

## Exploring Mumbai's Art Deco, A Century Of Architectural Gems

*With Mumbai home to the world's second-largest collection of Art Deco buildings, here's how to access and appreciate them.*

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Soona Mahal, Mumbai | Image credit: DesiBoy101, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Art Deco in Mumbai is more than an architectural style. It's said to be a visual diary of the metropolis stepping confidently into modernity during the early 20th

century. Along sweeping boulevards and sunlit maidans, these heritage buildings express optimism through symmetry, streamlined forms, and playful ornamentation. From residential blocks to cinemas, it reflects how global design ideas were adapted to a tropical, coastal city with its own cultural rhythm. For a visual deep dive, also check out our web story on the iconic Art Deco buildings of South Mumbai.

## History & cultural significance



Mumbai's Art Deco heritage | Image credit: © Vyacheslav Argenberg, CC BY 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

After the ornateness and opulence of Art Nouveau, the world was ready for a more modern design aesthetic. This first found expression at the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris in 1925. Minimalistic yet glamorous, using new materials and ideas, Art Deco was a revolutionary concept.

Art Deco is identified by its clean lines, curved balconies, geometric patterns, nautical themes, windows with eyebrow overhangs, stylised lettering in signage, and façades and grilles featuring designs that include zigzags, chevrons, frozen fountains, sunbursts, or waves etc.

By the 1930s, Bombay (as Mumbai was called at the time) was experiencing economic growth and social change. Stepping into its main character era, bringing in cosmopolitan residents who aspired to be global citizens, it was influenced by international trends from Europe and the United States. A great spate of building led to an explosion of Art Deco in Mumbai. It blended modern materials like reinforced concrete with Indian motifs, climate-responsive features, and local craftsmanship. This fusion made Mumbai culturally significant, as it represented a break from colonial Gothic styles and symbolised a forward-looking Indian identity.

## About Mumbai's Art Deco



Art Deco buildings along Marine Drive, Mumbai | Image credit: DesiBoy101, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Today, Mumbai is said to have the second-largest collection of Art Deco buildings in the world after Miami in the USA. 'Bombay Deco', as the residents like to call it, refer to its distinctive clusters, especially the 35 buildings that were inscribed in UNESCO's World Heritage List in 2018, which are located around Oval Maidan and Marine Drive in South Mumbai. These areas showcase cohesive streetscapes where buildings share a common design language.

But Art Deco in Mumbai extends much further, with perhaps over 200 buildings built in this style. You can also find them in areas such as Breach Candy, Nepeansea Road, Cumballa Hill, Malabar Hill, Byculla, Girgaon, and down Mohammed Ali Road. But, contrary to popular thought that Art Deco in Mumbai is limited to the island city, many clusters of these buildings can be found in areas such as Shivaji Park, Dadar, Matunga, Mahim, and in the northern suburbs of Bandra, Santacruz, Vile Parle, Malad, and Kandivali as well.

## Famous Art Deco buildings in Mumbai



Eros Cinema | Image credit: Priya Pathiyan

Several landmarks define Art Deco in Mumbai, each with its own personality. Iconic residential buildings and cinemas feature rounded corners, ziggurat-style setbacks, porthole windows, and stylised floral patterns. What makes a famous example of Art Deco in Mumbai stand out is the balance between functionality and flair; buildings designed for ventilation and light, while still making a strong visual statement. These structures demonstrate how Mumbai adapted luxury and glamour to everyday urban life.

Here are a few examples to get you started on your journey with Art Deco in Mumbai.

- **Cinema halls:** Regal (Mumbai's oldest Art Deco cinema hall), Eros (with the most stunning ziggurat architecture), Metro, Liberty
- **Hotels:** ICONIQA Hotel Mumbai International Airport, Fairmont Mumbai, Astoria Hotel Mumbai, Ritz Hotel Mumbai, Chateau Windsor Hotel, West End Hotel, Sea Green Hotel, Hotel National- Grant Road, Strand Hotel, Hotel Marine Plaza
- **Commercial buildings:** New India Assurance Building, HSBC Building, Reserve Bank of India, The Cricket Club of India
- **Residential buildings:** Rajjab Mahal, Soona Mahal, Empress Court, Dhanraj Mahal
- **Educational institutions:** Walsingham House School, Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, Ruia College

## Tours and walks

Guided walks are an engaging way to experience. Typically held in the morning, these tours last around 1-2 hours and focus on architectural details, social history, and storytelling. Prices vary depending on the organiser, but many heritage groups offer reasonably priced options. Tours often include curated routes, archival photographs, and expert commentary.

**Deco Walks** by Art Deco Mumbai are a great way to get acquainted with this unique architectural heritage. The organisation runs curated walking tours focused specifically on Art Deco in Mumbai, including routes around Oval Maidan, Marine Drive, and Matunga. Typical tours range from 60 to 120 minutes and are led by experts in architecture and heritage.

## Preservation & conservation efforts



HSBC Building, Mumbai | Image credit: DesiBoy101, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Preserving Art Deco in Mumbai has become a priority as awareness about its global importance rises. Conservationists, residents' associations, and civic bodies collaborate to restore façades, regulate renovations, and document architectural details.

Art Deco in Mumbai benefits from heritage listing protections, which help maintain the character of entire precincts rather than isolated buildings. These efforts ensure that such buildings remain a living heritage rather than a frozen museum piece.

Taking photographs is usually fine in public spaces, but be mindful of residents' privacy and space.

## **Tips to explore better**



Art Deco building in Churchgate area, Mumbai Image credit: DesiBoy101, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Art Deco in Mumbai is easily accessible via local trains, buses, and taxis, with Churchgate station on the Western Railway line being a key gateway.

When exploring, wear comfortable footwear and carry water, as walking is the best way to absorb details.

Respect private residences. Many Art Deco buildings in Mumbai are homes. Avoid touching façades or entering buildings without permission.

Slow down. These heritage buildings reveals its beauty through small details like railings, fonts, and colour palettes.

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