

TO FURTHER AND BEYOND

An incredible land, India with its vast and varied landscape, is blessed with picturesque places and experiences that are unique and memorable. We take you on a tour to some of the lesser-known gems around the country

BY ANUJ SARMA

Dhanaulti

Nestled amidst lush pine, deodar, rhododendrons and oak, Dhanaulti is a getaway that gives the traveler a much-needed break from the madding crowds. Be it a quiet and relaxing weekend or a glimpse into the rich colonial past, this hill station gives one a chance to disconnect from the chaotic world. Set out to explore the ECO Park that has been maintained by the Forest Department of Uttarakhand, walk through the narrow alleyways of the Landour Cantonment or just relax and unwind at the hotel.

Getting There: *The nearest airport is in Dehradun, 66 kilometers away. The nearest railhead is Dehradun. Dhanaulti is 325 kilometers away from Delhi by road.*

Majuli

The largest river island in the world, Majuli, is a fascinating island that floats on the Brahmaputra. It is bounded on the north side by the Subansiri river and the mighty Brahmaputra flows by the southern bank. Majuli is accessible only by ferry, which is available from Nimati Steamer Ghat, a short distance away from Jorhat. Go bird watching, as

the island is home to a myriad bird species, and visit the Vaishnavite monasteries, listen and watch to the unique music and dance forms of the region preserved by various art centres. Shop for exquisite Muga silk and give some time to the pottery and mask-making crafts.

Getting there: *Fly to Jorhat and take a ferry to Majuli. The nearest railhead is Jorhat. Majuli is accessible only by ferry.*

Sangla Valley

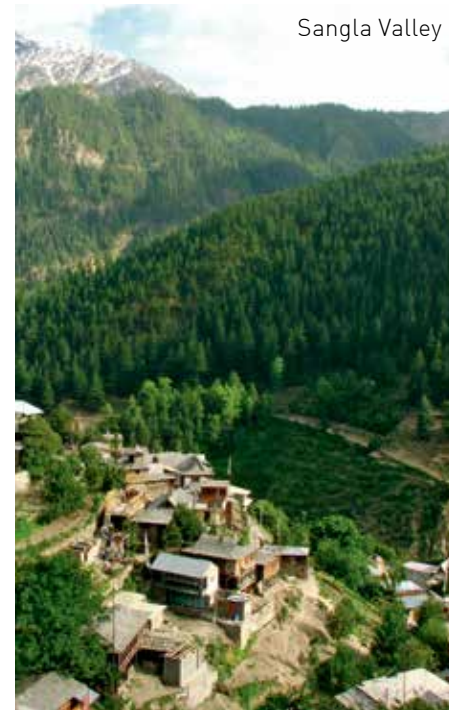
Sangla Valley is a land of unbridled beauty, and once you reach there, it would seem as if you have landed in

Dhanaulti

photograph by Sanyam Saini



Majuli



Sangla Valley



Yuksom

“The gladdest moment in human life, me thinks, is a departure into unknown lands.”

Sir Richard Burton

a paradise. Situated in the Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh, you would pass by vistas of unrelenting beauty, with more compelling panoramas unfolding. Treks are the main attraction in the valley. Walk to Nagasthi—four kilometers away, the last Indian border outpost, or take a hike through Basteri village situated on the bank of Baspa river. Chitkul, the last village on the Indo Tibet border has a Dhaba, which bills itself as the ‘last Dhaba in Hindustan’.

Getting There: The nearest airport is at Chandigarh. Catch a train to Kalka via Chandigarh and take the narrow-gauge train to Shimla. Sangla Valley is an 8 to 10-hours drive from Shimla.

Araku Valley

Located about 120 kms from Vishakhapatnam, Araku Valley has been a major draw with its lush green landscape and clean climate since the days of the Raj. Snuggled peacefully amidst the lush forests of the Eastern Ghats, the area is the home to isolated tribal communities. Make sure to travel by train or road to this part of the country as the journey itself is picturesque, with thick jungles on both sides. The journey by rail takes you through 58 tunnels

and over 84 bridges. Go caving in the magnificent Borra Caves, which are a million years old.

Getting there: The nearest airport is at Vishakhapatnam. The railways operate a train every morning from Vishakhapatnam to Araku at 6:45 am. Vishakhapatnam is 115 km away by road from Araku Valley.

Yuksom

Meaning the ‘meeting place of the three lamas,’ Yuksom is the historical starting point of the Sikkimese nation. It was the first capital and the coronation of Phuntsog Namgyal, the first chogyal (king), was done here. Yuksom serves as the base camp for many treks in Sikkim. It also has the main trailhead towards

Mount Khangchendzonga. Visit Dubdi monasteries, the oldest in Sikkim, and the Tashi Tenka, a royal palace complex built while Yuksom was the capital. For the relaxers, Yuksom is a calm and rejuvenating place to kick back peacefully for a few nights.

Getting there: The nearest airport is at Bagdogra, 170 kms away. The nearest railhead is New Jalpaiguri Railway Station (NJP), 150 kms away. Yuksom is 145 kms away from Siliguri.

Munnar

One of the most scenic hill destinations from Kerala and Tamil Nadu, Munnar is the largest tea-growing region in South India. Draped in emerald-green tea plantations, the low mountain landscape

is breathtaking and you often find yourself above clouds watching the mists kissing mountain tops. A road trip from Coimbatore to Munnar is one of the best in the country. Go animal spotting at the Chinar Wildlife Sanctuary and most importantly, check into one of the many plantation stays in the region and sample a wide variety of brews.

Getting there: The nearest airport is in Cochin 110 kilometers away. The nearest railhead is Aluva Railway station in Kerala. Munnar is well-connected by road to major cities in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Ziro

Nestled within the formidable mountains of Arunachal Pradesh, Ziro Valley is no

less than a mythical kingdom. Thronged by a large number of music-lovers during the annual Ziro Music Festival, the place is an undisputed top-on-the-list in any Arunachal itinerary. The main attraction there is meeting the older people of the Apatani tribe who are adorned with traditional ornaments, face tattoos and nose plugs and also drink some Apong, the local rice beer. Try out the pork and fish dishes prepared traditionally along with a fresh glass of Apong.

Getting There: Nearest airport is at Tezpur, Assam, but the airport at Guwahati is a better option. The nearest railhead is North Lakhimpur in Assam. Direct buses are available from Itanagar and North Lakhimpur.

Dadra and Nagar Haveli

Once a Portuguese colony, the quaint union territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli lies between Maharashtra and Gujarat and makes for a peaceful getaway from the bustle of the city life. Replete with ample flora and fauna, the place provides a wonderful affinity with nature. The capital city, Silvassa, is dotted with its colonial remnants in the form of churches, schools, fort walls and bungalows. One of the most popular destinations is Hira Van named after Hirva, a local tribal deity. Visit the tribal museum in Silvassa, which portrays the colorful life of the tribes.

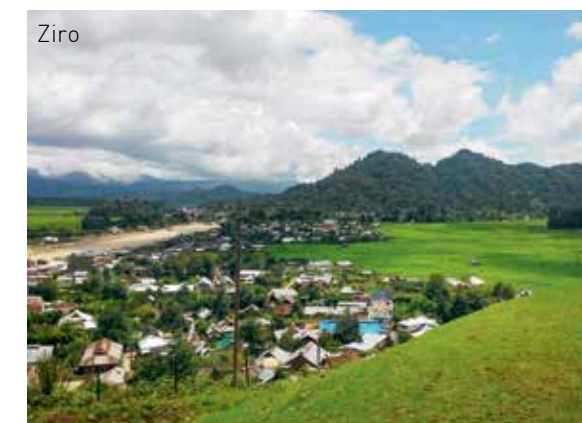
Getting there: The nearest airport is in Mumbai, 164 kms away. The nearest railhead is Vapi. Silvassa is connected by road to major cities in Western India. **W**



Munnar



Araku Valley



Ziro



Dadra and Nagar Haveli