

MUNNAR AND THE TEA PLANTATIONS

“

Our drive to Munnar earlier had taken nearly four hours as the narrow road climbed ever higher and higher. The views were spectacular, the sky deep blue and the vegetation a cacophony of every shade of green. ”

Words: Janet Myers

Images: Jonathan Myers



WE VISIT THE TEA PLANTATIONS AND ITS
ENVIRONS ON OUR JOURNEY THROUGH
KERALA IN SOUTHERN INDIA

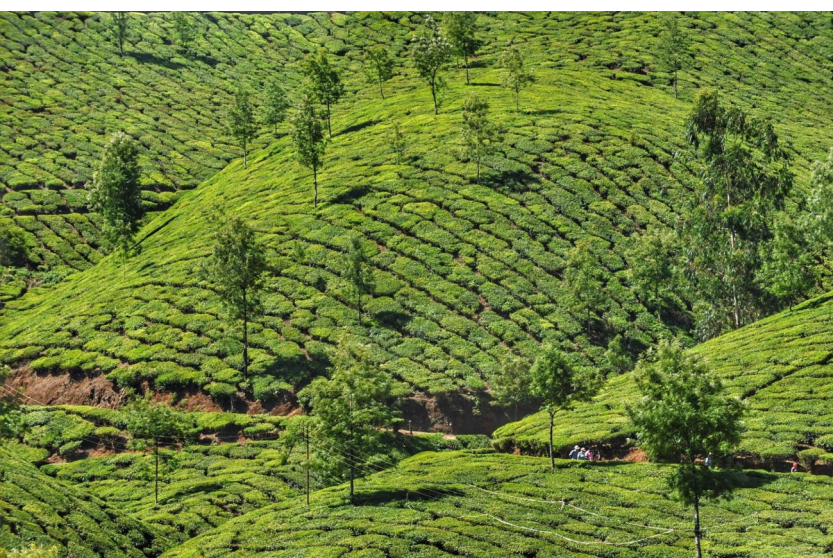
MUNNAR AND THE TEA PLANTATIONS



After a busy day I sit on our veranda drinking my tata tea. Like a vast plantation house the hotel nestles amongst the tea plantations of Munnar. Tall eucalyptus trees give us shade and melodic tones drift up from a near by temple. A thick haze sends everything beyond our immediate viewpoint into a muted world creating a sense of peace and tranquillity.



Our drive to Munnar earlier had taken nearly four hours as the narrow road climbed ever higher and higher. The views were spectacular, the sky deep blue and the vegetation a cacophony of every shade of green. After passing through banana and rubber plantations the hillsides gave way to a sea of tea bushes, each as flat as a pancake. Their neat well groomed appearance no doubt due to the fact that the tender shoots are now harvested with shears. Giant red poinsettia, blue jacaranda trees and flowers of purple, orange and yellow joined the mix. So too did giant black boulders which must have cascaded down the slopes when the landscape took its form thousands of years ago.



It was at the tea museum the following day that we discovered why the haze reminded us of Australia's Blue Mountains. It was no coincidence for eucalyptus trees flourished in large numbers amongst the tea. It seems seeds were smuggled into the country by an official in his wife's stockings when they returned from Australia at the beginning of the 20th century and soon their quick growing trunks were fuelling the



tea factories. The reason for the other splashes of colour amongst the manicured tea bushes came from a stewardship which had been in place since their early planting when a desire for harmony amongst nature dictated that only one third of the land should be given over to their plantation. Today we tend to think that we are the instigators of environmental conservation but that is not always the case.

The following day from our hotel base in the tea plantation we visited Muttupetty dam where we enjoyed a high speed powerboat ride on its emerald green water, The way down was steep and difficult. The boat sped along the picturesque shore lines, executed fast turns out in the water where Jon lost his cap, before heading again towards shore to see the cormorants. We retraced our steps up the steep path and stopped to recover from the climb. At the top we paused to say how do to some monkeys. The only thing we had to give them were tic tacs but they seemed to enjoy them as they crunched and relished their minty flavour.

View points at Echo point and Pothamedu came next with an overview of Munnar before our return to the hotel. The vibrant colours of the girls in their Sunday best as they came into town with their parents to visit the marriage bureaus to find husbands were stunning. This month being the top month for nuptials. A procession was also in progress as young girls took offerings to the temple. On their heads they carried bright yellow gifts. Another delicious meal and with the smell of the eucalyptus wafting through the open veranda doors we are soon asleep. Next day we resume our journey south but pause to see the tea 'pickers' at work and marvel at the speed with which they fill their baskets. From now on a familiar cup of tea will always remind me of Munnar



TEMPLE PROCESSION
AT THE TEA FACTORY
TEA PICKERS AT WORK
EUCALYPTUS TREES