



LOVE. LIVE. LAUGH.

AND Travel



Nothing makes the human soul happier than stepping out of the mundane and exploring the new. So in this month of kinship, here's how you can go off-grid and re-discover the love for travel

TEXT: BINDU GOPAL RAO

Love and travel come in all shapes and forms. There is no one-size-fits-all. It can be the love you have for your family, friends or your significant other, or the adventures you embark on with those loved ones. And while there is little we can offer in terms of how to celebrate your love for everything else, for the hodophiles, we have curated a list of destinations that will satiate the wanderlust and celebrate the love you have for the road!

 December to February is the best time to visit

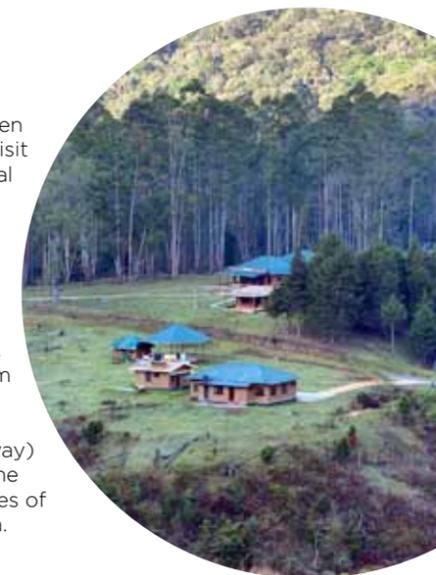
KOLUKKUMALAI

Imagine sipping a piping hot cuppa on the hills that are home to the highest tea plantation in the world! At Kolukkumalai village in Tamil Nadu, turn this imagination into reality. As you drive uphill from Suryanelli, a distance of around 6 km, the rolling greens of the Kolukkumalai Tea Estate play hide-and-seek with the white mist. Perched at an elevation of about 2400 m, the plantation is a dreamy treat, and located about 35 km from the tourist hotspot Munnar, it's serene and secluded.

At the heart of this green countryside is an old tea factory and you can explore it on a guided tour. Dating back to the 1930s, this two-storeyed factory follows time-tested and traditional methods of tea processing – seven elaborate steps that include withering, rolling, sieving, fermenting, drying, fiber extraction and grading. Savour a steaming cup of fragrant tea and bring back batches as souvenirs of your visit. You can stay in the nearby village and experience one of the most stunning sunrises in this part of the country.



Take note: When you are here, visit the Chinnakanal Waterfalls (about 30 minutes away) that drops from a height of around 600 m. The Pampadum Shola National Park (about three hours away) is home to some endemic species of fauna and flora.



The nearest airport is Kochi. SpiceJet connects direct and one-stop flights to Kochi from Dubai, Pune, Ahmedabad, Delhi and many other destinations in India. Book now at www.spicejet.com





DOOARS

An undisturbed and lush stretch of forest land at the foothills of the eastern Himalayas lies Duar or Dooar, meaning 'door', referring to the region being the gateway to Bhutan from India. Divided by the Sankosh River into the Eastern Dooars (Assam Dooars) and the Western Dooars (Bengal Dooars), this is where you can head to if nature is your calling. The dense forests teem with wildlife, as rolling tea gardens touch the horizon, interlaced by babbling rivers. The region is especially known for its wildlife, some of which you can explore at Jaldapara National Park (the largest such in Dooars), Gorumara National Park, Buxa Tiger Reserve, Chilapata Forest and Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary. The Jaldapara National Park is home to the rare one-horned rhinoceros along with the Indian bison (gaur), leopards, spotted deer, sambars, hog deer,



The weather is most pleasant from October to February



Take note: Checkout South Khayerbari (Khairbari), an animal rescue centre, and do not forget to explore the tea gardens here.



wild boars and numerous reptile and avian species. One-horned rhinos can also be spotted at Gorumara along with the grand Asiatic elephants.

Wildlife apart, keep some time in hand to explore the region's other attractions - Jayanti, a small forest village encircled by Jayanti River and picturesque hills; Buxa Fort, famous for the ruins of the Detention Camp used by the British for detaining Indian freedom fighters, and Murti, a stunning tourist spot located on the banks of the Murti River. Murti is a haven for birdwatchers and is popular for fishing, camping and hiking as well.

The nearest well-connected airport is Bagdogra. SpiceJet connects direct to Bagdogra from Delhi, Mumbai Guwahati, Bengaluru and Kolkata. Also, enjoy one-stop connections from Srinagar, Jaisalmer, Goa many other destinations in India. Book now at www.spicejet.com



The best time to visit Mahabalipuram is from October to February

MAHABALIPURAM (MAMALLAPURAM)

A slice of haven for history, heritage and architecture buffs, Mahabalipuram, known for its group of exquisite rock-cut temples from the 7th and 8th centuries, exudes infinite charm. Famous as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Mahabalipuram in Tamil Nadu does not disappoint a leisure traveller as well. Sun-kissed beaches, an endless coastline and a strategic location in close proximity to Chennai (around 50 km away) make it a perfect getaway!

One of the most prominent monuments here is the two-towered Shore Temple, overlooking the Bay of Bengal. Believed to be one of the oldest temples in India built out of blocks of



Take note: Make a pitstop at the Adivaraha Cave-Temple dedicated to Varaha, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu and do not miss the intricate elaborate relief sculptures here.



granite, it was constructed under king Narasimhavarmam II in the 8th century and symbolises the maritime ambitions of the Pallava dynasty. The pinnacle of Mahabalipuram's stonework, however, is a giant relief carving called 'Arjuna's Penance'. Inscribed on two huge, adjacent boulders, it depicts scenes from Hindu mythology and everyday life. Opposite the compound's northernmost entrance is an enormous boulder - known as 'Krishna's Butterball'. It is one of the most popular spots for photography here. Another fine work of architecture here is the 'Five Rathas' (five chariots), all said to be carved from a single large rock.

The nearest well-connected airport is Chennai. SpiceJet connects direct and one-stop flights to Chennai from Pune, Port Blair, Shirdi, Durgapur, Kolkata, Mumbai, Jaisalmer, Delhi and many more destinations in India. Book now at www.spicejet.com



GULMARG

It doesn't matter how many images of pristine white Gulmarg you see. Your jaw will still drop at the first sight of the powdery slopes of this scenic valley cocooned by the mighty snow-clad Pir Panjal range. While in summer, it's a dreamland of fresh green meadows carpeted with wild blooms, and lives upto its name "a meadow of flowers", in winter, Gulmarg is magical! Even if you do not ski, there is a lot to enjoy in the white wonderland and its famous slopes. Hike, trek and experience a ride in the gondola, the highest of its kind in the world. Breathe in the fresh crisp air and feast your eyes on the surrounding beauty as the cable car glides above hills and valleys and appears to get lost in mist and clouds! Head to the Gulmarg Biosphere Reserve to see rare species of fauna, flora and avifauna. If you are lucky, you can also spot the shy and endangered



Take note:

Check out the Strawberry Valley and live the dream of picking fresh strawberries if you are here between March and July. Pony rides are available within the farms.



musk deer, as well as the red fox. The Alpathar Lake, an ode to nature cocooned by lofty peaks, can be reached via a hike. The reflection of the mountains on the water surface, which freezes over in the colder months, is a sight to behold. The Gulmarg Golf course, said to be the highest in the world, and the Victorian-style St Mary's Church are some places you must bookmark here. While there is a long list of must-dos in Gulmarg, you can choose to just cosy up in a resort by a warm fire and share a few moments of peace!



Gulmarg is a year-round destination. Visit between December and February to enjoy snow. In summer, experience a pleasant sunny weather and green landscape



CHITRADURGA FORT

Around 200 km from Bengaluru, stands Chitradurga Fort, an offbeat destination that will take you down the pages of history. Life here is centred around the fort, which is believed to be among the country's strongest and famed for its sophisticated water harvesting system. Locally referred to as both *elusuttina kote* (fort of seven circles) and *kallina kote* (stone fortress), it once served as the center of Deccan politics. There are several mythologies associated with this place. According to one local lore, a legendary duel between Lord Bhima (one of the Pandava brothers of the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*) and the man-eating demon Hidimbasura or Hidambasura (as described in the epic) is said to have taken place on its grounds.

Within its precincts are several temples, the most notable among them being the Hidimbeshwara temple, the Venugopal Swamy

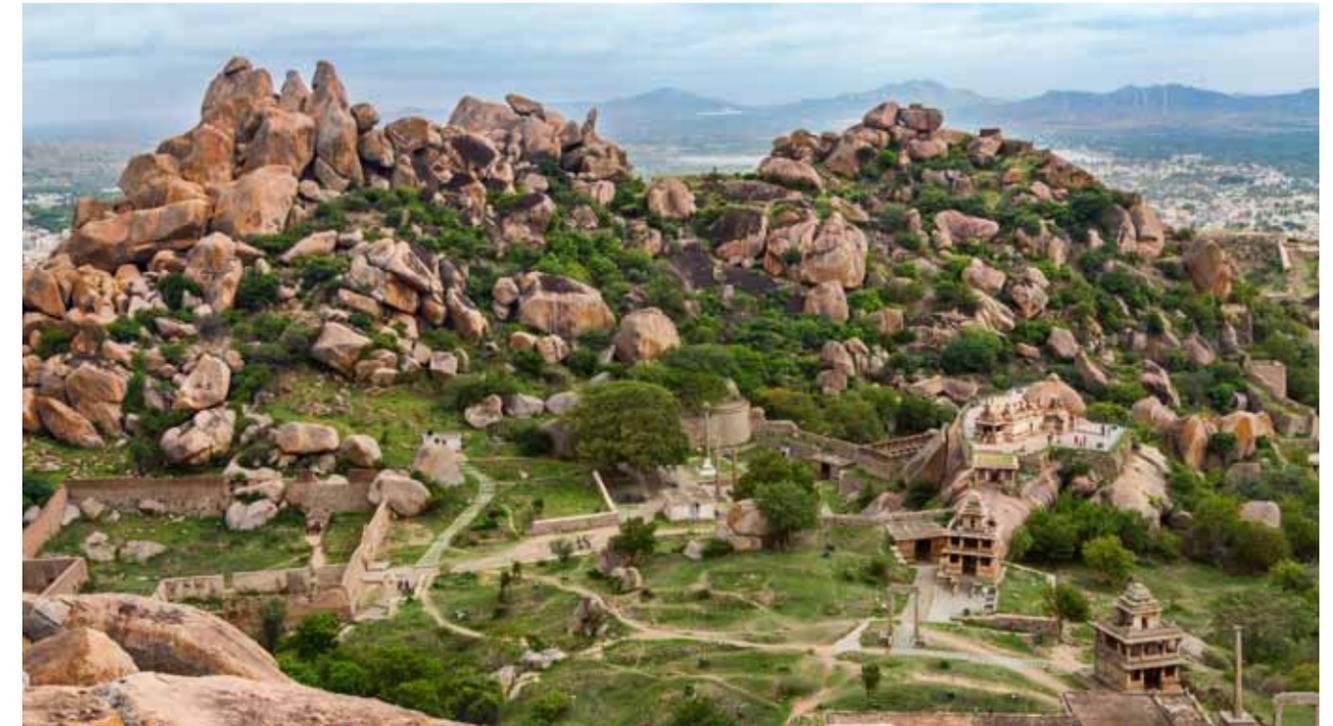


Take note: Visit Chandravalli, an archaeological site that boasts prehistoric caves and temples. Also make a trip to Vani Vilas Dam, Karnataka's oldest, around 40 km away



October through April is the best time to visit

temple, the Sampige Sideshwara (Siddheshwara) temple and a temple dedicated to the local deity Goddess Ekanteshwari. Both Hidimbeshwara and Sideshwara temples house a piece of bone that are believed to be the tooth of Hidimbasura. A must-see attraction here is the Onake Obavvana Kindi (*kindi* is the Kannad word for hole). This site is named after a brave woman Obavva and is connected to the historic attack of Hyder (Haidar) Ali on Chitradurga. Records have it that when Hyder's forces could not enter the fort, despite several attempts, they found a narrow crevice that could just barely admit a human. Obavva is said to have hid there, and displaying remarkable courage, grabbed an *onake* (pestle) and killed every soldier.



The nearest airport is Srinagar. SpiceJet connects direct and one-stop flights to Srinagar from Delhi, Mumbai, Jammu, Bagdogra, Chennai, Patna and many more cities in India. Book now at www.spicejet.com

The nearest airport is Bengaluru. SpiceJet connects direct and one-stop flights to Bengaluru from Pune, Goa, Bagdogra, Gwalior, Srinagar, Guwahati, Delhi and many more cities in India. Book now at www.spicejet.com



At Mandarmani, a section of the beach has been barricaded to protect the red crabs from human interference, making it easy to spot them



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MANDARMANI

An endless stretch of sand, countless colonies of sand bubbler crabs painting the golden beach red, and soft waves of the Bay of Bengal gently kissing the shore - all this and more await you at serene Mandarmani. Located in West Bengal's East Medinipur district, Mandarmani is touted to be the longest drivable beach in India. Though, driving is no longer allowed, you can walk or go for a morning jog, as the dawn breaks and fishermen from the nearby village sail in with their pre-dawn haul. You can even buy some of the fresh catch from the fishermen and the kitchen staff at your



Take note: If you are a foodie, this is where you can indulge in some of the best seafood, especially fish and enjoy local delicacies of the region.

accommodation, in all likelihood, will happily prepare a delicacy with it! Mandarmani, however, is not for a busy holiday. Come here to relax by the sea, count the waves, watch the sun and listen to the wind rustling through the trees lining the beach. Losing the track of time is the goal! Though there are several beach-side resorts, Mandarmani still remains relatively unexplored .



The most apt to visit is from October to February

The well-connected airport is Kolkata. SpiceJet connects direct and one-stop flights to Kolkata from Bangkok, Port Blair, Pune, Bagdogra, Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Jaisalmer, Srinagar and many more destinations in India. Book now at www.spicejet.com

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The best time to travel to Majuli is from October to February

MAJULI ISLAND

A pleasant getaway destination from the din and bustle of the city, and amidst nature, Assam's Majuli is the world's largest river island. Situated on the mighty the Brahmaputra river, Majuli is dotted with quaint villages and is home to astounding art and heritage, one of which is the stunning handcrafted mask. Majuli is also one of the most ancient sites of Assamese neo-Vaishnavite monasteries or *satras*, whose roots can be traced back to the 15th century. A tour of a few *satras* will offer a glimpse of the culture of the island through artefacts, literature, arts and crafts. Some of the *satras* that deserve a visit, include Kamalabri (Kamalabari) for ornate ceiling work, performing art, museum and historical artefacts; Auniati, which is home to several monks and Samaguri, where elaborate



Take note: Majuli is a birding hub and attracts enthusiasts from across the world. Some of the birds you can see here are adjutant stork, pelican and the whistling teal

The fine muga silk, a textile heritage of Assam, is abundantly used in the clothes made in Majuli



masks are made by hand for dances and story-telling.

To make the best of your time here, travel on foot or avail a local transport like a bicycle. Spend time with the locals and enjoy their warm hospitality. Most of the villagers practice weaving, farming and fishing along with pottery. If you express interest, they will not only welcome you with open arms but also teach you the ropes of their craft. You can even make masks with them and they will let you keep your handiwork as a souvenir!

AD

The well-connected airport is Guwahati. SpiceJet connects direct and one-stop flights to Guwahati from Delhi, Mumbai, Jaipur, Bagdogra, Udaipur, Jaisalmer and many more destinations in India. Book now at www.spicejet.com



KARJAT

One of the most engaging adventure activity hubs in Maharashtra, Karjat is known for trekking, river rafting and hiking. When you are not on an adrenaline high, feast your eyes on the lush green Sahyadri hills dotted with silver waterfalls, caves, forts and many sunset and sunrise points. A perfect weekend destination to escape the everyday city life, Karjat is a picture-perfect spot of

A great trekking option at Karjat is from to Vavarle to Matheran



Take note:

Explore the Ulhas River Valley, the Kothaligad Fort the Kondana Buddhist caves and the Bhimashankar temple. Around 20 km away is the popular vacation spot Matheran.



Karjat is at its best during monsoon. The weather is pleasant between September and February

green in the monsoon season, with the pinnacles of the mountains lost in the clouds and rain-fed rivulets streaming down verdant slopes. Its pleasant weather and clean air has made it a burgeoning health resort destination as well. Nearby, you can visit the ancient rock-cut caves and the imposing Maratha forts.

AD

The nearest well-connected airport is Mumbai. SpiceJet connects direct and one-stop flights to Mumbai from Jaipur, Srinagar, Varanasi, Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Dharamshala, Patna, Goa, Guwahati, Bagdogra, Udaipur, Dubai, Jeddah and many other destinations in India. Book now at www.spicejet.com