

Travel | Bohemian

The Call Of Coorg

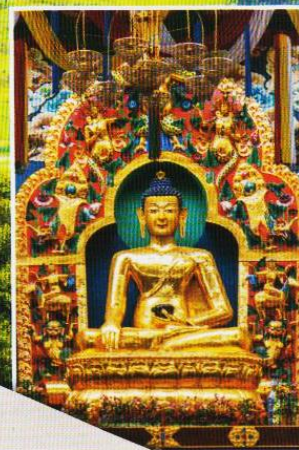
THE JOY OF A PLANNED HOLIDAY TO COORG—FRESH AIR, SOFT UNDULATING GREEN HILLS, ELEPHANTS, ADVENTURES ON THE RIVER CAUVERY, AMAZING LOCAL CUISINE AND FRIENDLY PEOPLE—MAKE IT A GREAT DESTINATION DISCOVERS ARUNA RATHOD.



T

he drive to Coorg is extremely interesting. As we leave the busy city of Bengaluru, our driver asks us if we have seen the blockbuster *Sholay*. "Of course, we have," we chorus. He tells us en route to Coorg is the town of Ram Nagar—a village where the entire film was shot. After about an hour, we reach Ram Nagar which is today a bustling town and the driver points out to large boulders atop hills and we recall the scenes of *Sholay*. The Masjid in the film is bang on the highway now, and the temple on the hill still exists!

After an hour or so, we come across another interesting city called Channapatna, the city of toys. Brightly painted, smooth toys is a tradition in this city. The 200-year-old Channapatna toy-making craft is still alive in many factories and showrooms that dot the highway. The rocking wooden horse is the most famous creation of this city and now using the traditional lac-turnery method—new products in a variety of bright colours have been added like wooden wind chimes, masks in a variety of colours. As we drive past, I wonder what's up next.



Filter coffee and Maddur vada is the next famous stop, I soon figure. The famous Maddur vada is flat and crisp on the outside, made from a mix of flours, onion pieces, and khus-khus. It has a unique taste and must be eaten with green chutney. Wash it down with strong filter coffee—popular in this region due to its proximity to Coorg, renowned for the best coffee beans in India.

Inside the beauty of Coorg

Tired of browsing for hotels, I decided to check out what a planned holiday would do for me at the Mahindra Holidays Resort. A vast property, it was difficult to fathom once we reached at nightfall but it was cool and refreshing. I was offered a warm welcome drink—the chuku coffee (local coffee served black, flavoured with jaggery and ginger); and I had a short walk to the apartment. I could see thick plantations all around me and hear the sounds of crickets and some birds too.

It was only the next morning that I realised that every window looked onto lush greenery and to enjoy it further, there is a big balcony where you can just relax, hear the birds chirping and spot them too. I

stepped out into the balcony to enjoy the greenery at sunrise.

I decided to proceed for the breakfast buffet and boy, what a spread it was! Rice balls are a Coorgi speciality—soft-steamed dumplings, which can be had with chutney or a curry. Vadas, two varieties of idli, dosas, continental specialities and the not-to-be-missed filter coffee. I was ready for the adventures of the day.

IN AND AROUND COORG

The Dubare Elephant Camp

Since the Dubare Elephant Camp is about 45 minutes away, and the elephants are fed at a particular time, it's best to start early. I enjoyed the early morning drive to Dubare—one needs to cross the Cauvery river to reach there. A short boat ride takes visitors across the river and you can watch the elephants bathing. If you want to bathe them, try your hand at a fee of ₹100. The elephants are bathed for an hour only, after that they walk up to the camp to be fed and play a bit. A large expanse of land is dedicated to them and the trainers are very comfortable with them.

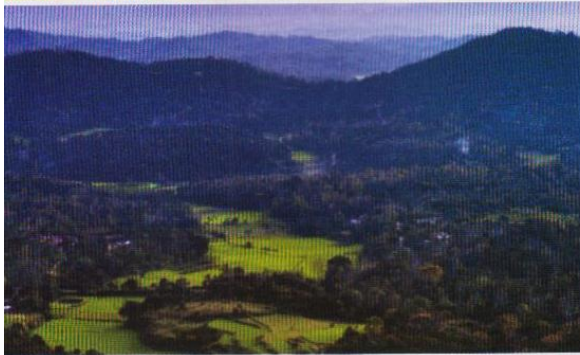
White water rafting in the Cauvery

We decided to try our hand at river rafting. There are some operators along the banks of the Cauvery. If you are a beginner, pay close attention to the guide.

Armed with a life-jacket and a helmet, and an oar, you can begin the experience.

Three rapids add to the excitement and the guide is of great help, especially if you are nervous. After five kilometres, we pull up and change, have a coffee and break for lunch. Post lunch, it was time to visit the Tibetan Monastery but unfortunately, the main building was under repair. Called the Golden Temple or Namdroling Monastery (a Buddhist one), it is the second largest Tibetan settlement in India after Dharamshala.





The Namdroling Monastery

The Namdroling Monastery was established by Drubwang Padma Norbu Rinpoche in 1963. This is the largest teaching center of Nyingmapa, a lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, and is home to a sangha community of over 5,000 monks and nuns. A busy place, it's best to visit early morning at or around 9 AM to feel the sanctity and hear the prayers. A typical tourist circuit includes a visit to the Omkareshwar temple, the Abbey falls and the Raja's seat.


Pushpagiri Wildlife Sanctuary

Next morning, post breakfast, a unique experience awaited us—a Hard Top Jeep Safari and I hoped to spot some animals. We boarded a Mahindra Jeep and I wondered what to expect. As the road kept getting rough, and winding, but not uncomfortable, as the drivers are very competent, I began enjoying the drive. After 12 kilometres from where we were staying, the jeep began its dirt track in rough patches and rocks, which is the only way to go up to the Pushpagiri Wildlife Sanctuary. While there is not much of wildlife, the name of the sanctuary comes from the tiny white flower Pushpagiri that grows in abundance on the hills. After

the rolling green hills, rough roads we stop at the forest check point, beyond which vehicles are prohibited. The mountains are ahead of us and I wonder what is beyond. I avoid the steep climb, and take the less arduous route. Both routes take one to the same spot. While walking up, it's sheer beauty all around: green hills, sloping valleys, blue skies and white clouds and silence. One hill ends and another begins. It's pure nature. We reach the top of the hill and look below; it's a drop of more than 100 feet, full of green landscapes. This place lets you soak in quiet and tranquility if you spend some time on this spot. After about an hour, we start our journey back to the hotel.

Coffee Trails

Post lunch it is time for a coffee trail at the Club Mahindra property we are in that ends at the Planters Club Coffee Lounge & Bar. The place offers 45 types of tea and coffee, so take your pick. For guests, there is an interesting coffee trail where one learns about how coffee is grown, the types of plants and how the cool climate is a must for coffee plantations. Arabica and Robusta are coffee beans that are grown in Coorg. Besides that, the Luwak coffee, the most premium coffee is also grown in the Coorg district. The process of producing this coffee involves having the civet cat ingest coffee beans. The cat's poop is then collected and processed. Also called Civet Coffee, the market price is extremely high as it is considered more nutritious than other varieties. It also has a high cost of production because of the unusual method of producing it, as well as the processing and quality certification involved.

As I left to return to the hustle-bustle of Mumbai the next morning, the smell of coffee remained with me and so did the cool climes of Coorg. 

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