

MONSOON MAGIC : THE SAHYADRI

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Imagine the scene. Many trekkers and climbers huddled together in a pub somewhere in the Alps or in an alpine but on an Alpine slope. It is raining outside. “On this damn **bad weather**” is the constant comment. With their week-end spoiled all are cursing the rains.

But not so in the Sahyadri. A group of trekkers, with or without raincoat is actually out to enjoy the rains. “Nowhere in the world perhaps, rains mean so much fun as in the Western Ghats”. Remarked Stephen Venables a leading British climber, on a monsoon trek with us in the local hills. It is warm and green to enjoy a rainy day, it is **great weather**.

With the full onset of the monsoons in early July, Sahyadri changes its mood totally. The country side turns green in various shades. All the nallas and water falls come alive, clouds envelope the mountain peaks. In fact in most places you can enjoy the fury of the rains uniquely. Mhasai Pathar, about 5 km from Panhala (a hill station near Kolhapur) is a flat rocky plateau. With rains lashing over the water is drained in all sides and falls from the plateau’s edges on all sides. But the strong wind will not allow the waterfalls to fall on the ground below. The water is thrown upwards causing a “rainfall of waterfall” on you. Many such unique phenomena can be enjoyed.

Lets take a typical monsoon hike. One starts on a grey morning in pouring rain. You can walk with some protection against rain (raincoat, umbrella or windproof). But very soon you will realise that you cannot help getting drenched. It is actually fun. The walk or trek takes you along the muddy village paths. It is slushy but the scenery takes your breath away. Clouds, waterfalls and rain

accompany you. If you don't find a shelter, the quick lunch is eaten under an umbrella or during a little break in the rains. No monsoon hike can be complete without a bath under a waterfall or dip in a shallow nalla. (In fact one must avoid taking a bath in major rivers or lakes during this season). So finally by evening you are back, totally drenched, shivering a little, dirty with mud on your clothes but satisfied. Nothing could be more welcome and enjoyable than dry clothes and sipping hot sweet tea at the end of such a day.

By early August the fury of the rains has subsided and now you have drizzles. This is the time for long cross country walks. You can walk from Karjat to Varose and climb up to Matheran either via Shivaji Ladder or near the Charlotte Lake overflow. One of the most enjoyable trek is to go up to Bhimashankar from Khandas. As you reach the middle plateau almost 30 waterfalls face you on the opposite wall. It is beauty at its best.

If you have the time and inclination any long overnight trek could also be rewarding in the rains. It allows you to trek at the edge of the ghats where the real fury of the rains is to be experienced to be believed. Go up Nane Ghat (from Kalyan - Murbad - Vaishakhare) and ahead to Kukdeswar temple, or walk from Malsej Ghat to Harishchandragad. You will have to stay the night in a dry temple, school or in a villager's house. Once you change to dry clothes you will feel warm and cosy. Of course putting on your wet clothes again next morning is another story :

Late August and September is also the flowering season in the Sahyadri. **Karvi** flowers are beautiful. They grow in a seven year cycle during rainy months. But each region has its own cycle so somewhere every year you will find them. **Vaghnakhi** (Tiger-claws) grows in plenty particularly around Karjat. They are used in the worship of Lord

Ganpati. All other types of vegetation and trees are fully alive. Nature is in fully glory in monsoon.

Unfortunately some unhealthy trends have been cropping up amongst trekkers, particularly on monsoon treks. Large college and other groups generally trek in monsoons only (before exams take over). It is erroneous to believe that a peg of alcohol keeps you warmer or makes you enjoy better. There has been cases when a trekker while taking dip in a nala has cut his leg due to broken beer bottle thrown-in earlier. Drunken trekkers have fall of from top of a waterfall. The country side is beautiful enough to get maximum fun. Don't numb your senses and risk your life by alcohol - you will miss most of the beauty.

Monsoon is the time when you can walk or drive along in the country side and enjoy even without climbing at all. Walk from INS Shivaji (Lonavla) to Ambavane (18 km). You will pass through forest of great beauty. Or walk along Vaitarna river (from Safala - Virar) at the base of Tandulwadi Fort. One can spend an enjoyable day in the country by driving to Bhilavle, Nadhal or Kalote lakes, all near Chowk (Karjat). There is plenty you can enjoy by being just there. The country side is beautiful all around.

So this rains do not rush to the Alps. To enjoy the rains the Sahyadri is around.

MONSOON TREK : SUGGESTIONS

1. Take proper rain protection - waterproof cap, raincoat or windproof or umbrella.
2. Spare clothes must be taken along well packed in plastic bag to keep them dry. At the end of a trek at railway station or so change to dry clothes and chappals (or fresh socks). You will not feel cold or get sick.
3. Do not go to any place where you may have to climb a rock or pass an exposed track from where you can slip. This is particularly true for large groups. Monsoon is not the time to do any rock climb, difficult peak or dangerous route.
4. Do not swim in an unknown lake, or river. Small nalas and waterfalls are good for bath. Do not swim in jeans - they get heavy with water and pull you down.
5. On a long hike study routes well. On some routes buses stop operating in these months. If lost on a trek, finding route in cloudy weather is more difficult.
6. Stay on village tracks or known routes. For an inexperienced trekker muddy tracks can prove troublesome.

7. Do not litter the surroundings with papers, foils or bottles. And no alcohol, it hampers your enjoyment and sometimes it is dangerous.

8. Details of all the treks are available in the guide book **Trek The Sahyadris**