

Travel & Beyond

• Vijaya Pratap

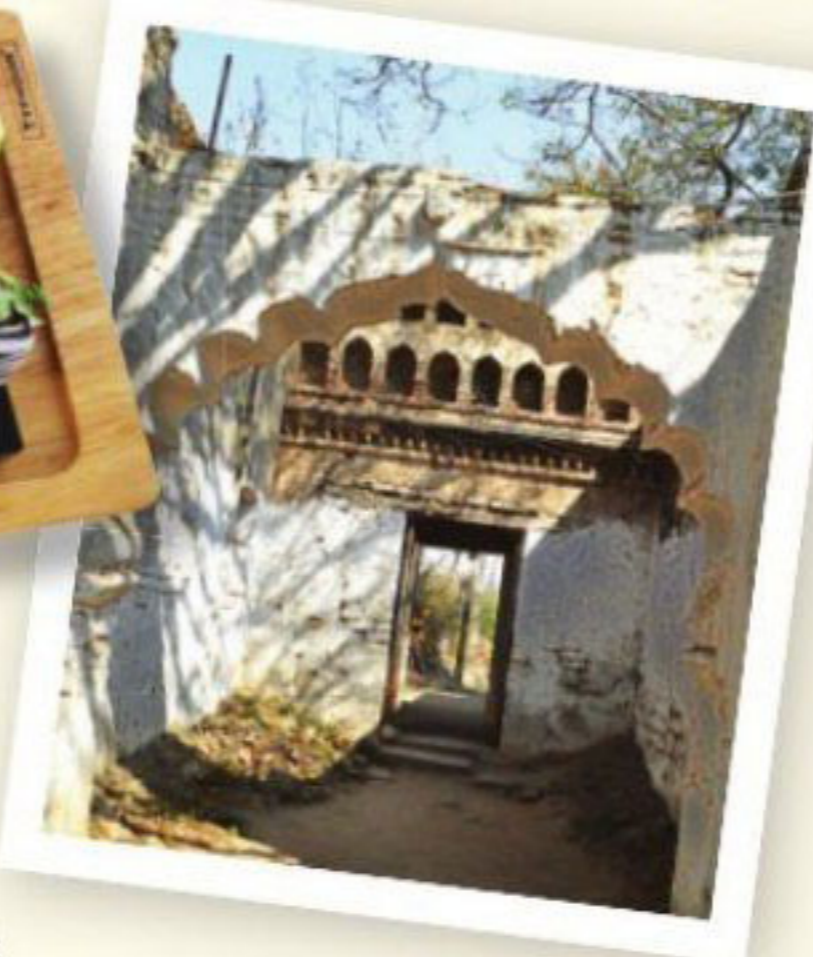
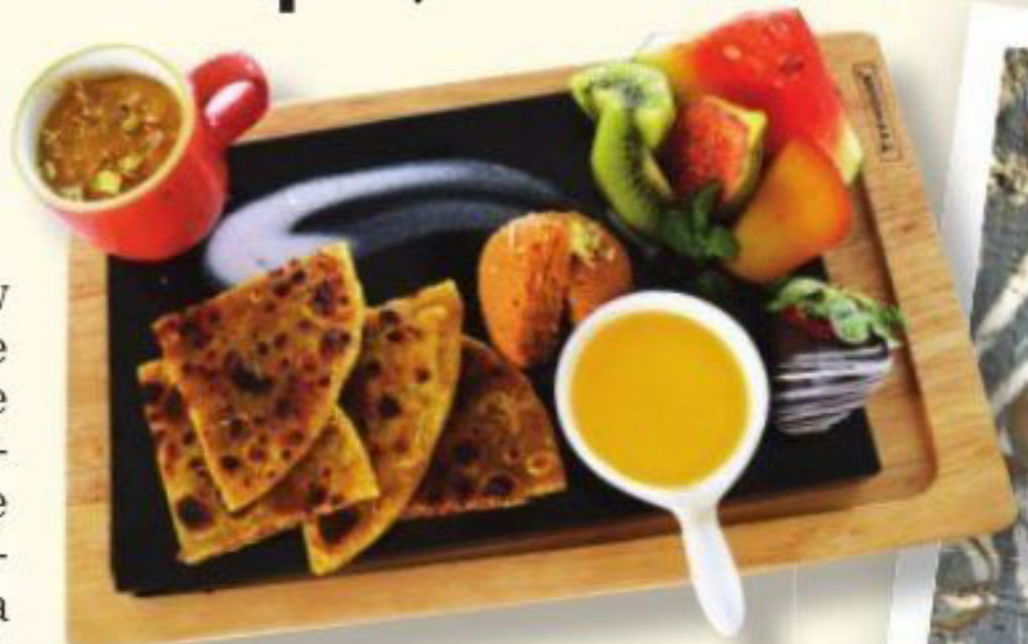


**O**range County, Hampi, that is steeped in the lore of the land and in the culture of its people made every effort to help me explore and get into the 'spirit of the land' which, I feel is essential when one is visiting a place: to understand fully and get the best out of the time invested. After their 'Virupaksha' and 'Raya' trails, the resort staff suggested that I visit the nearby ancient town Anegundi, the original capital of Vijayanagara Empire that lies on the north of the Tungabhadra River. More accessible now with the recently opened new bridge - a 30 minute scenic drive from Hampi. I didn't believe when Hari Krishna gushed while serving a kiwi smoothie during breakfast, "Ma'm, it's just like Goa!" I dismissed it as youthful fascination with a smile.

But I found the place indeed very green with lush paddy fields, cool and shaded banana plantations and coconut palms. Santosh, (the resort's trusted guide) sitting next to the driver, turned 180 degrees to give me an interesting overview of the place: "Anegundi and the surroundings hold immense mythical importance: it is believed to be Kishkindha; the birthplace of Hanuman (Anjanadri Hill) and Rishyamuka mountain, all associated with Ramayana; also supposed to be Pampa Devi's (Goddess Parvathi) birth place. Geographically, it is believed to be 3,000 million years old, one of the oldest plateaus on the planet, boasting several Neolithic dwellings bearing cave paintings that are still intact. Coming to the historical aspect, when the Delhi Sultans invaded South India, defeating Hoysalas in Beluru and Halebidu; Kakatiyas in Warangal; Pandyas of Madurai in Tamil Nadu; the strong need for a Hindu empire was fulfilled by Harihara and Bukka who founded the Vijayanagara Empire with sage Vidyananya's guidance. Though Anegundi was made the capital, with continued attacks from the North, they shifted the

# Rendezvous with ROYALTY

The ancient town Anegundi, the original capital of Vijayanagara Empire, has architectural marvels built by royals



I walked further into a small lane that opened into a huge courtyard. The old house with a tiled roof had antiquated cane chairs placed in the long veranda. An elderly gentleman dressed in white, with a matching silver mane and beard, was reading a book. He had a distinctive aura that could be a result of his erstwhile royal genes. I approached hesitantly, while Santosh stayed at a safe distance behind. The royal welcomed me warmly, gave permission to photograph the surroundings, but not him. After an open display of disdainful regard for journalists who depend more on Google and Wikipedia than wise old resi-

capital southwards, to Hampi. But the army always stayed in Anegundi ready for the battle and the elephants used for war were also stationed here. The fortification walls and the fort are still around. Even today, the royal descendants of the era are believed to reside here in this village," he said proudly. I thought it would be exciting to meet one of them! As we walked around the village of Anegundi, I was struck by its old world charm. I peeped into a house with wooden pillars and a central courtyard, only to be warmly welcomed by the inmates of the Kishkinda Trust that undertakes heritage conservation in Anegundi.

dents like him, he opened up and threw light on the house and his royal descent. "My name is Rama Deva Raya. We are from the Anegundi royal family. This ancestral house of mine is part of a 'diwana', which means a mansion in Kannada. The huge complex was divided among the family members, what you see across the road is 'hiriya diwana' inhabited by elders and this is the 'chikka diwana' inhabited by youngsters." Once he came to know that I am a Telugu from Hyderabad, he started speaking in our mother tongue - both his and mine. We traced roots, dug the past and predicted the future of our commonly inherited cultural heritage.

When I returned from the royal past, Chef Jay Dev treated me to a royal repast. My lunch at 'Tuluva' - the rich artisanal 'thali' featured traditional Kannada salads, meats, exotic vegetarian dishes, rotis, many types of 'podis' that demanded liberal doses of pure ghee and four types of sweets that came loaded with sin.

The Vijaya Vittala Temple left me wondering at its marvellous sculpture. I was pained to see many mutilated sculptures that were destroyed or vandalised by the Bahamani Sultans. While I sat under an old frangipani tree pondering over the plundering of this beautiful monument, the marvellously chiselled stone pillars that used to produce musical notes once upon a time, stared at me helplessly. As the sun was setting, I stood there in Vittala temple, drenched in the golden sunlight and so did the sculptures. It was a magical moment for me, to be a part of that beautiful silence.

That night, my dinner by the poolside was romantic with soft breeze, flickering candles, full moon in the sky, and the gentle notes of Raag Bageshri playing on the flute. I finished off my food and happily dozed off in my bed.

(The author is a documentary filmmaker and travel writer; blogs at [www.vijayaprataptraveland-beyond](http://www.vijayaprataptraveland-beyond))

