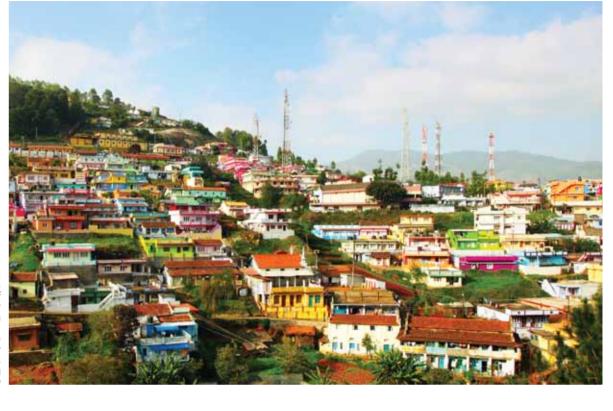


rowing up in Delhi, my only experience of the mountains were the rugged, pine-laden, hill stations in the Himalayas. The short vacations spent in the northern hills instilled in me fascination for the mysterious peaks that rise high above dusty, crowded plains and I always held a desire to visit the gentler slopes of the Nilgiris that lie in southern India.

When I got a chance to visit the Queen of the southern hills, Ooty, and Coonoor, in Tamil Nadu, my happiness knew no bounds. What

added to the excitement was the knowledge that I would travel from Coonoor to Ooty in the Nilgiri Moutain Railway (also known as the Nilgiri Toy Train). Ever since I saw SRK and Malaika Arora Khan dance to *Chaiyya Chaiyya* on the roof of this train in *Dil Se*, I too had wanted to experience this journey.

All I knew about Ooty and Coonoor — situated just 18 kilometre apart — was that they are famous for tea plantations. Much to my surprise and pleasure, these two pretty hill stations in the Nilgiris packed in much more than I knew or expected.



Colourful houses on the hills of Coonoor make for a pretty sight. (Facing page) The Nilgiri Toy Train crosses a bridge along the route

## Chaiyya Chaiyya from Dil Se, featuring Shah Rukh Khan, was shot on the roof top of Nilgiri Mountain Railway

Coonoor charmed me with its rolling tea estates and the vivid green that clothed the slopes soothed my jagged city nerves. It is a perfect place to unwind with a cuppa. There's an interesting story of how the first tea plantation came about up here. Way back in 1819, when the Scottish collector of Coimbatore visited this hill station, he found that there was no tea to be served. Miffed, he decided to plant tea himself, and today the plantations stretch out across acres.

A visit to one of the tea factories is a must. Here you can observe the entire process of tea-making, from plucking leaves, pruning to how it finally turns into the brew that you sip each morning. Don't forget to buy a packet before you leave; the Nilgiri teas are the finest

# Interesting **FACTS**

The Nilgiri Mountain Railway was awarded the status of World Heritage Site in 2005

It covers a distance of 46 km from Mettupalayam to Ooty in about five hours, going from 326 to 2,203 metre (1,070 to 7,227 feet), making it the steepest railway track in Asia

> It passes through 250 bridges and 16 tunnels

It's the slowest train in India operating at a speed of 10.4kmph in the world, and since they are grown on peaks higher than the ones in Darjeeling, there is a great aroma to the tea.

Although Coonoor is not as buzzing as Ooty, it's got a charm that's addictive. The highlight in Coonoor is definitely Sim's Park that was built in 1874. It is a great place to spend hours walking around and drinking in the scenic beauty. You can stop by to admire flowers of all shades and hues.

Then came the most enchanting part of my trip — onboard the Nilgiri Mountain Railway to get to Ooty. A ride on this toy train, a World Heritage Site, was something straight out of a Enid Blyton story. The blue-and-cream carriages take you through a picturesque route that covers lush tea estates, rolling hills, 250 bridges and 16 tunnels. There is something magical about this miniature train that winds its way around slopes — nobody is in a rush, nobody is competing to reach first and nobody cares about that 100kmph speed.

I boarded the train at Coonoor, which is the second last station along the route. Although

52 | Rail Bandhu - July 2016 www.railbandhu.in Rail Bandhu - July 2016 | 53

### DID YOU KNOW

The Nilgiri Mountain
Railway turned 106
on October 15, 2015.
On this occasion
the Nilgiri Railway
Museum opened at
Mettupalayam railway
station. Besides
photographs of the
train, tickets issued and
the first locomotive,
which was made
in Switzerland, are
displayed here.



## Rare flower blooms in the Nilgiris

Strobilanthes, a gorgeous lilac-blue flower, also known as Kurinji, only blooms once in 12 years. It is only grown in the Nilgiris in the Western Ghats. The next flowering will be in 2018. People from across the country plan trips to see the entire valley covered in these pretty blue flowers.





#### How to reach:

The nearest railway station to Coonoor is Coimbatore Junction, located 70 km away

I was prepared for it, the train chugged at a speed that came as a surprise — the cars were zipping faster than us. But I wasn't complaining — coming as I was from a city where speed is everything, life in the slow lane was truly therapeutic.

At every turn, you encounter a different scene — if at one point you are craning your neck to admire a tall peak shrouded in grey mist, at the next turn you find yourself staring down into the vale, looking at beautiful houses perched on the slopes and children playing

out in the open. As the light and shade keep shifting, your journey takes on different hues. Many tourists choose to travel on the stretch from Mettupalayam to Coonoor because this is where you get to view the most spectacular scenery. It is the steepest railway line in the continent and chugs along a distance of 46 km, starting from Mettupalayam at around 7.10 am and reaches its destination Ooty at noon, in roughly five hours.

At the next station — Lovedale — many school children boarded and suddenly the carriage



Upper bhavani Reservoir in the Nilgiris is one of the most beautiful and amazing place to visit. (Top) A postcardperfect building at Doddabetta peak

**54** | Rail Bandhu - July 2016

#### www.railhandhu.in

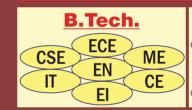
## AJAY KUMAR GARG ENGINEERING COLLEGE, GHAZIABAD

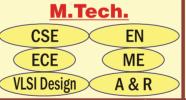
Affiliated to Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam Technical University (AKTU), Lucknow & Accredited by NAAC (Formerly known as UPTU)

Undisputed NO. 1 Engineering College in AKTU



Excellent Academic Results, Placements & Infrastructure makes AKGEC the right choice for you





MCA • Master of Computer Application

MBA (AKGIM - Code : 820)

(Automi Codo i G

Marketing

Human Resource (HR)

• Finance •

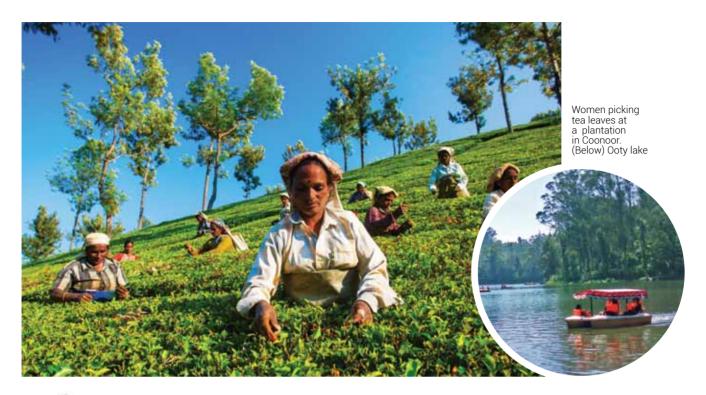
International Business

#### **MILESTONES**

- Recipient of Academic Excellence Trophy for "Best Engineering College in UPTU" for Two Successive Years from H.E., The Governor of U.P.
- The only Institution in U.P. to have received approval from DST, Govt. of India, for establishment of Centre of Relevance and Excellence (CORE) in the field of Industrial Automation & Robotics
- The only institution to have the following State-of-the-Art Centres of Excellence in collaboration with eminent multinational companies to provide industry relevant training and project exposure:
- Industrial Robotic Training Centre with Kuka Robotics
- Automation Technology Centre with Bosch Rexroth
- LabVIEW Academy with National Instruments
- PLM Centre with Siemens
- Integrated Automation Centre with AIA
- Pneumatic Knowledge Centre with Janatics

## UNMATCHED AND UNBEATABLE RECORDS BY STUDENTS DURING 2014-15

- 21 students in the Branch wise Merit Lists of AKTU with the highest tally of 3 Gold, 1 Silver and 2 Bronze Medals
- 96% B.Tech and 98% MCA students graduated with 1<sup>st</sup> Division/Distinction
- Excellent performance in GATE with Shobhit Mishra securing 3<sup>rd</sup> All India Rank
- 3 Students with CAT score above 95 & Bharat Tripathi securing 98.27 percentile
- 8 students in IITs, 1 in IISc, 1 in Georgia Tech (USA), 2 in IIMs, 1 in MDI and many other selected for M.Tech and MBA in eminent institutions
- More than 600 placements in good companies like Infosys, NIIT, IBM India, Wipro, Torrent Power, MAQ Software, TIMEX, Tech Mahindra and many more
- 167 students of AKGEC amongst 758 CLAD certified and 7 students amongst 102 CLD certified professionals in the whole country





#### India's first Chocolate Museum

Ooty is famous for homemade chocolates like truffles and fudges and to make things more interesting a chocolate museum opened at Indunagar on Ooty-Mysore road. It has been opened by brothers S.M. Fazloor Rahman and S.M. Abdhul Rahman who've been selling homemade chocolates for more than 15 years. One can see the entire chocolate making process here. It also has a chocolate fountain. The sheer variety of chocolates on display is quite interesting to see.

was filled with squealing, laughing, chattering kids eager to get home. For a minute, I almost envied their carefree attitude.

Soon we were in Ooty, the town the British established in early 19<sup>th</sup> century as their getaway in the south from the stifling summer heat. It is still the pride of the southern hills, although the heart of the hill town is now crowded and the screeching traffic is no different from what you are used to in big cities. But move away from all of this and you will see that Ooty still packs a lot of charm with

its pretty houses, colonial churches, parks and gardens. Other than that, the hill town is famous for its delicious homemade cheese and chocolates, a legacy left behind by the British.

And to soak in the beauty of the southern peaks, I made my way to Doddabetta peak — the highest point in the Nilgiris. Spread before was a beautiful vista — the entire southern ranges that I had been longing to see were ringed around me. I closed my eyes for a minute, just to soak it all in the beauty before I went back to the crowded plains of North. •

