

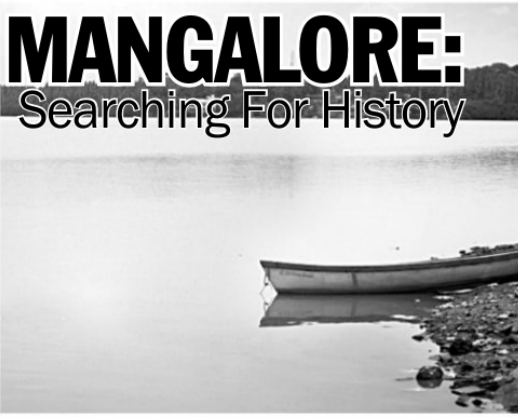
The aircraft lands on a narrow piece of land that leads straight to a valley. And that valley was where an ill-fated aircraft had crashed a few years ago. That is all I could think of during my descent into Mangalore. I held onto the sides of the chair and hoped that I would live. It was a smooth landing and for once I was grateful for that sharp brake. Once out of the airport, I caught a cab and headed out to the hotel.

But I wasn't ready for what was coming next. On steep roads, swirling down the hill was like going down a softie curl. And then my first glimpse of the glimmering city. It looked beautiful, laid out in front of me like a carpet of twinkling lights. I passed by a group of people - a large family with adults and children. I wondered what they were doing so far from the city at 9.30 pm, and then I saw a plane in the distance. It made sense. With heads lifted and upturned faces, they watched the flight come closer and got their fix of the day.

And that got me thinking about Mangalore. In my first 30 minutes here, I had moved from extreme fear to delight to warm-fuzziness. It had a small-town quality that made me wish for more.

Historically Mangalore is grand, Tipu Sultan had been here. It has had an important place in history. But what had happened to it now? Was it just another mid-sized city, now? I didn't associate it with the grandeur of a big city or a city that had dynasties fighting for it. I associ-

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ated Mangalore with crime and communal tensions, and that was all I knew about it. But surely Mangalore is much more than that.

The next morning, with just four hours before I made my way to Kasargode, the actual destination of the holiday, plans had to be remade. Maps were scrutinised and the reception lady thoroughly grilled. The plan was finalised - the day would include Sultan Battery, the College Chapel, the Mangaladevi temple and a stop at Ideal Cafe since everyone was raving about it.

The driver of my car was not from Mangalore. He had no clue where Sultan Battery was. He tried asking local people who didn't



A house built with Mangalore tiles

seem to be very clear either, but were aggravated that I did not know how to pronounce the word 'battery.'

Then Google Maps came to the rescue. On the way, Mangalore refused to let me get surly by tempting me with vistas of green spaces and simple but beautiful houses.

Sultan Battery is situated on a bend along a river as it

snakes through to the sea. It seemed to have a very strategic position, overlooking both sides of the river. Built by Tipu Sultan, this was a watch-tower to see if anyone was crossing the river and coming over with dark intentions.

Built with black basalt rocks, with viewing holes lining the entire wall, the structure seemed almost too simple in today's complex understanding of war and defence. But

then you put on the perspective of more than

200 years ago, and it seems that the location was indeed perfect for the purpose.

With every dynasty's rise, there is growth and also destruction of legacies. Legend has it that the rocks used to build this watchtower could have come from places of worship though no one knows for sure.

There were a few ships next to the river and we decided to go and take a look. It was a ship-building yard. It took them three months of hard work to make just one ship and then she took off, to prove herself worthy of the toil.

I watched the imposing *Vajralaxmi* enter the water for the first time in awe. Though there were some other ships too that looked gorgeous. Funnily these ships looked battle weary even though they were all brand new. These were meant to serve as fishing trawlers and were not built to be gleaming and swanky.

I left Sultan Battery and made my way to the College Chapel. Again, no one knew where it was, and even Google seemed flummoxed this time.

It took me around 20 minutes to find a person who could give me directions. Important note to self: don't call a chapel just a 'chapel', when it's called 'College Chapel'.

I got to go on a lovely personal tour courtesy the person-in-charge. The entire place is painted beautifully, and when I say entire... I mean every inch! What looks like marble at first glance is not, it's art. What seems like

a painting on a curtain and hanging on the wall, is also a painting. The illusions go on and on.

It was time for lunch and stomachs were grumbling all around. And so the next destination was Ideal Cafe! The food was okay, nothing exceptional but it was definitely the coolest restaurant in Mangalore and everyone with some time to spare seemed to be there.

The filter coffee that everyone praised was not that great. It had a rough, burnt taste with some of the coffee residue at the base. They say that's how Turkish coffee tastes, so there might be some who like it.

But if you are someone with a sweet tooth, skip a meal to just have ice-cream at Ideal Cafe. It was simply fabulous.

The last stop in Mangalore was the Mangaladevi temple. This is the temple that Mangalore is named after, so it had to be seen. A large temple, it was quiet and peaceful all the more as it was shut for the afternoon. We weren't allowed inside as the Gods were sleeping and so we were asked not to disturb them.

Mangalore was quaint. A neat and clean city that still seems enveloped in the past and happily so, given the rapidly changing face of every city in the country. I wouldn't say it surprised me, but it didn't disappoint. It was small, roads were relatively peaceful and the streets were still lined with houses exuding old-world charm.

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Sultan Battery