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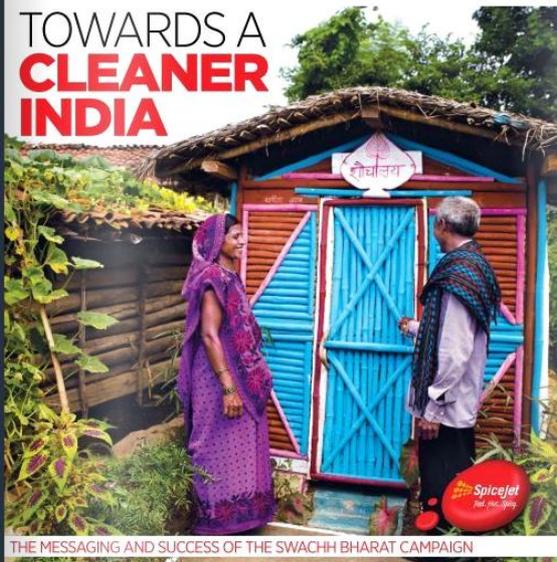
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THE INSIGHT MAGAZINE

TOWARDS A CLEANER INDIA



THE MESSAGING AND SUCCESS OF THE SWACHH BHARAT CAMPAIGN



UNPLUG YOURSELF ON THIS RURAL TREK

KOOKAL, A SMALL VILLAGE IN KODAIKANAL TALUK OF TAMIL NADU, IS IDEAL FOR A SHORT OR LONG TREK, CAMPING AND BONFIRE TRIP.

BY MEENAKSHI GUPTA

I am always seeking offbeat destinations. Sure, walking on the Mall Road of a hill station or capturing the sunset at a beach or admiring the ultra-modern architecture in a new city are still some of my favourite things to do while travelling. But I am always looking at challenging myself to some new experience or adventure. Right now, I have been bitten by the trekking bug. Trust me, the activity gives you a very big high.

I recently trekked to Kookal, a small village in Kodaikanal taluk of Dindigul district in Tamil Nadu. People visit Kodaikanal for its numerous attractions like the famous Kodai Lake, waterfalls, temples and viewpoints.

Well, all these are beautiful and scenic and many people visit then again and again.

But I was on a different trip altogether. It was a trek, camping and bonfire trip for me to Kookal village which is about 40 km from Kodaikanal and is at an elevation of approximately 6200 ft. Famous for its high biodiversity, Kookal also has a hilly terrain, step farming landscapes, dense forest, lake, flora and fauna and breathtaking views. It is certainly a nature lover's and adventure enthusiast's paradise.

We, a bunch of like-minded adventurers, started on a Friday night from Bengaluru in a hired Tempo Traveller for an overnight journey to Kodaikanal. There are other ways also to reach but we preferred to go on our own and not take public transport. The route is via Krishnagiri-Dharmapuri-Rasipuram-Karur-Dindigul-Kodaikanal-Kookal. By 7.30 am we were at Kodaikanal. You can either go



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TRIP TAKEAWAY

Book your stay in advance. Connect with local tour guides or homestays for camping options.

There are no luxury accommodations available.

Choose your commute by road or a self-driven vehicle. This way you can enjoy a lot of scenic beauty.

Kodaikanal Bus Stand is well equipped with wash and bath facilities at a very nominal charge.

Take permissions for trekking from local authorities.

Take a guide along with you for trekking for safety reasons.

Ensure your hydration and food are taken care of while trekking. There is nothing available on the top or en route.

Eat local food. The best you can have is the freshly made local food prepared by villagers or at a homestay.

Plan to reach the base camp before dusk. The forest is very dense.

Do not litter and keep the surrounding garbage-free.



straight to your campsite/ accommodation where you will be staying or can freshen up at Kodaikanal Bus Stand and have tea/coffee and then proceed further to Kookal which is around 40 km from here. The Kodaikanal Bus Stand has an excellent wash and bath facility at a nominal charge.

We then moved further up to our base campsite, which was booked in advance. There are options available ranging from homestays to tents. We chose to stay in tents. When we reached, the hot local breakfast with tea /coffee was getting ready for us. The idlis were being steamed in a traditional pan on woodfire. Some of us played with the 10 pets in the vicinity while others admired the flora all around. Fully fortified, we were soon ready for our trek. For lunch, we packed a basic lunch consisting of lemon rice, chutney and some savouries, along with drinking water.



Look for the magnificent Nilgiris range of mountains while you trek. There are different routes for trekking, ranging from three to eight kilometres, depending upon how high you want to go. The most important aspect to be remembered: do not venture out without a local guide. Due to the wilderness and wildlife of the area, tourists are required to get permission from the Forest Department to visit Kookal or trek in the forest areas.

The dense and lush green forest has the presence of animals like deer, boar, Indian Gaur, etc. The place is also home for exceptional and amazing wildlife. Mouse Deer, Barking Deer and Bison are some of the wildlife commonly sighted. The Wood Pigeon, Nilgiri Pipit and over 165 species of butterflies are also found here.

We finished our trek in four hours and reached the top for that spectacular view of a valley surrounded by mountains. Once again, I found a small temple on the top. Though there are a number of stories attached to them, hats off to the people who build these temples. After the trek, it was so soothing to sit in the shade of the temple. We relaxed for some time, had



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lunch and took lots and lots of photos. As expected, the descent was not so difficult and didn't take much time too.

The village has a spectacular view with terrace farming all over. There are Kookal Caves and Falls to explore too but due to lack of time, we were unable to visit. However, one can plan to stay for two or three days to explore the area and get some good photographs of wildlife and birds in the area. There is a small lake surrounding small hills of the village. You should spend some time on the banks of the lake and capture either sunrise or sunset.

We reached back to our base by 6 pm. Tea and snacks were waiting for us. After relaxing for a while we started

preparing for bonfire and barbeque. Some of our friends got some potatoes, sweet potatoes, pineapples, guava, corn, green apples and some non-vegetarian stuff. With a little nip in the air the bonfire, barbeque and music was a perfect setup after a long day.

If you are a nature lover, photographer, bird watcher or an adventure seeker, Kookal offers you an absolute serene ambience for a peaceful stay. Plan to stay there for a night or two. The next day we visited nearby villages and interacted with the villagers about their supplies and farming. It was a great learning experience to know how they sourced their water and groceries. ■