



Kingdoms of Southern India

Hindu and Islamic heritage of the Deccan Plateau

17–30 January 2026 (MM 874)

14 days • £7,540

Lecturer: Dr Peter Webb

Islamic architecture in the four cities of the Bahmani sultanate founded in the 14th and 15th centuries (Kalaburagi, Bidar, Bijapur, Golconda).

Hindu architecture of the Chalukyas from the 6th to the 12th centuries (Badami, Aihole, Pattadakal).

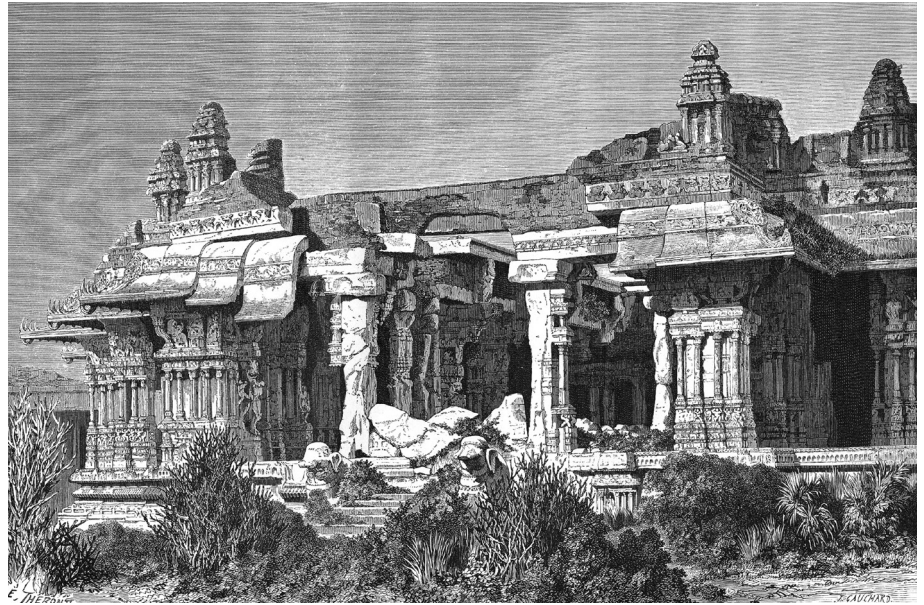
Hyderabad was one of India's largest princedoms and retains a rich artistic heritage.

Hampi was capital of the leading Hindu power from the 14th to 16th centuries, a most beautiful and fascinating centre.

The Deccan plateau of southern India from the medieval to early modern times was the frontier between Muslim powers expanding from the north and the established local Hindu civilisations of the south. The great wealth of the kingdoms, enhanced by the rich mines of diamonds and other precious gems, led to the construction of monumental capitals, palaces and temples. This tour explores the rise and fall of these kingdoms through their substantial architectural remains, many in remote and seldom-visited regions. The interaction, competition and cooperation between Persian and Indian cultures, and Muslim and Hindu beliefs are the themes to explore how history unfolded in the region between 700 and 1700.

The Chalukyas' architectural tradition developed from the early rock-cut caves at Aihole and Badami to the free-standing structural Hindu temples in Pattadakal. This evolution is clearly confined to sacred architecture. By contrast, the Vijayanagara empire, while further developing and standardising the sacred architecture of Hinduism, also developed an imperial idiom, mixing sacred and vernacular elements and gradually integrating Islamic elements borrowed from the emerging sultanates.

Vijayanagara, the City of Victory, was founded in 1336 and its eponymous empire ruled the Deccan until its defeat by the Islamic forces at the battle of Talikota in 1565. This political entity is often regarded by historians as the last Hindu power of the region. It marks the transition between the early Hindu kingdoms, such as the Chalukyas who ruled from the sixth century to the twelfth, and the



Hampi, Dutch wood engraving 1871.

Muslim sultanates which succeeded them and continued to rule until Independence in 1947.

From the fourteenth century onwards, the Deccan saw a sequence of Islamic sultanates, each with its own capital. In 1347, Ala-ud-Din Bahman founded the Bahmani Sultanate, based in Kalaburagi, for nearly a century, before the capital moved to the massive fortifications at Bidar in 1425. Upon the decline of Bidar, new rulers founded independent sultanates in its former territories, notably at Bijapur and Golconda.

The foundation of every new capital gave impetus to the local building traditions. Unlike in north India where most Islamic centres were built on existing Hindu cities, the Deccan sultanates built their capitals anew and a distinct Islamic architecture developed in close communication with styles and culture imported from the Persian world of Iran and Central Asia.

A feature of the tour is time spent visiting places where very few tourists venture. This involves some long coach journeys and two stays in fairly simple accommodation, but the reward is the thrill of deserted citadels with their superb palaces and mosques and impressive fortifications.

Itinerary

Day 1: Hyderabad. Rooms are available at the

hotel from 2.00pm on the 16th January, allowing for an early check-in today. Nothing is planned until lunch. Afternoon walk in Lad Bazar, the centre of the historical city; see the Charminar, the monumental gateway to the new 16th-century palace complex, and the main Islamic monument of the old town. First of three nights in Hyderabad.

Day 2: Golconda. Now within Hyderabad, Golconda was the first Islamic settlement in the area. The citadel of the Qutb Shahis, protected by three concentric walls built 1512–1687, is an excellent example of the Bahmani military architecture. Nearby are grand royal tombs, with bulbous domes and elaborate stucco.

Day 3: Hyderabad. Today's visits focus on Hyderabad after it was annexed by the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in 1687 and subsequently ruled by the Nizam. The Chaumahalla Palace was completed in 1750 and comprises four mansions set around a garden. The Durbar Hall (public meeting space) with its Belgian crystal chandeliers is an indication of the Nizam's wealth and taste for things European. The day ends with a visit to a private collection of Indian paintings and textiles.

Day 4: Bidar. A four-hour drive to Bidar, the capital of the Bahmani Sultanate from 1425 until its annexation to the kingdom of Bijapur in 1619. Sites of particular interest within the

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massive castle are the 16-pillared mosque and the Rangeen Mahal, the Palace of Colours, so called because of the wall tiles and mother-of-pearl inlays. Following a visit to the Mahmud Gawan madrasa, the most impressive Persian-style Islamic monument in South India, continue to Kalaburagi (formerly Gulbarga). First of two nights in Kalaburagi.

Day 5: Kalaburagi. The small town of Kalaburagi is of major historical importance. The first Bahmani capital in the Deccan, it was founded in 1347 before being abandoned in 1424 in favour of Bidar. The Jama Masjid (Friday Mosque), similar to the Córdoba Mezquita in form and dimensions, is unique in south India as it is fully covered and has no minarets; one theory claims it was built as a palace. Visit also the early Islamic tombs of the Bahmani Sultans, and in the afternoon, located a short drive outside of Kalaburagi, the remains of the early 15th-century palace city of Firuzabad.

Day 6 Kalaburagi, Bijapur. After a morning visit to the Sufi shrine of Gisu Daraz, drive to Bijapur. Afternoon walk through the old town to see the many historic buildings as well as the city walls and gates. The Ibrahim Rauza tomb complex consists of two intricately carved twin buildings finished in 1626, the tomb of Ibrahim Adil Shah II and the mosque. First of two nights in Bijapur.

Day 7: Bijapur. The day explores the main mosque, the Gol Gumbaz, a monumental domed tomb, and highlights of the many surviving palaces, tombs and water features of Bijapur built during its heyday as capital of the Adilshahi Sultans.

Day 8: Bijapur, Badami, Aihole. In the morning we leave the Islamic region and drive to the centre of the former Hindu Chalukya kingdom, Badami, now a charming small town beside a lake overlooked by rugged red sandstone cliffs. Scattered around the village of Aihole are numerous Jain and Hindu temples, a clear sign of its religious significance from the 6th to the 12th centuries. The sculptures of the Durga temple are among the finest of the Chalukya period. First of two nights in Badami.

Day 9: Badami, Pattadakal. The World Heritage Site of Pattadakal near to Badami is celebrated for embodying the last stage of Chalukyan architecture, 8th–9th centuries. This is a unique site where the three distinct styles of Indian religious architecture are

found in close proximity. Badami, the capital of the early Chalukyas from the 6th to the 8th centuries, has superb examples of early sacred architecture, both rock-cut and free-standing. Moreover, the sculptural programme of the cave temples provides a fascinating insight into the Hindu iconographic development of this period.

Day 10: Badami, Hampi. Morning visit to the early Chalukyan temples at Mahakuta, followed by a drive through remote and rural countryside to Kamalapura, our base to visit the World Heritage Site of Hampi. First of three nights near Hampi.

Day 11: Hampi. The ruins of the Vijayanagara capital, 1336–1565, lie in a remarkable landscape strewn with granite boulders and spread along the Tungbhadra river. The extensive site is organised around two main areas, the Sacred Centre with its concentration of temples and shrines, and the Royal Centre. The Sacred Centre is close to the river and includes the Virupaksha Temple in the middle of the village and Hemakuta Hill with its numerous shrines and commanding views of the area.

Day 12: Hampi. Following a visit to the Vitthala temple, today's visits focus on the Royal Centre and its secular buildings. Most striking is the Lotus Mahal in the Zenana enclosure with its cusped arches and pyramidal towers, a superb example of the syncretic architecture of Vijayanagara.

Day 13: Hubli, Hyderabad. Drive to Hubli airport for an afternoon flight to Hyderabad. Overnight Hyderabad.

Day 14: Hyderabad. Car transfers to Hyderabad airport can be arranged for your onward journey.

Lecturer

Dr Peter Webb. Lecturer in Arabic at Leiden University and a specialist in the cultural history of the Muslim world. Peter has travelled extensively across the Middle East and Central Asia and has studied at the Universities of Damascus and Isfahan. He held a fellowship at the Museum of Islamic Art, Berlin, where he researched Muslim architecture and Arabic calligraphy, studying monuments of medieval Egypt and Uzbekistan. In Oman, he studied pre-Islamic sites and local shrines dedicated

to ancient Arabian prophets in as part of his current research focus on the legends and history of Arabia. His publications include *Imagining the Arabs* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016), a comprehensive exploration of the Arab people in early Islam, and *The Arab Thieves* (Brill, 2019), a critical study of Arabian outlaw tales.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £7,540. **Single occupancy:** £9,030.

Included: arrival and departure airport car transfers; domestic flight with IndiGo Airlines: Hubli to Hyderabad; travel by private air-conditioned coach and people carriers; accommodation as described below; breakfasts, 13 lunches (including 1 packed lunch) and 12 dinners with wine or beer (except with packed meals), water, coffee, tea; all admissions; all tips; the services of the lecturer, tour manager and local guides.

Flights: flights from London to Hyderabad are not included in the price of the tour. We send the recommended flight options when they come into range (by March 2025) and ask that you make your own flight reservation.

Visas: required for most foreign nationals, and not included in the price of the tour. We will advise all participants of the process.

Accommodation. *Aside from those in Hyderabad and Hampi, the remaining hotels on this tour are less than luxurious, but they are adequately clean and comfortable and all the rooms have en suite bathrooms.* **The Leela, Hyderabad** (theleela.com): modern 5-star hotel located in the affluent Banjara Hills neighbourhood. **Lumbinis Grand Hotel, Kalaburagi** (lumbinisgrandhotel.com): basic 3-star hotel, though the best in town for service; rooms are clean with en suite facilities. **The Fern Residency, Bijapur** (fernhotels.com): simple but friendly business hotel, similar to Kalaburagi. **Badami Court Hotel, Badami** (hotelbadamicourt.com): a pleasant hotel with willing service around a garden with a small pool. **Evolve Back Kamalapura Palace, Hampi** (evolveback.com): 5-star luxury resort, located 9 km from Vijayanagara World Heritage Site.

How strenuous? A good level of fitness is essential. Unless you enjoy entirely unimpaired mobility, cope with everyday walking and stair-climbing without difficulty and are

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reliably sure-footed, this tour is not for you. A rough indication of the minimum level of fitness required is that you ought to be able to walk briskly at about three miles per hour for at least half an hour, and undertake a walk at a more leisurely pace for an hour or two unaided. Uneven ground and irregular paving are standard. Unruly traffic and the busy streets of larger cities require some vigilance. There are fairly steep ascents to hilltop forts and temples and some long coach journeys during which facilities are limited and may be of poor quality. Most sites have some shade but the Indian sun is strong, even in the cooler seasons. Average distance by coach per day: 62 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.

Combine this tour with: *Architecture of the British Raj*, 3–14 February 2026.