



With its vast interconnected courtyards, myriad architectural influences and a serene ambience only found in temples, the **Sitaram Bagh temple** overwhelms the visitor with its grace and beauty. WOW! drops into the 185-year-old temple and is charmed as much by its glorious history as by the tranquil aura it radiates...

The Temple that Time Forgot

Tucked away in a quiet corner of the Old City in Hyderabad is the Sitaram Bagh temple. Built by a banker, Puranmal Ganeriwal, in 1832, this centuries' old Shri Sitaram Mandir is a sprawling complex of temples and beautiful airy courtyards spread over 25 acres.

From the main entrance and its imposing facade to the labyrinth of quadrangled courtyards leading you on to endless discoveries, this peaceful temple is a visual treat. Built in a style that is exquisitely distinctive, it combines the North and South Indian styles of architecture with European elements.

Back in the day, Seth Puranmal acquired land in what was then the village of Mallepally, in the outskirts of Hyderabad; laid out an expansive garden (*bagh*) and built a temple for Sita and Ram; thus bestowing on this temple, the moniker Sitaram Bagh. This stretch of land was also the site for a Qutb Shahi mosque, which stands till today, albeit separated from the temple by a concrete wall. On this expanse there was an archaic step well too, one that was connected via subterranean ducts to a well in the mosque. It is around this step-well that the various structures of the temple complex, including a *gaushala*, *ved pathshala* and houses for the Brahmin families were constructed. This entire compound is now a protected monument as proclaimed by the Archaeological Survey of India.

As you enter the main temple, intricately painted doors, imposing archways and massive color blocked doors take you through a series of courtyards. Each one opening up to a *mandapa*, a temple or to just an open-to-sky pavilion enclosed in European style terraces adorned with Rajasthani *jharokhas*. If one courtyard boasts of a South Indian *mandapa* adorned with the *Dasavatar* carved in stone, the next one is a *mandapa* of European columns and fading frescos. Even the two main temples alternate in their styles. While the Sitaram *Mandir* is built in the North Indian style, with an entrance reminiscent of a palace in Rajasthan, the Varadaraja *Mandir* is built in the Dravidian architecture style.

One courtyard boasts of a South Indian mandapa adorned with the Dasavatar carved in stone

The idols of the main deities are in marble, staying true to the prevailing theme of Rajasthan. Little surprise then that the Sitaram Bagh temple is popular with the local Marwaris in and around the Old City.

TEXT AND PHOTOS: NEEHARIKA SATYAVADA

The Hanuman *mandir* though seems cut off from the old world charm of the rest of the temple, sitting away from the maze of the courtyards and almost too close to the boundary wall of the complex. It wasn't until renovations began around 2015, that people even knew just how old or huge the stone idol of Hanumanji was. Only once the foot-long *sindhoor chola* on the sculpture was taken off did they realise that the Hanuman idol was in fact burrowed knee deep in earth. The eight feet by five feet statue was then dug out and reinstated, complete with a new South Indian style *gopuram*. What is distinctive about this addition though is that, facing the four directions are *Abhay Hanuman*, *Veer Hanuman*, *Bhakt Hanuman* and the *Das Mudra*. All of them typically North Indian on a South Indian style *shikhar*.

EUROPEAN FLUTED COLUMNS AND RAJASTHANI JHAROKHAS COME TOGETHER IN A PAVILION

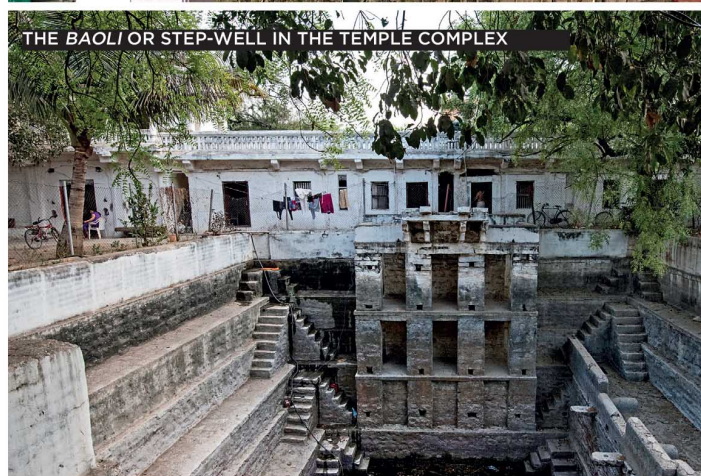


ENTRANCE TO THE SITARAM MANDIR



FADING FRESCOES DEPICTING RAM AND SITA

THE BAOLI OR STEP-WELL IN THE TEMPLE COMPLEX



DON'T MISS

The *baoli* (step-well). It is outside the main Sitaram *mandir* and fenced off, making it in a way quite easy to miss unless you go looking for it. Go straight along the path to the Hanuman temple, right across from the main entrance and you will find it on your left.

DID YOU KNOW?

The famous *Purana Rangji Mandir* in Pushkar was also built by the same Seth Ganeriwal in the year 1844. Yet again in the same unique combination of the South Indian Dravidian style and the North Indian Rajasthani *Vaastukala*.

HANDY TIP

Dress conservatively. For, though not really crowded like the other temples in the city, the management including the security of the temple complex are quite orthodox in their ways. They double check if you are indeed a Hindu before you are even allowed to wander into the first courtyard of the temple!

GETTING THERE

The Sitaram Bagh temple is around 10 minutes from the Moazzam Jahi Market. Take a left from the Sitaram Bagh Bus Stand to enter the walled complex. Google Maps is a handy tool. ■

Mangalhat Road, Nampally

Tel: 98480 55842 (Temple Office)

Timings: 5.30 am - 11.30 am and 5 pm - 8 pm