

# Like a princess

Aruna Chandaraja has a memorable six day luxury ride aboard the Golden Chariot, from Bangalore to Goa

## A LUXURIOUS ROUTE

- How long is the trip: Six days and seven nights. Begins from Bangalore on a Monday afternoon and terminates in Bangalore the following Monday morning.

- The route includes: Bangalore, Mysore, Kabini, Hassan including Halebid, Belur, Shravanabelagola, Hampi, Aihole including Pattadakal, Badami, Goa and back to Bangalore.

- Cost: US 350 dollars per person per night or its equivalent in Indian rupees.

- Contact for reservations: KSTDC, 49 Khaniya Bhavan, Race Course Road, Bangalore-560 002. Tel: (080) 2235 2901-03.

[www.goldenchariot.org](http://www.goldenchariot.org)

and a spa.

The six-day, seven-night trip which the train offers is intelligently designed to cover a variety of fare as well as showcase the best of the State's heritage. Actually, the organisers proudly point out to us that it covers three World Heritage Sites—Hampi, Pattadakal and Goa's cathedral-church spread.

After getting on at Bangalore, we are taken to the history-rich Srirangapatna town. Next is Mysore where we take in the fabulous Mysore Palace— predictably, the most audible gasps of awe are from the foreigners in the group. The Philomena Church is another sight to see and many want to linger for sandalwood and silk shopping but the train was leaving for Kabini

**Whoever** said the journey is as important as the destination had probably just been on a luxury train. The newly launched super-luxury Golden Chariot which traverses through Karnataka is about seeing the State in true maharaja style. The train's interiors are carefully crafted to ooze elegance and luxury and this includes the cabins and ensuite bathrooms, two restaurants, a bar



Dining in a plush interior is part of the experience.



**Wildlife Sanctuary.** Here, the lucky ones get to see the panther and wild dogs, while the rest satisfied themselves with elephants, deer, wild-boar and gaur that abound in this forest.

### REVISITING THE PAST

I have seen the temples of Halebidu-Belur, our next stop several times before, but they still inspire awe each time I revisit them. These exquisite specimens of Indian heritage, especially the famed Chennakeshava temple, represents the epicenter of Hoysala architecture. However, I refrained from visiting Shravanabelagola—with its world's tallest monolithic statue, since I had been there and done that only recently. The sprawling historic town of Hampi (where excavations are still on) with its unforgettably massive Yagalakshminarasimha statue and the Vittala temple with its pillars which resonate with the saptaswaras or seven notes are the highlight of the trip. We rushed

through the temples of Aihole and Pattadakal—time is at a premium given a tightly packed itinerary. And the spectacular caves of Badami—arrive after a trek up an incredibly filthy winding road—which takes our breath away. The signoff is at Goa—the last stop.

### SEA BREEZE

We disembarked at Calangute beach, overflowing with tourists and locals. Those who like it more

exclusive, are driven to the private beach at Taj Holiday Village. Later, we are driven to the church and cathedral-dotted Panjim and old Goa. Most buildings here are clad in a distinctive dark-brown laterite, so characteristic of Christian architecture on this part of the coast. The trip is rounded off with a visit to a heritage home Solar Dos Colacos for a peek into the lifestyle of Portuguese noblemen of centuries ago. A near perfect rail and land trip that had so much to offer!]

