

NAALNAAD AREMANE

Author : Hema Narayanan, 02/ Jan /2017

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Naalnaad Aremane, is how it is popularly known in the local Kodava language. More widely called, the **Nalaknad Palace**, this heritage building is a less explored Coorgi delight. Rustic and elegant, this traditionally styled monument is relatively small in size, in comparison to one's imagination of how vast a palace should be. Nevertheless, it's definitely not small when it comes to the richness of its architecture.



In the good old days of the Kings, all the artists of caliber needed were just a simple reason to give their creative skill a chance and thus emerged this palace. Built in 1792 AD by Dodda Veerarajendra, it was to commemorate his victory (*the ally of the British in the war*) against

the emperor, Tipu Sultan.? Nalaknad is not a palace in reality, but was the king?s hunting lodge, perched at the foothills of the Thadiyandamol peak in the Western Ghats.

Trekker?s Haven

Perhaps less known among the casual tourists, Nalaknad is quite a mainstream spot among the trekking community. It?s strategic location at the foothill of Thadiyandamol peak earns it, this popularity, and trekker?s all over, love to climb up this challenging peak, considered to be the highest in the Western Ghats, at a height of 1747 odd meters. Trekkers take a break here before heading out.

This two-story building of Nalaknad serves as a base for many campers, who off-load their backpack, catch their breath, rest their knees and spend a night of rest before scaling the peak, the next morning.

Some say, that this palace is not easily accessible. In my experience, it was not a challenge, though we went seeking out for it to find it, like any true traveler. Or perhaps, it could have been out-of-bounds in those days – why else, would the last King of Kodagu choose this palace as one of the final safe haven?s while he was escaping from the British?

The King?s Hunting Lodge

Like anyone else, I was surprised to learn that Nalaknad was a royal hunting lodge and not a palace, unlike the name suggests. The guide on premise indicated how the Kodagu Kings also relished it as a summer home. That was heartening to hear, since this beautiful rustic structure built in a traditional wood and tile-roof style with striking colors was at least frequented often.

Reddish tinge all over, with vegetable colors used for its wall paintings ? the two-tier halls are vibrant. Pretty patterns in the paintings intrigued the photographer in me. So did the carvings – chiseled with perfection. Ornamental pillars and verandahs juxtaposed by the floral ceilings caught my camera?s attention. Little doors and windows are built in a distinctive manner, which influence the direction of the light and hence the way it fell on the paintings and carvings, as if they were spotlights.

Looking for the photographic angles inside the palace, I chanced upon a restored mural that depicted Dodda Veerarajendra seated on an elephant, by his Coorg Army. As I walked out, looking at the hillside, I observed the unique symbols of Cobra carved at various places (meant to warn enemies in times often plagued by intrigue and uncertainty.) All in all, Nalaknad Palace is a well-kept secret of Madikere. When you go visiting Coorg next, do take an early morning peek into the historic Nalaknad Palace, flanked by the peak of Thadiyandamol. And relish a Hunter's Moment.

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