

Old hills, new eyes

If you live in Maharashtra and are searching for that 'lovely' hill station to escape the heat, think again. There is no brilliant hill station close by. Lonavala is hardly a hill station anymore. Matheran — you've been there, love it but it's too dusty to go in the summers; you need to wait for the rains...

You are left with Mahabaleshwar and Panchgani. Both are done to death but then, think again. Maybe all you need is a new perspective. My tip is to find accommodation in Panchgani and then head to Mahabaleshwar. And here are a few more tips..

Find a homestay: Make sure it's open, welcomes in the fresh air. Dump your luggage and then roam around the streets searching for old buildings, enter compounds, click photos and discover newsights and sounds.

Eat a meal at Purohit's (either at Panchgani or Mahabaleshwar): They offer a Gujarati



thali that isn't oily and rich. For vegetarians, this is a must visit. Also, it's mango season, so sin a little.

Skip the sunset points and all the other points at Mahabaleshwar: They aren't beautiful at all and the horses there are really mishandled. But check out this beautiful iron bandstand at Bombay Point... and imagine how it would have been when the bands played here every evening...

Visit Mapro Gardens at Panchgani: Visit this place just for their brilliant strawberry and ice-cream dessert. It isn't always in season but asking never hurts.

Talk to a stranger : Learn about lives others than your

own. You will be humbled and rewarded by insights into lives far tougher than yours.

Visit the oldest bakery in Panchgani : Try an assortment of biscuits and also pack some for the ride back home. The chocolate cream roll is tempting and disappears into your tummy rather fast...

Get some freshly roasted groundnuts: Preferably from that old man at the corner.

Get lost : And then discover more in the bargain... like these quaint government buildings.

Ask the owner of the place you stay for his favourite vantage point: They always say the one closest to their property is the best in the city. Honestly, it doesn't matter as long as you get something fabulous to look at.

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