

Easy Trip: Halli Berri, Chikmagalur, Karnataka

by Team LPMI (Lonely Planet Author) April 1 2016

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The cottages at Halli Berri come with lovely sit-outs on which to contemplate the coffee estate in particular and life in general

Photographer: APARNA NORI

BEAN THERE, DONE THAT
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GREAT FROM Bangalore, Mangalore

GREAT FOR The slow life, great food

Just off the road, 29km from Chikmagalur, is a time machine. You don't need to be Doctor Who to step into it. All it takes is a turn off the road into Kambihalli Estate and you step back in time into life on a coffee plantation. Into a simpler, less-connected life.

Your introduction will be the excellent coffee at the **Coffee Barn Café** at the estate gate, where Halli Berri's acclaimed Arabica bean holds court alongside a few excellent omelettes and sandwiches. And this is usually as far as most people will get into the coffee-planter experience. But you get to drive on, to one of the two Halli Berri cottages – compact cocoons of white brick and teak trim and heritage tiles and antique furniture. Each comes with a sit-out overlooking the coffee bushes in the estate. Inside, the huge bathroom boasts both indoor and outdoor showers, and such quaint touches as copper buckets and mugs. But it is the cosy living space that is most seductive – with a fireplace to keep you toasty on cold nights and beds that you will be hard pressed to leave in the morning.

But do rouse yourself, and go on an easy walk through the estate with the ebullient Vijay, who has little English but an enthusiasm that will transcend any lack of common language. He will show you the more delicate Arabica coffee bushes and the hardier Robusta plants; he will point out clusters of pepper, trees wound around each other in symbiotic embrace, the silver oak from Australia that can be cultivated for timber, the shade trees that keep the plantation cool, and the kalli bushes that are planted as barriers – their sap can blind or, in the least, cause rashes in human or animal intruders

as they try to push through them. He will take you on to the heart of the coffee estate – where the coffee beans are pulped, dried and stored, where the nurseries, under the brooding nurseryman Vellaya, are a fascinating trove of coffee, pepper and silver oak saplings, where you can be part of the workers' roll call if you're present by 7.30am, and

where you might meet charismatic Nalima Kariappa, fourth generation owner of this 220-acre estate, who, every day, lives the life you're experiencing for just a while.

You could, of course, break out and drive down winding roads to **Chikmagalur**, or the Hoysala temples at **Belur** and **Halebid** or even the **Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary**. But you could also just decide to give in to the slow life. To read a book or two. To go from one to the other of the excellent meals. To watch a giant Malabar squirrel leap through the forest canopy, dropping dried leaves like confetti on the ground below. To breathe in the sounds and smells of the coffee estate as the sky darkens and night falls. You could decide to be grateful that you could leave your other life behind.

Because this is a life not for everyone. Living the life of a coffee planter, even for just a day or two, is a privilege, but one that less evolved travellers may not recognise. It is, after all, a life without wi-fi, a constant supply of electricity, television, and even mobile reception. But beyond that, for the seeker of solitude, it is also a life that transports you to a world where coffee reigns, where you rise and rest by the cycles of the sun, where life magically slows down to allow you to give your mind free play. Go only if you are a seeker.