

Travel & Outdoors

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PICTURES: PA

India's tale of two cities

Mumbai and Chennai offer a vibrant and intoxicating blend of old-meets-new, even down to their names, as **Harriet Line** discovers

It's 5:30am and I'm bleary-eyed from the early start – but as soon as I reach the south Bombay fish market, the smell hits me and shocks my weary senses awake. This is peak time at the bustling market. The floor is pungently wet, yet the trawls are supremely fresh.

As I step over huge pomfret and tuna, ladies hurry by with wide bowls of the latest catch balanced on their heads. They are Koli women – descended from the original inhabitants of Mumbai – and have long run the show around here, bartering, auctioneering and heaving the fish into Sassoon Docks.

Fully awake, with the sun creeping over the horizon, I step out of the market and head north through the metropolis. Mumbai, I'm told, is a city, but Bombay (as most people still call it) is a feeling.

Negotiating its busy roads, that couldn't be more true – the honk of horns from scooters whizzing by is

almost continuous, while the sights and smells change with each second that passes, as we switch lanes on the manic streets.

There are street barbers, fruit sellers, and an array of wandering animals. Cows – revered as sacred, of course – incite a faster reaction than humans from drivers, if they haphazardly wander into the road. Bicycles scoot through the smallest gaps, while women in saris riding side-saddle on the back of motorbikes cling on, as they weave through the heavy traffic.

We see all this, and more, as part of the No Footprints: Mumbai by Dawn tour (nfpexplore.com), which brings sightseers to the most vibrant spots, before the city wakes.

Of course, some of the sounds,

The striking domes and elegant rooms make the hotel itself a destination



Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, main; a street food seller, above

sights and smells in this city of 20 million people are less desirable than others – most starkly, the unforgettable image of its slums. They are a far cry, the locals say, from the impression broadcast around the world in the hit 2008 film *Slumdog Millionaire*, but nonetheless, they are still a prominent feature in a city of two tales. Juxtaposed next to sky-high luxury apartments, the slums are home to around half the city's population.

Amid the poverty rise stunning buildings built during India's colonial era. From the Victoria Terminus station – where, unlike similarly

grand structures in the UK, the trains unwaveringly run on time – to Elphinstone College, there is an architectural charm left behind from that period in time.

Outside the station, now officially called Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus in honour of an Indian warrior king, newspaper distributors are piling papers high on the backs of their bikes. Dozens of different titles, in different languages, are meticulously ordered and then loaded onto rear pannier racks, forming 8ft-tall newspaper mountains.

It's hard to miss the “three religions of India” – cricket, cinema and chai. Bollywood billboards line the streets, chai tea sellers stand on every corner, and cricket is a sight to behold at the Oval Maidan. It's a dusty field of dreams for the hundreds of hopefuls who gather here daily, honing their skills and wishing they could one day join the national team, though to me, it's a muddle of wickets, bats and balls.

Bombay's charming chaos is energising and exhausting in equal measure, and I can't say I'm not a little bit relieved when our guide, Adi,

tells me we're heading back to the sanctuary of the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel, where we're staying. It's not merely an icon of the city, but part of its history – the first hotel in India to have electricity, an all-day restaurant, and the city's first licensed bar.

In 2008, the Taj fell victim to the horrific terrorist attacks that hit parts of Mumbai – and images of its burning exterior beamed around the world. It took the hotel several months to fully recover, but it has since hosted royalty and foreign dignitaries – as it had done for more than a century before.

The striking domes and elegant rooms make the hotel itself a destination, while its nine restaurants offer the best of Asia on a plate. Souk, at the top of the tower wing, indulges diners with spectacular panoramic views of the iconic monument, Gateway of India, and beyond, while local specialties are on offer at Masala Kraft. The hotel also boasts what must be the most serene spot in all of Mumbai in the form of its new-look Jiva Spa.

Guests are treated like royalty – nothing it seems is too much bother. Little touches, like bookmarks slotted into my bedside book – the page corners of which I had naughtily folded over – make the Taj stand tall among the world's best hotels.

Despite the temptation to stay put in these sumptuous surroundings, there is a lot more of India to see. Chennai, formerly Madras – but still known as such – lies on India's south-eastern coast. Like Mumbai, its rich colonial history is interwoven in the colourful culture. The city is huge – population eight million – but it feels smaller and less boisterous.

After a two-hour flight, we're swiftly driven to the Taj Connemara, southern India's oldest hotel, which has just reopened after a two-year renovation. It's a tasteful blend of classic colonial and art deco – and named after an Irish Baron Lord Connemara, the then Governor of Madras. While history has not been kind to his colourful life – as the hotel's heritage tour explains – the grand building has become a symbol of the city.

Diwali – the Hindu festival of light – is in full swing as we arrive.

Firecracker bangs echo through the streets and flower garlands decorate shops and houses. In the evening, we're treated to a traditional dance on a stage surrounded by candles.

Chennai, too, it seems, is a (welcome) assault on the senses. The city, the "film music capital" of southern India, is famed for its artistic and culinary heritage. From mid-December, the Madras Music Season takes over for six weeks, with more than 2,000 performances.

But a street food tour is perhaps the best way to get a flavour of the place, and our wonderful guide, Lakshmi from Storytrails (storytrails.in), does not disappoint. She not only brings us delicious local delicacies as we walk through the southern district of Mylapore, but takes us to the technicolor Kapaleeshwarar Temple. It's a feast for the eyes, dedicated to the Hindu deity Shiva.

Its magnificence isn't unique though, as I discover the next day when we drive an hour south of Madras to the Mahabalipuram Temples – a collection of Unesco-recognised 7th and 8th century monuments. After a beachside bite of red snapper at the Taj Fisherman's Cove Resort, we arrive at the ratha temples. They're an engineering marvel, having been chiselled out of single granite blocks, adorned with intricate depictions of Hindu gods.

We only have an afternoon here, but you could easily spend a whole day exploring the hundreds of carvings and monuments, including one of the world's largest open-air rock reliefs, the Descent of the Ganges.

Later on, back at the hotel, our last night is marked with one of the best dinners of the trip, at the Connemara's Raintree Restaurant. A flavourful end to an electrifying week, that's truly been a feast for all the senses. ■

Rooms at the Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai, start from £213. Rooms at the Taj Connemara, Chennai, start from £202. Visit tajhotels.com. KLM (klm.com; 020 7660 0293) flies to Mumbai from London City and Heathrow, via Amsterdam. Return economy fares start from £610. Jet Airways (jetairways.com) offers flights between Mumbai and Chennai from £55 one way in economy class.



Chennai's stunning 'technicolor' Kapaleeshwarar temple

SHORT HAUL



Take a Liberty in Sweden

Deep in the heart of Scandinavia lies a classic British country house, as **Laura Millar** discovers

As I walk up the long, curving driveway towards the grand mansion that awaits at the other end, I pause to admire the scenery. Behind me are a series of small, charming wooden cottages which look like they've come straight out of a fairytale, clustered close by a church. Expanses of trimmed grass stretch out as far as the eye can see, kept neat by the occasional cow. Deep forest lines one edge of the path, which meanders slowly until, at last, I spot the magnificent structure ahead.

It looks as if I've stumbled across an elegant stately home, which wouldn't be out of place in a National Trust brochure. Its graceful lines, stone turrets and landscaped gardens all indicate the kind of property you'd see in a British period drama – but there's one particular architectural feature which will be familiar to anyone who's gone shopping in London. Attached to the front, it looks like a small, half-timbered Elizabethan house, with whitewashed walls in between the wooden struts. It looks, in short, like a miniature version of the iconic store, Liberty's.

But I'm not in the British countryside, nor am I anywhere near London; I'm by the coast just a

45-minute drive from Gothenburg, Sweden's second largest city. And the story of how a very English castle came to exist in the middle of Scandinavia is not only fascinating, but also has links to Scotland.

Tjoloholm Castle was constructed between 1898 and 1904 as a country home for wealthy businessman James Fredrik Dickson, and his wife, Blanche. Blanche had been brought up in Sweden, but her great-grandfather was a timber merchant from Montrose. When her mother died, she was sent back to Scotland to live with relatives, before eventually returning to Sweden where she married James, a cousin. When the couple first decided to build on the Tjoloholm estate – which they bought in 1892 – they both wanted their new property to be designed like an Elizabethan mansion, but it was Blanche who was in the driving seat when it came to the castle's interiors.

And where else would any self-respecting woman with half an interest in the modes of the day seek inspiration, but from the most fashionable store of the time: Liberty's. Arthur Lasenby Liberty had founded his eponymous store in 1875, and his worldwide reputation was built on the quality, and design, of his beautiful fabrics and furnishings.

As a result, Tjoloholm became quite the showpiece in the local area – and beyond. And none of this came cheap; it's estimated it cost the Dicksons the equivalent of nearly £10 million today.

Tragically, James Dickson died shortly after building work began, and he never saw it in its full, finished glory. And Blanche herself only got to enjoy her masterpiece for two years, before passing away in 1906. While the property passed to the couple's children, and grandchildren, they didn't live there long, and the beautiful building fell into disrepair in the 1960s. Happily, in 1987, Sweden's equivalent of the National Trust swept in to start restoring it to

Blanche hired craftsmen from the store to come and work on the project

its former glory, and it was opened to the public, with the workers' cottages Blanche had had constructed in the grounds transformed into accommodation for visitors. But it was almost as if the foundation didn't quite realise what a unique property they had, until the discovery of a sheaf of letters and invoices between Blanche and her favourite store.

In April 2018, they reached out to Liberty in London, whose staff couldn't quite believe what they

Clockwise from main: the exterior of Tjoloholm Castle; one of the bedrooms; panelling in the library

were hearing; that there was a whole mansion with preserved Liberty interiors. Since then, both parties have collaborated to put on an exhibition which showcases the extraordinarily well-kept fabrics and furnishings which Blanche ordered.

You start in the castle's grand hall, lined with burnished wood panelling, surrounded by balustrades topped with carved, wooden animals, similar to those on Liberty's own stairwells. Blanche hired two craftsmen from the store to come and work on the project for a couple of years, and their talent is apparent in the elaborate mantelpieces and fireplaces.

Today, Tjoloholm is celebrated in Sweden as one of the best examples of the Arts and Crafts movement that still exists. Now we know that's down to a woman whose roots were in Scotland, whose heart was in Sweden, and whose exquisite taste was served by a department store in London. ■

Bohemian Luxury – Liberty Style runs until 30 December; tickets available from tjoloholm.se. Flights from Edinburgh to Gothenburg start from around £46 return, ryanair.com. Cottages at Tjoloholm Castle start from £103 per person per night, tjoloholm.s

48 HOURS IN

Richmond upon Thames

Friday, 7pm
Check in at the Bingham Hotel (61-63 Petersham Rd TW10 6UT; tel: 020 8940 7471; www.thebingham.co.uk). A double room at this bijou boutique hotel costs from £195. The three-course menu will set you back a modest (for London values of modest) £45 a head.

Saturday, 10am
Hire a rowing skiff at Richmond Bridge Boathouses for a couple of hours (from £8 an hour) on the Thames (tel: 020 8948 8270; www.richmondbridgeboathouses.co.uk).

1pm
Refuel with wurst, sauerkraut and Bavarian beer at Stein's, a Teutonic-flavoured beer garden with al fresco tables overlooking the Thames.

2pm
Take a green stroll to Ham House (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/ham-house-and-garden/trails/richmond-station-to-ham-house-historic-scenic-walk) to discover the treasures of this opulent 17th century mansion.

5pm
Relax with a pint at the The White Cross (Riverside; tel: 020 8940 6844; www.thewhitecrossrichmond.com).

8pm
Dine at The White Swan (26 Old Palace Lane; tel: 020 8940 6844; www.whiteswanrichmond.co.uk) where two courses from a gastropub-style menu in a 19th century inn will set you back around £25 each.

Sunday, 10am
Explore greenery and towering palms



at the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew (www.kew.org).

Midday
Sup an outstanding Bloody Mary, then enjoy a lakeside Sunday roast at The Botanical, opposite Kew's famous Palm House (www.kew.org; £18.50).

3pm
Visit the World Rugby Museum (Twickenham Stadium, Whitton Road TW2 7BA; www.worldrugbymuseum.com). Reopened in a rebuilt home last year, it's a celebration of the international game, not just a glorification of the auld enemy – even though the giants of the English side do loom large.

7pm
Pick up your bags from The Bingham and head for Heathrow and your flight home. ■

Robin Gauldie

Richmond is around 30 minutes by London Underground from Heathrow and around one hour from London Kings Cross mainline station. A taxi from Heathrow will cost around £30. Information: www.visitrichmond.co.uk

BARGAIN BREAKS

All set for Amsterdam

EasyJet Holidays is offering three nights at the three star Europa '92 Hotel in Amsterdam on a room only basis, based on two sharing, from £233pp including flights from Edinburgh on 27 August. **Call 020 3499 5232 or see www.easyjet.com/holidays**

Caribbean cruise time

Join Celebrity Reflection for its 13 night Ultimate Caribbean fly/cruise departing 17 November, prices starting from £1,959pp (based on two sharing) if you book before 28 August. Includes accommodation in a stateroom, return flights from

Glasgow, a gratis drinks package for two, one night's pre-cruise accommodation, transfers and the sailing from Fort Lauderdale, taking in George Town, Cartagena, Colon, Puerto Limon, Puerto Costa Maya and Cozumel. **Call 0800 4414054 or see www.celebritycruises.co.uk**

Made in Majorca

Prices start from £566pp for a seven night holiday in Majorca with Travel Republic. This includes all inclusive accommodation at the three star Club Santa Ponsa Hotel and return flights from Edinburgh departing on 11 July. **Call 020 8974 7200 or see www.travelrepublic.co.uk**