

Facade of The Medak Church

A Trinity of Faiths & More

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Everyone in Hyderabad has heard of the Medak Church and if you grew up in this city it is highly likely that you would have even gone there on a school trip, it is after all the largest diocese in all of Asia and is believed to be second only to the Vatican even across the globe!

So, one weekend we set out to see for ourselves the beautiful stained glass windows of this renowned Gothic church and they do leave you spellbound as the sunlight filters through them into the inner sanctum of the cathedral.

As we drove through the Narsapur Forest Range to Medak, what took us by surprise were the hordes of monkeys lined up all along the road. They are so accustomed to road-trippers along this route that the minute you slow your car down they will stand up and look into your window to see what snacks you have got for them! Having left early we reached just in time for breakfast at the first stop along the route, the Medak Fort. The state tourism department runs a little heritage hotel at the Fort and we were delighted with the fresh brewed coffee and the piping hot upma that was served.

The fort is known to have exploited the natural topography of the area in creating an invincible defense around itself and the summit where the hotel is built offers gorgeous views of the surrounding city. I was quite fascinated to notice how a Mosque, Temple and the Church were all aligned in a perfect diagonal, as the city grew and flourished all around it. Though not

much remains of the Fort, except for its three entrances, Prathama Dwaram, Simha Dwaram and Gaja Dwaram, these are striking in their architecture and their names say it all. Prathama being the 'first entrance', the other two entrances are adorned with snarling lion heads (Simha) and majestic elephants (Gaja). What stands out even today at this fort though is the Ganda Bherundam, the great Vijayanagar Empire's insignia, on the main entrance untouched by time.

After a leisurely exploration of the fort, our next stop was the Church. What started off as a project of Christian compassion in 1914 to provide employment and mitigate the suffering of people during the three-year famine that hit Medak, has brought to this district its

most famous landmark today. Its most recognisable feature of course remains the stained glass windows portraying scenes from the Bible, but what is also distinctive is its 175 feet bell tower.

A 15-minute drive from here and we were at the Pocharam Lake, just in time for sunrise and it was such a serene and peaceful experience that it truly is an oasis for the denizens of the traffic-choked Hyderabad. Calm blue waters, lush green trees, bird song minus the pollution and the crowds, this is one place that guarantees a pleasant morning. Formed from the construction of a bund on the Allair River in 1916, this lake abuts the former hunting ground of the Nizam, now the Pocharam Wildlife Sanctuary.

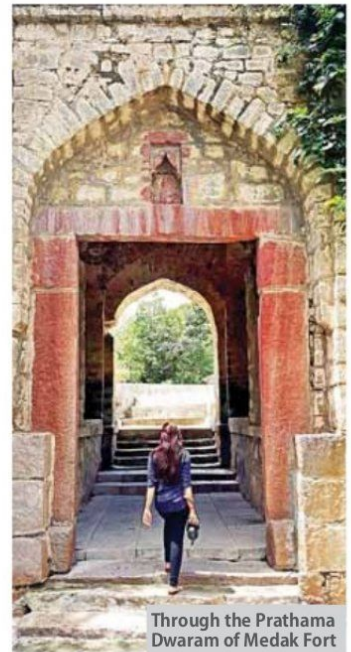
From crowded tourist landmarks to forgotten lakes and heritage discovery, there is more to Medak than meets the eye

Spread over 30,000 acres the sanctuary is also home to an Eco Tourism Centre and we were thrilled to discover that we could drive our car through the four kilometer jungle trail and a guide from the Centre came along to help us spot the different breeds of Chinkara, Nilgai and the Sambar Deer. I had my eyes peeled and my telephoto lens out, waiting to freeze that one moment when I could spot a deer and find the perfect angle to capture the guy in the beautiful sun dappled forest.

On Sundays, Medak wears an air of festivity with families sitting down for a picnic at the manicured lawns of the Church, as children run around to the hum of the choir in the background.



Along the Pocharam Jungle Trail



Through the Prathama Dwaram of Medak Fort

FACT FILE

At a distance of 95 Kilometers from Hyderabad, Medak is only an hour and a half's drive away. Take the NH44 and get off the highway near Kompally Junction and take the Medak Road for pleasant drive via the Narsapur Forest Range.