerges at the surface- 3 km from its current point at the Belum village.

Saptasvarala Guha

The Cavern with 7 musical notes or the Saptasvarala Guha is quite fascinating owing to its acoustics. The stalactites when struck create melodious notes. The demonstration of the same was available earlier but owing to the possible damage to the natural structures has been stopped. Nonetheless, one can still see the whole formation along the walls.

Mandapam

The mandapam is a giant hall where one can imagine a grand banquet. The high ceilings with artistic textures make it quite an awe-inspiring stop. What makes it even more attractive is the journey to get through it. One has to slide between narrow gaps and crouch along few low ceiling passages only to emerge in high vaulted ones.

Dhyana Mandir

A large slab of stone that represents a saint’s bed occupies this cavern. Whether the actual saint slept on it or not, it was a meditation centre for monks.

The Banyan Tree



Image courtesy: ©Ami Bhat

When the stalagmites and stalactite meet, there arises a mighty tree with roots that seem to hang down. The Banyan tree cavern of Belum Caves is quite a stunner, especially when you have the colourful lights play over it.

Thousand Hoods Cavern

When multiple cobras hang down from the roof and fan their hoods, what you get is the structure in the Thousand Hoods Cavern. After the Banyan Tree Cavern, this particular stop is an artistic splendour.

Travel Tips

- Belum Caves is around 330 km from Hyderabad and around 300 km from Bengaluru. There are regular tourist buses from Hyderabad.
- The closest airport is at Tirupati while Tadipatri is the closest railway station.
- The caves are fairly well developed by the tourism authorities and have enough lighting within them – making it quite comfortable even if you are claustrophobic.

AUTHOR’S BIO: Ami Bhat is senior marketing professional who has turned into a full time travel writer and blogger. 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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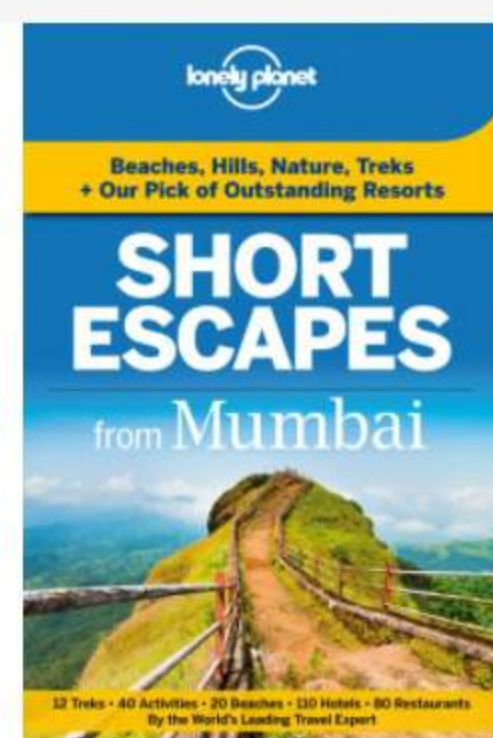
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