



# The CALL OF Rain

Monsoon is the season to rejoice, refresh and relive. Rejuvenate yourself in these offbeat destinations this season

TEXT: BINDU GOPAL RAO



Surrounding Banswara are several waterfalls, which come roaring to life during monsoon. Some of the most popular ones are Jua Falls, Singhapura Falls, Jholla Falls and the Kadeliya Falls. Also nearby is the Anand Sagar Lake, often referred to as the Bai Talab, commissioned by an erstwhile queen. It is popular for "wish-fulfilling" *kalpa vriksha* trees nearby! The elegant Raj Mandir, or City Palace, from its hilltop perch offers splendid views of Banswara and its verdant surroundings. The royal summer retreat, Badal Mahal, is located on the shoreline of Diablab Lake, a lotus-filled tranquil water body. Banswara is also popular for the varieties of mangoes grown here – including around 20 indigenous ones.

Evergreen all year round and surrounded by lakes and waterfalls, lush Banswara is a hidden gem just three hours away by road from royal Udaipur. An ancient land, which has been the home of the Bhil tribe for centuries, this serene town is nestled between Udaipur and Chittorgarh. Drenched in rain during monsoon, Banswara takes on an even darker hue of green, its lakes brimming with shimmering blue.

Often called the "home of a hundred islands", Banswara is drained by the Mahi River, whose waters fill the large Mahi Dam and its serene backwaters. The nearby Kagdi Lake and adjoining

garden make for a beautiful picnic spot. The lake is a huge draw for birds and birders. Enjoy a lazy cruise on the lake and soak in the beauty of the blue bounded in by rolling green hills. On the outskirts of Banswara is the Chacha Kota backwaters dotted with hundreds of little islands covered with pastures and forests, which come alive in the rains with lively waterfalls streaking down the forested hillsides. With an abundance of greenery and the horizon-kissing blue, these backwaters are the best off-grid destination ever! Relax in the pristine landscape and watch the local tribal communities make a simple living!



## Guide

Around 150 km from Banswara is the royal city of Udaipur, which turns into a magical land during monsoon. The City of Lakes is enveloped in monsoon mist as the lakes brim with water. Sajjangarh, or the Monsoon Palace is a must-visit!



**CHORLA GHAT, GOA**

A forest that glows in the monsoon may seem like magic. But in Goa, just 60 km from Panjim, the forest in and around Chorla Ghat starts giving off an iridescent light during the rainy season. This light comes from a type of bioluminescent mushroom that glows in the dark. Abundantly found in this biodiversity hotspot of the Western Ghats, these mushrooms flourish during the monsoon months and cover logs, twigs and stumps of trees, especially the ones that are decaying. After sunset, they start giving off an unusual greenish glow that lends the forest a magical, mystical air! However, one needs to tread deep into the forest to witness this glow and also its brightness depends on the amount of moisture in the air - the mushrooms glow when they have the right level of moisture in them.

But even if you do not catch the light, Chorla Ghat in monsoon is a mist-enveloped fairy-tale nestled in the green Sahyadri range. Explore the Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary and make pit stops at the serene Anjunem Dam. Mhadei has flourishing flora and fauna, including the royal Bengal tiger. The Amthane Dam is also nearby. As you navigate the green, you will see silvery waterfalls zigzagging down. Another highlight here is the thundering Vajra-Sakla waterfalls and a trek can be an exhilarating experience. The rainforests here have been recognised as an important birding sight as well, and you can spot many winged friends. Enjoy the drive through rural Goa - quaint villages, old churches, paddy fields and backwaters!



Not just Chorla Ghat, in monsoon, driving through the Western Ghats is a serene experience. You can meander through mist-laden Amboli Ghat, or the Anmod Ghat.

*Monsoon in Goa*



During monsoon, Goa's serene emerald beauty shines through! Go rafting on the Mahadei river, visit the spice gardens, and enjoy local festivals like Bonderam.

**KAAS PATHAR, SATARA, MAHARASHTRA**

Popularly known as Maharashtra's Valley of Flowers, Satara, about 50 km from Mahabaleshwar is home to the Kaas Plateau or Kaas Pathar, a UNESCO biodiversity site. From July to October, the 1,000-hectare area turns into a riot of colour, with wildflowers carpeting the land till the horizon. More than 850 species of flowering plants are found on the plateau, including several rare ones. Walk or hike around the plateau to soak in the feast of colours. Kaas Plateau's unique ecosystem also allows several endangered species of plants to thrive. A few kilometres away is the village of Bamnoli on the bank of the Koyna lake, where you can enjoy boat rides. Just beyond the Kaas plateau is the beautiful and serene Kaas Lake that sits pretty amidst rolling mountains. Carry a picnic basket and spend some time by the lake! The lake is also a bird watchers' haven. Around 5 km away is the mighty Vajrai waterfall thundering through the lush valley and making for a stunning visual. The panoramic view of the valley with the waterfall and the low floating clouds is magical.



Between July and October Kaas Plateau turns into a carpet of flowers

Satara is also known for its history, as it was the erstwhile capital of the Maratha empire, and is home to many temples and historical sites. An important site is the Ajinkyatara Fort and the Mangalai (Mangala) Devi temple nearby. The city has many other ancient temples. A stop at Dhavadashi, where Rani Laxmibai was born, is recommended.

Image: Arindam-Bhattacharya



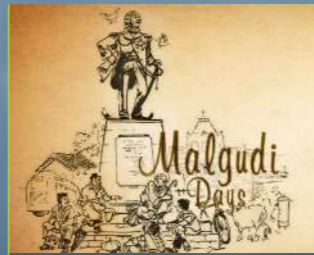
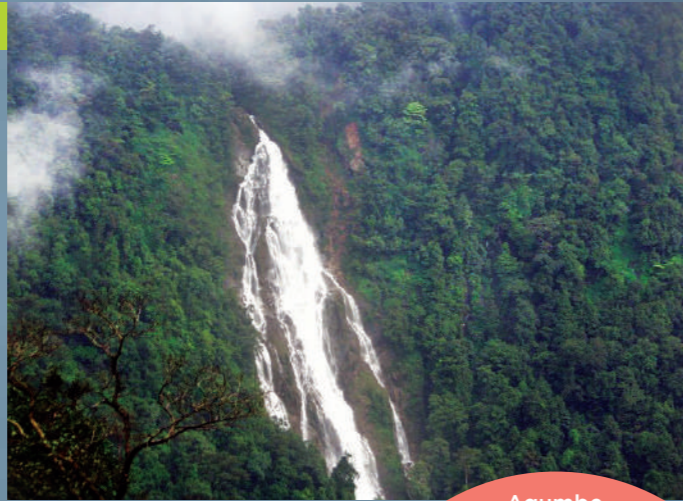
*Don't Miss*

Near Kaas Plateau, explore Sajjangad Fort, Lingamala Falls, Elphinstone Point and the Koyna Wildlife Sanctuary. The sanctuary, a Unesco World Heritage Site, is a haven of solitude and during the rains, is a velvety carpet of undulating green. While exploring do try the local Kolhapuri cuisine, including the spicy *tambda rasa!*

**AGUMBE, KARNATAKA**

You do not have to be a pluviophile to plan a monsoon holiday in Agumbe, a sleepy village in the Western Ghats of Karnataka. Known as one of the wettest places in the country, life in Agumbe is geared to welcome the long, wet days. Residents here will not bat an eyelid if on a scorching hot afternoon wisps of cloud cover the sun and within minutes a opaque curtain of silver drops down from the sky. Hardly anyone hurries to take cover, they let the rain be a part of their daily life. A green screen blankets every surface - moss and lichen cling to facades of houses, sloping roofs drain into gurgling roadside streams, and lush gardens overflow their fences! And if you still can't imagine, think of *Malgudi Days*, as this is where the popular television series (based on stories of R.K. Narayan) was shot!

The dense forests surrounding Agumbe, are a leafy haven throughout the year. But in monsoon, they truly come alive. As the rain pours, the tranquil forest comes to life with a magical cacophony. Steams gurgle, waterfalls roar, puddles are born and mature into ponds overnight, frogs croak and mushrooms spring up in the most unexpected places. To learn more about the region's wild residents, visit the Agumbe Rainforest Research Station (ARRS), which, among many other topics, also studies the king cobra, a common resident of Agumbe.



*Don't Miss*

If you want to relive the charm of *Malgudi Days*, you can stay at the Dodda Mane homestay, where the series was filmed. The charming, century-old house is designed in traditional style with carved wooden doors, narrow stone staircases, cosy rooms, a well and a large courtyard. Try its traditional local meal for a taste of Karnataka's culture!

Agumbe is a trekking paradise. You can trek to the nearby Barkana Falls, one of the highest in India, with the route offering gorgeous valley views. Try hiking to the Jogi Gundi and Onake Abbi falls as well. During the treks, take time to study the forest and its monsoon habitat - rare species of insects, frogs and even snakes!

