



Walks around the city cover its Art Deco precincts, the nooks and gullies of Kala Ghoda and Fort, and Dharavi Island to explore its East Indian heritage

Heritage Hide

With the city opening up, join these walking tours that will help you discover its rich architectural heritage

ELA DAS

WHEN it comes to its architecture, Mumbai is a city of contradictions. Between the hustle and bustle, lie promenades lined with extraordinarily designed residences, offices, schools, banks, cinemas, hospitals and even a petrol pump (at Ballard Estate) built at the turn of the last century. The most popular are the Art Deco buildings, which areas like Marine Drive and Oval Maidan are famous for. Gaining prominence during the First World War, the sleek geometric lines paired with bold vibrant colours evolved as a design that would provide maximum style at a minimum cost.

"It's safe to say that collectively, Mumbai has the largest number of Art Deco buildings in the world," proclaims Atul Kumar, founder and trustee of Art Deco Mumbai. What curiously started as an Instagram handle in the middle of 2016 eventually saw a loyal community steadily exchanging pictures, questions or sharing stories of heritage homes they lived in. Having spent decades working on conserving and advocating restorations of heritage structures across the

city, today, Kumar chronicles the history of this design movement one building at a time.

"We can't rely on the government or wait around for policies when it comes to conserving our architectural treasures. People living in these buildings don't always know much about its history, but are thirsty to learn more. When they find out that an eminent architect built their home or a peculiar design element in a room is worth a small fortune, they start to take a keener interest in preserving and protecting the spaces they live in," he suggests.

The non-profit initiative run by Kumar and his team also regularly organises walks around the city's Art Deco precincts. During the pandemic, however, these are conducted online, with tours comprising Deco on the Oval, Swadeshi Moderne in Fort and Marine Drive Deco. There's also Expression of Indian Identity, which explores the décoratif elements in Matunga. Different from its South Mumbai counterpart, this neighbourhood houses unique Indian Deco symbols with font and script details in Hindi and Gujarati.

But beyond this streamlined décoratif design, our city also boasts of other colonial-style movements ranging from Indo-Saracenic and Gothic to Neo-classical. When architect and restorer Nikhil Mahashur hosted a lecture on heritage architecture in the Kala Ghoda precinct, he noticed double the number of students turning up for the walking tour the next day. "They were more interested in seeing the minute architectural details and decorative façades in person than hearing about it in a class," he recalls. An interest in the subject was further fuelled during the time he was restoring Harpal

House in Kala Ghoda. This gave him the idea to start Walkitecture for people to discover the history of the city through its buildings and streetscapes.

"We often hear about London looking a lot like Mumbai, only cleaner!" jokes Mahashur, explaining that this isn't far from the truth. "What is now Kala Ghoda was known as Frere's Town named after Henry Bartle Frere, who was the Governor of Bombay from 1862 to 1867. At the time, the city was also witnessing the cotton boom, and with it, came more and more traders pouring into the city from the West. Frere, in turn, wanted to redevelop the city and all its public facilities, and brought in a committee of British architects for the job. This is why, today, we have such a rich and varied mix of Western European styles in just one small district."

What started as a passion project five years ago for architectural students at the colleges he gave lectures in, is now open to a wide audience on any day of the week. Walkitecture comprises tours across the nooks and gullies of Kala Ghoda, Fort, Colaba, Oval Maidan and Marine Drive.

For some, the city's history is closely linked to their indigenous heritage. As a member of an indigenous community, East Indian Mogan Rodrigues has been hosting heritage walks that focus on discovering and creating more awareness about his sometimes-misunderstood community. "There's a lot of information about our unique community that's slowly getting wiped out. Not much has been written about us nor documented," he laments.

Largely influenced by the Portuguese, the community's customs, culture and traditions have blended elements of the European country with the local ways of Maharashtra. To highlight these nuances, Rodrigues conducts day-long tours on Dhar-



avi Island (home to several East Indians) where one can witness their village set up, their professions, ports, churches and homes against the island's tropical landscape, beaches and seaside cliffs. "The first thing

you'll notice is the Portuguese-Mediterranean influence in the architecture of each of these homes. With red-tiled roofs, stucco walls and arches juxtaposed against brightly-coloured façades, these lesser-known

heritage structures are a celebration of the last remaining bastions of the community." At the end of the tour, visitors can gorge on an authentic East Indian lunch. Through each walk, the trio notes how Mumbaikars love their city despite the infrastructural challenges thrown at them daily. "Since no one has, till date, published these intricate bits of information on a formal or public platform, we have to rely on storytelling to learn about our heritage structures," says Kumar, adding, "People are always open to conversations and dis-

covering more about the homes they live in or the landmarks they've grown up around... They're delighted when they come across this growing community that's become a rich resource of information."



NIKHIL MAHASHUR



MOGAN RODRIGUES



ATUL KUMAR

WHAT: Walkitecture

WHERE: 9820318042 (Nikhil Mahashur)

FOR: Prices start at ₹500, but are free for all students



EVER WONDER WHICH COLONIAL STYLE OF ARCHITECTURE YOU'RE LOOKING AT? HERE'S A READY RECKONER

ART DECO

- » Eros Cinema
- » Breach Candy Hospital
- » New India Assurance Building
- » Campion School
- » Government Law College
- » BEST Bhavan

INDO SARACENIC

- » The Taj Mahal Palace
- » Western Railway Head Office
- » Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya
- » Readymoney Mansion

GOTHIC

- » Bombay High Court
- » David Sassoon Library and Reading Room
- » Elphinstone Building
- » Old Secretariat

NEOCLASSICAL

- » Army and Navy Building
- » Lansdowne House
- » Schoen House
- » Seth Gangalal V Mulji Nandlal Pyau
- » Church of St Andrew and St Columba

WHAT: East Indian Heritage Tour of Dharavi Island

WHERE: 9867403957 (Mogan Rodrigues)

FOR: Price per person with a meal is ₹1,600

WHAT: Art Deco Mumbai

WHERE: www.artdecomumbai.com

FOR: A recommended donation is ₹1,000 per walk

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