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SUNDAY CHRONICLE (/SUNDAY-CHRONICLE)

Mystical fortress

DECCAN CHRONICLE | HEMA NARAYANAN (/byline/hema-narayanan)
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Ruins overlooking Loch Ness

The Urquhart castle in the scottish highlands remains a regal, historic marvel despite its ruinous state

It was a mysterious and haunting evening in the year 2000, when we walked towards the ruins of a Scottish Castle in Inverness — a castle that is precariously perched on a peninsula at the edge on the banks of Loch (River) Ness. The sight of this castle had me frozen in awe, as it was the most astonishing one I had ever set my eyes on — the Urquhart Castle. Fifteen years hence, in the summer of 2015, I revisited Urquhart and it remains an impressive stronghold in spite of its ruinous state. Its magnetic aura had me visiting it twice — at sunset and in the morning.

Situated in the village of Drumnadrochit, Urquhart is an iconic sight between Fort William and Inverness. It seemed to have everything acting in its favour — its magnificent setting, its strategic location in terms of defense, the spellbinding views it commands up the length of the Loch and home of the fabled Nessie or Loch Ness Monster. Not to miss, this stunning castle is built in stone and existed as early as the 13th century. Little wonder, that it is considered to be one of the greatest castles in the Highlands.

Urquhart: The Past

<http://www.deccanchronicle.com/151031/commentary-sunday-chronicle/article/mystical-fortress>

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The audiovisual display at the visitor center had a terrific narration of the castle's history. The theatre inside ran an incredible movie about its history from the 6th to the 17th century, when it was demolished and the stories of the noble families who held the castle at different times: the Durwards, MacDonalds and Grants. Urquhart had witnessed considerable conflict throughout its 500 years as a medieval fortress and had bloodshed during the 13th to 17th centuries. It was seized by the English, after Edward I's invasion, was reclaimed and seized again, and came under the control of Robert the Bruce, King of Scots in the 14th century. The ambitious MacDonald Lords of the Isles repeatedly raided the castle and the Glen during the 15th and 16th centuries. Amidst all this, Urquhart gained the title of a 'Royal Castle', and was used by Kings of both Scotland and England.

Urquhart: The Present

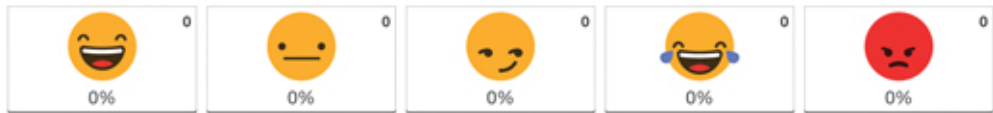
Urquhart's stories are also narrated well, through a remarkable collection of artifacts left by its residents, historic replicas and a full-sized working trebuchet siege engine, standing tall before the entrance. Going to the visitor centre served as an interesting prologue to the castle. One could take their young explorers on one of the four exciting Discover Explore Missions they have at the castle. Vibrant yellow flowers adorn the shores of the Ness. Walking over to a wooden gangway (earlier a drawbridge during the times of the wars) provides a clear view of the entire ruin, which mainly had demolished stone structures. Upon entering the castle, stood a wonderful historic Scotland exhibit.

A quick peer into a miserable dungeon jolted me. This used to hold prisoners and is said to have held the legendary Gaelic bard, Domhnall Donn. Inside the castle, the most distinguishable of these ruins were the ancient chapel, the dovecot that has retained its circular shape, a blacksmith's workshop and chambers that were the great hall and a kitchen in those days. An interesting gate of the castle led us right onto the shores of Ness, a divinely beautiful specimen of nature. The five-storey Grant Tower house, the most recent building on the site, offered views to die for of the iconic Loch and the hills of the Glen from the battlements. A narrow set of steep winding stairs lead up to the top.

I was wrapped in a sense of calm and bliss with everything around still and silent. The mesmerising bright blue water of the Ness flowed past gracefully for miles, till the horizon. Urquhart offered me a taste of the Scottish Highlands at their dramatic best — what with its wild natural beauty and 1,000 years of history. It was a rendezvous with my favourite castle and walking the ruins, yet again after 15 years!

— Hema is a technology consultant and world wandererTags: [lifestyle \(/content/tags/lifestyle\)](/content/tags/lifestyle), [sunday chronicle \(/content/tags/sunday-chronicle\)](/content/tags/sunday-chronicle), [scotland \(/content/tags/scotland\)](/content/tags/scotland), [europe \(/content/tags/europe\)](/content/tags/europe)

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