

Bindu Gopal Rao

The magic of travelling during the monsoons gets an extra lift when the destination puts up a show, and Sakleshpur certainly does not disappoint.

An important coffee-growing destination, Sakleshpur is perhaps less known than Coorg and Chikmagalur, but its coffee story dates back to the 1840s, when British planter Frederic Green set up the first commercial coffee estate here.

Located in the Western Ghats in Hassan district, Sakleshpur falls in the Malnad region, where high altitude and dense shade trees have created conditions ideal for growing both Arabica and Robusta coffee.

The estates grow pepper, cardamom and other spices alongside coffee, while the region is dotted with estates and homestays that offer travellers a chance to experience a slice of estate life.

While the monsoons lend an almost quaint, magical touch to the surroundings, it is the sheer warmth of nature that is best experienced this season. Of course, it helps that you can do it all while downing cups of the region's finest filter coffee.

"Sakleshpur asks you to slow down, and most people aren't ready for it. What you get is a road that climbs into the Western Ghats, mist that arrives without warning, and the smell of coffee blossoms if you've timed it right. I've been going for seventeen years, and the drive still resets something," says Ashwin Kumar, Founder and Managing Director, VibeZ Estates.

Sights and sounds

And while you are here, there is plenty to look around and soak in. One of the most recognisable attractions is the star-shaped Manjarabad Fort, a must-visit whether you are a history buff or not.

Dating to 1792, the fort was built by French engineers who helped Tipu Sultan with its construction. Offering panoramic views of the Western Ghats, its walls are made of granite and lime mortar, while the interiors were once used as an armoury to store arms and ammunition.

Another important landmark is the Sakaleswara Temple, which carries both religious and architectural significance. Built between the 11th and 14th centuries, the temple enjoys a scenic setting adjacent to the Hemavathi River.

Dedicated to Lord Shiva, its detailed sculptures and intricate carvings, coupled with the tranquil surroundings, make it worth a visit whether you are spiritually inclined or not.

The region is also blessed with fertile red loamy and lateritic



OF COFFEE & CLOUDS

From misty trails to ancient temples, Sakleshpur turns monsoon into an irresistible Western Ghats escape



soils, enriched by organic matter from the surrounding forests. These support its thriving coffee and spice plantations, along with crops such as areca nut and pepper.



"This rich agricultural heritage, alongside the region's history and natural landscape, allows travellers to experience a slower, more rooted side of Karnataka rather than simply visit it. The monsoon brings an added dimension, transforming the landscape into a lush, mist-covered retreat and making it an especially beautiful time to experience Sakleshpur. It is a season that naturally lends itself to slowing down, spending time outdoors and experiencing the Western Ghats at their most vibrant," says Aditya Mata, general manager, Rosetta Sakleshpur.

Nature's nuances

One of the best things to do in

Sakleshpur is to soak in its lush natural landscapes, and trekking here can be an adrenaline-inducing experience.

The Ombattu Gudda Trek through the protected Kabbinala Reserve Forest is for seasoned trekkers. It is an advanced trek that requires guides and takes a couple of days to complete.

Then there is the trek to Jenukal Gudda, or Honey Rock Hill, surrounded by coffee estates and green forests, with views of the Arabian Sea on clear days. The trek is moderate, making it best undertaken with a guide. Though the final stretch is steep, the stunning views make the climb worthwhile.

If you are hiking during the monsoon, be prepared for slippery surfaces and make sure you are accompanied by a local who knows the terrain. Likewise, a trek to Agni Gudda Hill, a volcanic hill, is known for its scenic vistas and Instagram-worthy spots.

Look around

When in Sakleshpur, make time for the UNESCO heritage site Chennakeshava Temple in Belur, built in 1117 CE under the patronage of King Vishnuvardhana of the Hoysala dynasty. A fine example of temple architecture and craftsmanship, the temple reflects a period when art, devotion and storytelling converged in stone.

Part of the UNESCO-recognised Sacred Ensembles of the Hoysalas, the temple is particularly fascinating for those interested in architecture and epigraphy. During the monsoon, its stone surfaces deepen in tone, adding a dramatic atmosphere to the experience.

A visit to Hoysaleswara Temple in Halebidu, also a UNESCO heritage site, should be on the cards as well. Halebidu was once the capital of the Hoysala dynasty and a centre of artistic and political significance in mediaeval South India.

Dedicated to Lord Shiva, the Hoysaleswara Temple is celebrated for its layered stone carvings and remarkable attention to detail. The monsoon showers enhance the texture and richness of the soapstone, creating a striking contrast across the carvings and revealing details that are often missed in drier months.

Do make time for Shettihalli Church, built in the 1860s by French missionaries. Its Gothic-inspired architecture is a major draw, while the fact that it remains in water during the monsoons makes for a striking visual spectacle.

Also visit Sri Parvathamma Hill in Dyathapura village, home to an ancient temple dedicated to Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvathi, along with panoramic, misty views of the surrounding Western Ghats.

So, if you are looking to experience the famed monsoons of the Malnad region, put Sakleshpur on your list. Coffee estates, misty hills, historic monuments and trails through lush forests make it a destination that can surprise you in more ways than one.

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