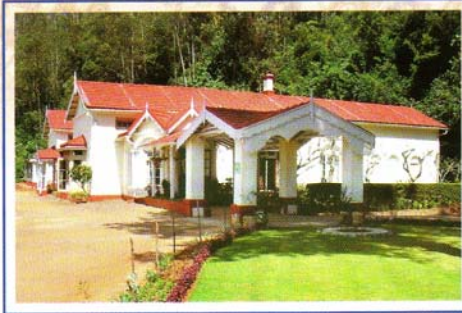


Images of crumbling grandeur, Raj nostalgia and ancient looking waiters. Absolutely wrong! Welcome to Kings Cliff, probably the finest small luxury heritage hotel in the hills of southern India. Kings Cliff is a lovely juxtaposition of unnerving faithfulness to British India history and luxurious facilities for today's discerning holiday traveler.



Last November, Meeta Prabhu, an enterprising young software engineer, stumbled across Kings Cliff, a 120-year old bungalow nestled in the hills around Ooty. In a radical departure from her Infotech background, Meeta herself plunged into the hospitality business and spent five months restoring the once dilapidated house to pristine condition.

Kings Cliff is a superb example of the houses of the British Raj that dot the hill stations of South India, and the façade as well as the interiors reflect the tastes of the original late 19th century British owners. Elaborate fireplaces, polished original wooden floorboards in all the bedrooms and living spaces, exquisite mint-condition antique furniture, and plenty of natural light in the nine bedrooms showcases both the inner beauty of the house as well as the scenic panorama of the mountains and the valley below.

With an army of five specialty chefs, you can enjoy a wide variety of cuisines. If you think that the chef from the Copper Chimney, Mumbai is the highlight, then you are in for a surprise. On a formally laid out table in the dining room, the Continental chef serves up a hot vegetable broth followed by a delicious main course of roast chicken, potatoes and organically grown vegetables. Evenings can be spent enjoying a nice cognac in the Cigar Room to the

crackle of a roaring fire. Even better, you can bring your own with no corkage charged. And with a staff of 26 to a maximum of 18 guests, you can get quite used to the pampering.

Ooty and the Nilgiris offer a lot of recreation, as long as you avoid the chaos of the town centre. Play a round of golf, go on short treks with a quirky local expert, visit a secluded log cabin by a picturesque lake to angle for trout, or even take an overnight

trip to The Wilds (more about it in a future *Escapes* article) at Masinagudi for a wildlife safari.

Getting to Ooty is quite painless. Take a short flight to Coimbatore and a two-and-a-half-hour road trip up the mountains. Or hop aboard the century-old Mountain Railway for a spectacular four-hour ride into Ooty from Mettupalayam.

So having trouble with the domestic help, grappling with the language or the crazy traffic of Chennai? Is the heat and humidity of Chennai getting you down? Then here's a little escapism for you.

About the author: Ashish Gupta runs his own travel company, Milesworth Holidays, an American Express Travel office in Chennai. He specializes in customized tours to popular and exotic destinations in India and overseas.

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