

WALK THIS WAY

There's no better way to sample local life than on foot.
And in India, the colour is all in the streets

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Sidestep the tourist trail for these eight great walking tours that let you experience the real India with all its bustle, vigour and chaos.

BANGALORE

Basavanagudi Heritage Homes Walk

Modern Bangalore may be known as the hub of the IT industry, but its true soul is found in its oldest neighbourhoods. This three-hour walk explores the streets of Basavanagudi, an area of colourful markets, tree-lined residential streets, heritage buildings and lush gardens. Guided by Mansur, an architect who grew up in this vibrant neighbourhood, you'll visit several homes built over different decades, some more than a century old. From small tidy bungalows with pillared verandas to sprawling multi-storied mansions set in large tropical gardens, some of these beautiful heritage homes are open to visitors eager to learn about their history and owners. unhurried.in

Don't miss: The many stalls at the vibrant flower market in Gandhi Bazaar along the way; perk up, too, with South India's famous delicious filter coffee at the many traditional eateries.

Tip: Wear footwear that is easy to remove when entering homes.

Green Heritage Walk, Lalbagh Botanical Gardens

Locals often outnumber tourists on this walk, which takes nature lovers on a whistle-stop tour of the botanical treasures in the lush 97-acre gardens, built by Hyder Ali in 1760, a former ruler of the Mysore kingdom, and later completed by his son Tipu Sultan. With over 1,000 species of flora, the gardens boast one of the most diverse collections of trees and plants in the world, and offer a peaceful respite from the chaotic city streets. Vijay Thiruvady, a passionate botanist and nature conservationist, guides you through the green oasis he knows as intimately as his own backyard, sharing facts and anecdotes along the way, often accompanied by one of the park's resident dogs. For each walk, the route is adapted according to the season, and the trees and plants in bloom. bangalorewalks.com

Don't miss: The mammoth 200-year-old white silk-cotton tree, one of the park's natural wonders.

Tip: Don closed shoes and long pants for walking off-trail through the long grass.

CHENNAI

Jewellery Trail, Mylapore

Jewellery's significance in Indian culture goes far beyond mere ornamentation: not only is it a treasured investment handed

down from one generation to the next, it also has great symbolic value. India has a 5,000-year-old tradition of jewellery-making, which is still done by hand. All these aspects are explored during this fascinating tour that takes you to brightly lit jewellery showrooms and up narrow stairways into artisans' tiny workshops to watch craftsmen at work. Listen to stories about exquisite bejewelled heirlooms worn only by Maharajahs, which reveal the significance of gemstones, and the symbolism behind the 16 pieces of jewellery worn by a Hindu bride. storytrails.in

Don't miss: The stunningly intricate temple jewellery set with precious stones worn by classical dancers. Along the way, drop by the seventh-century Kapaleeshwarar Temple, built in typical Dravidian style with imposing pyramid-shaped towers.

Tip: Most of the trail is on foot but auto rickshaws are used along some stretches.

Mystic Trail, Mylapore

Why do Indian women wear a *bindi* on their foreheads? Why are haircuts avoided on Tuesdays? What symbolic meaning is hidden in elements of Hindu temple architecture? This story trail demystifies many common Hindu practices and beliefs and the significance of its many customs, which permeate every aspect of daily life in India. You'll explore

Facing page, clockwise from top left: Get lost amid Lalbagh Botanical Gardens' natural splendour; India's resplendent jewellery heritage; bustling Bangalore at dusk
GETTY IMAGES; ISABEL PUTINA





Intricate kolams dress
the threshold of many
homes in India



GETTY IMAGES; CORBIS IMAGES; COCHIN MAGIC

Facing page, from top: Religious rituals are inherent in daily Indian life; take five with a freshly brewed cup of tea during your Broadway Bazaar Walk

This page, from top: Jew Town's quiet back lanes; the brass pulpit and elaborate interior of Paradesi Synagogue

Don't miss: The fortune-telling parrot near the back gate of the Kapaleeshwarar Temple, and wander through the charming back lanes that buzz with temple-goers, flower sellers, cloth merchants and stalls selling religious paraphernalia.

Tip: This is a traditional area. Dress conservatively, keeping legs and shoulders covered.

KOCHI

Broadway Bazaar Walk, Ernakulam

A walk through a teeming market area is a great way to feel the pulse of a place. This four-hour trek lets you wander through the lanes and stalls of this lively wholesale market and retail bazaar, where you can soak in all its sights, sounds, smells and flavours. From fruits, vegetables and spices, to watches, footwear, clothing and electronics: it's all here. Many stalls and shops have been family-run for generations, and shopkeepers are happy to share how the market business works, talk about crop cultivation patterns, seasons for different

several temples in the traditional neighbourhood of Mylapore, observe religious rituals and visit a temple priest's home. You'll also learn about the symbolism of details like the intricate *kolams* drawn on the thresholds of homes, the placing of *tulsi* plants in decorative pots in courtyards, and lotuses sold by flower sellers.



goods, even the transportation chain and pricing mechanisms. cochinmagic.com

Don't miss: The plethora of spices at the spice market. For a detour, hop onto the local ferry from Fort Kochi to Ernakulam to enjoy the scenic harbour views.

Tip: Be sensitive when photographing market sellers – they may not appreciate having their photo taken.

Jewish Heritage Tour, Kodungallur, Kerala and Fort Kochi

This full-day tour begins with a trip 29km north to Kodungallur, once an important seaport where the Jews first arrived in India.

Called the 'cradle of religions', this is also where St Thomas is believed to have landed in 52 AD. You'll find the Cheraman Mosque – the oldest mosque in India; the Bhagavathi Temple, a pilgrimage site for Hindus; and the beautifully restored 17th-century Chendamangalam Synagogue with its painted panelled ceiling, terracotta floor and shuttered wooden windows. The synagogue also houses a small Jewish museum, which carries a permanent exhibit on the history of the local Jewish population.

Back in Kochi, a walk through the narrow lanes of historic Jew Town takes visitors past the few remaining Jewish homes

to the Paradesi Synagogue, the oldest in India, and famous for its brass pulpit, coloured-glass lamps, intricate hand-painted Chinese floor tiles, and Belgian glass chandeliers. cochinmagic.com

Don't miss: The Hebrew tombstones in the Jewish cemetery are a unique sight in India. In the small lanes in Jew Town leading to the Paradesi Synagogue, browse through the many antique shops selling wooden furniture, brass statues and wood carvings.

Tip: It's an eight-hour tour, so bring enough water and a sunhat as it gets hot in Kerala.

KOLKATA

Confluence of Cultures Walk, from Bow Barracks to Burrabazar

Bengalis share their city with a diverse mix of people: Parsis, Anglo-Indians, Muslims, and the Armenians and Chinese. Meander its multicultural neighbourhood, and spot buildings that speak of the city's diverse cultural milieu: the Parsi Fire Temple, Maghen David Synagogue and the Armenian Church. Stop by the Hap Hing Chinese Provision Store, where shop owner Stella Chen loves chatting with visitors about life in Kolkata. calcuttawalks.com

Don't miss: The Chinese temple dedicated to the Hindu god Kali, followed by a Chinese breakfast at Tiretta Bazar where *dim sum*, *pau* and pork sausages sold by street vendors are a tantalising sight.



Tip: Join the morning walk when there is less traffic and fewer crowds.

Street Food Walk, New Market

Some of the city's best foods can be found on its streets. One of Kolkata's best-loved snacks is the humble roll: a flat, wrap-like *paratha* filled with assorted ingredients. Calcutta Walks founder, Iftekhar Ahsan, guides intrepid foodies to Nizam's for what he declares to be the city's best double chicken and double egg roll. Another must-taste is *puchka*: a bite-sized puffed bread

stuffed with potatoes, chickpeas, onion, tamarind chutney, chilli and spices – all eaten in one bite. calcuttawalks.com

Don't miss: The dizzying display of sweets in a Bengali sweet shop, like Indian cottage cheese-based *rosogolla* and *chum chum*.

Tip: If you have a food allergy, let your guide know before sampling the street food.

SilkAir flies to Bangalore, Chennai, Kochi and Kolkata.
For flight schedules, see SilkAir Postcards on page 61

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Singapore Airlines: ADELAIDE BRISBANE MELBOURNE PERTH SYDNEY AUCKLAND CHRISTCHURCH



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