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EXETER CATHEDRAL HAS THE LONGEST VAULTED CEILING AMONG ALL CATHEDRALS IN THE UK

ESOOTFOOT



Exeter's High Street is a busy retail centre.

IN RUINS

Terracotta wonders of Hadal, Narayanpur

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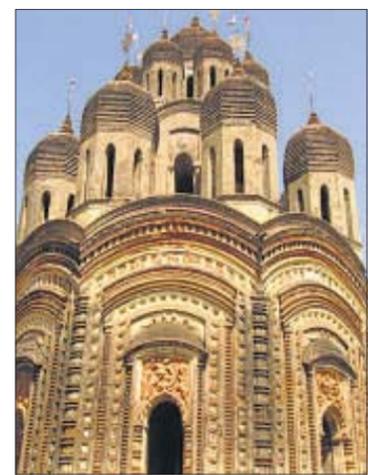
The terrific terracotta temples in villages of Hadal-Narayanpur, 38 kms from Bishnupur, lie in oblivion. Though located at a two-hour drive from the famous Bishnupur town, few tourists have heard about them.

Legend has it that one Muchiram Ghosh from Neelpur village made fortune in the business of indigo between 1720 and 1752 and changed his surname to Mondal. Till 1850, the family contributed richly in building temples with amazing craftsmanship of terracotta panels. Even today, despite years of negligence, these are standing tall.

The zamindari of Mondals was partitioned into three among three brothers and each of them, by the virtue of inheritance, has a treasure to display. The first temple that comes in sight belongs to the youngest branch, locally known as 'choto taraf'.

Inside their house, a 35 feet tall temple stands like a testimony of Bengal's pristine past. Dedicated to Lord Shiva, it appears to have profound influence of a church in its design.

Family members claim that one Baburam Mondal



A panel depicting a scene from Ramayana. (Top) A terracotta temple with nine pinnacles. SOMEN SENGUPTA / PHOTO

built this temple in the name of his son Ganga Govinda, nearly 170 years ago. The temple with nine pinnacles has three gate in its front.

One of the noteworthy tiles on the temple depicts the scene from Mahabharata where Arjun is aiming the fish above his head by following its reflection in water. The intricately carved court scene around the fish is a master's specimen.

On the other side of the boundary is a 25 ft tall ruined temple. A peerless terracotta panel on its front describes Vishnu in his anantashayan. As his wife Laxmi serves him, the lord rests on the snake bed. Also found are Bhishma on his bed of arrows and a scene from the battle of Ramayana.

A complete dilapidated temple known as 'chowvis kuthri' stands next to these two temples. Legend has it that when Maratha Bargee invaded Bengal, a huge amount of treasure was kept hidden in this temple.

The brightest gem of Hadal-Narayanpur is the temple of Radhadamodar, now owned by the middle branch of the family. The baked soil artwork here is as beautiful as found in terracotta temples in Bishnupur and Ambika Kalna. A panel here shows Ram and Krishna merge in one body. In the same tile, a dancing Lord Chaitanya justifies the impact of his Vaishnava cult movement in Hindu community of Bengal.

Near to this temple is rashmancha, or a stage for playing Holi with the God. This belongs to the eldest branch of the family. Standing next to the dilapidated royal palace, this 17-tower 40 ft temple like construct is one of the exceptional structures found in this part of Bengal.

If photography and archaeology are your passions, the majestic but dilapidated palace of Mondals, with a clear influence of European architecture, is a good destination for it.

But if local administration doesn't wake up to the restoration cries of these temples, they will be banished into oblivion.

In a county called Devon

ENGLISH SOJOURN
Walking down the cathedral town of southwest England



A lane in the Cathedral Close area in Exeter.

readers' corner

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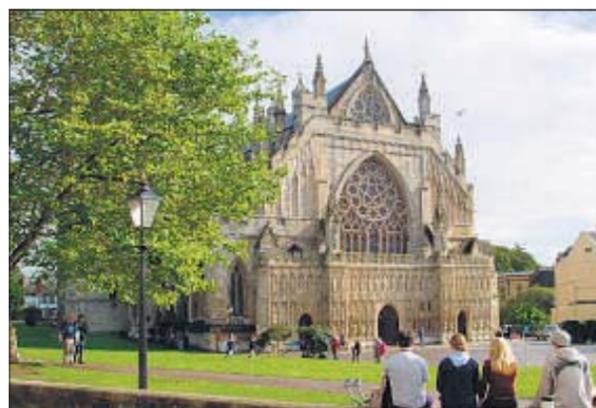
May and June are wonderful months to explore glorious Devon. But the Diamond Jubilee Weekend in June 2012 at Devon was no less exciting. That weekend, most people in the UK were watching Queen Elizabeth II and her family in the royal barge on the Thames in London, clutching on to their headgear amid cold and blustery conditions.

The Diamond Jubilee Concert on the television saw Dame Shirley Bassey and Tom Jones entertaining the monarch and the public. The chilly showers and ruthless squalls only added to the misery. During the trip, the first stop was Exeter, a beautiful cathedral town with a renowned university that has currently gained notoriety for the risqué parties its students throw. The city of Exeter stands on the river Exe, which recently made news when large tracts of land in and around the city reeled under floodwater. There are five bridges across the river, the first of which was built as early as 1238 AD. Exeter is two-and-a-half hours by train from London.

Exeter Cathedral is one of the greatest cathedrals of England, and it is right up there with Canterbury, Salisbury and Winchester. First built in Norman style, the present building was finished around 600 years ago. The cathedral is known for its exquisitely carved misericords, which are tip-up seats that acted as props during lengthy services. The misericords at Exeter have carvings that consist of foliage and grotesque beasts and were probably finished before 1300 AD. The cathedral has the longest vaulted ceiling among all cathedrals in the UK. Another notable feature here is a giant, blue-faced astronomical clock.

After a quick look around, I went to the cathedral gift shop where a rubber duck dressed as a bishop caught my attention. Other items for sale were tapestry shopping bags, ties, silks scarves, guide books, stoles and stained glass replicas. A beautiful replica for the patio door is a popular souvenir. This perhaps alerts daft pigeons that often fail to notice the clear glass during flights and come crashing against it all too often.

My next stop was Exeter's High Street, which is a busy retail centre. With a bored air, people browse through the usual stores that one finds in all town centres across the UK. After inspecting the shelves and racks at Next, Marks and Spencer,



Exeter Cathedral is among the biggest cathedrals in Britain. (Below) Exeter Quayside, which has a number of pubs and restaurants. PHOTOS COURTESY: EXETER CITY COUNCIL



THE FAMED NAVIGATOR SIR FRANCIS DRAKE (1540-1596), WHO WAS BORN IN TAVISTOCK, DEVON, REPORTEDLY FREQUENTED A PUB CALLED THE SHIP INN

Boots, House of Fraser, The Sony Centre and Gap, people venture into an antique shop that seemed different from the others.

Some purchased a small idol of Ganesha made of blue goldstone from the antique shop and some others buy an idol made of crystal. Exeter, unlike other cities in the British Midlands such as Leicester and Birmingham, is not teeming with Indians who generally buy idols of Lakshmi and Ganesha. The few Indians you find on the streets are perhaps students at the university.

On St Martin's Lane, I came across a pub called The Ship Inn. The famed navigator Sir Francis Drake (1540-1596), who

was born in Tavistock, Devon, reportedly frequented the place. There was a sign-board at the tavern with a declaration supposedly given by Drake in 1587 that next to his own ship, what he loved most was 'old Shippe in Exon'.

During the English Civil War in the 1640s, Royalist troops camped at the inn, which was recognised for its 'good wine and victuals'.

Some tourists scoff at the story and say local businesses are promoting the pub's association (if any) with Drake to promote tourism. However, the delightful pub, as a presenter on any TV programme in the UK would say, had charm, a wealth of oak beams and character by the bucketful! Wonder what Drake would have made of the antique shop next door and its shelves lined with Ganeshas.

The drive back to Leicester takes at least four hours. Passing by a Victorian B&B, possibly weighed down with antiques, it is common to see a couple of students trooping past diligently pouring over books. Studies over, they could be attending a wild party that night!

COLOURFUL TREAT



Bite into these chewy-goey biscuits when in French capital

MUST EAT IN PARIS
Macarons

Sweet, petite and colourful — after the cupcake craze that took the world by storm, macaron is poised to be the next bite-sized wonder. The French macaron may have been around for a while, but given the recent craze for single-serving desserts, these chewy-goey biscuit treats have seen a soar in popularity. These confections are perfect for brightening the displays at quaint little French *patisseries* and *boulangeries*, not to mention your day.

The macaron was born when two light, firm meringue biscuits, made of whipped egg whites and almond flour, were pressed together with a cream

filling. The biscuits are round, with a smooth dome and a ruffled circumference (called a foot, or pied), and the addition of a little extra something can magically transform the traditional cream-coloured macarons to stunning works of art.

Chocolate, strawberry and lime are the usual suspects when it comes to experimenting with colours and flavours in macaron recipes. But bakers across the world have taken the liberty of creating unique amalgamations that range from the bizarre (cheetos and candied bacon with maple cream cheese) to the oriental (green tea with red bean filling) and the elegant (cham-



pagne, amaretto and chestnut). Substitute a quarter-cup ground pistachio with ground almond, add a hint of green food colouring and you have a pistachio macaron. Add a bit of cocoa powder to the mix and it becomes a chocolate treat, made especially sinful with a Nutella filling. The macaron is a versatile beast that tempts and delights all who behold it.

Unlike the cupcake, however, macaron is a very hard dessert to replicate at home. "The measurements, the technique and the cooking temperature all need to be very accurate. Precision is the key," says Jawed, pastry chef at Hyatt Regency, Kolkata.

An aspect bakers must keep in mind in order to make macarons at home is: "Buy a good oven. These cookies bake for just 10 minutes at 150 degrees Celsius," he adds.

In Paris, macarons are everywhere. Retail chain Monoprix stocks them by the convenient containerful, open-air markets are laden with them, and café windows that pepper the city always have an unavoidable selection of macarons on display.

The Ladurée chain of luxury confectionery is famous for their macarons. In fact, some sources attribute the idea of the macaron, as we know it now, to Pierre Desfontaines, grandson of Louis-Ernest Ladurée, founder of the chain. It is said that in 1930, he first had the idea of sticking two

macaron shells together with a creamy ganache filling.

However, the *Larousse Gastronomique* — the quintessential kitchen guide for the French — traces the birth of the macaron to 791 AD, at a convent near Cormery, a town nearly 260 km from Paris. Others say it was only introduced to France by Queen Catherine de Medici's Italian pastry chef, whom she brought with her in 1533, after her marriage to France's King Henry II.

Priyasha Banerjee

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