

10 offbeat hill stations to visit in South India

by Ami Bhat (Lonely Planet Author) May 2017



Sprawling tea gardens at Devikulam. Image courtesy: Kerala Tourism Board

With mercury at its peak, **hill stations**, especially the not-so-crowded ones, are perfect getaways for a **family**. If you've already explored **North India**, then head to the south this time. With pristine nature, chirping birds, enough to keep you busy and yet relax, these offbeat **hill stations in South India** promise to give the holiday that you yearn for.

DEVIKULAM, KERALA

Beat the crowds at Munnar as you discover an extension of its beauty at Devikulam. With mist hanging over evergreen tea estates, you feel as if you are in paradise. Take a dip in its famous Sitadevi Lake, where according to the epic Ramayana, Sita took a bath in its sparkling waters. The lake is known for its therapeutic properties and also for trout fishing. Don't miss out on the Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary, a drive away, where you can spot the playful giant squirrels.

HORSLEY HILLS, ANDHRA PRADESH

Known as the Ooty of Andhra Pradesh, this quaint hill station will charm you from the moment you drive through its yellow blossom lined roads. It was named after a British officer W.D Horsley, who set up an abode here to escape the heat. You can still visit his home and explore the amazing views of the valley around it. Take your kids to the small animal park here or indulge in some adventure sports like zip lines, rope activities, trekking or ATV rides. Remember to look out of your windows when driving – you are likely to spot some prancing deer along the way.

IDUKKI, KERALA

Green topography of Idukki. Image courtesy: Kerala Tourism Board

Get ready for a green overload as you drive in to Idukki. A heady combination of sights and aromas of spices make you fall in love with the place instantly. Don't miss one of the biggest Arch Dams in the world – The Idukki Arch Dam. Built against a gorge that is formed by two hills, this dam charms with its arched structure that blends with the gorge and contains the waters of Periyar River. Remember to try out some hikes and adventure activities while here.

KOTAGIRI, TAMIL NADU

Escape the mad crowds of Ooty by opting for another of its Nilgiri neighbours – Kotagiri. Enjoy the sight of these blue mountains at some vantage points like the Kodanad View point. Feel the tingling spray of water at scenic waterfalls like Catherine the Elk falls. Book yourselves at a tea estate – the best way to enjoy the serene green world of Kotagiri.

ARAKU VALLEY, ANDHRA PRADESH

The low hills of Araku are covered with coffee plantations. Image courtesy: Wikipedia/Imahesh3847/CC BY-SA 4.0

A scenic drive along winding roads from Visakhapatnam takes you to Araku Valley. The drive stimulates your senses as you pass through forests whose silence is broken only by the sound of waterfalls and melodious birds. Visit the artistic and elusive Borra Caves, which were discovered accidentally by tribals in the region. You can get to know more about the lives of these tribes at the Tribal museum. Enjoy a cup of coffee at one of the sprawling coffee estates that you can even stay in. And if you are up for another scenic drive, go ahead a few kilometres to spend a day at Ananthagiri hills.

SAKLESHPUR, KARNATAKA

Famous for its Green Route trek, Sakleshpur promises you a cool respite with a bit of adventure and heritage. Though you no longer can hike along the Green route trek with its railway track, bridges and tunnels, you can head out on other trails that are equally beautiful. You will be mesmerised with the scintillating views at the Bisle View Point. While here, do visit Manjirabad Fort that was built by Tipu Sultan.

KEMMANAGUNDI, KARNATAKA

Kemmanagundi offers many trekking trails. Image courtesy: Wikipedia/Srinivasa83/CC BY-SA 3.0

Kemmanagundi has a royal history as it was the summer escape for the Maharaja of Mysore – Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV. This is a complete trekker's paradise with numerous trails, some leading to the highest peak in Karnataka – Mullayanagiri. You find delightful bird life as you go along these trails and if that is not enough, visit the Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary. While here, don't miss the pretty rose gardens and the caves of the Baba Budanagiri hills.

PONMUDI, KERALA

Ponmudi is a great getaway from Thiruvanthapuram. Image courtesy: Kerala Tourism Board

About 60 kilometres from Thiruvanthapuram lies this beautiful hill town whose name literally means Golden Crown. Head to the Golden Valley and spend time with the butterflies at the Kallar River. Secure a permit from forest officials to visit the enchanting Meenmutty Falls. Alternately, visit the Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary to discover its beautiful flora and fauna. Along the way from Thiruvanthapuram, stop by at the Koyikkal palace at Nedumangad to see 2500 year old coins, including one of the world's smallest one, Rasi.

YERCAUD, TAMIL NADU

Boating is a popular activity at Emerald lake in Yercaud. Image courtesy: Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation & Department of Tourism

For those in Bengaluru or Chennai, Yercaud is the perfect weekend get-away. Centred around the Emerald lake, this hill station is a quiet town with picture perfect views. You can trek down to the gorgeous Kiliyur waterfalls or boat in the lake. Alternately, you can just enjoy a picnic at Lady's Seat, where a set of natural rocks beautiful overlook a cloud-covered landscape. If this is a little tame for you, try the ATV rides at one of the coffee estates.

YELAGIRI, TAMIL NADU

Re-discover the joy of boating in the placid Pungavoor Lake. Image courtesy: Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation & Department of Tourism

An erstwhile private property of a family, Yelagiri, enchants you with its simple beauty. Relax and re-discover the joy of boating in the placid Pungavoor Lake and spend some time exploring the gardens around it. Pump up your adrenaline with a trek along the Swami Malai hills while you take in the untouched beauty of nature that lines the path. Also, take time out to go to the other side of the hill station to see the gushing Jalagamparai waterfalls.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Ami Bhat is senior marketing professional, currently on a break to pursue full-time travel blogging. A travel enthusiast, who loves sports, photography and dancing with equal passion, Ami believes in planning a short escape for every long weekend that can come up through the year. And when she cannot travel physically, she travels virtually through words on her travel. More on: <http://thrillingtravel.in/>



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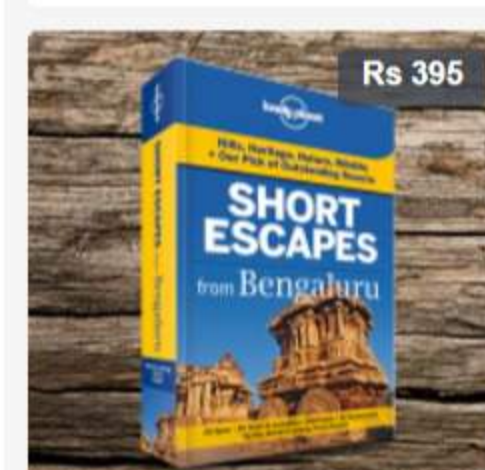
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