



**SCULPTED SPLENDOUR**  
The Belur temple (left and above); Coffee beans (below)



**A VISIT TO A COFFEE CURING PLANT WILL TAKE YOUR RESPECT FOR COFFEE TO A NEW LEVEL**

**EARTHY DELIGHT**  
Chikmagalur lies in the Baba Budan hills, named for a sufi saint who is said to have brought the first coffee beans into India

Travel

# Bean me up

It's very easy to wake up and smell the coffee in Chikmagalur, but travellers can find great hiking trails and delicious local food too

*Text by Mansi Narang. Photos by Deepak Gulati*

**E**VER WISHED you could plonk yourself into a hammock strung between two mango trees and finish that book you started last month, maybe give your gym shoes a 'real' workout in the mountains, and perhaps learn how to row a boat or check out some of the world's finest 12th century architecture, all in one weekend? It's probably too much to ask for in most places, but in Chikmagalur you could throw in some coffee picking, bird watching, and serious feasting too.

Chikmagalur is Kannada for 'little daughter's land', thus named because it was the dowry of the younger daughter of Rukmangada, the legendary chief of Sakarayapatna. The town lies in the Baba Budan hills, named after the Sufi Saint Baba Budan, whose clever defiance of stringent 17th century Yemeni export laws is said to have brought the first coffee beans into India (secretly tucked in his belt). His shrine is close to Chikmagalur, and is revered by Hindus and Muslims alike, and if the story is true, it ought to be a place of pilgrimage for all Indian coffee lovers as well.

## SPILL THE BEANS

As you enter Chikmagalur, you are greeted by coffee estates surrounded by verdant hills on all sides. The town is busy

and crowded, but a couple of turns down the main road lead you to a quiet haven. Whether you choose a resort or a homestay, you can be assured of the company of shady trees, beautiful birds, a fresh breeze, and loveable dogs you'll hate to part with when your trip is over. Those inclined to sleep, read or meditate can easily spend a long weekend here without budging. The exotic calls of birds, trees laden with luscious fruit and the gentle breeze will be the perfect accompaniment to your lazy weekend.

If you summon the willpower to go out for a morning walk, you'll encounter some of the most curious cows in the world, who actually turn around and stare at you quite hard as long as you're in sight, chewing their breakfast all the while. If you're used to city cows who do

not care two hoots for you or anyone, this can be quite unsettling and comical! I'm quite sure the looks I got were critical, and I did not pass the bovine test.

If you're a coffee lover, you can stroll idly about the coffee plantations, wondering if that not-so-pretty and not-at-all-fragrant plant is really the source of your daily brew. We even bit into the green coffee beans hoping for a quick espresso shot, but alas, they were quite bland. If you're lucky to catch the coffee blooms, you might swoon with their fragrance, which does not resemble coffee, but jasmine! A visit to a nearby coffee curing plant will take your respect for coffee to a whole new level, after you've seen the long and complicated journey the coffee beans make to your cup.

