

MISTY SPELLS

Alien anecdotes, raging peace and wild encounters are what define the spirit of a traveller. In this column on travel and adventure by Mayank Soni, Times of West Mumbai brings you the most exotic locates outside the city limits, waiting to be explored



Though a little late this year, the monsoon is always eagerly awaited, as skies pour water from the heavens, washing away all year's dust and grim. The nearby hills bellow breathtaking beauty, inciting hearts into an escape in the lap of lush greens, into unadulterated pleasures of nature.

The Times of West Mumbai reviews three weekend getaways where readers can enjoy the rains.

MALSHEJ - 150 KM NORTHEAST OF MUMBAI

True to its character in this part of the state, the monsoon is at its mischievous best casting a spell of

magic in the Western Ghats. While the city experiences its share of showers, it's the lush green cover of the rolling hills, ice-cold waterfalls and fresh air of the mountains that we long for.

Three and a half hour drive from Mumbai, heavenly white cover of rain-laden clouds greets tourists. Just near the tip of Malshvej vehicles ply at not more than 10 kmph for the dense cover of clouds reduces visibility to mere five metres ahead.

Flying low in the valley of Malshvej, the migratory pink-legged flamingoes are an absolute delight to bird watchers. Attracted by the backwaters of Pimpalgaon Joga Dam, these graceful creatures flock in large numbers during

Valleys and hills across the state are ready to host Mumbaikars for some monsoon revelry and rejuvenation

monsoon months of July to September and can be spotted just four kilometers from Flamingo Hill Resort.

Located at a distance of 15 km from Malshej is the birthplace of the warrior king Shivaji. One of the few well-preserved forts of Maharashtra, the restored citadel of Shivaji Maharaj is open to viewing for tourists. Cut deep through mountain rock are medieval water tanks and caves worth a watch.

GETTING HERE

By road - Take the National Highway 3 via Bhiwandi to Kalyan. From Kalyan head towards Saralgaon and further to Vaishakhare, which is near Malshej Ghat.

STAY

Flamingo Hill Resort
Log to <http://www.maharashtra-tourism.gov.in> for bookings

AMBOLI - 560 KM SOUTH OF MUMBAI

Wet and wild, Amboli is an ideal resort for those who prefer a few days of isolation. Located at an altitude of 690 metres, Amboli, one of the wettest places in Maharashtra, is covered in a blanket of fog for most part of the day during the monsoon.

Being a little far away from any major city has its own merits, for Amboli provides week-enders the luxury of having a peaceful vacation. The rains in this part of the Sahyadris are almost incessant so make sure to pack your raingear if you wish to explore around.

The surrounding hills and valleys of Amboli are covered with un-spoilt forest abundant

in wildlife. The numerous sight-seeing spots like Sunset Point, Parikshit Point, Kavelsad Point and Shirgaonkar Point offer heavenly drenched views of the emerald hills. And if you are lucky enough you could spot a deer or two in the jungle.

If you are in mood for a picnic then head for Nangartas Waterfall (10kms) or spend hours angling for a fish at Hiranya Keshi. Another off beat expedition is a visit to the Bauxite Mines, 10 km away. The trip to Amboli would be incomplete without a visit to the Madhavgad Fort. A major attraction of the fort is the breath taking view of the Arabian Sea it offers.

GETTING HERE

By rail - The most convenient railhead is Sawantwadi, 28 km on Konkan Railway.

By road - Drive all the way down NH17 till Kudal. Just three km short of Sawantwadi is Akheri Road junction, from where you take a left onto the curving SH121 that leads to Amboli.

STAY

Privatised Resort of MTDC offers 21-blocks of self-contained rooms.

BHANDARDARA - 180 KM NORTHEAST OF MUMBAI

Rugged mountains covered in a blanket of stunning green, birds chirping in excitement at the crack of dawn and mist lying low on the clear blue waters of Wilson Dam all add up to the alchemy of the sleepy town of Bhandardara.

Located 180 km northeast of Mumbai, Bhandardara boasts of the third highest waterfall of

the country in its vicinity. The gushing waters of Pravara River is quiet a sight plunging 170 feet from the Ghats to form the Randha Falls, situated just at a distance of 10 km from the town.

For the adventure hearted there are lots of treks on offer. The highest peak of the Sahyadris, Mount Kalsubai lies within half an hour of the Bhandardara Lake. Alternatively, you can boat across the tranquil waters of the lake to go to Ratanwadi. A three-hour hike from here will take you to Ratangad fort that offers fascinating view of the valley.

Religious tourists can visit the ancient Amruteshwar temple at Ratanwadi, which has been declared as a protected monument. The Shivling in the temple is installed a few feet below the surface and is believed to be submerged in water with the increase in ground water levels during the rains.

If, however, you are the kind who likes to laze on an armchair, then book a room at MTDC Resort on the edge of Bhandardara Lake and see time fly by through the window.

GETTING HERE

By rail - Igatpuri is the nearest railhead, with Bhandardara at a distance of 42 km from the station.

By road - Take the Mumbai-Nashik Highway (NH3) to Ghoti past Igatpuri. Just beyond the bus stand at Igatpuri take a right and cross the railway tracks. After a few minutes drive take a right to Bari vilage, further down again take a right at Varangushi to go for Shendi and Bhandardara.

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