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## CELEBRATING SPICEJET'S MILESTONES 2019



# HEAVEN ON EARTH



TREK UP TO THE WORLD'S HIGHEST ORGANIC TEA ESTATE IN KOLUKKUMALAI FOR AN INEXPLICABLE EXPERIENCE.  
BY MEENAKSHI GUPTA

I never thought I could ever get high on tea. In fact for that matter, anyone who treks up to the World's Highest Organic Tea Estate will surely get high. Shades of green, tall pine and eucalyptus trees, acres of tea bushes, freshwater streams from Kurangini Range of mountains and misty clouds all over the place left me spellbound.

#### **ABOUT KOLUKKUMALAI**

Located at a height of approximately 6,800 ft, this tea estate was built in 1935 but the farming in the area is being done for 150 years. Kolukkumalai is a village in Tamil Nadu, which is also accessible from Munnar in Kerala. The place is primarily

known for trekking but also has jeep safari options and stay on top where the Tea Estate is situated. Once you reach the campsite, there is another trek of about 3 km to view the most enchanting and scintillating sunrise. The sunrise is the highlight of Kolukkumalai. Amidst clouds and number of peaks, the sight is beyond words. If you are a nature lover, trust me you will never want to come down. About 15 km of a challenging trek is worthwhile. The jeep safari on a bumpy dirt track also takes you through the same route covering misty estate and is also one of the most thrilling experiences. The trek and jeep safari both start at a height of 3,800 ft above sea level. Jeep ride takes you up

## ADVENTURE CITIES

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Ensure your stay in advance.
- Though it says easy to moderate trek, remember it takes about 4-5 hours on one side.
- Check the weather conditions before going. It becomes very cold when it rains.
- Carry some light woollen clothing as the nights are chilly.
- Always carry a raincoat with you.
- Beware of leeches during rains. They are harmless creatures but can give nightmares to the first-timers. Carry salt and vaporub with you.
- Don't expect the stay to be luxurious. It provides basic comfortable tents with sleeping bags and a decent wash and bath facilities.
- Carry snacks and enough water as nothing is available during the trek, though the stream water is edible.
- Wear good fitting and sturdy trekking shoes.
- Travel light, as you'll have to carry your baggage while trekking.

through 40-45 hairpin bends so be ready for that adrenaline rush. The misty cloudy Kurangini mountains, chirping birds, steep trails, lush green tea bushes, the whole atmosphere is like a dream painting.

### HOW TO REACH

Kolukkumalai is at the hills of Kurangini Range of mountains. Suryanelli is the base

Tea Gardens

location which can be reached only by jeep from Bodiayakanur. Theni, in Tamil Nadu, is the nearest town from where the local buses ply to Bodi. Theni can be reached from various locations. All major State Road Transport Corporation buses ply to and from Theni. It is about 450 km from Bangalore, 570 km from Chennai and just 100 km from Munnar in Kerala. Try to grab a window seat when travelling from Theni to Bodi to admire the mesmerising landscapes en route. The U-pin bends, curvy roads, cloudy valleys, tall trees, the beautiful sky should not be missed.

I had read many blogs before heading for the trek. Most of the information I gathered said it was an easy trek and about 10-14 km long. Well, that depends on your fitness level. I'd say, the trek route level is moderate to difficult, not only for me but for my fellow trekkers too. My Garmin smart watch recorded 33,000 plus steps which meant it was nearly a 20 km trek one way. It took me about five hours to reach the campsite, as I was also taking loads of photos and videos en route. Yes, everyone becomes a photographer here;



## ADVENTURE CITIES

the natural beauty all around doesn't need any special skills to capture those landscapes.

### THE WONDER TREK

We left Bangalore on a Friday night by road transport bus for an overnight journey to Theni. By 7 am, we were in Theni and checked into a small hotel for wash and change. Whenever we go for treks, we look for a local eating joint for food. Not only do such joints serve authentic food but are also clean as they are fast-moving.

After finishing our breakfast we headed to the old bus stop of Theni to board the bus for Bodi. It took us nearly an hour to reach there. At Bodi, the jeeps were waiting to take us for that adventurous ride till Suryanelli, which took about an hour as it was drizzling all through. The curves and bends made the traffic go slow in misty rainy weather. But I was enjoying the ride thoroughly as the route has some scintillating views.

Once you reach Suryanelli, you have to buy tickets (pre-booked) to stay at the campsite. We refuelled ourselves with oranges and energy bars which we had carried along with us. Please note there are no restaurants at this place, so you have to carry your lunch too.

The trek starts at 3,800 ft high above sea level. Since it was raining and was really misty all through the route, it became little slushy and difficult to trek. For the first time, I encountered leeches. Passing through beautiful tea gardens, foggy trails, some dense and dark forest route and water streams we reached our campsite by 5.30 pm while the remaining group members who trekked slowly managed to reach by 6.30 pm. It was really dark by then with no lights.

An amazingly refreshing and freshly brewed organic lemon tea with banana fritters awaited us. We almost attacked the food, as the hunger pangs were really

killing us after the trek. By then the dinner was also ready and we decided to finish our dinner early so we could retire for another long day. The accommodation was in comfortable tents with sleeping bags.

### WAKING UP TO SUNRISE

The next day, we started at 5 am to get a glimpse of the famous Kolukkumalai Sunrise but since it was cloudy we couldn't witness it. The view from that height was unexpectedly beautiful. That followed another trek of 3 km that took us nearly an hour. The wide range of Kurangini Mountains and lush green tea gardens, oh! I missed a heartbeat. We spent some time there to take pictures from all possible angles, time-lapses, videos and used all our creativity to capture some memorable moments.

It was time to visit the Tea Factory. Built in 1935, the factory is still in working condition with old machines producing the finest organic tea. This is the only campsite that is well equipped with wash and bath facility and a full-fledged running kitchen where sumptuous meals are served all the time with of course the most delicious tea one can ever have.

Normally, the descend takes lesser time and weather was also clear the next day. We came down pretty fast. While coming down, not to miss, there is a ridge which divides Kurangini range between the two states Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The end of the ridge has a Tiger Face Rock and to pose yourself with that rock will give you adrenaline rush big time. You will literally have to stand at the edge to get a good photo, but it is worth it.

It was time to return home but trust me no one really wanted to come back from a place that was almost like heaven on earth. The spectacular view of clouds over the mountains with steep slopes of tea gardens at the bottom made it a dream-like experience. ■



Tiger Face Rock



Trek Route



Pongal Vada  
Breakfast at Theni