

TRAVEL

VISIT TO THE WORLD'S LARGEST TEAK TREE



KANNIMARA TEAK

THIS TREE, ONE OF THE BIGGEST NATURAL TEAK TREES
OF THE WORLD, WAS AWARDED THE "MAHAVRIKSHA PURASKAR"
BY GOVT OF INDIA DURING 1994-95

One is comfortably nestled at the Bison Forest Lodge at Parambikulam in Palakkad District on the border between Tamil Nadu and Kerala. It is a long and winding drive to get to this picturesque forest reserve. The biodiversity of the flora dotting the Eastern Ghats all along the 100-km drive from Pallakad town to Parambikulam is breathtaking. The drive on the Pallakad-Pollachi highway passes

through several villages in Kerala before entering into Annamalai in Tamil Nadu. Annamalai means elephant hill in Tamil. Annamalai is characterized by a rocky giant mound which bears more than a passing resemblance to the back of an elephant. We depart from Annamalai to Sethumada which is the forest check-post for entry into the Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary and Forest Park.

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At Sethumada, we register at the forest check-post ready for the steep ascent to the cool environs of Top Slip, the highest point of the hills. This journey is a slow one as we have to circumnavigate several hairpin bends leading to the Top Slip. The forest becomes thicker as you climb higher. Giant bamboo groves are seen everywhere. One can see several mouse deer dart between the green foliage and they disappear behind the trees. Many a time, wild boars, lion-tailed macaques and bisons can also be seen from a distance.

The most scenic views can be seen during this journey. Cloud kissed hills stretch as far as one's eye can see. Mist, fog and dew envelop the verdant mountainside. Mountain streams trickle down in elegance on both sides of the dusty road. Colourful birds singing melodious tunes are everywhere. Small sparrows lead the way by flying rhythmically alongside one's vehicle.

The 10-km drive from Sethumada to Top Slip is like driving through the clouds alongside misty mountains. These deciduous forests have patches of evergreen trees at regular intervals. As one nears Top Slip, one enters into giant bamboo forests. The green bamboo groves are huge and fan across the terrain. The thick forest cover filters the sunlight and the sound of the wind as it blows along the bamboo groves puts one into a light trance.

From Top Slip one crosses back into Kerala as one reaches the Thoonakadavu reservoir, located 20 km away from Top Slip. As we enter Thoonakadavu, the landscape undergoes a dramatic change and one finds scores of identical teak trees arranged in concentric rows on both sides of the forest road. As one enters deeper into the forest, the size and the number of teak trees go on increasing. One alights at the tree house at Sungam and rests here under the shade of several giant trees, overlooking the Thoonakadavu lake.

The view from the tree house is nothing short of majestic. The light blue sky is spread over the horizon. The snow white clouds are suspended in mid-air just above the deep blue waters of the lake. Rust coloured hills with patches of green unfold in the background. The moist air touches one's cheeks as one relaxes atop one's green house.

The trek to the world's largest teak tree begins from this tree house. One slowly makes one's way through the forest floor carpeted with millions of dried teak leaves. Every step is a tryst with nature. Several herds of spotted deer, mouse deer and sambhar are hidden behind the thick forest cover. Barking deer can be heard at close quarters. One treks barefoot between hundreds of teak trees guarding Asia's largest teak tree like soldiers.

After a short trek, the giant teak on the banks of the mountain stream comes into



HOW TO GET THERE:

The nearest airport to reach Prambikulam is at Coimbatore. Prambikulam is a 170-km drive from Coimbatore.

WHERE TO STAY:

The Forest Department Guest House at Prambikulam Elephant Sanctuary offers clean and comfortable rooms at economical rates.

WHERE TO EAT:

Local restaurants offer hot idlis with coconut chutney and dosas. Tender coconuts are available on the highways. Fresh vegetables are available at the local market. Seasonal fruits are also available in plenty

view. The closer one gets to this tree, the more gigantic it appears. Finally one reaches one's destination which is Asia's largest teak tree. The breadth of this tree is 6.57 metres and height is 48.50 metres. The age of this tree has not been estimated but it must be around 500 years old.

Local tribals believed that the bigger the tree, the more cosmic energy it contains! Hugging the kannimaram and basking in its vibrant primordial energy is a phenomenal experience.

After spending an hour resting under the cool shade of this giant teak tree, one steps down through a bridle path which

leads to a crystal clear mountain stream. The cold water, the green cover and the silence of the forest makes it a tranquil destination for trance meditation. After the meditation, taking a refreshing dip in the cold waters is energizing before slowly making the way back to the tree house. The return trek at dusk is a birdwatcher's delight. One sees several hornbills, woodpeckers, sparrows and robins perched on the branches of the trees. Several migratory birds are also seen near the lake. A few stray deer, wild boar and bison can also be encountered on the return trek.



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