

BANGALORE

→ SOUNDING OUT

Bangalorean resident Smita Bellur provides some cultural insight on one of India's principal and fastest growing cities

Bengaluru (the official name for Bangalore) is India's fifth largest city, with a population of over six million. The capital of the state of Karnataka, it is known as India's IT hub and symbolises India's growth story.

Folklore has it that a 11th-century king, lost on a hunting expedition, reached the hut of an old woman who served him boiled beans (*benda kaalu*) and the king named the place '*benda-kaal-uru*' (meaning 'the town of baked beans' in Kannada), which evolved into Bengaluru.

Up until a couple of decades ago, Bengaluru was known as the Garden City because of its large, lush green spaces – such as Cubbon Park and Lalbagh Botanical Gardens – but with the city's recent economic boom and rapid urbanisation, there is a great deal less greenery in India's buzzing 'technopolis'.

Today, with the influx of young software professionals from across India, a Bangalorean's musical taste can lie anywhere from head-banging heavy metal to sobered down *bhajans* (Indian devotional songs) or romantic ballads. Thanks to technology, Bengaluru has seen a spurt in musical activity over the last decade, allowing every genre to grow.

Although Bengaluru may lack some of the charm of other Indian cities, it still offers visitors a plethora of beautiful and historical sights. Tourists can marvel at the grand State Secretariat building, Vidhana Soudha; the high court, Attara Kacheri – known for its superb gothic architecture and Tipu Sultan's summer palace. Other places to look out for, just outside the city, are the famous 400-year-old Big Banyan Tree, the Bannerghatta National Park, classical dance academy Nrityagram and folk art museum Janapada Loka. There is

also the princely state of Mysore, a classical hub famous for the festivities that take place during the Dasara festival, as well as the exquisitely carved temples of nearby Belur and Halebid.

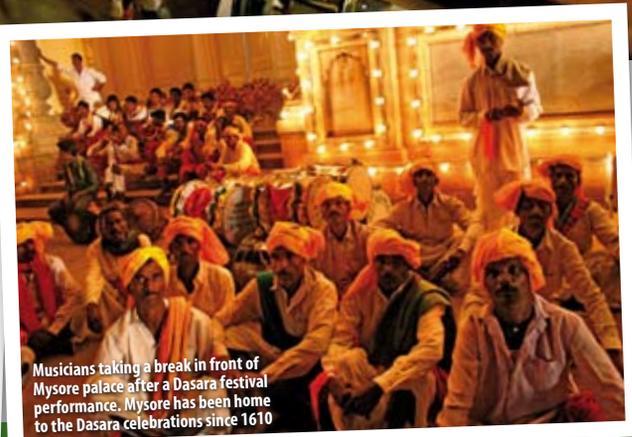
While the Department of Kannada of Culture hosts festivals in Karnataka like the Mysore Dasara and Hampi Utsava, there are several *Sangeeta Sabhas* (non-government local organisations) that promote classical music by hosting free concerts. Institutions like the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Chowdiah Memorial Hall, and Bangalore School of Music also actively organise music shows.

The local branches of the Alliance Française and Goethe Institut both play a very important role in world music through their cultural exchange and art promotion initiatives, broadening Bengaluru's musical spectrum with jazz, retro, funk and electronic music.



Organised chaos at City Market bus stop in Bangalore. It's difficult to believe that this was once known as the Garden City...

Raghu Dixit's performance to 5,000 inmates at the central jail in Bangalore last November was the first concert in an Indian prison



Musicians taking a break in front of Mysore palace after a Dasara festival performance. Mysore has been home to the Dasara celebrations since 1610

WHERE WILL THE RHYTHM TAKE YOU?

Check out www.songlines.co.uk/music-travel or p27 to seek out the trip that will tickle your musical tastebuds





Left: Revellers at the popular Opus nightclub
Below: fusion group Lehera performing at the Bangalore School of Music



VENUES AND CLUBS

Chowdiah Memorial Hall

This violin-shaped hall was named after Shir T Chowdiah, the famous Carnatic violinist, and is today the preferred auditorium for many of Bangalore's larger cultural events. This air-conditioned hall has a seating capacity of 1,045, good acoustics, sound system and power back-up as well. Among the popular maestros who have performed here are Ravi Shankar and the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

16th Cross, GD Park Extension, 2nd Main Road, Malleswaram, +91 80 23445810/23443956

Gayana Samaja

One of the oldest cultural organisations, Gayana Samaja plays host to Carnatic, Hindustani, devotional and folk music as well as Harikathe, theatre and various forms of Indian dance. With good acoustics and a capacity of about 700, this is a highly sought-after venue for classical performances.

KR Road, Basavanagudi, +91 80 26506049

Kyra

Kyra is an ideal place for unwinding with good food and great music. Designed for performances, this hang-out boasts good sound and a platform for all genres of music. The cuisine is a mix of continental, Indian and Chinese with wines, white spirits and cocktails. Trilok Gurtu, Raghu Dixit and Shubha Mudgal have all performed here.

2001, Kaatima Centre, 100 feet road, Indiranagar, +91 80 43389292, www.kyra.in

RECORDS/MUSIC STORES

Calypso

A cosy, well stocked music retailer in Jaynagar whose wide variety ranges from Western pop to Indian classical, spiritual music and movies too.

242, Manandi Arch, 9th Main, 3rd Block, Jaynagar, +91 80 41210889/22452368

Ravindra Kalakshetra

Built in memory of the great poet Rabindranath Tagore, to commemorate his centenary, this state-owned 830 seat capacity hall is right in the heart of the city with ample parking space. Dr L Subramaniam, Prabha Atre and Vishwa Mohan Bhatt have all performed here.

Kannada Bhavan, JC Road, +91 80 22221271

Alliance Française de Bangalore

An Indo-French institution, this important language centre is also an arts venue acting as a cultural bridge. Located in the heart of Bengaluru in green cosy environs, Alliance Française has an auditorium that seats 250 and is a good platform for music, dance and theatre. It has its own café and parking too. Among the popular musicians who have performed here are Thermal and a Quarter, Debashish Bhattacharya and l'Ensemble Sirocco.

PB 108, Thimmaiah Road, Opposite UNI Building, Vasanthnagar, +91 80 4080 8181/4123 1340, bangalore.afindia.org

Opus

If you are looking for an evening of music and Goan cuisine in a relaxing environment then Opus is your place. Started by Gina and Carlton Braganza, Opus is a place for music ranging from college bands to Western classical, jazz, fusion and Indian classical music.

4, 1st Main, Off Palace Cross Road, Chakravathy Layout, Vasanth Nagar, +91 9844030198, www.myopus.in

Reynolds

Reynolds is a one-stop shop for all music, sound, lighting and concert requirements. The 30-plus-year-old store started out selling musical instruments and has today diversified into selling and installing pro-audio systems and concert lighting.

**+91 80 2221 8651/2221 5663
www.reynoldsonline.com/home.htm**

FESTIVALS

Fireflies Festival of Sacred Music

Currently in its seventh year, this festival takes place in suburban Bengaluru at the Fireflies Ashram off Kanakapura road. It is held on third Saturday of February every year in an open-air amphitheatre. An all-night festival showcasing folk rock, soul fusion, nuances of Sufi, *qawwali*, folk, percussion, jazz and folk dances of Karnataka. Fireflies is extremely popular with Bangaloreans.

geethanavale@gmail.com

Bengaluru Habba

A mega festival that aims to reinstate Bengaluru as the culture capital and not just an IT capital, it features more than 3,000 artists over a fortnight in different venues across the city (including parks, temples, malls and the Palace grounds) in music, dance, film, street theatre and sports. It is usually held in December and organised by the Artistes Foundation for Arts.

info@bengaluruhabba.co.in, +91 80 2361 0920/2361 4443

Karnatic Classical festivals

There are many Karnatic festivals held in Bengaluru – highlights include Thyagaraja Festival by Gayana Samaja and the Sree Rama Seva Mandali's Rama Navami festival held at Fort High school grounds.

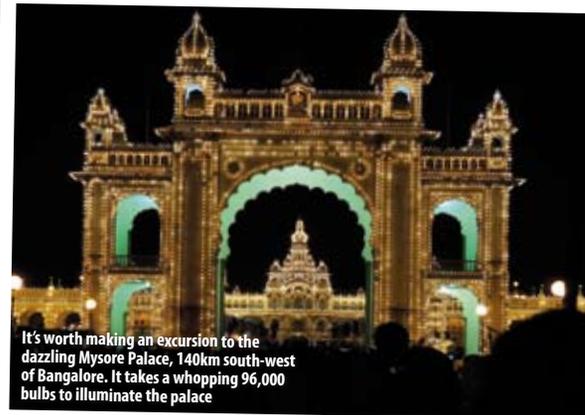
www.kutcheribuzz.com

Hindustani Classical festivals

Held throughout the year, many are all-night festivals featuring multiple artists. Admission is usually free and all are welcome. Prominent festivals include the Gururao Deshpande Punyatithi held usually in February, the BKF Mallikarjun Mansur festival held in September and Devnandan Ubhayaker Yuva Sangeet Utsav held in August.



A Dollu Kunitha performance at the annual all-night Fireflies Festival. Dollu Kunitha is a popular drum dance of Karnataka and is accompanied by singing



It's worth making an excursion to the dazzling Mysore Palace, 140km south-west of Bangalore. It takes a whopping 96,000 bulbs to illuminate the palace