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If You're Headed For Bangalore

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Once known primarily as a haven for Indian retirees, Bangalore today is the leading outsourcing hub for tech support and banking and a premier destination for business travelers. The city is a throbbing mix of tradition and modernity, where glass buildings tower over old stone bungalows and luxury cars share the road with rickshaws.

WALKING TOURS For about \$12 a person, entrepreneur Arun Pai, who knows his native city inside and out, will take you down Mahatma Gandhi Road and other famous Bangalore streets, relating anecdotes about the monuments, buildings, and parks along the way. He also leads a Sunday "Victorian Bangalore Walk," which highlights landmarks of the Raj, a "Green Heritage Walk" through the Lal Bagh Botanical Gardens, a "Beer Walk" through the city's many pubs, and a "Coffee Walk" to taste regional varieties. "Bangalore is a real coffee center, with many kinds grown within a 100-mile radius," Pai says. His company, Bangalore Walks (bangalorewalks.com), also offers customized tours for groups of 8 to 10 for \$25 to \$50 per person.

SHOPPING Long before Western-style shopping malls started sprouting up about five years ago, Bangalore had Commercial Street. For anyone interested in spending a couple of hours trying out their bargaining skills, a visit to this colorful, crowded lane is a must. You can buy anything from chunky silver jewelry and embroidered Kashmiri shawls to heavy wooden furniture and brass statues of Hindu gods and goddesses. There are stores selling semi-precious stones and traditional Indian dresses as well as many stands offering plastic and glass bangles. Sandalwood curios or incense sticks are a must, as is the soft-as-butter Mysore silk, available in every color you could want and priced at around \$20 a yard for the best-quality material.

FOOD Karavalli at the Taj Gateway Hotel serves the excellent cuisine of India's southwest Malabar Coast, featuring succulent seafood curries in spicy coconut gravies, eaten with rice or rice pancakes off banana-leaf-lined plates. The restaurant also offers chicken and pork specialties from Goa and Mangalore and many fish and prawn delicacies from Kerala, India's southernmost state. A meal for two with drinks runs about \$70.

DRINKS If you're looking to relax after a day of meetings, head over to the Blue Bar at the Taj West End Hotel. Adjacent to the Blue Ginger, the hotel's fine Vietnamese restaurant, the Blue Bar serves cocktails and tropical drinks outdoors under a thatched roof. By Savita Iyer

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