

# Whitefield has become the New Bangalore

## IT Destination Is The Cultural Hotspot Too

Shrabonti Bagchi | TNN

A software hive is pollinating our culture. By doing so, Whitefield is redrawing urban lifestyles and creating New Bangalore.

### CHANGING BANGALORE

The suburb, till now described in terms of software parks, malls and five-star hotels, is attracting some of the best talent in music, theatre,

dance and other performing arts, from Bangalore and across the country.

The village-turned-suburb-turned-city, virtually fab-

ricated by the IT revolution in the late 1990s, is setting the cultural tone for the rest of the city. While the biggest boost to art has come from IT families,

Prakash Babu

*This is the first of a series of articles to map a changing Bangalore, its new lifestyles, the demographics, the way we live, work and shop. We start with a village which has grown big enough to challenge a city*

Whitefield started off with a big advantage—it had no baggage. It created itself from scratch, mirroring the aspirations, spending power and

lifestyles of its new inhabitants, most of whom were expats. A new city grew from an old British outpost.

Jagriti Theatre founder Jagdish Raja credits the area's high-density expat population with making the consumption of culture seem

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essential and fashionable. "In the West, culture is seen as an imperative. It's as much a part of civilized urban life as eating out and watching movies, and expats have created that culture here." Most Whitefielders say the four-year-old Jagriti is the nerve centre of cultural activity. Jagriti's founders Jagdish and Arundhati Raja are pleased the project got delayed by 5-6 years.



# Culture & music thrive here

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“By the time Jagriti came up, there were already many residential enclaves up and running all around, and we got a steady audience from the beginning,” says Jagdish.

Although realty has expanded Whitefield laterally, art has found lots of lung spaces to breathe and thrive. “Whitefield is growing culturally, and some of our events, such as (sarod-maestro) Ashish Khan’s performance have seen packed



**AESTHETIC:** Jagriti Theatre, a hub of cultural activities in Whitefield

## CHANGING BANGALORE

RESIDENTS OF THE AREA CONTRIBUTE IN ENTERPRISING WAYS TO GIVE THE CULTURE SCENARIO A FILLIP

houses,” says Kamal Sagar, principal architect and director, Total Environment Building Systems. A lover of good music, he has created a new cultural space in Whitefield, the Windmills Craftworks, a microbrewery with strong emphasis on varied cultural performances. Sagar takes his music seriously, and Rudy David, a former member of the band Thermal and a Quarter, has been appointed creative head at Windmills, which has seen eclectic performances by the likes of Parisian jazz artists the Hadouk Trio and Kentucky folk musician Ben Solly. “We’ve made an effort to get artists who

play real and rooted music, not covers of blues and rock. We’re looking for emotionally connected music,” says Sagar.

Others are contributing in smaller, more intimate and enterprising ways. Water conservation experts Rajesh Shah and his wife Vallari run the cultural organization Natya, through which they organize monthly classical dance-and-music performances in their own home. Meant for small gatherings of 20-25 people, potential attendees are informed through a mailing list; word-of-mouth is also helpful. “For people living in Whitefield, it’s not always possible to go all the way to Chowdaiah or Ranga Shankara to watch plays and other performances,” says Shah.

Carlton Braganza, owner of Opus and Opus in the Creek, Whitefield, says: “In the past four-five years, Whitefield has emerged as a new hub of culture. In terms of numbers, Opus in the

Creek closely matches the original one in the heart of the city. We’re doing a festival there next month, with three days of DJs, bands and a flea market. Four years ago when we started Opus in Whitefield, it made perfect sense because we felt it had a readymade catchment area, and most people are willing to spend.”

Multi-utility performance spaces seem to be a bit of a thing in Whitefield, and pubs and eateries have been quick in signing up talent. Buzzy eatery LikeThatOnly will soon see an improvisational comedy performance by The Improv, a successful Bangalore-based comedy outfit that has performed across India. “Whitefield is a parallel city altogether, and it’s natural that it would develop a cultural life of its own,” says Saad Khan, director of The Improv. “It has an interesting mix of people – well travelled, open-minded. The dynamic is interesting. Also,

the area between Indiranagar and Whitefield is buzzing with new restaurants, and they offer comic performers good space,” adds Khan.

Improvisation is buzzing too. CounterCulture is now a venue for music, comedy and improvisational theatre.

Across the road is the MLR Convention Centre, which seats 800 people and offers live performances. Recently, it hosted British actor Pip Utt, famous for his one-man dramatic sketches during which he portrays historical figures like Winston Churchill and Adolf Hitler.

Importantly, art is gravitating to Whitefield because Bangalore is pushing it away. A pub owner from Indiranagar, who didn’t want to be named, said restrictions on live acts, especially independent music, in pubs and eateries in central areas has created a surge towards places like Whitefield, where random police raids and crackdowns on the basis of “one or two complaints from neighbours” is rare. “Increasingly, musicians are gravitating towards places like Phoenix Market City, where there is a permanent venue for live acts and home-grown rock bands are encouraged. Since this stage is located at a busy mall, they are assured of an audience,” said the restaurateur.

Of course, art has another reason to cheer. Once Whitefield gets connected by the Metro, art and entertainment will seem closer to Bangalore. And the Whitefield effect may be felt in neighbouring Sarjapur and not-so-faraway Devanahalli.