



Brewing an idyllic weekend

Namrata Narasimhan discovers the perfect recipe at the Tata Coffee's Plantation Trails in Coorg

It feels like we have time travelled. The bungalow with wooden columns, roof frames and a spacious courtyard characteristic of Kerala architecture perches atop a hill overlooking a lush coffee plantation. It is filled with sprawling rooms and exquisite Victorian furniture, and surrounded by little more than the sounds of nature,

transporting us back to the 19th century.

We are at Cottabetta Bungalow, which is a part of the Tata Coffee Plantation Trails that won the Booking.com Guest Review Award in 2017. After an early morning flight to Bengaluru and a 230-km drive, the plantation nestled in the perennially verdant mountains of

Coorg, Karnataka, is everything we had hoped it would be. Fatigue instantly gives way to anticipation when a butler — every bungalow has a butler and a personal chef — welcomes us with a choice of a specially brewed Coorg coffee called *bella kaapi* or a fruit juice. We settle for the local brew, setting the tone for our stay.

WHEN IN COORG

The sense of adventure at the



Getting there



Nearest airport:
Bengaluru: 230 km
Mangaluru: 181 km



Nearest railway station:
Mysuru: 102 km



By road:
Though the plantation doesn't offer pick up and drop services, they do help facilitate transportation from the nearest airports and railway station.

Plantation Trails is contagious. Every night here has a surprise in store, ranging from programmes that highlight local cultures to bonfires and barbecues.

On the first night, local students perform Coorg's traditional dance called *Ummathat* while the chef serves up a lip-smacking spread of local dishes like *kori* (chicken), *pandhi* (pork) curry, *kodumbuttu* (rice dumplings) and irresistible coffee-spiked desserts.

The chef at Cottabetta bungalow also serves Indian cuisines of the north and the south, Chinese, continental and a wide variety of

desserts, but with all that the Coorg cuisine has to offer, we recommend you go local.

FROM BEAN TO CUP

The local community is at the core of the plantation.

In keeping with Jamsetji Tata's vision, Tata Coffee's Plantation Trails encourages local talent, particularly in their naturalists. They believe in having someone who has lived in the area and loves it, explain life amid the rich flora and fauna.

A leisurely early morning walk comes alive with a naturalist who can explain the botanical names of

each plant in English and Kannada. As we stroll around the private nine-hole golf course, he identifies bird songs and calls, mimics some and helps us spot great black woodpeckers, the Malabar Grey Hornbill and more. The forest around us is home to some 300 avian species and a treat for bird watchers.

While an early morning walk might not be for everyone, the one thing you should not miss out on here is the 'Bean-to-Cup' safari.

The safari takes us through the plantation in a vehicle that has been customised for Plantation



IN AND AROUND COORG

The location of the Tata Coffee Plantation Trails makes it easy to explore Coorg.

1 HOUR AWAY:

- ▶ Irrupu Falls, which plunges impressively from a height of 170 feet
- ▶ Abbey Falls, one of Coorg's prettiest spots
- ▶ Nagarhole National Park, a wildlife reserve that extends into neighbouring Kerala and teems with Asiatic elephants, spotted and barking deer, langurs, cheetals, gaurs, nilgais and even the royal Bengal tiger
- ▶ Namdroling monastery, presided over by an 18-meter-high gold-plated Buddha and home to over 5,000 Tibetan Buddhist lamas
- ▶ Madikeri, the heart of Coorg district and a treasure trove of local coffees, teas, spices and curios

2 HOURS AWAY:

- ▶ Talacauvery, the birthplace of the River Kaveri, offers the chance of a holy dip and a spectacular view of the surrounding hills

3 HOURS AWAY:

- ▶ Chickmagalur, to see the other bungalow of Plantation Trails

TRAIL HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ Each bungalow and cottage, at the property, is built in a different architectural style. No two rooms in any of them are the same
- ▶ Though the bungalows retain their heritage, they are equipped with modern amenities like Wi-Fi and satellite TV for the modern traveller
- ▶ Each bungalow is served by a butler and a personal chef
- ▶ The nine-hole private golf course is open to guests of plantation trails



Trails by Tata Motors. We stop to smell the coffee flowers, the source of the fragrant toiletries we have been indulging in back at the bungalow. We also get to pluck coffee cherries, which don't carry the aroma of the beverage just yet, and learn about how they are processed.

November to March, we are told, are the best months to visit the plantation trails to catch the picking of coffee beans. However, with so

much to see and do, the Tata Coffee Plantation Trails is one of those places that you can visit any time of the year.

CHAI TIME

Unconventionally, Tata Coffee also has a tea estate in Coorg, making it perhaps the only company to provide the opportunity to experience life on a coffee plantation and a tea estate in a single trip. The gentle undulating hills of the

Glenlorna estate are a dramatic change of landscape from the tree-shaded coffee plantation.

And they are both a wrench to get away from. Indulgences aside, where else would you have the chance to hold a butterfly in your hand one day and enjoy an unexpected midnight sighting of an elephant the next? □

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