THE NILGIRIS
THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

The name Nilgiri means blue hills (Neelam – blue giri – hills). The Nilgiri Hills are a range of mountains with at least 24 peaks above 2,000 meters, and are situated in the western part of Tamil Nadu, on the tri-junction of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka. They are part of the larger Western Ghats Mountain chain. The topography of the Nilgiris varies from evergreen forests to grasslands, where about 50-55% of the land is covered with forest.

FLORA AND FAUNA

The Nilgiri Hills are rich in flora and fauna. The Nilgiri biosphere Reserve, a part of the Nilgiri hills was one of the first biosphere reserves in India. The fauna of this area includes over 100 species of mammals, 350 species of birds, 80 species of reptiles, 31 amphibians and around 316 species of butterflies. It includes the Nilgiri Tahr, the tiger and the Asian Elephant. The Nilgiris has very rich plant diversity. Around 3,300 species of flowers can be found on this mountain range. The sholas of the reserve are a treasure house of rare plant species. Some of the other plants, which are specifically found in this reserve, are Frerea, Wagttea among others. More than half of the 400 varieties of impatiens or balsam in the world can be found here.

Find a flower unique to the Nilgiri Hills and draw a picture of it.
PEAKS

Many of the peaks in the Nilgiri are popular tourist destinations because of their picturesque scenery.

- **Doddabetta Peak** is one of the highest points in the Nilgiris. The name Doddabetta can be roughly translated to ‘big mountain’. There is an observatory at the top of Doddabetta with two telescopes, for public use to see a magnificent view of the whole district.
- **Snowdon Peak** is beautiful filled with lush scenery. It is ideal for trekkers.
- **Dolphins Nose** is a tourist spot located in Conoor, more than 1,000 feet above the sea level. The tip of the peak resembles a dolphin’s nose hence the name. The rock formation here is completely unique. The ride up to Dolphins nose offers a great view.
- **Avalanche** lie around 28 km from Ooty. It has beautiful scenery and a great view of the avalanche valley and reservoir. There is an abundance of flora and fauna found here. It is the perfect place for campers and trekkers.

WATERFALLS

- **Kolahambai** is the highest waterfall in the Nilgiri range, measuring 400 feet. The area around the waterfall is rich in flora and fauna and is a beautiful sight.
- **Catherine Falls** is a double-cascaded waterfall with a height of 250 feet. It is named after the wife of M.D. Cockburn, who is said to have introduced coffee plantations in Kotagiri. The native name of this waterfall is GeddhehaadaHalla, which means ‘Foothills Dale River’.
- The Toda community considers the Pykara River sacred. This river flows over a series of waterfalls, the last 61 meters are known as the Pykara Falls. There is a forest rest house and a boathouse, which make it an attractive tourist spot. The Pykara Dam is a part of an important hydroelectric scheme, one of the oldest power plants in South India.
HISTORY

The Nilgiris were first mentioned in the ancient Tamil text, Silapthikaram. The original inhabitants of the Nilgiri Hills were the Todas, Kota, Irula and Kurumbas. The Nilgiri hills were initially under the Chera Empire followed by the Western Ganga dynasty and then the Hoysala Empire. The Nilgiri hills then came under the control of Tipu Sultan, who in the 18th century surrendered it to the British.

In 1819, John Sullivan, The British Collector of Coimbatore, set out to explore the Nilgiris. Under his supervision the Nilgiri District began to grow. He introduced the European flowers, vegetables and fruit trees found in the Nilgiri hills. The First road to the hills was formed in 1820 under his initiative. Furthermore he planned the execution of the famous Ooty Lake, which is now a popular tourist attraction.

In 1827 Ooty because of its pleasant weather became the summer capital of the British in Madras. Even after independence the places in the Nilgiri District remain a popular tourist destination.

NILGIRI MOUNTAIN RAILWAY

The British built the Nilgiri Mountain Railway in 1908, covering the distance between Mettupalayam and Ooty. The uniqueness of this railways line lies in the fact that it is one of the steepest in Asia. To cope with this it uses a unique system (Alternate Biting System) and is regarded as an example of great engineering. The journey itself from Mettupalayam to Ooty is full of scenic beauty.

In July 2005 UNESCO added the Nilgiri Mountain Railway, to the world heritage site of ‘Mountain Railways of India.’

Did You Know?

The Famous Hindi Song ‘ChaiyyaChaiyya’ from the movie Dil Se, featuring Shah Rukh Khan was shot on the rooftop of the Nilgiris Mountain Railway.
Find out the names of 3 endangered species in the Nilgiris biosphere Reserve.
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The Toda tribe was one of the earliest groups to settle into the Nilgiri Valley. Find out about their language, religion and history.

Find out about any famous legends about the Nilgiri Hills.

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