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soul canvas

BRUSH UP ON NATURE

Draw those aches and pains away with a curated painting holiday in the hills

EVER had a goat steal your paintbrush? Turns out the craziest things happen when you take your canvas and easel outdoors. Long-time artist Sumitha Sundaram is hoping to introduce more adults to the fun with her curated 'painting holidays' that promise colourful experiences, not restricted to your palette. Think lively debates around a campfire in the hills on the different schools of art, hands-on lessons on request at sunrise and, if you're not in the mood to create—play someone else's muse and pose for a portrait.

Ahead of her company Art de Tour Painting Holidays' third trip to Yelagiri on November 4 and 5, Sumitha lets on her that these experience visits attract participants across the age spectrum. And you don't necessarily have to be an artist, she clarifies. "We have 20-something IT professionals who just want to try something new, homemakers, artists by profession and senior citizens all the way up to age 70, who just want to relax and sometimes reconnect with a forgotten hobby."

To make the most of a weekend getaway, Sumitha tells us that three outdoor sketching sessions are pencilled in. Also, painting spots are finalised after much deliberation. "You have to think about aspects such as tree cover for shade, the best view of the hills or a sunrise for instance, and of course, the time of day, so that you aren't sweaty and uncomfortable while you're painting." This usually means before 8 am or after 3 pm to skip the afternoon sun.

Planning all of this comes quite naturally to Sumitha, given her almost two decades of experience organising camping and trekking

programmes for children, since 2000. Armed with a Fine Arts degree from Stella Maris and later gaining her entrepreneurial chops after co-founding her trekking company Aavishkaar India, one might assume that putting the two together was par for the course.

But ironically, she discovered the joys of sketching outdoors quite by accident. "A few years ago, I was at a camp in Coorg where the kids were off to a trek that I had already done several times over, so I decided to stay back and started doodling." The 45-year-old goes on, "The experience wasn't just pleasant, but life-changing for me, because in a matter of minutes I felt my shoulder pain disappear! There was a gentle breeze, my mood lifted, and I was completely in focus."

Nowadays, she sneaks in a quick session with her canvas out in the open whenever she can, for a refresher between office hours. "I head out to Marina Beach, Nageshwara Rao Park in Mylapore, Kasimedu... I just jump into the car and go to my favourite spots in the city," she says. Finding a sense of calm in crashing waves, we understand. But a bustling fish market?

"I find capturing the scene, in the midst of it all, is calming and healing for the body, mind and soul," she says. Who would have thought that a brush with the outdoors could, in some cases, help find a sense of inner calm?

Next painting holiday is at Karadimalai, Yelagiri. On November 4 and 5. Bring your own art supplies. Cost: ₹6,800 per person (all inclusive). Details: 9940056618

— **Sonali Shenoy**

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Participants at a recent getaway; (below) selected works



Sumitha Sundaram

Can't do a painting holiday?

Find your view right here:
Marina Beach | Semmozhi Poonga | Luz Church | Kasimedu fishing harbour | Ennore Creek

Best time: 6 am to 10 am & 4 pm to 6 pm

What to carry: Sketch book, paints or pencils (medium of choice) and don't forget a stool to sit on