

THE DRIVING FORCE

Want a long drive devoid of the traffic and chaos that we're so used to? **Rhea Dhanboora** suggests packing a road trip in with your vacation and gives you the best road trips to plan in India



>> If you want a long and adventurous journey then you can opt for a road trip from Delhi to Leh (left) which will be a two-day long drive. However, if you are looking something closer home, then a trip from Mumbai to Goa will also not disappoint you



MUMBAI TO GOA

Most people take a bus or train to Goa, but driving or riding down is a different journey altogether. Visiting Goa is common, but since you're going to anyway, why not do it in the best way possible? Remember to head there in the cooler months and avoid driving during the monsoon. The trip along the NH17 (albeit with slight bumps along the way) is a thrilling experience, especially negotiating the winding turns. Make sure your car is well maintained to avoid any sandy road accidents once you reach. You'll see coconut trees, plantations and an abundance of mountains and misty skies, especially early morning. Slow down near the villages and soak up the sights and sounds — it's all worth it!

GET GEARED UP: The trip takes up to 15 hours with pit stops and is around 500 km away from the city.

DELHI TO LEH

This one is for the more adventurous, since it not only takes longer, it's also a little more challenging because of the high altitude and winding roads. Your first stop itself is Manali, but after soaking up the sights at the hill station, you'll reach the beautiful Rohtang Pass and the desert mountain valley (Spiti) that is literally the land between Tibet and India. Stop often and don't miss the town Keylong or a chance to camp near Darcha. Make an overnight stop there before you head towards the breathtaking Leh. This trip needs to be planned carefully as the road is not open all year round, so plan your trip between June and November.

GET GEARED UP: The trip will take you around two days through Manali, driving up to 11 hours to each place, but don't hurry it or you'll miss some of the exquisite sights.

BANGALORE TO COORG

Coorg is so beautiful, that a visit is a must. This road trip is filled with dangerously winding roads, so we suggest leaving early in the morning to avoid heavy traffic. There may not be too many eateries on the way initially, so carry all your essentials with you and wait till the weather cools down a bit till

you make the trip. It's not advisable to do this journey overnight. Once you're on your way, don't spend all your time cooped up inside an air conditioned car because there's a lot to see. Stop at the town Madikeri (head to Rajah's seat nearby to watch the sunset), and linger at Tibetan camp (now a settlement) Bylakuppe for some great food and culture experiences. You can also visit the Dhubare Elephant Training Camp and Abbey Falls.

GET GEARED UP: Around 6 hours long, this is a great road trip for those who like making a lot of pit stops, are short on time and money, but still want an amazing experience.

CHENNAI TO KANYAKUMARI

This beautiful trip will take you along the Coromandel Coast and past Pondicherry, which is simply breathtaking. Driving to Kanyakumari gives you a longer distance to travel and a lot of sights and sounds to soak up. From the church in Pondicherry to the backwaters at Chunnambar where you can see a lot of heritage sights, dive into some culture in Pondicherry and then relax along the eight-hour scenic drive to the even more beautiful, beach heavy Kanyakumari.

GET GEARED UP: The trip will take you around 10 hours but the 700 odd km are completely worth it because they're incredibly scenic.

DEHRADUN TO NAINITAL

This may be a short trip, but it's still an extremely impressive one. The way through the hills is scenic to say the least and although roads are a bit harsh (make sure your car is in a really good shape), the sights, parks and shrines along the way make the journey worth it. You can pass through Rishikesh, stopover at Corbett and take a dip in Naini Lake as you pass through the Kumaon Hills. There are several long, barren stretches, so carry essentials on the way.

GET GEARED UP: The shortest trip on this list, at around a mere four hours, the 350 odd km are scenic enough for a weekend getaway. You could stop at Kathgodam on the way, making it a 12 hour trip.

