



The magic of 18

An incredible summer vacation

Guide

We are 18 and how! From cloud-covered hamlets to colonial cottages and from green cocoons to snowy paradises, we continue to scale new highs! Let's go red!

TEXT: BINDU GOPAL RAO

Since May 23, 2005, when the first SpiceJet flight took to the air on the Delhi-Ahmedabad-Mumbai route, your favourite domestic airline has been crisscrossing the country, connecting the corners of this vast nation. Today, the red, hot trademark tail can be seen blazing across the sky, proudly serving every Indian. As we celebrate stepping into adulthood, here are 18 stunning destinations to fly to with us this summer! Let's get the party started...

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SHOJA, 1 HIMACHAL PRADESH

If you want to experience the unadulterated mountain life this summer, head to Shoja village near the popular Tirthan Valley. Nestled in a spot of green and surrounded by mountains of dense deodar and pine forests, Shoja is a stunning dream. Best explored on foot, explore its many valleys, hike up to undiscovered hills offering stunning panoramic views and just enjoy being lost in nature. Do not miss trout fishing in the Tirthan river.



USP: A part of the Great Himalayan National Park, Tirthan Valley is spectacular. Spot a wide variety of animals and birds.



Must see

Jalori Pass with its dense forests and flower beds, Raghupur Fort, Jibhi waterfall.



The well-connected airport is Dharamshala. SpiceJet connects direct and one-stop flights to Dharamshala from Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai, Delhi and many more cities in India. Book now at www.spicejet.com

TURTUK & THANG, LADAKH 2

This is the land far over the mountains. Sitting near the northernmost end of India, Turtuk and Thang are adventures of a lifetime. Around 200 km from Leh, the road to Turtuk passes through Khardung La, one of the highest motorable roads in India and then, accompanied by the Shyok river, meanders into the Nubra Valley. Time seems to stand still at Turtuk village, a cluster of stone-walled houses with colourful wooden doors and labyrinthine lanes. Walk around, meet the warm residents of the Balti community, taste local apricots and visit the few homes where traditional crafts like weaving and wood carving are practiced



USP: Don't go with a plan and enjoy the journey as well. In May, take in the dreamy apricot blooms with a sweet scent.

and preserved. A few kilometres ahead is Thang, the last village on the Indian side. The River Shyok takes a winding turn, separating Thang from the next village Phranu, which is in Pakistan. Explore the local culture and cuisine, interact with the warm and hospitable locals and enjoy adventurous activities like trekking and camping. Make a day trip to Thang, stop at the viewpoint to feast your eyes on the kaleidoscope of nature!



Must see

The Turtuk Monastery, a historic polo ground and a 16th-century mosque



The nearest airport is Leh. SpiceJet connects direct and one-stop flights to Leh from Delhi, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad and many more cities in India. Book now at www.spicejet.com



MECHUKA, 3 ARUNACHAL PRADESH

A forested valley where horses run wild; where lofty, snow-clad caramelised mountains are set against a sky so brilliantly blue that no photographic filter can copy and a gently flowing river that can lull you to sleep. In this surreal frame sits idyllic Mechuka, a majorly Buddhist village near the Indo-China border. The best way to explore this dreamscape is by staying in a quaint homestay, most of which are made of glistening pinewood with colourful doors and windows. Members of the local Memba community are warm hosts and will offer to show you their village and farms! Wake up at dawn with a cup of fragrant ghee-tea. Walk to the nearby Buddhist monasteries, plan a picnic by the river, watch the wild horses in the flowering meadows and feast on delicious local dishes of sticky millet cakes and spicy pork sticks, over a cosy kitchen fire and friendly chats! If your innocent childhood landscape painting could come to life, it would be here!



USP: Take the Aalo (Along)-Mechuka road and fall in love with the majestic Siko Dido waterfall.

Must see

Visit the Samten Yongcha Gumpa sitting on a hilltop nearby. Said to be almost 400 years old, the monastery offers peace and unhindered views. Trek to Samden Choeling Gumpa for sunset views.



MALSHEJ GHAT, 4 MAHARASHTRA

Located in the biodiversity hotspot of the Western Ghats, Malshej Ghat in Maharashtra is a picturesque mountain pass descending into the Konkan region and dotted with waterfalls, lakes and hills that stay pleasant even in summer. The lush landscape turns every shade of green with the first showers of monsoon and then, a bright pink, as the meadows are carpeted with wild flowers. The pinks further deepen as migrating flamingoes fly in. A trekker's paradise, there are several trekking paths, including one to Harishchandragad Fort passing through stunning Sahyadri landscapes. The Ajoba hill-top fort is also popular for trekking and rock climbing, and the nearby Darkoba peak offers a magnificent panoramic view.

Must see

The scenic backwaters of the Pimpalgaon Joga Dam.



USP: Enjoy lakeside views and the magical environs with the morning fog and mists swirling up from the valley.

The well-connected airports are Mumbai and Pune. SpiceJet connects direct and one-stop flights to Mumbai from Bagdogra, Srinagar, Guwahati, Tirupati and many more cities. Also, fly to Pune from Srinagar, Jaipur, Dharamshala, Goa, Patna and other cities in India. Book now at www.spicejet.com



DZUKOU VALLEY, 5 NAGALAND

Often dubbed the Shangri-La of Northeast India, Dzukou valley sits sandwiched between Manipur and Nagaland, with a meandering stream marking the state borders.

Set in a gorgeous landscape of knolls, hillocks, ravines, rivulets and caves, the valley is best known for the kaleidoscopic carpet of wild flowers that bloom between May and July, the star attraction being the rare pink Dzukou Lily.

Most travellers start the two-day trek to the valley from Viswema village and spend the night in a rest house inside. You can also pitch your own tent for a night under the night sky.



Must see

The green Khonoma village is nearby and so is Kisama, the venue for the popular Hornbill Festival held every December. Kohima too is just an hour away.



USP: Many hikers extend the Dzukou valley trek through rhododendron forests to Japfu Peak, the second highest in Nagaland, known for its stunning sunrise and panoramic views of the entire region.

BETAAB VALLEY, 6 JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Betaab Valley in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir, is what fairy tales are made of. Nestled amidst dense forests of pine and deodar, with high mountain peaks on the horizon, and the Lidder river meandering through it, this valley is picture-perfect. Offering fantastic views of the Himalayas, the valley has been popular as a backdrop for films (the valley is named after a Bollywood movie *Betaab*). It is also a part of the sacred Amarnath Yatra, and during the season sees thousands of pilgrims.



Must see

Explore the Vera Aru Wildlife Sanctuary, Batote Park, Baisaran and Tulian Lake.



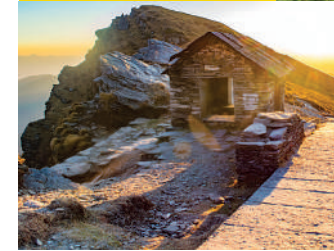
USP: Do visit the Lidder Amusement Park for long walks along the river or horse riding.

CHOPTA, UTTARAKHAND 7

Often dubbed as the mini Switzerland of Uttarakhand, Chopta with its salubrious climate and undulating views of the snow-laden Himalayas is the quiet getaway the doctor ordered. The landscape dotted with conifers, pines, deodars and rhododendrons is at the centre of the holy Panch Kedar circuit, which includes the temples at Kedarnath, Madmaheshwar, Rudranath and Kalpeshwar. A paradise for bird lovers, over 240 avian species have been spotted here. Visit the Chandrashila temple atop the eponymous peak from where you can see the Nanda Devi, Bandarpunch, Chaukhamba and Kedar peaks. Believed to be more than 1,000 years old, the Tungnath Temple is one of the world's highest shrines dedicated to Lord Shiva. The Deoriatal Lake and Ukhimath, the winter seat of Lord Kedarnath, are other pitstops.

Must see

Try trekking to the Chandrashila peak, visit the scenic Sari village and Bisurital, a hidden lake in the Mandakini valley.



USP: Chopta is known for bugyals, the high-altitude meadows, which are lush and green in summer. Rohini bugyal is one of the largest and most beautiful.

SOHRA, MEGHALAYA 8

Known more by its famous name Cherrapunjee, one of the wettest area on earth, Sohra offers a pleasant surprise at every bend. Nestled in the East Khasi hills, it tells a tale of nature's beauty with misty hill-tops, deep and revered forests, grand waterfalls, exotic orchids and an ancient culture. The road to Sohra winds its way through lofty hills and deep valleys. Then appears Sohra with its colourful houses perched on the hill side. Start your exploration of the town with the gargantuan Nohkalikai Falls, the tallest plunge waterfall in India, where a silver stream of water drops endlessly down a cliff! Do visit the Arwah Cave lined by lush greenery with its pathways winding through the side of Lawshynna Hill offering picturesque views of the waterfall and the surrounding valley. Go beyond the epic Nongriat double-decker root bridge to a short but intense trek that leads to the Rainbow Falls, known for its turquoise pool and giant boulders.



Must see

The Mawkdok Dympep Valley and Dainthlen Falls. Also make a trip to Thangkharang Park, home to endemic and exotic orchids.

USP: Explore the Mawsmi cave on the outskirts of Sohra. The dramatic limestone caves are well-lit and can be enjoyed at length.



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SpiceJet connects direct and one-stop exclusive flights to Shillong from Delhi and many more destinations in India. Book now at www.spicejet.com



DIMA HASAO, ASSAM

Dima Hasao is home to several indigenous communities and is said to be one of the greenest destinations in Assam, surrounded by the dense forests of the Barail mountain range. One of the most popular sites in Dima Hasao is the beautiful Halflong village, known for its legendary Blue Hills and the eponymous lake. The raging waters of the Kopili River feed the two dams in Umrong, creating stunning scenery. Jatinga, a scenic village known for its rich wildlife and rolling hills, is also worth a visit. However, every village in Dima Hasao is special, with hills, scenic rivers, rumbling waterfalls, orange orchards, pineapple gardens and welcoming people



USP: There are numerous treks here, especially at Thuruk, and one can also go bird-watching at Jatinga.

Must see

Panimur waterfalls, where part of the Hindi movie *Rangoon* was filmed. Also check out the ruins of the ancient Kachari kingdom in Maibang, and the rock-cut structures at the Maibong Archaeological site.



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

KURSEONG, WEST BENGAL

A peaceful hill town that was used by the British as a sanatorium, Kurseong stands surrounded in spectacular serenity even today. The small town revolves around two roads and a railway track! While the Hill Cart and Tenzing Norgay roads cut across the town, its nerve centre is a bustling marketplace with the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway running right through it. If you are here, then don't miss riding the Toy Train. The sprawling plantations of Castleton and Makaibari here are spellbinding. Do taste the local cookies! Blessed with a pleasant weather throughout the year, it's also known as the 'Land of White Orchids'.



Must see

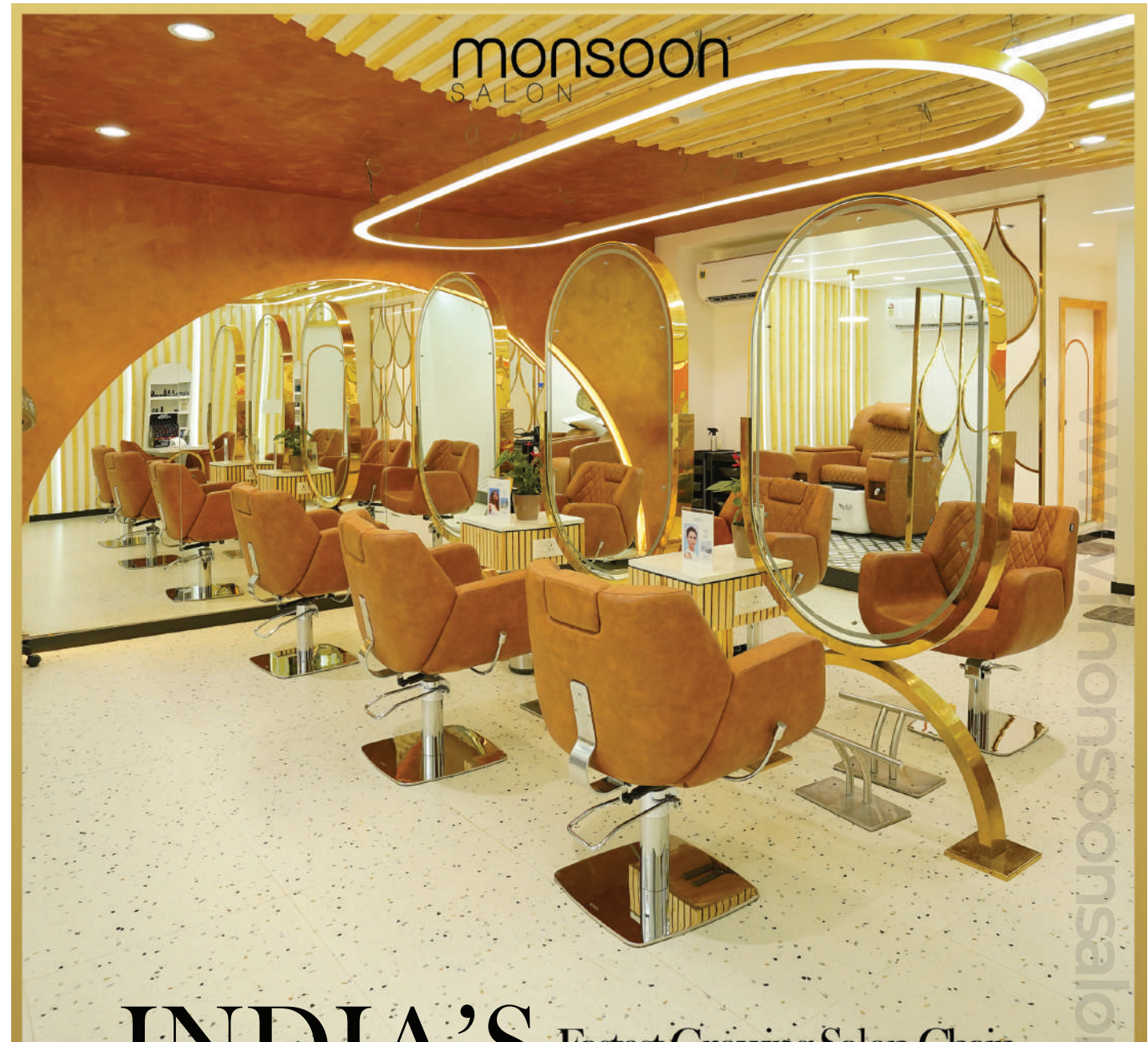
Visit the Ambotia Shiva Temple, Downhill Deer Park, Eagle's Craig as well as several museums



The nearest well-connected airport is Bagdogra. SpiceJet connects direct and one-stop flights to Bagdogra from Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Kolkata Mumbai, Delhi, Guwahati and many more cities. Also, enjoy exclusive flight to Pakyong (Sikkim) from Delhi and many more cities in India. Book now at www.spicejet.com



USP: Take a guided tour at the famed Makaibari tea estate, said to be the first such in the world!



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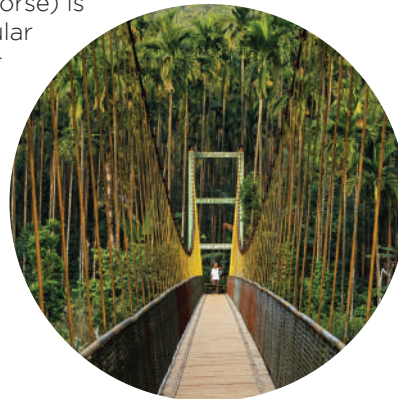
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KUDREMUKH, KARNATAKA 11

A mountain peak kissing the clouds, rises Sphinx-like from dense jungles and a green checkerboard of tea plantations. Till as far as the eyes go, the green mosaic spreads, stretching along like a soft silk carpet. That's the magic of Kudremukh! A land that offers an abundance of tea, coffee, cardamom and mango, Kudremukh attracts tourists who come here for serenity and calm. A landmark for sailors for over 2,000 years, Kudremukh overlooks the Arabian Sea and is a trekkers' paradise. The trek to the Kudremukh Peak (shaped like the face of a horse) is the most popular and, on a clear day, can offer a magical glimpse of the mountains.



Must see

Kadambi waterfalls, Hanuman Gundi Falls and Ganga Moola that are said to be the origin of the rivers Tunga, Bhadra and Netravati. You can also visit the temple of town of Kalasa or Agumbe, where the popular story of Malgudi Days was based, and also the hill station of Chikmagalur.

USP: The Kudremukh National Park is a biodiversity hub and within its dense foliage reside a plethora of wildlife, including the tiger! It's also a birding zone.

The well-connected airport is Bengaluru. SpiceJet connects direct and one-stop flights to Bengaluru from Delhi, Gwalior, Kolkata, Bagdogra, Pondicherry, Srinagar, Shirdi and many more cities in India. Book now at www.spicejet.com

VALPARAI, TAMIL NADU 12

It's a green, green world. That's the dream you live at Valparai, an offbeat hill station in the Annamalai (Anaimalai) mountains. Cocooned by rolling tea estates dotted by colonial cottages, spice plantation, dense forests and low hanging clouds, the hilly hamlet seems stuck in an exquisite time-warp. Not yet on the popular tourist map, enjoy a serene vacation here, visiting numerous waterfalls and temples or simply enjoying the views as you sip countless cups of tea and breathe in fresh air with a whiff of exotic spices! At dawn and dusk, explore the forests to catch a glimpse of the lion-tailed macaque or the great hornbill.



Must see

Do visit the Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary or the Aliyar Dam situated in the charming Annamalai Hills. Witness the shimmering waters cascading down from Monkey Falls and Chinnakallar Falls.

USP: The road to Valparai is equally pretty, winding up through dense green. If lucky, you may spot elephants, Nilgiri tahr or even leopards!



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CHITKUL, HIMACHAL PRADESH

Famous as the last inhabited village of India before the Indo-Tibet border, Chitkul tops the offbeat destination list. Remote and strikingly beautiful, it is the jewel of the Baspa Valley in Kinnaur district. Framed by the majestic Kinner Kailash peak, said to be the sacred abode of Lord Shiva. Chitkul is a spot of sunshine with apple orchards, cosy wooden houses and snow-covered peaks. If you are an adventure lover, you can opt for the many treks that take place in and around here, including the extremely challenging one to Lamkhaga Pass.



Must see
Pray at the revered Mathi Devi temple and Bering Nag temple, visit the Kamru Fort, Karchham Dam and Lake, Sarahan and Kalpa.



The well-connected airport is from Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai, Delhi and many more cities in India. Book now at www.spicejet.com

USP: Spend your time gazing at the Baspa riverfront and do plan a picnic to the green Sangla meadow.



PACHMARHI, MADHYA PRADESH

Often called the green heart of India, Pachmarhi is a stunning expanse of lushness high in the Satpura range of mountains. A unique hill station, it's popularly known as the Queen of the Satpura and is a part of a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. It gets its name from the five sandstone caves, a place that is said to have been used by the Pandavas during their exile, as described in the epic *Mahabharata*. Sitting amidst a sea of green, Pachmarhi was also a colonial hideaway, vestiges of which can be seen even today in charming cottages and grand churches.



Must see
Pachmarhi Lake, Bee Falls, Apsara Vihar Falls and Silver Falls as well as the Jata Shankar caves, Dhupgarh, Handi Khoh, Bada Mahadev cave temple and Reechgarh.



USP: The forests here are rich sources of Ayurvedic herbs and combined with the fresh air, Pachmarhi is one of the most relaxing wellness destinations in the country.



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MUNSIYARI, UTTARAKHAND 15

A remote hamlet, Munsiyari seems to be perched on the edge of the world. Circled by some of the highest Himalayan peaks, there seems to be no road out of this paradise! Wherever you go in this tiny settlement, the peaks are never far off. Be it the Panchachuli range, Hansling, Rajarambha or Chiplakot, they always keep an eye on you. And at dusk and dawn, they play with the sun's rays, creating one of the planet's most dramatic cinema-scopes! Enveloped by snow most of the year, dreamy Munsiyari can have a hypnotic effect, with its grand mountain views and the clear night sky with glittering stars.



USP: It is said Munsiyari offers the best views of the Panchachuli range, as it is the base for expeditions to Ralam and Milam glaciers and the Nanda Devi Peak.



Must see

Birathi Falls, the Bala Falls, the Munsiyari Tulip Garden & Eco Park, Thamri Lake, Lichen Park and Khaliya Top.



ZULUK, SIKKIM 16

Journey to the magical hamlet of Zuluk on the rugged terrain of the lower Himalayas in Pakyong and find the much-needed blissful escape in a land suspended in time. An important transit point on the ancient Silk Route, nothing much has changed in remote Zuluk, where life still goes on in an unhurried pace under the shadow of the mighty snow-covered mountains, including the Kanchenjunga. Surrounded by forests teeming with wildlife, Zuluk offers stunning views. The most popular viewpoint is at Thambi!

Must see

Memenchu Lake that stays frozen till May; Lungthung for the best views of Mt Kachenjunga; the gorgeous Nathang Valley; and the golf course at Kupup.



USP: Zuluk is most popular for the Old Silk Road that can be seen from here. There are 32 hairpins on a single road, famously known as the zigzag road, which is a unique engineering feat and the view is enchanting!



The well-connected airport is Bagdogra. SpiceJet connects direct and one-stop flights to Bagdogra from Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Kolkata Mumbai, Delhi, Guwahati and many more cities. Also, enjoy exclusive flight to Pakyong (Sikkim) from Delhi and many more cities in India. Book now at www.spicejet.com

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MEGHAMALAI, TAMIL NADU 17

Playing peek-a-boo with the clouds, Meghamalai lives upto its popular monicker, the cloud mountains! A mystery in shades of green, the beautiful and not-so-known mountain range in Madurai is surrounded by lush tea, cinnamon, pepper and cardamom plantations. With rugged nature trails and waterfalls, the Meghamalai Tiger Reserve is home to many animals other than the big cat. Spot birds like blue robin and the great Indian hornbill. The hilltop temples of Lord Murugan and Mangala Devi are not just for the devout but also offer stunning vistas of the landscape. Stroll or sit by the serene waters near Highwavys Dam or Iravangalar Dam.

Must see

The Clouds Land Falls or Meghamalai falls, Suruli Falls and Vellamalai are other must-see attractions.



JAWHAR, MAHARASHTRA 18

A quaint hill station in the Sahyadri mountain ranges, Jawhar was founded by the Munke dynasty and was once used by Maratha king Shivaji Maharaj. Known for its deep woods, cascading waterfalls, verdant valleys and stunning mountains, the city is a blissful retreat. Trek to the Bhupalgad Fort or Jai Vilas Palace for panoramic views. Do enjoy spectacular oranges and pinks from the famous Sunset Point.

Must see

Do checkout Hanuman Point, Jaisagar Dam and KhadKhad Dam, the opulent Jai Vilas Palace, the Old Fort and Dabhosa waterfalls. Nearby is stunning Shirpamal, where Shivaji's army had camped.



USP: Jawhar has been home to many tribal communities like Warli, Kolcha and Kukana who are doing their bit to preserve their art and crafts.



The nearest airport is Nashik. SpiceJet connects direct and one-stop flights to Nashik from Delhi, Ahmedabad, Dharamshala, Bagdogra and many more cities in India. Book now at www.spicejet.com



USP: Enjoy the old-world colonial charm of the plantation guest houses. Drive to Maharaja Methu, a green and windy viewpoint overlooking the plains on one side and the Periyar dam and forests on another. The Periyar Tiger Reserve is around two hours away.



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