

## Golconda Fort

Golconda fort is one of the most magnificent fortress complex in India which lies on the western outskirts around 11km from Hyderabad, the capital of the state of Andhra Pradesh. The history of Golconda Fort dates back to the early 13th century, when this south eastern part of the country was ruled by the Kakatiyas. The bulk of the ruins of this fort, date from the time of the Qutub Shahi kings, who had ruled this area in the 16th and 17th century. The fortress is built on a granite hill 120 metres high, surrounded by massive crenellated ramparts.



Shepherd's Hill or 'Golla Konda', as it was known in Telugu, has an interesting story behind it. In 1143, on the rocky hill called 'Mangalavaram', a shepherd boy came across an idol. This was conveyed to the Kakatiya king, who was ruling at that time. The king got a mud fort constructed around the holy spot and nearly 200 years later Bahamini rulers (1364) took possession of the fort. From 1507 over a period of 62 years the mud fort was expanded by the the first three Qutub Shahi kings into a massive fort of granite, extending around 5km in circumference, which has been a silent witness to many historic events. The illustrious rule of the Qutub Shahis at Golconda ended in 1687, with the conquest of the fort by the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, who almost completely destroyed the fort and left it in a heap of pathetic ruins.

Golconda consists of four distinct forts with a 10km long outer wall having 87 semi circular bastions; some still mounted with cannons, eight gateways, four drawbridges and number of royal apartments & halls, temples, mosques, magazines, stables etc, inside. The lowest of these is the outermost enclosure into which we enter by the 'Fateh Darwaza' (Victory gate, so called after Aurangzeb's triumphant army marched in through this gate) studded with giant iron spikes ( to prevent elephants from battering them down) near the south-eastern corner. At Fateh Darwaza can be experienced the fantastic acoustical effects, characteristic of the engineering marvels at Golconda. A hand clap at a certain point below the dome at the entrance reverberates and can be heard clearly at the 'Bala Hisar' pavilion, the highest point almost a kilometre away. This acted as the warning note to residents in case of danger though now it is a mere amusing diversion to visitors.



Of the great gateways, the Balahisar Darwaza is the most impressive. Mythical beasts and lions on stucco panels of the spandrels provide decoration on this defence portal. From the Balahisar Darwaza starts the uphill ascent of some 380 uneven stone steps.

The main structure of the fort is laid out in a sequence of enclosures that holds the public and administrative structures to the royal residences and halls. The mortuary baths lie to the right of the portico. The baths were meant for the deceased royalty and harem ladies who were given the ritualistic bath before burial outside the Banjara Gate. Nagina Bagh, now in complete ruins, lies within an enclosure.

The offices of Akanna and Madanna, two important Hindu officials in the Qutab Shahi court, are further up. The large iron weights, half buried in the ground, are curious relics of the past. Ruins of the Ambar Khana (granary 1642) and Bari Baoli (step well) are close to the upper terrace. One can also see a Hindu temple (Madanna's) belonging to the Kakatiya period carved out of a huge boulder. It has colorful murals of the Goddess Kali on the white-painted facade.

Another important structure is the mosque built by Taramati. As one clammers up and down the boulders through narrow patches and uneven steps we can see unusual clay pipes fitted into the wall planks – evidence of an efficient water supply arrangement to the uphill residential area.

Prominent corner minarets distinguish the small mosque (1518) built by Ibrahim Quli Qutub Shah. The courtyard extend up to the ramparts providing spectacular views of the landscape below, for miles. Close to the mosque lies the small Rama Mandir under the boulders. Ram Das, a revenue official jailed by Abul Hasan Tana Shah for misusing state funds, carved images of Rama, Lakshman and Hanuman on the rock surface in the cell.

The ascent of 380 steps finally culminates at the Balahisar Baradari, a wind-swept pavilion, twelve-arched, triple storeyed structure used as a durbar hall. It is divided by substantial piers into vaulted bays, a raised chamber with triple arches opens off the rear wall. On the uppermost terrace stands a stone throne. A pavilion, far away in the hills, is believed to have housed Taramati, Abul Hasan's paramour. The Baradari shows yet another engineering marvel – natural air-conditioning provided by a gap in the double walls which sucks the air and releases it with accumulated pressure in the chambers.



Steep narrow steps descend to the zenana quarters – Rani Mahal. These palaces, built on massive platforms, had high ceilings and walls covered with decorative niches, alcoves and cornices, essentially Persian in design. The tall wooden columns, now lost, reveal the bare structure of the triple vaulted hall. Delicate arabesques in the roundels above the side arches constitute the elegant ornamentation on stucco. The Rani Mahal in its hey-days contained a world of luxury envied by the grand Mughals themselves.

There is also supposed to be secret underground tunnel leading from the 'Durbar Hall' to one of the palaces at the foot of the hill. The tombs of the Qutub Shahi kings, built with Islamic architecture lie about 1 km north of the outer wall of Golconda. These graceful structures are surrounded by landscaped gardens, some of which having beautifully carved stonework. Outside the Fort are two separate pavilions built on a rocky eminence - the 'Taramathi Gana Mandir' and the 'Premathi Nritya Mandir' where the legendary sisters 'Taramathi' and 'Premamathi' resided. They gave their performance on a circular dais atop a two-storied structure, the 'Kala Mandir', which was visible from the king's durbar (king's court) on top of the Golconda Fort. The fortress city within the walls was famous for its diamond trade and the famed Koh-i-noor diamond is said to have come from here.

### **The Sound and Light Show**

A new attraction at the fort is a sound and light show that brings the legend of Golconda to life. With a spectacular interplay of audio and visual effects, the story of Golconda unfolds over centuries of splendour. The show livens up the glorious past and it is an experience worth watching. The show is presented in English, Hindi and Telugu.

Show Timings: Winter (November - February) 6:30pm, Summer (March - October) 7:00pm

Duration: 55 minutes

In English: Wednesday, Sunday

In Hindi: Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday

In Telugu: Thursday

Closed on: Mondays

### **How to get there**

**Air:** Hyderabad can be reached by air, from all the major cities of the country.

**Rail:** Hyderabad is well connected by rail to all parts of the country.

**Road:** There is a regular bus service to Hyderabad from many cities in southern, central and southeastern parts of the country.

**City Transport:** Golconda Fort is around 11-km from Hyderabad. Auto rickshaws and Taxis are available apart from luxury/semi-luxury buses, for local transportation.