



WEEKEND
GETAWAY

Take a road trip to Andhra Pradesh's future capital Amaravathi before it turns into a world class city

The Place for Immortals

Amaravathi, which along with Vijayawada, Guntur and Tenali, is going to be the new capital of our sister state Andhra Pradesh, is an ancient Buddhist town in Guntur District. The journey, from a hitherto forgotten little town to the newest world class capital city, in itself calls for a road trip to Amaravathi now, before it transforms into yet another urban sprawl.

Amaravathi, which means 'The Place for Immortals' is 320 kilometers away from Hyderabad, and it takes over five hours by road to get there. The ancient town dates back to the first century, when it was the capital of the Satavahanas. And since then, though forgotten, it never lost its religious significance. Amaravathi is sacred to both, Hindus and Buddhists.

Amongst the places of interest in Amaravathi are the Dhyana Buddha,

the Maha Chaitya Stupa and an Archaeological Museum associated with it; and the Amaralingeswara Swamy Temple. While the Maha Chaitya Buddhist Stupa is from the Ashokan Period, the gigantic Buddha Statue sitting in the *dhyana* (meditative) posture has become the 'Amaravathi Buddha', an icon of this developing city.

The Amaralingeswara Swamy Temple – also known as Amararamam – is one of the five Pancharamam Kshetrams of Shiva, a popular pilgrimage circuit for Hindus in Andhra. Legend has it that this Shiva Lingam, laid here by Indra, the King of Gods himself, wouldn't stop growing. A nail was then affixed to it, in an attempt to stop its growth. But the Lingam started bleeding and today devotees from all across come here to catch a glimpse of that red stain on the head of the Lingam. ■

DON'T MISS:

The Buddhist murals in concentric circles under the Dhyana Buddha. These lead from inside out onto a higher level up close to statue.

MUST TRY:

Puris sold at the shack outside Amaralingeswara Swamy Temple.

GETTING THERE:

Take the NH65 from Hyderabad and head right towards Nalgonda. This is the shortest route to Amaravathi via Miryalguda. Alternatively, one can also take the NH65 to Vijayawada and from there go to Amaravathi.

TEXT AND PHOTO: NEEHARIKA SATYAVADA