

hindustan**times**

SUNDAY MAGAZINE, MUMBAI, AUGUST 22, 2010
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BRUNCH

Hidden cities

We live in our cities;
work in them; love in them...
But do we know them? Not really.
So trek with us on four
unusual walks in Mumbai,
Delhi, Kolkata and Bengaluru,
and revel in what was revealed

Mumbai: To market, to market

Delhi: Blast from the past

Kolkata: Theatre of life

Bengaluru: Community living

COVER STORY

Hidden Cities

MOST OF US ARE IN OUR CITIES with one idea – getting ahead. We are constantly looking forward, making our cities reflect the way we would *like* to live, not the way we *do* live or once lived. Which is a pity. Because our cities were made by people just like us, who looked forward, just like us, and made these urban areas the cities we love today. Traces of the older generations of Delhiites, Mumbaikars, Kolkatans and Bangaloreans still remain, however. And many people have made it their business to make us notice them, by organising ‘heritage walks’ – taking us through areas of our cities that show how, once, we might have lived. Join us on four unusual ‘walks’ through Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata and Bengaluru and really, *really* see your city.



MUMBAI: BHULESHWAR

To market, to market

If you have any serious claim to being a true blue Mumbaikar, you’ve probably been to Mangaldas Market at least once. But as you choose your bolt of cotton or chikan or whatever has taken your fancy and pay for it, the bright red account books used by the shopkeeper will most likely have gone unnoticed.

These books, called Rojmel, however, are fascinating. At the top of each page (which is blank, unlike the ruled account books in which students of

accounting so laboriously do their sums), are the dates of the calendars used by each of the communities that trade in this market (and in Bhuleshwar).

So there’s a date in the English, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Parsi and Islamic calendars, along with the times of sunrise and sunset for each day. These are printed, the proprietor of Mahesh Kagdi and Printers tells me, so that orthodox Jains like himself can time their meals for between those times.

I nod, astounded, and buy one of the books on the spur of the moment (₹100), even as Deepa Krishnan, the owner of Magic Tours of India, an outfit that organises heritage and bazaar walks in Mumbai and other cities, beams at me.

She’s glad to have proved the point she made to me at the beginning of our walk – that no matter how many times you visit Bhuleshwar, you will always find something new and interesting in its narrow,

PANJRA POL: This animal shelter may well be the oldest in the city – it is said to have been founded in 1834 – and is an integral part of life in the area. It’s home to all animals. My guide tells me that people who live in the vicinity bring their children here every evening to feed the animals.



FOR THE GODS

A Rojmel (top), showing the dates of several community calendars. Prayer offerings (above), including three types of lotuses, datura and two types of tulsi



MADHAV BAUG: Situated on the road leading to CP Tank, Madhav Baug was built in 1874 by a Kapol Vani, Narottamdas Varjivandas. Today, the complex is run by a trust and houses a Laxmi Narayan temple, a gaushala and a school, as well as the offices of the trust. Mahatma Gandhi delivered a speech here in 1919. When I got here in the afternoon, the temple had a curtain drawn across it, so that its deities could enjoy their nap undisturbed.

twisting and crowded gullies.

That's certainly true for me, as I emerge from the city's most famous cloth market. But before we step back out into Bhuleshwar, there's a surprise in store for Krishnan. As I raise my head to ask her what is located on the first floor level of the shops (it's a storage area), my eye is caught by a sign that says 'Extra Gully'. When I point it out to Krishnan, she is amazed. "I've never noticed that before," she says, squinting past the signboard to look at the one just beyond it. That reads '1st Lane', and is meant to orient visitors within the market (and locate a particular shop), but Extra Gully is an oddity, and a puzzle that remains unsolved.

Bhuleshwar, however, is all about the odd, the unexpected and the unusual. It's a market (or a collection of markets, depending on how you look at it), where you can buy things you certainly can't find at your local department store. Some of the big markets in Bhuleshwar (like Mangaldas Market and Zaveri Bazaar) and others in the vicinity (like Crawford Market and the lanes off Mohammed Ali Road) are well known as places to sweat through when you want to buy anything from a million red beads for a mandap decoration to wedding jewellery for specific communities, goat's cheese to add to an exotic salad and even return gifts for your child's birthday party.

But it's the small shops that command my attention on this trip. As a sample, I notice cowdung patties (for use in pujas), soap made without animal fat (sold to Jains) and miniature clothes and jewellery (for decorating household idols). There's exotic kitsch (bindi wallets, complete with mirror and plastic sheets to hold any number of bindis), run-of-the-mill objects (like imitation jewellery, including copies of anything you have seen your favourite actress wear) and eyebrow-raising stuff (a bright



BINDI WALLET: Tanvi bindi shop, at Capital Market in Sutar Chawl, looks like it has every kind of bindi known to womankind. But that's not all it offers. It also has bindi wallets - fat purses that look identical to regular wallets, but instead have a round mirror and plastic leaves inside to hold an extensive collection of bindis. NRIs and foreigners go wild over these wallets, buying them to hold ATM and credit cards and the like.

red thong displayed prominently at an underclothing shop just outside a Shiva temple). Krishnan tells me she's even seen datoon on sale.

That's eminently fitting, as Bhuleshwar evolved from the 1700s onwards as a bazaar locality, according to *Bombay: The Cities Within* (written by Sharada Dwivedi and Rahul Mehrotra). They add that Bhuleshwar and the areas surrounding it (Kalbadevi, Girgaum, Kamathipura and Nagpada, among others), emerged as "the heart of the Indian town, where residential, commercial, social and religious activities were integrated into a tightly knit urban fabric as in a traditional Indian town". Krishnan explains that this 'Native Town', which developed outside the walls of the Bombay Fort, grew along community lines (there's a Hindu, Jain,



PUJA SHOP: I was so engrossed by the products on sale that I completely forgot to ask the proprietor the name of his store. Located on the lane leading to the Panjra Pol, it sells costumes and jewellery for religious idols, from miniatures to almost life-size sets. The shop is frequented by trustees of various temples across the city - in most cases, the clothing and jewellery of the idols at the temples are changed daily.

Muslim and small Jewish quarter) and still retains a way of life that is not seen in other parts of the city.

That's more and more noticeable as you walk deeper into the labyrinth of streets. Along Bhuleshwar Road, which is practically lined end to end by temples, we find a man selling offerings to the various gods - three kinds of lotuses, Datura fruits and two kinds of tulsi. Even the foodstuff here follows the rhythm of the seasons and the festivals, and during pickling time a profusion of vendors spring up, selling vegetables meant to be pickled, and freshly pickled produce as well.

Just as my head is spinning from all the new information I've absorbed in the last two hours, deliverance comes in the shape of Madhav Baug, built in 1874 by a Kapol Vani, Narottamdas Varjivandas, in memory of his father. Beyond its impressive gate is a sprawling courtyard, and something I never expected to find in Bhuleshwar - complete silence. It's the perfect environment to mull over the contradictions within Bhuleshwar - and speculate on what I might discover on my next trip within.

— MIGNONNE DSOUZA

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(You can explore Bhuleshwar on your own - just carry water, wear stout walking shoes and sensible clothing - or hire a guide. Many private operators run tours in this area)