



GREAT MONSOON DESTINATIONS

WITH THE RAINS HAVING WELL AND TRULY SET IN ACROSS MOST OF INDIA, HERE'S WALKING YOU THROUGH A CLUTCH OF PLACES WHERE YOU CAN ENJOY THE WET SEASON IN THE PEAK OF ITS GLORY



Most parts of India, dusty and hot for many of the months, come alive during the monsoons. Some are suddenly adorned with lush greenery, others are speckled with gushing waterfalls, still others wear colourful cloaks of wild flowers. Discerning travellers eschew the summer months when crowds are swarming all over the place and hotel rates are sky high. Instead, they opt for the cooler and greener monsoon months which also offers the bonus of more economical holiday packages. We run you through some wonderful destinations where you can enjoy the monsoon in its full glory.

MUNNAR

✈️ KOCHI

Rolling hills and emerald green tea plantations make for a picture postcard setting, and with the onset of monsoon, the gathering clouds lend a surreal feel to the breathtaking scenery. Rain-drenched Munnar (eastern Kerala) has a freshness about it that is lacking at other times of the year. The clouds hang low or gently sweep across, alternately masking everything in a translucent curtain and clearing up to reveal stunning vistas. The region is shrouded in mystery, thanks to the mist left behind. The best way to spend time is to soak in the atmosphere, take long walks along deserted roads or inside plantations, and become part of the romance that Munnar exudes.

(Distance from airport: 130 km)



ANDAMAN ISLANDS

✈️ PORT BLAIR

Miles from the country's coast and in the middle of the Bay of Bengal lie the Andaman Islands: exotic, unspoiled, and offering a significant slice of history. Perhaps the only place in India with such marine diversity, the rains bring many of the water-based activities here to a grinding halt but the sea and coast continue to exert a magnetic pull.

You can either stay put in Port Blair, or if the weather permits, head out to one of the islands, especially Havelock, which is less crowded and has beautiful beaches and coves where you can watch the waters - bright blue one minute, angry grey the next... A dip in the sea may seem scary but it is an altogether different experience lying on the beach and watching the waves lash against the rocks with a thunderous roar. This is not for everyone but comes highly recommended for those who love the monsoon.

(Distance from airport: 69 km)

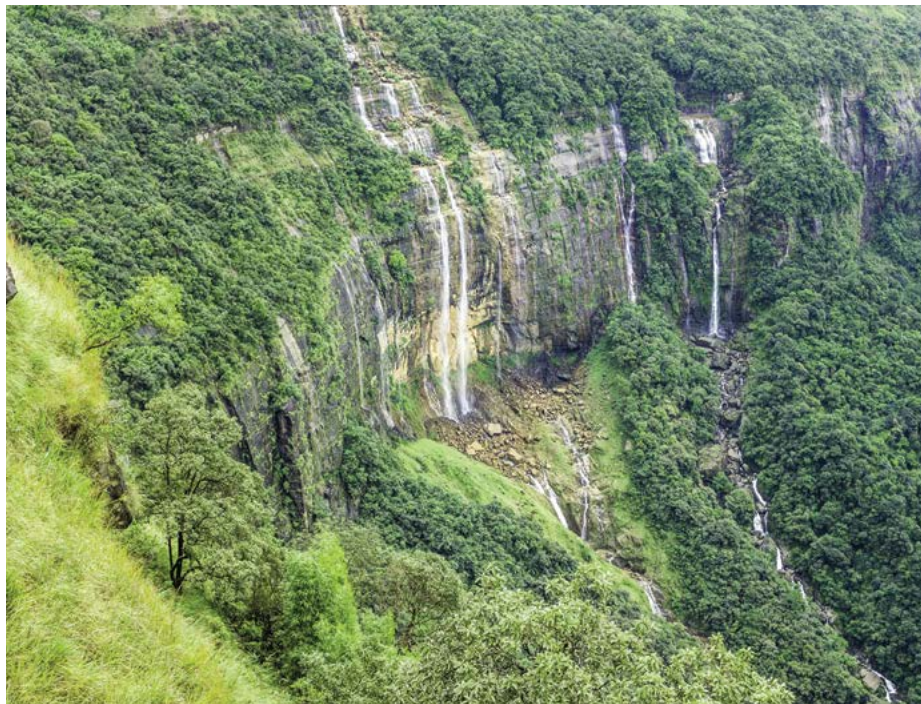
SHILLONG

✈️ GUWAHATI

The rain gods are particularly bountiful when it comes to the north-eastern state of Meghalaya, whose very name translates as megh (cloud) and alaya (home) i.e. home of the clouds. The state's capital, Shillong, sees average to heavy rainfall during the monsoon months, with light drizzles often morphing into torrential rain.

You can go boating on the massive Barapani Lake or Umiam River or head to Nehru Park nearby, where you can see a wide variety of flora and fauna. If you're an adrenaline junkie, the rapids at the base of the Elephant Falls are just the place for you. A trek to Shillong Peak, located at an altitude of 1,965 metre, proves just why Shillong earned the epithet, "Scotland of the East". The gushing waterfalls, lush green vegetation and orchids in a riot of colours are sure to blow you away.

(Distance from airport: 120 km)





GOA



It's a given that Goa is where you can enjoy sun, sand and surf throughout the year. However, from June through October, rains bring an added flourish to the natural bounty of this state. Soaked beaches, verdant environs, swollen waterfalls plus all the offseason financial benefits make it worth your while to visit Goa during the monsoon.

You can visit the iconic Dudhsagar Falls which are in their full glory. Else, this is also the time when Goans celebrate a plethora of festivals. Sao Joao, the fertility feast of Saint John the Baptist, sees men jumping into overflowing wells to retrieve bottles of feni, the local alcohol. Also, the feast of Saint Peter and Saint Paul has people sailing up the river on rafts that double as stage for performances. Then there is the Bonderam fest, replete with colourful flags and parades. As in neighbouring Maharashtra, Goa too celebrates Ganesh Chaturthi.

SHANTINIKETAN



In 1862, Rabindranath Tagore's father Maharshi Debendranath had build a small house and called it Shantiniketan (Abode of peace). Thirty nine years later, Rabindranath started a school there that was modeled on the lines of the ancient gurukul system. It would later grow into a university called Visva Bharati. Shantiniketan is a year-round tourist destination but becomes all the more attractive during the monsoons with visitors attracted to the campus' wonderful sculptures, frescoes, murals, and cultural events including Varsha Mangal (photo on right).

(Distance from airport: 164 km)





JOG FALLS

✈ MANGALORE

The Sharavathi River splits downstream from the Linganamakki Dam and plunges 830 feet to form four distinct falls i.e. Raja, Rani, Roarer and Rocket that are together called Jog Falls. Situated in the Shimoga district of Karnataka, the spectacular falls are certainly the state's pride. While they are visible almost throughout the year, it is during the monsoon that they are at their gushing best.

You can sit on one of the benches and gaze at the waterfalls, which, framed by thick green jungle, make for a stunning sight. It's even possible to catch a brilliant rainbow on a sunny day. When the falls plummet into the valley below, they form an impenetrable screen of milky white. When clouds cloak the falls from view, it's magical to hear the roaring water. Within minutes, they clear out and reveal priceless views...

(Distance from airport: 216 km)

KODAIKANAL

✈ MADURAI

Known as the Princess of hill stations, Kodaikanal is Tamil for 'gift of the forest'. Not only does the hill town retain an idyllic charm during the rains, the hills turn a deep green and the place is transformed into a kaleidoscope of colours. You can pick from a number of sights including Kodai Lake, Coaker's Walk, Golf Course, Bryant Park, Pine Forest, Dolphin Nose and Pillar Rocks. You can go for treks or simply walk down to Kodai Lake while soaking in the beauty of pink cherry blossoms that lend a distinct character to Kodaikanal at this time of the year. Cycling around the lake is another fun activity and cycles of all sizes are up for hire. Children can enjoy horse rides here. Enjoy the omnipresent cascades of the season while eating at small cafes that serve simple yet delectable fare mostly fresh out of the oven.

(Distance from airport: 117 km)





LADAKH

✈ SRINAGAR

Ladakh lies in the rain-shadow region of the Himalayas and experiences very little rain, but it is precisely for this reason that you should travel to this arid yet stunning region during the monsoon. In fact, May-end to September is the best time to visit Ladakh when whatever little rain is experienced in short, heavy bursts and the skies remain a clear, pristine blue rest of the time.

If adventure is what you seek, white-water rafting on the Indus and Zaskar rivers is just right for you. Opt for popular trails such as the Phey-Nimo route, Kharu-Spituk route and Upshi-Kharu route for spectacular mountain views. Ladakh also offers a large dose of culture, with its colourful festivals and gompas that display a unique blend of Indian, Tibetan and Chinese-Buddhist cultures.

(Distance from airport: 430 km)

COORG

✈ MANGALORE

Sometimes called the Scotland of India, Coorg is a visual treat during the monsoon. Located in the Western Ghats in Karnataka, it is well-known for its coffee plantations. Home to Tadiandamol, the third tallest peak in Karnataka, Coorg's rugged terrain makes for an ideal getaway, especially during the rains.

Behold the cascading Abbey Falls that are in full steam at this time of the year.

Another must-see is Talacauvery, the birth-place of the revered Cauvery River. Seated at an elevation, Talacauvery is almost always enveloped by fog and makes for breathtaking views during the rainy season.

Likewise, Madikeri's Raja Seat offers stunning views of the valley drenched in colours of the monsoon.

(Distance from airport: 150 km)



(BY ANITA RAO-KASHI, BINDU GOPAL RAO AND AARTI KAPUR SINGH)