



CALL OF THE HILLS

Lansdowne, one of the unspoilt hill stations in Uttarakhand will charm you with its pristine beauty

By Bindu Gopal Rao

"HOW GLORIOUS A GREETING THE sun gives the mountains!" Author John Muir's words came to my head when I witnessed one of the best sunrises in the hill town of Lansdowne. The sky change to varying shades of orange from pink before the sun came out in all its pristine glory.

Located in the Pauri Garhwal district of Uttarakhand, this quaint hill station is an immaculately maintained Cantonment town. This charming town is accessible thanks due to the well maintained motorable roads. Found and named after then viceroy (of India) Lord Lansdowne in 1887, several buildings and churches here were constructed during the British Raj.

Also home to one of the finest regiments of the Indian army, the Garhwal Rifles, Lansdowne has the best kept Officers' Mess in Asia. Your itinerary should include the Darban Singh Regimental Museum, displaying a rare collection of Garhwali rifles aged over 119 years old, thereby giving you



a glimpse of the glorious history of this regiment. As you take a stroll here you will also come across costumes from that period. For those spiritually inclined, there's the Tarkeshwar Temple situated 40 km away that can be accessed by a kilometre walk amidst tall deodar trees. At the premises you will be greeted with rows of bells that I am told are tied when devotees return after their wishes are fulfilled. For some architecture delight, stop by St Mary's Church (which remains closed on weekdays). Head to Jaiharikal (five km from Lansdowne) for the Indian avatar of Jesus Christ and Mother Mary at the picturesque Jeevan Dhara Ashram. Enjoy the sunset from Sakhmunda Village known for their friendly villagers and lush pathways. We stopped by a household where a group of women sang songs and even offered piping hot tea.

Being a virgin hill station, Lansdowne's green cover is dominated with oak, pine, rhododendron and raspberry trees. With magnificent views of the lower ranges of the Himalayas and the flowing Ganga, this is where you can experience nature at its serene best. This hill station is the perfect spot for bird watchers as locals have informed me that around 600 species like the Himalayan Bulbul, Black Headed Cuckoo, Spotted Dove, Oriental Honey Buzzard and Blue Throated Barbet can be spotted here throughout the year. In fact my best bird watching experience was over here, which made the trip even more memorable. Do make it a point to catch a spectacular sunrise from Tip-n-Top, a vantage point offering a bird's-eye view of the town. Indulge in some village shopping at the local market called Gandhi Chowk. Don't forget to sample the typical Garhwali meal. To soak in the natural essence of Lansdowne, take a walk around the myriad paths around the hill. This is the best way to get up close with Uttarakand's best kept secret hillstation.